

CHECKING IN

More than a sporting chance at the Renaissance



ROCHELLE LASH

Toronto's sports frenzy will peak in 2015 with the Pan-Am and Parapan Am Games and the 20th anniversary of the NBA team Toronto Raptors. But the sports scene is perennially intense in the Queen City. Counting the Raptors, Toronto is home to seven professional sports teams: the Toronto Blue Jays of Major League Baseball, the CFL's Argonauts, the NHL's Maple Leafs, the Marlies of the American Hockey League, Toronto Rock of the National Lacrosse League and Toronto FC of Major League Soccer.

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

The Renaissance Toronto Downtown Hotel is at the very core of sports fever. It is said to be the only hotel in the world that is part of a major-league sports arena, the Rogers Centre. That's the home field for the Blue Jays and the Argonauts. That means that if you book a room with a view — one of the Renaissance's 70 deluxe guest rooms and suites or one of the private Skybox Suites that overlook Rogers' field — you will have a unique, compelling seat at sporting events such as the Blue Jay's season opener, April 13. Arriba, the hotel's restaurant, also overlooks centre field and features such sports-worthy lunch and dinner dishes as beer-battered fish 'n' chips, mushroom ravioli, flatbreads, steaks and fish. When it's game night, Arriba might be the most elusive reservation in town. The Renaissance has 348 rooms and suites, airy in style, with floor-to-ceiling windows and modern business-like decor in colours of chocolate and vanilla. At the heart of Toronto's entertainment district, the Renaissance is close to the CN Tower, Ripley's Aquarium, Air Canada Centre, Metro Toronto Convention Centre and Harbourfront. The Rogers Centre is a landmark with its own set of statistics. Indoors, even with the retractable roof closed, it towers so high that a 31-storey building could fit at centre field and it is broad enough to house eight 747



The Arriba restaurant at the Renaissance Toronto Downtown Hotel overlooks centre field at Rogers Centre, and on game night, reservations could be quite elusive. PHOTOS: RENAISSANCE TORONTO DOWNTOWN HOTEL



The Renaissance Toronto Downtown Hotel has a unique location as part of the Rogers Centre, which is home to pop concerts and Blue Jays' baseball games.

airplanes. (Ouch! Don't mention a retractable roof to anyone who knows Montreal's Olympic Stadium.) Besides major-league sports, the arena will rock with concerts like One Direction on Aug. 20 and Taylor Swift on Oct. 2 and 3.

The dazzler this summer will be the opening ceremonies of the Pan-Am Games at the Rogers Centre on July 10. The Cirque du Soleil will create an original production especially for the extravaganza, but if you can't attend, it will be widely broadcast.

THE GAMES OF SUMMER

The PanAm and Parapan Games will welcome about 7,600 athletes from Central, North and South Americas, as well as the Caribbean. The Games will take place at venues in 16 municipalities of southern Ontario in 30 new and refurbished venues. Some already have been road-tested. Water Polo Canada used the new Atos Markham Pan Am/Parapan Am Centre for an international meet in early 2015. During the summer games, this arena east of the city centre also will be the site for table tennis and badminton.

The new Cisco Milton Pan Am/Parapan Am Velodrome, northwest of downtown, already has been the site of major cycling prequels to the Games. It will multi-task with basketball and volleyball courts inside the cycling oval and a walking/jogging track around the perimeter.

Some of the sports set to make a Pan Am debut will be golf, women's rugby and baseball, wheelchair rugby, seated volleyball. Men's softball will return to the Pan Ams as will Parapan football.

NEW PEARSON TRANSIT

Travellers to Toronto from Montreal, Ottawa, Halifax and Windsor have lots of choices including VIA Rail and flights

IF YOU GO

Porter Airlines: 888-619-8622, 416-619-8622, flyporter.com. Porter flies to Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport (downtown) from Montreal (from \$99 one-way), as well as Mont Tremblant (seasonal), Ottawa, Quebec City and Windsor. Air Canada flies to the downtown airport from Montreal. (888-247-2262, aircanada.com).
Visitor information: Toronto: 416-203-2600, www.seetorontonow.com; Ontario Tourism, ontariotravel.net. Pan-Am Games (July 19-26) and Parapan Games, (Aug. 7-15), in Toronto: 416-957-2015, toronto2015.org. Union-Pearson Express: 416-869-3600, upexpress.com.
Renaissance Toronto Downtown: 800-237-1512, 416-341-7100, renhotels.com; 1 Blue Jays Way, Toronto.
Price: Rooms with Rogers Centre view start at about \$359 per night during a game or concert; other rooms and suites from \$209. Rates include indoor pool, hot tub, fitness centre; valet parking, \$35, self-parking, \$25. Marriott Reward Members get benefits.

to the downtown Billy Bishop Airport. But there is news — big news — for tourists and business people flying in from Western Canada and international cities to Toronto Pearson International Airport. The new UP Express will be a rapid-transit system launching by Games-time and linking Canada's two busiest transportation hubs. The ride between downtown Union Station and Pearson will take 25 minutes, with two stops en route. The new UP Express terminus at Union Station will feature airline check-in kiosks and the trains will have flight information, luggage racks and on-board Wi-Fi. Rochelle@rochellelash.com twitter.com/rochellelash

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VERMONT

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