

Stretching Out for Global Events

Events outside the United States offer event organizers a chance for their participants to experience sports thrills from a different perspective

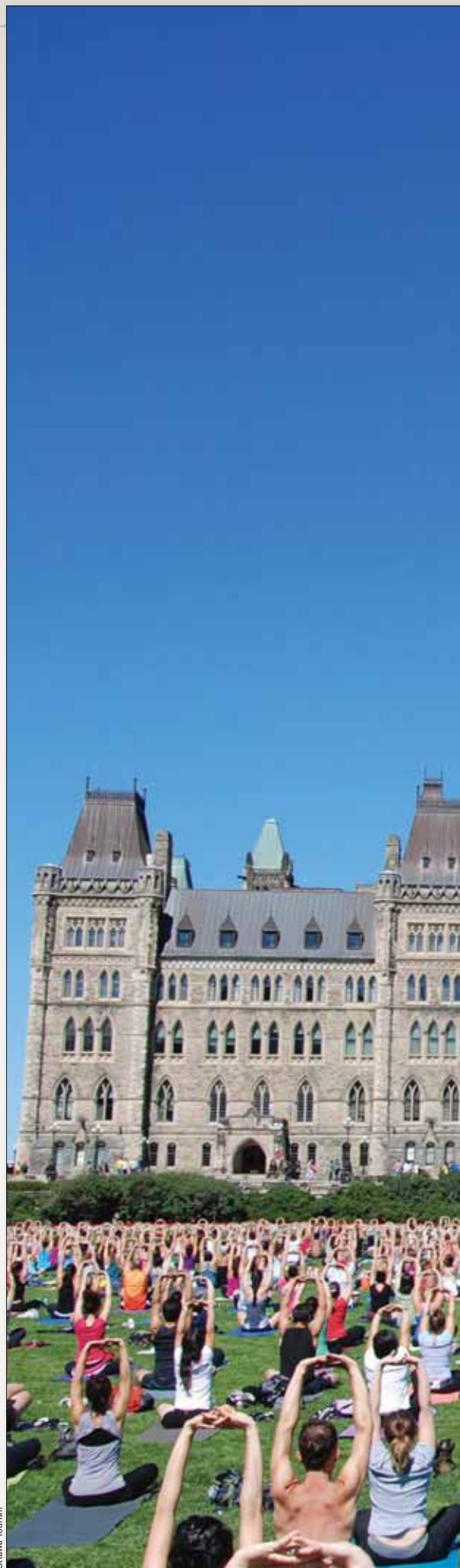
By Rachel Carter

The types of sports people play say as much about a country as its food, music or art. It's no surprise that ice hockey is a staple in the Canadian capital of Ottawa or that sailing regattas cut through the turquoise waters around the U.S. Virgin Islands. Monaco is known for the iconic Formula 1 Grand Prix that roars through its streets and the yachts that flock to its deep-water port. But there's always room for surprises. Beach volleyball is hugely popular in Berlin, while in Vancouver residents are hungry for basketball. The surprises, and the opportunities, are endless. When event organizers are looking for a change of pace, it might be smart to look beyond the border of the continental United States.

Ottawa: Sports Capital

As the capital of Canada, Ottawa is not only home to the government and national cultural institutions but also serves as a national hub for sports. "It's a beautiful city," said Darrell Cox, manager of major events for Ottawa Tourism. From an overall hosting strategy, the city looks at national championships as "really our sweet spot," he said. "We have the advantage of being the headquarters of 65 percent of the national and multisport headquarters, so it attracts a lot of national championships," such as youth ice hockey and volleyball championships. The Canadian Track and Field

From May to December in Ottawa, Ontario, thousands of residents and visitors have the chance to participate in free yoga sessions outside the Parliament of Canada.







Sport Hosting Vancouver

BC Place Stadium in Vancouver, British Columbia, has hosted many events, including matches during the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Championships will be held this summer and next at the Terry Fox Athletic Facility, which has a polyurethane running track and three lighted grass fields.

The city also is enjoying “a real resurgence in the Canadian Football League with the RedBlacks starting up,” Cox said. The Ottawa Rough Riders, founded in 1876, shut down after the 1996 season. Now the Ottawa RedBlacks are taking the city by storm after only three seasons. The team, which plays in the 24,000-seat TD Place Stadium, made it to the Grey Cup championship game—the league’s Super Bowl—in its second year and won it the following year. The 105th Grey Cup will be played at the stadium in November.

TD Place is also home to the Ottawa Fury FC, which joined the United Soccer League for the 2017 season as the affiliate of Major League Soccer’s Montreal Impact. The stadium is located in 18-acre Lansdowne Park, which fronts Rideau Canal and has easy access to the historic 32,000-square-foot Aberdeen Pavilion.

A \$290 million public-private project to redevelop Lansdowne Park wrapped up in 2015. The project included refurbishing the 1967 Ottawa Civic Centre, which is now the 9,500-seat TD

Place Arena. That venue is home to the Ottawa 67s, a junior ice hockey team in the Ontario Hockey League.

Everyone knows Canada is a “big hockey country, and we’re a big hockey city—hockey really rules here,” Cox said. The city’s National Hockey League team, the Senators, play home games at the 18,500-seat Canadian Tire Centre.

Curling is also hugely popular. The Ottawa Valley Curling Association lists 46 member clubs, including the oldest, the Ottawa Curling Club, founded in 1851. The association hosts the City of Ottawa Bonspiel—the term for a curling tournament—which has been held annually since 1956. In December, Ottawa hosted the Tim Hortons Brier, the Canadian national men’s curling championship, at TD Place Arena, and it will host the 2017 Canadian Olympic Curling Trials in December at Canadian Tire Centre.

In addition to ice sports, “Ottawa is really known for running,” Cox said. “Every weekend there’s something going on with a 5K or 10K. We’re so set up with our parkway systems, it makes it easy for road closures.”

The annual Tamarack Ottawa Race Weekend typically draws 47,000 visitors. It’s the largest marathon in Canada with 7,000 racers, not counting runners in the half-marathon, 10K, 5K, 2K and kids’ marathon. Fun runs and obstacle course races are also gaining popularity, and city officials are

looking to grow ultimate events and attract e-sports tournaments.

Vancouver: **Worldwide Host**

Vancouver’s legacy as a sports destination was sealed as host of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, but after the big event “there wasn’t a strategic plan with sports and events and venues,” said Michelle Collens, senior manager of Sport Hosting Vancouver.

That changed when Vancouver was one of five Canadian host cities of the 2015 FIFA Women’s World Cup, which “forced us to come together to understand who each participant was and what we had to offer,” Collens said. The result was Sport Hosting Vancouver, formed in January 2016 from a partnership involving the city government, Tourism Vancouver, the Vancouver Hotel Destination Association, the University of British Columbia, BC Place Stadium and the Vancouver Convention Centre.

The Canadian Football League’s BC Lions play at BC Place Stadium, which is also home to the Vancouver Whitecaps of MLS. The NHL’s Vancouver Canucks play at Rogers Arena, and the Vancouver Canadians are a Class A minor league affiliate of the Toronto Blue Jays. But professional sports aren’t the focus of Sport Hosting Vancouver, which has its eye on the inbound market for both events and out-of-town visitors to local events. “Rugby sevens has been super-hot and popular here,” Collens said. “Now we’re trying to focus on organizers not just selling to the Vancouver market but how to sell tickets to the UK, Australia, etc.”

The second annual Vancouver Rugby Festival is a youth tournament that welcomed 50 teams in March and runs alongside the HSBC Canada Sevens tournament, which will be hosted in Vancouver through 2019. BC Place Stadium was also the venue for round six of the HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series in 2015–2016.

Soccer is still riding high on the momentum from the Women’s World Cup. The final phase of construction is underway at the National Soccer Development Centre at UBC, featuring two artificial turf fields, three grass fields and a new 35,000-square-foot

fieldhouse. If the U.S., Canada and Mexico win their shared bid to co-host the 2026 World Cup, Vancouver is in a prime position to welcome one of the 10 games that would be held in Canada. BC Place Stadium, which was renovated in 2011, has a retractable fabric roof and can be configured to hold either 22,000 for MLS games in the lower bowl or up to 54,500 total.

When the NBA Grizzlies relocated to Memphis, Tennessee, Vancouver lost its basketball team, and “we’re hungry for it,” Collens said. Vancouver will host a new NCAA Division I basketball tournament with eight men’s and eight women’s teams. The inaugural 2018 tournament will use the 466,000-square-foot waterfront Vancouver Convention Centre in downtown, where the East Building will become an arena with about 4,000 seats.

Tennis and ice sports are both areas the city would like to develop. Winning the 2019 IIHF World Junior Championship for Rogers Arena was “a huge feat” because it hasn’t been in Vancouver since 2006, Collens said. Sport Hosting Vancouver is working with UBC and Tennis Canada on options to attract more tournaments.

U.S. Virgin Islands: Ocean Retreat

The U.S. Virgin Islands comprise three main islands, each with its own personality. St. Thomas is the most cosmopolitan and has the largest population. St. John is the smallest island, and more than half of it is a national park. St. Croix is the largest of the three islands. Its rich history and laid-back feel make it a “happy mixture” between the other two islands, said Alani Henneman Todman, director of communications for the Department of Tourism. St. Thomas and St. Croix each have an airport, but St. John is accessible only by boat or ferry. “Each island is situated for different events based on the needs of the event,” she said.

Now in its 45th year, the USVI Open/Atlantic Blue Marlin Tournament, the “Super Bowl of Big Game Fishing,” is held on the eastern tip of St. Thomas. The St. Thomas International Regatta has been held every spring for over 40 years, in the same month as both the Heineken

Regatta in St. Maarten and the St. Barths Bucket Regatta, so “it’s a must-do for the sailor,” Todman said. The St. Thomas Yacht Club also hosts the International Optimist Regatta in June.

On St. John, the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park run the Beach-to-Beach Power Swim, which has become “very popular and draws a lot of international publicity,” she said. Some swimmers use that event as a diving-off point for the Love City Triathlon and Aquathon, also on St. John. Back on land, 8 Tuff Miles is a race from the sea level at the National Park Visitor Center in Cruz Bay up 999 feet through the park and then back down to a finish line near sea level in Coral Bay. “You can hike or run or walk, but no matter what, it’s tough,” Todman said.

Every November, the St. Croix Coral Reef Swim includes 5-mile, 2-mile and 1-mile swims either along the island’s shoreline or starting at Buck Island, a coral reef, and ending at the Buccaneer Hotel beach. Also in November, the St. Croix Yacht Club hosts the St. Croix International Regatta in Christiansted. On land, the St. Croix Scenic 50 race features 50-mile and 50-kilometer runs and a 50-mile team relay.

The Paradise Jam is one of the islands’ signature annual events, drawing eight elite men’s and eight women’s college basketball teams over two weeks in November to the 4,000-seat UVI Sports and Fitness Center on



Monaco Tourist and Convention Authority

Monaco is home to the iconic Monaco Grand Prix but can also host a wide range of sporting events at venues across the city-state.

the St. Thomas campus of the University of the Virgin Islands. “It’s one of the foremost preseason, premier Division I basketball tournaments in the world,” said Calvert White, assistant commissioner for the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation, who pointed out that Kentucky, UConn and Tennessee have competed.

Rugby is also a growing sport with the formation of the USVI Rugby Football Union in 2012. White also is hoping to go after cricket, which “is big here in the USVI,” he said.

Monaco: Open for All

For Monaco, being known as a luxury destination is a double-edged sword. Organizers may be reluctant to come there because they think it will be too expensive, but in fact the sovereign city-state on the French Riviera is less expensive than cities like London, Paris and Barcelona, said Guy Antognelli, deputy general manager for the Monaco Tourist and Convention Authority.

“Everything on TV and cinema is good for our reputation, but we have to explain it’s not only for billionaires,” said Antognelli. In Monaco, “sport is in our DNA,” he said. The principality



Visit Berlin/Wolfgang Scholten

Olympic Stadium in Berlin has undergone many renovations since hosting the 1936 Olympic Summer Games and can seat about 75,000.

has hosted the Monaco Grand Prix since 1929, and many Formula 1 drivers, tennis players and other professional athletes live there.

The Formula 1 Monaco Grand Prix races on city streets from the harbor, up to the Monte Carlo Casino and down through a famously challenging tunnel. The iconic four-day event draws about 200,000 visitors as well as a reported 1 billion viewers around the world. Monaco also hosts, in alternating years, the Monaco ePrix for Formula E racing and the Historic Grand Prix.

Monaco has one or two sailing competitions every month. Three years ago the Yacht Club de Monaco opened a new Norman Foster-designed building as the centerpiece of a renovated marina.

Rugby is also growing, thanks in part to Charlene, Princess of Monaco, who has been a patron of AS Monaco Rugby since 2012. The annual Sainte-Devote Tournament draws more than a dozen teams of children under 12 from around the world to play at the 18,500-capacity Stade Louis II, where the Monaco Sevens Cup Olympic qualifiers were played before the 2016 Olympic Summer Games.

The stadium is Monaco's major sports venue and home to the AS

Monaco FC professional soccer team, which just won the Ligue 1 championships. Officials plan to refurbish and expand the arena, which is home to AS Monaco Basket, a popular basketball squad. The Monte Carlo Country Club is the host venue for the annual Monte Carlo Rolex Masters, an ATP World Tour Masters 1000 tournament.

Berlin: **A New Image**

Christian Tanzler, spokesman for Visit Berlin, is eager to dispel misconceptions about Germany and its people. Berlin is an open-minded, free-spirited city filled with creative people who even "have humor, for example," he said with a laugh. "What Berlin stands for is freedom—freedom in thinking and freedom in space."

That freedom manifests itself through art, music and sports. Berlin is home to two soccer teams: Hertha BSC, founded in the western part of the city, and FC Union Berlin, which during the Cold War played in East Berlin. Hertha plays in the famous Olympiastadion, while Union Berlin calls the 22,000-seat Stadion An der Alten Forsterei ("stadium at the old forester's house") home.

When it comes to venues, "the most important one is the Olympic Stadium," Tanzler said. Built by Adolf Hitler for the 1936 Olympic Summer Games with

a capacity of about 100,000, the stadium is an important attraction "even for people not interested in sport."

A 2004 renovation modernized the facilities and reduced the seating to 74,475, though it remains the country's largest venue. The final of the German Football Association's DFB-Pokal, or German Cup, has been held every year at the Olympiastadion since 1985, and it was the site of six matches, including the final, for the 2006 FIFA World Cup, which "radically changed the image of Germans in the world," Tanzler said. "It showed people are dancing on the street, and people are open-minded."

Berliners love volleyball in general and beach volleyball in particular. Every spring, the city creates a thriving beach scene along the Spree River, with space devoted to beach volleyball, ultimate and other sports. Some areas where the Berlin Wall used to stand now hold parks and sand beaches. "In Berlin, everything is a little related to our history, and everything is related to the special structure of our city," Tanzler said.

The Berlin Marathon, now in its 44th year, is the city's signature event and one of the largest marathons in the world. Held every September, it attracts nearly 50,000 participants and an estimated 1 million spectators from more than 120 nations.

Cycling is one of the city's growing individual sports. Cyclocross riders take advantage of woods surrounding the city, and the annual Velothon Berlin draws about 20,000 participants for 60K, 120K and 180K closed-road races. The city also has the 12,000-capacity Velodrom, an indoor track cycling arena.

Handball, basketball and ice hockey are also popular, but the city has a special affinity for niche sports, such as parkour and kite land-boarding.

Global Destinations: **Expanded Horizons**

International destinations offer organizers a chance to incorporate venues that are as iconic as the destinations themselves. Global cities are also magnets for international events that draw people from all over the world. Organizers should remember that it's a big world, with plenty of places to play. ■