

Ottawa 2017

Five reasons the revamped capital is the best place to celebrate Canada's 150 years as a nation

BY *Lin Stranberg*

I used to think that visiting Ottawa was like a grown-up version of going to my grandparents' place for Sunday dinner. It was lovely to be there in that old-school way: not of the moment, but solid and comforting.

Ottawa today? It's like the grandparents took out a new lease on life. They've dumped the old place, moved into urban digs and are throwing a lot of parties. >

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Canada's quiet capital has morphed into a lively city that's actually exciting to visit with hip new hotels, fabulous new restaurants and a new vitality in the air that simply wasn't there before. Over and above the cultural benefits of a national government centre, it's transformed itself into a city to visit for fun, not just to take a tour of the Parliament buildings — although you can, happily, still do that while you're at it.

What's more, Ottawa is positively buzzing with celebrations for the 150th anniversary of Confederation this year.

1

CANADA'S GRANDE DAME HAS HAD A MAKEOVER

Like an aging beauty after good cosmetic surgery, Ottawa has been refreshed and rejuvenated. It's the same city, but it feels more exuberant these days. Landmarks like the monumental Beaux-Arts Wellington Building and the National War Memorial have gotten a facelift, there are new builds all over the city centre, and the new LRT will launch in 2018 as the largest infrastructure project in the history of the capital. The 12.5-kilometre route is aptly named the **Confederation Line** (ligneconfederationline.ca).

2

PARTY ALL-YEAR LONG

The sesquicentennial is a big birthday for Canada. **Ottawa 2017** (ottawa2017.ca), the official planning organization, is throwing some major A-list events under the leadership of Executive Director Guy Laflamme. "Epic is the target here," he says. "We want to use this anniversary to open up new horizons... this is not just a Canada Day blowout."



Giant mechanical creatures from France will roam the streets of downtown from July 26 to 30.

COURTESY OTTAWA CELEBRATIONS BUREAU



Ignite 150 will bring 17 epic stunts to every corner of the capital throughout the year.

COURTESY OTTAWA CELEBRATIONS BUREAU



Most Winterlude activities are free and the festival attracts close to 600,000 people every year.



The lobby of the new ALT Hotel features a mosaic with 7000 photos of landmarks across the country.

COURTESY ALT HOTEL

In addition to sporting events like the Red Bull Crashed Ice Championships, in which Canada's best ice cross downhill athletes will hurtle down a hair-raising ice track on the Rideau Canal near the Château Laurier, and iconic Canadiana like the Juno Awards and Grey Cup game, there are a number of special happenings that Laflamme promises will be "culturally audacious."

He described some of the most avant-garde as "live experiences requiring audience participation." These blockbusters include Inspiration Village, music/dance/theatre/cinema happenings presented in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Foundation; an underground multimedia event in a transit station, and La Machine, where visitors will encounter huge and fanciful mechanical creatures on the city streets.

3

OTTAWA LOVES A FESTIVAL

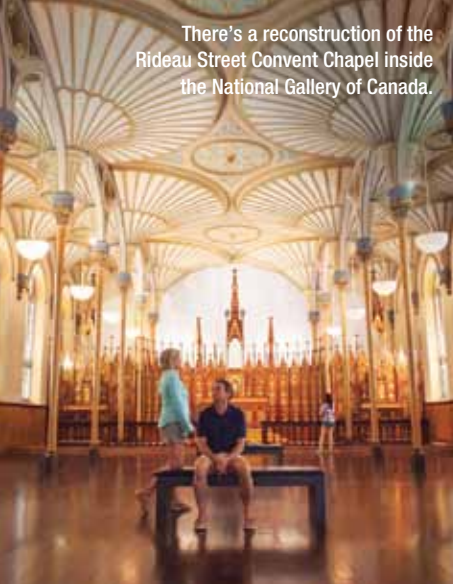
With its talent for inclusion, a welcoming attitude and easy accessibility, the city is always game to host new visitors and loads up its social calendar with annual events. Season by season, Ottawa loves a festival, making it easy to catch one just about any time of year. These are diverse celebrations like the spectacular **Tulip Festival** (tulipfestival.ca) in May, big-name jazz, blues and classical music fests in summer, **Pride** (ottawacapitalpride.ca) in August, the **International Animation Festival** (animationfestival.ca) in September and **Winterlude** (pch.gc.ca/winterlude) in February. (As soon as the temperatures drop, the **Rideau Canal** (rcs.ncc-ccn.ca) turns into a deluxe skating rink. It's an only-in-Ottawa experience beloved by both visitors and locals, some of whom even skate with briefcases and backpacks on their daily commute to work.)

4

STYLISH NEW SPACES

Last summer I checked into the new **ALT Hotel** (althotels.com; from \$154) on Slater Street, just a few blocks down from Parliament Hill. As the baby of the chic Germain-hotel family, it's got a no-frills price point, but rolls the same brand of comfort and style into a package with an additional perk: no checkout time on Sundays — ever. In my books, that more than makes up for the lack of room service. As of now, it's my new go-to for any Ottawa stay.

Plus, if you're a museum-restaurant-walk around kind of traveller like I am, the location is ideal. From



There's a reconstruction of the Rideau Street Convent Chapel inside the National Gallery of Canada.



The Heart & Crown Irish Pub is just one of many restaurants located in the Byward Market.



The Ice Cross Downhill World Championship will skate through the city on March 3 and 4.

CAPITAL EVENTS

In addition to ongoing celebrations, these and other special events are scheduled for Ottawa 2017:

- January 16–22:** Canadian Tire National Skating Championships
- March 3–4:** Red Bull Crashed Ice World Championships
- March 15–18:** Stanley Cup 125th anniversary tribute
- March 27–April 2:** Juno Awards
- May 20–September 4:** Exhibits and performances at Inspiration Village
- End of June–September:** Underground Multimedia Experience
- July 1:** Canada Day on and around Parliament Hill
- July 1 onward:** Canada Scene, a cultural festival at the newly renovated National Arts Centre
- July 2:** Interprovincial Picnic on the Bridge
- July 26–30:** Giant mechanical creatures by La Machine roam free downtown
- Summer 2017:** YOWttawa, a two-day ticketed outdoor music event
- November:** Canadian Videogame Awards
- November 26:** 105th Grey Cup
- December 2–10:** Tim Hortons Roar of the Rings Olympic curling trial


the hotel, it's a pleasant 20-minute stroll over to Sussex Drive and the light-filled spaces of the **National Gallery of Canada** (gallery.ca). On the way back, you can look around the **Byward Market** (byward-market.com), which is older than Canada's Confederation. Take a ramble through historic streets crammed with fruit and vegetable stands, restaurants and quirky shops.

The market area is looking more stylish and contemporary these days with the arrival of the new **Andaz Hotel** (ottawa.andaz.hyatt.com; from \$249), a progressive boutique-inspired Hyatt that opened last August. Andaz is global, but keeps it local in cuisine and décor. It features Canadian Council Art Bank-curated artwork on hotel floors saluting each Canadian province. Nearby, the **Ottawa Art Gallery** (ottawaartgallery.ca) is expanding into a multi-use high-rise that includes a posh new Le Germain hotel, opening later this year.

5 GREAT EATS

Ottawa's new restaurant scene will surprise you. A great new spot for lunch or dinner is **Riviera** (dineriviera.com) on Sparks Street, named not after a Mediterranean coast, but a classic Buick. I had the *orecchiette carbonara* with fresh pasta that was made in-house. Other dishes on the dinner menu include lobster pappardelle, black cod with carrot puree and braised beef short ribs with soft white polenta.

The latest from the chefs of Elgin Street's El Camino (a tacos and tequila raw bar) and Datsun (Asian fusion) opened last summer. Set in a former bank building, Riviera's soaring ceilings and urban ambiance are a stylish complement to its fabulous food and service. The restaurant serves up interesting cocktails too. Reservations are a must.

For more information on travel to the capital, visit **Ottawa Tourism** (ottawatourism.ca). 

Fear colon cancer, not the test

Colon Cancer is the number two killer of all cancers – and it can affect anyone. But with early detection the survival rate is estimated at 90%. And it all starts with a simple self-administered test that you do in the privacy of your own home. Talk with your doctor and get the test. Not knowing is not the answer.

*Darryl Sittler,
Hockey legend
Lost his wife to colon cancer*



For more information or to donate visit coloncancer.ca