



TRAVEL



Canadian lesbians show their Pride (clockwise from bottom left), a view of the city at night and Clafouti's sweet treats



EXPLORE
LOVELY,
LESBIAN-CENTRIC
TORONTO.

CANADA!

Ranked No. 4 this year in the *Economist's* survey of the most livable cities in the world, Toronto, the provincial capital of Ontario and the largest city in Canada, offers globe-trotting lesbians a whole lot to love.

The city's inhabitants are laid-back—not uncaring or uninterested, just extremely mellow. They never appear to be in a hurry, and drivers even have the patience to stop for scofflaw pedestrians who cross the streets willy-nilly.

Our first night there, my girlfriend and I went with some friends to the opening of a new performance piece at *Buddies in Bad Times*, world's oldest and largest queer theater (buddiesinbadtimes.com). Then we sauntered over to Church Street to see the action.

WHERE THE GIRLS ARE

The lesbian scene in Toronto is more elusive than the gay male scene, with producers throwing lesbian parties at straight clubs and dykes organizing large community events such as the Inside Out Toronto LGBT Film and Video Festival (insideout.ca). Some younger dykes were on staff at the Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives, and gave us a tour that made for an enlightening glimpse into the queer history of our neighbor to the north (clga.ca).

The 519, Toronto's queer community center, is a home away from home for locals and visitors alike, with two comfortable lounges on the first floor. The space includes a restaurant, too (the519.org).

Just across Church Street from The 519 is Slacks, the only lesbian bar and restaurant in town. Owner Karen Halliday runs the place full-time with her partner, Michele Hammerton. For us, Slacks had absolutely no competition as far as watering holes were concerned, although queer women also like to hang out at the Beaver (beavertoronto.ca) and the Hen House (henhousetoronto.com).

But to Halliday, the issue of competition arises only when she raises the subject of lesbians spending their money outside the community. She'd like to see more of their support. "If we closed our doors tomorrow there would be a huge outcry, and from women who have never been here, or haven't been for years," she says. FYI: Slacks is not a grungy establishment. It's an attractive, upscale space for women and their friends to have a drink, eat good food and enjoy great music from local faves such as Melissa Ferrick and Hunter Valentine (slacks.ca).

WHERE TO STAY

After a burger stuffed with brie and olives at Slacks, my gal and I headed back to our own home away from home for the long weekend—a comfy corner room with a lively painted ceiling at the Gladstone Hotel. Owner-developer Christina Zeidler calls the Gladstone, with its 37 artist-designed rooms, a unique, rather than boutique, hotel. Zeidler, a lesbian, is an international film and video artist whose interest and investment in art even extends to finding work for artists and paying them a living wage. When the hotel was restored and renovated in 2004, she employed local architects, artists and artisans. Now, she recruits local residents, including artists, to staff the joint, and hosts an array of art, music and political events. Rooms start at \$195 (gladstonehotel.com).

A funky hotspot, the Gladstone has public spaces on

BY STEPHANIE SCHROEDER



ON QUEEN STREET WEST, A LINE OF LOVELY STOREFRONTS HOUSE VINTAGE AND DESIGNER BOUTIQUES, CONTEMPORARY AND ANTIQUE FURNITURE SHOPS, CAFÉS, RESTAURANTS AND ART GALLERIES.

The Gladstone's Faux Naturelle room (top) and Queen Street's chic shops

HOW TO GET THERE

Porter Airlines gets you to Toronto in about an hour and a half from Newark and also flies from Boston and Chicago Midway Airport. Porter lands on "the island," Toronto Island Airport, officially known as Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport. You'll need to take the ferry across the 400-foot western channel, or hop a shuttle bus to downtown then take a taxi to your destination. Porter often has discounts ranging from 30 to 60 percent, so plan ahead. (flyporter.com)

HOW TO GET AROUND

Just about everywhere we wanted to go was in walking—or trolley car—distance from the Gladstone. Check with the Toronto Transit Commission about public transit, by far the best way to get around. The trolleys, buses and subway are very user-friendly. (ttc.ca)

WHEN TO GO

Before you go, check with Tourism Toronto to find out about seasonal happenings—events, festivals, sports, theatre—and to get the best package deals and special offers. (seetorontonow.com)

every floor and the walls are lined with modern art. The hotel boasts a café, the small art bar and the main bar, where karaoke is a hit on weekends. There is also a ballroom, where a wedding took place during our stay. It's legal for lesbians to marry in Canada. The guidelines only require that you apply for a marriage license and proffer an officiant and two witnesses. There are no residency or citizenship requirements. There is, however, a residency requirement if you want to get a divorce.

OUT AND ABOUT

On Queen Street West, a line of lovely storefronts house vintage and designer boutiques, contemporary and antique furniture shops, cafés, restaurants and art galleries. A friendly local tour guide, Betty Ann Jordan, provides insight into Toronto's Art and Design District.

If you go, be sure to take Jordan's free first-Saturday walking tour of the area (artinsite.com).

The Katharine Mulherin Gallery (she also has a gallery, Mulherin Pollard, in New York City) was a fantastic contemporary art space showing the best local,

national and international modern artists (katharine-mulherin.com). One clothier caught my eye—Magpie Designs. The storefront is filled with Mad Max-meets-Phantom of the Opera stylings—very dramatic. The two designer-owners, Cathy McDayer and Angela Mann, have their atelier in the back.

Cajú, a Brazilian restaurant with a casual upscale atmosphere, serves excellent fare at reasonable prices (caju.ca). Clafouti, a petite patisserie, serves French treats that are perfect for brunch or a picnic. To describe the heavenly clafouti itself as egg custard with seasoned fruit is akin to describing a Bugatti Royale as a chassis with four wheels.

King Street West is trendier than bohemian Queen Street. The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) has grown from a 10-day event to a year-round operation. In addition to showing Inside Out, TIFF screens new and classic films, hosts a children's film festival and maintains a reference library. You can find its new home, the TIFF Bell Lightbox, at the corner of King and John (tiff.net).

I got an unexpected panorama of Toronto from Broadview Avenue while perched on a bench in front of the Rooster Coffee House (roostercoffeehouse.com), across from Riverdale Park. With the breathtaking sight of lush greenery all around me, I sipped an espresso alongside my companion, Carlos Rios from All About Toronto Tours (allabouttoronto.com). He was our guide to this magical spot in a most livable city. ■