

Yonge-Dundas Square is a popular meeting place during the evening

# Toronto's vibe

PHOTOGRAPHS: TOURISM TORONTO

Toronto is a city that is constantly growing and for the four million tourists that flock there every year, it is full of surprises. Not only will their thirst for culture be quenched but all are bound to pick up on its dynamic vibe. NICOLA HANCOX takes a look.

Toronto is hailed as one of the world's most multicultural cities," explains Lianne Hodgson, Director of Sales & Marketing at Toronto Languages Plus. The largest city in Canada, this ethnically diverse metropolis (49 per cent of Toronto residents are believed to have been born outside Canada) manages to make visiting students feel right at home. James Rice, Managing Director of Connect School of Languages, underlines that Torontonians are friendly people only too happy to interact with international students. "Our first instinct is to treat them exactly the way we treat every other Canadian. They aren't treated like tourists so it's excellent for their English and wonderful for them to understand the different cultures," he relates.

Called the city of neighbourhoods, Toronto is full of little cultural pockets where distinct communities can be found around every corner. "It seems that every major country is represented in Toronto," says Rice, "and we all get along! It's quite remarkable." Chinatown, Little Poland, Portugal Village and Greektown – reputed to have the second largest Greek community outside Greece – are just some of the microcosms students might stumble across while out and about. Hodgson notes that such exposure can only be a good thing and says they actively encourage students to get out and explore the city. "We encourage our students to enjoy some of the ethnic neighbourhoods such as hitting various little cafés, salsa clubs, and galeterias in Little Italy," she notes.

Such diversity makes dining out a particularly interesting experience and David Oancia, Marketing Coordinator at Hansa Language Centre, relates that students can sample cuisine from all over the world. "Students are forever on the never-ending search to find the best cheap restaurant. This in turn leads to debates about the merits, pleasures, displeasures, unbearable spiciness of Afghani, Korean, Vietnamese, Persian or Jamaican cuisine!" he exclaims.

Meanwhile, for those who prefer to try before they buy, Hodgson suggests students visit Toronto's largest marketplace, St. Lawrence Market (1). Here, more than 50 speciality vendors await hungry tourists with an array of meat, fresh fish, cheese and other produce. And once shoppers have emptied their wallets they can sample a speciality coffee at the gourmet coffee and tea boutique.

Toronto has experienced an architectural boom of late and there are plenty of buildings guaranteed to stun visitors. The Royal Ontario Museum (2) is one such example and has recently undergone a transformation with the opening of the new Michael Lee-Chin Crystal wing, which is an exciting mix of sharp-edged steel, glass and original brown stone. One of Toronto's most notorious super-structures is the

CN Tower (3). "Every student who comes to Toronto visits the CN Tower," notes Hodgson, and standing at 553.33 metres it certainly dominates the skyline. Holding the record as the world's tallest free-standing structure for 31 years, it was finally surpassed in height by the still-under-construction Burj Dubai in September last year.

With so many ethnic groups, street festivals are a regular occurrence and Oancia states that there are "over 150 street festivals in or around the Greater Toronto area". Caribana, one of the largest street carnivals in the world, is said to be unmissable and students really can lose themselves among the steel drums, calypso music and colourful costumes. For something a little more low-key, however, Hodgson relates that the historic neighbourhood of Cabbagetown holds an annual festival every September. "It is a festival dedicated to celebrating local artisans, live music, and local treats from the neighbourhood eateries," she notes. "There is a big street party with food stalls and live acts for two days."

The Toronto International Film Festival is reputed to be the second most important film festival after Cannes and anyone lucky enough to be in town in September will

be treated to more than 300 films at over 23 different downtown venues. Annual attendance often exceeds 300,000 and the festival itself has become as star-studded as its French equivalent. "Last September one of our Mexican students was so excited to see Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie just a few blocks from the school," exclaims Douglas McKibbin, Director of Marketing at Archer Education Group. The event also provides students with plenty of volunteering opportunities and many schools reflect that this is a popular way of getting involved in the local community.

According to Almira Mun, Marketing & Communications Manager at the University of Toronto, students can easily escape city life and enjoy the great outdoors all year round. "Toronto experiences the four seasons in a way that allows people to do all sorts of things depending on the season. For example, Dragon Boat racing in the summer, camping in the fall, in-line skating in the spring or skiing in winter," she relates.

Algonquin Provincial Park, located between >>



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## Agent viewpoint

"Toronto is an exciting and cosmopolitan city, but still keeps the safe and friendly atmosphere and has welcoming people. Being one of the major cities in North America, many Brazilians do see it as a reference and a place to go! They like the excitement, safety, nightlife, places to visit during the day, sports and events and possibilities of visiting other destinations not so far from Toronto – such as Niagara Falls, Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec and even New York! The city is well served with transportation and students can meet people from all over. Some Brazil-

ians see Vancouver as a bit of a distant place, with a bit less nightlife and shopping opportunities."

**Antonio Bacelar Jr, Via Mundo Intercâmbio e Turismo, Brazil**

"People who choose Toronto are looking for a large city which is safe and offers a lot of cultural and leisure-time attractions. Quite a few of them are hockey fans and they want to see the Toronto Maple Leaf team play. Some of them are also happy to have a destination that is one non-stop flight away from Switzerland. They enjoy the multitude of things that they can do in Toronto. There just are no limits! Toronto is

bigger than other Canadian cities and it is also more multicultural."

**Mary McKay Vilén, Canada Live, Switzerland**

"Clients choose Toronto as a study destination because it is close to Mexico and has many tourist attractions. It also offers a good quality of living. I think students like the fact that Toronto is close to other important cities. They enjoy travelling around and they like the different clubs and pubs that they have there. In comparison to other destinations I would say it is very similar to New York in the USA."

**Olga Garza, Canada Incredible, Mexico**

Georgian Bay and the Ottawa River in central Ontario, attracts more than 800,000 visitors each year and with more than 1,200 designated campsites in and around the area students will be able to join the crowd and camp under canvass for a couple of nights. There are also more than 2,000 kilometres of canoe routes awaiting keen adventurers, as Oancia explains. "Another popular and

unusual activity we have is a canoe camping trip through Algonquin Park. As you can well imagine, it is the ultimate Canadian experience," he says. Oancia adds that their school frequents the park so often park rangers have even named a lake after their group leader.

A trip to Toronto wouldn't be complete without experiencing Niagara Falls, located 120km southeast of Toronto. It is estimated that more than 168,000 cubic metres of water roars over the edge every minute in high flow. Hodgson underlines that the falls are "extremely beautiful in the winter" and group excursions to the site are a popular extra-curricular activity for many.

Toronto is the only Canadian city to represent six major league sports, including ice hockey, football, basketball, baseball, soccer and lacrosse and, consequently, watching a sports game is a popular activity among foreign students. Oancia relates, "The school buys bulk tickets for Toronto Raptors NBA basketball, Toronto Argonauts American Football, and professional hockey games."

Exploding with so many things to see and do, Toronto's students will be truly captivated by its people, culture and originality.

### Eaton Centre

The Eaton shopping centre is Toronto's most visited tourist attraction. The centre has a vaulted glass ceiling and its design has influenced shopping centre architecture throughout North America



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