

Oshawa is much more than just the epicenter of an automotive empire



MIKE COHEN
FYI

OSHAWA — How many times have I driven to Toronto over the last few decades, passing by the city of Oshawa on the way and merely taking a glance from Highway 401?

I knew that Oshawa, located in the Durham Region, was the home of a General Motors plant and the Generals junior hockey team. Well, I recently had to make return trips to and from Toronto to drop off and pickup family members. Doing these drives back to back was not an option. I needed a place to recharge my batteries. I also wanted to stay somewhere close to the 401. Oshawa was calling my name.

Where to stay? I zeroed in on a Marriott International property, which had just opened a few years ago. It is a combined 115-room Courtyard by Marriott hotel and 98-suite TownePlace Suites by Marriott hotel at 1011 Bloor Street East, owned and managed by Sunray Group of Hotels. The property shares a fitness centre, an indoor swimming pool and meeting spaces with over 12,000 square feet of versatile event space. I was impressed with what I learned about Sunray, which has some 50 hotels under its umbrella, including four in Montreal.

The dual-brand property I stayed at is situated just north of Highway 401 and is connected to the Oshawa Harmony Event Centre. It offers convenient access to the Oshawa Centre, Canadian Tire Motorsport Park, Tribute Communities Centre and the Canadian Automotive Museum.

I got to meet with General Manager Ilhan Kodalak and Operations Manager Heather Richardson. Kodalak recently assumed the helm after running a Homewood Suites in Ottawa for five years. “I had my job interview

via Zoom,” he told me, “so when I arrived and first saw this property, I was so impressed; it was like a resort.”

Kodalak is not wrong. If I closed my eyes and landed in the lobby, I’d be hard pressed to challenge the GM’s statement. From the large parking lot, impressive façade and gorgeous interior you will guarantee a five-star experience. I was elated with my accommodations, a full suite with all the comforts of home.

“Attracting both business and leisure travellers, the Oshawa area is an ideal location for these hotels,” said Janis Milham, Senior Vice President, Classic Select Brands for Marriott International. “Each brand offers distinct amenities and services that tailor to all visitors.”

The Courtyard by Marriott Oshawa guest room offers hybrid zones for working, sleeping, relaxing and getting ready. The new room design is intuitive and thoughtful, offering flexible yet comfortable spaces that enable technology. Upon arrival, guests can store bags on the “Luggage Drop” and plug personal devices into the “Tech Drop” ledge for seamless technology integration.

The Courtyard also offers the Refreshing Business lobby environment, where guests can enjoy an open and bright area outside of their rooms. Along with media pods, complimentary Wi-Fi and a variety of seating zones, the redefined space is ideal for everything from pop-up meetings to social gatherings. The lobby also features the newly designed Bistro, the epicentre of the lobby, which fosters social connections and collaboration with more flexible and informal seating options. As an ideal casual dining destination, the Bistro offers guests a wide variety of fresh local classic menu items with a contemporary twist. In the evening, the Bistro Bar also features an array of cocktails, beer and wine for guests to enjoy at the end of the day. The entire menu was carefully designed to offer a variety of flavorful, fresh items to

satisfy every palate from morning to night.

The TownePlace Suites by Marriott Oshawa is ideal for travellers who need accommodations for longer stays, offering studio and one-bedroom suites with fully equipped kitchens that have stainless steel appliances and granite countertops, and separate living/working and sleeping areas in some suites. Guests can work and relax on their terms in modern suites that feature a fun, yet sophisticated sofa and task chair, a large flat screen television as well as luxurious new bedding. Most rooms also feature the Home Office Suite, complete with The Container Store’s elfa closet system, designed to provide guests with plenty of storage and flexible space to spread out and make it their own. I had two televisions which provided access to streaming services and YouTube. That is something I really appreciated to have in the background as I worked away on my laptop.

I would go a step further. Once you get into Toronto, hotels can get very expensive. This is a terrific spot to stay with the family, less than an hour from downtown Toronto. The kids will love the pool. In the spring, summer and fall you can buy your own meat, seafood and vegetables and use one of two large barbeques. They also have a nice outdoor courtyard where you can sit down at a table to eat or just relax.

On both mornings I took advantage of the excellent buffet breakfast, from waffles, eggs and bacon to bagels, toast, muffins, Danish, juices and of course coffee.

The hotel has accessible on-site parking, elevators and a self-operating lift or a sloped entry into the hotel swimming pool. Service animals are welcome. There is valet parking for vehicles outfitted for drivers in wheelchairs

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and van Accessible on-site parking. For more information about the physical features of their accessible rooms, common areas or special services relating to a specific disability you can call 1 905-215-1093.

You can log on to www.marriott.com/youcy and www.marriott.com/yooots.

DINING OUT: I had a gift card for The Keg Steakhouse & Bar, so what better place to use than at the location on the grounds of Oshawa Centre? Using Open Table, I booked a table on their outdoor patio and enjoyed a fabulous meal. The Keg serves the finest cuts of succulent steak, aged for tenderness and grilled to perfection. Prime rib is a Keg specialty, slow roasted, hand carved and perfectly seasoned with special Keg spices. That was my choice, with some lobster bisque as an appetizer. The restaurant also serves delicious seafood, memorable appetizers, crisp salads and decadent desserts. For dessert I saved room for the lemon meringue tart.

WHAT TO DO: Oshawa is a mere 55 minute drive from downtown Toronto and noted for being the epicenter of an automotive empire, a Hollywood film production hub and a place of history, culture, music and food.

This is indeed a popular spot for filming. A new Amazon Prime series called *Cross* began shooting here recently. It stars Aldis Hodge as author James Patterson's detective Alex Cross.

Parkwood National Historic Site, the family home of General Motors Canada founder Colonel Sam McLaughlin, is featured in a myriad of movies. Nearby Pickering is where the Amazon Prime series, *Jack Reacher* was filmed. Other notable film and TV series shot on location in the region have include Netflix's *Luckiest Girl Alive* and *The Umbrella Academy*; the Amazon series *The Boys*; Hallmark's *The Way Home*; both *Coroner* and *Anne With An E* on CBC; and, the award winning *Schitt's Creek*.

Parkwood National Historic Site is a museum, event space, giftshop and com-

munity hub within the city of Oshawa.

Oshawa Centre is the main shopping centre in town. Open since 1956, it has grown into a 1,219,962 square foot super-regional shopping centre serving as Durham's fashion, service, and entertainment hub. With a growing retail mix now up to 260 stores, Oshawa Centre is a one-stop-shopping experience where you can find both affordable and trendy fashion options. I was very impressed with this venue and found some great buys. For your convenience, there are a total of 60 reserved accessible parking stalls located near every entrance into Oshawa Centre. Vehicles parked in these spots must have a valid disabled parking permit clearly displayed. You can also take advantage of their complimentary wheelchairs and walkers. These are available at Guest Services on a first-come, first-serve basis. You need a government issued piece of ID and must deposit either one piece of photo identification or one piece of non-photo identification.

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery believes that art cultivates connected and caring communities. As an artist-centered and community-oriented public art gallery in Durham Region, it brings people from diverse backgrounds together to engage with art that inspires new perspectives, generates meaningful conversations, and creates a sense of belonging. The RMG is wheelchair accessible and manual wheelchairs are available. ASL and sign language interpretation are available upon request as are large print, tactile tours and audio descriptions.

The Canadian Automotive Museum is home to the world's most significant collection of Canadian automobiles. Located in a former 1920s car dealership in historic downtown Oshawa, the museum is a family-friendly, year-round destination. The main floor is wheelchair accessible, but unfortunately, the second level can currently only be accessed by stairs. It is free admission to those unable to access the second floor. Check out their website for a full schedule of walking tours, exhibits, guest talks and children's events.

Oshawa Museum is the city's only local history museum located in beautiful



PHOTO: CANADIAN AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM

The Canadian Automotive Museum is home to the world's most significant collection of Canadian automobiles

Lakeview Park. There are year-round tours of three restored homes with diverse exhibits.

The Ontario Regiment Museum houses the largest collection of operational historic military vehicles in Canada. The museum specializes in delivering immersive historical experiences. During events, visitors can see a selection of the museum's vehicles start their engines and roll onto the tank arena. The museum's largest annual event, Aquino Tank Weekend, is one of the largest military events in Canada, with a series of live battle re-enactments, exhibitors, and special guests offering the ultimate military historical experience.

For the kids, Treetop Eco-Adventure Park is an aerial treetop trekking and zipline park in North Oshawa. There are courses available for all ages. A Jr. Children's course has aerial elements and ziplines for youngsters from ages three to six years old. They also have two different Children's courses and five Youth and Adult courses depending on a height reach requirement. All the courses are self-guided with guides on the ground or courses to provide assistance where needed. The Big Zip is a zipline that is 734 inches in length and can reach speeds up to 35 km. Reservations are required.

With direct assistance it may be possible for some physically disabled people to complete some aspects of some of the courses. Advance notice and a brief interview would be required to determine if it would work out.

Santa's Cottage offers personalized, seasonal appointment only, one-on-one visits with Santa for you and your family. Included with appointments is access to The Outdoor Gallery, filled with incredible photo ops to capture your perfect holiday photo.

Put your RC to the test on the Xtreme RC & Raceways' large indoor track, browse the extensive selection of parts and supplies in the store, or speak with friendly and knowledgeable staff. It is open seven days a week. Rentals and birthday party packages also available.

NEB's Fun World is a family owned entertainment centre located at the north end of Oshawa. It offers a wide range of attractions including, bowling, go-karts, arcade, playground, VR and lots more.

By merging innovative video game concepts with state-of-the-art equipment, Battle City redefines laser tag. Objective based missions require players to be strategic as they fight their way towards victory. ■



A bedroom in the hotel.

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