



Congratulations Winners of the 2017 Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence

November 8, 2017 (Niagara Falls, ON)—The best of the best in Ontario tourism were celebrated at the annual Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala on Tuesday, November 7th at the Scotiabank Convention Centre in Niagara Falls. The Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence recognize tourism industry successes by honouring organizations and individuals who have made significant contributions to tourism in the province.

Jointly presented by Attractions Ontario, the Culinary Tourism Alliance (CTA), the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation (OTMPC), and the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO), the Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence are divided into four respective categories:

Ontario's Choice Awards calls upon tourists and locals to vote for their favourite attractions in eight different categories; the overall top-voted attraction is named Attraction of the Year.

The *Culinary Tourism Awards of Excellence* celebrate the people and places across the province committed to building Ontario's food identity, and showcasing the best of its food culture.

The *Tourism Marketing and Travel Media Awards of Excellence* recognize those who contribute to Ontario's tourism industry through impactful partnerships, marketing activities and media relations.

The *Tourism Industry Awards of Excellence* are presented to organizations, businesses and individuals that represent the quality of outstanding offerings that make Ontario a destination of choice.

Congratulations to the winners! Your dedication to outstanding service is what makes Ontario a place to discover for travellers around the world. Thank you for your generous and diverse contributions to our industry.

2017 Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence Winners

Ontario's Choice Award for Attraction of the Year

Top Attraction Science North

Culinary Tourism Awards of Excellence

Culinary Tourism Leadership Award Peterborough & the Kawarthas Tourism

Culinary Tourism Experience Award BMVA: The Apple Trail

Culinary Tourism Event of the Year Award Cultivate: A Festival of Food & Drink

Tourism Marketing & Travel Media Awards of Excellence

Tourism Marketing Campaign Award Under \$50K Peterborough & the Kawarthas Tourism

Tourism Marketing Campaign Award Over \$50K Kingston Accommodation Partners

Tourism Marketing Partnership Award Tourism Toronto and Air Canada

Tourism Print Collateral Award Tourism Toronto

Tourism Digital Marketing Award Kingston Accommodation Partners

Travel Media Story Award Colleen Friesen

Travel Media Photography Award George Fischer

Tourism Industry Awards of Excellence

Accessible Tourism Award Stratford Shakespearean Festival of Canada

Sustainable Tourism Award Yours Outdoors

Tourism Employer of the Year Caesars Windsor

Tourism Champion of the Year Adriano Ciotoli

Tourism Innovator of the Year

Escape Manor & Diefenbunker
Museum — Escape the
Diefenbunker

Tourism Event of the Year

2016 World Cup of Hockey

Lifetime Achievement Award

Guy Laflamme

For more information on award winners, please see the attached backgrounder.

Quotes

“The Ontario Tourism Awards celebrate our dynamic industry’s vision and innovation. Each winner’s contributions bolsters our local economies by welcoming more visitors who are drawn by Ontario’s exciting attractions, unique festivals and delicious local fare. This includes Science North – an agency of my ministry – named by tourists as Ontario’s attraction of the year. Congratulations to all award recipients and thank you for your commitment to making Ontario a world-class tourism destination!”

Eleanor McMahon, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport

“Celebrating excellence is a major part of the Ontario Tourism Summit, and we’re very proud to congratulate each winner on their individual achievements. Thank you for sharing your amazing experiences, marketing campaigns, business initiatives and leadership with Ontario and the world!”

Beth Potter, President & CEO, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO)

“Ontario’s Choice Awards recipients are voted on by consumers and visitors to Ontario. We had a significant number of votes cast this year, and every attraction that was voted for deserves accolades. Finalists for the Attraction of the Year Award feature two small attractions, in addition to an attraction from Northern Ontario—this is a testament that any attraction, big or small, can achieve this honour. Big congratulations to Science North on this accomplishment.”

Troy Young, CEO, Attractions Ontario

“All of the Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence recipients exemplify the immense breadth of tourism experiences Ontario has to share with visitors. It's exciting to see so many immersive food experiences on the docket this year! Congratulations to all of the finalists and winners that contributed to Ontario’s tourism success.”

Rebecca Mackenzie, President & CEO, Culinary Tourism Alliance (CTA)

“Congratulations to all of the 2017 Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence winners. The dedication and inspiration that Ontario’s tourism stakeholders provide to our tourism visitors within Ontario, Canada and around the world is what makes Ontario a truly remarkable destination. OTMPC is pleased to be a part of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of the industry.”

**Lisa LaVecchia, President & CEO, Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation
(OTMPC)**

Backgrounder

Ontario’s Choice Award for Attraction of the Year — Science North

Science North is Northern Ontario’s most popular tourist attraction, and an educational resource operating one of the largest science facilities in Canada. Science North’s attractions include a science centre, IMAX® theatre, planetarium, butterfly gallery, special exhibits hall and Dynamic Earth: Home of the Big Nickel.

Ontario Culinary Tourism Leadership Award — Peterborough & the Kawarthas Tourism

For years, the fruits of the region’s centuries-old farmlands and passionate producers have been, and continue to be, the most important ingredient in the vibrant local food scene. In recent years, Peterborough & the Kawarthas Tourism has showcased local chefs dedicated to using local food and beverage, and the producers supplying them. This year, they piloted a new exclusive food tourism experience to further these efforts.

Ontario Culinary Tourism Experience Award — BMVA: The Apple Pie Trail

The Apple Pie Trail is the ultimate experience for culinary tourists to discover the people, places and authentic tastes that define the south Georgian Bay area. Located in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of the Niagara Escarpment that forms the historic Bruce Peninsula, the Apple Pie Trail was created to educate and inspire visitors to explore one of Canada’s largest apple growing regions.

Ontario Culinary Tourism Event of the Year — Cultivate: A Festival of Food & Drink

Cultivate: A Festival of Food & Drink is three days of farm-to-festival family fun, hosted during harvest season in Port Hope. It began in 2015 to celebrate local chefs, restaurateurs, farmers and brew masters who are working together to bolster the local food scene. The festival promotes the Cultivate region’s (consisting of Northumberland County, Prince Edward County and the eastern part of Durham Region) food, drink and culture.

Tourism Marketing Campaign Award Under \$50K — Peterborough & the Kawarthas Tourism

After successful development of the area's first signed road cycling routes in 2015, Peterborough & the Kawarthas Tourism launched a multi-platform marketing campaign called "Grab Life by the Handlebars", to position the region as a premier cycling destination. This niche campaign resulted in significant ROI, which has provided many strategic opportunities to continue to inform the area's future product development and marketing initiatives.

Tourism Marketing Campaign Award Over \$50K — Kingston Accommodation Partners

The Kingston Brand Campaign was rooted in a forward-thinking marketing approach to speak to today's discerning travellers in a voice that's non-commercial, experiential, authentic, and shaped by locals. Kingston rolled out the new brand approach and positioning through its various marketing channels—including paid, earned and owned media—and was largely fuelled by a comprehensive, experiential and content marketing program that added voice and credibility to the Kingston experience. The brand has been widely embraced within the Kingston tourism, economic development and cultural communities.

Tourism Print Collateral Award — Tourism Toronto

The Toronto Food & Drink guide, a 32-page, full-colour magazine, was designed to inspire visitors to seek out unique and exceptional culinary experiences. The magazine leverages interest in Toronto as a "foodie" destination by showcasing the diversity, breadth and quality of Toronto's restaurants, food festivals, markets, Ontario produce, craft breweries and local wine and spirits.

Tourism Digital Marketing Award — Kingston Accommodation Partners

The "Makers of Kingston" digital campaign included content marketing, database marketing, paid advertising and social outreach. Centered around stories featuring local tattoo artists, chefs, artisans, entrepreneurs and designers, content included development of video and editorial to tell a more immersive story, and had a consistent call to action to learn more about Kingston as a destination at visitkingston.ca.

Tourism Marketing Partnership Award — Tourism Toronto and Air Canada

Tourism Toronto and Air Canada partnered to introduce a Toronto Stopover Program: the first program of its kind for Canada. When Americans travel to Europe or Asia on Air Canada, they can stopover in Toronto for up to 7 days at no extra charge. Air Canada had only previously promoted the new program within niche business travel-owned activity, but there was a unique opportunity to more prominently establish Toronto as a stopover destination, exclusively from Air Canada. In 2016, the program generated 5,862 visitors who chose to break their ticket and stop in Toronto. Compared to 2015, there was an increase of travellers coming in from the US of 618%, and 704% from Europe and Asia.

Travel Media Story Award — Colleen Friesen

In 2014, Waterloo Regional Tourism and St. Jacobs Country worked with Grand Experiences to build a new Ontario Signature Experience for cycling through Mennonite farms and communities. Raised as a Mennonite, Colleen immediately accepted the invitation to come and experience the trip, and then pitched the idea to Adventure Cyclist magazine. The story appeared in the February issue of Adventure Cyclist, both in print and digital versions. Adventure Cycling's mission is to inspire and empower people to travel by bicycle. They are the largest non-profit cycling organization in North America, with more than 50,000 members.

Travel Media Photography Award — George Fischer

George Fischer is one of Canada's most renowned and prolific landscape photographers. He has produced over 55 photo books from around the globe and Canada—but one of his most beloved areas of Canada is the 1000 Islands region of Ontario, where he can be most often found dangling precariously outside a helicopter, trying to capture another breathtaking image. Whether he is on land, water or air, George's romance with the 1000 Islands has produced countless images that have appeared in international magazines and the promotional publications of tourism agencies around the world.

Accessible Tourism Award — Stratford Shakespearean Festival of Canada

The Stratford Festival is fully compliant with the AODA: all buildings are wheelchair accessible, with availability for special-access seating. But further to accessible buildings, the festival has taken initiative to reach people who have either felt excluded from theatre, or thought they could not participate fully in the theatre experience. The Stratford Festival has performances for blind and low-vision theatre lovers; hearing assistance receivers in all theatres; and ASL-interpreted performances. In 2016, the festival piloted a relaxed performance format specifically designed to welcome patrons who benefit from less-restricted audience environments—including guests with intellectual or learning disabilities, sensory processing conditions or autism spectrum disorder.

Tourism Event of the Year — 2016 World Cup of Hockey

This event brought fans from around the world to Toronto to celebrate hockey, activating day and night across multiple city sites from September 17 to 29. The tourism success of the World Cup of Hockey can be attributed to a variety of different elements, including all games being played at the Air Canada Centre; technological experiments in game presentation that heightened the spectator experience; and the Scotiabank World Cup of Hockey Fan Village, a free, 10-day event-within-an-event, occupying more than 250,000 square feet in Toronto's Distillery District. The Distillery District activation attracted more than 100,000 visitors, and the overall World Cup of Hockey event was identified by Tourism Toronto as a major contributor to a tourism boost in 2016—a record-breaking year for visitation.

Tourism Champion of the Year — Adriano Ciotoli

Adriano launched WindsorEats in 2004, and has since become a leader in promoting the Windsor-Essex region as a culinary tourism destination. WindsorEats quickly expanded to fill gaps identified in local offerings, starting the area's first cycle tourism initiative—the Wine Trail Ride—which now generates about \$10,000 dollars in visitor spending within the Windsor-Essex region per five-hour tour. The success of the Wine Trail Ride led to other innovations, such as the Bikes & Beers cycling tour, the Drinks of Walkerville, walking tours (designated as an Ontario Signature Experience in 2015), and The Traveller, a vintage 1973 Trillium trailer that's been converted into a full-service mobile bar, designed to promote the Windsor-Essex region wherever it goes. Friday Night Lights, a free, bi-weekly community event Adriano created, generated \$100,000 dollars in visitor spending at local establishments in 2016, and attracted visitors from across Ontario and beyond. Adriano currently sits on Tourism Windsor-Essex Pelee Island's Board of Directors, as well as the Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation Board of Directors, and has previously served on the board of the Culinary Tourism Alliance.

Tourism Employer of the Year — Caesars Windsor

Caesars Windsor is one of Windsor and Essex County's largest employers, with over 2,800 employees. Recognized as a key contributor to the regional hospitality industry, Caesars Windsor is known throughout the Caesars enterprise for exceptional guest service, environmental leadership and corporate citizenship. Devoted to the professional and personal development of its employees, Caesars offers staff more than 100 different complimentary training programs, from leadership skills to benefits administration. An active partnership with St. Clair College and the University of Windsor offers paid and unpaid internship programs, which have resulted in hiring students for advertising, finance and human resources positions. In 2016, Caesars Windsor implemented a mentoring program that matches employees with a senior leader. Employees are also eligible for numerous recognition programs, in addition to fun, community-building events.

Sustainable Tourism Award — Yours Outdoors

Operating in the Haliburton Highlands, Yours Outdoors offers creative learning vacations and outdoor adventures that celebrate and the rich, natural and cultural heritage of the region in all seasons. Experience packages—including custom programs for guests with special needs or interests—are original, engaging, enlightening and designed to connect visitors with communities and the great outdoors. Yours Outdoors applies principles and practices of experiential, sustainable tourism to all its offerings; the organization supports local economies and businesses by purchasing local goods and services, maintains small group sizes to limit negative social and environmental impacts, avoids the use of disposable materials whenever possible, and contributes to local environmental initiatives while respecting and appreciating cultural diversity.

Tourism Innovator of the Year — Escape Manor & Diefenbunker Museum: Escape the Diefenbunker

In March of 2016, the Diefenbunker Museum and Escape Manor partnered to launch the world's largest escape room: "Escape the Diefenbunker". Most escape rooms are on a much smaller scale, but this innovative escape room takes place on one entire floor of the former Cold War bunker turned National Historic Site of Canada and museum, and spans 25,000 square feet. It was an instant success; the first six months of the program sold out within days, and continues to attract guests. An "Escape the Diefenbunker" Waitlist Facebook group currently has more than 600 members, and there's also an email waitlist with 1000 subscribers. "Escape the Diefenbunker" is a perfect example of museums partnering with third party content providers to use their spaces in different ways, and attract new audiences while encouraging and fostering creativity in the community through an exciting new experience.

Lifetime Achievement Award — Guy Laflamme

Guy has been creating, producing and marketing tourism products for over 25 years. Prior to leading the organization of Ottawa's Canada 150 celebrations as Executive Director of the Ottawa 2017 Bureau, Guy's successes include Canada Day Celebrations, the Winterlude Festival and Mosaika—a sound and light show on Parliament Hill. He's also served as Senior Vice President, Capital Experience at the National Capital Commission, Chair of the JUNO Awards Host Committee and Chair of the Genie Awards Host Committee. Outside of event promotion and marketing, Guy has been a professor at the Telfer School of Management in the Executive MBA program at the University of Ottawa for the past 25 years, and has taught at the University of Bucharest Business School for the past eight years.

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