

On Friday 26 October 2018, I was delighted to join a small group of Travel Agents on a 4-night trip, hosted by Jetset, to Canada's largest city Toronto. The city's motto is "Diversity Our Strength".

After meeting at Gatwick Airport and introducing ourselves over a bacon roll & prosecco (in the No. 1 Lounge) we flew economy class with Air Transat. We enjoyed the privileges of their Option Plus (approx. £50 extra each way) which entitles you to an additional 23 kg of checked baggage, check in at an exclusive counter, priority boarding and baggage handling along with an on-board comfort kit which consisted of a blanket, eye mask, neck pillow and a set of natural wood ear buds.

We arrived into Toronto Pearson International Airport Terminal 3 where we were met by Brian, a Toronto Canadian Tourist Board representative. Brian took us on the shuttle train to Terminal 1 where we caught the UP Express train to downtown Union Station which has a journey time of 25 minutes and operates every 15 minutes between 0500 and 0100. Traffic can be very heavy into the city so the train is often a much quicker and reliable option. We then hopped in taxis from Union Station for a short



CN Tower

journey to the Chelsea Hotel which was our base for the next 5 days. With just enough time to unpack & freshen up, we then went for an excellent supper at the Scaddabush Italian restaurant just across the road; it is advisable to book in advance as it gets very busy at peak times.

The next morning we were taken on a Niagara Falls Tour, operated by Greyhound, departing from the nearby bus station which was a ten minute walk from the Chelsea Hotel. The average journey is one hour 30 minutes and we were advised to layer up with clothes to accommodate both cold and warm periods throughout the day and take extra socks in case our feet got wet!

En route to the falls, we visited Niagara-On-The-Lake. Described as the prettiest town in Ontario, Niagara-On-The-Lake is a well preserved 19th Century Village in the heart of Ontario Wine Country hence; we were invited to take part in some wine tasting at a local vineyard.



Niagara Falls



Niagara Falls – in our ponchos

Niagara is deemed one of the greatest natural spectacles on the planet and despite seeing Niagara Falls on a grey, gloomy day, it was certainly spectacular. Included in the tour was a hearty lunch at the Sheraton Hotel with one of the most iconic backdrops

from the Massimo's Italian



Niagara Falls – view from Sheraton

Fallsview restaurant. After lunch we had a twenty-minute Hornblower cruise which left everyone soaking wet (ponchos are provided) but it was well worth it as it enabled you to get up close to each of the falls. (cont.)



We were then driven to Table Rock (top of the Canadian Horseshoe fall) for some more photo shots and were given time to browse around the gift shop.

At the end of the day we boarded the bus for our journey back to the Chelsea Hotel. A quick change of clothing and off out for supper at Red's Steak House which was just around the corner.

On Sunday morning we had an early rise for breakfast at the Hotel Sheraton Centre Toronto followed by a brief site inspection. The four star hotel is perfectly situated in the heart of the downtown financial and entertainment districts and its facilities include a gym and indoor pool. All of Toronto's attractions, from the Eaton shopping centre to the CN Tower, are within easy reach of this family-friendly hotel.

Niagara Falls – from Table Rock We had a Toronto city tour in a private luxury mini bus where we could sit back and enjoy the sights of the city's fascinating past and vibrant present unfold. This was followed by a Jazz brunch at the Hot House restaurant & bar, one of Toronto's destination food and wine eateries located in the historic St. Lawrence neighbourhood.

In the afternoon we visited Ripley's Aquarium of Canada. It is an awe-inspiring interactive attraction consisting of 9 carefully curated galleries, featuring one of the world's most extensive jellyfish exhibits, the longest moving sidewalk, stingray and bamboo shark touch pools and daily live dive shows.

The day ended back at the Chelsea hotel for a little relaxation before dinner at Pappas Grill for some traditional Greek food in Greek Town which was a 15 minute taxi drive away.

Monday was another early start with breakfast at the Chelsea followed by a site inspection of this property which is the largest hotel in Toronto with 1590 rooms. This hotel is centrally located, surrounded by good restaurants and plenty of shopping opportunities. The hotel will appeal to families as it offers a swimming pool, kids centre, teen lounge and a waterslide all located on the 2nd floor. However, the slide has limited opening times and out of season is only open at the weekends. There is an adult pool and gym situated on the top floor which has great views over the city.

From the Chelsea Hotel we hopped on the private luxury mini bus to meet the sales director of the newly completed Bisha Hotel Toronto (Part of the Loews Hotel Chain) for a hosted lunch & site inspection. It is a very high end contemporary hotel (used by lots of celebrities) that prides itself on its unique exquisite rooms and an amazing rooftop restaurant and infinity style pool with stunning views of the city and CN Tower. I personally found



View from the Bisha Hotel rooftop

the décor and lighting in the bar/lounge area too dark so that may not appeal to everyone.



Segway ride

After a delicious lunch, we boarded the mini bus again and made our way to the historic distillery for some beer tasting and a 25 minute glide around on a Segway. (cont.)

On Monday evening we participated in a 90 minute 'Original Haunted Walk of Toronto Tour'. We heard some of the most spine-tingling ghost stories from the earliest days of the city, including haunted theatres, unsolved mysteries and the terrifying encounters at Mackenzie House. We will never look at the city the same again!

It was good to end the night with dinner at the Marché, located in the heart of downtown Toronto. Marché impressed me with its extraordinary open atrium atmosphere and its open-market setup. It offers a wide range of fresh produce all of which are prepared right before your watchful eyes.

Our last day started with breakfast and a site inspection at the Fairmont Royal York. A Toronto landmark, Fairmont Royal York is located in the heart of Toronto's downtown shopping, entertainment and sightseeing districts, across the road from Union Station. I found it to be a very impressive and excellent standard of hotel. It was, at the time of our visit, undergoing refurbishment to the reception/lobby and ground floor restaurant. There was minimal disruption though as they masked everything very well and rerouted guests within the building.

After the Fairmont, we did our final site inspection at the Hyatt Regency Toronto hotel. Like others, it is in the heart of the entertainment district, steps away from theatres and sports venues, galleries, museums and shopping. A very clean and comfortable hotel that serves all individuals including families well, with a gym and rooftop outdoor seasonal pool. I would recommend upgrading from the standard room to a suite as the supplement seemed very reasonable and the suites were well worth the extra cost. Some rooms have views of the CN Tower but this can only be made as a request as they are unable to guarantee the location of your room.



Views from and of the CN Tower

A short walk from the Hyatt and we were at the foot of The CN Tower. This tower defines the Toronto skyline at 553.33m (1,815ft 5in) and is Canada's most recognizable and celebrated icon. The CN Tower is an internationally renowned architectural triumph, an engineering Wonder of the Modern World and a must-see for anyone visiting Toronto. The current entrance fee starts at CAD \$38 per adult and during busier months it is best to avoid arriving between 11 am- 3pm as it gets very busy then. I would recommend making a reservation to have either lunch or dinner there, as this will bypass any queues and it great value for money. A two-course lunch is CAD \$60 pp and dinner CAD \$65 pp which includes entrance to the lookout level and glass floor and whilst dining you have fantastic views of the city in the revolving restaurant. For the very brave....they also offer an edge walk where you are suspended out from a ledge at the top of the tower.



Toronto Beach

Our final afternoon allowed us free time to spend either shopping or sightseeing. I took advantage of the beautiful sunny day to enjoy the scenery from the harbour front. From here, you are able to take a boat trip around the Toronto islands which gives you a great view of the Toronto skyline. I sat on the man-made beach for a while and then walked the full length of the harbour to Billy Bishop Airport. This small domestic airport is across the water but you are able to walk through a tunnel that links the harbour front to the terminal on Toronto Island. There is also complimentary ferry which takes vehicles as well as passengers on the short two minute journey.
(cont.)



View from Billy Bishop airport

The city has a fabulous underground system more than 19 miles long known as the Path. It is a network of underground pedestrian tunnels, elevated walkways connecting office towers, hotels and shopping centres in downtown Toronto. The temperature in Toronto is pleasant during the summer months but can be as low as minus 7 degrees Celsius in the winter, but with the underground system you are able to make your way around a large part of the city without having to venture out into the cold.

I would like to thank Jetset and Toronto Tourism for their hospitality over a very enjoyable five days.

Karen Swann