



TORONTO POLISHES BIG-LEAGUE IMAGE

By Dan Schlossberg

Don't let anyone suggest Toronto isn't in the big leagues.

Even when winter grips most of the Canadian continent, fans keep warm by screaming their lungs out for the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs, burning the hot stove league for the baseball Blue Jays, and wondering whether unwitting hotel guests will provide another X-rated show for SkyDome baseball fans.

When local pro teams hit the road, fans flock to The Hockey Hall of Fame and Canada Sports Hall of Fame, which share a building at the Canadian National Exhibition.

Canadians are conditioned to be good sports; who else could smile even when their teeth are chattering? Maybe their sparkling environment has something to do with it.

Toronto's streets are clean. The natives are friendly. The mass transit system offers service instead of graffiti.

The city is the capital of Canada in every way but one: the seat of government is located elsewhere.

Peter Ustinov describes Toronto as "New York run by the Swiss." Fortune magazine calls it "New York without crime, corruption, or pollution." And tourism thrives to the tune of \$3 billion per annum.

Moonstruck was filmed here. So were The Fly, Three Men and a Baby, and dozens of other popular movies.

Toronto has also given the world insulin, Standard Time, and Superman (creator Joe Schuster based The Daily Planet on The Toronto Daily Star when creating the Clark Kent character in 1938). By that time, The Star's list of distinguished alumni already included the name of Ernest Hemingway. Silent film star Mary Pickford and Fiddler on the Roof producer Norman Jewison also came from Toronto.

The city is a stage: the third largest on-location film town in North America (behind Hollywood and New York) as well as the third largest theater town in the world (behind New York and London). Its 3.5 million residents enjoy 130 theater companies on 45 stages.

Ethnic diversification is staggering: there's a Little Italy, a Greek quarter, three different Chinatowns, and more than 70 ethnic groups -- statistics that support the 1989 UN designation of Toronto as "the world's most ethnically-diverse city."

International enclaves are everywhere. Beyond the fruits and fish of the Kensington Market are fresh-baked Mexican tortillas. Not far away are Greek bakeries and Far Eastern kitchens. Many of the city's 4,000 restaurants purchase fresh produce at St. Lawrence Market, a large farmer's market on bustling Front Street.

Queen Street West is the place to go for hip clothes, coffee houses, nightspots, and used book and records. Creations from the world's top fashion designers are in the Bloor/Yorkville area. And Spadina Avenue, between Adelaide and College, is the heart of the city's fashion district.

Toronto meant "place of meeting" to the Huron Indians and maintains that reputation today. Canada's business center, cultural capital, and entertainment mecca sits in a prime location on the north shore of Lake Ontario -- 90 air minutes from 60 per cent of the United States and 90 minutes by automobile from the New York State border.

Shops and restaurants line Yonge Street, stretching 1,100 miles from Toronto harbor to James Bay, and the Underground City, where three miles of tunnels link 1,000 retail stores. Much of the local population hangs out there during the cold-weather months.

While Yonge is the longest street in the world, the underground is the world's largest subterranean complex. Shops, restaurants, banks, services, theaters, and clubs stretch six blocks north and south -- half of it under the financial district.

On cold winter days, when less hearty people would be hibernating, half the city packs the underground.

Even without a car, getting around is easy: the Toronto Transit Corporation (TTC) brags that it runs the safest, cleanest, most efficient system in North America.

It certainly has the largest streetcar network -- so extensive, in fact, that the Gray Line offers a vintage trolley tour that covers many of the city's historical sights in 90 minutes.

Unlike other cities, which have tried to cultivate tourist favor by painting buses in trolley regalia, Toronto has the real thing. Its trolleys are streetcars, running on rails imbedded in the streets and powered by overhead electric lines. At rush hour, motormen jump out with crowbars to move rails manually and reroute their cars.

There's no talk of ripping out the rails here: the trolleys -- especially the old-time red ones -- are far too popular. Free transfers between streetcar and subway lines helps.

No wonder the SkyDome has only 350 parking places: fans leave their cars home.

Since its opening in 1989, the ballpark has challenged the adjacent CN Tower as Toronto's top tourist attraction.

It took three years to build the \$550 million structure, topped by a retractable roof 31 stories high. A 32-home subdivision could be contained in the eight acres inside.

The stadium holds 53,000 seats -- most of which are occupied when the Toronto Blue Jays are home. The Rolling Stones also packed the place, which converts to a football configuration for the Toronto Argonauts.

The SkyDome has gained some unwanted notoriety as the world's only X-rated ballpark: fans with binoculars have been known to spot amorous adventures through the windows of the SkyDome Hotel, high above center field.

Seventy of the hotel's 348 suites have stadium views -- exposing unwary occupants to thousands of potential Peeping Toms. If they keep their clothes on, hotel guests can enjoy a luxurious private vantage point -- with or without crowd noise (windows on the ballpark side are remarkably sound-proof when closed).

As much a tourist attraction as the ballpark, the hotel has a lobby with a 16-screen video wall that captures the on-the-field action, while its split-level suites have TVs on both levels. Live views are available from Windows on the SkyDome Restaurant, Sightlines Lounge, and Cafe on the Green, four SkyBoxes that hold 25 people each, and the rooms that face the field. Guests who stay there find there's no stranger feeling than waking up in the morning, drawing the curtains, and coming face-to-face with an empty ballpark.

While many hotel guests come for the novelty, many come for the convenience: proximity to the tower, convention center, and theater district as well as the ballpark.

The convenience is so good that several players actually live at the hotel.

Also in the SkyDome complex are the largest McDonald's in North America, a health-and-fitness club, meeting facilities, and SkyPlace, a maze of offices and retail outlets.

Right next door is the CN Tower, the corporate symbol of Canadian National Railways. The tallest freestanding structure in the world (1,815'5"), it was built to improve communications systems blocked by existing skyscrapers. The \$57 million tower, constructed over a period of 40 months, opened in 1976.

The tower still draws 1.6 million visitors per year. They come for the view -- 100 miles in all directions from the Space Deck -- as well as the revolving restaurant and the world's highest nightclub.

Though the tower's four elevators move 1,200 people per hour, waiting lines are often long. Many guests simply sample the construction film "To the Top" and move on.

Once a year, climbing the stairs is an option: the first 1,760 steps of the 2,570-step staircase are opened as a special United Way fund-raiser. Getting down is faster -- especially for

stuntman Dar Robinson, who has jumped off the tower several times.

Conditions are hardly conducive to such feats. Windows are armor-plated to protect against turbulence and the tower has an intentional sway to compensate for days when extreme winds whistle off Lake Ontario. Lightning hits the tower 75 times a year but three copper strips running down the sides provide adequate grounding.

The tower is both a source of radio-TV signals and a beacon for visitors heading for downtown. Visible even from distant points across the lake, it stands in marked contrast to such historic structures as St. Lawrence Hall (1851), where P.T. Barnum first introduced Tom Thumb; the Gooderham Building (1892), the local version of New York's Flatiron Building; and Union Station (1927), where 22 pillars of Bedford limestone support a soaring Italian tiled ceiling that looks like a hangar for the Goodyear blimp.

Casa Loma, a 98-room, \$3.5 million mansion built from 1911-14 by industrialist Sir Henry Mill Pellatt, is probably the most unusual structure in the city. Built because its owner had a fascination with European castles, it contains 25 fireplaces, 30 bathrooms, 5,000 lightbulbs, a shooting gallery, and three bowling alleys.

The only castle in the world with an electric elevator and indoor pool, it also has fountains, gardens, and an 800-foot tunnel leading from the main house to the stables. Its days as a private residence ended in 1923 when Sir Henry couldn't keep up with rising costs: \$12,000 for taxes, \$15,000 for fuel, and \$22,000 for the staff of 40 servants.

Ferries docked at the foot of York Street give hour-long harbor tours and connect the mainland with nearby islands. One of them has a marker indicating that Babe Ruth hit his only minor-league run there in 1914 while playing for Providence of the International League.

Harbourfront, sandwiched between the lake and SkyDome complex, is a prime place to walk. A fine example of waterfront restoration, it combines the shoreline with open parkland, office/retail space, and enough room to stage 4,200 shows, events, and activities per year.

When winter's winds whip the waterfront, try Bloor/Yorkville district; the one-time hippie haven is now the home of the city's most exclusive shops and restaurants -- definitely the place where one might spot a visiting celebrity (like Toronto native Dan Aykroyd). Pedestrians will also see why Toronto is sometimes called the City of Steeples.

History comes to life at the University of Toronto, founded in 1827 -- seven years before the city was incorporated.

Seven of the original structures still stand at Fort York, where American forces attacked the entrenched British during the War of 1812. In retribution, the British invaded Washington, D.C. and set fire to the President's residence. The building survived but the scorched walls had to be whitewashed so many times that the structure became known as the White House.

Locals like to say the city is worth more than New York: the Mississauga Indians set its value at \$1,700 and sold it to the British in 1787 for flannel, food, and axes.

The Royal York Hotel, a Front Street landmark, reflects the city's British heritage. Visitors wishing to rub shoulders with celebrities, however, may have better luck at the Four Seasons, the home-away-from-home for presidents, politicians, and dignitaries from around the world.

It's even tougher to choose a restaurant.

Toronto is certainly a city to be savored and not gulped. It is diverse, dynamic, and endearing -- and sometimes a bit mysterious.

No one, for example, has figured out why the architect of the Ontario Science Centre painted his signature in Japanese on the roof. It is visible only to those who fly over it.