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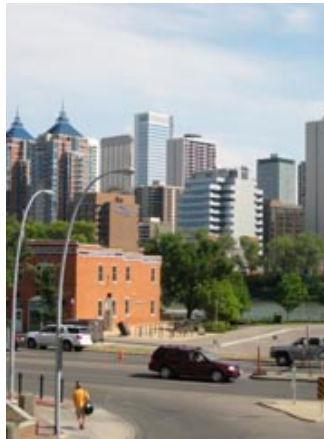
city deep, mountain high

Calgary: city deep, mountain high

This Canadian heartland city boasts a wealth of hip [restaurants](#), chic [boutiques](#), history and culture as rich as its oilfields and as hearty as its cattle industry

by **Elyse Glickman**

photographed by the author



Above: Inn-Style: suite living at the Kensington Riverside Inn.

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SOME PEOPLE DESCRIBE Alberta as [Canada's](#) answer to Texas, and Calgary as Canada's answer to Dallas or Houston. The association is understandable given its most famous industries have historically been (and continue to be) cattle and oil. The Calgary Stampede, not surprisingly, continues to be one of the city's biggest tourist draws every summer, and the oil industry continues to bring prosperity to the city. Come winter, there are the seductive ski runs of the Canadian Rockies, Lake Louise and Banff.

However, you don't need to be a cowboy enthusiast, ski bum or oil baron to embrace Calgary's historic and cultural riches. Downtown gems include what may be one of the cleanest and safest Chinatown areas in North America, the stunning Glenbow Museum (focused on Canadian history and anthropology with some modern art thrown into the mix), the lush Prince's Island Park, the distinguished Fairmount Palliser Hotel, the vibe-y Hotel Arts (and its Raw Bar, with insane gourmet cocktails), Epcor Center (a theater complex anchoring downtown) and the Art Gallery of Calgary. And what visit would be complete without something touristy and "just because"? Downtown exists in the form of the Calgary Tower's observation deck. A short distance out of town, another worthwhile stop is Heritage Park Historical Village, a literal hands-on way to experience Calgary's past that is remarkably low on kitsch and high in substance.

My home for the week was [the Kensington Riverside Inn](#), a property deftly mixing old school grace with attentive service, wonderful breakfasts, a mod lobby and surrounding neighbourhood with everything a single girl (or couple) could ever want, including an endless run of clothing stores (many focused on local brands), gourmet food emporiums, a fantastic bedding shop (name here), several craft stores with local and Canadian jewellery lines and the main branch of Crave (a cupcake bakery with justifiably long lines and unique flavours like lemon-lime and peppermint patty).

Top left: Olive this place! Sleek Italian culinary chic at Olives, downtown. **Above left:** Oh, Canada! Calgary's dramatic and ever-changing skyline. The city's number of building cranes is currently second only to Dubai. **Below left:** Downtown Calgary.





Calgary is a remarkably prolific shopping city, from the fantastic earthy, organic paradise of the Calgary Farmers' Market (featuring a nice dose of vendors woven in offering hand-crafted jewellery and accessories) to one neighbourhood that's cuter than the next (17th Avenue, Inglewood, Stephen Avenue Walk), all with intriguing mixes of funky sportswear boutiques, high-end designer salons and interior design shops and antiques. Stephen Avenue is flanked with Canada's best department stores (the Bay, Holt Renfrew) and major malls with some of the better Canadian fashion chains connected together with those Plus 15s (clever indoor walkways conceived by Order of Canada-winning architect Harold Hanen that bridge key buildings together). And when its time to unwind from all that shopping (especially Currents on 17th Avenue, with boutique style at Gap prices), a trip to the aptly-named Oasis Spa (with unique Egyptian-style interiors and treatments) is a must with its clever Middle East-meets-west approach to beauty.

While Calgarians have much to be proud of with their rich history, 21st-century Calgary's foodie scene is undeniably dazzling. Although the city has its share of cowboy grub (most notably, Buzzards/Bottlescrew Bill's Pub), there are many ways to savour Alberta beef (or, if you prefer, local fish and enticing market vegetable dishes), from the elegant River Café and the Ranche situated in lush park settings to places like Olives, Brava Bistro and Avenue Diner that do contemporary cuisine right (great ambiance and truly interesting food minus the attitude one may expect from these places). Ethnic fare abounds, especially Asian, and the King and I, Tropica Malaysian & Thai, China Rose and Wild Ginger are among the hot spots that deliver spice and style in equal measure.

If you have a sweet tooth, look no further than the nearest Bernard Callebaut shop. Most locations of this 25-year-old Calgary institution not only offer excellent Belgian-influenced selections, but also soft serve ice cream that could be sized up as "liquid velvet" and memorable hot chocolate (or should we call that 'haute chocolate', given he's the only North American chocolatier who is invited to attend the annual Salon de Chocolat in Paris each October?)

Every time I arrive in a city for the first time and

look out my hotel window (my view included the skyline and the river), the questions I usually ask myself are, ‘Would I want to come back here?’ and ‘Could I live here?’ While there are many places where I would cheerfully make a return visit, it is a revelation to discover a place where I actually could actually envision myself as a resident, thanks to a perfect balance of sophistication, cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, natural beauty and people. Calgary is one of those rare places. •

Elyse Glickman is US west coast editor of *Lucire*.

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