

The City of Ottawa has everything a driveable holiday can offer



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FYi

OTTAWA - As Canada's capital, Ottawa is the perfect place to experience some of the country's best attractions, celebrations and flavors in one welcoming city. With its unique blend of urban and rural beauty, year-round outdoor activities, and vibrant neighbourhoods, the Ottawa region is best explored over several days or more. Since I often go there for family reasons, an extended trip is usually on the agenda as was the case this past summer.

What can we recommend?

Let's start off with the seat of Canada's federal government and the setting for national celebrations the year round. Parliament Hill is the most visited Ottawa attraction. Guided tours are free and include the Senate, House of Commons, East Block and Parliament: The Immersive Experience. Be sure to reserve your tickets in advance.

Ottawa cultural attractions, museums and galleries invite visitors to experience the best of Canada all in one place. Whether it's the stunning National Gallery of Canada, with world-class art on display, or the dramatic Canadian War Museum, these are the experiences that bring Canadian culture to life for any visitor.

A historic farmers' market and shopping district by day, a favorite gathering place of restaurants and clubs by night is the ByWard Market, just east of Parliament Hill. This is one Ottawa neighbourhood you won't want to miss.

A historic waterway filled with boaters spring through fall and the world's largest naturally frozen skating rink in winter, the Rideau Canal winds through the heart of Ottawa before connecting with the Ottawa River through dramatic stepped locks right next to Parliament Hill.

Have you ever considered trying whitewater rafting and kayaking on the Ottawa River, some of the continent's finest, then top it off with some bungee jumping? The Ottawa region is also a cycling enthusiast's dream destination, with around 800 kilometres (497 miles) of recreational pathways linking natural areas, parks, gardens and national sites.

Ottawa is a city of celebrations, offering visitors a year-round calendar of parties, festivals and special events. Admire over a million tulips and enjoy special programming throughout the city during the Canadian Tulip Festival in May. On July 1, the city celebrates the biggest party in the country, Canada Day. Visitors will also experience a host of music celebrations, including the Ottawa Jazz Festival, Ottawa Chamberfest, and Ottawa Bluesfest, which welcome some of the world's biggest acts to our city. In winter, Canada celebrates Winterlude, and takes to the ice on the world's largest skating



An aerial view of Ottawa

rink, the Rideau Canal Skateway.

The culinary scene in Ottawa is in full bloom, with a thriving community of Ottawa chefs and diverse restaurants making names for themselves both at home and abroad. To experience multiple venues in one outing, book a dining tour of one of Ottawa's great neighbourhoods — Ottawa Tasting Tours and Experience Food make all the arrangements for you. Or take a guided gourmet food tour with C'est Bon Ottawa to explore food shops, farmers' markets and restaurants. The tasty options are endless!

The Capital's premier performing arts venue, the National Arts Centre, presents a full lineup of music, dance and theatre, plus popular touring acts and shows. Ottawa also has a thriving local theatre scene, including the Great Canadian Theatre Company, Ottawa Little Theatre, The Gladstone and La Nouvelle Scène.

Ottawa is filled with Capital sights and attractions and just about as many ways to explore and see them. Experience a tour on both land and water with the Lady Dive Amphibus, or enjoy a leisurely cruise on the Ottawa River or the Rideau Canal. Get up close and personal to city sights by joining a walking or cycling tour based on your activity level and interests.

Unique Ottawa neighbourhoods offer distinctive shopping, dining and nightlife experiences across the Capital. From the must-see ByWard Market area, to the Glebe's community feel, to the trendy Wellington West, there's lots of local flavor to soak up in Ottawa's varied districts.

Accommodations

For the second summer in a row, we were fortunate to spend the day at the

magnificent Brookstreet Hotel in Kanata. While we stayed with family, we do want to try out the accommodations here on a future visit. We arrived for our day of leisure and checked in at Perspectives Restaurant and a table on the beautiful patio looking over the full property. Since this was a Sunday, we were fortunate to be able to order from the brunch menu. What a treat! There were three of us. We started off with some drinks and then perused the different choices, opting for the classic breakfast (two eggs over easy, pea-meal bacon, breakfast potatoes and their homemade sourdough toast); a three egg omelet, with mushrooms, brie cheese, spinach, chives, potato, fresh fruit and sourdough toast; and the salmon and avocado toast (salmon gravias, smashed avocado, sourdough, pickled red onions, wasabi cream cheese, sesame seeds, two poached eggs and green salad). Look out for young server Spencer. He was just terrific.

Interestingly, a few days later, I received a text from a gentleman I know from Chomedey who asked if I was having brunch at the Brookside. He said his wife thought she saw me at a nearby table. Happily, he had read one of my stories last year, which focused on the hotel. As a result, he booked a stay.

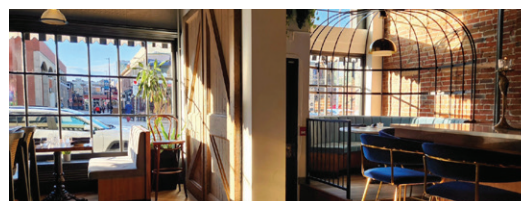
The heated outdoor saltwater pool and the area surrounding it truly is a slice of paradise. We were greeted by Rachel from the hotel's Flex Fitness Centre who set us up with three comfortable lounge chairs, under a large umbrella to block the sun. Each of us were given towels, bathrobes and slippers. I did not want this day to end. The water was just perfect. After a lengthy swim and dip, I headed to the spacious jacuzzi for another totally re-

laxing experience. This type of activity is always a novelty for me.

The hotel is now completing an impressive \$11 million renovation project, transforming its guestrooms into a haven of luxury and comfort. One of the highlights of the renovation is the integration of advanced technology. Each room is equipped with smart TVs, high-speed internet access, and intuitive climate control systems, ensuring guests stay connected and comfortable throughout their stay. Energy-efficient fixtures underscores the hotel's dedication to sustainability and guest satisfaction. This hotel has 276 rooms and suites spaced across 18 floors. In the past year some major room upgrades have taken place. From my seat at poolside I could see the busy activities at the Marshes Golf course and a lovely pond that converts to a skating rink in the winter months. An 18 hole mini golf course is very popular with families. The Flex Fitness Club has 500 members from the community.

Professional Baseball

The Ottawa Titans began play in the Frontier League in 2022. They play out of the state-of-the-art Ottawa Stadium. This is minor league professional baseball. The schedule begins in May and continues through early September. It is a wonderful outing for the entire family, even someone who might not even be a baseball fan. The franchise officials work so hard to offer a fun game day experience. I really enjoyed my night out there, especially coming from Montreal. Our professional baseball team the Expos left 20 years ago.



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Professional Football

I went to my first professional football game in Ottawa in more than three decades to see the hometown Redblacks host the Calgary Stampeders at TD Place Stadium (formerly known as Lansdowne Park), which seats 24,000 for football games and concerts. The Lansdowne neighbourhood also hosts two condominium towers and town homes with a combined 280 units, a 360,000 Sq. Ft. shopping/entertainment district, an office tower, 1,300 underground parking spaces and an 18-acre urban park.

Dining Out

There are so many wonderful choices for dining out. From my most recent trip, here is my culinary report.

The historic York on William (YOW) building, which encompasses Starling Restaurant & Bar and Apothecary Cocktail Lounge, represents a must visit and we were thrilled to dine there for the second successive year. The latter are part of a multiple-dining concept featuring a rooftop terrace and street-level patio and located in one of the oldest buildings in Ottawa, dating back to 1875. Starling is Ottawa's new concept which elevates any night out with hand-crafted cocktails and a refreshing, modern menu that draws inspiration from bold flavors and fresh ingredients. Here you step in to an inviting and stylish atmosphere, built for creating an incredible experience. Starling brings you contemporary dishes from timeless classics to personal recipes with a fondness for locality, designed to be loved by one or shared by many. Their mixologists can serve up a broad range of tasty concoctions, either mixed, stirred or shaken and inspired by local ingredients and international techniques.

Starling is named after a highly social bird that likes to travel in large flocks. That is why you will see decorative bird cages in the restaurant. Our table had one. Let me recommend the Mediterranean platter (including some amazing focaccia bread), caprese risotto with shrimp, the steak frites and the beef tenderloin. Save room for the delicious sticky toffee pudding.

The Métropolitain Brasserie, conveniently located next to the Byward Market at 700 Sussex, is home. Home to Ottawa's largest oyster bar, the restaurant is open seven days a week, serving lunch, dinner and brunch on weekends. The Brasserie presents a Hill Hour every day from 4 pm to 7 pm for discounted oysters and shrimp, and every Thursday for Buck a Shuck. There is an award-winning wine list, and this is considered a prime place for a large event or a romantic dinner for two, adding that certain Parisian flavor. Let me recommend the small size seafood tower, the burrata toast, the crispy duck confit and the petit steak frites. For dessert we shared a decadent piece of flourless chocolate cake, a recommenda-



The Byward Market

tion from our server Michael.

The Metcalfe Hotel in Ottawa marks the Gray Collection's first hotel property outside Montreal. Located in the heart of downtown Ottawa, just a few blocks from the historic Parliament Hill, the boutique hotel is home to Cocotte, a French-inspired restaurant on the ground level, where we dined. From veal blanquette to duck confit, the executive chef has crafted a creative menu inspired by French cuisine with market-fresh ingredients. Try the Canadian oysters, the salmon tartare, the scallop and truffle risotto and the cod chaudrée. For dessert you will enjoy a s'mores log, with marshmallows, chocolate sauce and some other decadent ingredients.

Somewhere Dine Bar in Ottawa's Byward Market combines casual elegance with a contemporary European flair. You will enjoy a dozen oysters to start along with the truffle tuna crudo and the Arancini al Agrodolce (risotto balls filled with a savory mixture, breaded, and deep-fried to crispy perfection). I strongly recommend the Somewhere Surf & Turf Board (tenderloin, lobster tails, seared scallops, poached jumbo tiger tail shrimp, glazed cremini mushrooms, garlic roasted asparagus, roasted parmesan potatoes, lemon garlic aioli, torched lemon, peppercorn sauce and clarified butter). For dessert the decadent trio of tiramisu, fried cinnamon rolls and chocolate brownie is fantastic!

Over the last few years I feel as if I have become an ambassador the Red Lobster restaurant chain. Yes, I am a big fan, and as a frequent visitor to Ottawa for fam-

ily reasons, no visit goes without a trip to Red Lobster on St. Laurent Blvd. just as you enter the city via Highway 417. There is a second location at a mall in Nepean. Red Lobster was indeed a staple in Quebec over 25 years ago. But the company pulled out of our province and given the decision in May to file for bankruptcy that does not seem to be in the cards. As of this writing they were to be sold to Fortress Credit Corp., a lender experienced in restaurant management that has financed the chain's operations, including a new \$100 million loan that allowed it to stay afloat during its bankruptcy proceedings.

In recent months Red Lobster has closed around 100 restaurants and at least a dozen more are set to shut their doors, none in Canada. It has been reported that mismanagement, competition, inflation and other factors brought down Red Lobster. Thai Union, a global seafood supplier, became Red Lobster's leading shareholder in 2020. Even though they cut costs and removed longtime, promotions such as \$20 endless shrimp resulted in a loss of \$11 million. It is reported to be \$1 billion in debt.

I first went to the Red Lobster on St. Laurent Blvd. in Ottawa some 20 years ago when I met the general manager Ian Forrester. When I started returning here for family reasons, I was delighted to see Ian was still there. He was excited to tell me about how many Montrealers come for lunch or dinner, whether they are visiting or just coming in for the evening. Yes, Ian confirms, there are Montrealers who drive in for dinner only. I know a few

of them.

Well, I am pleased to report that the Red Lobster on St. Laurent Blvd. is doing just fine. When I arrived for dinner the parking lot was full and the wait for tables was so long, the overflow had to sit on benches outside. Forrester was happy to have me spread the word that the Canadian locations have done very well in recent years and they are not impacted by the threats of closure. Many people only read the headlines, so naturally Ian and his team keep getting calls to see if they are still open.

For our most recent visit the three of us started off a Caesar salad, some clam chowder and the mouth-watering signature biscuits. You get two per serving and there is an option to order a half dozen more — good to wrap in a plastic baggie and take home to enjoy. These delicious and soft rolls are not something you will find anywhere else. For the main course I chose the lobster, shrimp and salmon meal with a side of rice. The others chose the Ultimate Feast (Maritime lobster tail, garlic shrimp, snow crab legs and Walt's Favourite shrimp, with rice); and the Twin Maine tails (a pair of perfectly roasted Maritime lobster tails with cole slaw and mashed potato).

I made breakfast plans with a number of friends. Ottawa has so many dining establishments that serve all-day breakfast, something that is not common in Montreal. Zola's Restaurant offers Italian fare and a terrific "Blunch" menu served from 8 am to 3 pm each day. The Big Budgie caught my eye: three eggs, home fries, corned beef hash, calabrese sausage, capicola ham, bacon plus a breakfast sausage and a choice of toast. I substituted the sausages for some smoked salmon. My friend chose the eggs benny: two poached eggs, home fries and an English muffin topped with hollandaise choice and a small salad. Located in a strip mall in the west-end of the city, Zola's is family-owned and operated.

At the iconic Nate's Deli on Sparks Street my breakfast companion Steve and I both ordered the King Nate. It comes with three eggs, a choice of bacon, ham, sausage or tomatoes, with home fries, a pancake of French toast and toast. You can also get items like steak and eggs, omelettes, a breakfast poutine, eggs benedict, a breakfast sandwich and bagel and lox. Steve and I also decided to order smoked meat sandwiches to go.

The Wellington Diner specializes in all things related to breakfast, lunch, dinner, and everything in between. I was pleased to meet owner Jeff Frost. My dining partner chose one of the many Eggs Benny options, which feature two poached eggs atop an English muffin and smothered in savoury hollandaise. This is served alongside house homies (home fries) or a house salad. I chose the smoked meat hash: juicy smoked meat, sauteed peppers and onions, three cheese blend with two over-easy eggs and chipotle hollandaise. Before I left, I also ordered a hot chicken sandwich ■