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Eat, drink and be merry in Toronto



The author and her family have some 'selfie' fun at the home base of their Toronto stay, the stylish Chelsea Hotel in the city's downtown. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

TORONTO: LAND OF ACTIVE AND YUMMY FAMILY FUN

CATHY DONALDSON
FOR THE TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Is it possible to eat, drink and exercise your way through a city?

During a recent visit to Toronto, my family foursome did its best to try.

In fact, we discovered that Canada's largest city offers all the ingredients—including fantastic dining options, marvellous mar-

kets and beautiful surroundings—to yield a delicious recipe for active and yummy family fun.

Our adventure began not long after we touched down at Toronto's Pearson Airport. We drove our rental car to the heart of the city and checked in to our home base for the stay, the Chelsea Hotel, at Yonge and Gerrard Street West.

It was our first trip to the Chelsea. We found the stylish and massive (1,590 to be precise!) the ideal

steps from great shopping at venues like the Eaton Centre and close to theatres, nightlife and attractions galore.

Part of the Langham Hospitality Group, the Chelsea is a terrific family destination, with four restaurants and lounges, separate adult and family recreation areas and pools, including "Corkscrew," downtown Toronto's only indoor waterslide. There are also services like a Family Fun Zone with Camp Chelsea, the Kid Centre, and Club 33 Teen Lounge.

Of all the hotel's amenities, my adult daughters, husband and I especially enjoyed our workouts in the Chelsea's Deck 27 gym and pool areas with their

spectacular city views.

After burning some calories, we refueled at the hotel's Market Garden, which we liked for its convenient grab-and-go atmosphere. It was an easy solution for a quick meal before we headed out.

Unlike previous junkets to Toronto that saw us take in the more traditional sights, this trek had a foodie flair. The eating extravaganza began that night at the Amsterdam BrewHouse on Toronto's waterfront. The sprawling brewery and restaurant is known for its craft beer and local grub.

Before I devoured my pick—the Smoke House Burger—I felt it important (strictly for research purposes, of course) to sample

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Spectacular city views await guests on the sundeck outside the Chelsea Hotel's Deck 27 gym and pool area. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

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From chocolate bonbons to cakes, eclairs to these macarons, Delysées—part of Culinary Adventure Co.'s King & Queen West brunch tour—is a feast for the eyes and taste buds.

PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



The author sampled Amsterdam BrewHouse's Richmond & John beer flight, three small but tasty glasses of the brewery's lighter beers, 3-Speed, Amsterdam Blonde and Raspberry Wheat. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Kensington Krawl guide Clair Parker holds sourdough brown bread and rhubarb cheesecake danish samples for tour participants during a stop at Blackbird Baking Co. on Baldwin Street. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Toronto: Land of active and yummy family fun

FUN →E1

some of Amsterdam's beers. I went with the Richmond & John beer flight, three small glasses of the brewery's lighter beers, 3-Speed, Amsterdam Blonde and Raspberry Wheat. I was particularly fond of 3-Speed, a nice beer to sip as my clan and I yakked about soup to nuts while enjoying a stellar view of Lake Ontario in the setting sun.

The next morning, after another dutiful workout to shed a fraction of the previous night's calories, we began our search for more interesting edibles, this time at Savour Toronto's "Kensington Krawl" food tour.

We met our enthusiastic guide Clair Parker and fellow participants at a coffee shop for a three-and-a-half-hour culinary excursion, on foot, of Kensington Market. The market emerged around 1910 when Jewish immigrants settled in the neighbourhood, with many selling goods from pushcarts and horse-drawn carriages. Over time, it evolved into a bustling area of narrow streets with homes and small stores featuring merchandise sold by a diverse mix of immigrants.

As Parker led us from stop to stop, we learned of the history while sampling an eclectic array of items, such as individual charcuterie boards at Sanagan's Meat Locker, Applewood smoked cheddar and other divine dairy fare at Global Cheese, and an authentic Belgian waffle at Wafels & More.

"People are getting more concerned about where their food is coming from so they love coming here," Parker noted as regular customers shuffled in to Blackbird Baking Co. while we chomped pieces of sourdough brown bread and rhubarb cheesecake danish.

We were sufficiently stuffed on samples when the tour came to an end at Maison Close 1888, a bar and kitchen tucked inside a quirky Victorian home on Kensington Avenue. We cooled our heels with a cocktail and chatted in agreement about the excellent value of the \$65 tour.

A few hours later, after a necessary nap back at the Chelsea, we were off

to dinner.

Based on a friend's recommendation, we booked a table at Mildred's Temple Kitchen in T.O.'s Liberty Village neighbourhood. Owners Donna Dooher and Kevin Gallagher were committed, I read on the restaurant's website, to providing locally sourced, seasonal ingredients, prepared simply and sumptuously.

Reality did not disappoint.

Our family quartet (and an added boyfriend) were escorted to a comfy table at one end of the restaurant's sleek interior. Both younger and not-so-young in the group thought the place had a cool vibe and modern feel. The dishes were equally fresh and intriguing.

I couldn't pass up Mildred's Duck and Waffles, a savoury waffle topped by a confit duck leg drizzled with wild blueberry and green peppercorn chutney, rhubarb gastrique, all adorned with a sunny duck egg. Though it sounded wild for my fairly conservative taste buds, I was glad to have made the call and gobbled up every lovely morsel.

Equally deserving of drools were the choices the others enjoyed, the Wellington County grilled strip loin steak served with a red wine and shallot demi, and MTK's Best in Burger. But top accolades went to the sublime dessert we shared - a caramel pecan square covered in chantilly cream and rich, caramel sauce. (If there is a recipe for happiness, this will be forever mine.)

Somehow one of my daughters and I rolled our well-fed frames out of bed the next morning to run nine kilometres and abide by a program we were following at home. Our hour jog from the Chelsea to the waterfront, along scenic Queens Quay West and back, zipped by, though we did make a few obligatory selfie stops.

After a quick shower, it was time to eat again.

For this round of our gastronomic spree, we tried Culinary Adventure Co.'s three-hour brunch tour of the King and Queen West area, ranked one of the world's hippest

neighbourhoods for its streets filled with local patisseries, bars and one-of-a-kind restaurants.

We met our amicable tour guide Ian Risdon, a long-time restaurateur, at Portland Variety, a quaint café where we filled up on caffeine and taste-tested what is arguably Toronto's best chocolate chip cookie.

Sugar buzz complete, the walking, talking, and eating shifted to high gear. Highlights included a scrumptious Filipino breakfast of garlic rice, spicy pork, eggs and mixed greens at Lamesa; a decadent Nutella-filled pastry treat from Sud Forno; Killer Bee pizza slices with mozzarella, calabrese sausage, serrano peppers, pickled red onions and honey at North of Brooklyn; and a fresh-from-the-oven buttery croissant (along with some gorgeous sweets) at Delysées.

Between consumption points and a stroll down Graffiti Alley - where comedian Rick Mercer does his famous rants - Risdon answered the group's many questions and provided insight into the Toronto food scene.

"About 4,500 restaurants open yearly and about 4,400 close," he said. "It's a saturated market."

The good news for visitors: there's no shortage of ways to please your palate.

Considering the wealth of information garnered and the multitude of good eats at places our family might have never considered, the tour's \$99 price tag seemed reasonable.

That night, we skipped more eating in lieu of another family fave: comedy.

At the famed Second City, we caught *Everything is Great Again*, a laugh-out-loud show with a hilarious cast of young comedians who gave us two hours of pure, non-eating-related entertainment.

And, yes, I wore my loose-fitting pants.

Cathy Donaldson

is a writer based in Moncton. During their adventure, the Donaldsons were guests of Tourism Toronto and the Chelsea Hotel. For more information about Toronto, visit seetorontonow.com.



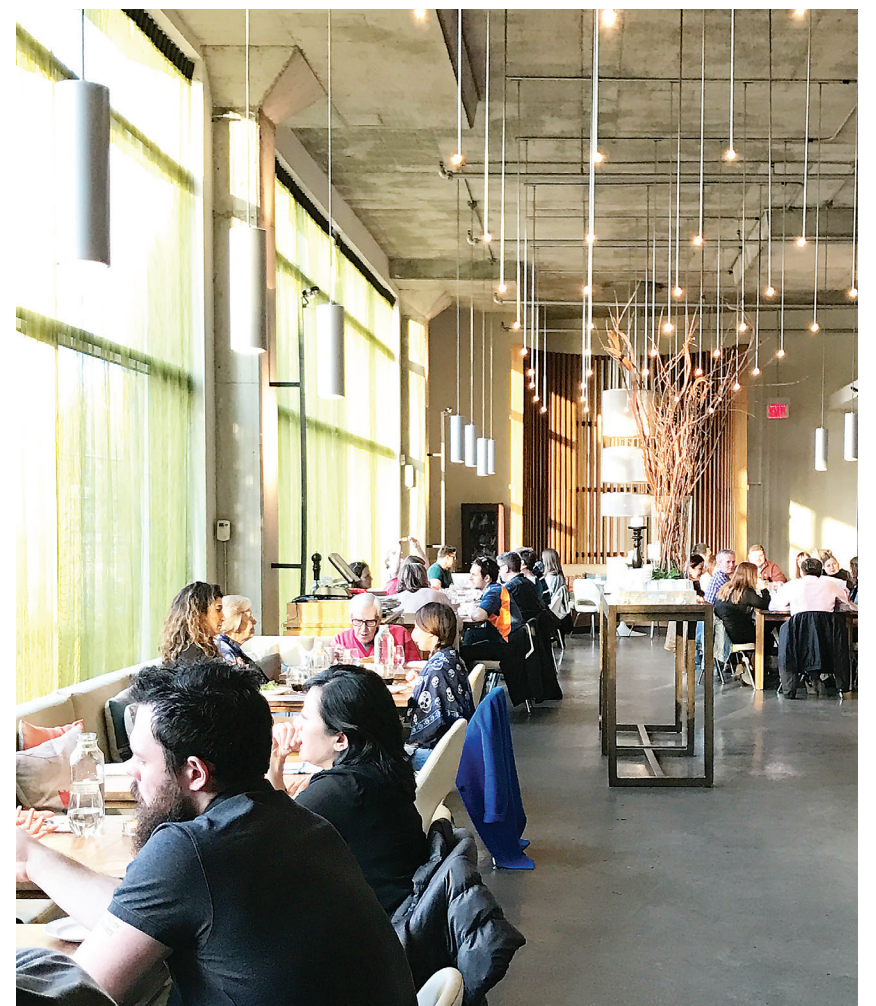
Individual charcuterie boards featuring meat selections and a Scotch egg were a hit during the author's visit to Sanagan's Meat Locker during the Kensington Krawl. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



The author's husband, Keith, left, and daughters, Sidney, centre, and Sarah, right, pose in front of Toronto's iconic sign at Nathan Phillips Square. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Culinary Adventure Co.'s three-hour brunch tour of the King and Queen West area, ranked one of the world's hippest neighbourhoods, included a stop at Lamesa for a scrumptious Filipino breakfast of garlic rice, spicy pork, eggs and mixed greens. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Mildred's Temple Kitchen in TO's Liberty Village neighbourhood had a cool, modern vibe and proved true to its word for making simple, sumptuous dishes with locally sourced, seasonal ingredients. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Culinary Adventure Co. tour guide Ian Risdon answers questions while taking participants for a stroll down Graffiti Alley, where comedian Rick Mercer does his famous rants. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Top accolades during the visit to Mildred's Temple Kitchen in TO's Liberty Village went to this dessert, a caramel pecan square covered in chantilly cream and rich, caramel sauce. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Culinary Adventure Co. tour guide Ian Risdon, a long-time restaurateur, answers his tour group's many questions, providing insight into the Toronto food scene. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



The author, right, and her daughter, Sidney, ventured out for a morning run to work off some calories but made time for a few 'selfie' stops. PHOTO: CATHY DONALDSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL