

**For Immediate Release
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Toronto's Tourism Businesses Provide Weekend Getaways to Inspiring Local Families

Toronto, ON – Every weekend two local families of children with special needs will have a chance to relax and indulge at some of Toronto's top hotels, theatre shows, sports events, attractions and restaurants on three-day getaways provided by Toronto's tourism industry. Tourism Toronto announced its new Relax, Recharge & Renew program that begins today for families across the Toronto region.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to share the joy and benefits of a vacation experience in Toronto with some very inspiring families in our own community," said David Whitaker, President and CEO of Tourism Toronto.

Each weekend, two families will leave their child in a high-quality, provincially funded respite care setting and then return home where a limousine will pick them up for a three-day package that includes:

- two-night hotel stay, including breakfasts
- tickets to a marquee theatre or sporting event
- passes to major attractions
- dinners at top restaurants
- pick-up and return by limousine
- TTC passes to get around the city throughout the weekend
- an overnight bag
- a gift for the child in care

"Respite care provides short-term parental relief for parents caring for children with complex needs. This program is a wonderful opportunity for mom and dad to recharge with a well-deserved getaway," said Tracy Kitch, Vice President of Programs and Services at Bloorview Kids Rehab.

Tourism Toronto is working in close partnership with the Respite Network in Toronto including Bloorview Kids Rehab, Safehaven, Community Living Toronto under the coordination of RespiteServices.com, as well as Erinoak in Mississauga and York Support Services Network in York Region. Families are selected by the respite providers based on the specific situation of each family.

"Not only are we able to provide weekends and experiences to families from across the Toronto region including Mississauga and York Region, but we're also able to tap into the diverse tourism offerings throughout our community so families can experience a wide range of hotels and entertainment," said Mr. Whitaker.

"Caring for young people with special needs is challenging and takes a lot of energy, time, and

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patience," said Children and Youth Services Minister, Deb Matthews. "Providing rest and relief for parents and families is an important part of helping children and youth with special needs succeed and be the best they can be."

"Many of Toronto's tourism businesses already have wide-ranging charitable programs, providing hotel rooms, meals and tickets to events and attractions to thousands of people every year. This new program, fully funded by Tourism Toronto and its member businesses, brings the tourism community together with a special group of families right here in our own community," said Mr. Whitaker.

The new program is the latest initiative under Tourism Toronto's corporate social responsibility commitment that also includes support for education and the environment. Earlier this year, Tourism Toronto launched scholarships in tourism and hospitality at 10 colleges and universities in southern Ontario, funded local environmental retrofit projects to offset the carbon emissions from more than 300 flights, and rallied 200 visitor-industry volunteers to plant 600 trees and 6,000 flowers on Earth Day.

Tourism Toronto, Toronto's Convention and Visitors Association, is an industry association of more than 1,200 members established to sell and market the Greater Toronto Region as a remarkable destination for tourists, convention delegates and business travelers around the globe. For more information please visit www.torontotourism.com.

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