

Edmonton



Edmonton skyline along North Saskatchewan River valley

Canada's 'Little Brother' Metropolis Grows Up

The U.S.-Canada border, the longest unprotected border in the world, sees 500,000 daily crossings. Our relationship with Canada defines ally. While most Americans are familiar with Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, their sleeping gem, Edmonton, is starting to get the attention it deserves. Located in the heart of Alberta—one of Canada's 10 provinces—and hockey legend Wayne Gretzky's launch-pad, Edmonton is a young northern city of more than a million people with a lot more to do culturally than you'd expect. Their southern neighbor Calgary is a bit more of white collar oil town that's known, ironically, for peddling Edmonton's oil. Edmonton was recently named the cultural capital of Canada, and for good reason—there's no shortage of galleries, symphonies, plays, concerts, and festivals. This riverside metropolis is a mellow yet savvy urban getaway if there ever was one. By the way, their river valley park, which bisects the city like a greenbelt should, is 22 times bigger than Central Park.



Edmonton's Winspear Centre

Culture thrives here. Although across-the-river Old Strathcona seems get all the mojo buzz, downtown Edmonton teems with world class performance spaces. The Citadel is a breathtaking complex of theaters, one a 700-seat state-of-the-art thrust stage. All of the Citadel's venues combined make it the busiest regional theater in Western Canada. citadeltheatre.com. The Winspear Centre's acoustically perfect balcony-flanked venue also showcases world-class music acts. winspearcentre.com. A sculpture itself when viewed from afar, the incredible Art Gallery of Alberta opened in 2010. It dazzles from inside and out. youraga.ca.



Art Gallery of Alberta (photo: Robert Lemermeyer)

The Union Bank Inn, a resurrected old-style bank that melds bold Modern Renaissance—imagine swanky 1911—and contemporary design. The goose down bedding, fireplace, and fleece robe waiting in your room add to the understated elegance. Sturdy like an armory, the 14 vintage rooms have different themes each individually overseen by some of Edmonton's finest interior designers. An adjacent wing providing business-style accommodation makes 34 rooms total. People make a place and their warm staff completes the luxurious Inn experience. The ground floor of the hotel features Madison's Grill—fine dining sourcing local options—and the adjoining wine cellar-esque Vintage Room. unionbankinn.com.



Madison's Grill—ground floor of The Union Bank Inn

For a taste of grand Canadian royalty consider the imposing, river valley-hugging Fairmont Hotel MacDonald. Sample this landmark on fairmont.com/macdonald-edmonton. The cheesy-but-fun Fantasyland Hotel, attached to the famed West Edmonton Mall, is themed by floor. Choices include Hollywood, Roman, and Tropical—there's even a few igloo-themed rooms with bunk beds. The mall's mammoth indoor rollercoaster is a savage neck-twister. fantasylandhotel.com.



Edmonton's Fairmont Hotel MacDonald

Edmonton's Blue Plate Diner, holding court on downtown's 104th Street promenade, serves uplifting diner cuisine including an elk & bison burger, vegetarian options, and a Kentucky Hot Brown (turkey) Sandwich. This cozy joint with high ceilings is a member of eatlocalfirst.com.

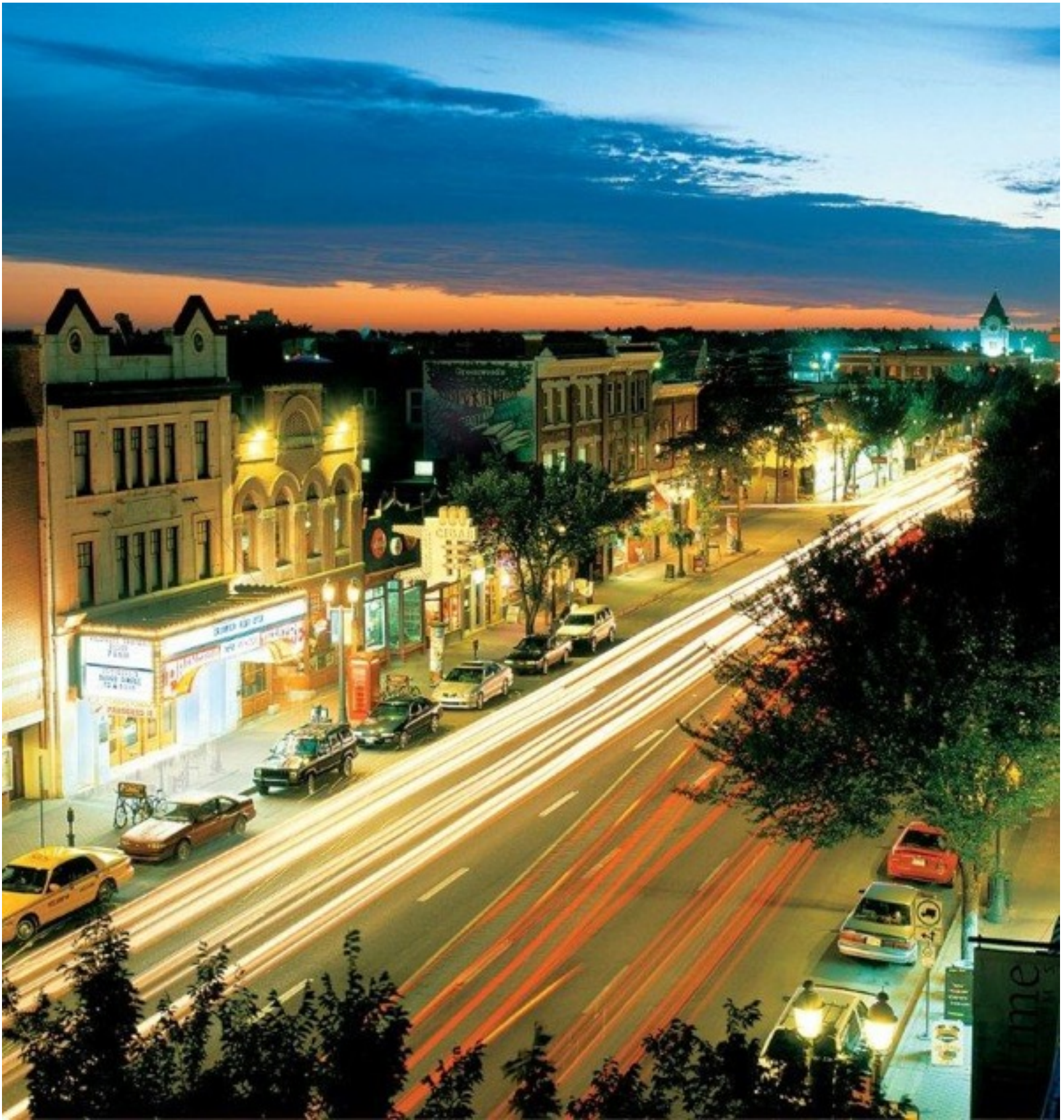


104th Street Promenade—home of the Blue Plate Diner

Set in a homey building on a residential tree-lined street, the NVE Institute is a spa specializing in phyto-aroma cosmetology—translation, epic massages with a tender “you can nap now” touch, concluding with a nifty tubular-cocoon wrap. A world away from pomp, this place is a down-to-earth upscale treat. nveinstitute.ca.

CROSSING THE RIVER

For an entirely different urban vibe, explore life across the North Saskatchewan River. Old Strathcona, Edmonton’s Brooklyn, is a hip historic area that’s home to more than 100 eateries and pubs offering the city’s largest variety of jazz, blues, country, folk, alternative rock and dance. Also a theater district with 10 theater groups celebrating new works and innovative takes on classic material, improvisation, and children’s productions. Discover one-of-a-kind offerings, from locally made crafts to treasures from afar. Amid many historic buildings, businesses are mostly owner-operated, offering whatever you’d expect to find in New York’s Soho district, minus the people-jams. oldstrathcona.ca.



Old Strathcona

The Varscona Theatre is located in the heart of Old Strathcona, and is home to four professional resident companies as well as many independent theatres. Check out shadowtheatre.org and varsconatheatre.casaannett.com.

Visit Old Strathcona in mid-August and you'll be in the heart of North America's longest-running and largest fringe theatre festival. In fact, Edmonton is festival ground zero—home to 30 major festivals year-round that celebrate the arts, music, winter, and sports.

Packrat Louie is an upscale brick-walled Swiss bistro with a wood-fired oven and made from scratch international cuisine via fresh local markets. Located in the heart of Old Strathcona, the Swiss, French, German, and Italian influences are enjoyed in an open, friendly environment. packratlouie.com.

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Via Rail has service to/from all points east and west of Edmonton—the four hour train ride west to rustic-but-hip Jasper passes through the Canadian Rockies and some of North America's best scenery. This rail odyssey makes Amtrak tuck its tail between its legs. viarail.ca.

For an impressive overview of what's to do in rockin' Edmonton visit edmonton.com.



Edmonton twilight