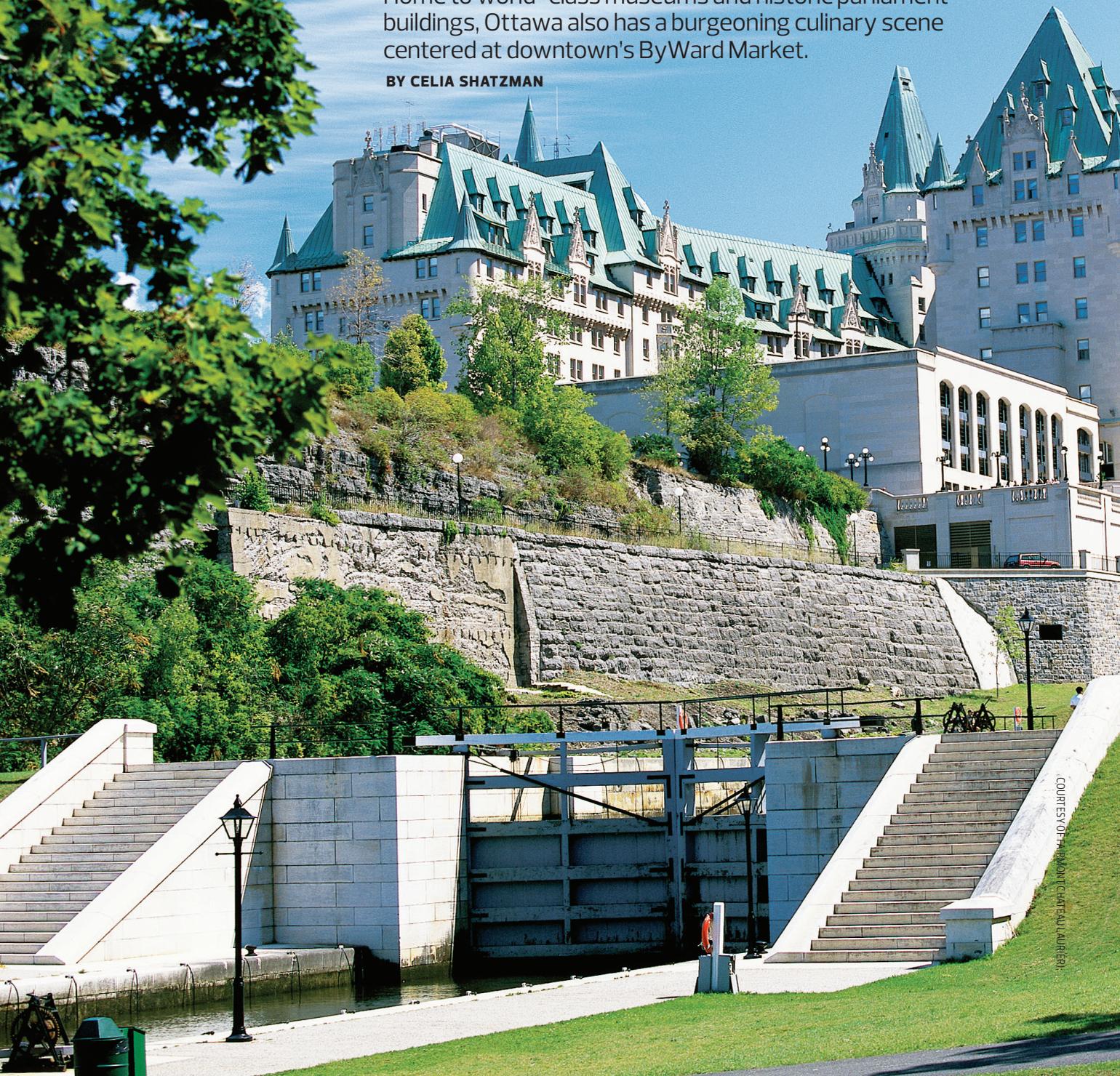


# Capital of Food

Home to world-class museums and historic parliament buildings, Ottawa also has a burgeoning culinary scene centered at downtown's ByWard Market.

BY CELIA SHATZMAN



COURTESY OF FAIRMONT CHATEAU LAURIER



**T**O REALLY EXPERIENCE THE HEART OF A PLACE and its food culture, head for the market.

Chef-turned-TV host Anthony Bourdain has made a career out of visiting exotic locales and often makes a point to stop at the local market. He's suggested to his viewers to get up early to check out the basics of any culture's cuisine, which often includes prepared foods from stands or stalls (so you don't need to worry about not having access to a full kitchen).

And ByWard Market in Ottawa's eclectic downtown is the perfect such place to dive right in. Canada's capital, in the province of Ontario at the Quebec border and the fourth largest city in the country, has gained a reputation over the last few years for its innovative dining scene.

One of Canada's oldest markets and the most popular tourist attraction in Ottawa, ByWard was established in 1826 by Lt. Col. John By. He chose the location and laid out the street plan, making the roads at both ends of the market (George St. and York St.) extra wide to accommodate the horse-drawn carriages used to deliver food and goods daily. Today, the market is open year-round and still has a farmers' market, as well as independent shops selling handmade goods and restaurants and bars, all of which draw as many as 50,000 visitors on a busy weekend.

C'est Bon Cooking offers intimate group food tours of the market during tourist season (every Saturday May through October, plus Mondays and Thursdays in July and August). Or, if you're feeling adventurous, go it alone and follow this route for tastes ranging from locavore cuisine to high tea, gourmet cheese and cupcakes.



**Top:** Ottawa's ByWard market in the heart of the city can attract as many as 50,000 visitors on a busy weekend. **Above:** afternoon tea is served seven days a week at Zoe's Lounge at the Fairmont Chateau Laurier and comes with an assortment of pastries. **Right:** The House of Cheese offers a stunning array of imported and domestic cheeses, along with pate and other specialty items.



TOP: COURTESY OF OTTAWA TOURISM; CELIA SHATZMAN

## 1 Fairmont Chateau Laurier

Start a few blocks away from the market at The Fairmont Chateau Laurier, next to Parliament Hill on Rideau Street in the heart of the city. The impressive limestone luxury hotel was built in 1912 in the style of a 16th-century French chateau, complete with fairy tale–esque turrets. A key fixture on Ottawa’s skyline, the hotel has a storied history and was one of the first in Canada to source locally, with a mission of keeping food in the community. In the main dining room is Wilfrid’s Restaurant with views of Parliament, where you can sometimes hear the clock tower bells while indulging in the sophisticated, classic fare.

But the meal that can’t be missed is afternoon tea at Zoe’s Lounge, complete with freshly baked scones and Devonshire cream. The traditional tea service takes place in the opulent and classically elegant lounge, where guests can choose their beverage with help from a tea sommelier. Delectable sandwiches, like the smoked turkey salad with English cucumber and watercress, round out the dainty fare. 1 Rideau St., 613-241-1414, [fairmont.com/laurier-ottawa](http://fairmont.com/laurier-ottawa)

## 2 Metropolitan Brasserie

Next, head a couple blocks east to Metropolitan Brasserie. Meant to replicate brasseries in France, the décor consists of burgundy leatherettes, generously sized wall mirrors and perfectly crisped and salted french fries paired with homemade aioli. The “Hill Hour” happy hour (\$1 oysters and jumbo shrimp) draws nearby Parliament workers for the longest raw bar in Ottawa. 700 Sussex Dr., 613-562-1160, [metropolitainbrasserie.com](http://metropolitainbrasserie.com)

## 3 Play Food & Wine

Head another block east to the corner of Sussex Dr. and York St., and stop at Play Food & Wine. It’s a fitting name for the fun, colorful tapas restaurant—red swooping fabric covers the ceiling, playing off the bright blue walls. Chef

de cuisine Katie Brown creates inventive small plates like melt-in-your-mouth scallops with jicama, green apple, bacon and pistachio, or the perfectly cooked gnocchi in a lemon and brown butter sauce with dried cranberries and fiddleheads, the local vegetable favorite. Wine director Grayson McDiarmid curates the by-the-glass selection; be sure to wash your meal down with a glass of Neige, the deliciously crisp dessert ice cider from Quebec. 1 York St., 613-667-9207, [playfood.ca](http://playfood.ca)

## 4 Courtyard Restaurant

On the southwest end of the market is York Courtyard. Sometimes you can catch a jazz band performing at one of the four courtyards in the area. Inside is the Courtyard Restaurant, a member of Savour Ottawa and Organic Ocean, a sustainable fishery. The seafood is so fresh that chef Murray Wilson personally calls local fishermen with requests. Hay uses specialty equipment for molecular gastronomy techniques like sous vide, which vacuum seals food

in a pouch before cooking. He uses this method on items from steak to bacon to watermelon. 21 George St., 613-241-1516, [courtyardrestaurant.com](http://courtyardrestaurant.com)

## 5 La Bottega Nicastro

Next up is La Bottega Nicastro, a shop that specializes in imported groceries, including a line of homemade pasta specially made in Italy. Take a seat at the petite authentic Italian restaurant in the back of the store and ask the friendly, knowledgeable staff for a sample of aged cheese drizzled in truffle honey. La Bottega Nicastro is also known for its impeccable selection of olive oils and balsamic vinegars, as well as the bread, which is made at a special artisan bakery where it’s allowed to rise for 24 hours. 64 George St., 613-789-7575, [labottega.ca](http://labottega.ca)

## 6 ByWard Fruit Market & The House of Cheese

Head a few stores over to ByWard Fruit Market, a specialty green grocer. The shop is popular with chefs because it

## ALL ABOUT OTTAWA

**POPULATION:** 917,550

**AIRPORT:** Ottawa Macdonald–Cartier International Airport, ranked the No. 1 airport in North America and No. 2 in the world by the Airport Service Quality program

**WEATHER:** Ottawa has a humid continental climate with four distinct seasons. Summers are warm, humid and often sunny; the average July maximum temperature is 80 degrees, and daytime temperatures of 86 or higher are commonplace. Temperatures can vary greatly in the spring and fall. Fall colors in Ottawa and the surrounding area are some of the nicest around; the first chill usually comes in mid- to late September, when evening temperatures begin to dip. The average low temperature in January is 4.5

degrees; snow and ice are dominant during the winter season. Ottawa receives about 93 inches of snowfall annually. Temperatures usually start to warm in April and May.

**TOURIST SEASON:** July and August are the most common times to visit and when many museums, attractions and tours offer the widest variety of options. May, June, September and October are also popular months. February’s Winterlude festival is another peak period.



### INSIDER TIP

#### DECODING THE FARMERS' MARKET

The farmers' market is located on the main square of ByWard Market. Each stall has a color-coded sign to show how much the farmers grow themselves: Green symbolizes 100 percent; yellow indicates 60 percent and can be supplemented with produce grown by others; and red means they might grow some products themselves, but they mostly resell.

carries rare delicacies and will track down any exotic fruit it doesn't stock. The grocery is famed for its truffle and mushroom collection, gourmet sea salts and edible flowers. (A sprinkle of truffle salt on fresh cucumbers from the market offers an enormous burst of flavor and enhances their natural taste.) 36 Byward Market Sq., 613-241-6542, [bywardfruit.com](http://bywardfruit.com)

Next door is The House of Cheese, a family-run store that's been open for more than 25 years. Much of the staff has been there nearly as long. More than 500 cheeses, made locally and around the world, plus chocolate and paté fill the shelves. Pair one of the many cheese samples with a



**Maple cinnamon goodness:** Maple cake and frosting sprinkled with cinnamon, brought to you by the Cupcake Lounge.

taste of ice wine jelly, a cool twist on the sweet staple. 34 Byward Market Sq., 613-241-4853, [thehouseofcheese.ca](http://thehouseofcheese.ca)

## 7 The Cupcake Lounge

Top off your tour with dessert, and make Cupcake Lounge your final destination. The bakery uses all-natural ingredients and a special method to completely cover the cake in icing, which the owners claim keeps the cake moist longer. Try one of the 12 flavors made fresh daily, like the signature Maple Cinnamon; it's Canadian maple cake and frosting sprinkled with cinnamon, decorated with a tiny red maple leaf. 6 Byward Market Sq., 613-862-0926, [thecupcakelounge.com](http://thecupcakelounge.com)



## Must-see sites

Ottawa has more than a lively culinary scene—it also boasts outdoor recreation, distinct neighborhoods, cultural gems and historic attractions.

**THE HOME OF CANADA'S FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**, Parliament Hill, offers free daily tours of the Gothic Revival–style buildings and rides to the top of the Peace Towers with a 360-degree view of the city.

**THE CANADIAN MUSEUM OF CIVILIZATION** is the country's most visited museum and tells the story of Canadian and world history and culture; it has the largest collection of indoor totem poles in the world.

**TAKE A SIGHTSEEING BOAT RIDE** or paddle in a kayak or canoe along the Rideau Canal, a UNESCO World Heritage site that winds through the city.

**THE ANNUAL CANADIAN TULIP FESTIVAL** is May 3–12, with special events and more than 3 million tulips on display throughout the region. The biggest concentration of tulips is at Commissioner's Park—there are 300,000 tulips, and the beds stretch for 1 kilometer.

**THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA**, located downtown, is nearly as famous for its striking architectural exterior as what's inside: one of the largest collections of domestic art and spectacular special exhibits.

**ON SUNDAYS IN THE SUMMER**, several major parkways are closed to traffic between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. to give cyclists, skaters and runners free rein on Sunday Bike Days. Rent a set of wheels from one of the BIXI stations around town or Rentabike, located under the Rideau Street Plaza Bridge, across from Fairmont Chateau Laurier, and peddle through Little Italy and Chinatown.