

## Focus Report Eastern Canada

# Familiar but still stunning

*Peter Ellegard* samples the cosmopolitan bustle of Toronto, the café life of Ottawa and the thunder of Niagara Falls

**J**ust a seven-hour flight away, Ontario has long drawn the British — to settle and to visit. This is hardly surprising, as it was ruled by Britain for nigh on 200 years. It is partly that centuries-old association that makes Ontario feel so homely for visitors. Yet despite the familiarity and accessibility, the experiences on offer in the province are part of a different world: cosmopolitan and cultural Toronto, nature at its most spectacular in Niagara Falls, plus history and colonial heritage in Kingston and Ottawa.

Toronto, the capital of Ontario, is Canada's largest city and its main entry point. The so-called Queen City is a pulsating kaleidoscope of ethnic neighbourhoods. They include four Chinatowns, a Greektown, a Little India and a Little Italy, which also hosts significant Latin American and Portuguese communities.

The best way to get an overview of the city and adjacent Lake Ontario is from the top of the landmark CN Tower — one of the world's tallest structures at 1,815ft. Take in the stunning vista from the Sky Pod observation deck or savour haute cuisine in the revolving 360 Restaurant.

Easy to get around by streetcar, subway and bus,

Toronto is also a very walkable city. There are almost 17 miles of underground walkways, so you can even explore in the harsh Ontario winter. They link major shopping malls and streets and even have shops along them.

You can also explore Toronto's past on foot with a guided tour, discovering delights such as the city's old jail in the basement below the former city hall, now the bustling St Lawrence Market, and the architectural splendour behind the dull facades of old bank buildings. History has also been given a makeover in the old Distillery District, now a collection of cafés and boutiques, where you can hop on a two-wheeled Segway and take a tour.

Toronto is culture vulture heaven, boasting a big theatre district as well as world-class museums and art galleries. Among them, the Royal Ontario Museum is a grand, Italianate edifice on to which has been grafted the futuristic, glass and steel Michael Lee-Chin Crystal wing, Canada's largest museum of natural history and global culture, it houses the world's largest fossil collection.

The Art Gallery of Ontario is another old institution given a space-age twist. One of Toronto's favourite sons, the architect Frank Gehry, has transformed it into a mes-



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merising blend of stately old and dazzling new. Exhibits range from Old Masters and Renaissance treasures to modern art and sculptures.

Ninety minutes from Toronto is the awesome spectacle of Niagara Falls, over which one fifth of the world's fresh water cascades. Get a close-up view of the thundering Horseshoe Falls on a *Maid of the Mist* boat tour.

The Niagara Peninsula is a fertile region of vineyards and orchards with wine trails offering tempting stop-offs at wineries and fruit stalls. Postcard-pretty Niagara-on-the-Lake, at the junction of the Niagara River and Lake Ontario, has lovely old shops and galleries worth visiting.

Kingston briefly became the first capital of Britain's Canadian colony in 1841. British traditions remain strong there, albeit liberally mixed with a dash of French. To the east, on the banks of the St Lawrence River, Upper Canada Village is a 60-acre re-creation of life 150 years ago with more than 40 old buildings and costumed interpreters who bring history alive with demonstrations and talks.

Ottawa's imposing copper-roofed Gothic-revival Parliament buildings are the focal point of the city, on a hill crowned by the 300ft Peace Tower with its carillon of 53 bells. The city's wealth of cultural attractions includes the National Arts Centre complex, the glass-walled National Gallery of Canada and the Museum of Civilisation. It is also a city of parks and open spaces, of street cafés, restaurants and joie de vivre. The Rideau Canal, full of pleasure craft in summer, is transformed in winter into the world's longest ice rink and a setting for the Winterlude carnival.

## “ Upper Canada Village is a 60-acre re-creation of life 150 years ago

### Quintessential Quebec

**Quebec is the largest Canadian province in area, and the second largest in population. Its forests cover more than 750,000 km<sup>2</sup>, which is the size of Sweden and Norway together**

In 1988, a large part of the

Charlevoix region was designated a Unesco Biosphere Reserve. There are two national parks, Parc National des Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie and Parc National des Grands-Jardins

### **The 400-year-old Quebec City is North America's only fortified city**

Among the wildlife you may spot on a trip to Quebec are white beluga whales, black bears, moose and snow geese

### **Baie-Saint-Paul, where Cirque du Soleil originated in the 1980s, is a beautiful village full of art galleries, museums and boutiques**

Montreal was initially called Ville-Marie (City of Mary) until 1775

### **Local cuisine includes poutine (French fries and cheese curds drizzled with gravy)**



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HENRY GEORGI/CORBIS



Peace and quiet in a busy city Lake Ontario, the smallest of the Great Lakes, in Toronto