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Vogue's Guide to Canada's Cultural Capital: Toronto

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by RANDI BERGMAN



After years of being described as “just like New York but smaller,” Toronto has some legitimate reasons for newfound bravado. One of the most diverse cities in the world, Canada’s cultural capital is home to an incredibly rich variety of neighborhoods and atmospheres (see [Chinatown](#), [Little India](#), [Little Italy](#), [Little Portugal](#)); its annual Pride Week is one of the world’s largest, boasting upwards of a million visitors each year; and the art, fashion, and restaurant scenes—not to mention its coffee culture—is booming. Here, we take a look at the best that



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Art Gallery of Ontario

Since its [Frank Gehry](#) renovation back in '08, the [AGO](#) has become bold in its scope, hosting everything from an exhibit on Michelangelo’s drawings (currently on view) to one about [Patti Smith](#)’s photographs and personal objects. The [Royal Ontario Museum](#) also boasts standout architecture, quite literally, jutting from its storied walls with the [Daniel Libeskind](#)—designed deconstructivist crystal.

Photo: Courtesy of Stephanie Yeow / @sheephania



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Bar Isabel

Wunderkind chef [Grant van Gameren](#) has dominated Toronto’s food trends of late, first with the carnivorous [Black Hoof](#) and now with [Bar Isabel](#), the Spanish-spun tapas restaurant unanimously loved for its oaky, hole-in-the-wall ambiance and its spicy boquerones. Another of the city’s recent titans, [Anthony Rose](#), holds court on Dupont Street with a troika of hotspots, [Rose and Sons](#), [Big Crow](#), and [Fat Pasha](#), which all ride the Eastern European Jewish-inspired schmaltz trend.

Photo: Courtesy of Jennifer W. / @beanspork



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Park Life

Come summertime, [Trinity Bellwoods Park](#) is a veritable hipster haven of picnic blankets and contraband microbrews. Meanwhile, the city’s largest green, [High Park](#), is a cherry blossom paradise each April. For something a bit further out of the city center, [Scarborough Bluffs](#) is thrilling with its spectacular cliffs.

Photo: Courtesy of Pauline / @xopaulineexx



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Casa Loma

[Casa Loma](#), a Gothic Revival castle built in the early twentieth century remains a curious, fantastical must on any first-timer’s list. For the sadcores, nearby [Mount Pleasant Cemetery](#) is an equally, if a bit eerie, step back in time, with graceful tombs dating as far back as 1876.

Photo: Courtesy of Hailey Hye-young Park / @park.h.hailey



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Vintage

A Goldilocks gem of the vintage world, Toronto rivals the best of them for pieces that are neither pricey nor overly mass. The west end’s many outposts, [69 Vintage Chosen](#), [Silver Falls](#), [I Miss You](#), and [Penny Arcade](#) are superb for of-the-moment essentials, while classier joints like [Gadabout](#), [Magwood](#), and [Cabaret](#) draw the line at anything post-seventies. [Kensington Market](#), a hippie paradise of vegan cuisine, tacos, and peasant blouses is also a must-see nearby.

Photo: Courtesy of Bianca Venerayan / @biancavenerayan



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Sam James Coffee Bar

This hip [chain](#) of coffee joints is the kind of place where you’ll forgive baristas for answering “Yes, we have 2 percent” to a request for skim milk because they are just so good-looking. The city is snobbish about its caffeine fix, which happily translates to exceptional roasts from [Sense Appeal](#), [Fahrenheit](#), and the beautiful [Dineen Coffee Co.](#)

Photo: Courtesy of Isabelle / @chew.this



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TIFF Bell Lightbox

The city’s ever-growing Toronto International Film Festival birthed a permanent home few years back, which will play host to “[Stanley Kubrick: The Exhibit](#)” through 2015.

Photo: Courtesy of Shivani Kohli / @hopefulvagabond



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Daniel Faria Gallery

[Daniel Faria](#), a latter day Troy Donahue with a roster of notable Canadian artists (most notably, [Douglas Coupland](#)), exhibits from a former garage on the city’s west side. Other arbiters of cool like [Clint Roenisch](#), [Neubacher Shor Contemporary](#), and [Hermann & Audrey](#) keep things similarly interesting.

Photo: Courtesy of Shari Drenstein / @shariorenstein



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The Drake Hotel

With its many outposts (a chain of boutiques, a Financial District eatery, and a cottage country inn), [The Drake Hotel](#) is at the heart of Toronto’s hip transformation. The [Gladstone Hotel](#) is a worthwhile stop nearby, each hotel room uniquely designed by local artists.

Photo: Courtesy of Kristina / @kristina_ezhova



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Libations

Classy cocktails and craft beer are more common than dance parties, the former of which are best concocted at the [Carbon Bar](#), [Black Hoof’s Cocktail Bar](#), and the above-mentioned [Bar Isabel](#). The snack/drink mix is done craftily at [416 Snack Bar](#), with its rotating menu of miniatures.

Photo: Courtesy of Michelle Pinchev / @citybyheart



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Shopping

Toronto’s impending luxury deluge is not without precedence, with [Holt Renfrew](#) having held the high-end chalice for years and [The Room at Hudson’s Bay](#) upping the ante with a focus on Brit-lead avant-garde (an [Isabella Blow](#) retrospective is on view through the month). Meanwhile, smaller boutiques like [119 Corbo](#) boast an Antwerp Six–bent selection of Dries Van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester, and Maison Martin Margiela.

Photo: Courtesy of Daniela Fers / @danieliafers

