

OTTAWA: An Historic Highway Becomes a Modern Destination

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In 1857 Queen Victoria declared the small and naturally beautiful community of Ottawa the capital city of her flourishing Dominion. (The Monarch had actually been approached to settle a dispute amongst Quebec City, Montreal, Toronto, Kingston and Ottawa as to who should be crowned capital.)

Situated on the banks of the Ottawa River and sharing a border with Quebec, Ottawa with its grandiose architecture, seamless bi-lingualism and political activity, is a natural leader among the nation's cities. This big city, with small town charm and appeal, is now part of a larger entity known as the National Capital Region (NCR). The NCR includes the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton on the Ontario side and the Communauté urbaine de l'Outaouais (Aylmer, Gatineau and Hull) on its Québec side. Located at the meeting place of the Ottawa River and the Rideau River, it has historically been a busy spot. Therefore, it should be no surprise that today the combined community has the fourth largest population in Canada with over 920,000 people and is now one of the country's fastest growing areas.

Beneath Parliament Hill, the graceful and symbolic Peace Tower, and the world famous Museum of Civilization lie the roots of a strong and important Native history, one that has affected the entire nation's direction and helped shape the landscape of the Canadian identity.

Trading along the Ottawa

In past times, the Ottawa River was a major highway for many Aboriginal groups. On the water and along the shorelines, First Nations met, traded, cooperated, fought and grew. Although dozens of distinct peoples passed through and set up camp on a temporary basis, all the lands touching the river belonged to the Algonquin people known as the "Adawa". Their name means 'people of the trade,' and when European explorers came to the region in search of beaver pelts, they called the entire area "Ottawa" after these people.

One of the first recorded encounters between the Algonquin inhabitants and European explorers occurred when Samuel de Champlain recorded his version of meeting a group of traders while on his way into the interior in 1603. Land claims are currently in process as the Algonquin Nation of the area reports that it has never surrendered its territory by treaty or sale. The Algonquin also state that they have never handed over land parcels because of conquest to any newcomer population. These people have continued to petition the government for recognition of these facts since 1772.

Next on the scene were the Métis voyageurs who ran supplies from Montreal to Fort

William and used these waterways as part of their routes. Carrying enormous loads, the first leg took them from Montreal, up the Ottawa River and across to Georgian Bay. The trip was arduous; the weather often inclement; and, the journey slow. Spring teams did not arrive in Fort William until July. It is no surprise that a thriving Métis community grew from the blending of voyageurs with the local First Nations settlements and the influx of new migrants.

Building the city New France crumbled under British rule in 1759, and the Ottawa area began to become popular with Americans who were staking claims on the land. Amongst the new settlers was Philemon Wright and his followers who set up in what is now Hull, but what was then predictably known as Wright's Town.

Following the War of 1812, a means of communication--between the main centre of Montreal and the western lands of the Dominion--safe from the volatile threats of southern neighbours was sought. In response, the Rideau Canal was constructed as a waterway link between the then capital city of Kingston and Montreal. Lieutenant-Colonel John By was contracted to oversee the development between 1826 and 1832. According to history texts, the Colonel set aside vast tracts of land for the building of fortifications which were later used as the site of the Canadian Parliament Buildings. The community was known as Bytown.

The rich forest industry was mainly responsible for the boom that the two townships experienced. Bytown became incorporated in 1855 and became Ottawa and in 1875. Wright's Town did the same and was renamed Hull. Steadily, a community grew. Factories produced metalwork; retail businesses thrived; schools and media were established. The little community was on its way to becoming the nation's capital.

Economics in the Capital Today

One of the main employers of Ottawa's thousands of citizens is the Federal Government of Canada. These employees make up 20% of the overall workforce. As a spin off, many organizations who deal with the government and who have affiliates and offices nationwide have also set up shop here. It has been reported that 650 high technology firms with an estimated 36,000 employees also operate in Ottawa; the hospitality industry supplies 27,000 people with jobs, and the health and life sciences field offers another 18,000 positions.

Such a vibrant, diversified and large work force is one of the main reasons why Ottawa has one of the highest disposable income rates in the country. It also boasts reasonable housing prices and opportunities with an impressive growth rate.

Cultural Centre

Ottawa has a well deserved reputation as a bustling cultural centre. With over 50 galleries and more than a dozen museums, including the Canadian Museum of Nature, National Museum of Science and Technology, National Aviation Museum, National Gallery of

Canada, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the new Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, it's easy to see why. The City also keeps up with its impressive hospitality reputation year round with sports events, and tourist-attracting festivals, such as Winterlude and the Canadian Tulip Festival.

Ottawa: the Aboriginal community's think-tank

Today Ottawa is home to many Aboriginal organizations and offices. The Métis National Council, Métis Nation of Ontario, Assembly of First Nations and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation all call the city home. With so many great resources and numerous workforce, Ottawa is an exciting and ideal centre for Aboriginal minds to gather, plan and move forward the issues integral to the survival and growth of Canada's three distinct Aboriginal peoples.