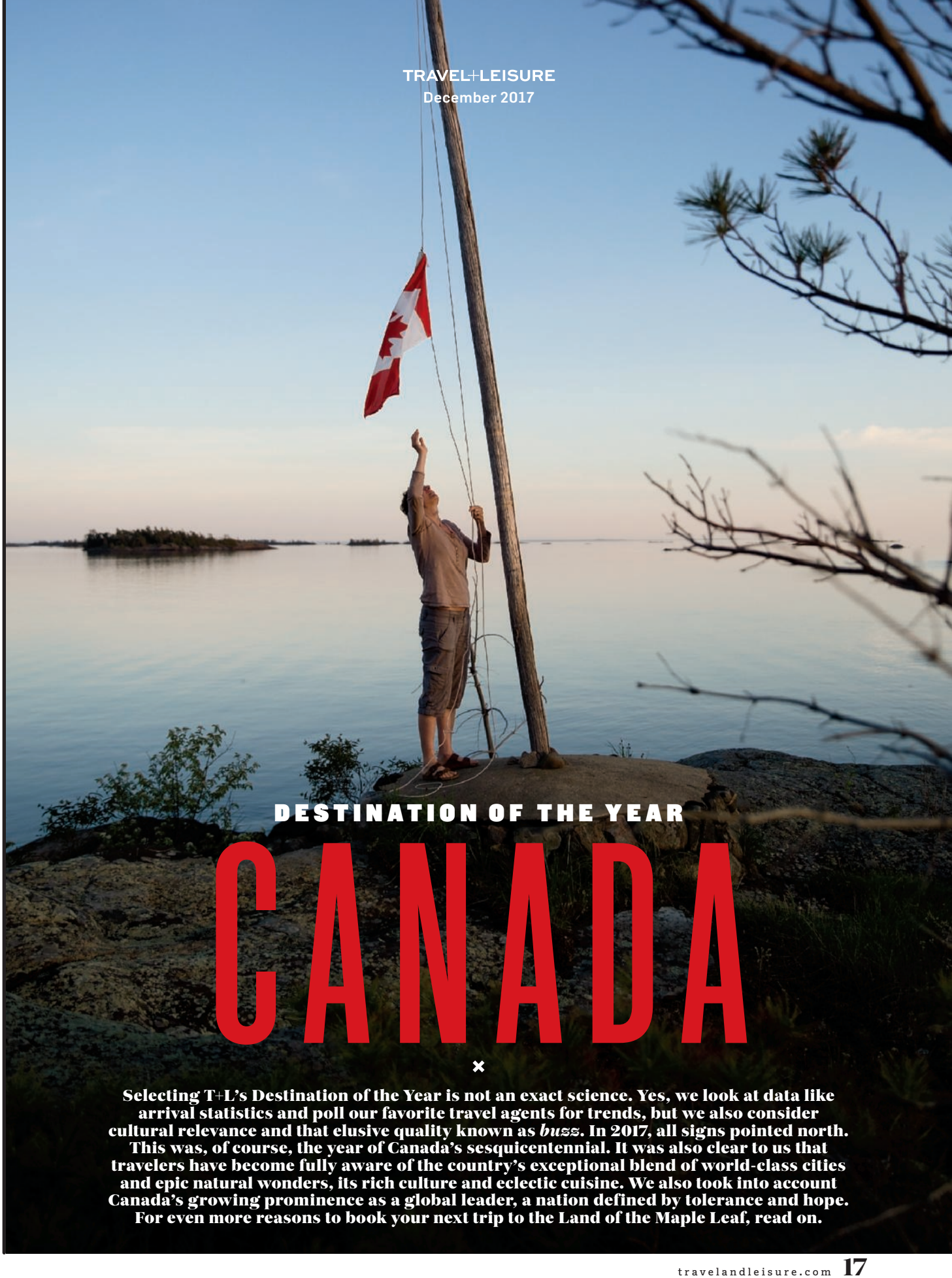


LORNE BRIDGMAN

DESTINATION OF THE YEAR

CANADA

Selecting T+L's Destination of the Year is not an exact science. Yes, we look at data like arrival statistics and poll our favorite travel agents for trends, but we also consider cultural relevance and that elusive quality known as *buzz*. In 2017, all signs pointed north. This was, of course, the year of Canada's sesquicentennial. It was also clear to us that travelers have become fully aware of the country's exceptional blend of world-class cities and epic natural wonders, its rich culture and eclectic cuisine. We also took into account Canada's growing prominence as a global leader, a nation defined by tolerance and hope. For even more reasons to book your next trip to the Land of the Maple Leaf, read on.

The view of downtown Vancouver from Stanley Park.

O CANADA!

How much does Gary Shteyngart love our great northern neighbor? Let him count the ways.

After the interesting turn of events last fall in the United States, I, like so many others, have been looking up real estate prices in MTV, as Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver—Canada's three largest cities—are sometimes called. I am not, however, a hoser-come-lately to the charms of Canada. It is a country that has loomed large in my imagination since my family's arrival in the United States from the Soviet Union in the 1970s. In fact, we could just as easily have come to Toronto as New York. I recall visiting my father's best friend in that city in the 1980s and being shocked by the orderliness of the large housing estate in which he lived, the relative lack of aggression, and the patient lines for fried doughy Timbits at the local Tim Hortons, to say nothing of my own desperate Manhattan urge to mug someone on the spotless subway, since these folks were obviously not going to do it for themselves.

Since then, Canada has been a place I often dream of when I find myself asleep at the keyboard. I fell in love with the work of Montreal's late Mordecai Richler, a satirist who has influenced me as much as any other writer. I spent my 30th birthday with a dozen of my best friends at Montreal's Restaurant L'Express slurping up bone marrow, just as the rascally Barney Panofsky, the hero of Richler's masterwork *Barney's Version* (turned a few years ago into a movie starring Paul Giamatti), would have done. My wife and I were married by a justice of the peace in the Arctic town of Grise Fiord, in the territory of Nunavut, the northernmost civilian settlement in Canada and one of the coldest inhabited places on the planet. She has always felt a special closeness to Arctic and Antarctic terrains, as well as to Inuit culture, and when she suggested we get married at the far end of Canada, with just a few people in attendance, I felt a great calm come over me. The coldest spot on earth would be the perfect place to join with another human being for a lifetime. Years have passed since our nuptials, but I still can't accurately describe what happened on that trip, other than that I traveled to a brilliant northern planet where the night was as deep and dark and starry as any humanity has ever seen, and where the sun, an infrequent guest, sets entire mountain ranges of ice alight like a hazy, melancholy god paying her scattered worshippers a visit. Oh, yes, and there was also that time when I sat on a floor with a dozen villagers eating a raw caribou, with a small ax as my only implement.

And then, a few years later, in Toronto, I got into serious Canadian trouble. After judging the Scotiabank Giller Prize, Canada's most prestigious literary award, I got drunk at a dinner and was quoted as saying that Canadian writers "didn't take the same damn risks" as writers from poorer, less culturally subsidized countries. The uproar was immediate, and soon I found myself quoted and reproached in the country's biggest newspapers. As quickly as I could, I hightailed it back to Toronto, where I duly apologized in front of a large audience at the main library and was immediately forgiven by at least some of the country's literati. I apologized on Twitter and in person to as many Canadians as possible. One reader I met told me, "You really apologize like a Canadian," which I took to be the highest order of compliment imaginable. Once again, Canada, I'm sorry. →

KAMIL BIALOUS

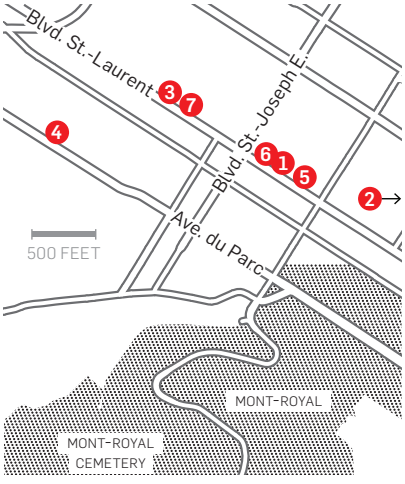
From top: The bar at Restaurant L'Express, in Montreal; "duck in a can" from Montreal's Au Pied de Cochon.

Today, Canada is in some ways the opposite of dull or risk-averse. Montreal's Plateau and Mile End neighborhoods are world-class incubators of hip, the latter being the birthplace of the acclaimed art-rock band Arcade Fire. As for food, I would argue that Montreal now ranks as the third-most important dining destination in North America, after New York and Mexico City. Few cities synchronize indigenous and global cuisines with such panache. The first time I was served Au Pied de Cochon's "duck in a can"—a duck breast and lobe of foie gras with thyme, garlic, and braised cabbage, cooked inside an actual can—I was gently shocked by its playfulness and informality. But Montreal is like that. The weather provides drama, the locals provide levity, and the Jews provide the world's finest bagels—and I say that, humbly, as a Jewish New Yorker.

And Toronto, once derided as one of the world's great boring cities, is now certified awesome. One of my favorite bars in the world is the Communist's Daughter, at the corner of Dundas and Ossington, where one can play board games amid the Christmas lights and pretend to be the spawn of some northern Menshevik. Toronto's food is now equally spectacular, as befits a city seen by many as the most multicultural in the world. And what can I say about Vancouver, the least affordable (real estate–wise) city in Canada? It is about as Asian a place as you will find anywhere outside of Asia, and one of the most beautiful marriages of land, sea, and rain you can find outside of a writer's caffeinated imagination.

But wait, there's more! Honestly, any place I end up in Canada is filled with quirky delight. Even Winnipeg surprised me, with a gorgeous hotel bar (the Palm Lounge, at the perfectly named Fort Garry Hotel), the thought-provoking Canadian Museum for Human Rights, and one of the smartest audiences I've ever encountered during my travels as a writer, the kind that brings homemade Ukrainian Easter eggs to your reading and will gladly fix you a shot of something strong to go.

Is Canada a paradise on earth? Even Canadians will tell you that they can find their compatriots too smug, too self-satisfied. I can sort of see why they might feel that way, but I think much can be forgiven. As someone born in Russia, I know from cold—and Canada gets *cold*. Except for its western edges, this is no climate-blessed land, no temperate wonder like Catalonia or Australia. The whipping winds, the grip of the →



NEIGHBORHOOD GUIDE

MONTREAL'S MILE END

This district of the Plateau Mont-Royal borough is one of the coolest in Canada. Come for the music, creative boutiques, and dozens of trendy bars and restaurants.

STAY

Lodging in the area is limited, so your best bet is an Airbnb or the guesthouse **Pensione Popolo** 1 *(pensionepopolo.com; doubles from $75)*, upstairs from the music venue Casa del Popolo. For more-luxurious digs, head to nearby Old Montreal for the new **Hotel William Gray** 2 *(hotelwilliamgray.com; doubles from $211; see an exclusive offer on page 8)*.

EAT & DRINK

For refined English brunch fare, try **Lawrence** 3 *(lawrencerestaurant.com; brunch entrées $10–$14)*, which serves bubble and squeak, a blood-sausage sandwich, and beef liver with onions. At the cozy basement boîte **Petite Maison** 4 *(petitemaisonmtl.com; prix fixe from $29)*, Québécois celebrity chef Danny St. Pierre is acclaimed for his "inverted poutine," a potato croquette with cheese and gravy inside. The menu at **Lili. Co** 5 *(restolilico.com; small plates $2–$25)* changes daily, with options sure to delight both vegetarians (canteloupe and tomatoes in goat-feta cream) and omnivores (jerk sweetbreads).

DO

Bands from Arcade Fire to the Moldy Peaches have played at **Casa del Popolo** 6 *(casadelpopolo.com)*, also a vegetarian restaurant, bar, art gallery, and fair-trade café. Shoppers should check out **Boutique General 54** 7 *(general54.ca)*, an independent store with women's clothing and accessories from more than 60 Canadian and American designers.

DOMINIQUE LAFOND. MAP BY HAISAM HUSSEIN

everlasting ice age, the quick frostbite of a walk to the car, all give Canadians leeway to be occasionally less than charming.

It is fair to acknowledge that Canada does have vast areas of darkness, including a history of racism and brutality toward its native inhabitants, the people of the First Nations. These include the Inuits my wife and I met at Grise Fiord, whose forebears were forcibly resettled to Nunavut in the 1950s from their homeland in Quebec. Many believe that this program was part of a government strategy to counter Soviet and American influence in the Arctic by planting what have been called "human flagpoles" in the region.

But these days, so many of us below the 45th parallel look north with wonder, even as large swaths of the world's population, from China to Syria to the Philippines, are realizing that their American Dream might not actually be so American after all. For them and others, Canada's secret has been revealed. *Out*: the wintry gloom, the images of safety and boredom, the moniker of "Toronto the Good." *In*: the strange experiment of bringing together the world's brightest and often most endangered people, to a soundtrack by Arcade Fire and the additional drumbeat of a freshly shaken duck in a can. ■

A TOWER OF SONG IN MONTREAL

"Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything," an exhibition honoring the late Canadian songwriter, just opened at the renowned Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal. A global roster of artists—Jenny Holzer, Taryn Simon, and Thomas Demand among them—explore the great themes of Cohen's work, including death and love, politics and faith. Though the musician spent much of his life in the U.S., he returned often to his native Montreal, where he would go for walks in Mont-Royal, the venerable park overlooking the city. It was there that John Zeppetelli, who curated the show, had his only encounter with Cohen, on the artist's 70th birthday. "I imagine he thought of himself more as a Montrealer than a Canadian," Zeppetelli says. "I think it was the particularity of this bicultural city, and his own status within it as a poet." *Through April 2018; macm.org.*

Alabaster ramps inside Winnipeg's Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

AARON VINCENT ELKAIM/THE *NEW YORK TIMES*/REDUX

5 NEW ONE-OF-A-KIND MUSEUMS

From Whistler to Winnipeg, compelling institutions are opening that combine thoughtful collections with arresting design. Dive into the nation's cultural offerings.

1. Canadian Museum for Human Rights *Winnipeg*
This three-year-old museum in the capital of Manitoba hosts exhibits on issues from genocide to bullying. "Points of View," which runs through February, features 70 photographs exploring freedom of expression, the environment, and diversity. *humanrights.ca.*

2. Remai Modern *Saskatoon*
The copper-colored exterior and large windows of this modern art museum, which opened in October, have transformed the skyline of Saskatchewan's largest city. Inside you'll find nearly 8,000 works, including a collection of Picasso linocuts and ceramics. *remaimodern.org.*

3. Audain Art Museum *Whistler*
Take a break from the slopes to visit this new institution in British Columbia dedicated to regional art—think Northwest Coast First Nations masks. Though just steps from the village, the space, designed to blend in with the surrounding trees, creates a sense of seclusion. *audainartmuseum.com.*

4. Museum of Contemporary Art *Toronto*
Formerly known as MOCCA, the institution is scheduled to reopen next spring with a more international focus, in a new, 55,000-square-foot location in Junction Triangle. *museumofcontemporaryart.ca.*

5. Illusuak Cultural Centre *Nain*
The Illusuak Cultural Centre in northern Newfoundland & Labrador is slated to open next year. Designed by Todd Saunders, the curves of the wood-clad exterior continue inside, where the language, traditions, and stories of the local Inuit will be displayed through permanent exhibits. *facebook.com/illusuak.*

One of Via Rail's Panorama cars.

3 WAYS TO CROSS THE COUNTRY

Stretching nearly 4 million square miles and touching three oceans, Canada offers plenty to explore—and now there are more ways than ever to see it all in style.

Rail
For more than 40 years, Canada has offered train service through **Via Rail** *(viarail.ca)*, its nationwide carrier. This year, the company will finish a complete refurbishment of the fleet's economy and business classes. Opt for the "Canadian" route, which links Vancouver with Toronto and features the popular Panorama cars, which have large windows that extend up to the ceiling.

Trail
This year, the Canadian government completed the **Great Trail** *(thegreattrail.ca)*, a network of nearly 15,000 miles of paths that connect the country's coasts. Now travelers can hike, ski, and horseback-ride through breathtaking wilderness in every region—from the lush forests lining the Pacific coast and the Yukon's sprawling tundra to the steep cliffs overlooking the Bay of Fundy.

Sea
In 2018, Canadian cruise operator **One Ocean Expeditions** *(oneoceanexpeditions.com)* will debut a new itinerary that circumnavigates the country by ship, plane, and train in 56 days. While at sea, guests sail on the *Akademik Ioffe* through the Arctic Circle to explore the fjords and glacial systems around Baffin Island, as well as spot wildlife like polar bears, narwhals, and beluga whales.

TAKE IT FROM A CANUCK...

"One of my favorite places I lived as a kid was a village called Steveston, near Vancouver. I have fond memories of waking up early to ride my bike to the dike and watch the sun rise. I'd go home for breakfast, then do it all over again with my friends."

—COCO ROCHA, MODEL FROM BRITISH COLUMBIA

NEIGHBORHOOD GUIDE

VANCOUVER'S CHINATOWN

Long a destination for travelers, Canada's largest Chinatown has begun luring young chefs, artists, and entrepreneurs, who have launched exciting new businesses alongside the neighborhood's beloved attractions.

STAY
The standout hotel is **Skwachays Lodge Hotel & Gallery** 1 *(skwachays.com; doubles from $103)*, which offers 18 suites, each filled with First Nations art, that can serve as a perfect home base when exploring town—the property sits conveniently between Chinatown, downtown Vancouver, and Gastown.

EAT & DRINK
Chinatown has seen a surge in vegan and vegetarian restaurants in the past couple of years, including **Virtuous Pie** 2 *(virtuouspie.com; pizzas from $8)*, which serves 10-inch plant-based pizzas and a variety of seasonal, house-made ice creams. **Kissa Tanto** 3 *(kissatanto.com; entrées $22–$37)*, a 76-seat Japanese-Italian hybrid, became an immediate favorite after opening last spring. Its retro Tokyo-jazz-bar vibe is an appealing atmosphere for dishes like rib eye topped with saffron-chili sauce. For drinks, stop in at the **Boxcar** 4 *(thecobalt.ca)*, where the 24 rotating taps feature local craft brews and regional favorites.

DO
The architecture alone makes wandering through Chinatown worth it, but be sure to take in some culture. Housed in the neighborhood's oldest building, **Rennie Museum** 5 *(renniecollection.org)* displays one of the largest contemporary art collections in Canada. It's free and open to the public during the week. If the weather is nice, a walk through the **Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden** 6 *(vancouverchinesegarden.com)* is also a must. Book a guided tour for an insider's take on the surrounding Taihu rocks, hawthorn berries, and more.

ERIC MARTIN/FIGAROPHOTO/REDUX. ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA LINKO. MAP BY HAISAM HUSSEIN

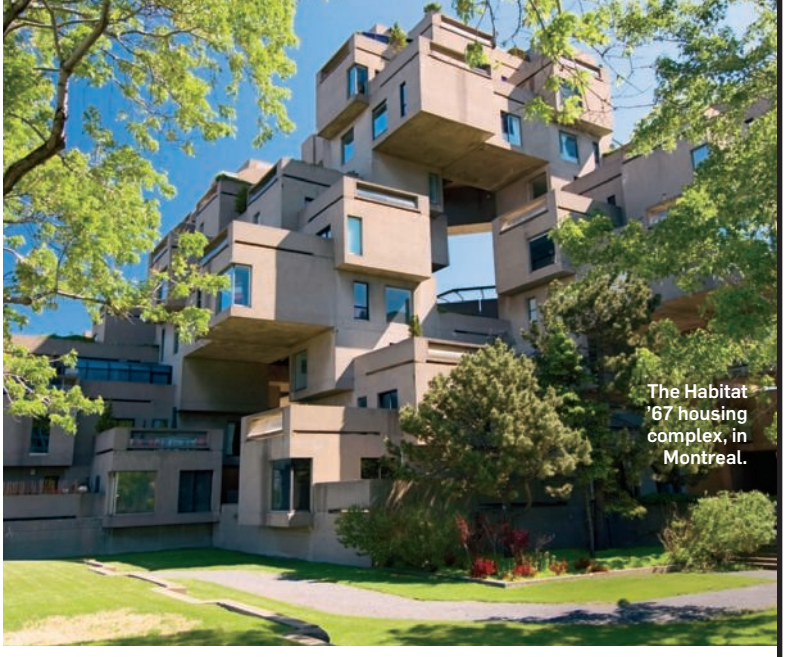
THE NEXT GREAT FOOD DESTINATION IS... WINNIPEG?

Like many of the best restaurant towns, the capital of Manitoba is a cross-cultural mecca. More than 100 languages are spoken in the province, and those international influences are helping Peg City redefine traditional Canadian prairie cuisine.

Winnipeg's large Filipino community—almost 5 percent of the population speaks Tagalog—flocks to **Bisita** *(bisita.ca; entrées $9–$14)* for *lumpia* spring rolls and adobo-spiked wings. First Nations groups are also represented on the restaurant circuit: **Feast Café Bistro** *(feastcafebistro.com; entrées $8–$14)*, run by a woman from the Peguis community, showcases the versatility of bannock, an indigenous fry bread, which is used in everything from bison pizza to tacos.

Fine-dining spots, too, are embracing Winnipeg's melting pot. At **Deer & Almond** *(deerandalmond.com; entrées $11–$27)*, chef Mandel Hitzer gives global fare a provincial twist in dishes like yam tortellini and venison tartare. At **Máquè** *(maque.ca; small plates $5–$18)*, a contemporary Asian-French eatery, *mapo* tofu and kung pao pork meet *jambon de Bayonne* and duck confit. Spanish classics star at **Segovia** *(segoviatapasbar.com; tapas $2–$24)*, but don't limit yourself to Iberian ham—the more adventurous plates, like lamb sweetbreads with eggplant escabeche, have helped this tapas bar rake in awards throughout its eight-year run.

Pan-fried greens at Máquè, in Winnipeg.



The Habitat '67 housing complex, in Montreal.

5 BUILDINGS WORTH A DETOUR

The country that has produced architectural stars from Frank Gehry to Todd Saunders is home to an extraordinary collection of buildings that embody its history and ideals. These are some of the best.

1. Habitat '67 ***Montreal***
Created for the World's Fair in 1967, this all-concrete prefab icon began as the college thesis of starchitect Moshe Safdie, who hoped the building would be a new and more livable model for dense city housing. Plan your visit around one of the guided tours that run several times a week. *habitat67.com.*

2. Atwater Market ***Montreal***
This 1933 indoor market is one of the finest Art Deco structures in North America. When you enter, look up—the stall signs are among the few original interior details left. *marches publics-mtl.com.*

3. Province House ***Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island***
This 1844 gem shows that Canadian architects had equal—or greater—mastery of the Greek Revival style then prevalent in the States. Use the companion app to explore the grounds. *pc.gc.ca.*

4. Sharp Centre for Design ***Toronto***
British architect Will Alsop created a minor sensation in 2004 with this improbable speckled box on stilts. In spring and summer, the Toronto Society of Architects leads tours that include a stop here. *ocadu.ca.*

5. Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia ***Vancouver***
In a nod to its First Nations–focused collection, the 1976 museum has linear framing reminiscent of some indigenous groups' timber buildings. It's the signal achievement of Arthur Erickson, once hailed by his contemporary Philip Johnson as "the greatest architect in Canada." *moa.ubc.ca.*

TAKE IT FROM A CANUCK...

"I basically lived at this Tex-Mex bar, Sneaky Dee's, as a teenager. It was there that my affection for nachos turned into a full-blown affair. As an adult, I Uber their nachos to my place twice a month."

—JEN AGG, TORONTO RESTAURATEUR (THE BLACK HOOF, RHUM CORNER, GREY GARDENS) AND WRITER

FROM TOP: RUBENS ABBOUD/AGE FOTOSTOCK/ALAMY; TREVOR HAGAN/*WINNIPEG FREE PRESS*. ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA LINKO

The Blue Mountain Vineyard, in British Columbia's Okanagan wine region.

A SECRET PARADISE IN B.C.

As one of the world's top emerging wine regions, the Okanagan Valley offers an eclectic array of styles, not to mention great food and gorgeous views.

The Okanagan Valley ranks among the most beautiful wine regions in North America, yet it remains relatively unfamiliar to U.S. travelers. (Chalk that up to some frustrating trade barriers that make Canadian wine a non-player in the U.S. market.) Talk to locals, though—as well as Vancouver residents, who are an hour-long flight away—and they know what they've got: more than 8,000 acres of picturesque vineyards surrounding spectacular Lake Okanagan, a serpentine body of water that twists through low mountains for 80 miles in southern British Columbia.

The region's climate is surprisingly varied, creating hospitable conditions for a wide array of grapes. That's partly due to the sheer length of the lake, whose bottom tip is a mere four miles from the Washington State border. "The southern part of the Okanagan is hotter than Napa Valley," Canadian wine expert Kurtis Kolt says. "In the north, it's much cooler. You've got bears. They come down in the middle of the night and gorge on grapes. Call it true Canadian-style wine growing."

Those marauding bears have yet to make it inside any of the 170-plus tasting rooms that dot the region, however. In the north, stop by top producers such as **Tantalus Vineyards** *(tantalus.ca; tastings $4 per person),* for subtly aromatic Rieslings, and **Mission Hill Family Estate** *(missionhillwinery.com; tastings $15 per person),* for expressive Chardonnays. Then head south along the lake to try warmer-climate reds, which are the focus of both the irreverent up-and-comer **Church & State Wines** *(churchandstatewines.com; tastings $7 per person)* and the regional leader **Black Hills Estate Winery** *(blackhillswinery.com; tastings $10 per person),* which occupies an airy, glass-walled space with sweeping views of the valley.

Kolt also points out the bounty of local produce: fresh seafood from the nearby Pacific as well as Lake Okanagan, picture-postcard orchards laden with apricots in the summer and apples in the fall, artisanal cheese producers and cideries, and restaurants that take advantage of all that grows in the Okanagan. Add in activities like sailing; kayaking; biking along winding, vine-bordered back roads; and stargazing in the clear northern night, and it's shocking that more Americans aren't crossing the border. ■

TAKE IT FROM A CANUCK...

"My family and I recently visited Banff National Park in Alberta. I was struck by how stunning it was as an adult. As a kid, the mountains, gondolas, and blue-green lakes were magical, but seeing that beauty preserved all of those years later was really striking. We plan to go every summer from now on."

— MARCEL DZAMA, ARTIST FROM WINNIPEG

KAMIL BIALOUS. ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA LINKO

NEIGHBORHOOD GUIDE

TORONTO'S KING AND QUEEN STREETS WEST

The stylish design district is home to award-winning restaurants, great culture, and tons of innovative shops.

STAY

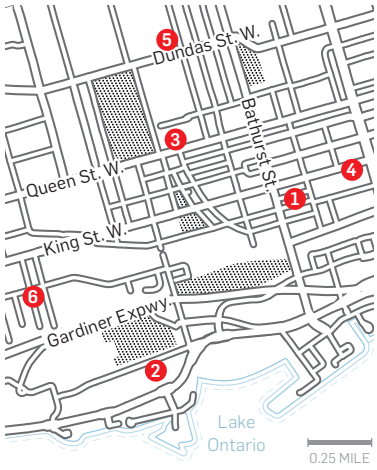
With its central location and incredible city views, the sleek **Thompson** 1 *(thompsonhotels.com; doubles from $526)* is an ideal base from which to explore the neighborhood. Farther afield, the **Hotel X** 2 *(hotelxtoronto.com; doubles from $339)*, on the Lake Ontario waterfront, is scheduled to open this month.

EAT & DRINK

At the Canadian bistro **Canis** 3 *(canisrestaurant.com; tasting menus from $51)*, chef Jeff Kang uses simple seasonal ingredients, from cabbage and pearl onions to fish and poultry, in his sophisticated tasting menus. Locals come to **Pablo's Snack House** 4 *(barotoronto.com; small plates from $4)*, a "secret" small-plates joint on the second floor of the popular Latin eatery Baro, for executive chef Steve Gonzalez's beef empanadas and tacos made from fresh local fish. **Rhum Corner** 5 *(rhumcorner.com; entrées $6–$30)* specializes in Haitian-inspired cocktails and cuisine, such as *griot*, made with pork shoulder, and *pen patat*, a sweet-potato dessert.

SHOP

I Have a Crush on You 6 *(ihaveacrushonyou.ca)*, a gift store, gallery, and design studio, is stocked with creative trinkets, stationery, and clothing made by Canadian designers. In the rear of the store is Amy Kwong's Smitten Kitten, which sells paper goods.



5 HOTELS TO BUILD A TRIP AROUND

These varied gems, both new and old, include iconic city landmarks and remote wilderness escapes.

1. Ritz-Carlton *Montreal*

César Ritz himself gave the stamp of approval to this first-ever Ritz-Carlton, which opened in 1912. More than a century on, the hotel is still setting the standard for luxury, thanks to the spacious guest rooms and grand spaces like the Palm Court, renowned for its afternoon tea. *ritzcarlton.com; doubles from $360.*

2. Fairmont Le Château Frontenac *Quebec City*

Angelina Jolie and Alfred Hitchcock have both checked in to this mainstay, a 19th-century, castle-like wonder that defines the skyline. A recent $75 million renovation brightened up the lobby and the 611 guest rooms—which welcome more than 300,000 people a year. *fairmont.com; doubles from $200.*

3. Wickaninnish Inn *Tofino*

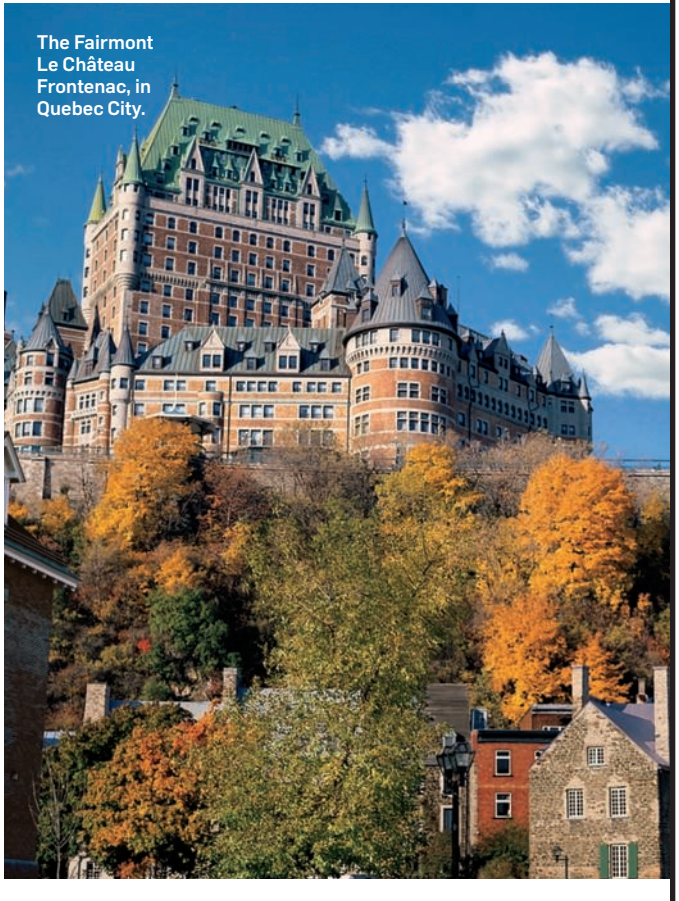
A rustic-luxe inn on Vancouver Island's western coast, the 21-year-old "Wick" offers easy access to nature. Guests can walk through the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve or watch for winter storms—fully decked out in rain gear—along the beach. *wickinn.com; doubles from $272.*

4. Fogo Island Inn *Newfoundland*

From the outside, this 29-room hotel, which is set on a sparsely inhabited island, is a visually arresting masterpiece—the sleek, X-shaped structure sits on stilts. Inside, the furniture, quilts, and rugs have all been made by local craftsmen, and food (mackerel, berries) is sourced just miles down the road. *fogoislandinn.ca; doubles from $1,429.*

5. Post Hotel & Spa *Lake Louise*

This family-run Relais & Châteaux hotel in Alberta, which dates back to 1942, is like an elegant Swiss chalet dropped into the middle of the Rockies. In the summer, guests come to kayak and swim; in the winter, it's a skiers' haven. *posthotel.com; doubles from $272.*



The Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, in Quebec City.

COURTESY OF FAIRMONT LE CHÂTEAU FRONTENAC. MAP BY HAISAM HUSSEIN

Reporting by Rocky Casale, Jacqueline Gifford, Ray Isle, Jessica McHugh, John Scarpinato, Christopher Tkaczyk, and Ian Volner.