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## Food & Drink - In Good Taste - Historic Properties

### Historic Properties

Three eateries where location meets legacy

By Josephine Matyas | Photos by Tim Forbes

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## TIR NAN ÒG

Step into Tír Nan Òg at The Prince George Hotel and you'll notice a nod to the traditional pubs of Ireland. And there's good reason for that: the authentic pub decor was constructed in The Emerald Isle, disassembled, shipped over the ocean to Kingston and then brought back to life in the warmth of the historic Ontario Street property.

**A Little History:** The large stone building holds its own on a streetscape that was the centre of action when Kingston was the capital of the United Province of Canada. Next door is the magnificent City Hall and immediately across the street sits the original K&P Railway Station (now the Tourist Information Office).

As commanding as it is today, The Prince George had humble beginnings. Around 1817, the plot of land next to Market Square was the perfect spot for Lawrence Herchmer, a prominent Kingston merchant, to build a small liquor store. His son-in-law, John C. Macpherson, expanded the stone building and converted it into a hotel. The business cycled through a variety of names, but since 1918 it has been known as The Prince George Hotel.

**Eat and Drink:** The Prince George is home to three restaurants, all connected and serving from the same menu, and all aim to provide a premium pub experience of food, drink and live entertainment.

Tír Nan Òg (the name is Gaelic for "land of youth") holds the lion's share of the seats, including an expansive wraparound patio. At the smaller, intimate pub fronting Ontario

Street, known as the Old Speckled Hen, you can sidle up to the original wood bar, circa early 1900s, and peruse shelves that hold an impressive selection of whiskies and scotches. Before the demise of smoking in bars and restaurants, the small corner room known as Monte's was home to Kingston's cigar lounge. The space is still used in the busy summer months and is available for private parties and events.

The menu tilts towards traditional Irish pub food. Look for Guinness: it flavours the gravy atop poutine and is used to braise the mushrooms in the Guinness steak and mushroom crock. There are potatoes aplenty and English-style cheeses like old Cheddar and creamy, sharp Stilton. The signature dish is the Rosslare Lamb Shank, seasoned and slow-cooked in-house and served with buttermilk mashed potatoes and grilled veggies.

**Bet You Didn't Know:** There are stories of ghosts that haunt the corridors of the building and some staff members claim to have captured the ethereal beings in photos. Timid staff can't be coaxed into the maze of hallways and rooms in the basement.

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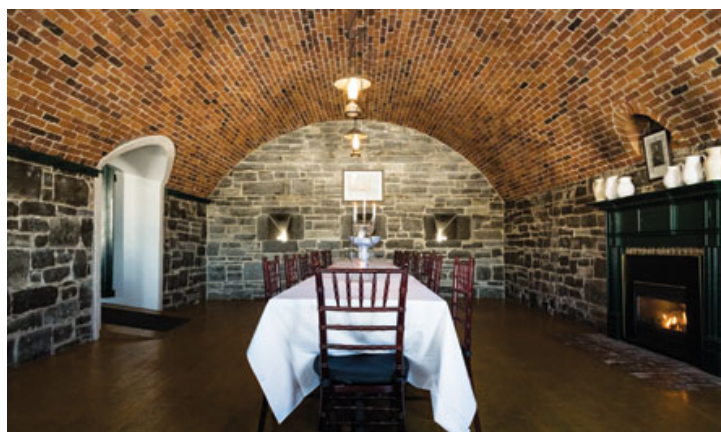
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## FORT HENRY RESTAURANTS

Fort Henry National Historic Site is a Kingston landmark and part of the Rideau Canal's UNESCO World Heritage Site designation. The walled fortification has long been an irresistible draw for visitors and locals alike. With a new deck, the fort can boast the best view in town.

**A Little History:** Once called the "Citadel of Upper Canada," Fort Henry was built on the crest of a peninsula with a commanding view over the St. Lawrence River, as part of a strategy to guard the entrance to the Rideau Canal. The current stone block fort was completed in 1836 (replacing an earlier fortification of wood and earth) and was a marvel of modern engineering at the time.

The vaulted brick ceilings of the casements were considered bombproof and state-of-the-art — at one time they were storage magazines. Six of the casements in the advanced battery have been converted into dining rooms that are true to the period atmosphere.

The red brick ceilings and stone walls are all original, complete with narrow rifle slits cut into the two-foot thick limestone.

**Food and Drink:** For reserved special events (corporate functions, weddings, private parties), diners become guests of the officers' mess, circa 19th century. Forget the "please" and "thank you" — the gap between officers and the servants was wide and the rules of conversation were strict. Being attended to by soldier servants is a way for visitors to appreciate an authentic dining experience as well as gain a sense of the history of Fort Henry. Meals served by candlelight include dishes that were typical officers' eats: stuffed roast pork, prime rib and braised beef.

In the summer months, the Bonnycastle Lunch & Tea Room serves traditional, casual British fare served by soldier servants dressed in period costume.

**Bet You Didn't Know:** There's a big change coming to the fort restaurants in 2013. Beginning April 1, visitors will no longer have to pay the general admission fee to dine at the restaurants and patio in the advanced battery section of the fort. As well, the advanced battery level is opening Kingston's newest — and largest — outdoor deck offering bistro-style seating and spectacular views of the city skyline.



## THE PORTSMOUTH TAVERN

At one time Portsmouth Village was surrounded by farmers' fields, but these days the area west of the downtown core has been swallowed up by Kingston's expansion. Portsmouth lost its sleepy farmland in a flurry of building activity, due to the construction of the large, stonewalled provincial penitentiary facility. Where there were workers, there was a tavern. And The Portsmouth Tavern fit the bill.

**A Little History:** In its early days, the Kingston area was renowned for its shipyards and rich marine traditions. On the outskirts of town, at Hatter's Bay in Portsmouth Village, a marine railway hauled vessels in need of repair in and out of the waters of the lake. One

family of ship's carpenters, the Beaupres, purchased the land at the corner of Yonge Street and Grange Street in the settlement of Portsmouth and by the late 1860s had

constructed a frame building on the site. First named The Farmer's Inn, and then The Portsmouth Public House, the food and beverage business stayed in the Beaupre family until 1974. With a change in ownership came a change in name and in the late 1980s the local watering hole became known as The Portsmouth Tavern. To locals and regulars, it is simply called "The Ports," and to old-timers, "Beaup's."

**Food and Drink:** Drink and light pub snacks may have been around for a century and a half, but meals are a relative newcomer on the menu at The Ports. The expanded restaurant was established onsite in 1985 and the selection has grown to include wraps, a club sandwich to die for, homemade burgers that have their own loyal following and salads made from scratch.

The Ports is also known for its pool league, large-screen TV sports, Friday night karaoke and live bands. And just like the good ol' days, the place holds its own with a loyal group of regulars.

**Bet You Didn't Know:** The original penitentiary at Portsmouth was a provincial facility — when it opened in 1835 there were just six inmates in residence. Shortly after Confederation in 1867, the penitentiary was taken over by the federal government of the Dominion of Canada. By that time, there were 800 inmates.