



Discovering NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

EVERYONE HAS HEARD OF NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO, but not everyone has heard of Niagara-on-the-Lake. They're only ten miles and a world apart. This little village will remind you of Boca Grande, Naples, Nantucket, or even St. Armands Circle in Sarasota.

Our timing couldn't have been better if we wanted to experience winter in all its glory: Below zero wind chills, blowing snow and ice.

That picture of the hotel on this page isn't an artist rendering or computer generated. The Prince of Wales Hotel is an iconic destination in Niagara on the Lake. The historic Victorian hotel was built in 1864 and is in the epicenter of this beautiful village straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting.

We've always wanted to stay here, and this time we finally were able to chalk it off our bucket list.

The hotel has 110 rooms. The suite in which Erin and I stayed included a four-post bed, living room and a fireplace that warmed the room with a flick of a switch.

Yes, the Prince of Wales stayed here before he became the Duke of York. Queen Elizabeth II was here in 1973. But on this icy cold December weekend, we were treated like royalty.

I never appreciated valet parking and having bags brought up to a room more than when the temperature is around zero. The next best thing was being able to take a hot shower and then walk downstairs to a gourmet meal.

The first night we dined in the serene Escabeche Restaurant. We sat at a two-



top along the window where we could make eye-contact with a growing icicle. Gerald was all-business as our waiter. He was all about customer service and respect. We never had to wait for him while he gabbed with other tables. So refreshing to have great service.

Our meal began with a rare treat—gluten free bread (I have a wheat allergy by DNA). For appetizers, Erin had the Grilled Marinated Eggplant, Nicoise Olives, Ontario Goat's Milk Cheese atop local romaine leaves and drizzled with a beet root vinaigrette. I had the Spanish Chorizo Sausage Risotto accompanied with smoked cherry stone clams and sweet corn butter. Excellent!

For our entrees, I had Pan Seared Beef Tenderloin with a bourbon butternut squash soubise, crispy onions and roasted broccoli florets. Erin chose Grilled Tiger Prawns & Maple Cured Pork Belly with organic Blue Polenta & Heirloom Tomato Preserve. We were both very happy with our selections.

More gluten-free fun for dessert—

Dark Chocolate Sweet Potato Brownie with Vegan Peanut Butter cream & Field Berry Chia Seed Jam.

We waddled back up to our suite very pleased with our first meal.

When dawn broke Erin rushed to the curtain to see what Mother Nature had done to our little hamlet north of the border. White powder was piling up by the hour on Picton Street. We bundled up, stopped for coffee and yogurt at a nearby shop, and then wandered the village, stopping in many of the local shops.

We then began the short drive down the Niagara Parkway into Niagara Falls. It's a beautiful drive along the Niagara River with the United States sitting just a couple ice rinks across the water.

The Niagara Parks Commission did a great job lining up a series of activities for us to enjoy the Falls, most of which I didn't know existed! Our first top was a "ride" called "Niagara's Fury" where we stood in a room that shook and sprayed a mist of water at us as we watched a 360 degree surround-sound presentation about how the Falls came to be. Perfect for kids.

From there, it was on to "Journey Behind the Falls." This was amazing: We went 13-floors down an elevator and through a hallway and wound up a few feet from the Horseshoe Falls, at eye-level. Another series of hallways brought us BEHIND the Falls!

We returned to the Prince of Wales for a hot shower and then a warm meal downstairs in the bar of the hotel. It felt like we were guests of an upscale ski-lodge, especially when we sat down by a roaring fire.

After a lazy afternoon in the suite, we took the hotel's shuttle van to another one of the Vintage Hotel properties a



couple miles away. Very decadent to walk out a red carpet into a waiting van and be dropped off at another high-end doorway.

We were now at "Queen's Landing," which is right on the water adjacent to a harbor. On this night, there wasn't much boating going on. We sat at a table in front of a large bay window overlooking the river. The restaurant was called "Tiara," and we were about to learn it deserves a crown for its wonderful food and service.

We started with artichoke and spinach soup followed by corn starch tossed fried calamari. They accompanied their bread with chipotle hummus, garlic butter and balsamic reduction.

For the entree, Erin had chicken breast with fingerling potatoes and pan-seared garlic rappini. I had a gluten-free Seafood pasta in a

chardonnay cream sauce. Dessert was maple crème brûlée as only Canada can do and homemade ice cream alongside French macarons.

A good night was made better by the VIP service provided by Food & Beverage Supervisor and Sommelier Shelly Scott-Young. After the meal, she gave us a quick tour of the hotel. We hope to return for a stay during a future visit.

Though we ran out of time in our short stay, Niagara-on-the-Lake has a proud tradition around the holidays: Candlelight Strolls, Santa Claus Parade, New Year's Eve specials, and the Niagara Ice wine Festival in January.

Grab your passport and escape to this beautiful unspoiled enclave tucked along the Niagara River in Ontario. You won't regret it, no matter the season. – Ray Collins