

# Ottawa to take starring role in Canada's 150th birthday celebrations

Canada's capital hopes the country's year of festivities will boost tourism and focus attention on its fun side, its cool districts and its ambitious civic projects



Fire starter ... a fireworks display on New Year's Eve kicked off Ottawa's celebration of Canada's 150th birthday. Photograph: Prabhakar Street

**Chris Mallinos**

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Guy Laflamme doesn't look like a visionary. He's neatly dressed and well-spoken, with a meticulously organised binder of business plans and charts. But when he starts talking about a four-storey, fire-breathing dragon roaming the streets of Ottawa, you have to wonder.

Laflamme is the brains behind Ottawa's celebrations of Canada's 150th birthday. As executive director of Ottawa 2017, it's his job to make the Canadian capital the epicentre of a nationwide party unlike anything the country has ever seen.



Guy Laflamme.

What he has come up with is set to confound the commonly held view of Ottawa. Like many bureaucratic capitals, the city has long had the image of a bland government town that pulls down the shutters early every evening. It doesn't help that it's sandwiched between ever-chic Montreal and popular Toronto. But Laflamme, drawing inspiration from capitals such as London and Rome, has dreamed up a year-long celebration that's futuristic and unconventional.

Aside from a giant mechanical dragon and spider arriving from France in July, Kontinuum, the world's first underground science-fiction multimedia show, will take over one of the city's new light-rail stations in June. And in July, Sky Lounge will be a gourmet dining experience on a table dangling from a crane 50 metres in the air. In March, the Red Bull Crashed Ice world skating championship will hold a race along the city's Rideau Canal. More than 250 events are planned over 12 months, including street parties, concerts and pop-up stunts, with a giant fireworks display on 1 July to mark the day of Confederation.



A giant mechanical dragon and spider will roam Ottawa's streets in July. Photograph: La Machine

Ottawa's mayor, Jim Watson, hopes the extravaganza will boost tourism by 20%. And if all goes according to plan, those extra visitors will leave with a whole new impression of the city.

"The perception [of Ottawa] is so outdated," Laflamme said. "We need to show the world - and the rest of Canada - what this city is all about."

Setting out to transform a city's identity may be audacious, but Ottawa is already in the midst of a resurgence. Nowhere is that more evident than in Wellington West, a former working-class

district now home to fashionable cafes and boutiques, and the city's oldest professional theatre company.



Supply and Demand, Wellington West

Wellington West still has a village feel, but its amenities are far from small-town. At Supply and Demand, named one of Canada's best new restaurants in 2013, chef Steve Wall offers fresh pastas, small plates and a raw bar. At the other end of the scale, the maple bacon doughnut at nearby SuzyQ is as Canadian as it gets. In a former printworks, the Tooth and Nail microbrewery's beers include a pilsner called Vim and Vigor, Fortitude stout and Tenacity pale ale - all fitting names for a city on a mission.

Combine this with large-scale infrastructure projects, including a long-awaited transit expansion, and it's clear that Ottawa is rising to the occasion with confidence.

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