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The Ottawa Region

Top Ten Must-See Heritage Attractions

by Garry Shaw



This year Canadians celebrate the 150th anniversary of confederation – when the various colonies of Canada came together on July 1st, 1867, to unite as a single nation. At the time, this included the Province of Canada (effectively Quebec and Ontario), Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. A new nation needs a capital, and this honour fell to the city of Ottawa.

Today, Ottawa is a vibrant city, though often overlooked in favour of the more popular tourist destinations of Toronto, Quebec City and Montreal. But perhaps this will all change in 2017. The biggest celebrations for Canada's birthday will be held in Ottawa, and the annual Canada Day celebrations on 1st July – when Parliament Hill becomes a concert venue, packed with revellers, and many of the city's streets, closed to traffic for the day, transform into outdoor parties – will surely be the most exuberant and impressive in the country.

So, get ready to dress in red, stick maple leaf stickers to your face, wave some flags, and break out the Tim Hortons' coffee. It's time to celebrate. And while you're in Ottawa, why not check out our top ten must-see heritage attractions in the region.



Image: cjuneteau, CC BY 2.0

1

ByWard Market

Laid out by Lieutenant Colonel John By in 1826 (who also built the Rideau Canal – busy man), the ByWard Market is a good central location to begin your time in Ottawa. There are quirky shops, souvenirs, and plenty of places to find tasty snacks – why not try a 'BeaverTail', a large fried pastry covered in your choice of sweet topping, or say goodbye to your teeth by overdosing on the numerous maple-covered delights on offer. There are also various stands selling local produce and arts and crafts goods. Plus, once you've finished exploring the market itself, there are plenty of pubs, cafes, and restaurants surrounding it to keep you entertained well into the evening.

3

Parliament Hill

Home to Canada's parliament since 1859 (and a cat shelter until recently), this Gothic Revival dream, complete with gargoyles, perches on the edge of a hill overlooking the River Ottawa and Gatineau beyond. The circular library behind the main parliament building is the oldest part of the complex, as it was saved from a fire that broke out in 1916 that destroyed the original buildings. You can take free guided tours of the parliament's Centre Block, including the Senate, House of Commons, and Library of Parliament, all year round, and while you're inside you might get a chance to see that dreamy Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Plus, if you're there in the summer months, you can catch the Changing of the Guards outside.

2

Canadian Museum of History

Technically across the river from Ottawa in Gatineau, Quebec, this excellent museum (in fact, one of my favourite museums in the world) features awesome displays and recreations, and does all it can to immerse you in Canada's history. You learn all about Canada's First Nations, complete with totem poles and a recreation of an excavation, before venturing upstairs to the Canadian History Hall to explore the country's colonial period – remember, however, that this section is closed until July 1st, when it will reopen, revamped, shiny and new. There's also a fabulous range of temporary exhibitions, and an IMAX cinema. Oh, and while you're in Quebec (and only in Quebec, I've been told by Quebecers), don't forget to try some poutine, the fries, cheese curds and gravy concoction that is both terrible for the heart and pleasing to it at the same time.

Left: The National Gallery of Canada

Above: Sun-dried grass on the roof of the Canadian War Museum, with Parliament Hill visible in the distance

4

The Rideau Canal

The Rideau Canal was built between 1826 and 1832 to connect Ottawa with Kingston, 202 kilometres away, and became a UNESCO heritage site in 2007. At its Ottawa end, you can wander along the canal's pretty banks where it meets the Ottawa River and watch boats making their descent through the locks – a particularly attractive spot is just below Parliament Hill (take the steps down from Plaza Bridge). There, among the roller bladers, you'll find Bytown Museum (bytownmuseum.com), dedicated to the history of Ottawa; it's the 100th anniversary of this museum in 2017. During the winter months, due to Canada's frosty temperatures, the frozen canal becomes a 7.8 kilometre long ice rink, complete with huts to buy hot chocolate. (Perhaps ensure you have the right travel insurance before giving this a go – broken ankles can be expensive).

Image: Garry Shaw



5

Old Hull

Just across Ottawa's Alexandra Bridge lies the Old Hull region of Gatineau, Quebec. It may not seem the prettiest place at first (try to ignore the high-rises and government buildings), but if you head to the area of Promenade du Portage, you'll find century-old wooden houses, a lively market, pubs (including a microbrewery), restaurants and antique stores to explore. In the past, this area was a famously lively spot for nightlife, particularly as bars stayed open later in Quebec than in Ontario, and drinking was less frowned upon by its Catholic French inhabitants (during the twentieth-century's teenage years, prohibition in Quebec lasted 14 months – in Ontario it lasted 30 years). Now, after receiving a lot of investment, this previously neglected historic area is once again becoming the place to be.

Image: D. Gordon E. Robertson, CC BY-SA 3.0



6

Canadian War Museum

War! What is it good for? Museums apparently. The Canadian War Museum is the most fun you can have around military tech without risking death. Like the Canadian Museum of History, this fabulous museum features immersive environments spread over a number of galleries, each covering a different phase of Canadian warfare. There's also a military technology hall, where you can get up close to tanks, guns, and aircraft, while the Regeneration Hall is dedicated to the search for peace. They also have a black Mercedes once owned by Hitler.

Image: Andrijko Z, CC BY-SA 3.0



Left, top: The Rideau Canal

Left, middle: Plaster statue of Spirit of Haida Gwaii by Bill Reid, Canadian Museum of History

Left, bottom: The Canadian Museum of Nature

Right: Canadian National Railways Locomotive 6400, donated in 1967, will return when the Canada Science and Technology Museum reopens in November

Image: Canada Science and Technology Museums Corporation



7

National Gallery of Canada

Protected by a giant spider (ok, it's a sculpture of a spider by artist Louise Bourgeois), Canada's national gallery boasts a fantastic collection gathered from around the world, with a particularly intriguing contemporary section and, notably, the famous 1770 Benjamin West painting *The Death of General Wolfe*. For the 150th anniversary celebrations, the gallery's curators have assembled more than 1,000 pieces of Canadian art to tell the story of art in Canada; this is the biggest renovation in the gallery's history and shouldn't be missed. Also of interest is the Rideau Street Convent Chapel, surprisingly located in the midst of the gallery. Built in 1887, this beautiful chapel was moved there in the 1970s to save it from destruction.

9

Canada Science and Technology Museum

As of writing, this museum is currently closed while it undergoes a C\$80.5 million renovation. When it reopens on November 17th, 2017, to celebrate its 50th anniversary, it will boast over 7,400 square metres of exhibition space and five new galleries, including areas dedicated to 'Creating and Using Knowledge' and 'Technology in our Lives'. There will also be a space called 'Artefact Alley', where visitors will be able to experience augmented reality.

10

Diefenbunker, Canada's Cold War Museum

A short ride away from Ottawa, the Diefenbunker (a play on the name of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, who commissioned the bunker) was built in secret between 1959 and 1961 to give Canada's government a place to safely govern their potentially irradiated land in the event of a nuclear war. They'd need to make quick decisions though, as their food stocks only lasted for 30 days (apparently, they figured that within a few weeks, both Russia and the USA would have fired all their nukes, and it would be safe to go outside – rather optimistic). The bunker became a museum in 1998, enabling you to explore its many rooms, spread over four storeys, including the prime minister's suite, Bank of Canada vault, and the war cabinet room. It's also a great place to catch special temporary exhibitions – they even have an artists-in-residence programme. If there happens to be a five-megaton blast, this is simultaneously the safest and most artsy place to be in Ottawa. Oh, and if you're there on October 29th, 30th or November 5th, you can take part in a zombie attack.

8

Canadian Museum of Nature

Every aspect of the natural world is explored in this excellent museum's galleries: fossils, underwater life, mammals, geology and birds (and there's an art gallery too). As you pass from gallery to gallery, you'll come across statues of woolly mammoths, dinosaur skeletons, and a massive blue whale skeleton hanging from the ceiling. There are creatures of the less dead variety too; so, if live beetles, cockroaches and tarantulas don't bother you, head over to the 'Nature Live' section to meet them. Sometimes (and rather unexpectedly), the museum holds music events in the galleries, just in case you feel like dancing the night away in the vicinity of dinosaurs and geological specimens. In June 2017, an Arctic Gallery will open in the museum as its latest permanent gallery.

Getting there

Flying

Both Air Canada and Lufthansa operate direct flights between London and Ottawa. WestJet also offers connecting flights via Toronto. United, American Airlines and Delta fly from the USA. Flights from Australia usually go via Vancouver.

Visas

Citizens of most EU countries, including the UK, do not require a visa to visit Canada; however, they require an eTA – an electronic Travel Authorization, which must be bought online before travelling. American citizens do not require a visa or an eTA to enter Canada.

Getting around

There are plenty of buses and taxis in Ottawa to help you get around. For information about bus routes and fares, including a travel planner, visit: www.octranspo.com. In 2018, a new light rail transit service will open, providing another way of navigating central Ottawa, with stations at Parliament and the ByWard Market.

Holidays

(In 2017): July 1 (Canada Day), July 3 (Canada Day observed, due to July 1 being a Saturday), August 7 (Civic Holiday), September 4 (Labour Day), October 9 (Thanksgiving), December 25 & December 26.

Money

Currency: Canada's currency is the Canadian Dollar, which is divided into 100 cents. Banknotes are issued in 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 denominations. Coins come in 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents.

Credit Cards are widely accepted across Canada. ATMs are available throughout Canada.

The Essentials

Time difference: GMT - 5

Language: English and French are the official languages of Canada.

Electrical current/ plugs: Plug sockets have either two flat pins or two flat pins with a round third pin. The current is 110V and 60 Hertz.

Water: Tap water in Canada is safe to drink and bottled water is widely available.

Politics: Canada is a parliamentary democracy with a prime minister as head of the federal government.

Religion: The vast majority of Canada's population are Christian.

Weather

Temperatures across Ottawa can reach an average of around 30°C in summer, but drop to way below freezing in winter, when the average temperature is around -15°C.

Shopping

The ByWard Market offers plenty of souvenir stores, selling maple products and clothing bearing the Canadian flag or images of moose. If you fancy a drink, there's a large range of Canadian beers to try, including those produced by brewpubs in Ottawa itself, such as the Clocktower Brew Pub. Ontario is also well known for its wine – try

Further information

1. ByWard Market Square, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 9C3; www.byward-market.com/en/home

2. 100 Laurier Street, Gatineau, Quebec, K1A 0M8; www.historymuseum.ca

3. 111 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A4; www.lopparl.gc.ca/Visitors/index-e.html

4. Rideau Canal, Ottawa, Ontario; www.rideau-info.com/canal

5. Promenade du Portage, Gatineau, Quebec; www.historymuseum.ca/cmcc/exhibitions/hist/hull/index_e.shtml

6. 1 Vimy Place, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0M8; www.warmuseum.ca

7. 380 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 9N4; www.gallery.ca

8. 240 McLeod Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 2R1; www.nature.ca

9. 2421 Lancaster Road, Ottawa, Ontario, K1G 5A3; www.cstmuseum.techno-science.ca

10. 3929 Carp Road, Carp, Ontario, K0A 1L0; www.diefenbunker.ca

some of those produced by Henry of Pelham. If you'd prefer a coffee and a doughnut, visit Tim Hortons, a Canadian institution since 1964 (the 'Canadian Maple' doughnut is particularly good). Other typically Canadian purchases include ice hockey paraphernalia (if you're in Ottawa you should buy something connected with the Senators), First Peoples art, and miniature inukshuks (stone figures made by the Inuit).

Brief history of Ottawa

The area of Ottawa was first inhabited by the Algonquin people (although the name of the city is derived from that of the Odawa First Nation). After the arrival of Europeans in the region during the early 17th century, the Ottawa River was used by fur traders to transport their goods, and the first major settlement in the area, Hull (originally known as Wrightsville), was established in 1800 on what is today the Quebec side of the river. Twenty-six years later, Bytown was founded on the opposite side of the river by Lieutenant-Colonel John By when developing the Rideau Canal. The region then became increasingly prominent due to its role in the timber trade. In 1855, Bytown was renamed Ottawa and two years later became the capital of the Province of Canada, an area that encompassed modern Quebec and Ontario. Since this province's founding in 1841, its capital shifted from place to place, with Quebec City, Toronto, Montreal and Kingston all spending time in the top slot. With confederation in 1867 and the creation of Canada as a nation, Quebec and Ontario became separate provinces, so each received its own provincial capital: Quebec City for Quebec, and Toronto for Ontario. Ottawa now became capital of Canada as a whole.

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