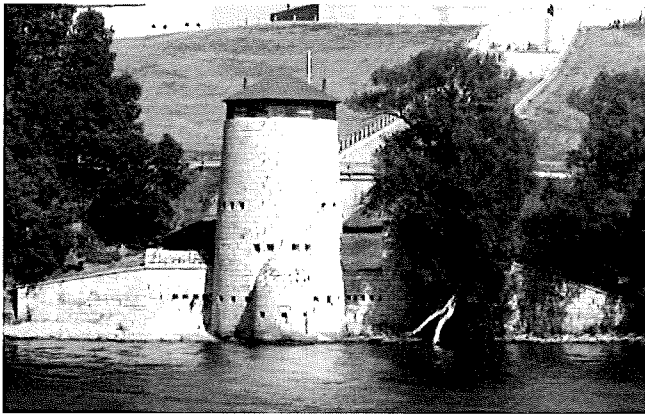


Kingston, Ontario – Gateway to the 1,000 Islands



— by Deborah Williams

If first impressions count, Kingston, Ontario is definitely a winner. There is something special about a city where you can arrive by water. Located at the point where Lake Ontario meets the St. Lawrence River, Kingston is one of Canada's most historically important cities.

Kingston is the gateway to the Thousand Islands, a former national capital, key naval base, and strategic site of forts Henry and Frontenac. It is home to the historic Rideau Canal that (together with Fort Henry) is Ontario's only UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Although it is possible to arrive via land by traveling north to Alexandria Bay, crossing the Thousand Islands Bridge, and then traveling south for about 30 miles, the best way to arrive is by car ferry; actually, two ferries. Take the Horne's Ferry from Cape Vincent on the New York side of the St. Lawrence to Wolfe Island, the

largest island in the Thousand Islands. Horne's Ferry has been operating since 1802. After a ten-minute drive across the Canadian island, take the Wolfe Island Ferry to downtown Kingston.

If you are lucky you might bump into or hear Kingston's Town Crier, who was crowned world champion in 2010. Kingston is also very much a family and resort city. Home of Queen's University and the Royal Military College — Canada's version of West Point — it's also a major education center.

Fort Henry dominates the town from its high promontory. Here, from May through mid-October, the Fort Henry Guard performs 19th century drills, including the Ceremonial Retreat. The ceremony includes a display of music and marching by the fife-and-drum band, an exhibition of infantry drills, and a mock

battle with artillery support; all brought to a close with the firing of the garrison artillery and the lowering of the Union Jack.

Fort Henry has it all — even a goat. Today's goat, who participates in shows and parades, is David X. A young goat, he began his service in June. The goat is Fort Henry Guard's mascot in memory of the mascot of the 23rd Regiment of Foot (Royal Welch Fusiliers), stationed at the fort in 1842 and 1843. To commemorate this regiment and their mascot, the Saint David Society of Toronto has donated ten white Saanen goats since 1953; thus the current goat is David X.

Children are given a special welcome at the fort and are invited to join the Children's Military Muster Parade. During our visit, a group of three-to-ten-year-olds were dressed in military uniforms and joined as

continued on page 64

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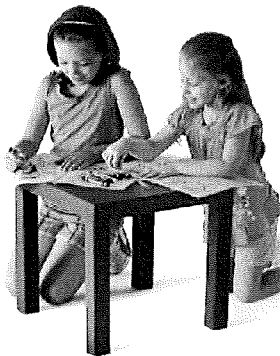


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KINGSTON, ONTARIO *continued...*

privates in the "British Army in the Dominion of Canada." As newly recruited privates, the group practiced drills and learned to snap to attention at the officer's command. They also learned to "prove" by raising their right hand as a request to speak.

Recruits could not speak without permission. At the end of their drill session, each private received a certificate attesting to his or her "loyalty, courage and good conduct." Recruits can also join classes in the 1867 Victorian schoolroom at the fort. Afterwards, under the supervision of the teacher, they can practice writing a letter home, which can be mailed from the garrison stores.

Other family activities include the pay parade. Convince the paymaster that you deserve your "Fort Shillings," redeemable in the gift shops. There are also regular rifle firings and the opportunity to follow the actual escape routes of prisoners during the 1830s, World War I and II. Listen to the defense of troublesome soldier Private Atkins and decide a fitting punishment. On Wednesdays during July and August, come for the stirring Sunset Ceremony featuring the Fort Henry Guard and its performing units. The ceremony is capped off with fireworks.

The first Fort Henry was built during the War of 1812 but was never attacked. After the war, the British were still concerned about possible attacks from the United States and built the present-day fort from limestone. The pentagon-shaped fort was garrisoned until 1891 when the threat of invasion was presumed to be over.

The fort fell into disrepair until its restoration began in 1936. Student tour guides dressed in 19th century military uniforms take groups through the fort and the inner rooms. Many have been turned into museum rooms displaying Canadian-British uniforms, decorations, banners, and weaponry.

From the parapets, soldiers kept watch for enemy ships. Today, the most frequently sighted vessel is the Wolfe Island Ferry, making hourly trips between downtown Kingston and the island. Windsurfers and other pleasure boats, as well as 1000 Island excursion vessels, make up most of the other traffic. However, ocean freighters can still be spotted. The view of the city and surrounding area is quite spectacular. Work is now underway on a \$10 million Discovery Center just outside the fort. It will open next spring.

During my most recent visit, a bagpiper dressed in full ceremonial garb faced the water as he played. Out on the water was one lone, double-masted schooner under full sail. It could have been the 19th century.

Kingston is known as Limestone City — limestone is the material of choice for forts, the university, most other public buildings, and many private homes. All this limestone gives the city a definite feeling of permanence. These buildings have been built for the ages. The most prominent of them all is the City Hall, which overlooks the bustling waterfront. It boasts a classical dome and columns, and seems much grander than one might expect to find in a small city. Actually, it was intended to be Canada's Legislative Assembly — the seat of Canadian government. However, by the time it was finished, Queen Victoria decided that Kingston was too close to the U.S. border to be the capital. As it has since the building's conception, City Hall shelters a bustling outdoor farmer's market.

Just in front of City Hall are Confederation Park and the Tourist Information Office, housed in an 1885 vintage stone building that was once the station for the long defunct Kingston-Pem-

continued on page 67

broke Railway. Pick up information on the self-guided walking tours. There are audio tours for download, and you can even borrow an iPod. Comments in the guest book give clues to the area's appeal: "The most beautiful city I've been to in Canada," says a German visitor.

The Confederation Tour Train departs from the Tourist Office and offers a 50-minute circuit of the city and a good overview of Kingston. It's also an easy city for walking, and the streets bear such proper British names as King, Queen, Princess, Brock, and Wellington. Kingston has been called a city of museums. Surely the most unusual is Canada's Penitentiary Museum, located in a mansion that once housed the prison warden who presided over the massive waterfront federal prison across the street. It was built in 1873 by inmate labor.

Each of the eight rooms in the museum is dedicated to a theme. The punishment room is surely enough to assure most of us stay on the straight and narrow. There are paddles and whips, tiny cells and leg irons attached to a cannonball. There is

even a table where prisoners' feet would be placed in wooden stocks. They would be made to bend over and be strapped down to endure a flogging on their bare buttocks.

Just a few blocks further along the waterfront is the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes, developed out of a shipyard and a dry dock. The museum's exhibits span three centuries of lake and river lore. The Alexander Henry, a retired Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker, is docked alongside and is open for tours.

Just a 15-minute drive from downtown Kingston is the closest set of locks on the Rideau Canal at Kingston Mills. It is Ontario's only World Heritage Site and the only canal from the great canal building era that still operates along its original route and with most of its original structures intact. Locks are operated by hand and there are restored historic buildings open for touring as well as a picnic area. Completed in 1832, the 125-mile canal connects Kingston with Ottawa, Canada's capital. There are canal boat tours as well as boats, kayaks and canoes for rent.

Don't miss a cruise on the St.

Lawrence. The 1000 Islands Cruises, with two boats docked at the harbor, offer a variety of sightseeing, luncheon, dinner, and sunset cruises of the harbor and St. Lawrence River. During our cruise, a talented duo called the Island Cats entertained everyone with their music. The commentary was fun and educational, using someone playing the part of Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister, and Kingston resident.

Travel Tip of the Month: Don't forget proper ID for everyone to go across the border. For information visit <http://tourism.kingstoncanada.com> or call 1-888-855-4555. Cape Vincent is about a four-hour drive from Buffalo. It takes about one hour for the two ferry rides and drive across Wolfe Island. Visit www.hornesferry.com or call 315-783-0638 for the Horne's Ferry schedule. The schedules for the two ferries are coordinated to make the crossing easier.

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Deborah Williams is a veteran travel. She lives in Holland, NY and is a long-time contributor to WNY Family. Visit her at www.deborahwilliams.com.

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