

A weekend away in Kingston

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Kingston City Hall - aerial view

History, scenery and some unique experiences come together in the Limestone City. Here are some ideas for a long weekend getaway to suit any taste and budget.

Despite its convenient location midway between Toronto and Montreal, Kingston is more than just a stopover city. The scenic waterfront, special events, attractions and sports are enough to draw anyone in for a weekend getaway or a week-long stay. There's a little something for every interest and any budget -- but don't just take our word for it. Here's a quick look at what the

city has to offer.

Things to do

Take a tour. There's a lot to see -- both on land and from the water. Enjoy a sunset dinner cruise to see the city's skyline at night, or hop aboard the Confederation Tour Trolley to see some of the highlights like Fort Henry, City Hall and the waterfront. You can also rise above it all with an hour-long flight from the Kingston Flying Club.

Absorb the local history. Kingston has many historical claims to fame. Not only it is located in a strategically advantageous place where Lake Ontario meets the St. Lawrence River, it's also Canada's first capital city and burial place of our first Prime Minister. Visit renowned National Historic Sites like Fort Henry, Fort Frontenac, Murney Tower and the Kingston Mills Locks, and see the burial place of Sir John A. MacDonald at Cataraqui Cemetery.

For a more personal look at local history, go back in time in the homes of some of the area's most prominent residents. In addition to Sir John A. MacDonald's former home, Bellevue House, there is the Allan Macpherson House in Napanee, the Fairfield House in Amherstview and the Fairfield-Gutzeit House in nearby Bath.

Take in a museum. The city has over two dozen museums, archives and galleries -- including some unique sites you won't find anywhere else like Canada's Penitentiary Museum and the International Hockey Hall of Fame. Many places like the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes and the Pump House Steam Museum offer family and kids' programs throughout the summer in addition to regular tours and special events. ([Click here](#) for a full list of sites).

Art-lovers may want to pay a visit to the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University and check out some of the local galleries too.

Enjoy the waterfront. The city has a lot of public waterfront paths and parks, any of which are perfect for a leisurely stroll or a picnic lunch.

Get some exercise. There's no shortage of places to walk or bicycle like the Waterfront Pathway, Lemoine Point Conservation Area and the pathway at the Royal Military College. The City of Kingston also has maps for historic walks, and the Haunted Walk is a spooky favourite among guests and locals alike.

Of course, we'd be remiss if we didn't mention water sports too, like kayaking, boating and fishing. Sailors and windsurfers also flock to Kingston thanks to its windy conditions. The large number of ship wrecks in the area -- about 200 in total -- makes for some great scuba diving too.

Eat out(side). Kingston has a wide variety of restaurants ranging from casual to fine dining, but one of the quintessential activities on a summer's night is to eat outdoors. Enjoy lunch or dinner on the restaurant patios, or a nightcap at a café to end the evening. For a cold one, try the Lone Star Café -- known for having the largest waterfront patio in the city.

See a show. The city's new K-Rock Centre continues to draw world-class performers like Il Divo and Anne Murray, but local theatre is also a hit as well. The newly renovated Grand Theatre is open for business again with a line-up of local theatre and visiting performances and shows. Free concerts and outdoor events also happen throughout the summer too.

Shop 'til you drop. Kingston has its share of malls and big boxes stores, but it's the independents that will catch your eye. The downtown core has a wide variety of specialty shops and boutiques carrying everything from gourmet foods and books to unique gifts, fashion and artwork. The city is a hobbyist's paradise with a variety of quilting, knitting, beading, stained glass and other hobby and craft stores within a short drive.

Venture outside the city. Kingston also serves as the ideal home base from which to explore nearby areas. For instance, spend a day touring the wine district of Prince Edward County, or head to Picton's Sandbanks Provincial Park for a day at the beach. Gananoque is the ideal starting point for a boat tour of the Thousand Islands, and you can take in a play at The Firehouse or Gananoque Playhouse.

What's happening?

There's always something going on in the city. Here are some upcoming highlights for August:

Sunset Ceremonies at Fort Henry (Wednesday evenings) -- This popular event brings history to life with period music, bayonet drills, re-enactments of field manoeuvres, music and a fireworks finale.

Movies in the Square (Saturdays until September 3) -- Pack a lawn chair and head to the Springer Market (behind City Hall) for a free night at the movies.

Sheep Dog Trials -- Now in its 21st year, this annual event brings together 100 top competitors from across North America. There are also side attractions for the whole family.

1000 Islands Poker Run (August 7-9) -- Love them or make fun of them, but it's hard not to venture to the waterfront to see these powerboats in action as they compete for prizes.

CORK International Sailing Regatta (August 19-22) -- Did we mention Kingston is known for its windy conditions? This regatta is one of the many sailing, training and racing events held each year on Kingston's waters.

Limestone City Blues Festival (August 27-30) -- The city gets the blues every year with concerts throughout the city. Some of 2009's headliners include the Robert Cray Band and Mavis Staples.

Myles Acres' Wine and Food Fair (August 29) -- Let the wineries and locals restaurants come to you for this one day foodie-fair.

Where to stay

There's no shortage of options with historic inns, campsites, cottages, hotels and budget accommodations available. If you're looking for a hotel or motel, compare location as well as room rates. If you plan to spend most of your time in the downtown area, many of the hotels like the Four Points Sheraton, Holiday Inn and the Radisson Plaza Hotel are within walking distance of the shops and many of the local attractions, though they may be a little more expensive and charge additional for parking.

However, if you plan to travel outside of the city, hotels in the city's west end -- like the Green Acres Inn, Travelodge, Best Western Fireside Inn and the Ambassador Hotel -- have easier access to the highway and they're only 15 minutes out of downtown. Lower-cost motels can be found throughout the city as well.

If camping or RVing is more your style, there are a couple of campgrounds in the area including Kingston KOA -- which offers many attractions like mini golf, rides and a playground for dogs in addition to its tent sites, RV sites and cabins. Many of the campgrounds are just outside of the city, such as Bon Echo Provincial Park in Cloyne or the Little House on the Water on Howe Island.

For travellers coming by boat, there are places to park it as well like the Confederation Basin marina. If you wish you had a boat, book a night aboard the *Alexander Henry* -- a ship turned Bed & Breakfast.

For travellers with tight budgets, Queen's University and St. Lawrence College open their residence doors for the summer. Queen's University -- which is close to the waterfront and downtown area -- offers rooms at a rate of \$45 per night for a single room, \$55 for a double or \$99 for a two-bedroom suite.

It's worth doing some research to compare rates, locations and amenities -- but book before you go to avoid disappointment as popular places tend to fill up quickly. (See [Tourism Kingston](#) for contact information.)

Tips for your trip

- *Try a mid-week getaway.* Sunday to Thursday night stays are often cheaper and it's easier to find accommodations -- and to score an upgrade. Another bonus: there won't be quite as many travellers around.
- *Dress right.* It's cooler and windier near the water -- especially at night. During the day, sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses are a must too because the water reflects the sun's rays.
- *Park away from the action.* If you're downtown, parking fees tend to be higher closer to the waterfront and attractions. Don't overlook parking garages -- their rates are reasonable and you can park in the shade.
- *Take the scenic routes.* Highway 401 offers convenient access to places like Picton, Gananoque and Brockville, but Highway 33, Highway 2 and the Thousand Islands Parkway offer a more picturesque drive.
- *Cheat on your diet -- just a little.* Visit Cooke's Fine Foods for some gourmet treats and coffee, or try one of the two homemade ice cream shops along Ontario Street (across from Confederation Park). Pan Chanco's is also not to be missed.
- *Know when to stay clear.* The prisons may be pretty to look at, but the guards won't give you a tour. Also, don't photograph or attempt to enter the military base unannounced as security has been tightened since 2001. (Military buffs can check out the Military Communications & Electronics Museum and RMC Museum instead.)
- *Look for free information.* The "Key to Kingston" guide is available at many hotels and it will fit nicely in your bag. You also can download the [City of Kingston Street Atlas](#) for free or try the online [Kmaps](#) feature.
- And when in doubt, **ask the locals.** Word-of-mouth advertising is alive and well, and everyone has their favourite places to dine out, grab a drink, order takeout and shop.

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[The City of Kingston Visitor's Guide](#)

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