

Vacation Guide

Rideau Canal offers year-round vacation pleasure, recreation

The Rideau Canal, stretching 198 km (123.5 miles) from Ottawa to Kingston, Ontario is a waterway for all seasons. Year-round, it is a pleasure route for relaxation and recreation.

In summertime, the living is easy. Sports enthusiasts, history buffs and vacationers can all find something to excite and interest them.

Boating, of course, is a popular activity. All types of pleasure craft from palatial cruisers, yachts and houseboats to canoes, paddleboats and rowboats ply the Canal waters. The waterway generally opens for navigation the middle of May and closes the day after Thanksgiving in mid-October.

For those who enjoy sitting back and letting someone else man the helm, Paul's Boat Lines Ltd. in Ottawa offers a 1 1/2 hour sightseeing cruise along the Canal. Aboard the Miss SBJ or the Ottawa Queen, passengers travel 8.8 km (5.5 miles) from the National Arts Centre to Dow's Lake. The guided tour, conducted in both French and English,

introduces the visitor to the geographical and historical importance of the Canal.

But activity on the waterway isn't limited to boating. An Ottawa bicycle path allows cyclists to enjoy the scenic beauty of the Canal while improving their physical fitness. The waterway is also popular with joggers, those out for a relaxing drive, and people who enjoy a leisurely stroll.

Visiting the Canal's museums is an interesting way to discover the history of the waterway.

The Bytown Museum, located below Confederation Square in Ottawa, is dedicated to the relics of Col. John By, the British engineer who constructed the Canal in the 1820s, and other artifacts relating to Ottawa's history. The museum, the oldest stone edifice in Ottawa, was Col. By's base of operations during the Canal's construction. Today, the second floor houses pictures and sketches of the Canal, while the basement holds the complete set of tools used to build it and the great vault where the

payroll was stored.

The Merrickville Blockhouse Museum, in Merrickville, Ontario (76 km or 47 miles from Ottawa) features displays relating to the Canal's construction and the early surveying of the area.

At the Kingston Mills lockstation, (6 km or four miles from Kingston) the blockhouse has been recently restored with furnishings from the late 1820s.

Strolling about any of the four Rideau Canal blockhouses is an excellent way to view 18th century military architecture. The blockhouses located at Narrows Locks, Newboro Locks, Merrickville Locks and Kingston Mills Locks still retain the hand-operated machinery, massive wooden gates and the cut stone walls that Col. By designed almost a century and a half ago.

There are interpretative programs going on at many of the lockstations informing visitors about the Canal's rich history. At the Bytown Museum in Ottawa, and the Lockmaster Angling Visitor Centre, at Kingston Mills Locks, the program includes

slide shows, films and exhibits. Many of the lockstations are remote, but all are accessible by road.

Vacationers could spend a summer's afternoon in Ottawa visiting the lockstation located below Confederation Square. There, an intricate series of eight locks lifts boats 24 m (79 feet) from the Ottawa River to the man-made portion of the Canal.

Autumn is a lovely time of year along the Rideau Canal. The changing leaves enhance the beauty of the waterway, making it a perfect place for a romantic walk.

In winter, the Canal vibrates with activity. From the middle of December to the end of February, a 7.8 km (4.8 mile) stretch of the canal, in Ottawa, transforms into the world's longest man-made skating rink. Much of the rest of the Rideau Canal system is a popular route with cross-country ski and snowshoe enthusiasts.

Springtime brings flowers and festivals to the Canal. Soon after Canada's capital sheds its wintry blanket of snow, a colorful carpet of

tulips takes its place. And one of the best places to view the flowers is along the Rideau Canal. Thousands of them bloom every spring along Col. By Drive and the Queen Elizabeth Parkway, two scenic routes that run parallel to the waterway, one on each side.

In May, Ottawans celebrate the arrival of spring and the blooming of the tulips with the Festival of Spring.

The Festival is highlighted by a Festival of Spring Parade on the Rideau Canal led by a giant smiling tulip, outdoor concerts, a craft market and a beer garden.

For more information on the Rideau Canal contact the Rideau Canal Office, Parks Canada, 12 Maple Ave. N., Smiths Falls, Ontario.

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