

GREAT  
TASTE OF

## Ontario

Cheese your  
own adventure

Cheese lovers, take note: Throughout the month of May, Oxford County is hosting Big Cheese Days, a festival celebrating the region's cheese producers. What better time to check out the county's Cheese Trail?

**F** If you're a cheese lover, Oxford County's Cheese Trail is a must-visit. Located about an hour and a half west of downtown Toronto, Oxford County is also known as the "Dairy Capital of Canada." The area is home to numerous cheesemakers, delicious local restaurants and charming small shops, making a short day trip to Oxford County the perfect getaway for any foodie. Better yet, the region is hosting the aptly named Big Cheese Days festival throughout the month of May. On every Saturday, Big Cheese Days sees 30 businesses across the county offering visitors special tastings and experiences, including the chance to try limited-edition cheeses, whey cocktails and fireside fondue. We've suggested an itinerary below, but trust us: there's no wrong way to experience Ontario's cheesiest region.

**10 a.m.**  
Coffee time

Start the day off with coffee at The Olde Bakery Cafe in Ingersoll. Aside from a cup of java, this bakery is the perfect spot to fuel up on breakfast goodies like pancakes, french toast and waffles with locally tapped syrup!

**11:30 a.m.**  
History lesson

Next, head over to the Ingersoll Cheese and Agricultural Museum to learn about the region's history of cheesemaking in a replica of a



working factory. And while you're in town, head over to Patina's of Ingersoll to shop for eclectic handcrafted goods. From jewellery and puzzles to candies, clothes or any sort of knickknack, Patina's stocks souvenirs from more than 100 artisans from across the world.

**1 p.m.**  
Lunch break

Get back to the dairy with a visit to Red Dragon Dairy in Salford, a family-owned cheese plant and store specializing in sheep and water buffalo milk cheeses. Plus, if you're hungry for lunch, the friendly folks at Red Dragon can make you a sandwich or sub with local meats and cheeses.

If you're looking for a fuller lunch, drive over to Woodstock and hit up the Brickhouse Brewpub, a pub and brewery that sells local Ontario craft beers and a food menu inspired by local ingredients and suppliers – plus, you can try a pint of Brickhouse's own Upper Thames Brewing Company beer.

**3 p.m.**  
Tour de force

Then, stop by Gunn's Hill Artisan Cheese, an artisan cheese plant whose delicious curds are made with milk from the neighbouring family dairy farm. For Big Cheese Days, they're offering a version of their famous Oxford Harvest cheese that has been flavoured with za'atar, a Middle Eastern spice blend. To make the most of the visit, pre-book a tour of the premises to learn more about the cheesemaking process and the local agriculture.


**4:30 p.m.**  
Sample size

For more cheesy goodness, head over to Bright Cheese and Butter, the oldest operating manufacturer of cheddar cheese in Ontario. Established in 1874, Bright Cheese and Butter makes cheeses like aged cheddar, asiago, colby and feta in its 1800s-era factory, where you can visit and sample Bright's delicious award-winning cheeses and of course, curds!

**6 p.m.**  
Dinner bell!

Finally, when you've had your fill of curds (if that's even possible), grab dinner at Feast On-Certified sixtynine in Woodstock, an upscale restaurant dedicated to quality and craftsmanship. The menu at sixtynine is always a surprise because it changes based on what's available from local farms. End the day with a delicious seasonal dessert to fuel you (and your full stomach) on your journey home.

Check out these  
other  
foodie  
tours  
around  
Ontario

*Want to eat your way around the province? Try these other fun, food-focused tours.*

**Chatham-Kent's  
Ice Cream Trail**

Located in the southwest of the province, this sweet culinary trail features 19 ice cream shops that serve up delicious scoops, sandwiches and more. Download the Great Taste of Ontario passport for more info!

**Ontario's South Coast  
Wineries Toast  
the Coast Trail**

Looking for drinks, not food? This tour, which will have you driving through Norfolk County along Lake Erie, features nine wineries that will make it easier than ever to drink locally.

**Wellington Farmers  
Market Trail**

Located in Wellington County near Guelph, this tour will guide you to eight farmers' markets, where you can take advantage of the region's delicious local produce. Each market has unique vendors and provides the perfect excuse to explore Ontario's small rural towns.

**Barrels, Bottles  
and Brews**

This tour, located in Windsor Essex, is all about local craft beer and spirits – and the history behind them. Take a drive south to this region to sample some of the province's best concoctions.

Top: The perfect cheese board, courtesy of sixtynine restaurant. DUDEK PHOTOGRAPHY; Above: Udderly Ridiculous Farm Life offers several farm experiences during Big Cheese Days. DAYS LIKE THIS PHOTOS; Below: A cheesemaker in the aging room at Gunn's Hill Artisan Cheese. DUDEK PHOTOGRAPHY



# The return of the Shaw: Everything to see, do and eat in Niagara-on-the-Lake

It's not quite a galaxy far, far away, but theatre fans are excited to get back to Niagara-on-the-Lake. Here's how to spend a long weekend exploring Ontario's prettiest theatre, wine and good food capital

The Shaw Festival is welcoming audiences back indoors and theatre-lovers are ready. The iconic arts festival's spring-summer season features a wide-ranging selection of plays, from the classic love story *Cyrano de Bergerac* to *Damn Yankees*, a romantic musical about a middle-aged baseball fan who makes a deal with the devil and wakes up a rising star on the Washington Senators. Also on the lineup: Bernard Shaw's political extravaganza, *Too Good to Be True*, *Chitra*, a one-act play by Rabindranath Tagore based on a story the *Mahabharata*, and Oscar Wilde's beloved *The Importance of Being Earnest*. With so many amazing shows to see, why not make a weekend of it? We've rounded up where you should eat, stay and play in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

#### When hunger strikes...

##### Ruffino's Pasta Bar & Grill, 242 Mary St.

Take a trip to Italia without ever leaving Ontario. Lovingly nicknamed Naples-on-the-Lake, Ruffino's prides itself on being a family, heritage and future-first business, serving up delicious pastas, wood-fired focaccias, hearty entrees and sweet, traditional Italian desserts using ingredients from their own farm and gardens.

##### Tiara Restaurant, 155 Byron St.

Sip some local wines and savour the delicious eats at this waterfront restaurant. It's a five-star, farm-to-table culinary experience with a beautiful view of Niagara-on-the-Lake's harbour. Enjoy the succulent flavours of the best Canadian ingredients, Niagara wines, craft cocktails and local beers.

##### Peller Estates Winery, 290 John St. E.

Crafting award-winning wines for more than 50 years, Peller Estates is a must-see stop during your time in Niagara. Indulge in a tour of the winery, followed by a casual meal on its outdoor terrace or a fancy, candlelit dining experience in the wine cellar, all crafted by award-winning Chef Jason Parsons.

#### When you're ready for a rest...

##### Prince of Wales Hotel, 6 Picton St.

Nestled in the heart of downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake, this classic hotel is one of the best the quaint city has to offer. Boasting elegant, Victorian-style rooms and a contemporary spa, this luxury hotel is minutes away from Lake Ontario, hosts traditional English tea time daily, has two notable on-site restaurants and is just a five-minute jaunt from the Shaw Festival Theatre.

##### T24 on Queen Hotel & Spa, 124 Queen St.

With spacious guest rooms, luxury villas and an on-site spa, this hotel located in the Old Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is a blend of Victorian and modern, and leaves little to be desired. It isn't far from several of Niagara's best wineries and a scenic 10-minute walk from the Shaw Festival Theatre.

##### The Olde Angel Inn, 224 Regent St.

If history is your thing, consider booking this historic landmark. It's the oldest operating inn in Ontario, established in 1789 and rebuilt after the War of 1812. And it has even longer history than that – politicians raised a glass here after outlawing

slavery in 1793. Its beautifully-lit beer garden is the ideal spot for a post-theatre nightcap. Just don't wake the inn's resident ghost, Captain Colin Swayze.

#### When you're between plays...

##### Grab a double scoop at Cows Ice Cream

Founded in Cavendish, PEI., in 1983, this iconic ice cream hot spot only has one Ontario location, and it's in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Touted as Canada's best ice cream, stop by to pick up some of the legendary Cows merch and get a cone with the family. It'll be worth the inevitable brain freeze, we promise.

##### Go on a guided wine and beer bicycle tour with Tour de Vine

Follow your local tour guide along one of two picturesque routes – the Niagara River Parkway or the Lakeshore – with plenty of stops to taste some of the best wines and beers Niagara-on-the-Lake has to offer.

##### Take a private historical tour with Wheelz Niagara

Scenery lovers and history buffs alike will want to book a private tour of Niagara's most interesting historical sites. Equally beautiful and historically significant, this full-day, seven-hour tour stops at Old Fort Erie, Chippawa Battlefield Park, Laura Secord Homestead and many other sites that tell the story of the War of 1812.



RUFFINO'S PASTA BAR &amp; GRILL



PELLER ESTATES WINERY

## Five Indigenous food experts on their favourite Ontario food experiences

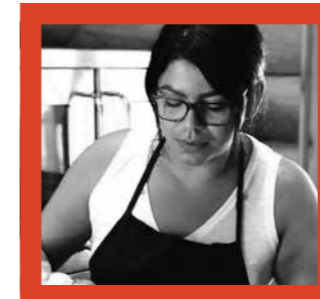
From foraging classes to restaurant hidden gems to must-visit markets, Indigenous food experts share their recommendations



**Joseph Shawana**  
educator and chef

"I will be re-opening my restaurant, Ku-Kum Kitchen, in my home community of Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island. It will be relaunching as a casual-dining experience using Indigenous ingredients, flavour and storytelling.

I've also helped Wikwemikong Tourism with its Indigenous culinary guide program. I've trained the guides in the best plants that guests can forage for, which they can then take back to the kitchen and cook up into a meal – anything from baked white fish wrapped in wild plantain and stuffed with wild garlic to hot stone-seared venison loin with wild mushrooms. You can also spend the day fishing with Wass Tours, and what you catch you can cook on the shoreline. There's a lot happening in the culinary world on my home island!"



**Aicha Smith-Belhaba**  
chef

"On my reserve [Six Nations of the Grand River], there's a restaurant called Yawékon which is run by Tawnya Brant. She does the same type of stuff as me, where we're 'Indigenizing' foods you may normally see. Her food is good. Like, her menu for today is Squash Alfredo Vegetarian Lasagna, Bison French Onion Soup, Beef Birria Tacos..."

I'm actually going to be opening a restaurant on the reserve next year. We want to do casual fine dining that uses Indigenous ingredients while reconceptualizing what Indigenous foods look like. I'm also half Algerian, so one of the dishes I'll be doing is a grilled venison chop seasoned with North African spices; so it's Middle Eastern but it's also from here as well."



**Trina Mather-Simard**  
executive and artistic director,  
Indigenous Experiences

"Some of the things I love most about what we're doing at Madahōki Farm [a newly launched agritourism initiative] are our seasonal festivals. In June, we have our Summer Solstice Indigenous Festival. We have three unique Indigenous meals prepared by our chefs, which you can order across Canada. We're doing a barbecue box with homemade burgers, sausages, game meat and wild rice salad, a curried caribou meal and one more we're still finalizing.

We also welcome guests to the farm. We have a marketplace, where we're focusing on Indigenous food products. We carry Indigenous-harvested syrup and honey, as well as corn soup and bannock in a bag that you can take home and make. We've also just added some cool corn cobs that you can microwave to make popcorn."



**Leni Brem**  
director of operations at  
Indigenous Tourism Ontario

"One of my favourite local food experiences is Pow Wow Cafe in [Toronto's] Kensington Market, which has a great vibe and lots of great stores and food. Chef Shawn Adler uses locally sourced ingredients to make Pow Wow cuisine like Pow Wow-style tacos, [which use Indigenous fry bread as a base for a range of meat and veggie toppings]. I also love the sodas he makes, which include a Sweetgrass and a Cedar flavour. They are delicious, unique and refreshing!"



**Billy Alexander**  
director of programs at the  
Culinary Tourism Alliance

"I always love the Indigenous summer solstice. It's the epitome of being able to learn about our Indigenous culture – our art, our music, our crafts, our dance, our food, our ceremonies. There's a misconception that our Indigenous Pow Wows are just for us, but I would recommend that anybody take in a Pow Wow experience if they can. It's the best way to experience our culture in its entirety. There are so many different Pow Wows, especially with things opening back up for the first time in three years all throughout Ontario. They're often very well publicized. We love when non-Indigenous people come and experience our culture in its full capacity."



# Ontario's most famous doughnuts

We take our doughnuts pretty seriously in Ontario, and for good reason: Canada famously has more doughnut shops per capita than any other country. (Perhaps that's why we eat more doughnuts than any other country too!) What's more, Ontario is home to some of the most interesting, original doughnuts around. From Thunder Bay to Ottawa, here's where you can go to discover your next favourite deep-fried sweet treat.



Left: French crullers from Good Glaze Doughnuts in North Bay. Top: An O-Towner, Ottawa's take on the cronut, from Art Is In Bakery. Bottom: Apple Cider Doughnuts from Norfolk County.

## Thunder Bay: Persians

Legend has it, this local delicacy was first created in the 1940s by baker Art Bennett, who named the pastry after John Joseph "Black Jack" Pershing, a First World War general who visited his bakery while he was making dough. Bennett's Bakery & Deli still stands today – and visitors can still try Art's top-secret recipe, which calls for an oval-shaped doughnut frosted with pink, berry-flavoured icing.

## Norfolk County: Apple Cider Doughnuts

Did you know that Norfolk County is the only place in Ontario with an official doughnut? The Apple Cider Doughnut, the official doughnut of Norfolk County (declared as such in 2015) found at the Cider Keg, is well worth the road trip. This local specialty incorporates locally produced cider into the batter. Then, after the doughnut is fried, it's coated with cinnamon and sugar.

## Sudbury: Jelly Pigs

You can find jelly pigs at the iconic Leinala's Bakery in Sudbury. These traditional Finnish doughnuts, which are filled with raspberry jam and topped with sugar, really do resemble little pigs, hence the name. They were brought to Northern Ontario by Elli and Anvi Leinala, who founded the bakery after they immigrated to Canada from Finland in 1959. Pro tip: don't leave without trying other Finnish delicacies, including 'S' cookies (cinnamon cookies piped in the shape of an S) and b  b  s, which are cream-filled pastries topped with icing.

## Ottawa: O-Towners

Can't decide between a croissant or a doughnut? Take a trip to Art Is In Bakery in the country's capital, Ottawa, to try its decadent crossover pastry, the O-Towner. This concoction (sometimes called a Cronut) is made by frying "laminated" doughnut dough, a term that refers to the process of folding butter into dough, like a croissant. O-Towners are usually coated in sugar, but some come with creative, seasonal fillings, which change every day.

## North Bay: French Cruller

Sink your teeth into a French cruller next time you're in North Bay, especially the ones at Good Glaze Doughnuts. Like all crullers, these ones are made with eggy choux pastry dough; when fried, they rise and become light and airy. North Bay's version isn't your average cruller: these are twisted before being fried, giving them their signature ridges – which, by the way, hold the perfect amount of salted caramel glaze.

# The secret history of Ontario ribfests

Where there's smoke, there's... a community tradition that's still going strong after 30 years

You always smell a ribfest before you see one: the smoky, woody haze of charcoal, the primal aroma of meat cooking low-and-slow over carefully tended fires, the top notes of candy floss and popcorn from the fairground attractions that often ring the periphery.

It's a scent Douglas Hillier knows well. "When Ribfest is on, no matter where you are in the downtown core, you can smell that sweet barbecue sauce, the pork and the smokers that have been going all night," says Hillier, whose family has been running the London, Ont., ribfest for 13 years. "It's just so exciting," he says, adding that his favourite moment is the same one each year: "When the line starts to develop," he laughs. "It always makes me nervous that no one will come."

He needn't worry. Over the last 30 or so years, ribfests – festivals dedicated to celebrating the mighty rib, where various professional "ribbers" set up their rigs and tempt punters with their take on this sticky, succulent art form – have exploded in popularity, the arrival of smokers and tents in town parks and fairgrounds around Ontario greeted with the same excitement that used to accompany the arrival of the circus.

While ribfests can be found throughout Canada and in the U.S., Ontario over-indexes on this phenomenon, with more than 50 planned for this summer versus just a handful in, say, British Columbia. There's some speculation that the province's affinity for barbecue has ties back to enslaved people who brought their foodways north when escaping via the Underground Railroad, then celebrated Emancipation Day in border towns like Windsor and Sarnia with barbecue festivals. It certainly hasn't hurt that ribfests have coincided with the rise of a foodie culture where we'll happily wait in line for an hour to try the latest craze we've seen on Instagram; and food trucks, of which pitmasters and ribbers are a popular subset, can have cult-like followings.

Either way: "This isn't just an event," says Hillier, who averages 200,000 guests over five days at his ribfest, one of dozens across the province. "Some people wait all year for this. They talk about it like it's their religion."

As with other faiths, the precise origins of modern ribfests are a bit of mystery, and vary depending on who you talk to. Best as anyone can tell, the idea of gathering people to-



gether to eat a ton of ribs and select the ultimate pitmaster seems to have occurred in two separate places in Ontario around the same time.

In London, Hillier says the event began as a "barbecue festival" in 1985 that went for three years before officially becoming a ribfest run by the local Boys and Girls Club. The Club used it as an essential fundraiser for 20 years before turning it over to his family, who run it as part of their larger events business. (They still ensure a donation is made to charity.)

"I do it for my happiness," says Hillier, who was diagnosed with a brain tumour a few years before he took over the event. "I don't make a lot of money, but I have a joyous life because of Ribfest."

Ninety minutes down the 401, however, you'll find Hillier's "friendly rival," a.k.a. Canada's Largest Ribfest, a fundraiser by Rotary Burlington Lakeshore that's generated more than \$4-million for charity since 1996. "This phenomenon didn't exist in Canada before our club started it," claims Brent Paszt, one of the event's current co-chairs. "At Rotary, our focus is always how to raise more money for charity, and the [the ribfest founders, John Thorpe and Robert Peeling] were just looking for another idea." Inspiration came when Thorpe, active in cycling, was at a road race in Cleveland, Ohio and

saw a ribfest being held as a side event.

They decided to try hosting their own event and ended up raising \$850 in their first year. (If you've been to a ribfest, you know there's no entrance fee and guests pay vendors directly for food, but organizers make money on alcohol sales, sponsorships, donations and vendor fees.) By 2016, the event had hit its highest attendance ever: more than 183,000 people who ate 150,000 pounds of ribs over four days. While the pandemic put a bit of a damper on this growth, they're hoping to reach or even exceed those numbers in 2022, hosting up to 20 ribbers, the most out of any Ontario ribfest.

"You get to know some familiar faces that keep coming back over the years," says Paszt. "People make it a weekend getaway, and it's become a gathering spot for groups of 20 or 30 friends who might not see each other for most of the summer, but they have that end-of-summer barbecue appointment." They've even had a wedding book out space for a cocktail hour. (Yes, the bride did chow down on ribs, white gown and all.)

That community spirit is common at other ribfests, too. Just ask Scott Wright, chair of another Rotary ribfest down the road in Niagara Falls. "It's always on Father's Day weekend, so for a lot of people in the community

it's become a tradition to bring the family out," says Wright, who notes they get around 20,000 people over the three days. Their first event was in 2005, modeled on a ribfest they'd seen at St. Catharines Rotary Club put on. It has all the classic elements – four or five ribbers, bands playing, a beer tent, funnel cakes and freshly-squeezed lemonade – set against a particularly stunning backdrop in Rapidsview Park. "You can literally hear the roar of the falls, and you can see the mist," says Wright.

On a good year, the Niagara Falls Rotary Ribfest can raise \$40,000 to \$45,000 for the club, which a committee works to distribute among the community. "We've been supporting a breakfast program in the schools of Niagara Falls since day one, so a lot of the money would go to that," says Wright. "We support the local hospital foundation, the women's shelter, the Y..." The list goes on, and also includes some international donations, like buying breadfruit trees to support nutrition programs in the Caribbean, and digging wells in Haiti. "We really try to get the message out about the good work that Rotary does," says Wright.

It's also just a really fun way to spend a summer's day or evening. "It's been our club's largest fundraiser, but I also just enjoy it as well," says Wright.

## Road trip-worthy ribfests

Will travel for ribs? Grab the wet wipes, because we've got a finger-licking itinerary of Ontario ribfests for you to visit this summer

### Windsor Ribfest

This stop on the Northern Heat Rib Series – sort of like a band touring, but with ribbers and craft beer – brings some of North America's best rib teams to Riverfront Festival Plaza on June 3 to 5.

### Rotary Club of Niagara Falls Sunrise Ribfest

After two years of running a drive-through ribfest, Niagara Falls' annual ribfest will be back at Rapidsview Park from June 17 to 19. Expect music, vendors, ribs – and the return of Piggy, the fest's big, pink mascot.

### Whitby Ribfest

From a full midway to a dedicated "Kidfest at Ribfest" children's zone, the 12th annual ribfest held by the Rotary Club of Whitby Sunrise, happening July 8 to 10, has plenty going on – including ribs, of course.

### London Ribfest and Craft Beer Festival

There will be live music, craft beer vendors and everything from fries and roasted corn to butter beer soda on offer at this fest, which runs from July 28 to August 1. But everyone knows what the prime attraction is: Ribber's Row, which will run along Wellington Street at Victoria Park.

### Brantford Kinsmen Ribfest

Sample five of North America's best ribbers – and vote on awards like "Best Pig Rig" and "Best Sauce" – at the Brantford Civic Centre over three days starting August 5.

### Canada's Largest Ribfest

If variety is what you're looking for, this four-day fest is for you. About 18 ribbers will be setting up shop at Burlington's Spencer Smith Park starting September 2. Also on offer: midway rides, games and other kid-friendly activities.



## Celebrating spring ingredients

Spring is an exciting time of year for cooking. To celebrate the vibrant veggies in season, three talented Feast On chefs share their imaginative takes on preparing spring's peak produce



### Ramps

Katie Ardington, executive chef at Beckta Dining & Wine Bar in Ottawa, associates ramps with the smell of spring. "What I love about ramps is that part of them is so delicate and the other is so strong," she says. "I get pretty excited when they start to arrive – it's among just a few local ingredients that grow close by."

Ramps are in season for just a few brief weeks beginning around mid-April, and this fleeting freshness enhances their allure for cooks. Ardington sources as many ramps as she can get her hands on every spring. "We have a farmer that has a couple of acres nearby and every year we just tell them we'll buy everything they can pick," she says. "Some years we could get close to 150 pounds in one delivery."

Her favourite way to cook these pungent veggies is one that marries it with other flavourful spring

veggies: a pared-down ragout that combines ramps with asparagus and morel mushrooms, along with stock and beurre monté. "Doing a quick chiffonade of the ramp leaves and adding them at the end with some fresh chervil heightens the delicate garlic flavour," she advises.

Ardington also loves pickling ramp bulbs so she can add a burst of spring flavour to dishes throughout the year. "Using those pickled ramps in the winter after preserving them for many months is the perfect sweet-sour garlic flavour that's great with anything," she says.

### Asparagus

Crisp and green, asparagus may just be the quintessential spring veggie. Purists think a drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkle of salt and pepper is all that's needed to bring out its pleasantly sweet-bitter taste, but

asparagus lends itself well to more

complex dishes, too.

Stephanie Soukis, president and CEO of Waterloo Region's Little Mushroom Catering, enjoys cooking with asparagus because of its versatility. "I love asparagus paired with brie; I make a mean asparagus and brie soup. But our favourite way to make it at home is to wrap it in bacon and broil it," she says.

Soukis' top take on asparagus is a brunch classic made from scratch. For her eggs Benedict, blanched asparagus is served with a house-made cheddar-and-herb biscuit topped with a poached egg, dill and extra-lemony hollandaise. "We don't cook the asparagus for very long; we're just kind of shocking it. That's how you get a good crunch and that vibrant green colour," she says. "It's all about mouthfeel and complementing flavours."

### Rhubarb

Rhubarb is one of the first crops ready to be harvested each spring in the gardens at Westcott Vineyards in Niagara's Benchlands. "One of the first signs of spring is seeing that bright, vibrant, hot pink colour on a plate," says Olivia Simpson, who oversees the vineyards' culinary program with her partner and co-chef Ricky Caspe.

Rhubarb is a familiar ingredient in pies, jams, and other desserts, but Caspe also appreciates the subtle acidity it brings to savoury dishes. "It can be Ontario's version of lemon," he says. "It doesn't necessarily need to be the star of the dish. It's also a sort of secret ingredient that can help bring up the acidity of plates without it having to be a 'rhubarb dish.'"

Rhubarb plays this "secret ingredient" role in a smoked trout pie that Caspe and Simpson often feature on

their spring menus. Caspe describes the pie as a savoury riff on a Pop-Tart. "The smoked trout is the filling, but the rhubarb is a super important component to it," he says. A rhubarb compote brings acidic balance to the trout filling, which is seasoned with fennel and wrapped in a pastry crust. Candied rhubarb also serves as a colourful garnish for the dish.

"We took all the flavours of rhubarb – the sweetness, the fruitiness, the acidity – and tried to spread it out as much as we could across that dish," Caspe says. "I think it gets chefs, and everyone, really excited because once you start seeing rhubarb, it means that winter is over."

## Three Ontario regions food-lovers must visit this spring

Take a road trip to one (or all) of these charming destinations and you're guaranteed to experience some of the best sights and meals the province has to offer

Late spring is arguably the best time to explore Ontario. So, why not take advantage of the sunshine and warm temperatures by planning a weekend trip to the County of Brant, the Kawartha Lakes or the Haliburton Highlands? You'll get your fill of arts and entertainment, set out on a mouth-watering Butter Tart Tour and take in the natural beauty from hiking trails and lookout points at all these delicious destinations.



### County of Brant

Home to Paris, St. George and more than 25 other quaint communities, the County of Brant offers over 250

acres of pristine parkland – which means you're likely to work up an appetite while exploring. Start the day off right with brunch at the Sociable Kitchen + Tavern. (Try the chicken and waffles or barbecued brisket hash.) For locally grown fare, like rhubarb and sweet corn, head to Brantwood Farms, where you can pick your own strawberries, too. Then, load up on tasty local eats, from cheese and sausages to organic coffee, at the 49-stall Brantford Farmers' Market. For more take-home treats, stop by The Windmill Country Market for a homemade bumbleberry pie and apricot jam. Wind down in the tasting room at Steel Wheel Breweries, where you can try local, small-batch brews like Norwegian oat pale ale and a sour-sauvignon blend. For dinner, Fume Resto Bar is an ideal spot for a date night. Try a limoncello thyme prosciutto and tuck into some squash ravioli before calling it a night.

**What to do:** Take a one-hour tour at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, where you'll learn the history of the Six Nations (Onondaga, Mohawk, Cayuga, Oneida, Seneca, and Tuscarora). Seeing real artifacts and hearing stories along the way will bring the experience to life. Keep the history lesson going with a visit to the Bell Homestead National Historic Site, the home in Brantford where Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1874. The models of the first telephones are still there! If you're up for a real adventure, make a reservation with the Grand River Rafting Company for a three- to five-hour Turbo Tubing tour from Paris to Brant Park. You'll need to paddle in some spots, but the views make it worth the effort; and if you need a water break, there are even fresh springs you can drink from.

**Where to stay:** Betty's Place Bed and Breakfast in Burford. The breakfast, which often includes Betty's famous crescent bacon rings, is not to be missed. There's even a

chocolate shop on site with 21 kinds of German chocolate bark, which makes for a delicious souvenir.



### Kawartha Lakes

An hour and a half northeast of Toronto, Kawartha Lakes is made up of 24 communities (including Lindsay and Fenelon Falls) with more than 250 lakes and rivers. Bobcaygeon, home to the first lock along the Trent-Severn Waterway, is an especially fun spot to explore. The Bobcaygeon Farmers Market is an ideal way to spend a Saturday morning. You'll find local vendors including Martin Family Farm, which offers summer sausage, pies, tomato plants and more. Dessert lovers will definitely want to hit a stop or two on the Kawarthas Northumberland Butter Tart Tour. Download a map online to check out the 50 spots you can visit for gooey, flaky tarts, including the Bobcaygeon Bakery. Or, cool off with a cone at the headquarters of Kawartha Dairy Ice Cream. This family-owned company is famous for its delicious flavours made with fresh cream from local farmers. Go for a classic flavour like Moose Tracks or try the newer Iced Coffee Sorbet. When evening falls, enjoy an Old Dog Brewery Single Malt Scotch by the fireplace at The Original Just for the Halibut Tap House and Grill. The restaurant is known for its delicious seafood dish-

es, including steamed P.E.I. mussels and pan-seared Ontario wild-caught pickerel.

**What to do:** Pick up a bicycle from the Bike Share program at Lock 32 and cycle the South Sturgeon Route toward Lindsay for some amazing views of Sturgeon Lake. The 36-kilometre route will take you by Kawartha Settlers' Village, where you can walk between 20 historic buildings and get a feel for what life in the Kawarthas was like between 1830 and 1935. And you can't leave Bobcaygeon without a visit to the beloved Bigley Shoes & Clothing. The legendary store has more than 40,000 pairs of shoes and 25,000 swimsuits!

**Where to stay:** For some well-deserved relaxation, reserve a cottage at Blue Pigeon Resort. With amenities like a saltwater swimming pool, boat rentals and designated campfire spots, the resort is an ideal place to slow down and take in some gorgeous sunsets.



### Haliburton Highlands

The highlands are known for their stunning rock faces, lakes, valleys and unique outdoor activities. The population more than triples during the warmer months of the year, but there's still more than enough space for everyone to enjoy the great out-

doors. And there's plenty of great food to enjoy, from woodfired pizza from Into the Blue Bakery at the Haliburton County Farmers' Market to the Reuben sandwich of McKeck's, a cottage country institution that was originally opened by Toronto Maple Leaf player Walt McKechnie. Beer lovers will want to chill out with a pint of Spruce Kveik – flavoured with locally-foraged spruce tips, of course – at award-winning micro-brewery Haliburton Highlands Brewing. And if you're camping or renting a cottage, the fresh and frozen options at AM/PM Outdoor Gourmet are made with local ingredients, and can easily be heated and served. Try the sundried white bean salad and the Jamaican jerk wings.

**What to do:** Take in some incredible views on the Haliburton Forest Canopy Tour, a four-part adventure that begins with a scenic drive through the forest (in your own car). Next, you'll canoe across a lake and go for a guided walk along the Pelaw River Rapids before the best part: climbing 20 metres up into the treetops. The canopy boardwalk is over half a kilometre long (the longest of its kind in the world) and offers breathtaking views of Haliburton Forest. Later, catch a flick at Highland Cinemas Kinmount, a museum and movie theatre in one. Get there early to check out the impressive collection of film memorabilia and projectors. The Haliburton Sculpture Forest is a great place to take in some local art in a beautiful, natural setting, and it's budget friendly, too. The entry fee is donation-based and there are free guided tours in July and August. The collection is made up of works by Canadian and international artists.

**Where to stay:** The Lakeview Motel is the perfect place to unwind after a long day spent exploring, especially if you book a room with an outdoor jacuzzi! Its country-style rooms are cozy and comfortable – and pets are welcome here, too.

## Experience big, bold, global flavours in Brampton

Unapologetically authentic dishes bring foodies from afar to this under-the-radar food town



Indian sweets from Kwality Sweets & Restaurant

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is one of the most multicultural places in the world, with an incredibly diverse food scene to match. Among the foodie destinations in the region, one city stands out: Brampton. From Sri Lankan "short eats" to Trinidadian doubles and Nigerian suya, you can find a bite from just about anywhere in the world in this culinary treasure trove, located just north of Toronto. Here are some of Brampton's best international eats.

**For the best Sri Lankan short eats**  
*Vinayagar Vilas, 85 Kennedy Rd., S. Unit 31*  
"Short eats" is a Sri Lankan term that essentially refers to snacks – a quicker bite. Start your journey with savoury vegetarian stuffed patties, onion pakoras or a dal vada before indulging in sweeter vaipana (fried dumplings) washed down with a house-brewed masala tea.

**For the best Nigerian suya**  
*MJ's BBQ and Suya, 361 Parkhurst Square Unit 5*  
Serving up traditional Nigerian home cooking, MJ's BBQ and Suya is a family-owned and operated business that is a mainstay in the community. Its take on suya – a skewer of thinly sliced spicy beef marinated in a blend of herbs and spices imported from Nigeria – is a must-try. Have yours with a side of jollof rice and pepper soup.

**For the best Trinidadian doubles**  
*Alima's Roti and Pastry, 13 Kenview Blvd.*  
If you've ever heard of doubles, the iconic Trinidadian snack consisting of spicy curried chickpeas sandwiched between fried dough, you know they're always plural and b) delicious. Here's one more lesson: Alima's Roti and Pastry is one of the best places in Brampton to find them. Level up your experience by adding some parathas or dhalpuris to go, alongside any curry. Yes, that's a lot of food, but whether you enjoy these delicious eats for lunch the next day or sneak in a midnight snack, your future self will thank you.

**For the best Afghan kabobs**  
*Royal Kabob, 284 Queen St. E.*  
Layers of sweet, salty, sour and

savoury Middle Eastern syrups and spices create the flavour bomb that is Afghan food. Royal Kabob makes some of the best – you guessed it – kabobs in Brampton. Every bite is beyond tender and well seasoned, from beef shami and beef chapli kabobs to tandoori chicken and tikka kabobs.

**For the best Hakka cuisine**  
*Guddu's Chilli Chicken, 205 Van Kirk Dr. Unit 3*  
What's better than Chinese or Indian cuisine? A fusion of both. Guddu's Chilli Chicken has been serving up Hakka cuisine for more than a decade, and one bite will tell you exactly why. Our favourites are the dry chilli chicken, chilli fish and chilli paneer alongside traditional Hakka noodle and rice dishes. Curious about their other offerings? Try one of their unique Chinese bryanis for all the comfort, flavour and spice that a fusion of regional Chinese and Indian cooking offers.

**For the best Jamaican stuffed patties**  
*Mackay Pizza, 930 N. Park Dr.*  
Another community favourite, Mackay Pizza has also been a staple for well over a decade, and for good reason. Though most waltz through those doors for a taste of the cheesy goodness of pizza, the star of the show is their stuffed Jamaican patty. Mackay patties are loaded with freshly shredded lettuce, mayo and cheese with an option for other add-ons. This snack is simple, balanced and mind-blowingly tasty.

**For the best Indian sweets**  
*Kwality Sweets & Restaurant, 2150 Steeles Ave. E.*  
This family-run restaurant has a full dine-in menu, but the real draw here are the desserts, with more than 70 Indian and Bengali treats available including laddoos (made with flour, nuts, sugar, jaggery and ghee, these round treats are little bursts of joy), many varieties of burfi (square, milk-based sweets that are sprinkled with chocolate, coconut, almonds or other toppings) and amriti (a Bengali sweet made from batter deep-fried in the shape of a circular flower then soaked in a sweet syrup).



