

BY JOSEPHINE MATYAS

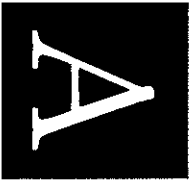
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM FORBES

KINGSTON

fall in love (again) with

be a tourist in your own town





few weeks ago, I was zipping along the sidewalk on Clarence Street — head down, my brain tangled in the latest list of things to do — and late for something, no doubt. For one brief second, I glanced up, then stopped dead in my tracks. In front of me was the perfect juxtaposition of stone buildings, rooflines and green space. A Kodak moment, if ever there was one. And not just a photo opportunity: from the sidewalk I could see that there were markers and plaques. History, as well. This is, after all, the city that was the first capital of Upper Canada, and the place where Sir John A. Macdonald practised law, lived, and is buried. You knew that, didn't you?

As a travel writer, I log tens of thousands of kilometres looking for photo opportunities and destinations just like this one on Clarence Street. But the reality is that as a Kingstonian, I need only walk a few blocks from my front doorstep to trip over one . . . and another, and another, and another. They've been here all along — together with the museums, parks, waterfront, festivals, tours, music, art and architecture that make up the fantastic city that is our home. We call it The Limestone City (thanks to the chunky ledge of ancient limestone that blankets the region). Others save time and funds all year, and then call it their "vacation destination."

WHOS PROMOTING THE CITY?

It may not keep him awake at night, but Rob Carnegie, director of tourism at the Kingston Economic Development Corporation, is a man with a clear vision of what successful tourism looks like

for the city. "Our main goal is making Kingston top of mind in the surrounding target markets — especially Toronto and Ottawa," he says. "We're all about building partnerships within the city, with organizations like Kingston Accommodation Partners Inc. (a not-for-profit organization that brings together Kingston accommodation and attraction partners to focus on the promotion and development of the local tourism industry) to market our waterfront, our shops, our farmers' market, our restaurants, and all that can be experienced in Kingston."

Carnegie believes in the power of these tourism partnerships. "It's been key. It's put Kingston on the map in our target markets." An important spinoff has been the development of a main Tourism Kingston website (www.tourism.kingstoncanada.com), a one-stop portal for all there is to see and do, and places to stay and dine.

"Because of Queen's University and the Royal Military College, we also have a huge market of visiting friends and relatives here in Kingston," says Carnegie. "Plus, the city is a very popular retirement location. These visitors are a huge segment of the market and we're hoping that they'll come to visit relatives, will recognize Kingston as a leisure destination, and then choose to come back again for a few days and see more of it while on holiday."

Through his position in the tourism field, Carnegie is certainly plugged in to all that Kingston has to offer visitors. His own personal favourites include Fort Henry, cruising the Thousand Islands, strolling through downtown on a summer's evening and having brunch for one of Kingston's many festivals. "We all have housing tractors for one of Kingston's many festivals. We all have the opportunity to be ambassadors, to showcase our city, and to show those close to us what's best about living here."

The hometown cheering squad isn't the only one boasting about Kingston. *Monoculture* magazine recently published its annual list of the best places to live in the country, and Kingston moved up the ladder to the number four position (it was ranked the sixth-most-desirable place to live in last year's ratings). The study looked at factors that matter a lot to Canadians: weather, jobs and salaries, home prices, crime rates, local medical care, and transit to and from workplaces. Ottawa, Victoria and Fredericton earned this year's top three spots.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE AREA?

So, what is it that gets guys like Carnegie so charged up about our city? You can summarize it in just three words: location, location, location. Just like the real estate mantra, successful tourism is all about the surroundings. Without a great setting, you've got . . . well, you've got nothing to work with and even less to market to the outside world. And Kingston has those golden, natural assets in spades: as the gateway to the Thousand Islands, the city is surrounded by freshwater lakes and forests that are instead of in their southern reaches of the province. Located at the confluence of Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River and the Rideau Canal, it held a strategic military position during the mid-1800s, so the area is steeped in a rich history. Its brief stint as the

opposite pages, Kingston Confederation Tour Trolley; right, Mackintosh Castle





left: Fort Henry National Historic Site; next page: view of Kingston from Wolfe Island Ferry

first capital of Upper Canada — and its place as Ontario's oldest city — left behind a legacy of classical architecture from the 19th century. That's why every block of the city's downtown core boasts a limestone building or a stately Victorian home (many have been transformed into bed and breakfasts or inns).

WHY LOCALS SHOULD BE LOOKING CLOSE TO HOME

So, it's a no-brainer: a great setting, with so much to see and do right here under our noses. So the next time you're planning a vacation, why not make it a staycation? Here's just a smattering of why Kingston is an ideal hometown vacation destination.

WATER EVERYWHERE

1. Just a stones throw from the city, you can tap into the recent hoopla of the Rideau Canal's new UNESCO designation (the first in the province). Kingston Mills is the closest lock to the city, and its lockhouse provides a boat into the life of an 1839 soldier. The Rideau Canal is North America's oldest continuously operating 19th-century canal — with 24 lockstations, most with hand-operated cranks — maintained by Parks Canada to provide a navigable channel through the rugged Canadian Shield of eastern Ontario. The canal was built in the early-1800s as a secure wartime route to move troops and supplies out of reach of American forces, although it was never used for military purposes. www.rideauheritage.com

2. What could be more of a water destination than an island? If not in the water, how about surrounded by water? Wolfe Island — the largest of the Thousand Islands — is just a short, five-minute ride from downtown Kingston, and if you walk on or take your bike, you can skip the lineup of cars. If you've never done so before (or even if you have), ride the ferry to and from the island in one fall swoop just for the fun of it. If you want to make it a full outing, pack a picnic, get off on the other side and explore the island's highlights: berry picking in season, swimming and bird watching at secluded Big Sandy Bay (www.bigandybay.ca) or cycling one of the island's three marked routes past rolling fields and wetlands. You can't get lost: it's an island (www.wolfeisland.com). There are also ferries to nearby Howe Island and Antlers Island.

3. There should be a rule that you can't call yourself a Kingston resident until you've taken a cruise of the harbour and the Thousand Islands. There is no excuse: in the summer they run every day; some have musical entertainment, others serve you candlelight dinners. All you have to do is get yourself down to the docks and they'll take care of the rest. How hard can that be? www.woodslandcruises.com

Million-dollar vistas of the city
Hop onto the ferry to Wolfe Island and do the return trip just around dusk (or foot and by bike as well, plus there is no waiting in line). You'll watch the lights pop on all over town, and the skyline of the city and Fort Henry lake on a warm, new form. Guaranteed to leave a lump in your throat.



Get an ice cream cone and drive to the top parking lot at Fort Henry. Spread a picnic blanket at the crest of the hill and feel the world slow down (or get a trail pass and enjoy a waterside stroll at Point Henry). Instant vacation mindset. You'll wonder why you haven't been doing this every week you've been living here.

Take a sightseeing flight over the city for a real bird's eye view (www.offtraining.com or www.kingstonflyclub.com).

Bike, walk, jog or drive the roadway around the Royal Military College. It's another wonderful spot for a picnic with that million-dollar view.



If you crave water, you'll also want to check out:
• Diving one of Kingston's many freshwater shipwrecks — many are more than a century old
• The Canadian Olympic Training Regatta Kingston (CORK) — translated, this annual waterfront event means that lots of sailors are in town (www.cork.org)
• Kayaking, canoeing or sailing with one of the local clubs — they have courses, training and regular outings that make discovering the water's pleasure almost effortless.
• Swimming and hiking at Frontenac Provincial Park (www.frontenacpark.ca)

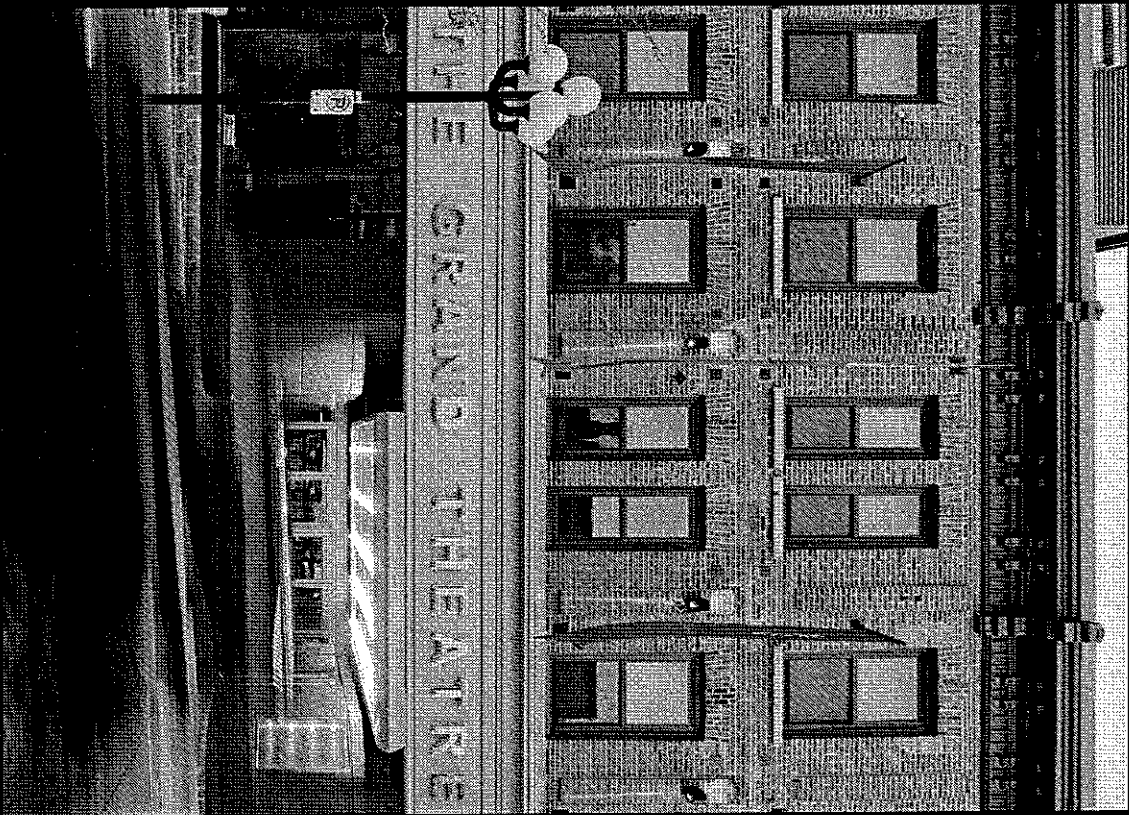
ACTIVE CHOICES

1. Got two extra hours and some tread left on your walking shoes? The City of Kingston Waterfront Pathway starts from the Rideau trailhead in the west (center and park at Trailhead Place, just past the Lake Ontario Park entrance on King Street West) and follows the Kingston waterfront (with a few small detours through the core of downtown), ending up at The Woolen Mill at the foot of Cataract Street. From up to stem, the pathway measures in at eight km, but you can join the marked trail anywhere along its route. It's a good bet that you've walked parts before — every Kingstonian has probably been there and not known it — but you can find details on the complete route at www.cityofkingston.ca. It's a great way to show off the best of the city to your guests, and burn up to about 400 calories while you're out there.

2. The Cataract Regional Conservation Authority (CRCA) operates and maintains natural sites that are some of the jewels of the Kingston region. Does Lemorne Point ring a bell? How about the beaches and trails at Gould Lake, or hiking and canoeing at Little Cataract Creek? The CRCA maintains three other conservation areas, and each is a unique eco-system (www.catacraregion.on.ca). Also under the umbrella of the CRCA is the Cataract Trail, which cuts through the rugged Canadian Shield, connecting history and nature, and is open year-round for joggers, hikers, mountain bikers, bird watchers and stikers (www.ridauinfo.com/central).

3. You may not even know that the City of Kingston dabbles in the business of recreational nature trails, but in 2006, the city purchased the old Kingston and Pembroke Railway right-of-way and groomed the trail for safe recreational use. Hikers, skiers, cyclists and equestrians can now enjoy the 15-km K&P Trail, which is a vehicle-free route from the edge of the city to the heart of the surrounding countryside. www.cityofkingston.ca





left The Grand Theatre

If you're looking for more activity, you'll also want to check out:

- Running pathways around Royal Military College — great views of the city are a bonus

- Cataract Canoe Club (www.cataractcanoe.org.ca)
- Kingston Velo Club (www.kvc.ca)
- Rideau Trail Association (www.rta-trail.org/)

THE HISTORY TRAIL

1. You live here... have you been to Fort Henry lately? The undisputed "King of the Hill" — did you know it's the largest fortification west of Quebec City? — is a National Historic Site, a part of the newly designated Rideau Canal UNESCO World Heritage Site and a living museum of 1800s military life. The current fortification was built after the War of 1812 to defend the intersection of three important waterways and trading routes: the Rideau Canal, the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. You can tour the Fort, catch a Sunset Ceremony (Wednesday evenings through July and August) or settle in for one of the special events, like the performance of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture by the Kingston Symphony, complete with cannons fired by the Fort Henry Guard and a fireworks finale. www.forthenry.com

2. Every Kingston elementary school student has ridden the Confederation Tour Trolley. What's your excuse? The city's signature red trolley bus has its all the highlights: from the Royal Military College, Fort Henry and Fort Frontenac in the east end to Kingston's penitentiaries, Portsmouth Olympic Harbour, Bellevue House and the campus of Queen's University. You can sit and relax through the whole 90 minutes; your pedometer won't register a single step.

3. Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, really did live here (the grounds at what was once his "country estate," Bellevue House National Historic Site on Centre Street, are restored to circa 1840) and is buried here (the Cataract Cemetery entrance off Swenheim Road just north of Princess Street). Known as the country's founding father and a passionate defender of centralized government, Macdonald also facilitated construction of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway; his presence is strong here in Kingston — streets are named after him, statues preside over green spaces (check out City Park at the corner of King and West streets) and historical plaques mark the buildings where he lived and practised law.

If you like history, you'll also want to check out:

- The city's last gas lamp at the intersection of King Street East and Lower Union Street

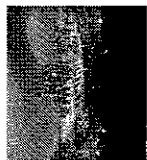
Harvey Rosen,
Mayor, City of
Kingston
DOWNTOWN

"Take visitors downtown. Whether it be a walk through the rows of market vendors in the square (or a shake in the winterfest), a delicious meal with friends and family at one of the unique restaurants, shopping for a hidden treasure in one of the inviting stores, stopping to catch a cool breeze alongside the scenic waterfront or seeing a concert or show at the Grand Theatre or the K-Rock Centre, Kingston's downtown has something for everyone."



Rob Carnegie,
Director of Tourism,
Kingston Economic
Development Corporation (KEDCO)

FORT HENRY
"Fort Henry is a huge highlight for me. The Fort is that anchor attraction for Kingston; it's a draw that ties in our history and is part of the new UNESCO designation. The team there is constantly developing new products and that's exciting."



• The First Canal Day Walking Tour, showcasing the highlights of downtown Kingston history (www.visit.com/sjwgojs)

- The Hallowed Walk of Kingston, focusing on the city's ghost stories and offbeat history (www.hallowedwalk.com/)
- The city's four Martello tower fortifications were built in the mid-1800s to protect the harbour and the entrance to the Rideau Canal trade route. The Murray Tower National Historic Site (at the foot of Barré Street) is open to the public during the summertime.
- St. Paul's Churchyard (corner of Queen and Montreal streets) contains the graves of many of Kingston's original English families.
- Free guided tours of Kingston City Hall with its magnificent stained glass, artwork and council chambers
- Kingston City Market — one of the country's oldest — operates Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday in Market Square behind City Hall. Also home to an antique market, outdoor classic movies, music events and winter-time skating rink.

MUSEUMS CHECKLIST

1. Every kid loves the Pump House Steam Museum with the two flywheel steam engines that date back to the late 1800s. Steam was the fuel of choice in the last century, and it was steam power that ran just about everything going, engines, pumps and locomotives. Kingston's industrial past is all on display here. Plus — as any kid will tell you — it's on so cool when the steam whistle blasts. www.cityofkingston.ca
2. The Marine Museum of the Great Lakes is where you can learn about Canada's great "inland seas."
3. Kingston is sometimes nicknamed "Prison Capital," and you can just go with the flow at Canada's Penitentiary Museum (housed in the former wardens residence) where you can trace the history of the federal penitentiary system from the days of harsh punishment through modern programs of counselling and rehabilitation. www.pentmusem.ca
4. The Frontenac County Schools Museum in Battlefield Village houses both a gallery and a schoolroom. A wide collection of archives — including logbooks, slates, scrapbooks, photos, textbooks and desks — invite visitors to experience school as it would have been at the turn of the century.

If you're looking for a bit more of a brain challenge:

- Bet that Queen's Observatory has a bigger telescope than anything you can find at home. Public open houses

FESTIVALS

1 Limestone City Blues Festival is four days of invigorating blues — in downtown clubs and open-air concerts www.kingstonblues.com

2 The annual Kingston Buskers Rendezvous should not be missed. Street performers will be on every corner to celebrate the festival's 20th anniversary this summer. The Rendezvous is consistently named as one of the three best street performer festivals in North America www.kingstonbuskers.com

3 The Kingston Sheep Dog Trials is one of the summertime events for dog lovers. Held every August in Grass Creek Park — this year the local event celebrates 20 years — the dogs and their handlers get to strut their stuff www.cityofkingston.ca

or enough for you? How about:

- Chilifest: bring your appetite, a bowl and spoon www.chilifest.ca
- Taste of Kingston outdoor food festival in Confederation Park — a chance to nosh your way through dishes from some of Kingston's best eateries
- First Capital Days Celebrations for those who just can't let go of the notion that Kingston once held the title of Upper Canada's first capital (www.firstcapitaldays.ca)
- Kingston Jazz Society Festival (www.kingstonjazz.com)
- Canadian Guitar Festival (www.canadianguitarfestival.com)
- The Skys the Limit Festival (www.skysfestival.ca)
- FebFest winter carnival (www.febfestkingston.com)
- FanFest Arts and Crafts Show, music, arts and crafts (www.cityofkingston.ca)
- Kingston Fall Fair (www.kingstonfallfair.com)
- Grass Roots Music Festival (www.kingstonmusicfest.com)
- For a complete list of events, visit www.kingstonandeventsonario.ca

Visit kingstonlife.ca and answer our online poll question about where you plan to be a tourist in Kingston this summer

N

or more arts and music:

• The Kingston Symphony always has a full season of world-class music right here, in your hometown. The Spring Music Lovers' House Tour is especially popular www.kingstonsymphony.on.ca

• Don't be surprised if one of your next-door neighbours is leading a secret life as a member of the Cantabile Choir — there are now several different choirs (and 250 singers) in the organization, all of which have regular performances

twice a month give you a chance to spy on those elusive celestial objects

• Did you know that diabetes was once diagnosed by tasting the patient's urine to see if it was sweet? Discover this and other gems at the Museum of Health Care on George Street, the country's only museum dedicated to the history of health and health care www.museumofhealthcare.ca

• The Kingston Archaeological Centre, who knew that humans have occupied the land at Kingston for about 8,000 years (give or take a few centuries)? Arrange a walking tour through time www.cartintoqueens.ca

• The Miller Museum of Geology at Queen's University traces the geological history of the Limestone City

• The Military Communications & Electronics Museum is the largest specialized communications museum in North America www.c-and-e-museum.org

• The MacLachlan Woodworking Museum highlights the history of Canada's wood-working www.cityofkingston.ca

• The International Hockey Hall of Fame and Museum — forget the one in that "other" city, this is an original and the spot where you'll find the exclusive Don Cherry Exhibit www.ihhof.com

CULTURE

Of course, you know all about Kingston's beloved Grand Theatre, which just re-opened following a major renovation and offers a wonderful variety of events all year long. But there are many other cultural activities you'll want to check out. Among them:

1. Local adults often overlook another school trip favourite, but the Agnes Etherington Art Centre boasts a rich collection of artwork of national and international prestige www.aac.ca

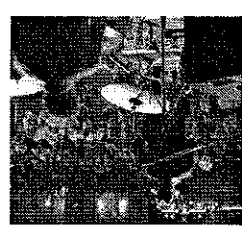
2. All summer long you can enjoy free concerts (lunch and evenings) through Music in the Park at Confederation Park and Music in the Gardens in Lions Civic Gardens

3. St. George's Cathedral Noon-Hour Concert Series provides centre stage to local musicians who perform inside the historic cathedral

Doug Ritchie,
Managing Director,
Kingston Business
Improvement Area
Downtown

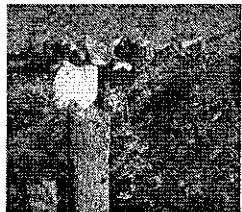
"I have a regular stream of visitors in the summer months. I've had a packed house for both the Buskers Festival and the Limestone City Blues Festival. That also includes enjoying the waterfront and, of course, lunch on an outdoor patio."

Kingston. For a small city, there are lots of options, lots of genres."



Carolyn Bonta,
Commander,
Cataraqui Canoe Club

"Whenever we bring friends from out of town, we try to get them out to places like Gould Lake or Frontenac Park to get them up to the lake and Sheld area and to see just how beautiful it is."



Emily Fennell,
Independent Musician

LIVE MUSIC

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