

The latest from Ottawa

The Royal Canadian Mint, Butterflies and Winterlude

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FYI

There are so many terrific museum-like tours to enjoy when visiting Ottawa and over the last few years I have taken many of them. The Royal Canadian Mint was always on my list and I must say the private tour I received from guide Jasmin was a real educational experience.

First off, there are two Royal Canadian Mints: the one on Sussex Drive in Ottawa and another in Winnipeg.

The Royal Canadian Mint's headquarters occupies the same historic building in Ottawa where it was founded in 1908. This facility produces world-renowned collector coins, gold and silver bullion, and medals and medallions that honor those who have made a significant impact on Canada. Winnipeg is where the loonie, toonie, dimes and nickels are produced.

On the tour you will get a bird's eye view of the production floor and come away with a better understanding of the numismatic coin making process. Here you will learn about the skill and precision that goes into coin design while getting a closer look at their state-of-the-art gold refining-technology. I stared right into their record-breaking "Million Dollar Coin" and got up close and personal with the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games medals.

Jasmin pointed to a 575 kg piece of coil and asked me what I thought it was worth. I had no idea. When she told me \$6.2 million, I was floored.

The boutique offers a wide range of beautiful coins and commemorative circulation sets. There are also offer Mint branded items and Canadian themed souvenirs that are perfect keepsakes to remember your visit.

In order for the Royal Canadian Mint to comply with its obligations including those under the Proceeds of Crime (money laundering) Terrorist Financing Act, if you are planning on purchasing Royal Canadian Mint bullion product(s) through one of the boutiques, you may be required to provide official Government issued identification and/or any other



You can purchase a coin collection.

information deemed appropriate by the Royal Canadian Mint before completing your purchase. Examples of situations when this would occur include for cash purchases and larger value transactions.

Tours last about 45 minutes and they are available in both official languages. Due to a fluctuating production schedule, not all tours are guaranteed to view live coin production during your visit.

All coins manufactured by the Royal Canadian Mint are legal tender. However, unlike Canadian circulation coins, collector coins are non-circulating legal tender (NCLT). As such, these coins are not intended for daily commercial transactions and accepting them as payment or for redemption is at the discretion of businesses and financial institutions.

As collector coins can only be redeemed at face value by businesses and financial institutions willing to accept them, it is

recommended that individuals wishing to sell a collector coin first consult with a coin dealer, who is more likely to offer a price above face value.

The first coin officially made at the Royal Canadian Mint was a 50 cent circulation coin. Governor General Earl Grey activated the press on January 2, 1908, which struck Canada's first domestically produced coin. A few moments later, the Countess Grey struck the second coin ever produced at the Royal Canadian Mint – a copper penny. Jasmin showed me models of two 106 kg coins produced in 2007. Their face value was \$1 million each and they were sold to the Royal Ontario Museum and a businessman from Dubai who brought it back to his country and made it into a coffee table. In honor of the 125th anniversary of the Stanley Cup in 2017, the Mint made a palm size replica and sold copies for \$360 each.

The production of banknotes is the responsibility of the Bank of Canada.

Foreign circulation products and supplies are another pillar of the Mint's Circulation Business. They have more than 100 years of experience delivering coins, coin blanks and tokens to customers around the world, including central banks, mints, monetary authorities and finance ministries. The Mint also produces high technology dies for international customers, which allows countries to strike their own coins. These contracts leverage the infrastructure and industry-leading expertise in the Mint's Winnipeg manufacturing facility.

The Mint produces colored circulation coins for international customers, using its high-speed, high-resolution pad printing technology. Examples include the award-winning 50-cent Armistice coin produced in 2018 for the Reserve Bank

of New Zealand, the Barbados 2021 \$1 "Flying Fish," the first glow-in-the-dark colored coin produced for circulation abroad, and the world's first double-sided colored circulation coin, issued in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Central Bank of the Bahamas.

The Mint is an award-winning numismatics market leader, producing a great variety of innovative and diversely themed collector coins, from entry-level to premium offerings, for every type of customer. Its numismatic product plan places the customer at the center of its product development so that the coins respond to their needs and interests. At the same time, the Mint is focused on making coins that represent Canada's history, culture and values, while also reflecting Canadian diversity.

Thanks to its world-class designs, the Mint's global leadership in the art and science of minting is consistently recognized with prestigious international awards in large part due to innovative technology enhancements such as ultra-high relief, selective plating and stunning color that allow the Mint to create unique and compelling products. Mint.ca continues to rank among the top destinations for online numismatic coin purchases in Canada and around the world, a direct result of the Mint's focus on building traffic to its website in order to grow direct sales, as well as the secondary market for collector coins.

The Mint is the recipient of many industry awards for the theme, design or innovative qualities of its numismatic coins. Chief among these are the Coin of the Year Awards (USA) and the Mint Director's Conference Awards (international).

The Mint is an experienced and respected manufacturer of high-quality, handcrafted medals commemorating events of national significance and honoring Canadians for their military and civilian achievements. Its most notable customers include the Canadian Forces, the Chancellery of Honours (Rideau Hall) and the RCMP. Among the medals and honours crafted by the Mint are the athlete medals of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games and the 2015 Toronto PAN AM/PARAPAN AM Games, the Order of Yukon and the King Charles III Coronation Medal.

The Royal Canadian Mint is located at 320 Sussex Drive. It is recommended you call 1-800-267-1871 to book your tour at least 48 to 72 hours in advance. Walk-up tours are first-come, first-served and often sell out due to limited space. The boutique is open Tuesday to Sunday, from 10 am to 5 pm. Info: <https://www.mint.ca/en/visit-the-mint/ottawa-mint>

Live Butterflies

Tropical butterflies are once again fluttering around the Canadian Museum of Nature's solarium. *Butterflies in Flight*, a delightful exhibition of live, winged beau-

EMBER PHOTO



The bar at Ember.

OTTAWA

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ties, continues for a year until January 4, 2026. Dozens of butterfly species — such as the impressive, large blue morpho — flutter around the solarium at any given time. New interpretive panels in the adjacent Bugs Alive exhibition present information about pollinators and their important role. Pollinators boost the yield of crops such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, oils and fibres. Cross-pollination promotes the genetic diversity of wild plants.

The butterflies are supplied from sustainable farms in Costa Rica and the Philippines — transported to the Museum during their pupal stage and raised by the museum's animal care specialists. Visitors will be able to see the pupae hanging in rows in the solarium and perhaps spot some butterflies starting to emerge. There is a species identification guide, as well as pinned specimens for close-up examination. Brightly colored clothing is encouraged to attract the butterflies.

Entry into Butterflies in Flight is \$6 in addition to the cost of general museum admission. In conjunction with Butterflies in Flight, the museum is presenting the Canadian premiere of the movie, *Butterfly Journey*. A story of adaptation and survival, the movie follows the vast migrations of the blue tigers of Australia and the monarchs of North America and Mexico. *Butterfly Journey* is produced by Stranger Than Fiction Films in association with Definition Films and distributed by K2 Studios.

Visit nature.ca to reserve tickets, or for information about hours, admission, and other activities.

Winterlude Fun

One of the major cold weather attractions in Ottawa for the past 47 years has been Winterlude, with the 2025 edition underway now until Feb. 16. There is something for everyone to enjoy, from family-friendly activities, to group adventures and date nights! Visitors can look forward to stunning ice sculptures created by artists from around the world, skating on the world-famous Rideau Canal Skateway (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and playing around in a gigantic

snow playground called Snowflake Kingdom.

Check out <https://ottawatourism.ca/en/see-and-do/winterlude>

Dining Tips

On each trip to Ottawa, I share with readers tips on where to dine.

Chez Lionel: Groupe Grandio made its biggest headlines in recent years with the acquisition of iconic steakhouses Moishes and Gibbys. But the highly successful culinary operation has a host of other dining establishments in its stable and that includes the French brasserie Chez Lionel, which presently has five locations and a sixth on the way this spring. While in Ottawa, we enjoyed our first experience in Kanata. Chez Lionel was purchased by Groupe Grandio in 2022 and this locale marks its first outside of Quebec. The intention is to expand across the country. The others are in Boucherville, Brossard, Sainte-Therese and Laval (presently being renovated after flooding last summer). In March the sixth Chez Lionel will debut in downtown Montreal at 1259 Rene-Levesque Ouest.

The Kanata location has 96 seats in the dining room, 25 more at the bar and a seasonal patio that can accommodate 58, notes General Manager James Denis. It is located directly off Highway 417 at ground level of a Holiday Inn. There is ample free parking. We started off with some drinks. For appetizers we selected the delicious cream of butternut squash soup, the bluefin tataki, the duck confit arancini and 12 oysters with them. The main course choices were the duck breast a l'orange, seafood risotto and braised beef cheek. For dessert we shared the tarte tatin, a pastry in which apples are caramelized in butter and sugar before being baked and served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and an irresistible macaron platter of six.

Ember: One of Ottawa's newest restaurants is Ember, which opened on Clarence Street in the Byward Market last June. At Ember it is all about sharing and that is precisely what we did. After some drinks, a couple of matcha milk punches and a chardonnay, we ordered a half dozen Quebec/New Brunswick oysters, beef tartare with roasted marrow, spicy crispy tuna, charcoal kissed salmon crudo, wood fired halloumi, zucchini pesto pizza and the 12-ounce char-grilled striploin. For dessert we shared the Turkish lokma, made of leavened and deep fried dough balls, soaked in syrup and coated with cinnamon.

Red Lobster: What would a trip to Ottawa be for me without dinner at my beloved Red Lobster? There are two locations in the nation's capital. However, our "go to" spot is the one on St. Laurent Blvd. where general manager Ian Forrester, ably seconded by manage Owen Hoyt, has been greeting us for more than two decades. Red Lobster recently came out of bankruptcy protection and had to close a number of locations in the United States. The chain is present in four



OTTAWA TOURISM PHOTO

A scene from Winterlude.

Canadian provinces — Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Quebec last saw a Red Lobster some 30 years ago. New ownership has placed Red Lobster back into a good business position. There have been no issues of concern here in Ottawa where the parking lot on St. Laurent Blvd. is always packed with cars and it is common to find a lineup for tables out the door. We started off with some spiked strawberry lemonades and soon enough along came the mouthwatering and freshly baked Cheddar Bay Biscuits. For starters two of us went for cups of piping hot clam chowder while the other member of our party tried the new lobster bisque. The main course was next and there was no question for two us. We had been craving the live Maritime lobster. The other member of our party wanted a little variety and she chose Walt's Shrimp Your Way; regular shrimp, garlic shrimp, a Maritime lobster tail along with some mashed potatoes on the side. While we were quite full, the chocolate wave dessert looked too good to pass up so we asked Karen to bring us three forks and plates to share. It came with a big scoop of vanilla ice cream and some chocolate sauce.

Cindy's: One of the things I love about the Ottawa dining scene is the wide choice of diner-style restaurants that serve up good old-fashioned breakfasts. Over the last few years I have looked for little gems and I found one again in Cindy's Family Restaurant. It is in a small strip shopping center in an industrial sector of the Ottawa suburb of Nepean. "Cindy" is owner Cindy Shields who told me that the restaurant has been in her family for 35 years. I decided to order the I'm Hungry Special, which included three eggs over easy, two slices of bacon, two sausages, ham, home fries, toast, two slices of tomato and a cup of tea. This kind of breakfast is always a treat and I was not disappointed. My friend Jack

went for the veggie omelette, Breakfast service ends at 11 am and lunch is then served until 2 pm.

Dinty's: Last summer I was driving through the town of Aylmer in the Gatineau region, just across the bridge from Ottawa, when I passed by a place called Dinty's. Later I did some research on the place and it turned out to be something quite iconic. So, on my most recent visit, I dropped by and met Jim Sourges. He owns the place with his brothers Andre and Louis. First established here in the 1930s, the spot was originally named after the Dinty Moore character in the then popular "Bringing up Father" comic strip. In 1962, Greek immigrant Peter Sourges purchased the place with his wife Afrodit, undertaking significant renovations by adding booths with mini juke boxes, pizza to the menu and home delivery. A fire destroyed the interior of the restaurant in 1976 and it was renovated again, this time with a bar and a dining room. The late 80s saw a return to Greek heritage with the introduction of souvlaki and gyros to the menu along with the famous homemade dressing. In 2000, Peter and his family made a bold move and built a new facility on the same land. The new "Dintys" opened in November 2000, seating 140 inside and 50 more on a seasonal patio. There is a very large parking lot. I joined Jim for breakfast, ordering the popular combo with a few extras: bacon with rye toast, eggs over easy, crispy cubed potatoes, French toast and a cup of tea. It all came quite quickly and hit the spot nicely. There are a variety of other egg dishes, including benedicts and omelettes, as well as wraps, crêpes, waffles, pancakes, kids meals and mimosas. The lunch and dinner menus feature Greek specialties such as souvlaki and pita options, fish, pasta, burgers, sandwiches, pizza, steak and poutine. The place is popular for groups and parties. ■

MIKE COHEN PHOTO



Service with a smile from Cindy Shields.