

How to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday

By Zachary Kussin

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Fairmont's Le Château Frontenac is the world's most photographed hotel.

DANIEL KELLEGHAN

And you thought your last birthday bash was one for the ages.

Canada celebrates the 150th anniversary of its confederation, or the unification of the British colonies into one dominion, on July 1.

In arguably the biggest birthday party ever, our neighbor to the north is marking this occasion with a country-wide roster of eye-opening trips, hard-to-ignore offers and thrilling attractions that all travelers — yes, even Canucks — can enjoy this year.

Below, a look at our favorites that will make you book those plane tickets right now.

Great Canadian Railway Adventure

A partnership between VIA Rail Canada and Fairmont Hotels & Resorts now lets visitors celebrate Canada's 150th by zooming cross-country on a scenic 20-day train trip. Beginning in British Columbia and ending in Quebec, passengers make stops along the way — including in Winnipeg, Toronto and Ottawa. For nights not spent on the train, passengers get overnight stays at a number of Fairmont properties, including Le Château Frontenac in Quebec City — the world's most-photographed hotel. (From \$9,990/person)

Ottawa Sky Lounge



Sky Lounge

Ottawa, Canada's capital, rings in this milestone anniversary with Ignite 150, a series of out-of-the-ordinary events held throughout the city. A number of them are not yet announced, but from July 7 to 22, thrill-seekers with appetites can reserve a seat on the Sky Lounge — a stable dining table suspended 150 feet above ground by a crane, where visitors can sip cocktails and nibble on bites prepared by chef Stephen La Salle and his team from the Andaz's feast + revel restaurant. Ultra-Canadian menu items include braised beef poutine and a maple-scented butter tart. (\$125)

Banff National Park



Parks Canada / Scott Munn

Thanks to the nation's big birthday, tourists can visit Canada's national parks, marine conservation areas and historic areas for free all year. So make the most of it by visiting Banff — Canada's very first national park — in the province of Alberta. Nestled in the Canadian Rockies, Banff is known for its gorgeous alpine scenery, as well as fantastic opportunities for whitewater rafting, hiking and fishing.

Montreal



While Canada's 150th birthday is nothing to scoff at, trendy Montreal blew out the 375 candles on its cake this month to commemorate its much-earlier founding. Part of its celebrations include Avudo — an illuminated nighttime display in the Old Port that runs through Sept. 2. Through 3-D projections on large screens, fountain installations and music, the show pays homage to the St. Lawrence River — those who sailed down it to reach Montreal and who built around it to call the city home. (Admission is free, but tickets must be reserved)

Alianait Arts Festival



Ed Maruyama

Way north in Nunavut, the Alianait Arts Festival in the city of Iqaluit — held from June 30 to July 3 — benefits from near-constant summer sunlight thanks to its location near the Arctic Circle. Here, visitors can celebrate Canada's milestone anniversary by familiarizing themselves with native Inuit culture. While performances and workshops include indigenous throat singing and drum dance sessions, the event also includes sets from non-Inuit performers, including Nova Scotia rocker Joel Plaskett, of the band Joel Plaskett Emergency.