

INSPIRATIONS

Celebrating inclusive communities / Célébrons nos communautés inclusives



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Mathieu Auclair gets ready to play ball with his Challenger Baseball Québec group in Laval. (Photo, Carole Brochu)

Adapted baseball hits a home run in cities across Quebec

The Challenger Baseball Québec program gives children with cognitive and physical disabilities an opportunity to play baseball in a safe environment in a division adapted to their particular needs.

Read the full story about adapted baseball in Quebec on p. 35 of this edition.

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Las Vegas

Adapted Travel

By Alexandra Cohen

One magical week in Las Vegas

I recently returned from a week in Las Vegas (<https://www.visitlasvegas.com/ca>), where one member of our family had mobility issues. She began the trip using a cane, but early on had to switch to a wheelchair. I discovered that Las Vegas is a very accessible city – from the hotel we stayed at to the clubs and restaurants, and the taxi drivers who went out of their way to assist us.

Las Vegas has more accessible guest rooms than any other city in the United States. Hotels have rooms with roll-in showers, transfer showers, tubs with built-in seat and tubs with portable seats. However, it is of course recommended you speak with the reservation desk about your specific requirements. If you need additional details, ask for the hotel's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator. For an overview of room availability, call the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority Reservations Center: Voice/TTY - 1-800-884-2592.

Most hotels have assistive listening devices, available at the showroom or lounge entrance, for those who are hearing-impaired. Wheelchair seating is also available in most restaurants, lounges and showrooms. Call ahead for details.

All hotels have accessible slot machines and many have sit-down table games. Many hotels also have accommodations for wheelchair users to play craps. Gaming personnel are well-trained in assisting

vision and hearing-impaired people to play table games. If you need a sign-language interpreter for the gaming schools offered at many of the casinos, just ask in advance. Most bingo rooms have Braille cards and large-print cards. A few larger rooms have electronic bingo, enabling visually impaired players or persons with hand-dexterity problems to play up to 100 cards at once.

All taxi companies in Las Vegas have lift-equipped vans accommodating one wheelchair. Call from your room, use any dedicated taxi phone or just ask the doorman at your hotel for an accessible taxi van.

WHERE TO STAY: We stayed at the gorgeous Vdara Hotel & Spa (<https://www.vdara.com>), a luxury boutique property located at CityCenter.

An all-suite hotel and spa designed for those who love the excitement of Vegas but prefer to enjoy it in a smaller and more exclusive, non-gaming, smoke-free environment, Vdara is physically connected to the Bellagio and directly adjacent to the Aria Resort & Casino, offering access to all of the amenities and energy of CityCenter while also providing a nearby retreat from the hustle and bustle of the strip.

The Vdara made its big debut in December 2009. Internationally-inspired, the chic boutique resort offers a holistic spa, luxurious pool, intimate meeting space and the sophisticated and convenient Vice Versa Patio & Lounge and Market Café Vdara, both located in their small and easy-to-navigate lobby.

Featuring 10,000 square feet of contemporary conference space, Vdara has become the premier choice in Las Vegas for customized executive meetings, corporate, social and banquet functions for up to 400 guests. The Pool & Lounge, a beautiful getaway that we had the chance to experience firsthand, also features 19 lux-



The Vdara Hotel & Spa.

urious cabanas, including six spa cabanas.

While at the Vdara people have the opportunity to experience what is surely a first in many of their lives: snacks and coffee delivered to their rooms by two relay robots by the names of Fetch and Jett. These talented bots work alongside their human colleagues to transport an array of frequently forgotten and requested amenities including shaving and dental kits as well as tasty bites and drinks from Market Café. We were pleased to see that our corner suite offered us a lovely view of some of the hotels on the Strip. Other similar suites offer picturesque views of the Bellagio Fountains and surrounding mountains. The in-suite tablet sits right beside the king-sized bed. From this tablet, you can order room service or snacks to be delivered by Fetch and Jett, and also book your next spa appointment.

The kitchenette features a two-burner stove and a full-sized refrigerator, while the living area offers a dining table fit for four. You can end the day by soaking in the spa-like tub sitting in the room's expansive bathroom. There are 42-inch, flat-screen and high-definition televisions with media hubs for MP3 players, cameras, DVD players and game consoles as well as a work desk with a multi-line telephone in each of these suites. We also had access to large

closets with plush robes and slippers, an ironing board and clothes steamer and a washing machine. The in-suite, laptop-sized electronic safes were also very convenient.

The hotel has a fully equipped 2,000-square-foot fitness center, with cardio, exercise machines and free weights, as well as personal trainers available for private or group instruction. A smoothie bar offers a selection of smoothies, nutritious snacks and juices.

Wheelchairs and scooters are available at all MGM Resort hotels for a fee. At the Vdara, manual wheelchairs are available for rent free of charge. To guarantee a wheelchair or scooter, contacting the Bell Desk ahead of time is recommended.

For more information and reservations, log on to www.vdara.com, call toll free at 866-745-7767 or 702-590-2111. Follow Vdara on Facebook and Twitter at Vdara Las Vegas and VdaraLV.

BAVETTE AND THE PARK MGM: The former Monte Carlo Hotel officially shed its name recently for a new identity – Park MGM (<https://www.parkmgm.com/en.html>). The project comprises two new distinct experiences: Park MGM and a Las Vegas version of the renowned NoMad, a stand-alone 292-room hotel encompassing the tower's top four floors.

We got a nice look at this new hotel when we recently dined at Bavette's Steakhouse (www.bavettessteakhouse.com). Like its beloved Chicago sibling, the new Bavette's represents an outstanding dining experience. With the restaurant's glowing chandeliers, red banquettes and vintage art and murals, guests are transported to an intimate space as they eat.

Bavette's offers fantastic takes on some time-honored steakhouse traditions, such as multi-tiered seafood towers, dry-aged bone-in ribeyes and lamb chops. In addition to some of the classics, we also enjoyed a traditional filet mignon, a large baked crab cake and side orders of wild mushrooms and buttery mashed potatoes, all beautifully served. Desserts leaned toward decadent. We enjoyed the chocolate cream pie with an Oreo crust, as well as their classic lemon-meringue pie. Bavette's



The Vdara features beautiful suites.

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is open 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 5 p.m. to midnight Friday and Saturday, and 5 p.m. to 10 pm on Sunday. Reservations can be made by calling 702-730-6700.

Before or after dinner at Bavette's, explore the stylish Juniper Cocktail Lounge next door, a truly unique drinking experience that I very much enjoyed. The mixology destination challenges the status quo of mainstay drinks while staying true to the foundation of what makes a great cocktail. Whimsical elements like fortune-telling Gin & Tonics come to life through house-made juices and syrups, a premium selection of spirits, and an intense dedication to the craft.

JABBAWOCKEEZ ON THE VEGAS STRIP:

We were thrilled to see Jabbawockeez (<https://www.jbwkz.com>) for the first time after their energizing 70-minute show. The Jabbawockeez first caught the nation's eye when they competed on "America's Got Talent" in 2006, before ultimately winning the grand prize on the first season of the MTV reality show "America's Best Dance Crew," produced by Randy Jackson.

Their live show at the recently renovated Jabbawockeez Theater at the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino (www.mgmgrand.com) on the Vegas Strip is absolutely fantastic!

Their show, JREAMZ, takes audiences on a journey of mesmerizing sights and sounds, entertaining audiences with a dynamic mix of choreography, music, videos, characterization and special effects. The imaginative production finds a way to seamlessly combine dance, drama and a surprisingly effective amount of comedy.

Featuring the signature white masks and intricate dance moves that have positioned

the group as the world's most influential dance crew, Jabbawockeez is cutting-edge entertainment at its best. JREAMZ has been voted the "Best Family Show" and "Best All Ages Show" in Las Vegas for three consecutive years.

Jabbawockeez perform Thursday through Monday at both 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Tickets are available for purchase at any MGM Resorts box office, by phone at 702-531-3826 or 866-740-7711 and online at mgmgrand.com or ticketmaster.com. The MGM Hotel and Casino is very wheelchair accessible, with lots of elevators and ramps available throughout.

THE CIRQUE'S MICHAEL JACKSON ONE:

When in Vegas, experiencing at least one Cirque de Soleil production is a must. As proud Montrealers, we did just that and chose the Cirque's incredible Michael Jackson ONE (<http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/shows/michael-jackson-one/show/about.aspx>), an awe-inspiring show that fuses acrobatics, dance, storytelling and visuals, taking the audience on an immersive journey through the music and spirit of Michael Jackson. Shows take place at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino from Fridays to Tuesdays at both 7 and 9:30 p.m. Driven by the late King of Pop's powerful, multi-layered music – heard like never before in a riveting, state-of-the-art surround-sound environment – ONE takes the audience through a series of seamless visual and musical tableaux.

The talented cast of 63 dancers and performers quickly reel you in, taking over the stage and at times even the audience with their infectious energy and brilliant tricks. You will repeatedly find yourself gasping in disbelief at the magic taking place on stage. This show captures the essence, soul and inspiration of the King of Pop, celebrating a legacy that continues to transcend generations. You will surely be captivated by the aerial acrobatics and special effects during this unforgettable performance, while trying not to sing along to Jackson's most popular songs, from "Smooth Criminal" to "Thriller" (a particular highlight).

This show, in its technical and energized



The famous spiked lemon dessert at Spago.

glory, truly is not something that you want to miss. For ticket information, call 877-632-7400 or 800-745-3000 or visit www.cirquedusoleil.com/mjone or www.mandalaybay.com. Cirque du Soleil strives to make it as easy as possible to purchase accessible seating tickets for venues across the country. Availability and the type of accessible seating will vary based on each venue's policies and/or the type of event taking place.

LUNCH AT SPAGO: We had a delicious lunch at Wolfgang Puck's legendary flagship restaurant Spago (<https://wolfgangpuck.com/dining/spago-lv>), located at the Bellagio (<https://www.bellagio.com/en/hotel.html>). Puck's revolutionary restaurant debuted in this location last summer with an entirely new look and menu and the exceptional level of service for which the restaurant is best known.

The restaurant is beautifully situated in front of the Bellagio Fountains for a fantastic view while you eat. Spago's re-imagined menu features Puck's signature California fare paired with modern technique and inspiration from his chef's weekly trips to the Santa Monica Farmer's Market. At lunch and dinner, the market-driven menus feature handmade pastas, wood-oven pizzas, fresh seafood, all-natural meats and prime steaks, alongside handcrafted cocktails and a robust wine list.

From popular Spago dishes to new dishes offered only at Bellagio, guests have a wealth of options to choose from for lunch or dinner. The chef brings his own signature to the Las Vegas steak dinner, allowing guests to indulge in prime meats, such as wagyu and Japanese ribeye carved tableside. In addition to trying one of their delicious cuts of American wagyu, complete

with white truffles, we also indulged in their smoked salmon pizza with caviar, a true highlight on their menu. We enjoyed a fresh strawberry cocktail as we sat on the patio enjoying the fountains, along with a dessert that I can only describe as outstanding: their spiked lemon. Words cannot do this dessert any justice, but you need only take to the internet to see it for yourself, as our waiter described as their menu's "most hash tagged item" due to its astonishing appearance, complete with flakes of gold.

Similar to the menu, the wine list will be seasonally inspired, starting the summer months with a strong selection of rosé wines. In addition, the list features nearly one dozen wines from Wolfgang Puck's private label, a collection of food-friendly wines that celebrate the spirit of food and life for which the chef is known.

ON TO FINE ARTS: After lunch we visited the beautiful Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art (BGFA). BGFA is committed to presenting intimate exhibitions featuring works by some of the world's most compelling artists. Since opening in 1998, the gallery has presented exhibitions of artworks and objects drawn from internationally acclaimed museums and private collections. For groups of 10 or more, the gallery offers special pricing of \$11 per person. For additional information, call 702-693-7871 or 877-957-9777.

CATCH THIS GREAT MEAL: Last fall, the Aria Resort & Casino (<https://www.aria.com/en.html>) welcomed Catch (<https://catchrestaurants.com>), the go-to dining destination for celebrities from Los Angeles to New York City. Known for attracting A-listers from around the world, this restaurant, with its Asian influence, debuted on The Strip, bringing with it a

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Jabbawockeez in action.



The spectacular entrance at Catch.

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something-for-everyone dining experience.

Just arriving at Catch is a true experience. The entryway is a truly picturesque 80-foot-long tunnel, filled with brightly colored flowers organized into beautiful patterns. It feels like stepping into a secret garden or even a hidden world.

On the menu, you will find a host of seafood sharables. Guests can dive in with an assortment of bright appetizers. The Catch ceviche infuses the bold flavors of mango and blood orange ponzu with Alaskan King Crab, Maine Lobster, shrimp and scallops. The decadent truffle sashimi allows guests to indulge in both tuna and hamachi paired with chili ponzu, caviar and rich black truffle purée.

In addition to their Vegas-specific sushi rolls, Catch also offers its famed signatures. The vegan veggie king roll is made with king oyster mushrooms, cashew and spicy miso. For a unique and delicious flavor profile, guests can opt for the hellfire roll,

which uses spicy tuna in two ways with Asian pear and balsamic.

We also enjoyed other shared starters, including the crispy shrimp, the rice cakes and an order of their mushroom spaghetti, which was truly delicious. For our main course: roasted branzino, a restaurant highlight, alongside a side of spaghetti squash. Prefer meat? Catch offers options like the 25-day dry-aged Tomahawk: 36-ounces of all natural, grass-fed beef with caramelized onion wagyu butter.

Their over-the-top desserts celebrate indulgence, featuring treats like the "Hit Me" chocolate cake that encourages guests to smash the liquid "Klondike" bar perched atop a brownie, devil's food cake and roasted white chocolate ice cream.

Catch is located within the main lobby of the Aria Resort & Casino. It is open for dinner Monday through Sunday from 5:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. The lounge is open Thursday through Saturday from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. To make reservations, call the Aria Concierge at 702-590-5757 or visit OpenTable.

Finding information made easy in EMSB's own database of special needs resources

By Fay Schipper

We live in a world today where information is at our fingertips via the internet - including databases pertaining to services and programs for the Montreal special needs communities. *Inspirations'* own custom-made database is accurate, up-to-date and extensive. It's designed to help the user navigate the maze of information by dividing it into 13 well thought-out categories. In reviewing each section one by one, they have become richer and more inclusive, with the aim of becoming even more informative for our readers.

Section 10, which lists camps and respite care, will soon become popular with summer just around the corner. Parents and caregivers searching for the best camps and respite programs for their children will find it helpful that this section is divided into day camps and sleep-away camps in this wealth of camp postings. The day

camp section has 34 listings, sleep-away 20, and there are 34 programs offering respite care.

Financial programs and subsidies, found in Section 12, feature information that is difficult to find by browsing the web on your own. The *Inspirations* database presents the information in easy-to-understand language with each section following in sequence. Before it was posted, this section was reviewed by a financial expert to ensure all the facts were presented accurately, and he made no red marks with corrections!

Access the database on our website at www.inspirationsnews.com. Enjoy the database, and send any comments or new resource postings to info@inspirationsnews.com.

Fay Schipper is Inspirations' volunteer database consultant.

Make it Matter supports Fun 15 with Friends at Edward Murphy

By Olivia Sheehy-Gennarelli

Make it Matter (MIM) is currently supporting the Fun 15 with Friends initiative at Edward Murphy elementary school. Fun 15 focuses on inclusion for all, and heightening awareness about autism all year round. Through social, fun and interactive activities, the program fosters friendships between students with autism and their peers.

Fun 15 was started by special education teacher Alana Goodings last year during Autism Awareness Month. Goodings approached MIM for funding as she wanted to run activities all year and not just during the month of April. MIM was excited to be part of this initiative and quickly agreed to fund their activities. Now, friendships are being made throughout the school year.

Goodings and her colleague, Marita Romberg, are co-captains of this year's *Inspirations*/EMSB Autism Speaks Canada - Montreal walk team. It takes place Sunday, June 9 at McGill University's Tomlinson Fieldhouse.

Make it Matter has been in operation for two years, funding educational initiatives that would otherwise fall under the radar. The team is expanding and is constantly learning about the Montreal community and its current needs. Make it Matter is planning its next gala. Stay tuned by bookmarking www.makeitmattertoday.org or follow it on Instagram and Facebook at [Makeitmattertoday](https://www.facebook.com/makeitmattertoday).

The organization is always looking for ways to support families to ensure that all children have equal access to the resources needed to succeed.

Reach out by email to Deborah@makeitmattertoday.org.

For more information on the Montreal walk, visit www.ascWalk.ca.

Olivia Sheehy-Gennarelli is a co-founder of Make it Matter.



Edward Murphy students having fun at Fun 15 with Friends on March 25.
(Photo, Alana Goodings)