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STEPPING OUT IN A REVIVED TORONTO

CELEBRITIES looking for a cheap laugh or aiming for a permanent spot in quotation books should be banned from making comments about countries or cities. It took decades for Melbourne to live down Ava Gardner's flippant comment during the filming of *On The Beach* that it was a great place to make a movie about the end of the world. Toronto, too, suffered from an out-of-date image for years after Peter Ustinov dubbed the city - New York run by the Swiss - even though it has long been one of the most dynamic places in North America.

Toronto's chrome and glass skyline has sprouted a new crop of skyscrapers over the past few years. Yet the dominant building remains the CN Tower, which held the title of world's tallest building for 34 years until it was surpassed by the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. To compensate for the loss, the 116-storey tower opened the

trademark blue titanium and houses the world's largest collection of Henry Moore sculptures. One hundred and ten new galleries were added to the first art gallery Gehry ever visited (his grandmother lived across the road). The most impressive being the 200m-long Galleria Italia which snakes around the front of the building and almost "forces" light into the building. Torontonians like to quip that the AOG is Gehry's only work in Canada if you don't count the sandcastles he made as a child.

Within a few minutes walk you'll find the most famous of Toronto's major museums. Daniel Libeskind, another stalwart of architectural tourism, designed the somewhat controversial addition to the ROM, the Royal Ontario Museum, the largest museum in Canada. Completed in 2007, the crystal-like design looks as if a giant prism of glass has been welded

no slouch when it comes to being a style magnet, either. Opened just under two years ago, the hotel is slap in the middle of Toronto's late-night action corridor between King St West, Queen St West and Chinatown. Many people stay here just for the views of downtown Toronto, the CN Tower and Lake Ontario from the huge roof-top terrace, anchored by a heated infinity pool. The 24-hour diner-style restaurant attracts party types before and after a big night out - with and without champagne or a glass of locally-grown wine from the Niagara Peninsula, Canada's largest wine-growing region.

Celebs like Lady Gaga and Andre Agassi prefer the more discreet charm of the Soho Metropolitan, known as the Soho Met. Shoe-horned into a smart apartment block close to the CN Tower, you won't have to venture far afield for smart bars, cafes and restaurants. The

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EdgeWalk last August. Billed as the first attraction of its kind in North America, thrill-seekers - and I don't use that term lightly - can stroll around the top of the building's pod with no guard-rail and just a 1.5m-wide transparent ledge under their feet. There are safety harnesses attached to an overhead rail, of course, but the 30 minute shuffle could feel more like an eternity for anyone hit by a sudden attack of vertigo. And it wouldn't be smart to have a shot of Canadian Club Reserve whisky beforehand to steady your nerves, either.

Personally, I prefer staying closer to the ground at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Redesigned and extended in 2008 by local boy-made-good, Frank Gehry, the exterior is clad in the star architect's

on to the side of the old museum, which walks an eccentric but highly successful path of combining natural history with the decorative arts. You can see the dinosaur skeletons from the outside, but you'll have to venture inside to eyeball an eclectic collection that ranges from Chinese imperial robes through arts and textiles from Africa, the Asia-Pacific and Europe, and a stuffed moose.

There's nothing like an elderflower and Campari cocktail or a Moosehead lager after wearing out the shoe leather. And the barman at the Toronto Thompson hotel is an absolute master when it comes to mixing and pouring drinks. Part of the Thompson boutique hotel line-up with outposts in New York, LA and Chicago, the first "foreign" Thompson is

rooms are decked out in warm beige and chocolate, and the bathrooms get the thumbs-up from those who think that a long soak is a necessary component of a relaxing holiday. But if top-quality sushi or Canadian whiskies (sample Alberta Springs for a real treat) and live jazz in a glam setting are more your style, The Drake - quirky yet supremely stylish with only 19 rooms - is the place to be seen. The hotel's Corner Cafe is a haven of invert snobbery where many of Toronto's models come to chow down on that homeliest of treats - home-made scones. Many of them can also be found on King St West, which resembles a fashion catwalk on most weekends. A fitting development for a former garment district that experienced a long overdue

revival in the 1980s and '90s. It comes as a surprise to many visitors, but Canada has pursued an even more expansive multi-cultural immigration policy than Australia. Toronto's web of minority neighbourhoods feature cheek-by-jowl restaurant enclaves from Little Italy through Little India, Gay Village and not one but three Chinatowns. The constant that binds them together is the uniformly high quality of the food.

St Lawrence Market started life 200 years ago when Toronto was still little more than a fur-trading town and it's still a major force in the city's life with over 120 vendors and stalls. A grazer's heaven, it was voted one of the 25 best markets in the world by *Food & Wine* magazine. There might be little left of Toronto's historic core, but the man to help you get the most out of strolling past Old City Hall and the colonial churches whose iron grip on the city's lifestyle lead to the label "Toronto the Good", is Bruce Bell. One of the most entertaining tour guides I have encountered anywhere, I highly recommend making a booking (www.brucebelltours.ca).

A bar crawl is a must, too. There's plenty of British-style pubs from the Black Bull Tavern, which boasts the largest outdoor patio in the city, to the Bow and Arrow where you'll find 27 micro-ales. Forty brews are on tap at C'est What, including the bar's own hemp ale. At the other end of the spending scale is the Canoe Restaurant & Bar. Located on the 54th floor of the TD Bank Tower, it's not only one of the best restaurants in Canada, the brilliant views are as breathtaking as the food.

But whatever you're looking for - from student watering holes like Squirly's through "date" bars (try Sutra), funky dives (head to Sweaty Betty's) and vodka bars that wouldn't be out of place in St Petersburg (go to Pravda Vodka Bar) - Toronto delivers in spades. 🍷



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 SPARKLING CATEGORY 2011

"Nice champagne yeast characters on the toasty nose, some toasty complexity on a palate with excellent structure and good depth of yeasty flavours with balanced acidity"

WINESTATE MAGAZINE



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