

# Toronto

## NEIGHBOURHOODS

Leave touristy Toronto behind with  
Nikki Bayley's guide to the city's hipster side



**F**irst things first: it's not Toronto, it's the 'T-dot' or the 'six'. Knowing what the locals like to call it is just the first step in getting to know sides of the city that tourists don't see, but it's a good start.

Escaping the shadow of the CN Tower in favour of its outlying islands and arty, urban areas is step two, and after that, it's pretty impossible not to feel at home in the cosmopolitan Ontario capital.

It just got even easier to get to from the UK too, thanks to Westjet's new service, which starts flying daily from Gatwick on May 7, joining Air Canada, British Airways and Canadian Air in offering a non-stop year-round service to Canada's largest city.

This sprawling metropolis is famous for its diversity and is arguably the world's most global city, with half of its population born outside Canada. New express train the UP, which shuttles from Pearson airport direct to Union station in 25 minutes, makes it easy to get downtown, and once there, the transit system is a delight with streetcars rattling along the wide city streets.

With world-class restaurants and cutting-edge bars, hip hotels, thriving fashion and entertainment districts, not to mention excellent museums,

galleries and a raft of popular attractions, there's never been a better time to visit Toronto.

### ► DOWNTOWN

**Why go:** If it's a first time to the city, then there are a few must-dos: 'edge walking' around the top of the CN Tower, or at least admiring the incredible view from restaurant 360; exploring the vast Royal Ontario Museum (see if you can find the dodo skeleton!); and going on a day trip to Niagara Falls and its winery region.

**What to do:** Try to visit Front Street's 200-year-old St Lawrence Market on a Saturday when there are plenty of free samples to graze on, from fresh-grilled bacon strips to olives and cheese. Take home locally made Kozlik's mustard (they have 36 varieties) and head downstairs for all kinds of maple syrup goodies, but hit up the Carousel Bakery for its famed 'peameal' bacon breakfast sandwich, guaranteed to fight off even the fiercest jetlag.

The historic Distillery District was once home to the world's largest whisky producers but its red brick buildings and quaint cobbled streets were transformed at the turn of the 21st century into a pedestrianised hub for arty boutiques, galleries, designers, restaurants and coffee shops. Look out for Soma

Chocolate, an award-winning bean-to-bar chocolatier.

A National Historic Site of Canada, the Kensington Market neighbourhood is well worth a few hours browsing its vintage clothes stores, vinyl shops and tasty eateries, with everything from the Jamaican-Italian hybrid Rasta Pasta to the excellent Seven Lives tacos. Stop by the Blue Banana for collectible Canadiana – think bacon-flavoured cocoa, maple leaf-toting sock puppets and unique gifts.

Then, with all the Toronto basics ticked off, get out into five of its distinctly different areas and explore.

### ► TORONTO ISLANDS

**Why go:** Fifteen minutes by ferry from the bustle of downtown Toronto are its peaceful, car-free islands and sandy blue-flag swimming beaches. Frankly, it's worth the ferry ride alone for the glorious views of Toronto's skyline from the water, with the CN Tower rising above it all.

**What to do:** Hire a bike – or a fun four-seater family 'quadricycle' – from Toronto Island Bicycle Rentals on Centre Island and explore this easily navigated little chain of islands just offshore from the mainland in Lake Ontario.

Centre Island has the most attractions: younger families will adore the Far Enough Farm

petting zoo, and the Centreville amusement park has everything from miniature golf and bumper boats to swan rides and terrific antique car rides. Couples and singles may enjoy the clothing-optional thrills of Hanlan's Point nudist beach or the more sober attractions of the heritage home architecture on Ward's Island.

### ► KING WEST

**Why go:** Up-and-coming west side neighbourhood King West is at the heart of the city's fashion and entertainment districts, offering an ultra-cool slice of Toronto style.

**What to do:** Take in a baseball game from hometown heroes the Blue Jays, dance to big-name live acts at the nearby Rogers Centre, or check out Canada's Walk of Fame in front of the Princess of Wales and Royal Alexandra theatres.

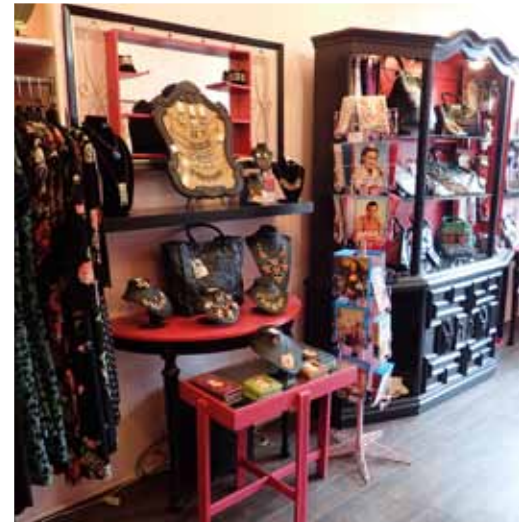
Indulge your fashionable side and shop for locally sourced jewellery and clothing for women at Coal Miner's Daughter, or stylish menswear with an in-house barbershop at Frank & Oak. Rehydrate plane-stressed skin at brand-new facial spa concept Blitz Facial Bar, then treat yourself to Nügateau's sweet and savoury éclairs followed by incredible 'modernist' cocktail creations at Barchef.

**Where to stay:** The

RIGHT:  
St Lawrence  
Market

FAR RIGHT:  
Thrill of the Find,  
Leslieville

BELOW:  
Thompson Hotel



→ Thompson is a recently renovated ultra-stylish hotel with a residents-only rooftop pool boasting jaw-dropping views of the CN Tower, a nightclub in the basement and a popular lobby lounge bar. Its elegant Colette Grand cafe has gloriously buttery croissants.

▶ LESLIEVILLE

**Why go:** Toronto's version of Brooklyn, Leslieville offers a trendy east side village-like neighbourhood, with rich pickings for shoppers seeking unique



**Stock up on Canadian designers and cool retro womenswear at the Doll Factory or bag a couture bargain at Thrill of the Find**

styles and foodies looking for the latest dining trend.

**What to do:** Enjoy a lazy afternoon exploring this fashionable 'hood on the rise, which has been gentrifying over the past decade. Stock up on Canadian designers and cool retro womenswear at the Doll Factory, bag a high-end couture bargain (discount Dior, anyone?) at Thrill of the Find, and shop for unique gifts at the Etsy-like Pied A Terre craft market.

Seek out the city's best grilled-cheese sandwiches from the Leslieville Cheese Market or sample the all-bacon menu at Rashers, a tiny hole in the wall which serves ethically sourced (and 100% delicious) all-Canadian bacon. On a summer evening, soak up the vibe on one of the many sun-trap patios sipping craft beers and cocktails while people watching.

▶ THE BEACHES

**Why go:** Towards the end of the line on the 501 'red rocket' streetcar heading east along Queen Street, you'll find Toronto's little secret: the Beaches, a heritage neighbourhood with a gorgeous spread of parks, boardwalk and beaches all within sight of the CN Tower.

**What to do:** Shop for beach hats and bric-a-brac at The Artisans or Potala Tibetan Gift store, browse the racks at Book City then pick up supplies at any of the delis or bakeries lining the streets, or choose an all-natural ice cream cone from Touti Gelati and head to Kew Gardens for a picnic. There are tennis courts, a baseball diamond and bandstand for summer concerts, →



ASK THE EXPERT



**Michele Simpson,** media relations manager, Tourism Toronto  
"Toronto's neighbourhoods are the heart of the city. They pulse with life and each has a personality of its own. A visit isn't complete without exploring these culturally diverse areas – have a coffee or a craft brew, savour an exotic snack, poke around a bookstore or art gallery – and experience what makes Toronto the vibrant place it is."



## DESTINATIONS



ABOVE: The Beaches

→ and four family-friendly beaches from Woodbine Beach in the west to Balmy Beach in the east. In July, the Beaches celebrates a 10-day jazz festival, and is a hub for all things funky.

### ▶ WEST QUEEN WEST


**Why go:** Toronto's west side gives visitors a chance to sample the best in cutting-edge Canadian art and design with some 300 galleries, restaurants, bars and design houses packed into a mile-long strip.

**What to do:** Visit the by-donation Museum of Contemporary Art\_Toronto\_Canada, set to reopen in new premises next May after a rebranding. Alternatively, explore the area's vibrant graffiti on a walking tour with the Tour Guys, then join hipsters at play at the Gladstone Hotel for an adult colouring-in evening or lego-and-lager night.



**Join hipsters at play at the Gladstone Hotel for adult colouring-in or lego-and-lager nights**

Eat at Boralia for a culinary adventure through Canadian history, where traditional aboriginal dishes and recipes from settlers are given a modern and delicious twist, then dive into Rhino bar's rotating craft brew tap menu on the spacious patio.

**Where to stay:** The ultra-hip and arty Drake Hotel if you're looking for style over soft touches. The Drake boasts an in-house live music and performance space, wildly fashionable rooftop bar, lounge and cafe. Room rates from £136. 



ABOVE: The Drake Hotel

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