

5 best places to go skating

BY MICHAEL PRENTICE, CITIZEN SPECIAL DECEMBER 26, 2009

1. The Rideau Canal

World's longest, world's largest, world heritage site, whatever. We think a 7.8-kilometre stretch of canal in the heart of Ottawa is world's best spot for an outdoor skate, then a hot chocolate and BeaverTail. Or drop into the nearby Royal Oak pub or Canal Ritz restaurant for something stronger and more filling. Skating season usually starts early January. www.canadascapital.gc.ca or phone 613-239-5000.

2. Rideau Hall skating rink

Feel and act like near-royalty by skating on the outdoor rink used by governors-general at Rideau Hall in Ottawa since 1872, then warm up by woodfire in skating hut. The rink is open for public skating, no charge, no reservation necessary, noon to 5 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays, from early January. Groups can reserve at other times. www.gg.ca or phone

1-866-842-4422.

3. Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto

For skaters, there are two places in Ontario they must lace up their skates at least once -- the Rideau Canal and Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto.

Skating is free on the outdoor rink beside city hall, seven days a week from early morning till 10 p.m. But it's a five-hour drive from Ottawa, so requires an overnight stay. www.toronto.ca or phone 1-416-392-2489.

4. Springer Market Square, Kingston

A wonderful spot next to Kingston's historic City Hall, this outdoor rink is already open for the season. Skating is free and the rink is open daily from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. It's a two-hour drive from Ottawa, a little longer by the scenic route (Highway 10) through Richmond, Perth and Westport. www.cityofkingston.ca or phone 1-613-546-4291 ext. 1700.

5. Old Port, Montreal

Bonsecours Basin skating rink in the Old Port is Montreal's first artificial outdoor rink and is open more than 100 days a year. It's open daily from 10 a.m. until mid-evening. There's a \$6 charge for adults, \$4 for children six to 12. Two hours' drive from Ottawa, with a multitude of attractions before and après-skate. www.montrealplus.ca or phone 1-514-496-7678.

-- Michael Prentice, who only once tried skating, but loves winter visits to all five of these spots.

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