

The original market building has now been given over to arts and crafts, and the farmers' market and the little specialty shops that line the streets have been joined by dozens of restaurants, pubs, galleries and high-fashion boutiques. This is one of the places that Ottawans frequent in search of food, entertainment and sophisticated shopping.

Life in Ottawa is very much defined by its proximity to nature, and by the incredible accessibility of lakes and forest to city-dwellers. The hills of the 35 600-ha Gati-neau Park and the forests of the Greenbelt (a remarkable band of protected field, forest and marshland that partly surrounds Ottawa) lie only minutes from downtown. Unlike most large cities where nature tends to disappear under concrete and asphalt, Ottawa's river banks are more often lined with parks and beaches than buildings.

Winter offers a variety of outdoor diversions. There are more than a dozen ski resorts operating within a 20-minute drive of Parliament Hill and 200 km of cross-country ski trails wend their way through the Gati-neau Hills and city parks. Ottawa also boasts the world's largest outdoor

skating rink, when an 8-km stretch of the Rideau Canal is cleared and its giant ice surface becomes the focus of the Winterlude Festival. Briefcase in tow, business people even skate to work.

In May, Ottawa explodes with colour during the Festival of Spring. For 10 days, the city is adorned with more than one million tulips, the gift of a grateful Dutch government, after Ottawa offered refuge to Princess Juliana of the Netherlands and her family during the Second World War.

In summer, the Rideau Canal brings thousands of small recreational vessels up from the Great Lakes, while glass-covered excursion boats provide a leisurely way of exploring the city's waterways. Bicyclers and joggers abound, and there are many kilometres of bicycle trails. Some roads are even closed to auto traffic on Sundays, allowing free rein to hikers, joggers and cyclers.

Autumn is no less spectacular. In the Gati-neau Hills, on any sunny October day, gold and scarlet trees seem to burn with a light of their

The National Arts Centre is located in the heart of downtown Ottawa.

own, and huge crowds turn out to walk the forests during an annual celebration called Fall Rhapsody.

Much of the city's cultural life has blossomed thanks to the efforts of the federal government which over the years has created first-class facilities to nurture and encourage performing arts. The country's cultural show-place, the National Arts Centre (NAC), opened in Ottawa in 1969. Home to the NAC Symphony Orchestra, it also offers a regular program of music, dance and theatre from all over the country and, indeed, the world.

Complementing the work of the NAC, is an increasing number of small professional and amateur theatre companies that perform in either English or French. In addition, cabaret-and-dinner theatre is becoming increasingly popular in cafés and restaurants, along with two new stand-up comedy clubs.

An exceptionally wide range of cultural institutions is also concentrated in Ottawa, including seven national museums. This year will offer visitors an especially rich experience with the opening of the new, glass-towered National Gallery designed by the world-renowned Canadian architect Moshe Safdie. Next year the new Museum of Civilization, which will open across the river in Hull, will trace the historical and cultural development of Canada, including that of its native peoples.

Considering the nature of Ottawa's industries, the residents of the area are generally a highly educated group. As a percentage of population, there are more PhDs than elsewhere in the country. Carleton University and the fully bilingual University of Ottawa have a combined full-time enrolment of more than 20 000 students. Ottawa also boasts Canada's largest bilingual community college.

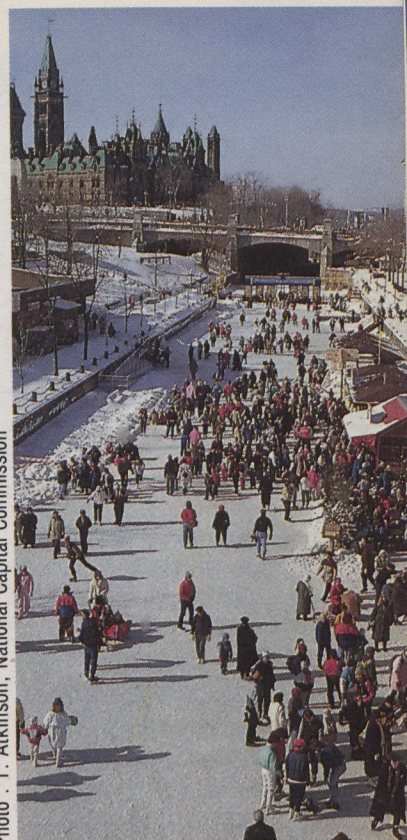


Photo: T. Atkinson, National Capital Commission

The Rideau Canal: the world's largest outdoor skating rink.

The majority of residents of French or British descent have been joined by immigrants from every corner of the world. Their presence in the Ottawa region enriches many aspects of life, from architecture and shopping to food and festivals. For example, there is a burgeoning Chinatown just west of downtown Ottawa, not far from an older district called Little Italy, and the streets in both areas are lined with ethnic shops, restaurants and grocery stores.

Modest in scale, rich in language and culture, and strongly rooted in nature, Ottawa embodies much that is central to the Canadian experience.

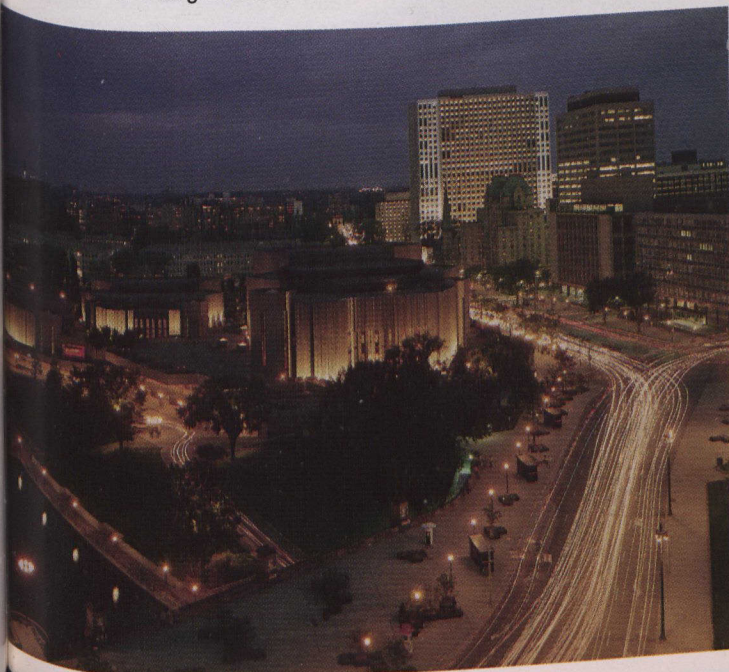


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