SELF-GUIDED HISTORY TOUR

TAKE A STEP BACK IN TIME TO CELEBRATE OUR 90TH ANNIVERSARY
Since opening our doors on June 11, 1929, Fairmont Royal York has set the hospitality standard and continues to be a Toronto and Canadian icon. Once the tallest building in the British empire, our hotel has seen many big events and played host to some of the world’s best and brightest stars in fashion, television, film and business. Most of all, it has been the choice hotel to royalty from across the globe. In honour of our 90th anniversary, we invite you to learn more about our storied hotel with this custom-curated self-guided tour, made especially to commemorate this occasion.

**THANK YOU FOR CELEBRATING THIS MILESTONE BIRTHDAY WITH US!**

**History of the Hotel**

- Named for “the Royal Town of York” founded by John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada (Ontario) in 1793
- Honoured King George III’s second son, Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany (1763-1827) who won a series of victories for Great Britain in the French Revolutionary Wars that same year
- York was incorporated as the City of Toronto in 1834, returning to the indigenous name likely derived from the Iroquois “tkaronto,” which may mean “plenty,” “place where trees stand in the water” or “meeting place”

**Queen’s Hotel**

- Four brick houses on the present site of the Fairmont Royal York Hotel were acquired by Lake Boat Captain Thomas Dick in 1843 and named Ontario Terrace
- “Ontario Terrace” housed Knox Theological College, the Sword’s Hotel, the Revere Hotel and, finally, the Queen’s Hotel in 1862
- Canada’s First Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, formed his first cabinet and developed his National Policy in the Red Parlour suite at the Queen’s Hotel
- Famous Queen’s Hotel guests included Queen Victoria’s 4th daughter, Princess Louise, actress Sarah Bernhardt, Grand Duke Alexis of Russia and Governors General including Lord Lansdowne, Lord Stanley, Lord Aberdeen and Lord Dufferin

Curated by Historian and Author: Dr. Carolyn Harris, Instructor in History at the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies
Construction of The Royal York Hotel

- Canadian Pacific Railway acquired the Queen's Hotel in 1925 and demolished it in 1927 to construct the Royal York Hotel to complement the new Union Station.
- Union Station and the Royal York Hotel were designed by Ross and Macdonald, one of Canada's most prolific and successful architectural firms prior to the Second World War.
- Union Station and the Royal York Hotel were designed in the Beaux-Arts style common among official buildings in Canada.
- The 28-floor Royal York Hotel was the largest hotel in the British Commonwealth at the time and the tallest building in Toronto until 1931.

The Grand Opening in 1929

- The Royal York Hotel officially opened to the public on June 11, 1929 with a whole day of tours and celebrations including a Toronto Board of Trade luncheon serving 1,800 and an evening ball for 2,300.
- Governor General Viscount Willingdon officially checked in as the first guest.
- The hotel boasted 1,048 guest rooms equipped with radios, private bathrooms and shower facilities; 30,000 electrical outlets; the largest hotel kitchen in Canada with a bakery capable of baking 15,000 French rolls per day; and ten passenger elevators.
- The hotel had enough red carpeting to stretch from Toronto to Hamilton.
Begin your self-guided walking tour in the Fairmont Royal York lobby, next to the new clocktower, named the 90th Anniversary Clock – a dedication to all those who have made memories at this iconic location in the hotel.

- Designed by Edward and William Maxwell in 1929 and restored to its 1920s splendour in the 1990s, it has recently been revitalized and opened again for the next era of guests and visitors June 11, 2019 after the most extensive transformation in the building’s history.
- Paying homage to its rich history, the new lobby features geometric patterns that reflect the Art Deco movement popular in the 1920s when the hotel first opened.
- The lobby served as a temporary Field Hospital when the cruise ship Noronic caught fire in Toronto harbour in 1949.
- 11,560 square-foot ceiling includes hand painted decorative touches inspired by the Renaissance art of Northern Italy as well as heraldry and the national motifs of Scotland, Ireland, the United Kingdom and France.

There have been a series of dining venues in the hotel lobby since 1929:
- In 1972, Acadia Restaurant opened in the lobby with menus featuring excerpts from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem, Evangeline.
- Acadia restaurant included a brick oven bakery that allowed patrons to watch the hotel’s famous French rolls being baked.
- Today, the hotel showcases not only freshly baked goods, but a stunning bar, lounge and restaurant at its new signature dining venue, REIGN Restaurant + Bar + Bakery.
The Royal York’s Clocks

• The hotel’s original clock installed in 1929 was originally found on the ceiling of the lobby level main elevator bank. It was made by Self Winding Clock Company of New York who supplied Canadian Pacific with many clocks, starting 1916. This clock is now found on the ceiling of our Convention Floor main elevator bank.

• The lobby clock is one of the most well-known meeting places in the city.

• During the Second World War, military personnel departing by train from Union Station would ask their loved ones to “meet me at the clock” and would make plans to meet again at the hotel when they returned home – this phrase has become synonymous with the property ever since.

• Today, CLOCKWORK Champagne & Cocktails honours the Royal York Hotel clock’s long history as a meeting place with its new statement timepiece in the heart of the lobby.

• The statement timepiece today is called the “90th Anniversary Clock” and is dedicated to the past, present and future colleagues of Fairmont Royal York who have for 90 years, been the beating heart of the hotel.

• The new clock tower is one-of-a-kind designed by New York-based, Rockwell Group.

• The double-sided face is a classic motif to honour the hotel’s timelessness for the next generations.

• The addition of the Celestial Clock face on the bottom of the clock tower side facing west, depicts a different way of telling time. Some would marvel the play on ‘time-travel’ being a connection to the moon, sun, stars and sky.

While meetings and events are often hosted in our spaces, we have provided then & now photos in the event they are in use.

The Imperial Room

• Once known as a Las Vegas-style supper club from the 1940s to the 1980s with a diverse range of famous performers including Tony Bennett, Ray Charles, Eartha Kitt, Tina Turner, Liberace, Sonny and Cher, Ronny Hawkins and Jim Carrey.

• Chandeliers are replicas of Louis XVI style chandeliers and are larger than the ones in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles.

• The bandstand is a replica of a regency pavilion in London’s Vauxhall Gardens during the reign of King George III.

• Afternoon tea is served in the adjacent Library Bar every weekend.

Proceed upstairs to the Main Mezzanine Floor. These rooms are part of the expansion of the hotel unveiled to the public in 1959, which added 400 new guest rooms and 14 new meeting rooms. The theme of the new rooms was Canadian art, history and landscapes.
History Alley
- Featured throughout the MM level hallways are photographs of famous hotel guests and events since 1929
- Portraits of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, have been on display in various places in the hotel throughout the Queen’s reign
- Members of the royal family often stay at the Fairmont Royal York during visits to Toronto
- Elizabeth II first visited the hotel in 1951 and was last here for an official dinner in 2010

British Columbia Room
- The room features eight totem poles as well as masks carved by Arthur Price
- Arthur Price traveled extensively in British Columbia, learning about the art and culture of the Pacific North West Coast First Nations, and previously carved totem poles for Fairmont’s Jasper Park Lodge in Alberta
- Mural by E.J. Hughes entitled View from Qualicum Beach
- 1,150 square feet, seats 48 for boardroom meetings, 90 for banquets and has capacity of 160 for receptions

Quebec Room
- Murals by Montreal artist Leslie Smith depict Old Quebec and Old Montreal
- Azure blue hooked tapestry walls depicting fleurs de lys and storybook scenes required 4,320 hours of work by 10 women
- 1,322 square feet, accommodates 175 people for receptions, 90 for banquets and 50 for boardroom meetings

Alberta Room
- Mural of “The Bow River Valley at Banff Springs,” painted in oils by Canadian artist A. Sheriff Scott
- Alberta’s coat of arms in a leather engraving is mounted on outstretched cowhide
- Cattle brands on the leather wall panels designed by The Kenway Leather and Saddle Company of Alberta include the E.P ranch owned by King Edward VIII
- 1,348 square feet, accommodates 50 for boardroom meetings, 90 for banquets and 170 for receptions
Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Rooms

- New Brunswick room mural depicts the arrival of United Empire Loyalist settlers at the site of Saint John, New Brunswick in 1783, following the American Revolution
- A reproduction of an original by John David Kelly, which was part of the Confederation Life Insurance Company’s collection
- Nova Scotia room includes a mural by Leslie Smith depicting an assembly of Samuel Champlain’s Order of Good Cheer in 1606-1607 at the site of Port Royal (now Annapolis Royal)
- Inspired by an engraving in the collection of Libraries and Archives Canada

Manitoba Room

- Three large murals in oils by Canadian painter Newton Brett depict animal and bird life in Manitoba
- Murals include buffalo, elk and ducks
- 1,214 square feet, seats 60 for dinner, 50 for a boardroom meeting and 160 for a reception

Algonquin Room

- Honours Ontario’s famous Algonquin Provincial Park
- Artwork includes a decorative map of the park and landscape oil paintings by A. J. Casson, the last surviving member of the Group of Seven (died 1992)
- 856 square feet, seats 104 theatre-style, 32 for a boardroom meeting and 105 for a reception

York’s Station Bar

- Opened in 1972, a tribute to the hotel’s Canadian Pacific Railway history
- Design imitates the interior of a Canadian Pacific Railway car
- Was known as Toronto’s smallest bar with only one bartender and seating for 25
- Closed when bartender Alina Budzinski retired after 28 years as York Station’s bartender and over 40 years of service at the Fairmont Royal York

Proceed upstairs to the Convention Floor via the escalator at York’s Station. Before exploring the rooms, be sure to see the original 1929 Lobby Clock hanging from the ceiling next to the main guest elevators, safely preserved for 90 years! The Clock was installed by the Self Winding Clock Company of New York, which supplied the Canadian Pacific Railway with numerous clocks starting in 1916.
**Canadian Room**

- Largest room of its kind in Canada when it opened in 1959
- 15,000 square feet of floor area and capacity for 2,200 for meetings and 1,550 for banquets
- Keynotes the distinctive Canadian theme presented in the hotel’s MM-level rooms named and decorated after the provinces and territories of Canada
- Large silhouetted Canadian Coat-of-Arms in full relief mounted on the wall
- Provides setting for conventions, office Christmas parties, fundraisers and banquets - and was once the setting of a 1992 gala dinner attended by Charles and Diana, the Prince and Princess of Wales
- Remains the hotel’s largest event space, capable of hosting a reception for 1,670 guests
Ontario Room

- 19 x 8-foot mural by Canadian artist C. J. Greenwood depicts the Toronto Purchase of 1788 when Lord Dorchester purchased the land that became the City of Toronto from the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation on behalf of the British Crown
- Trillium motif above the doors in honour of Ontario’s official flower
- 3,224 square feet and accommodates receptions of more than 400 people

Ballroom

- One of the most photographed rooms in Toronto and the setting in a variety of films
- Italian-inspired décor was restored to its 1920s glory during the 1991 renovation
- Ceiling painting of Venus on her swan chariot drawn by bulls was originally hand painted on canvas then attached to the ceiling and sealed with lacquer
- Provides a stunning view of Union Station and is the most popular wedding venue at the hotel, seating 590 guests for reception
Concert Hall

- One of the most famous rooms at the hotel, it can accommodate an orchestra pit and stage, and used to house a 7000 pipe Casavant Frères organ and film projector.
- Hosted one of the earliest performances by the Canadian Opera Company in 1929.
- 21st century movies filmed at the hotel include Serendipity (2001); Brian’s Song (2001); The Tuxedo (2002); New York Minute (2004); Where the Truth Lies (2005); Cinderella Man (2005); Hollywoodland (2006); Take the Lead (2006); Mr. Magorium’s Wonder Emporium (2007); Max Payne (2008); Grey Gardens (2009); Chloe (2009) and Amelia (2009).

Before leaving the hotel, be sure to visit the Avenues shopping and restaurant concourse below the lobby. Benihana Japanese Steakhouse and Lounge first opened as Benihana’s of Tokyo in 1973. It remains the only Benihana location in Canada.

In 1881, Toronto’s first zoo opened in the care of Harry L. Piper at the site of what would become the Royal York Hotel. Many years later he is still honoured with the dedication of “Piper’s Street” behind the hotel and Fairmont Royal York’s Piper’s Pub. Piper’s Pub serves classic pub fare featuring sustainable Ocean Wise seafood, Canadian beef and local cheeses.

We also welcome you to try our new signature dining venues, REIGN and CLOCKWORK, located on the Lobby Level.