



AN APPETITE FOR CYCLING

Ottawa's culinary trails

BY MICHELE PETERSON



There's no denying that our nation's capital is a destination well suited for exploration on foot. Blessed with a wealth of history, architecture and fine dining, there's something enticing at every turn.

What many people don't know is that Ottawa is also one of North America's most bike-friendly destinations. And, as I discovered, there's an added bonus to exploring it from behind a set of handlebars. You can guiltlessly indulge in wonderful local cuisine thanks to the calorie-burning workout cycling offers.

Ottawa has had a long relationship with food. In the late 1700s, an enterprising farmer named Joseph Mondion

settled on the shores of the Ottawa River where he raised livestock and sold meat and fresh vegetables to *voyageurs* travelling up the river. Since then, the fertile Ottawa Valley has been producing food for residents and visitors. The city hosted its first agricultural fair in 1829 and local cheesemakers even sent a mammoth cheese weighing 10,000 kilograms to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Tasty trails

Today, cyclists can retrace the steps of early food lovers by biking the Voyageurs Pathway, a 30-kilometre trail in Gatineau that follows the northern shores of the Ottawa River. South, across Pont Alexandra Bridge is Byward Market, a worthy stop for food fans. Supervised bicycle parking (available on the William Mall) permits cyclists to stroll among more than 120 places to eat

and drink within a four-block radius. Alongside bins of organic produce displayed in tempting array, you can scout out finds such as organic apple cider, fresh goat cheese or free-range duck delicacies, proving that Ottawa is more than maple syrup and sugary beaver tails.

After fuelling up, it's time to experience the biking scene along the popular Rideau Canal Western Pathway. Here, cyclists roll past stately heritage homes and gardens brimming with flowers, all the while flanked by the bright blue waters of the Rideau Canal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Worth a short detour on Fridays (when it's open for lunch) is a stop at the Whalebone Oyster House on Bank Street, where you can indulge in a platter of fresh oysters harvested from New Brunswick to the Discovery Islands of B.C.

Back on the bike trail, Dow's Lake is also a recommended midday stop

even if it's just to soak in the view. This picturesque park is a hub of activity with people paddling kayaks, couples pedalling bicycles built for two and teens zooming by on in-line skates. The pavilion poised dramatically at the water's edge has two outdoor patios where casual fare is served. Committed foodies eagerly await the launch of Lago, an upscale Latin-inspired bar and grill scheduled to open in 2008. It will offer among other items, at least four different varieties of *ceviche*, a refreshing Latino seafood dish made with lime juice.

Further along, the trail becomes the Experimental Farm Pathway, where a procession of Canadian grains lines both sides of the path. First established in 1886, the Experimental Farm National Historic Site is an agricultural research facility and working farm that provides a taste of rural Canada in the heart of the city. Cyclists looking to stretch their legs will enjoy strolling along the shade-dappled paths of the Arboretum, a garden filled with exotic heritage trees from Germany, France and China.

Heading north, the trail connects to the scenic Ottawa River Pathway where, if stamina levels permit, you can continue west to the cottage-country atmosphere of Britannia Beach for a refreshing swim or northeast towards the city centre.

Special cyclist services

Whether you choose to pedal for exercise or relaxation, Ottawa's bike trails suit both novice and advanced cyclists. With more than 200 kilometres of dedicated, paved pathways it's easy to clock plenty of distance on the odometer. The elevation on most trails is flat, while those looking to boost their heart rate can head to the challenging, steep inclines of the Gatineau Hills.

On Sunday mornings from Victoria Day weekend to Labour Day (May 18–August 31), major streets are closed to motor vehicles and convenient rest stations offer cyclist amenities such as bike racks, washrooms and drinking fountains.

Rewarding in many ways

Cyclists might consider an overnight stop at Brookstreet, a boutique-style hotel that offers bike storage, special leg tonics for cycle-weary legs, and four-diamond dining at Perspectives Restaurant. Executive Chef Michael Blackie's inventive menu mixes the best of regional produce with global influences. An avid supporter of local producers and member of Savour Ottawa (an initiative to promote culinary tourism and local producers), his menu includes treats such as Lanark County cheese, foraged leeks and subtle wild ginger. His culinary prowess is evident in classics such as crispy Ceylon tea smoked duck or in his Dr. Who salad, a sophisticated yet playful foray into the world of molecular gastronomy featuring watermelon, dry-roasted kalamata olives and slivers of prosciutto. By the time you dip your spoon into a soft chocolate dessert soufflé, your aching muscles are completely forgotten.

Hitting the pavement never tasted so good. ■

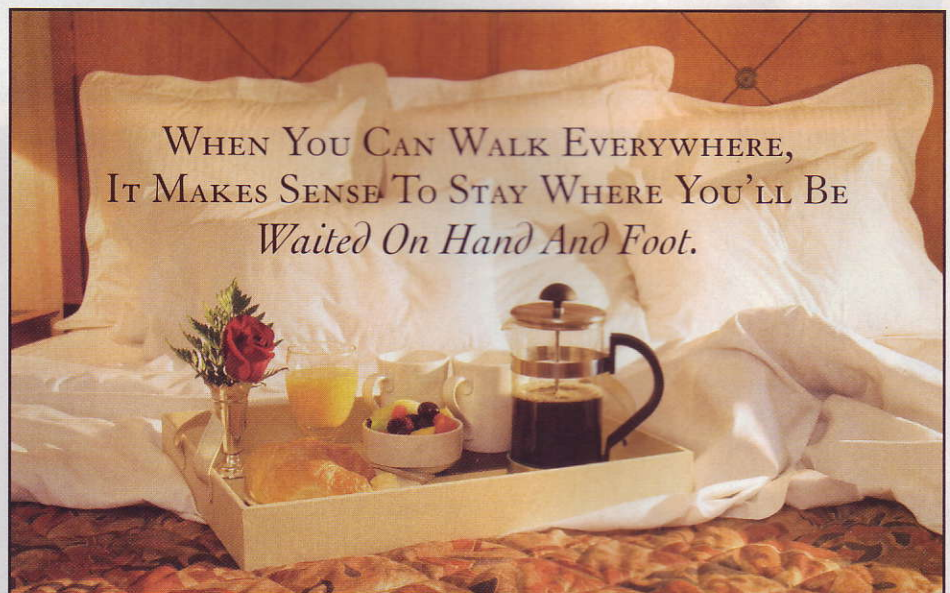
opposite page, top: Ottawa and the surrounding area are riddled with cycling trails like the popular Rideau Canal Western Pathway. *Ottawa Tourism* | opposite page, centre: A Dr. Who watermelon appetizer at Perspectives Restaurant is just one of many culinary rewards at the end of the cycling trail. Brookstreet

travelplanner

Browse an interactive map, get updates on cycling routes and parking information at canadascapital.gc.ca/biking; 1-800-465-1867.

Stay at bike-friendly Brookstreet for Perspectives' fine dining, Au Naturel Spa, easy highway access and proximity to the Greenbelt and Watts Creek bike pathways: Brookstreet.ca; 1-888-826-2220.

Rent a 21-speed comfort bike, complete with helmet, lock and map for \$23 per half-day from RentABike located beneath the East Arch Plaza Bridge on the historic Rideau Canal: rentabike.ca; 613-241-4140.



WHEN YOU CAN WALK EVERYWHERE,
IT MAKES SENSE TO STAY WHERE YOU'LL BE
Waived On Hand And Foot.

A HISTORIC LANDMARK IN THE HEART OF OTTAWA.

Within a short walk from Lord Elgin you'll find downtown Ottawa's best shopping, dining, entertainment, festivals and tourist attractions. Inside you'll find that pleasing amenities, extraordinary service and vacation value are in abundance. On your next visit to Ottawa, walk into a historic landmark and walk out to the best of downtown.



LORD ELGIN

WWW.LORDELGIN.CA

1-800-267-4298

100 ELGIN ST., OTTAWA, ON K1P 5K8 T: (613) 235-3333 F: (613) 235-3223