

# Canada Olympic House bigger and better than ever in Rio

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By Israel Fehr

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RIO DE JANEIRO – Canada's home away from home for its Olympians and their family and friends is bigger and better than ever. The Canada Olympic House in Rio officially opened its doors Thursday night, with help from Governor General David Johnston and his wife Sharon who were on hand for the ceremonial ribbon cutting in front of the entrance to the house's celebration room.

Yes, it was a matter of pomp and circumstance, but it goes without saying: any place with a room designated for celebrations is bound to be a good time. Especially one with multiple big screens dedicated to showing sports.

"We call this the world's best living room to watch the Olympics," said Derek Kent, the Chief Marketing Officer for the Canadian Olympic Committee. "That's what we created. When people walk in we want to make sure they're comfortable and also we want to give them one spot where they feel safe and they can watch everyone compete."

That's the driving force behind the Canada House project. And from the cottage chairs on the balcony to the red-and-white canoe paddles adorning the ceiling it would be difficult for any proud Canadian that walked in the building not to feel at home.

The COC identified the Associacao Atletica Banco do Brasil, a sports club in the Leblon neighbourhood of Rio, as the perfect location for their headquarters. They've been working for two years to make sure the domain they had dreamed up was perfect for when the Games begin.

With the guidance of Canadian design firm Yabu Pushelberg and help from key sponsors that dream came to life. The setup in Rio is by far the largest space they've occupied – at 20,000 sq. feet – in an Olympic city, and the advancements don't stop there.

"It's much larger than Sochi," said Kent. "It's the most innovative house we've ever built. It's the most digitally enabled house we've ever built."

But while the area it's covering has expanded considerably compared to past Games, that doesn't mean Canada House has forgotten its roots. The famous Molson beer fridge is back and the newest addition, a bobsled simulator, is sure to keep the many guests – the COC's target is for 20,000 people to come through over the next two weeks – occupied while they wait for another cold one.

There's also a wall of honour that will feature a digital photo of every Canadian medal-winner on the podium or with their hard-earned hardware in hand that will remain up until the end of the Olympics. Real-time recognition. It's 2016, after all.

For the athletes, Canada House gives them peace of mind while they're competing, knowing that their loved ones are able to gather somewhere that reminds them of home to enjoy the experience of the Games.

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