

# Falling for Niagagarda

Niagara Falls still tops travel bucket lists – and it's easy to see why, finds **Robin Murray** on a First Class Holidays trip



**b**elieve me, the poncho is definitely required," my travel companion says as we queue to board Niagara City Cruises' iconic *Hornblower* catamaran. I'd heard tales about how passing Niagara Falls in a boat invariably results in a head-to-toe drenching, but I'd dismissed these warnings, believing it could be no more than a gentle spray. How wrong I was.

I'd already spent a considerable amount of time admiring the trio of waterfalls spanning the Canada-US border before getting up close and personal with them in the catamaran. But it is only now – as we approach the horseshoe-shaped falls, with its sheer noise and powerful force – that I truly appreciate its magnitude and beauty.

Instead of risking a soaked phone, I save my photo-taking for later that day, when I'm in the safety of the skies, courtesy of an Airbus H130 operated by Niagara Helicopters. As I move closer to the front of

the queue for my 12-minute flight, I watch groups of people returning, their faces filled with wonder at what they've just witnessed.

Within minutes of boarding I'm admiring the sprawling Ontario landscape, and the moment the falls come into view is one I'll never forget.

#### TOURISM REBOUND

Niagara Falls was hit hard by the pandemic, but visitor numbers are gradually recovering and there are hopes that they will return to pre-pandemic levels this year; indeed, the 995,000 international visitors figure for February alone this year isn't that far off the 1.32 million visitors for the July to September quarter in 2019.

The falls' recovery is hardly surprising, given its phenomenal global appeal. The BBC's epic travel competition *Race Across the World* has helped too. In the wake of the most recent series, which was set entirely in Canada, First Class Holidays – host of





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Toronto skyline at sunset; Niagara Falls; Niagara-on-the-Lake; Toronto at night

PICTURES: Khristel Stecher; Goh Iromoto; Shutterstock/Steve Heap



my fam trip – reported a “double-digit” increase in bookings.

**AWAY FROM THE FALLS**

While the waterfalls are of course the main draw for people visiting Niagara Falls, the eponymous city is a fun place to spend a night or two, and most of the hotels – including the Marriott I’m staying in – offer fantastic views of the landmark.

The mix of attractions lining the city’s main promenade, Clifton Hill, ensures there’s plenty to keep visitors of all ages entertained, whether you’re a kid – or a kid at heart. I have tremendous fun on the Niagara Speedway go-kart track, before visiting Ripley’s Believe It or Not!. To refuel, lunch at Kelseys Original Roadhouse offers a more than decent cheeseburger and fries, with service to match.

Just a 30-minute drive from Niagara Falls is the quaint Niagara-on-the-Lake, which couldn’t be more different in style. As soon as I step off the coach I feel like I’ve been transported to a bygone era. The town is steeped in history, once

“At the CN Tower I have one of the most memorable meals of my life, in the revolving 360 Restaurant

serving as the first capital of Upper Canada and playing a crucial role in the war of 1812. The streets are filled with beautifully preserved Victorian and Georgian buildings, showcasing intricate details, colourful facades and immaculate gardens. It almost feels like a model village on a real-life scale.

**TORONTO**

A trip to Niagara Falls should definitely be tied in with Toronto, a 90-minute drive away. The buzzing, cosmopolitan city makes a fine alternative to New York. My two-night base here is the elegant and historic Fairmont Royal York,

a stone’s throw from the main train station and not far from many of the city’s must-visit attractions. From my room I admire the skyline-dominating CN Tower – all 553 metres of it – and it’s at the top of this vast structure that I have one of the most memorable meals of my life, in the revolving 360 Restaurant. The views are spectacular, and the height we’re at makes the city’s many skyscrapers seem like tiny buildings. As dusk turns to dark, we watch the sprawling metropolis below gradually illuminate.

I was told to expect a “fantastic vibe” in Toronto by a friend, and she was right. The city possesses a wonderful atmosphere, cultivated largely by the friendly, warm nature of its hospitality staff and inhabitants. And the fact that the city’s beloved ice hockey team, The Maple Leafs, had just won a play-off semi-final against Tampa Bay Lightning only enhanced the overall mood during my visit. Sharing in the fans’ evident happiness made a wonderful way to end a spectacular trip. **TW**

AGENTS’ *views*



“Seeing the falls was my highlight. My favourite vantage point was actually from my room at the Marriott – when I looked out of the window for the first time it gave me a real buzz.”

**Sam Beavan,**  
Miles Morgan Travel



“For future clients I look to Toronto, I’m definitely going to recommend that after they’ve seen the city they stay a night at Niagara, then head to the airport from there, as we’ve done on this trip. I’m also going to be promoting city breaks to Toronto, which isn’t something I would have done previously.”

**Tanya Nash,**  
Colchester Travel

**BOOK IT**

**First Class Holidays’** three-night Toronto & Niagara Falls Extravaganza starts from £1,479 per person, based on two sharing room-only accommodation at the Fairmont Royal York, Toronto (two nights) and Niagara Falls Marriott Fallsview Hotel. Includes return flights from Gatwick, transfers, CN Tower admission and 24-hour hop-on hop-off Toronto sightseeing, a Niagara Falls Adventure Pass and Niagara helicopter sightseeing flight, departing on April 13, 2024. [fcholidays.com](http://fcholidays.com)