

Kingston Ontario



*Photo Credit: Tourism Kingston

Kingston Ontario: On the Waterfront

With one of the **loveliest lakefronts** in Ontario and access to the Rideau Canal, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, Kingston Ontario is a big winner with anyone who loves water and water recreation. I count myself in this group.

The fact that it's known as the Limestone City for all of its great stone **historic buildings** adds a second layer of appeal.

A third advantage is its **active cultural life**. For a city this size (around 113,000 in the city proper), Kingston has a surprising number of museums, several of which are associated with historic Queen's University. Kingston seems to attract artists and artisans, judging from the numerous art galleries selling work by people from the city and the surrounding region. Nearby Wolfe Island also has an active enclave of resident artists. Perhaps it's the beauty of the surroundings.

Overview of Kingston Ontario & a dash of history

Kingston is the largest city in Southeastern Ontario. It's located half-way between Montreal and Toronto, which makes it a great stopover and retreat if you're planning to visit both of these big cities.

This area has been settled for centuries, first by the Mississaugas First Nations, then by the French, then by the British. During the American Revolution, Kingston became a refugee centre for Loyalists.

Kingston's major historic claim to fame is that from 1841 to 1844 it served as the first capital of a united Canada. (It was moved because it was considered too vulnerable to attack from the Americans.)

Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, lived here for many years and you can visit his restored former house at Bellevue House National Historic Site of Canada, not far from downtown.

Kingston Ontario Landmarks & Tourist Attractions

Time-budget tip: If you're short on time, one way to see a lot of Kingston in a hurry is to take the **Confederation Tour Trolley**. It leaves from the tourist office downtown and takes about 50 minutes.

Many of Kingston's buildings are made of stone, which has earned it the nickname of **Limestone City**. You'll discover lovely 19th century stone homes and commercial buildings all over the city.

One of its most famous buildings is **Kingston City Hall**, a gorgeous 19th century structure facing Confederation Park and Lake Ontario.

Nearby is an antique steam engine in front of the tourist office.

Kingston Ontario also boasts the oldest **Farmer's Market** in Canada where you can buy not only fresh produce but the products of local artists as well.

Queen's University has some gorgeous architecture and a few interesting museums as well. (See my Kingston Ontario museums page.)

Kingston Penitentiary is a suitably stern-looking structure. "A nice place to visit, but you wouldn't want to live there." There's actually a museum on site where you can learn about the history of incarceration in Canada. My paternal grandfather once worked here as a guard. The penitentiary is also the main setting in an interesting book called "The Convict Lover" by Marilyn Simonds. The book deals with the

relationship between a convict and a teenage girl and is based on a true story.

Fort Henry offers visitors a look at 19th century military architecture. You can attend parades and sunset ceremonies as well.

The Murney Tower National Historic Site is a great place for photo-ops. The towers were built in 1846 and house a small museum of 19th century military and domestic artifacts.



*Above: Kingston Ontario's ferry to Wolfe Island
Photo credit: Wayne Heibert, Tourism Kingston*

Play in the water

One of my favourite memories of Kingston is the **1000 Islands Cruise** I took from here. By the time I got off this boat I was so mellow from the lake breezes that my legs could barely hold me up. I was in serious need of a nap! You can choose between the 90 minute or the 3 hour cruise during the day, and there are dinner/evening cruises as well.

Serious boaters will want to tour the **Rideau Canal** and perhaps travel all the way to Ottawa that way. For more information about the Rideau Canal, check this interesting site: <http://www.rideau-info.com/rideau-info.html>. You can also take a scheduled boat tour from Kingston to Quebec City with **St. Lawrence Cruises** (<http://www.stlawrencecruiselines.com>)... something I've always wanted to do! Expensive but I bet it's worthwhile.

An inexpensive way to get out on the water is to take the **ferry over to Wolfe Island**. Get off and enjoy the art galleries and have a picnic, or just ride it there and back for the view.

Entertainment in Kingston Ontario

If you're looking for live theatre or concerts or orchestra, check the recently restored Grand Theatre or the K-Rock Centre in downtown. A smaller venue is the Wellington Street Theatre.

Festivals include the Limestone City Blues Festival, the Jazz Festival, Wolfe Island Music Festival, Kingston Buskers Rendezvous, Fanfayr Arts & Craft Show, and the Kingston Canadian Film Festival.

Ghost-hunters will want to check out Kingston Haunted Walks. If any city's haunted, this one should be, what with its long history, the fort, the penitentiary, and so on. Lots of violent history, in other words!

Where to eat and shop

A big student population (including that of the Royal Military College) coupled with a British background means that Kingston has a lot of pubs, perhaps more than most cities its size, it seems. During the summer, the patios are quite full. If you prefer a quieter setting though you can also find cafes, family restaurants and fine dining places including many ethnic choices.

I'm not really a big shopper but when I go to Kingston I do like to visit Cooke's Fine Foods and Coffee on Princess Street and buy some gourmet treats. This shop opened in 1865 which makes it 2 years older than Canada, and it still retains that old-fashioned look with its tin ceilings and original hardwood floors. It's sort of like visiting a museum! I wonder if my grandparents shopped here when my grandfather was working at the Penitentiary in the early part of the last century.

Kingston Ontario Hotels & Other Accommodation

You'll find your favourite chain hotels and motels in Kingston (Best Western, Comfort Inn, Days Inn, Sheraton, etc).

You'll also find dozens of Bed and Breakfasts, many of which are housed in quaint heritage homes. One unusual one is on a boat called the Alexander Henry. It's open seasonally only, of course. Very cool idea!

The budget-minded traveller will want to check out Queen's University which rents rooms to tourists during summer. There's also a private hostel called Skweek's House (Hostel) which seems to get good reviews; their phone number is (613) 507-7595.

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Photo Credit: Rob Taylor/Taylor Studios - Kingston; Fort Henry Archives

Kingston Ontario Museums & Art Galleries

Curious travellers take note: For a city this size, Kingston has a large number of museums and galleries. I think that's probably due to the fact that it's a university town; several of the smaller museums are affiliated with Queen's University. Since Kingston's a military town, too, there are a few military museums as well.

A few of these museums are not in Kingston proper, but just outside of the city – doable if you have a car.

Agnes Etherington Art Centre – Part of Queen’s University. Emphasis on Canadian art.

Bellevue House National Historic Site of Canada - Home of Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald.

Correctional Services of Canada Museum – Part of Kingston Penitentiary. Margaret Atwood used the museum’s information when researching her novel “Alias Grace” (a great book, by the way!).

Fort Henry National Historic site of Canada – A UNESCO World Heritage site. Frontenac County Schools Museum – Visit an early 20th century school room.

International Hockey Hall of Fame & Museum – For rabid hockey fans!

Kingston Mills Block House – Part of the Rideau Canal System. A restored blockhouse circa 1839.

Kingston Scout Museum. Call for an appointment to visit. Memorabilia from the Scouts.

MacLachlan Woodworking Museum – On Hwy 2, ten km east of Kingston.

Marine Museum of the Great Lakes - Open to public during the summer on a daily basis but open only by appointment at other times of the year.

Military Communications & Electronics Museum.

Miller Museum of Geology. Part of Queen’s University. Fossil and mineral displays, dinosaur exhibit, a working seismograph.

Modern Fuel Artist Run Centre – for fans of contemporary art.

Murney Tower National Historic Site – Small museum in a tower with military and domestic artifacts from the 1800s.

Museum of Healthcare – Housed in the Ann Baillie Building, a National Historic Site, one of the first purpose-built nurses' residences in Canada. Medical equipment from the late 1700s to present. Includes creepy things like a "scarifier", a blood-letting device from the 18th century. Not for the faint of heart.

Princess of Wales Own Regiment, Military Museum.

Pump House Steam Museum.

RMC Museum (Royal Military College). Housed in the Fort Frederick Tower.

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