

The Best of Toronto

Chances are that even if you've never set foot in Toronto, you've seen the city a hundred times over. Known for the past decade as "Hollywood North," Toronto has stood in for international centers from European capitals to New York—but rarely does it play itself. Self-deprecating Torontonians embody a paradox: Proud of their city's architectural, cultural, and culinary charms, they are unsure whether it's all up to international snuff.

After spending a single afternoon wandering around Toronto, you might wonder why this is a question at all. The sprawling city boasts lush parks, renowned architecture, and excellent galleries. There's no shortage of skyscrapers, particularly in the downtown core. Still, many visitors marvel at the number of Torontonians who live in houses on tree-lined boulevards that are a walk or a bike ride away from work.

Out-of-towners can see the fun side of the place, but Torontonians aren't so sure. They recall the stuffiness of the city's past. Often called "Toronto the Good," it was a town where you could walk down any street in safety, but you couldn't get a drink on Sunday.

Then a funny thing happened on the way through the 1970s. Canada loosened its immigration policies and welcomed waves of Italians, Greeks, Chinese, Vietnamese, Jamaicans, Indians, Somalians, and others, many of whom settled in Toronto. Political unrest in Québec drove out Anglophones, many into the waiting arms of Toronto. The city's economy flourished, which in turn gave its cultural side a boost.

Natives and visitors alike enjoy the benefits of this rich cultural mosaic. More than 5,000 restaurants are scattered across the city, serving everything from simple Greek souvlakia to Asian-accented fusion cuisine. Festivals such as Caribana and Caravan draw tremendous crowds to celebrate heritage through music and dance. Its newfound cosmopolitanism has made Toronto a key player on the arts scene, too. The Toronto International Film Festival in September and the International Festival of Authors in October draw top stars of the movie and publishing worlds. The theater scene rivals London's and New York's.

Toronto now ranks at or near the top of any international urban quality-of-life study. The city has accomplished something rare, expanding and developing its daring side while holding on to its traditional strengths. It's a great place to visit, but watch out: You might just end up wanting to live here.

1 Frommer's Favorite Toronto Experiences

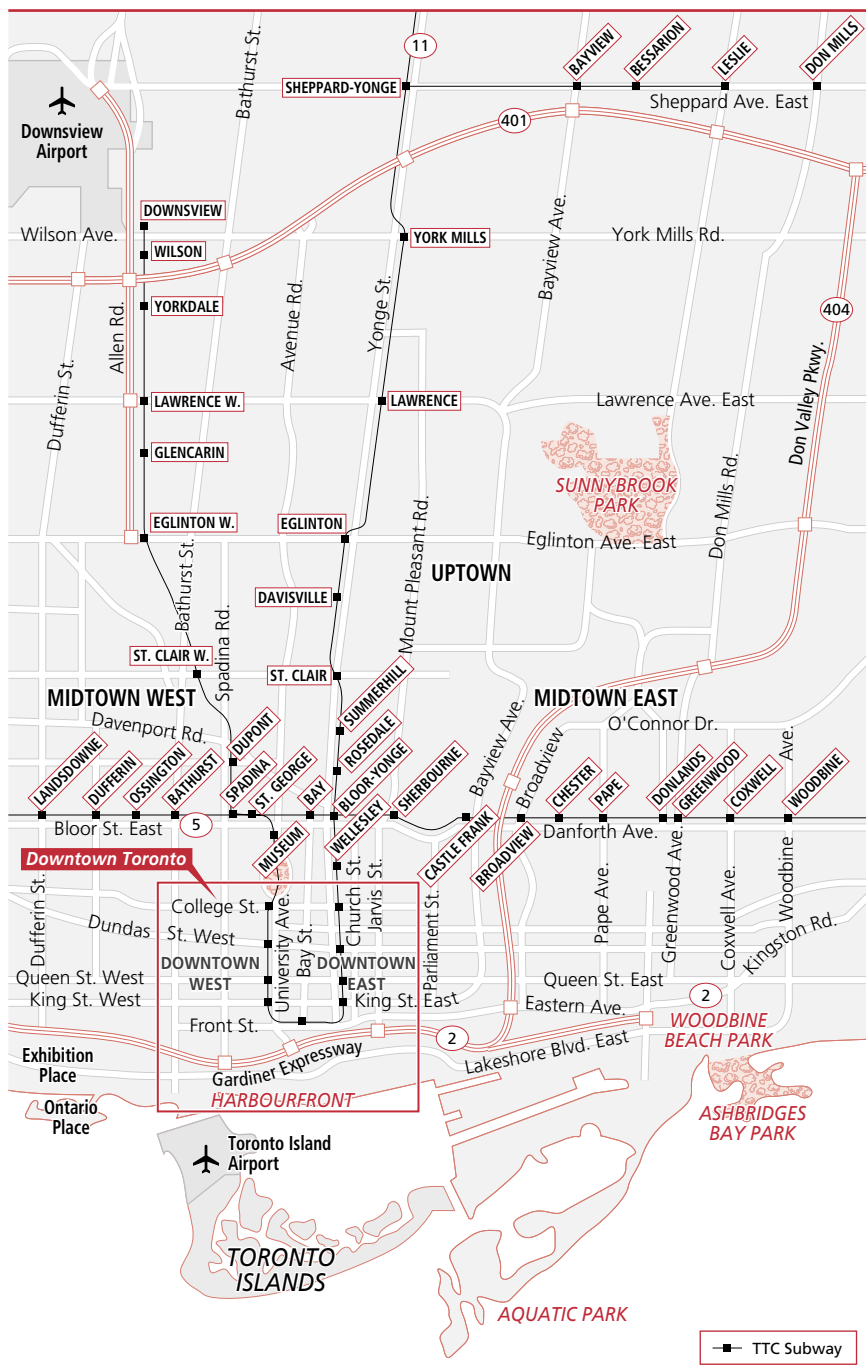
- **Taking in the Art Galleries and Boutiques on West Queen West:**

The stretch of Queen that runs west of Bathurst Avenue is also known as the "Art & Design

District" with good reason. This is the new home of the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art; it's also the neighborhood to visit for cutting-edge style. See chapter 6.

This map illustrates the Humber River and its surrounding urban environment in the Greater Toronto Area. The river is depicted as a winding waterway, with labels for 'Humber River' and 'Humber Marshes'. Major roads are shown as thick lines, including 401, 404, 407, and 418. The map also shows the location of Pearson International Airport and various parks like Centennial Park and Humber Bay Park. The map is titled 'Lake Ontario' at the bottom.

Lake Ontario



- **Cafe Hopping at Trattorias in Little Italy:** Several magazines have zeroed in on this neighborhood as one of the *haute*-est spots in North America. Trendy, yes, but it's also a fun area for stopping by the many cafes and wine bars, and for dining on outstanding food. See chapter 5.
- **Hanging Out at Harbourfront Centre:** There's always something going on—the International Festival of Authors, art exhibits, cultural celebrations, and the Toronto Music Garden, just to name a few. See p. 119.
- **Picnicking on Centre Island:** Hop on the ferry and escape to the islands. From across the water, you'll see the city in a whole new light. See *The Toronto Islands* on p. 125.
- **Swinging from the Henry Moore Sculptures at the Art Gallery of Ontario:** The British sculptor Henry Moore so loved Toronto that he bestowed his greatest works on this museum. Kids have been known to swing from the gigantic works in front of the gallery. See p. 125.
- **Viewing the City from the Roof Bar at the Park Hyatt:** Unfortunately, the famous CN Tower gives you a better view of Niagara Falls than it does Toronto itself. To truly appreciate the city's beautiful architecture, there's no better spot than the Roof. See p. 217.
- **Exploring the Wonders of the World at the Ontario Science Centre:** You don't have to be a tyke to appreciate the amazing interactive displays about biology, ecology, and technology. See p. 130.
- **Visiting the University of Toronto Art Centre:** This intimate gallery is one of the city's secret treasures. Visit it for the special exhibits (such as the recent Picasso Ceramics) or for the stunning permanent collection of Byzantine art. See p. 135.
- **Taking in a Game at SkyDome or the Air Canada Centre:** SkyDome is home base for the Toronto Blue Jays baseball team. The Air Canada Centre is where the Maple Leafs (hockey) and the Raptors (basketball) play. Torontonians love their teams and come out to support them in droves. See p. 143.
- **Wandering through the Riverdale Farm:** In case you need more proof that Toronto is a very green city, it has a working farm in its midst. Cows, sheep, pigs, goats, and other critters call it home. See p. 148.
- **Treasure Hunting for Vintage Clothing in Kensington Market:** How can one small area have a dozen vintage-clothing vendors? And how do they keep prices low and quality good? Haphazard Kensington Market is a joy for bargain hunters. See “Walking Tour 1: Chinatown & Kensington Market” in chapter 7 and p. 196 in chapter 8.
- **Listening to a Concert at the Toronto Music Garden:** This serene space was codesigned by cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and it's intended to invoke Bach's First Suite for Unaccompanied Cello. It's easy on the eye, but the best time to come here is for a summertime concert. Pure bliss. See chapter 7.
- **Shopping (or Window-Shopping) in Chic Yorkville:** Once home to the city's bohemian community, Yorkville is an enclave of exclusive shops, art galleries, and upscale cafes. See “Great Shopping Areas” in chapter 8.
- **Checking Out Local Theater:** Sure, Toronto likes its blockbuster shows. However, the offerings from the CanStage Company, the

Tarragon Theatre, and the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People are innovative and consistently excellent, too. See “The Performing Arts” in chapter 9.

- **De-stressing in a Day Spa:** Toronto is home to some of the best day spas on the continent, including the Victoria Spa, the Stillwater Spa, and the Estée Lauder Spa. See “Spas & the City” in chapter 6.
- **Busting a Gut at a Comedy Club:** Maybe it’s something in the water: Toronto has produced more than its share of top-notch comedians, including the shagadelic Mike

Myers, Jim Carrey, Dan Aykroyd, and the late John Candy. Check out local talent or international stand-up stars at one of the many comedy clubs. See “The Club & Music Scene” in chapter 9.

- **Day-Tripping for Festivals and Falls:** Niagara-on-the-Lake is Ontario’s wine country, and home of the Shaw Festival; it’s less than a half-hour drive away from Niagara Falls. Picturesque Stratford has its own theater festival. See “Stratford” and “Niagara-on-the-Lake & Niagara Falls” in chapter 10.

2 Best Hotel Bets

- **Best Historic Hotel:** The (gloved) hands-down winner is **Le Royal Meridien King Edward**, 37 King St. E. (☎ 800/543-4300), which was built in 1903 and in the past few years has been restored to its former glory. The lobby, with its pink marble columns and ornate frescoes, has seen the crème de la crème of society trot through over the years. In the 1960s, the Beatles holed up in the King Eddy while 3,000 fans stormed the lobby. See p. 64.
- **Best for a Romantic Rendezvous:** The **Park Hyatt Toronto**, 4 Avenue Rd. (☎ 800/233-1234), has it all: a beautifully renovated Art Deco building, top-notch service, and one of the best views in the city from the rooftop terrace lounge. This is the place to relax and let yourself be pampered. See p. 68.
- **Best for Making Guests Feel Part of the Community:** The **Drake Hotel**, 1150 Queen St. W. (☎ 416/531-5042) fosters a sense of community by hosting music events, literary readings, and countless other festivities. If you

hate feeling like a tourist, this hotel is for you. See p. 62.

- **Best for Tech-Lovers:** The **SoHo Metropolitan Hotel**, 318 Wellington St. W. (☎ 800/668-6600), makes the best use of technology I’ve ever seen at a hotel. It’s as if the designers compiled a list of all of the most frustrating aspects about staying in a hotel room and resolved to fix them. And they succeeded! See p. 58.
- **Best for Families:** The **Delta Chelsea**, 33 Gerrard St. W. (☎ 800/243-5732), is a longtime family favorite, and in 2003 it further enhanced its standing by introducing the Family Fun Zone, which includes a playroom with live bunnies and fish, a video arcade, and a waterslide. It also offers children’s programs, a day-care center, and kid-friendly restaurants. There are two pools, one for tykes and one for adults, and many rooms have refrigerators or kitchenettes. See p. 61.
- **Best for Business Travelers:** The **Metropolitan Hotel**, 108 Chestnut St. (☎ 416/977-5000), is just a few minutes from the Financial

District, and its amenities are competitive with those of its pricier competitors. Features include a 24-hour business center and in-room amenities such as fax/modem hookups, large work desks, and cordless two-line phones. The restaurants, Hemispheres and Lai Wah Heen, are favorite sites for business lunches. See p. 59.

• **Best Moderately Priced Hotel:**

Given the location and amenities, it's hard to beat the **Delta Chelsea**, 33 Gerrard St. W. (☎ 800/243-5732), for price. Close to the Eaton Centre, Chinatown, and the Financial District, its double rooms start at C\$129 (US\$90) per night. See p. 61.

• **Best Budget Accommodations:**

Victoria University, 140 Charles St. W. (☎ 416/585-4524), rents out its student residences from mid-May to late August. It's in an excellent location, with simple rooms and great facilities, including tennis courts and a pool. All this for C\$67 (US\$47) a night. See p. 72.

• **Best Service:** At **The Sutton Place Hotel**, 955 Bay St. (☎ 800/268-3790), ask and you shall receive. The high staff-to-guest ratio means that there's always someone around to do your bidding. You also won't lack attention at the **Four Seasons Hotel Toronto**, 21 Avenue Rd. (☎ 800/268-6282), or the **Park Hyatt Toronto**, 4 Avenue Rd. (☎ 800/233-1234). See p. 69, 68, and 68.

• **Best Hotel Dining:** The prize goes to **Senses**, 318 Wellington St. W. (☎ 416/961-0055), at the **Metropolitan SoHo** for its divine combination of delicious fare, sensuous setting, and impeccable service. Close runners-up are the Hilton Toronto's very grand dining room, **Tundra** (☎ 416/860-6800); the Fairmont Royal York's new offering, **Epic** (☎ 416/860-6949); and the Park Hyatt's restaurant, **Annona** (☎ 416/924-5471). See p. 91, 88, 89, and 102.

• **Best Gay-Friendly Hotel:** Everyone comes to the **Clarion Hotel & Suites Selby**, 592 Sherbourne St. (☎ 800/387-4788). In a Victorian building in a predominantly gay neighborhood, this hotel draws gay, lesbian, and straight travelers with Belle Epoque style and individually decorated rooms. See p. 69.

• **Best for a Stylish Stay:** The **Hôtel Le Germain**, 30 Mercer St. (☎ 866/345-9501), one of Toronto's new boutique hotels, is a stunner, with its dramatic design and lots of artwork in public and private spaces alike (even the elevators!). See p. 58.

• **Best for Travelers with Disabilities:** The **Fairmont Royal York**, 100 Front St. W. (☎ 800/441-1414), looks monolithic but it pays a lot of attention to accessibility. The adaptations accommodate wheelchair users, the visually impaired, and the hearing impaired. See p. 59.

3 Best Dining Bets

• **Best New Restaurant:** 2004 saw some stiff competition for the title, with lots of new restaurants opening for business, but the winner is **Jamie Kennedy Wine Bar**, 9 Church St. (☎ 416/362-1957).

The combination of unforgettable cooking and stellar service is hard to resist. See p. 99.

• **Best for a Business Lunch:** A sure bet is **Canoe Restaurant & Bar**, in the Toronto Dominion

Tower, 66 Wellington St. W. (☎ 416/364-0054), a see-and-been spot for local and visiting power brokers. See p. 86.

- **Best for a Celebration:** The atmosphere at **Blowfish Restaurant & Sake Bar**, 668 King St. W. (☎ 416/860-0606), is lively every night. The mix of the glamorous dining room, fine sushi, and a cool crowd gives the restaurant its edge. See p. 89.
- **Best for a Romantic Dinner:** I'm the first to admit that I'm biased, but the **Rosewater Supper Club**, 19 Toronto St. (☎ 416/214-5888), is my idea of perfect romance (this restaurant was where my husband proposed to me). Relax and let the pampering begin. See p. 98.
- **Best Decor: Monsoon**, 100 Simcoe St. (☎ 416/979-7172), has an award-winning interior design by Toronto firm Yabu Pushelberg. The brown-on-black setting vies for attention with the impressive kitchen. Upstart **Rain**, 19 Mercer St. (☎ 416/599-7246), is easy on the eye, but good luck getting in—even pop diva Nelly Furtado couldn't do it. See p. 87 and 91.
- **Best View:** Forget the obvious choice (**360 Revolving Restaurant**, in the CN Tower, 301 Front St. W.). Instead, dine at **Scaramouche**, 1 Benvenuto Place (☎ 416/961-8011), which has a far more elegant perspective. Its floor-to-ceiling windows overlook the downtown skyline. See p. 87 and 112.
- **Best Wine List:** The international selection **Centro**, 2472 Yonge St. (☎ 416/483-2211), is hard to beat. The basement is a wine bar with Italian, Californian, and Australian vintages by the glass; upstairs, the dining room boasts more than 600 bottles from around the world. Prices range from C\$32 (US\$22) into four figures. See p. 111.
- **Best Bistro:** Bistros often do well with comfort foods, but **Biff's**, 4 Front St. E. (☎ 416/860-0086), serves up modern takes on classic dishes; its setting goes beyond comfortable to luxury. See p. 97.
- **Best Italian: Il Posto Nuovo**, 148 Yorkville Ave. (☎ 416/968-0469), serves fine modern Italian cuisine in elegant digs—and the efficient, knowledgeable waitstaff makes everyone feel at home. See p. 102.
- **Best Portuguese:** Standing alone on Italian-dominated College Street, **Chiado**, 484 College St. (☎ 416/538-1910), serves modern Portuguese cuisine. The seafood is flown in daily. See p. 89.
- **Best Greek:** The cooking at **Pan on the Danforth**, 516 Danforth Ave. (☎ 416/466-8158), will convince you that Pan really was the god of food. This is Greek cuisine updated with panache. See p. 109.
- **Best Out-of-Towner:** Talk about catching on like wildfire—the new restaurant **Wildfire**, at Taboo Resort in the Muskoka region (☎ 705/687-2233), is a work of art. Give yourself over to the genius chef by having one of the 4-, 5-, or 11-course tasting menus. See p. 251.
- **Best People-Watching:** Across from the Sutton Place Hotel is **Bistro 990**, 990 Bay St. (☎ 416/921-9990), where everyone in Toronto but me has made a celebrity sighting. (I'm too busy enjoying the delicious food.) See p. 101.
- **Best Value:** First prize goes to **Brassaii**, 461 King St. W. (☎ 416/598-4730), a stylish bistro with excellent food, top-notch service, and wallet-friendly prices. It's open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. An honorable mention

The Best of Toronto Online

How did anyone ever plan a trip without the help of the Internet? It's hard to imagine now, given the wealth of information available online. But not all sites are created equal, so before you get ensnared in the Web, point and click on these gems.

- **Toronto.com** (www.toronto.com) boasts articles on arts and culture as well as a hotel directory, restaurant reviews, community news, and events listings. One of its best features is its extensive use of photographs.
- **City of Toronto** (www.city.toronto.on.ca) is the official municipal guide to Toronto, a straightforward source of practical information peppered with profiles of fun places to visit and announcements of festivals, free concerts, kids' events, and more.
- **Girl Talk Toronto: A Mini City Guide** (www.journeywoman.com/girltalk/toronto.html) runs the gamut from the serious (transit safety) to the frivolously fun (the best places to shop for shoes). This user-friendly site also highlights arty spots, off-the-beaten-path attractions, and the best places for brunch, all from a female perspective.
- **Green Tourism Association** (www.greentourism.on.ca) is an excellent resource for eco-friendly travelers. There's information about car-free transportation, outdoor activities and sports, and healthy dining.
- **Toronto Life** (www.torontolife.com) has extensive restaurant listings, as well as links for events, activities, and nightlife.
- **Toronto Star** (www.thestar.com) includes everything from theater and concert reviews to local news and weather conditions.

goes to **Messis**, 97 Harbord St. (☎ 416/920-2186), which has been a training ground for some of the best chefs in Toronto. See p. 97 and 105.

- **Best for Kids: Millie's Bistro**, 1980 Avenue Rd. (☎ 416/481-1247), is a family favorite with sunny dining rooms and a special children's menu. A more casual choice would be the deli-style **Shopsy's** (33 Yonge St.; ☎ 416/365-3333). See p. 112 and 101.
- **Best Steak House: Barberian's**, 7 Elm St. (☎ 416/597-0335), has boosted the level of protein in Torontonians' diets since 1959. It also serves great martinis and

desserts, but what everyone comes here for is the meat. See p. 85.

- **Best Pizza:** A cubbyhole-size eatery in midtown, **Serra**, 378 Bloor St. W. (☎ 416/922-6999), makes thin-crust pizzas laden with gourmet ingredients. See p. 107.
- **Best Sushi: Hiro Sushi**, 171 King St. E. (☎ 416/304-0550). Chef Hiro Yoshida offers up classically prepared sushi as well as a few unique specialties. But there is competition from **Blowfish Restaurant & Sake Bar**, 668 King St. W. (☎ 416/860-0606). See p. 98 and 89.
- **Best Afternoon Tea:** A very tough call. Afternoon tea in the lobby

lounge at the **Le Royal Meridien King Edward**, 37 King St. E. (☎ 416/863-3131), has been called the most authentic English tea, and it is divine. But I am partial to the phenomenal lavender-and-rose-infused Rooibos Provence tea that you'll find at **Annona** at the Park Hyatt, 4 Avenue Rd. (☎ 416/924-5471). See p. 64 and 102.

- **Best Alfresco Dining:** The lovely patio at **Biff's**, 4 Front St. E. (☎ 416/860-0086), is just about perfect. Set well back from the street, it affords terrific people-watching possibilities. See p. 97.
- **Best If You Have Only One Meal in Toronto and Price Is No Object:** While I hate to go along with the crowd, the common wisdom is on the money with **North 44**, 2537 Yonge St. (☎ 416/487-4897). Simply put: Great food, great staff, great setting. See p. 111.
- **Best If You Have Only One Meal in Toronto and Price Is an Object:** Look no further than **Brassaii**, 461 King St. W. (☎ 416/598-4730). For all of the

reasons listed above under "Best Value." See p. 92.

- **Best Chinese:** **Lai Wah Heen**, at the Metropolitan Hotel, 110 Chestnut St. (☎ 416/977-9899), serves deluxe Cantonese and Szechuan specialties, including a variety of shark's fin soups and abalone dishes. It features several good-value prix-fixe specials at lunch and dinner. See p. 90.
- **Best Brunch:** Who needs bacon and eggs when you can have *torta rustica* with layers of ricotta, mozzarella, leeks, peas, and smoked trout? This and other glamorous offerings are available at **Agora**, at the Art Gallery of Ontario, 317 Dundas St. W. (☎ 416/977-0414). See p. 88.
- **Best Desserts:** It's a tie. Dufflet Rosenberg bakes up a storm at **Dufflet Pastries**, 787 Queen St. W. (☎ 416/504-2870). You'll find her name on the dessert list at some of the city's top restaurants. And then there's the **Senses Bakery**, 2 Queen St. E. (☎ 416/364-7303). Resistance is futile. See "Sweet Treats: Toronto's Dessert Cafes" on p. 220.