

The Suburban

magazine

JANUARY 9, 2015

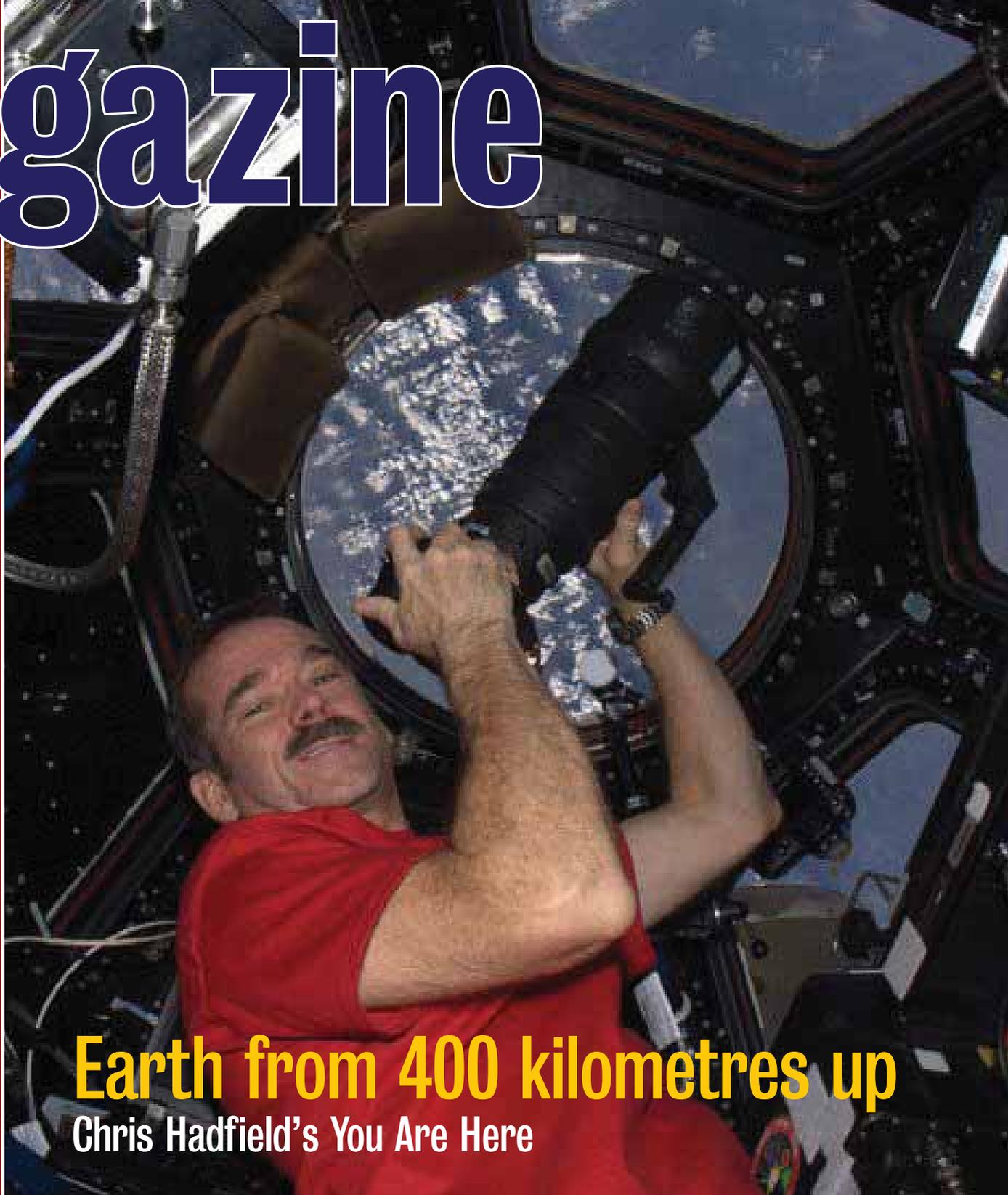
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Earth from 400 kilometres up

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Exploring New York City's Museum of Modern Art and some fine dining

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

NEW YORK CITY - If you are headed to New York City anytime soon, here is a good tip: purchase the CityPASS (www.citypass.com/new-york). New York sure does appreciate its Canadian tourists and this has been underlined in recent years by the establishment of an NYC & Company office right at 99 Blue Jays Way in Toronto. By logging on to www.nycgo.com you can begin planning your activities.

We were only in town for a few days and while the other two members of the family saw some Broadway shows, I wanted to do some exploring. But where does one start? New York CityPASS includes admission to NYC's top six attractions: the Empire State Building Observatory, The Met, American Museum of Natural History, MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art), Top of the Rock or Guggenheim and the Statue of Liberty or Circle Line Cruises. It is valid for nine days from first day of use. Not only do you get to skip ticket lines, you save 41 percent.

I had never been to MoMA (MoMA.org) before, described as the foremost museum of modern art in the world. Established in 1929 as an educational institution, MoMA is a place that fuels creativity, ignites minds, and provides inspiration. With extraordinary exhibitions and the world's finest collection of modern and contemporary art, MoMA is dedicated to the conversation between the past and the present, the established and the experimental. Its mission is helping you understand and enjoy the art of our time.

MoMA is located in midtown Manhattan, at 11 West Fifty-third Street, between Fifth and Sixth avenues. MoMA's holdings include more than 150,000 individual pieces in addition to approximately 22,000 films and four million film stills. Upon arrival, pick up a mobile device free of charge on floors 1 or 6. Photo ID is required. You can also use your own handheld device via MoMA's public Wi-Fi network or download the free APP at MomMA.org/mobile.

It is best to start off on the 6th floor to see any special exhibitions on and then work your way down. The fifth and fourth floors features paintings and sculptures from the 1880s to the 1940s and the 1940s to the 1980s respectively: the likes of Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Roy Lichtenstein, Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol. Floor 3 focuses on architecture and design while contemporary galleries (prints, illustrated books and media) highlight the second floor. Near the lobby, on the main floor, you will find an art lab and a sculpture garden. There are theatres down below showing different films. You must go to the film desk to find out the schedule and get a special ticket.

MoMA recognizes the diversity of the general public's abilities and needs, and it offers a variety of programs and services to ensure the accessibility of the Museum and its collection. All public areas of the Museum and entrances are wheelchair accessible. Entrances with power assist doors are located

on Fifty-third and Fifty-fourth streets between Fifth and Sixth avenues. Wheelchairs are available free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis and are located in the checkroom in the main lobby. Motorized wheelchairs are permitted.

Family Programs at MoMA introduce kids and adults to modern and contemporary art through gallery conversations, art workshops, artist talks, film screenings, activity guides, websites, and interactive spaces. Museum and program admission are free

MoMA is open Saturday through Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Friday, 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Museum Admission is \$25 for adults; \$18 for seniors and 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. There is no cost for members and children 16 and under.

If it is shopping you like, the boutiques of Madison Avenue, the iconic department stores on Fifth Avenue and the fashion-forward shops in Soho and the Village, are the favorites. Sporting 100 upscale retailers, Madison Avenue is a slice of heaven, New York's most luxurious shopping experience. From 57th St to 72nd, this haute strip where the wealthy shop, boasts 15 blocks of designer boutiques and specialty retailers.

Among the most popular tourists stops in the Big Apple are the 9-1-1 Memorial, the Empire State Building, the Museum of Civilization, Ellis Island, The Statue of

excited to meet one of the stars, Paul Anthony Stewart, whom I watched for a decade on the now former CBS soap Guiding Light. "It was a fun part," he acknowledged while signing program books. The show itself stars Jessie Mueller in the title role of Carol King and she gets high marks for an outstanding performance.

The Omni Berkshire Place

We stayed somewhere new on this trip, the Omni Berkshire Place (www.omnihotels.com/hotels/new-york-berkshire) at 21 East 52nd Street between 5th and Madison—a great location. I was particularly impressed with the live chat assistance available on their website as I planned the trip. With the simple click of the mouse there was someone at the opposite end answering all of my questions in real time. I also signed up free of charge for the Select Guest Loyalty Program, which provides you with complimentary perks such as free Wi-Fi Internet service, access to a 24-hour business center and a state-of-the-art fitness center with a sundeck overlooking midtown Manhattan. You also get a free shoe shine, pressings, the newspaper, morning beverage of your choice, express check-in and check-out, customized room preferences and bottled water.

This luxury Omni Berkshire Place is steps away from Fortune 500 companies and

Oklahoma in suite 2100, now called the Rodgers & Hammerstein Suite. The Dunfey's Hotel Corporation (which included Omni Hotels and Dunfey Hotels groups) purchased the property in May 1978 and provided a \$9.5 million face-lift in 1979. In 1988, Hong Kong-based Wharf Holdings purchased the Omni Hotels chain and in 1995, Omni Berkshire Place underwent a complete historic restoration of more than \$70 million. TRT Holding, Inc. purchased the Omni Hotel chain in 1996.

In the fall of 2003, the hotel completed a \$4 million enhancement to all the guest rooms, suites and hallways. In 2007, the hotel opened a new restaurant concept, Fireside Cocktail Cuisine, redesigned the lobby, added an additional 1,200-square-foot meeting room and updated all the existing meeting rooms. In 2010, in collaboration with industry design experts, Champalimaud Design, all of the hotel's guest rooms and suites received a new fresh, modern look from floor to ceiling. Soothing paint and rug colors paired with classic artwork and mirrors produce a plush environment while the new sleek English sycamore wood furniture and desks provide clean lines in the spacious rooms that are ideal for tending to work or relaxing tuned into new high definition 42-inch flat screen televisions.

We stayed in a spacious Madison Suite, overlooking 52nd Street and Madison Avenue. These magnificent 781-square-foot suites feature a large master bedroom with an oversized bath that includes separate shower and soaking tub along with generous counter space. There are two telephones in the bathroom. We very much appreciated the in room safe. The separate living area has an extremely comfortable pull-out sleeper sofa, club chair, desk and an iHome© audio system. The hotel has a very helpful concierge desk. Across the street is Isadora's Café, which has an absolutely endless array of items to choose from. It is just perfect to bring dinner back to the room before a show.

For more information about the hotel, call 1-888-444-OMNI or locally at 212-753-5800.

Morton's Steakhouse & the Montreal connection

Morton's 5th Avenue (www.mortons.com/newyork) is located in the heart of Midtown Manhattan (551 5th Avenue, at 45th Street). Its expansive dining room can accommodate large parties or an intimate dinner for two while the private boardrooms are the ideal setting for meetings, celebrations and events. Bar 12-21 is the perfect gathering place for a cocktail or lite bite.

Morton's offers a diverse list of wines with a portfolio of producers from both domestic and international wineries. General Manager Michael Rains has been at this location since it opened 21 years ago, starting out as a server. He is very hands on, visiting each table at the very pretty two tier restaurant which seats 280 diners.

We enjoyed an absolutely outstanding dinner at Morton's. Our server John made sure to explain the menu to his in detail, including the specials. A fresh loaf of bread,



Liberty, Central Park/the Central Park Zoo and the Bronx Zoo

Broadway experience

Unquestionably "the draw" in New York City remains its extraordinary Broadway productions. Be prepared to pay big dollars, even for a seat that is the second to last spot in the house at the top. Here is a tip though. Go online via Ticketmaster or Telecharge, check out the precise availability and call the toll free number so that you can get a more accurate route of what is available. While they offer to mail the tickets at least 48 hours before the show, we recommend that you either print them out online or ask to pick them up at will call. In some cases you can even buy cancellation insurance. We purchased tickets for Beautiful, the Carol King Musical. At the stage door I was

some of the city's most illustrious sites like Fifth Avenue Shopping, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rockefeller Center, Central Park and Broadway theatres. One day, while heading to the lobby, I met a very friendly gentleman in the elevator. He introduced himself as Delfin Ortiz, the general manager of the Omni San Antonio at the Colonnade who was at the New York location on an interim basis. A day later he gave me the good news that he was being asked to move to the Big Apple full-time.

Combining modern technology and fresh contemporary décor, these reinvented New York accommodations have a true residential feel to them. Warren & Wetmore built this historic landmark hotel in 1926. In 1942, Rodgers & Hammerstein collaborated on the landmark American musical



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (French, 1864–1901). Jane Avril. 1893. Lithograph, sheet: 49 5/8 x 36 1/8 in. (126 x 91.8 cm) The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of A. Conger Goodyear, 1954.



47 different dining titles.

The China Grill

During this trip we also dined at the fabulous China Grill (www.chinagrillmgt.com) at 60 West 53rd Street, which happens to be the birthplace of this extraordinary dining spot. In 1987 China Grill New York opened to a packed dining room and immediate critical acclaim. By its fifth anniversary, the restaurant was as busy as ever and regarded as one of the hottest destination spots in New York City. Owner Jeffrey Chodorow's labor of love, his first and only venture into the restaurant world, had proven to be an enduring success in a scene where restaurants seemed to come and go overnight. Over 20 years later, China Grill Management and its affiliates continue to produce some of the most original, critically acclaimed and wildly popular dining hotspots in major cities across the

globe. CGM and its affiliates own, operate, create concepts, and/or consult in creating some of the most acclaimed and innovative restaurants in Miami, New York, London, Mexico City and now Dubai. We experienced the China Grill in Miami five years ago and were excited to get a reservation in the Big Apple.

Virtually every dish at China Grill is prepared on the grill or in a wok, using sauces strictly for flavor. Portions are generous, and artfully presented on bold, oversized plates, and above all, meant for sharing. We toasted the evening with some champagne and then ordered a pair of starters: the fall off the bone lamb spareribs, plum and sesame glazed and the curried chicken satay, with chilled sesame noodles and toasted peanut sauce. For our main course, we opted for the curry miso black cod, with sweet soy glazed Chinese broccoli and yuzo-miso butter sauce and the grilled Szechuan beef, with sake soy spicy shallots and cilantro. As for sides, we had the five vegetable fried rice and the lobster mashed potatoes. We did save some room for dessert and the chocolate seduction and the mandarin ginger crème brûlée won out. Our server, Pedro, was excellent at describing all of the dining options available – and there are plenty. We were also impressed to see Emily Roth, the assistant general manager, so active in the service. Not only did she bring some of the items to the table. She also cleared the plates on a few occasions. We very much appreciated the care the staff took to cater to one family member who had an issue with sesame seeds. They went out of their way to explain what was in each dish and separated the seeds wherever possible.

China Grill is no just a meal, it is an experienced. We thoroughly enjoyed every morsel of food that came our way. This venue itself is very pretty with soaring 30-foot ceilings, multi-level dining platforms, two fully stocked bars and a centralized open kitchen which creates an eye-popping visual counterpart to the restaurant's mouth-watering cuisine. During warm weather months, China Grill's outdoor patio offers the perfect oasis for any event. It is right across the street from MoMA. You can call 514-212-333-7788 for reservations.

China Grill offers a \$38 Pre/Post Theatre Menu. This is available Monday to Friday during lunch 11:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and dinner 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and again after 9:30 p.m. On Saturdays you can enjoy a special \$28 prix fixe menu and \$10 bottomless

mojitos and raspberry mimosas from 11:45a.m. To 3 p.m. The other NYC restaurants under their auspices are Ed's Chowder House, Empire Hotel Rooftop and Plunge Rooftop at Gansevoort Meatpacking.

The Hard Rock Cafe

I have always been a big fan of the Hard Rock Cafe (www.hardrock.com) chain and enjoy checking out the different incarnations when I travel. Last summer I did so in Nice, France, so when I found myself in the Times Square area on Saturday night I could not resist stepping inside the 1501 Broadway location to rock my senses with tantalizing food and drinks and enjoy their awe-inspiring rock memorabilia collection. The Times Square cafe features priceless pieces of rock 'n' roll memorabilia from Hard Rock's world-famous collection, including artists with New York roots, such as John Lennon, Jimi Hendrix, The Ramones and Bruce Springsteen. The lively restaurant is a popular destination for locals and travelers from all over the world with multiple seating areas, an enthusiastic staff and an extensive menu of high-quality American fare. The street-level Rock Shop carries an assorted line of Hard Rock merchandise including city-specific products such as T-shirts, sweatshirts, pins, leather jackets, key chains, watches, baseball caps, glassware and more. The Hard Rock opened at its current location in 2005 at the historic Paramount Theater, right in the heart of Times Square. The building boasts its own fascinating musical legacy: originally a movie house that opened in 1926, the theater presented live music throughout the '30s and '40s, and even hosted the premiere of Elvis Presley's first film, *Love Me Tender*, in 1956. This place is huge. The main cafe seats 708 people, yet when I arrived there was still a lineup through the



entrance to get inside. If you want to beat the line then go to their website, select the location of your choice and request priority seating.

Some of the notable memorabilia pieces at the New York location include items from the Beatles: Led Zeppelin/John Bonham, Billy Joel, The Ramones: James Brown, the Grateful Dead, The Who, Bo Diddley and the Abbey Road Studios Front Doors.

I love the menu at the Hard Rock and on this night I had the delicious legend burger, topped with smoked bacon, cheddar cheese, a golden fried onion ring, crisp lettuce and vine ripened tomato. It came with crispy fries. For dessert I had the sensational oreo cheesecake. There are so many selections to choose from, including a number of other burgers, sandwiches, starters, salads and entrees such as grilled Norwegian salmon, fried shrimp platter and a cowboy rib eye.

With a total of 194 venues in 60 countries, including 148 cafes, 21 hotels and 10 casinos, Hard Rock International (HRI) is one of the most globally recognized companies. Upcoming new Hard Rock Cafe locations include San Juan, Asuncion and Auckland. New Hard Rock Hotel projects include Daytona Beach, Dubai, Los Cabos, Dallas-Fort Worth, Abu Dhabi, and Shenzhen and Haikou in China.

Getting across the border early ensures timely Big Apple arrival

SARATOGA SPRINGS: We are developing a new routine when travelling to New York City these days. Get across the border late in the day, stop off mid-way overnight and get an early start the following morning. Last year we stayed in Saratoga Springs at one of the nicest Hampton Inn and Suites properties I have visited so we were happy to repeat the same routine en route to the Big Apple for our most recent trip.

Saratoga (www.discover-saratoga.com) is home to exciting nightlife, chic boutiques, great events and much more!

Our previous one night stop at the Hampton Inn and Suites (www.saratogaspringsuites.hamptoninn.com) at 25 Lake Avenue was such a pleasant experience, this was in fact an incentive to stay over here again. Having opened just over six years ago, it is part of the Turf Hotels group. The first thing you will notice is the majestic entrance. Upon checking in your room key grants you entrance to free covered parking on a multi-

level garage. There are 123 guest rooms and suites featuring king or queen-sized beds. Some suites have spacious balconies and separate living rooms with sofa beds. We booked the latter and were pleasantly surprised by how extraordinarily large the unit was. I particularly liked the ultra-comfortable chairs in front of the two TVs.

You can connect to free high-speed internet access to surf the web, get some work done at the desk or set up your laptop on the convenient lap desk to work from the comfort of the clean and fresh Hampton bed. Amenities such as a mini-refrigerator, microwave and 32-inch HDTV with premium cable television make you feel at home. You can also take advantage of a free hot breakfast. There is a gym, fitness centre, a nice pool and a Jacuzzi. Assistant General Manager Dan Duvernay says summer weekend stays are booked a year in advance.

—Mike Cohen