

L'Auberge de Sedona Resort

Written by Written by Melissa Larsen

After a \$25-million renovation, L'Auberge de Sedona offers an exclusive getaway a stone's-throw from Northern Arizona's red rocks and babbling Oak Creek.



FOR VALLEY DWELLERS IN NEED of an escape, Sedona has long provided a not-too-far respite with world-class spa services, incredible hiking opportunities and, most notably, stunning red rock panoramas. After the completion of a \$25-million, three-year-long renovation, the new digs and amenities at L'Auberge de Sedona might just steal some of the attention from Snoopy Rock.

Guests who previously stayed at the resort will notice changes immediately, as the L'Auberge lobby has been completely relocated. After leaving their car with the friendly valet (no gratuity needed, as the resort enlists a service fee that eliminates the need for tipping), there is no line at a reception desk to wait in. Instead, the lobby at L'Auberge consists of a few desks by which guests get to take a seat and check in with the helpful front desk personnel. The best part of the check-in process is the lobby's proximity to Oak Creek, the babbling water surrounded by picturesque trees that runs alongside the resort. After the room key is in-hand, a few moments of deep breathing by the water is the most relaxing way to kick off a weekend away up north. (In the morning, be sure to head back to the creek for the 8 a.m. duck feeding. Guests of all ages are invited to watch different species of ducks waddle out of Oak Creek by the dozens and enjoy some corn on the cob.)



Once the cool Sedona air and gently flowing creek has cleared the mind and awakened the senses, a new-and-improved room awaits. The renovation brings the redesign of 26 lodge rooms and 31 creekside and garden cottages, as well as the addition of 30 spa cottages and vista cottages and suites. Each room sports a more modern look than in years past. Highlights of many of the cottages and suites include the balconies or patios, rich wood furnishings, finely appointed bathrooms with deep-soaking tubs and a warm color palette—as inspired by the resort's surroundings—of earthy hues of sage, taupe and bark. However, privacy might be each suite and cottage's most desirable and appreciated amenity. Each room is so exclusive, in fact, that many of them have an outdoor cedar-wood shower. Even during the chilly evenings, bathing in the hot water under the stars is a rare treat that L'Auberge guests get to enjoy over and over again.

The resort's award-winning Spa at L'Auberge also underwent its very own transformation, now including four indoor treatment rooms, a full-service mani-pedi salon and more. Within its 5,000 square feet, Spa at L'Auberge therapists perform a variety of treatments that soothe and calm even more so than the tranquil rocks of Sedona. (Many of the treatments are available creekside for an added dose of indulgence.) A favorite among guests is the ahhh-inducing Aroma Stone Massage, which employs warm basalt river rocks to relieve tension and smooth out kinked muscles. Next door to the spa is a newcomer to the L'Auberge lineup: a saltwater pool (saltwater is said to be good for skin). The climate-controlled pool, and accompanying hot tub, offers eye-popping panoramas and yet another way to bid adieu to stress.

What the spa and pool do for the body, L'Auberge Restaurant on Oak Creek does for the taste buds. The exceptional, award-winning restaurant features a menu that changes seasonally in an elegant, finely-appointed atmosphere with top-notch service. Diners have the option of a five-course chef's tasting menu or a three- or four-course menu. For a starter, Textures of Beets, featuring Seacat Gardens beets prepared in a variety of ways, is a favorite; the butter-poached Maine lobster paired with scallops is a seafoodie's dream as a main course. For a relaxing end to an evening at L'Auberge, a drink at Veranda Bar, yet another recent addition to the resort, is in order.

Even with amenities galore—new and old—L'Auberge stays true to what people have always loved about Sedona: simple relaxation in a stunning setting.

Lexus RX F SPORT — SPA-tacular!

Getting to a luxury mountain spa, restaurant and inn is even better with a luxury ride taking you there.

This past holiday season, a **2014 Lexus RX F SPORT** intensified our enjoyment of a trip to and from **L'Auberge de Sedona**, which celebrates

its 30th anniversary this year.

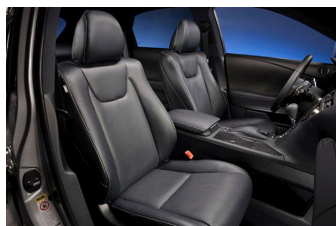


The five-door SUV rewarded us with luxury and comfort, which we expected, and surprising performance and agility, through the 200-plus miles from the southeast Valley, on city streets and highways and from 1,200- to 4,500-foot elevations.

With a new look, the 2014 RX luxury utility vehicle attracted some attention on the way, including in a Chandler Walgreens parking lot from a couple who thought the car was “fantastic” and that they had just ordered one and couldn’t wait. Ours was in a resplendent new color, Claret Mica.

This year, the F SPORT features an all-aluminum 3.5-liter 24-valve V-6 engine producing a very capable 270 horses. Lexus says it’s good for 0–60 times in just over seven seconds and quarter-mile sprints of 15.6 seconds, with an electronically limited top track speed of 112 mph. That’s excellent for a 4,178-pound car. We had luggage as well, and the overall performance was not noticeably affected by the additional weight.

The eight-speed Electronically Controlled Transmission, with intelligence (ECT-i) and Dual Variable Valve Timing, also with intelligence (VVT-i), maximizes driving ease, and the torque converter uses a low-speed damper to enable lock-up in the forward gears to help improve fuel economy. This very smart F SPORT also incorporates Intelligent Shift Control, which sets gearing patterns based on vehicle speed and throttle position and estimates road conditions and driver input.



One element of the car’s best-of-both-worlds flexibility I immediately enjoyed: The Multi-Mode Sequential Shift steering-wheel-mounted paddle shifters allowed me to take control and, while this isn’t a Lexus LFA supercar, the normally staid SUV offered some “bring-it-on” excitement in this mode.

The F SPORT, of course, lets you know where you’re at in terms of combined mileage performance, and we did quite well (21.3 mpg, about what Lexus estimates), despite the hill climbs and the various calisthenics we put it through. The car included All Wheel Drive.

The sport-tuned suspension includes a double-wishbone rear and a thick stabilizer bar up front as well as inversely wound front coil springs, which compress in opposite directions, providing greater stability. The car features standard VDIM handling technology, which anticipates loss of vehicle control, governs all of the vehicle’s dynamic handling systems, including brakes and traction, adds steering assist torque and provides a limited-slip differential effect. The 19-inch optional wheels also added to the stability.

Pioneers of the luxury crossover some 10 years ago, the early Lexus SUV models were, indeed, luxurious and well appointed, but I found those I encountered underpowered and less than pin-point accurate in targeting and control. My daughter had an early model, and it was much more comfortable on the arterials rather than meeting the demands of the highway, including merging acceleration and crisp, assured lane-changing.



In contrast, the 2014 did everything I asked of it, delivering quick response to acceleration demands and easily handling those radiator-menacing uphill switchbacks on Interstate 17 north of Black Canyon City. Response was accurate at low rpms as well as up to 80 mph and beyond. The F SPORT was nimble and in great shape: A few slalomlike maneuvers had the SUV boldly requesting to go where none had gone before.

This is a great car for the family, providing a spacious interior for school, club and sports events as well as a strong grand tourer for short or extended trips state- or nationwide. The Monroney sticker showed \$56,475, so it's not going to find a permanent parking spot at all addresses, but it's a Lexus and that showed consistently.

Regarding family safety, for instance, all RX models have 10 standard airbags, including side curtain airbags, front seat-mounted side airbags, rear side airbags and knee airbags for the driver and the front passenger. And, the optional Heads-Up Display in the windshield allowed me to keep attention on the road and still monitor vehicle speed, navigation directions and basic audio system info.

Because our family had some holiday sickness during our stint with the car, we couldn't try all the technology incorporated — the printed literature snugged under the front center console comprises three or four books — we were able to try some of the many components.

The power tilt and telescopic steering column eased entry and exit, for one. When you switch off the engine, the seat slides up to two inches rearward, and the steering wheel tilts upward and slides forward when the engine is switched off. When you press the engine ON switch, the seat and steering wheel return to their last position.



In addition, the leather-wrapped three-spoke steering wheel with integrated audio controls offered comfort and ease changing channels and volume for the high-performance optional Mark Levinson sound system.

We also found the power back door convenient for groceries and for luggage. And, the back-up camera that displays rear images on the central control screen should be standard on all vehicles, budget to luxury. Similarly, the Blind Spot Monitor with Rear Cross-Traffic Alert helped both in city and highway driving for slow- and high-speed lane changes.

Our RX model also had an Eco driving indicator zone that displays current fuel economy. And, the heated (and ventilated) front seats made the cool winter mornings in the Valley and Sedona cozy.

However, we weren't able to try the optional rear-seat entertainment system with high-resolution seatback screens or the voice recognition and Bluetooth® technology with a compatible smartphone.

And, a feature of the cruise control, the Pre-Collision System (PCS) with Dynamic Radar Cruise Control, which uses radar to help maintain a pre-set following distance from a vehicle traveling directly ahead, sounded great, but we couldn't get quite up to techie speed to try it on this go. Highly recommended.

*For more information on the Lexus RX F Sport, see www.toyota.com and www.lexus.com.
Brown is a Valley-based freelancer (www.azwriter.com).*