

Some appetizing dining suggestions when you next visit Toronto

MtlRestoRap

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Readers became accustomed to my culinary reports from Ottawa these past few years. Now, for family reasons, I will spend more time in Toronto, where the dining scene is spectacular. So, here is my first column of tips for you.

Black+Blue Toronto (www.blackandbluetoronto.com), located on downtown King Street exemplifies the Vancouver-based Glowbal Group commitment to excellence. In Susie, a one-time Griffintown resident, we certainly had a server with encyclopedic knowledge of the offerings. We started off with some drinks. One of Susie's colleagues, Tyler, was next to visit us with a tray of all of the restaurant's different cuts of meat. That was a true education and helped us a lot in making our final decisions in relation to the curated menu.

The meal began with some appetizers: a burrata salad, some extraordinary beef carpaccio with small pieces of toast, bluefin tuna roll and the king salmon roll. We savored every morsel of these culinary masterpieces that Susie had suggested. The beef carpaccio came topped with horseradish crema, pickled shimeji mushrooms, crispy shallot, fried capers and shaved parmigiano Reggiano. For the main course, Susie guided us in the right direction. She arrived with our dinner on a mobile carving station. There was a perfectly grilled Waygu striploin, which she cut into five slices. The Beef Wellington was a real treat and Black+Blue has truly mastered the recipe. This was an impressive beef tenderloin, wrapped in a crêpe puff pastry and including mushroom duxelles, truffle jus, seasonal vegetables and pommes purée. Susie cut three mouthwatering pieces for us, with some absolutely delicious sliced carrots. Also on the side were plates of Wagyu fried rice and lobster mashed potatoes. For dessert, came the most decadent surprise of them all: the Black+Blue butter cake. This is a rich vanilla cake with a cream cheese base, topped with white Chantilly cream drizzled with salted caramel sauce and garnished with fresh berries.

When travelling in the United States, **Ruth's Chris Steak House** (www.ruthschris.ca) has always been a favorite stop of ours. There are six Canadian locations, including three in Toronto and others in Niagara Falls, Calgary and Edmonton. Not only were we fortunate



Owner Lana Duke at Ruth's Chris Steak House

enough to dine at the downtown Toronto spot, situated within the Hilton Hotel, I got a true history lesson when I interviewed Lana Duke, an incredible woman who was friends with founder Ruth Fertel. She owns the three Toronto locations and three more in San Antonio, Texas. Our server was Kimberly, who has worked at this location for 27 years and had high praise for Lana. As some warm bread arrived at the table, we started off with some drinks and allowed Kimberly to guide us through the menu. She was extremely thorough, providing some good recommendations. There were three of us on this night and given the large portions we were advised to share. We began with some appetizers, leading off with house favorite, the sizzling crab cakes. We also enjoyed 12 fresh seasonal oysters and chose the porterhouse steak for two, a 40-ounce USDA prime cut, combining the rich flavor of a strip and the tenderness of a filet. As for sides, we went for the crab fried rice and the au gratin potatoes. For dessert the warm apple pie was truly something special, coming with ice cream. We also opted for the key lime pie.

Bangkok Garden (www.bangkokgarden.ca/), located on downtown Elm Street, introduced Authentic Thai food and culture to the city over 40 years ago. I was alerted to this restaurant via a promotion with the Royal Thai Government and their Thai SELECT Certification Program. (www.thaiselect.ca). My friend selected from the main menu. I took advantage of the unlimited tasting menu buffet, which included a wonderful noodle bar. The soup was simply fantastic! At the noodle bar the server allowed me to select exactly what I wanted included, and this was a treat. It was piping hot, containing rice noodles, chicken and some garlic bites. Anthony had a similar soup brought to the table by our server. For the main course, my friend



The extraordinary Beef Wellington at Black+Blue

Anthony went with the Phad See EEW, containing broad rice noodles, vegetables and egg, with chicken added. I am a big fan of buffets and after having my soup I went back and filled my plate with some spring rolls, chicken drumsticks, chicken fried rice, shrimps and some tasty chicken slices. There are dessert options as well.

We have enjoyed the glamorous afternoon tea service at **the Ritz-Carlton** in Montreal in the past.



Server Fianna at Eggspectation

So, it was very nice to do the same at the Toronto location's lovely **EPOCH Bar & Kitchen** (www.epochtoronto.com). Our server provided a comprehensive overview of the tea selection. In no time at all that arrived, as did a tower of delicate butter scones, finger sandwiches and sweets arrived at the table.

Now that I will be coming to Toronto a few times a year for family reasons, one of my first scouting missions involved finding the closest **Red Lobster** (www.redlobster.ca) location from where we were staying. Only a few blocks away on downtown Bay Street was one of the largest Red Lobster locations, I have ever seen. In fact, it seats over 260 people. Our server Ana Maria started us off with some drinks and brought us the always much anticipated basket of house-made cheddar biscuits. For appetizers, we opted for cups of piping hot cups of clam chowder and lobster bisque, accompanied by crackers. As for the main course, I chose the ultimate feast: Maritime lobster tail, garlic shrimp, snow crab legs and Walt's Favourite Shrimp. It was served with rice. The other members of our party went for a one and a quarter pound lobster, with a side of mashed potatoes and Walt's Favourite Shrimp. The latter came hand-breaded, butterflied and lightly fried, served with cocktail sauce and choice of one side. We saved some space for dessert and shared a delicious piece of Key Lime pie.

I have long been a fan of the Montreal-founded **Eggspectation** (www.eggspectation.com) restaurant chain. While in Toronto I noticed that there was an Eggspectation downtown, at the corner of Bay Street and Albert right near a main entrance to Eaton Centre. The manager and franchisee is none other than Bennett Renda. Yep, he is the son of founder Enzo Renda and has been running this location for 11 years. My breakfast companion on this morning was an old friend whom I grew up with in Montreal who has lived in Toronto for three decades. This was his first Eggspectation experience and he was impressed. We started off by sharing some gooey goose bread, something not available in Quebec. My friend went for the Huevos Rancheros, two free-range eggs, prepared any style, piled on tortillas, layered with refried beans, ground chorizo, avocado, jalapeños, house-made pico de gallo, and cilantro-lime aioli. I chose the All American: two free-range eggs, prepared any style, with applewood-smoked bacon, ham, and sausage. This was served with the trademark Eggspectation's Lyonnaise-style potatoes.

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