

Harbourfront	149
Financial District	150
Old York	150
Theatre Block & Entertainment District	150
Queen Street & Dundas Square	151
Yonge Street Strip & Church-Wellesley Village	154
Bloor-Yorkville	155
University of Toronto & The Annex	156
Kensington Market & Little Italy	158
Queen West & West Queen West	159
East Toronto	162
The Beaches	162
Greater Toronto Area	163

## Shopping ■

# Shopping

There's no denying it – Toronto is a city of shopaholics. In addition to the array of retail giants – many of which are not present in any other Canadian city – every main street, hip suburb and ethnic neighborhood of T.O. has its own treasure trove of independent shops and edgy boutiques. Armed with time and patience, fashionistas will uncover some extremely well-kept secrets, while more leisurely shoppers will enjoy the colorful and sometimes highly unusual shops in each of Toronto's districts. Vintage clothing, locally made artisan crafts, bookstores and a heaving local and international designer scene are all to be found amidst the vibrant cultural landscape, which has shoppers flocking from all corners of the country. And with tax refunds and attractive exchange rates for US and European visitors, Toronto is a retail haven for international travelers.

## Shopping Strips

Queen St W, east of Spadina Ave as far as the colossal Eaton Centre mall, was once known as 'the' shopping mecca. These days, the urban streetwear shops that remain punctuate a shiny parade of big-name retailers. Further west, around Trinity Bellwoods Park (or West Queen West as it's locally known), you'll find an enticing mixture of vintage, designer and specialty record shops as well as boutiques crammed with delights of a most unusual variety.

Bloor-Yorkville has long been known as the city's swankiest shopping district, a far cry from its early days in the '60s as the hippies' Flower Power quarter. Bloor's Vogue-worthy designer shops and sparkling jewelers complement the antique, fine-art and specialty shops sprinkled around Yorkville's narrow streets and along Yonge St in affluent Rosedale. If dealing with huffy salesclerks isn't your ideal way to spend a day – or your pocketbook simply isn't up to the task – it's still a great place for window-shopping and day-dreaming.

Chinatown, known mainly for its colorful markets and restaurants, sits just south of Kensington Market, Toronto's own vintage village, where bargains can sometimes still be found among the racks of leather jackets and boho-chic microshops. In Little Italy imported Italian fashions mix with the most up-and-coming in Canadian chic.

A landmark for students and followers of counter culture in all varieties, The Annex, just west of the University of Toronto's St George campus, is home to a mixed bag of specialty book stores, hip-yet-affordable local designs, and multilevel shops to please the most dedicated of film and pop culturites. Honest Ed's (p157), a bargain bazaar as old as time itself, is a must-see if only for the kitsch factor, and Markham Village provides a calming antidote of crafts, alt.culture locales and more niche bookstores.

## TAX REFUNDS

Visitors are eligible for refunds of the 6% federal Goods and Services Tax (GST) paid on nonconsumable goods and short-term accommodation, provided they spend at least \$200 and that each eligible receipt totals over \$50 before taxes. All original receipts (credit-card slips are not sufficient) must be stamped by customs before leaving the country, whether at the airport (*before* you check in!) or a land-border crossing, where you'll need to make your goods available for inspection.

Drivers can obtain instant cash refunds for claims of less than \$500 at participating land border duty-free shops, including those at Sarnia, Windsor, Niagara Falls and Queenston. Otherwise mail your stamped receipts within one year of the purchase date, along with boarding passes and a completed GST rebate booklet available at tourist offices or directly from the federal **Visitor Rebate Program** (☎ 902-432-5608, 800-668-4748; [www.cra.gc.ca/visitors](http://www.cra.gc.ca/visitors)). Allow four to six weeks for processing.

Don't be misled by private companies that distribute 'official tax refund' booklets at visitor centres and duty-free stores. These companies offer to obtain your refund for you and then take up to 20% (minimum \$10) for their services. But it's usually just as fast and easy to do it yourself.