



Syracuse's 'Destiny'

Photo courtesy Mid-Lakes Navigation

on the shore of Onondaga Lake

This 'Salt City' on the Erie Canal in upstate New York is the perfect travel destination for Canadian visitors

BY BRIAN McCULLOUGH

Look up. Look way up. The kid navigating the web of rope, cables and challenge obstacles 25 metres above the mall floor looks like she is in total command of the situation. Her parents, maybe not so much.

Welcome to Destiny USA, the massive shopping and entertainment complex just a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Ottawa in Syracuse, NY. The mall's gravity-defying third-level WonderWorks Canyon Climb Adventure is billed as the largest suspended indoor

ropes course in the world.

"It's very popular," said Destiny representative Sara Wallace. "It's interesting to see the younger kids. They run out there, and they're fearless. They try all of the challenges and obstacles. Oftentimes their parents go out with them, and the parents are the ones hesitating and over-thinking it. It's a lot of fun to watch."

Destiny USA's 200 retail stores, outlets, restaurants and great entertainment choices make this a fun family destination, especially for Canadian visitors who take advantage of the

special CAA discount and other deals offered to cross-border shoppers. Last year, Canadian customers accounted for 25 per cent of sales.

"We've put a lot of work into the landscaping and the dynamics, the comfortable seating areas, the storefronts — everything is different," Wallace said. "Wherever you turn there's something new to see."

No kidding. Destiny USA's genesis on this patch of land that was once home to a scrapyard and an oil tank farm is a remarkable story of how one man with vision — Pyramid Manage-

Syracuse Summer Festivals 2013

Taste of Syracuse
June 7, 8

**Syracuse Rubber Stamp and
Scrapbook Getaway**
June 8,9

Ironman 70.3 Syracuse
June 23

Empire Brewfest
July 19

**Syracuse Nationals
3-day Classic Car Show**
July 19-21

**Northeast Jazz
and Wine Festival**
July 26,27

**AmeriCU Syracuse
Arts & Crafts Festival**
July 26-28

NYS Blues Festival
July 28

**Athleta IronGirl
Women's Triathlon**
Aug. 4

**CNY Scottish Games
& Celtic Festival**
Aug. 10

Great New York State Fair
Aug. 22-Sept. 2

*For information on more
Syracuse area festivals
go to www.visitsyracuse.org*



Photo ©Wainwright photography

Historic city centre: Clinton Square is where the two-day Taste of Syracuse food and music festival will get underway June 7. The Marshall Tucker Band and Loverboy are the headline acts.



Photo ©Wainwright photography

Above: The New York State Fair has been entertaining and informing visitors in Syracuse since the late 19th century. The 12-day fair opens Aug. 22.

Below: With more than 200 stores, restaurants and entertainment choices, Destiny USA is a major destination for Canadian visitors to Syracuse.

ment Group chairman Robert Congel — transformed a lakeside industrial eyesore into the largest gold-certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design commercial retail structure in the United States.

None of this surprises Danica Kataler, the communications manager for the Syracuse Convention & Visitors Bureau. "There's a lot of positive energy around all of Syracuse. We have a lot of passionate people in our leadership. With Destiny USA coming on board, and all the new businesses that are coming here, the national attractions — it's awesome."

It must be something in the water





Photo: Mirbeau Inn & Spa

The Mirbeau Inn & Spa in Skaneateles is the perfect place for a romantic getaway.



Photo: Andrew Lauren, courtesy Erie Canal Museum

The Erie Canal Museum conducts walking tours that reinterpret downtown Syracuse as a canal-side city. A modern pool reflects an earlier time when the canal passed through Clinton Square.

— the salt, perhaps. Syracuse gets its drinking water from nearby Skaneateles Lake, possibly the cleanest lake in the United States, but according to Dennis Connors, curator of history for the Onondaga Historical Association, a large deposit of rock salt buried underneath New York State makes the underground springs brinier than sea water.

"This was known from colonial times," Connors said. "This was a resource that was developed early on after the American Revolution. Syracuse is still known as the Salt City."

The salt industry was a catalyst for one of the great projects of the day, the construction of the Erie Canal. Between 1817 and 1825 Irish labourers cut a 584-km navigable waterway to link Albany on the Hudson River in the east, to Buffalo on Lake Erie in the

west. The narrow canal opened a vital trade route for salt and other goods between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes. Some called it the Eighth Wonder of the World.

Syracuse and its surrounding communities are well worth visiting for the canal attractions alone. The canal and tow path to the east of the city are popular with kayakers, hikers and cyclists, while the Chittenango Landing Canal Boat Museum is a good place too see how the boats were built. To the west, at Camillus, visitors can ride a boat across a restored 1850s stone-arched aqueduct in a section of canal set up for tourists.

The Erie Canal Museum right downtown houses a full-sized replica of a canal boat inside the original 1850 weighlock building, the only one of its kind in the country. Museum cura-

Low down, horse thievin' varmints!

Destiny USA was known as the Carousel Center until its major expansion and rebranding in 2012. The Carousel name was connected to an antique horse carousel amusement ride that company chairman Robert Congel bought at auction for the new centre when it opened in 1990. The purchase was not without its drama. During shipment in 1988, someone stole one of the horses from the carousel and blackmailed Pyramid Management Group for its return. The ransom was paid, and a map was sent telling them where to find the horse. Visitors can still ride the 1909-vintage carousel for \$1 at Destiny USA's food court, but they will have to ask which one of the horses it was that went off on a canter a quarter-century ago.

tor Dan Ward, and development and marketing director Natalie Stetson, describe the busy activity of the station in its heyday:

"The boats would pull in to the weighlock," Stetson says. "The water would be drained, and they would settle into a giant wooden cradle connected to a scale. They figured out a toll depending on how far the boats were travelling, what they were carrying and how much they weighed."

"It was a very busy canal," Ward adds. "It was crowded, and often gridlocked at the locks."

Thank goodness it is full steam ahead for Syracuse's 2013 summer event schedule. The city's signature Taste of Syracuse food and music festival kicks off on June 7, and the pace doesn't let up until the Great New York State Fair wraps up on September 2.

All activities for Taste of Syracuse are free, but the tasty little food samples at the festival cost \$1. Plan on making it a family visit as the festival has a full lineup of entertainment for the kids.

Don't forget to try the city's traditional dish — salt potatoes drizzled with melted butter. "I don't know if I want to call it a delicacy," said Dennis Connors, "but it's kind of a local favourite around here, especially in the summertime."