

EVENTS BARS + CLUBS HOTELS **PRETEND IT'S PROM NIGHT ALL OVER.** With mints on your pillow instead of cockroaches. [click here to find hotels](#) MOVIES RESTAURANTS toron be in st



T.O's un-tourist guide

For a real taste of how we live in this part of the world – the nicer bits, anyway – the Sunday Star humbly offers its first alternative guide

July 29, 2007

1. Quad-hopping and rooftop quaffing

Hidden within the University of Toronto's Gothic revival buildings are the quadrangles – so cooling in the summer, so *Brideshead Revisited*. On the east side of St. George St. is Knox College (1915), its quad romantically overgrown, its leaded windows closed, a fountain gurgling. Next, University College (1892), with cloisters and mature maples; Hart House (1919), a more formal and open quad, often used for receptions; and Trinity College (1925), where a medieval knot garden is being built. Nearby Philosopher's Walk leads north to Bloor St. W. and the rooftop bar of the Park Hyatt, or the stunning/scary view from the Panorama Lounge on the 51st floor of the Manulife Centre.

2. Berczy park

Contrasts tell stories, which is part of the magic of Berczy Park, a little triangle of green and shade shoved against the glass and steel towers of downtown. Without the towers, it's just green space; with them, it's a beckoning oasis. Truth told, it wasn't even meant to be a park. The city bought the land, behind the Gooderham Flatiron building (1892), in the early 1970s to house the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts. When that was built across the street instead, locals petitioned for a park. Named after painter William Berczy (1744-1813) — an early settler whose best-known work is a portrait of the Mohawk chief Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant) — the park is the perfect spot to enjoy a leisurely noon-hour by the fountain. Just don't forget to bring along a peameal sandwich from nearby St. Lawrence Market.

3. Tommy Thompson Park

Officially, at least, it's Tommy Thompson Park, though in local parlance it's more commonly called the Leslie St. Spit or simply, the Spit. The latter name does resonate with the park's origins as a massive landfill, like some huge, pocked tongue sticking out into Lake Ontario. But what that moniker misses is nature's subsequent conquest in creating a great wilderness anew. To wit: After crossing the little red bridge along the main road (approximately five kilometres out), follow one of the little paths to the right. You'll end up overlooking a sleepy lagoon with a beaver den at the far end, next to a huge colony of cormorants nesting in the trees. It's almost like walking into the pages of a *National Geographic* special on the Everglades.

4. Park Dream

The course of true love travels west on the King St. car, yes it does. Up Roncesvalles to the Thin Blue Line, the sweetest little cheese boutique at Number 93B. Your heart melts at the sight of the Ciel de Charlevoix, which you purchase with cranberry and hazelnut crisps, a piece of pâté. Olives of course. And stout bread. Stroll now into High Park, wending through the main gate on Parkside Ave., up to the amphitheatre where you spread your blanket on cool grass, share your picnic, and await the arrival of Puck and Oberon, and the latest CanStage performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The hour of 8 arrives. The play's afoot. Night falls. Stars pepper the sky. You surrender.

5. Gerrard India Bazaar

Toronto is known for its little neighbourhoods, but Little India remains an off-radar gem, bursting with flavour and colour on Gerrard St. E. between Greenwood and Coxwell Aves. It's best to start in the afternoon. Snack first, then shop. Try a shammi kebab in a bun with mint and chutney, a Pakistani college favourite, and a kulfi iced pop. Then check out the strip for new DVDs or CDs, visit Nucreation (1414 Gerrard St. E.) to look at sarees. Buy some paneer or good garam masala to take home from one of the many grocers.

Make the climax a trip to Toronto's longest-standing construction site: the Lahore Tikka House. Aside from offering excellent biryanis and butter chicken, they've been building the new restaurant for three years.

6. Dufferin Grove Park

Not so far from the madding crowds of downtown, Dufferin Grove Park – on the east side of Dufferin St. across from the mall – offers a rare, small-village experience. Toronto the aloof this is not.

Thank two wood-fired ovens, which serve as the focal point. Summer Tuesdays and Wednesdays (noon to 2 p.m.) and Sundays (1 to 3 p.m.), \$2 will get you a lump of dough, tomato sauce, cheese and herbs from the garden, plus access to the pizza and bread oven. Thursdays (3 to 7 p.m.) feature a farmer's market and Fridays (6 p.m.) host regular community dinners, at \$6 for a main dish. Add-ons include soup, salad, dessert and the park's homemade Italian bread.

7. Lawrence East

"Salaam aleikum, brother," a customer booms at Om-Anas Islamic Fashion, which sells hijabs, modest blouses, the book *What the Young Moslem Says* and the *Hajj Fun Game*, (\$19.99) "What time do y'all close?" he asks. Like most places in Toronto's Arab Quarter, on Lawrence Ave. E. between Victoria Park and Warden, it closes as darkness falls, around 9 p.m.

In the 40 Middle Eastern restaurants and shops you'll find Syrian pastries, sugared chick peas, the new disc from the darkly handsome Egyptian heartthrob Amir Diab. Habibi!

The jewel on the strip is Arz Fine Foods (1909 Lawrence): store-made hazelnut ice

cream (\$3 a scoop); 23 kinds of olives; bastura, a spicy Middle Eastern prosciutto; zaatar, the thyme mix; and the luscious, yogurt cheese, lebneh.

8. Humber trail & Sunnyside

An evening promenade on the western waterfront trail: yacht clubs, a small lighthouse, the Humber Bay Butterfly Habitat and a glimpse of a Red Admiral or a Mourning Cloak. The path, sweetly fragrant, below Lake Shore Blvd.W. near Parklawn Rd., leads to an eccentric pedestrian bridge over Mimico Creek, designed by Santiago Calatrava (of the cathedral-like BCE Place). Further on, a memorial to Air India flight 182 and to the east, the pearly hues of the city's skyscrapers. Stroll on, for 3 km., past wetlands and a bridge arching delicately over the Humber River, to your destination, the Moorish-style Sunnyside Bathing Pavilion. As romantic as it sounds, the 1921 pavilion is a reminder that before the Gardiner Expressway this was once a rollicking amusement park.

Pause at the Sunnyside Café, for a brew (\$4.75) or a sundae (\$5.99), with nothing less than Lake Ontario at your feet.

9. Ward's & Algonquin Islands

An odd thing happens most days at the Toronto Islands ferry dock. There's a crush of people, bicycles, strollers and coolers all funnelling onto the ferry marked "Centre Island." If retro amusement-park rides and swan boats happen to be your thing, this is the line for you.

If not, look to your left. Scarcely anyone queues up for the Ward's Island ferry, which is precisely why that's the one to take. Once you disembark from the boat less taken, a magical little world awaits, where quaint cottage-houses and gardens line a warren of broad, shady sidewalks. Swim at the beach on the south side, then head to the Rectory Café for a snack. Or, better yet, pack a lunch and picnic on the north side of nearby Algonquin Island, with its fabulous views of the skyline.

10. North Toronto Station

Inside the North Toronto Station, you can still hear the loud rumble of passing trains through the thick limestone walls. You can still stand in the waiting room, with its 11.5 metre-high ceilings, arched windows and herringbone-tiled floors, and feel the energy of trips past.

These days, however, no train will stop to pick you up, as the building, built in 1915, now houses an enormous LCBO outlet. Instead, a visit will tempt you to linger in the history of Rosedale neighbourhood.

Sit on a bench in Scrivener Square and admire the station's 41-metre-high clock tower, modelled after the Campanile of Venice's St. Mark's Square. Nibble on bread and cheese from nearby specialty shops. Or head across Yonge St. to the renowned Rosedale Diner.

11. El Convento Rico

College St. W. on a Friday or Saturday night is one of the busiest places in Toronto. It's a more mature crowd than the entertainment district, but with less pretense than Yorkville. But nowhere is more welcoming, literally, than El Convento Rico, the latin dance club just east of Ossington Ave. frequented by partiers of all sexual varieties, but

mostly straights, who come by the hundreds to see the infamous drag shows after midnight.

Hang-ups are checked at the door, so don't be surprised to see a stagette party whooping it up with gender-bending dream girls. The bar opens at 9 p.m., with an \$8 cover charge.

12. Oakville Galleries

Housed in a lakeside estate home bequeathed by its owner, James Gairdner in 1971, the Oakville Galleries' property at Gairloch Gardens is a hidden gem of contemporary art and shoreline idyll. Open to the public, its acres of meticulously groomed greenspace and flora tumble gently to the lakeshore. But the real wonders are inside. The curating staff have mounted some of the most interesting contemporary shows in the province. In the process, they've amassed a collection of works by an absolute A-list of Canadian artists—Roy Arden, Robin Collyer, Rodney Graham, Angela Grauerholz, Gathie Falk, Liz Magor and Micah Lexier. Must-see: Jane Cardiff's "A Large, Slow River."

13. Baldwin St.

Indian, Italian, French, Chinese, Mexican, Thai, Japanese — the tiny two-block stretch of Baldwin St. bound by Beverly and McCaul Sts. is a veritable United Nations of culinary options.

This being Toronto, it seems only fitting, but "Baldwin Village," as some like to call it, has managed to maintain its multiplicity in the face of growing pressures from nearby Chinatown. At only two short blocks, it's a welcoming oasis, and not just for the food. Narrow and refreshingly car-unfriendly, this stretch of Baldwin, tucked behind Mount Sinai Hospital, seems to repel automotive traffic by sheer force of will.

On a lazy summer evening, the hypnotic scents of a dozen national cuisines teasing at your nostrils, Baldwin Village is the perfect spot for a peaceful urban meander.

14. Pacific Mall

Not quite the shopping frenzy of Hong Kong, but the Pacific Mall in Markham, 25 km. northeast of downtown at Steeles Ave. and Kennedy Rd., is as close as Toronto gets to a frantic eastern market.

You need courage – bargaining is expected and weekend parking is tight, despite 1,500 parking spots. With 14 optical stores, prescription glasses are a good buy. Cellphone and car part modifications, pirated DVDs (seven for \$20), and all the sequined shoes, plastic waterfalls and satin cushion covers you could wish for.

If you tire of the pace, have lunch (\$11 for two) in Heritage Town, on the second floor, where Ken Sun, who hails from the Yellow River, uses martial as much as culinary arts in his made-to-order hand-pulled noodles. Slapping the dough yields the most delicate, ginger infused dumplings. That alone is worth the drive.

15. Scarborough Bluffs

The Scarborough Bluffs, a massive memento of the ice age, extend 14 kilometres along Lake Ontario, towering 65 metres high. The sandstone and clay cliffs appear dark gray

when wet and almost white when dry. Erosion has carved out oddly shaped pinnacles, reminiscent of western badlands.

To see the bluffs bottom-up, take Brimley Road South to Bluffers Park, a mix of picnic areas, restaurants, marina and wide beach. The best top-down view of the cliffs is from Scarborough Bluffs Park (east of Midland Ave., off Undercliff Drive). That park also has a conservation area, a kilometre-long looping path through wild flowers and grasses that locals call "The Meadows." From up there, sailboat-sprinkled Lake Ontario goes on forever. "Don't tell anyone," pleaded a dog walker. "It's a secret."