

Ontario



Québec may be bigger, British Columbia may have more mountains, and Alberta is certainly flexing its economic biceps at the moment, but when it comes to culture, cuisine and sophistication, Ontario wins hands down. Sure, there are just as many empty, cold acres here as anywhere else, but when you're in Ontario, you can't help but feel a palpable connection with the rest of the planet. Forget ice fishing, conifers and bear for a minute – this is global Canada, big-city Canada, sexy, progressive, urbane Canada.

Most Ontarians live in the south within a few hundred kilometers of the US border, where winters are bearable and steamy summers lure folks outside. Toronto, Canada's largest city, is here – a blazing metropolis overflowing with multicultural arts, entertainment and eating opportunities. Ottawa, Canada's capital, is changing too. No longer a steadfast political filing cabinet, contemporary Ottawa is as hip as you want it to be.

Year-round, Ontario celebrates its diversity with a cavalcade of festivals. Thespians rejoice over Stratford's Shakespeare Festival and the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Connoisseurs of a more hedonistic activity – beer drinking – immerse themselves in Kitchener's Oktoberfest and the London Beer Festival, while a festival-free weekend in Toronto is an event unto itself.

Cities and festivities don't float your boat? Not far from the madding crowds, low-key agricultural towns and historic settlements define Ontario's country civility. And if you *must* seek out wildlife, there are some excellent national parks here too. From arctic Hudson Bay in the north to the temperate Great Lakes in the south you'll find more than enough boreal forests, undulating hills and vineyards to keep you feeling green. And don't forget Niagara Falls – if you've found a natural wonder more deserving of the adjective 'spectacular,' drop us a line.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Eat, drink and groove your way through **Toronto** (p103) – a truly global city – or emerging **Ottawa** (p238)
- Stare wide-eyed at the thunderous impact of **Niagara Falls** (p152)
- Spend a quiet evening along the picturesque **Thousand Islands** (p236)
- Set sail for chilled-out **Pelee Island** (p178), Canada's southernmost land
- Head for **Manitoulin Island** (p197) for a dose of aboriginal culture
- Paddle through the quiet waters of **Lake Superior Provincial Park** (p209) and **Pukaskwa National Park** (p211), pondering the meaning of life as the blazing sunset dips into the Great Lakes



History

When Europeans first stumbled through the snow into Ontario, several aboriginal nations already called the region home. The Algonquin and Huron tribes had long occupied the southern portion of the province, but by the time European colonization took hold in the early 18th century, the Iroquois Confederacy (aka the Five Nations) held sway in the lands south of Georgian Bay and east to Québec. The Ojibwe occupied the lands north of the Great Lakes and west to Cree territory on the prairies (today's Alberta and Saskatchewan).

The first Europeans on the scene were 17th-century French fur traders, who established basic forts to facilitate trade links with the Mississippi River. With the arrival of the British Loyalists around 1775, large-scale settlement began. After the War of 1812, British immigrants arrived in larger numbers, and by the end of the 19th century, Ontario's farms, industries and cities were rapidly developing. In the aftermath of both world wars, immigration from Europe boomed – Toronto has since evolved into one of the world's most multicultural cities.

An industrial and manufacturing powerhouse, Ontario is home to around 39% of Canada's population. Despite boom times in Alberta, Ontario remains the first choice of immigrants from across the globe, with solid employment prospects and Toronto's well-established immigrant support services proving a powerful draw.

Local Culture

Ontario sees itself as a civilized place – the pinnacle of multicultural Canada, detached from the rednecks out west and infinitely more sensible than the Francophiles in Québec. The good citizens of Toronto work hard and play hard, and are fond of making myopic comments like, "This place is so awesome – why would we want to go anywhere else?" The rest of the country finds this highly irritating, a reaction celebrated in the 2007 film *Let's All Hate Toronto*.

Outside of Toronto, however, you'll find most Ontarians to be rather mild-mannered folk – they know they have a high standard of living and access to all the world's bounty, but they don't feel the need to boast about it. Rural Ontarian towns are generally unassuming (and often unspectacular), but usu-

ONTARIO FACTS

Population 12,753,700

Area 1,076,395 sq km

Capital Toronto

Nickname The Iroquoian name for Ontario is *Skanadario*, meaning 'sparkling water'

Birthplace of Wayne 'The Great One' Gretzky (1961); prima ballerina Karen Kain (1951); co-discoverer of insulin Sir Frederick Banting (1891); Blues Brother Dan Aykroyd (1955)

Home to Canadian Rock: Bryan Adams, The Tea Party, Neil Young, Alanis Morissette, Jeff Healey, Rush, The Cowboy Junkies, Barenaked Ladies, The Tragically Hip etc...

Number of times the car stereo will play Bryan Adams' 'Cuts Like A Knife' on any given Ontarian road trip Seven

ally have some good pubs, B&Bs and farmers' markets selling high-quality local organic produce.

More than any other province, Ontario is hockey-mad. This is the home of Wayne 'The Great One' Gretzky, and right through the year, huge slabs of prime-time radio are given over to Toronto Maple Leafs and Ottawa Senators talk-back shows, spotlighting the failings of new recruits, dissecting Leafs' coach Paul Maurice's post-match interviews and debating whether or not *this* could be the year. The 'Sens' fell just short of Stanley Cup glory in 2007, but Toronto's 1967 Stanley Cup victory looks set to remain unsurprised for some time yet.

Land & Climate

From north to south, Ontario spans a whopping 1730km. It's mostly flat country (this ain't the place for downhill skiing), but is peppered with lakes and forests. The northern continental climate sees bitterly cold winters and mild summers. In southern Ontario there's a collision between cold air from the arctic north and warm maritime air from the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico. This creates steady precipitation throughout the year, heavy summer humidity and much milder winters than in the north.

That said, the entire province is blanketed with heavy snowfalls during winter. January averages are around -4°C on the Niagara Peninsula and -18°C in Ontario's northern zones. In the south, where most of the population