



Parliament Hill, Ottawa

# WANDERING THROUGH ONTARIO

Canada's second-largest province contains a treasure trove of activities

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ith over 415,000 square miles of area, Ontario is Canada's second-largest province, bordering four of the five Great Lakes and boasting 2,390 miles of coastline. From the country's capital of Ottawa to the amethyst mines of Thunder Bay—and all points in between—this neighbor to the north offers a wealth of historic, natural, and cultural sites worth exploring.

Parliament Hill is the historic governmental center of Canada, overlooking the Ottawa River. Rideau Hall, the residence of the governor general of Canada, is open to the public at no charge for guided tours through the state rooms where the governor general fulfills official duties and welcomes dignitaries. The grounds are also accessible year-round.

Two hours southwest of Ottawa, en route to Toronto, sits one of the Canada's oldest and most notorious prisons—the first facility of its kind in British North America. First opened in June 1835, the Kingston Penitentiary housed dangerous criminals until it closed in 2013. Since that time, seasonal tours of this National Historic Site have been offered to shed light on the life of inmates, including stories of riots, escapes, and notable figures who spent their days and nights confined behind these formidable walls. Across the road, the former warden's house called Cedarhedge now serves as the award-winning Canada's Penitentiary Museum.

This bustling provincial capital is home to countless attractions, including the



## Ontario's Provincial Parks

There are 330 provincial parks throughout Ontario, encompassing more than 18 million acres. Here are a few of the top group-friendly parks, according to the Ontario Parks Department.

### Bronte Creek Provincial Park

*Oakville*

Hosts seasonal events including Maple Syrup Festival, Ghost Walks, and Victorian Christmas

### Killbear Provincial Park

*Nobel*

Located on Georgian Bay with opportunities to hike, paddle, and swim while experiencing the region's picturesque landscape

### Pinery Provincial Park

*Grand Bend*

Open year-round with sandy beaches, 10 hiking trails, and a great visitor center

Ripley's Aquarium of Canada with its 20,000 aquatic animals and the Royal Ontario Museum, offering a range of exhibits on natural history and ancient civilizations. The 1,815-foot CN Tower stands out along the waterfront skyline with observation decks, the revolving 360 Restaurant, a hands-free external walkway, glass floors, and floor-to-ceiling windows for panoramic views of the city and beyond. Group rates are available for both dining and the observation platforms for approved operators.

The Distillery District—named for the 19th-century whiskey distillery that once operated there—winds along cobblestone streets where visitors can indulge in a craft cocktail or a wood-fired pizza, shop for local art, or take in a live performance. See the city from a different vantage by venturing out in Toronto Harbor and Lake Ontario aboard



Gallery of Birds,  
Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto

the Kajama, a 165-foot three-masted schooner. Or, hop aboard the ferry to Toronto Island Park—a group of 15 islands interconnected by bridges and pathways. Don't miss the 1808 Gibraltar Lighthouse—the oldest existing light on the Great Lakes and one of the city's oldest structures.

An astounding 3,160 tons of water flow every second from the Niagara River over the brink of three waterfalls—Horseshoe (also known as the Canadian Falls, the largest at 173 feet tall), American, and Bridal Veil—collectively regarded as one of Seven Natural Wonders of North America. The Hornblower catamaran cruises up close to this one-of-a-kind attraction during a one-hour tour, available April through November.

The 520-foot Skylon Tower features two restaurants accommodating to groups—the world-famous Revolving Dining Room and the Summit Suite Buffet. The indoor and outdoor observation decks are open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., allowing for jaw-dropping falls views. Special rates are available for groups of 20 or more. All spaces are open year-round, with each season giving off its own unique vibe.

If time permits, jaunt over to Niagara-on-the-Lake with its shops, eateries, and nearly two dozen wineries. The only lakefront tasting room is Konzelmann Estate Winery, which traces its roots to 19th-century Germany. Visitors can partake in a variety of delectable tasting experiences including a junk food pairing, sip and paint events, and fireside flights.

Discover the natural history of Sault Ste. Marie by land or water. The Agawa Canyon

Tour Train offers a 114-mile, 10-hour trip, showcasing the rugged beauty of Algoma Country and the Canadian Shield with a 90-minute visit at the Agawa Canyon, only accessible by rail. Trips are offered Aug. 1 through early October. Travel through both the Canadian and American locks (passports not required) aboard the "Miss Marie" during a two-hour boat ride. The vessel holds 100 passengers and group rates are available for bookings of 20 or more. Both excursions sell out, so it is advised to book well in advance.

Start your visit in Thunder Bay with a visit to the Thunder Bay Museum, and uncover the area's heritage and local culture with three floors of both long-term and rotating exhibits. Throughout the summer, 75-minute docent-led walking tours travel past architecturally significant and historically relevant sites. Five self-guided walking tour routes, showcasing 117 sites, are accessible for free through the new Thunder Bay Tours app.

Sail Superior operates a fleet of four vessels offering catamaran and sailing trips out in Lake Superior, including short harbor tours, sunset cruises complete with wine and cheese, extended day trips, and even multiday excursions. For a cool hands-on experience, head to the Amethyst Mine Panorama in search of the "jewel of the gods"—the amethyst, the official gemstone of Ontario. A 5-acre aboveground quarry is open for the public to harvest these purple shaded variations of quartz for just \$5 per pound. Rock hunting is open daily, from June 1 through Oct. 1. 📍