

Toronto Revisited

Saturday, 30 July 2005

Last week, I took a much needed week off and visited Toronto, my hometown. My family is slowly migrating west and this seemed the perfect opportunity to reconnect with my hometown before they've all left and trips there would become even more infrequent. It's been almost two years since my last visit to this place I called home for 25 years. I reconnected with high school friends and college cohorts I'd lost touch with over the years. So much is different, yet remains the same.

I spent a day walking around the downtown core of Toronto. It is a beautiful city filled with historic brick buildings among towering glass skyscrapers. A flurry of new condominium developments is transforming the skyline. There's even a 30-storey windmill just off the shoreline that powers local homes and businesses. I hear one of the businesses is a micro-brewery too, a tribute to the Canadian obsession with beer.

Toronto is a sprawling place filled with culture. There's Little Italy, Korea Town, Little Portugal, and Little Greece to name a few areas that define Toronto. Cultural regions aren't by itself unique to any big city, but Toronto embraces it with street signs defining the region. And then there are the festivals, like Caribana that celebrates Caribbean culture or the Toronto Jazz Festival that transforms downtown and waterfront into a series of outdoor concert halls.

Toronto is, however, an inconvenient place to visit. A car rental from the airport comes with a 14.6% tax on top of the 7% federal tax and 8% provincial tax. Parking in Toronto is difficult with few parking lots and \$15 to \$20 prices at the ones you do find. Gas prices just hit \$0.90 to \$0.95 per liter. The TTC subway system is antiquated with no air conditioning in the stations or the buses. It's hardly comfortable in the plus 30 C (86 F) heat combined with humidity in the 50% range that makes it feel closer to 40 C (104 F).

Still, Toronto will always be my hometown. Home is Vancouver now, where my family will all be residing in the coming months. Though I live in Los Angeles, home is where my roots are and I haven't grown them here...yet.