

Visiting Ottawa anytime soon?

Here are my latest tips on the dining scene

MtlRestoRap

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OTTAWA- The culinary scene in our nation's capital is in full bloom, with a thriving community of Ottawa chefs and diverse restaurants making names for themselves both at home and abroad. Here are tips from my most recent trip.

Starling

The historic York on William (YOW) building, which encompasses Starling Restaurant & Bar and Apothecary Cocktail Lounge (www.starlingottawa.ca) in the Byward Market, 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 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. Our wonderful server Rory started us off with some drinks: a Scarlet Tanager, an Elderflower Egret and an Abigail Placebo. Following a look at the menu, we began with 12 oysters. Next, we chose something new, a Mediterranean platter. It was highlighted by freshly baked and piping hot focaccia bread along with marinated roasted peppers, salsa verde and cerignola olives. We also enjoyed a bowl of caprese risotto with shrimp. For the main course, we ordered the steak frites and the beef tenderloin. For dessert we shared the delicious sticky toffee pudding.

Métropolitain Brasserie

We can never get enough of the fabulous Métropolitain Brasserie (www.metropolitainbrasserie.com) in Ottawa, conveniently located next to the Byward Market at 700 Sussex. Home to Ottawa's largest oyster bar, the restaurant is open seven days a week, serving lunch, dinner and brunch on weekends. We started the evening off with some cocktails, The small size seafood tower was more than enough for three of us to share. It contained shrimp, oysters, mussels, snow crab, cod croquettes, scallop crudo and ceviche. The burrata toast for two was another treat for the three of us to share. There is a nice selection of main courses. We went for the duck confit, the petit steak frites and the flourless chocolate cake for dessert.



The Somewhere Surf & Turf Board.



The dining room at Cocotte.

Cocotte

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 (www.cocottebistro.com), a French-inspired restaurant on the ground level, where we dined. Our server Cedric started us off with some cocktails. We then went through the menu and started off with a dozen Canadian oysters and salmon tartare. For the main course, the three of us ordered the duck confit, the scallop and truffle risotto and the cod chaudrée. For dessert we shared the special of the night, a s'mores log, with marshmallows, chocolate sauce and some other decadent ingredients.

Red Lobster

It was big news back in May when the Red Lobster (www.redlobster.ca) restaurant chain filed for bankruptcy. But I am pleased to report that my "go to" spot on St. Laurent Blvd. in Ottawa is still bringing in big crowds. For our most recent visit the three of us started off a Caesar salad, some clam chowder and the mouth-watering signature biscuits. 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).

Somewhere Dine Bar

We had heard a lot about a trendy dining spot called Somewhere Dine Bar (somerwhereottawa.com) in Ottawa's Byward Market. We were greeted by our server Karime, who started us out with some drinks. It was then time to look at the appetizers and we selected a dozen oysters, the truffle tuna crudo and the Arancini al Agrodolce.



Server Clara at the Wellington Diner.



The Bird Cage table at Starling

For the main course the three of us shared the most remarkable Somewhere Surf & Turf Board. This was quite the feat: a 14-ounce tenderloin, six-ounce poached 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. We did save some room for dessert and along came a decadent trio of tiramisu, fried cinnamon rolls and chocolate brownie.

Breakfast Options

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 (www.zolas.ca) offers Italian fare and a terrific "Blunch" menu served from 8 am to 3 pm every 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 benney: 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 (www.nates.ca) 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 (www.wellingtondiner.ca) 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.

For more details on each of these restaurants go to the Ottawa section of www.MtlRestoRap.com. Mike Cohen can be reached at info@mikecohen.ca