

A tower OF TORONTO

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CN TOWER

There is one constant among all of Toronto's variety: the enormous CN Tower, which looms above the city at almost every turn. Standing at over 553 metres in height, it was the world's tallest tower for 34 years and has been a Canadian icon since its construction in 1976.

Once inside, most visitors immediately head for the observation deck at almost 450 metres in the air, where clear days offer views stretching up to 120 kilometres. If you like to dine as you admire the panorama, then the revolving 360 restaurant is certainly for you.

Daredevils will appreciate the glass-floor observation deck, where you can stare below your feet at 342 metres of nothing, but the truly fearless will continue 14 metres up to the EdgeWalk – an attraction that allows harnessed thrill-seekers to hang from the outside of the tower.

Canada may conjure up images of hostile wilderness and snow-capped mountains, but its cities are some of the most welcoming imaginable.

Text and Photos Antony Barton



Some visitors will leap at the chance to stare down at 342 metres of nothing.



The bohemian appeal of Kensington Market draws many tourists.

New Yorkers who fancy a taste of Canadian hospitality can simply cross Lake Ontario and embrace Toronto. This booming metropolis is many visitors' first experience of Canada and a regular contender for the world's most liveable city.

A brief stroll past the streetcars and along the wide streets of the country's largest city will reveal a harmonious combination of modern art installations and quirky old buildings, lively bars and quaint coffee shops. You will find outdoor entertainment ranging from rock concerts to jazz festivals, and the differing cuisine from one street to the next reflects the city's 240 distinct and vibrant neighbourhoods.

The variety continues through to the nightlife. The district known as Clubland is famous for having North America's highest concentration of nightclubs, bars and restaurants, although you are sure to find fine dining and top-class entertainment practically everywhere else, too.

Enjoy sampling everything Toronto has to offer, but be sure to investigate the following five highlights.



Pick up some retro clothing and sample the Middle Eastern mezze.

KENSINGTON MARKET

Around 49 per cent of Toronto's residents were born outside of Canada, which is partly why it is regarded as one of the world's most diverse cities. It also explains the rich cultural variety of its hundreds of neighbourhoods.

The most famous of these is Kensington Market. The houses may be Victorian, but their colours are pink, green and yellow. Cars come with their own grass lawns, Rastafarians sing on the sidewalks and grannies wear tie-dyed smocks. This anti-corporate enclave features stalls and shops selling retro clothing and curios, while the dining options include makeshift cantinas and Jamaican patty stands, standing alongside the health food shops, cheese merchants and fishmongers. Sample the Asian and Middle Eastern cuisine as you navigate your way through the African drummers, didgeridoo musicians and hippy cyclists that populate the colourfully graffitied streets.

"The Audience" welcomes supporters to the Rogers Centre.



Old City Hall is among Toronto's architectural landmarks.



A BRIEF STROLL PAST THE STREETCARS AND ALONG THE WIDE STREETS OF THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST CITY WILL REVEAL A HARMONIOUS COMBINATION OF MODERN ART INSTALLATIONS AND QUIRKY OLD BUILDINGS.

LAKE ONTARIO

There is plenty to do around Lake Ontario besides taking a dip in the water. You will find three city beaches, with the appropriately named Beaches neighbourhood boasting the most popular of the three. The 3.5km boardwalk is ideal for an evening stroll, and the annual 10-day Beaches International Jazz Festival regularly draws over 800,000 visitors.

In the downtown area, the Harbourfront Centre hosts over 4,000 cultural events each year, and these are usually free or inexpensive. Its open-air WestJet Stage is ideal for live music and provides a spectacular view of the neighbouring fleet of yachts and the occasional tall ship sailing by.

A short distance away is the Rogers Centre, where Toronto Blue Jays and Toronto Argonauts play baseball and Canadian football games, respectively. Sports fans should consider booking a room with a view of the pitch in the world's only hotel located in a major league sports and entertainment venue.



The stadium hosts baseball and Canadian football games.



Artistic eccentricities can be found in the most unexpected of places.

DISTILLERY DISTRICT

Famed for its alluring architecture, the Distillery District contains a variety of shops housed in some 40 heritage buildings. These form the largest number of Victorian-era buildings in North America and were declared a National Historic Site of Canada in 1988.

When the restored area was reopened in 2003, the owners declared that no land would be leased to chains or franchises, making this an ideal place to discover independent retailers. The pedestrian-friendly precinct encourages creative residents and visitors, so you will find galleries, art studios and a theatre for the performing arts. The coffee shops, restaurants and cafés are always on hand when you have finished rifling through the boutiques' one-of-a-kind products and would rather just relax in front of some entertainment on the brick-paved streets.

If the galleries create a hankering for more art, then the striking Art Gallery of Ontario should be your next stop. Here you will find more than 80,000 significant works from across the globe.



The tremendous power of the falls leaves most visitors awestruck.



Gaze over the entire spectacle from the 160m Skylon Tower.

NIAGARA FALLS

Just a 90-minute drive from Toronto is Niagara Falls. Visitors are spoilt for ways to enjoy the three tremendous waterfalls, although many are immediately mesmerised by the 750,000 gallons of water pouring over the cliffs each second.

Drag yourself away for just a moment and you will discover your viewing options include the boat tours that take waterproofed crowds within splashing distance of the crashing water, caves that allow visitors rear access to the thundering falls and the 160m Skylon Tower, which provides astonishing bird's-eye views of the entire scene. The location of the Skylon Tower and the views of the American Falls combine to make the Canadian side a much better vantage point than the US side.

Watching the sheer power of the falls, which together have the highest flow rate of any waterfall in the world, you are likely to wonder why in 1901 a 63-year-old teacher decided to become the first person to go over the falls in a barrel. Listen carefully and you are likely to hear other visitors wondering the same thing.



Slip on a waterproof for a boat tour of the falls.