

Toronto:

New City in the New World



Peter Ustinov once observed that Toronto seemed to be New York City, run by the Swiss. Indeed the people of Switzerland, known for their clean pristine landscape and propensity for precision would be readily "at home" in this city of 3.5 million — Canada's largest urban centre.

What is one to make of this "new city" in the New World? At first glance, it may appear American with its ubiquitous grid of highways and buildings. While Toronto is seen to spread out like Los Angeles and have as many suburbs as Detroit, the comparison is superficial only.

For one thing, Toronto manifests an architectural continuity stretching outwards from the city's core in a manner quite different from most American cities. It also displays a continuous canopy of green, formed in part by its extraordinary system of natural ravines, and in part by its unique urban forests in extensive low-rise residential neighbourhoods.

Toronto's name is of Indian derivation and means "place of meeting." This is apt since long before it was settled, native peoples passed through the area following a trail and canoe route that was a portage between lakes Ontario and Huron. The Toronto Passage, as it was known, was used by French explorer Étienne Brulé as early as 1615 and was popular with French fur traders.

During the 1780s, the United Empire Loyalists — American colonists who supported the British cause during the American Revolution — moved north and settled around the upper St. Lawrence River and lower Great Lakes. In 1834 the site was incorporated as the City of Toronto with an elected civic government.

With the arrival of the railways during the 1850s, the city's regional grasp was widely extended. Wholesaling, banking and railway

entrepreneurship grew accordingly, and Toronto was made the capital of the province of Ontario at Canadian Confederation in 1867.

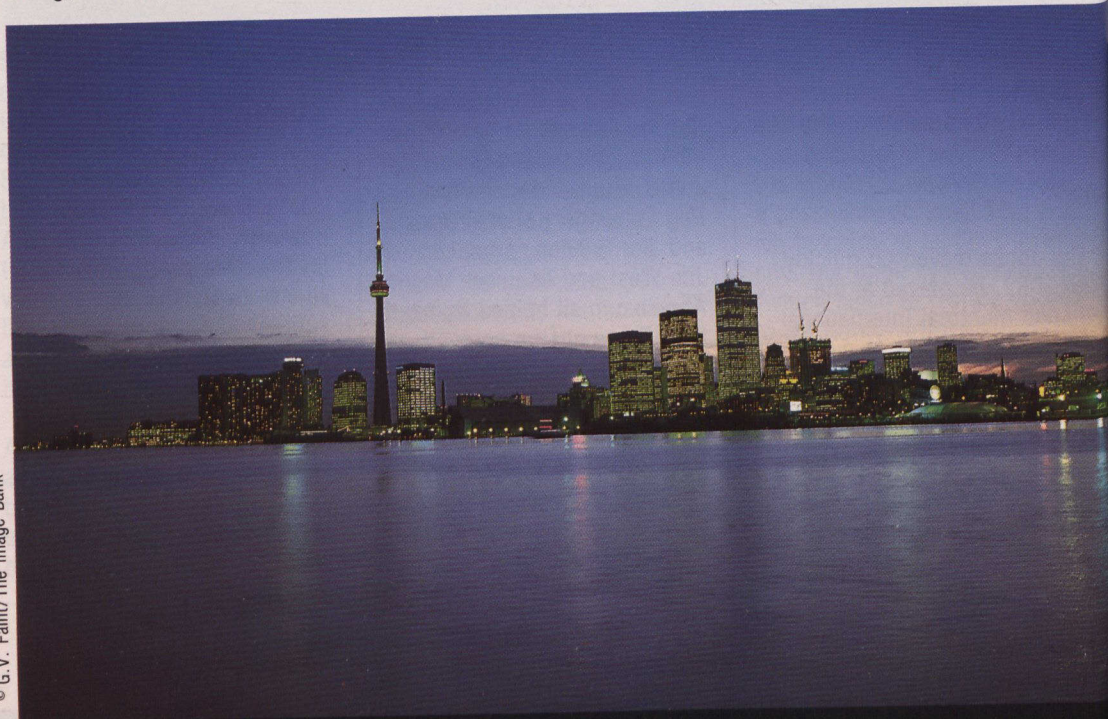
Today, Toronto is the pre-eminent centre of commerce and industry in Canada. Visitors (including France's President François Mitterrand) invariably remark on the thriving architectural culture that is everywhere in evidence here, whether in the dazzling downtown sculpture garden of gleaming towers or the carefully maintained residential areas, many of them restored for a new and vital existence.

From the observation deck of Toronto's landmark CN Tower, the world's tallest free-standing structure at 553 m, the contemporary city stretches to the north, east, and west horizons, covering 5 600 km². To the south it is bordered by beautiful Lake Ontario. Toronto's physical features include a natural

harbour sheltered by sandy islands, backed by gently rolling, well-watered, fertile country. The area has a fairly mild climate, by Canadian standards, with winters much less severe than on the Prairies or in the Maritimes for instance.

In economic terms, Toronto's growth is indisputable. Over the past five years, property values in the downtown core have doubled. The office vacancy rate has hovered near 8 per cent, well below the 18 per cent average of other major North American cities. Last year, retail sales jumped 12 per cent to \$20 billion, unemployment dropped to less than 4 per cent, 75 000 new businesses started and 17 million tourists spent more than \$2 billion.

Toronto's skyline features the landmark CN Tower, the world's tallest free-standing structure.



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