

Ottawa remains a fabulous getaway opportunity for Montrealers



MIKE COHEN
FYI

As Canada's capital, Ottawa is the perfect place to experience some of the country's best attractions, celebrations and flavours 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 three days or more.

For family reasons we have made Ottawa a regular part of our lives the last couple of years, notably for the peak vacation periods. Most recently we enjoyed a fabulous summer holiday there. For a Montrealer, what's better than driving just over two hours to enjoy some professional baseball, great museums, nice beaches and delicious dining experiences? It was nice for me to sit down with Vladimir Jean-Gilles. He's the recently appointed manager of travel media relations and he grew up in Montreal.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD MUSEUM

Located on a national heritage site, the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum is the world's only working farm in the heart of a capital city. The museum offers visitors a unique opportunity to see diverse breeds of farm animals — important to past and present Canadian agriculture — and to learn about the food they eat. In addition to breeds common to Canadian agriculture, such as Holstein dairy cows and Angus beef cows, the museum also has Canadienne and Milking Shorthorn dairy cows, as well as Tamworth pigs. Many other breeds of dairy and beef cattle, pigs, sheep, horses,

poultry, goats, rabbits and even honeybees round out the collection.

Museum programs and exhibitions are related to Canada's agricultural heritage, food literacy, and the benefits and relationship of agricultural science and technology to Canadians' everyday lives. Public programming also includes school programs, summer day camps, interpretive tours, demonstrations, and joint undertakings with community groups and associations. On the day I visited there were busloads of camps and the kids were having a great time.

Some of the exhibitions were eye openers. *Canola! Seeds of Innovation* marks the 50th anniversary of canola as a "Made in Canada" crop. This is an immersive and interactive exhibition exploring the ingenuity of Canadian plant researchers, who took on the challenge of creating a healthy vegetable oil from rapeseed, a little-known plant that grew well on the Prairies. Following decades of collaboration and hard work, they succeeded in developing one of Canada's most important crops: canola. Meanwhile, via documentation and videos, the *Healthy Oceans for a Healthy Planet* exhibit examines the challenges facing our oceans due to pollution, habitat destruction, and overfishing. Covering over 70 per cent of the Earth, oceans help regulate the climate and provide us with food, energy, and livelihoods.

Meanwhile, the exhibition *From Earth to Us* explores how we transform natural resources to meet our needs and wants — and the resulting impact this has on the world around us. Visitors will delve into topics such as mining, materials, metallurgy, energy, climate change, and water resources.



Montreal native Vladimir Jean-Gilles manages travel and media relations for Ottawa Tourism.

Discovery Park, an interactive, outdoor exhibition is accessible throughout spring, summer and fall. Agriculture is a dynamic industry, constantly transformed by human ingenuity and creativity. Stroll through *Discovery Park* and explore some fascinating agricultural innovations...you may be surprised by what you find!

Have you ever wondered what it's like to drive a tractor?

Farming For the Future, their newest exhibition, is waiting for your visit! You can climb aboard a life-sized tractor cab — or enter an immersive, accessible cabin at ground level — to digitally drive a tractor.

The Canada Agriculture and Food Museum is open year-round, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a week. It is open on statutory holidays, except December 25. The museum offers free admission from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. Reserve your tickets in advance. It is located at 901 Prince of Wales Drive.

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 19 years ago.

POOL AND GOLF TIME

While in Ottawa we had a chance to

visit the Brookstreet Hotel in suburban Kanata, enjoying a delicious lunch on the patio at Perspectives Restaurant and some quality time at the lovely outdoor saltwater pool. The hotel has 276 rooms and suites spaced across 18 floors, and plans do call for it to eventually build a second tower.

The Marshes Golf course has a pond that converts to a skating rink in the winter months. An 18-hole mini golf course is very popular with families. It is no surprise that the NHL's Ottawa Senators partnered up with the property. Brookstreet is recognized as the official hotel and resort of the Senators and Canadian Tire Centre, which also includes the title sponsorship to the Brookstreet Lounge located at ice level. What this also means is if you happen to stay here during the hockey season, you never know which NHL player you might run into. The property is located at 525 Legett Drive.

DINING OUT

There are so many wonderful choices for dining out. The historic York on William (YOW) building, which encompasses Starling Restaurant & Bar and Apothecary Cocktail Lounge, represents a must visit. 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. Early occupants included an undertaker, a baker, and a wholesaler, uses which reflect the diverse commercial activity of the ByWard Market in the 19th Century.

Starling is Ottawa's new concept, which elevates any night out with hand-crafted

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Kids get on a tractor at the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum.

OTTAWA

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cocktails and a refreshing, modern menu. Here you step in to an inviting and stylish atmosphere, built for creating an incredible experience. There are two seasonal patios: one at street level can seat 50 while the rooftop has room for 60.

Last summer I made my first visit to the Métropolitain Brasserie in Ottawa, conveniently located next to the Byward Market at 700 Sussex. That is just steps away from Parliament Hill. Home to Ottawa's largest oyster bar, the restaurant is open seven days a week, serving lunch, dinner and brunch on weekends. When we planned our return summer trip to the Nation's Capital, this was the first dining establishment on our list. The patio can accommodate 125 people while the capacity inside is 300.

Lavender Grill and Lounge opened in the Byward Market in the summer of 2022, the vision of owner Reza Khakbaz. Khakbaz and his team have certainly taken advantage of connecting the name of the restaurant, from the décor to the colouring of some of the drinks like my blackberry smash tea mocktail, a combination of blackberry and Earl Grey tea. There are 100 seats inside the restaurant and nice terrace which can accommodate 20. The menu contains a touch of Dubai and Iran, two countries where Khakbaz has lived. But make no mistake, the items to choose from are all very familiar from steaks to pasta.

Two years ago, Pierrefonds native Christopher Michaud, a former sports reporter for *The Suburban*, opened a popular supper club called Marzitelli and named after his Italian mother. On my most recent trip to Ottawa I went to visit with him and take advantage of the popular Marzitelli Sunday brunch. We sat on the rooftop terrace, overlooking hopping Elgin Street. Chris's charming wife, Fei, helps manage the place and on this day his niece Caleigh was my server. Fei also handles the bar and provides great renditions of classic cocktails and specializes in custom house favourites. Ask about her Amaretto Sour or Fei's Negroni!

Chris left Montreal in 2013 to pursue his love for music and cooking, landing in Toronto. Initially he built websites and came up with a concept for online orders and deliveries for restaurants, preceding Uber and the other apps. He did that for three years until he decided to open a bar on Yonge Street. When the venue started attracting lineups for its drinks, music and pasta, a neighbouring restaurant took notice and proposed a merger. That arrangement lasted two years before Chris was on the move again, this time to the popular Ontario summer vacation spot of Wasaga Beach where he set up some food kiosks.

He returned to Toronto in 2018 and established his first Marzitelli. This was small operation, but business evolved nicely until the COVID-19 pandemic turned everything into pieces. By the fall of 2020, Chris and his wife decided that another fresh start was necessary and this time it would be Ottawa. His new version of Marzitelli materialized at some prime real estate at Elgin. The second floor dining room and lounge can accommodate 220 people, plus 40 on the seasonal terrace. Facing east, it has the distinct advantage of an early morning sun and afternoon shade.

The dinner menu is noted for excellent pasta dishes, all made from scratch and from the Marzitelli family recipe book, as well as French classics, pizzas, burgers, steak, shrimp, whiskey maple braised salmon, fish tacos, a poke bowl and more. Chris's late dad was a musician and his mom a cook. On the stage sits Chris's baby grand piano and it isn't uncommon to see him come out of the kitchen after dinner service to enjoy a few cocktails with the guests while playing well-known hits. Often, guests are also entertained by one of his many musical friends invited as performers. In fact, his house band is called the Men From Marz and performs about once a month. It includes Chris and NDG musician Dimo James Papadimitrios.

Finally, Al's Diner on Clyde Street serves breakfast and a whole lot of other menu items all-day long. The place opens at 6 a.m. Monday to Saturday and 7 a.m. on Sundays, remaining open for dinner Tuesday to Friday. Besides an array of breakfast items, the regular menu consists of items like pizza, wings, burgers, salads, fish and much more.

A DAY AT THE BEACH

Ottawa has several lovely beaches minutes from the city centre. Our favourite is at Britannia Bay, located on the Ottawa River. It is great for swimming, picnics or just watching the sailboats go by on a beautiful summer day. Key amenities include washrooms, change rooms and outdoor showers; free parking; a canteen; picnic tables and barbecue pits; and play structures and fields. Lifeguards are on duty daily between noon and 7 p.m. during the summer season. Volleyball net rentals are available for a modest price per day.

VISIT OTTAWA PASS

A new option for visitors to Ottawa launched this summer: the Visit Ottawa Pass is available for adults and children as either a one-day or three-day pass, offering admission to the Canadian Museum of History; Canadian War Museum; Haunted Walk of Ottawa; National Gallery of Canada; the Diefenbunker, Canada's Cold War Museum; Royal Canadian Mint; and Gray Line Ottawa in summer months. In winter months, Cobblestone Tours takes over. Passes are good for 24 (or 72) hours after their first use. Watch for full details at visitottawapass.ca

PARLIAMENT HILL

The restoration of Centre Block on Parliament Hill, which started in 2019, continues. A trompe l'oeil has been installed on Centre Block and will expand as masonry work continues through 2023 and beyond, allowing visitors to get a sense of what the building looks like behind the tarps. In the meantime, free guided tours of an architecturally impressive "temporary" House of Commons in West Block and a "temporary" Senate chamber in the former train station next to the Rideau Canal are available year-round. visit.parl.ca

WALKING TOURS

Ottawa Walking Tours now offers a food/art/history tour called the Centretown Neighbourhood Experience. Tours depart from Minto Park on Elgin Street every Saturday afternoon at 2:30 p.m. until September 30.



Westmount native Jacques Shore is one of the owners of the Ottawa Titans.



A view of the poolside at the Brookstreet.