

Toronto Adventures

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Toronto is one of the most exciting and enticing cities to visit. It can also be a friendly place for families with children.

Toronto is home to some of the best museums in the world. All of them are entertaining and educational, but there are three that are not to be missed. All admission prices listed are in Canadian funds.

The Metro Toronto Zoo (361A Old Finch Avenue, Scarborough, 416-392-5700, www.torontozoo.com) is one of the finest zoos in the world. Admission is \$12 for adults and \$7-\$9 for different aged children. Hours are 9-7:30 in summer, with shorter hours the rest of the year. The zoo has an incredible variety of animals and is huge (wonderful because the animals have great open living spaces, terrible because your feet will ache), so bring strollers and wagons. You may wish to pay an extra fee to ride the Zoomobile, an open air train. There are seven large indoor pavilions and many outdoor exhibits. Some exhibits, such as the polar bear and seal exhibit have above and below water viewing areas. Other exhibits offer above and underground views. Inside the Australasian Pavilion is The Edge of Night, an exhibit of nocturnal animals. Touch Tables are available inside the pavilions. New at the zoo is Kesho Park, a walking African safari. The habitats are so large at this zoo that it sometimes seems the animals are roaming free. McDonalds' restaurant has several locations inside the zoo.

Another family favorite in Toronto is the Ontario Science Centre (770 Don Mills Road, North York, 416-696-3127, www.osc.on.ca). Admission is \$10 adult and \$6-\$7 for children of different ages. It is open 10-5 daily with extended summer hours. The Science Centre can be overwhelming for the

mind in the same way the zoo is overwhelming for the body. There are over 800 exhibits in 13 halls and it is simply far too much to really see all in one day. The Centre is wonderful because it provides stimulation for minds of all ages. Many of the exhibits are hands on. Children will enjoy the activities even if they do not fully understand their applications. Current highlights include Mind Works (an exhibit about the workings and science of the human mind), Human Body (which includes basic anatomy as well as advanced science like DNA) and Information Highway (many computers and programs, including a look inside a computer). The Centre also has an Omnimax theater (there is an extra fee). Live, exciting demonstrations (including lasers, glassblowing and electricity) occur throughout the museum. There is a restaurant and gift shop on the premises.

The Bata Shoe Museum (327 Bloor Street west at St. George Subway, 416-924-7463) may sound like a strange concept but it is actually a fascinating museum about human adaptation, ingenuity and culture. Hours are 10-5, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, 10-8 Thursday and 12-5 Sunday. The museum houses the world's largest collection of shoes and shoe related items. Over 10,000 items covering 4500 years of history fill the museum. Exhibits include strange sights, such as Chinese silk shoes for binding women's feet, pre-Columbian sacrificial boots and human hair slippers worn by executioners. Celebrity shoes worn by people such as Winston Churchill, John Lennon and Elizabeth Taylor are also included.

Toronto is home to many other famous sites. The CN Tower (301 Front Street West) is the tallest freestanding building in the world (1,815 feet!). Visitors ride glass elevators to the observation deck for a stunning and heartrenching view. Telescopes are available. The Tower is also home to Mindwarp, a motion simulator, Qzar, a laser tag game and the educational EcoDek.

Casa Loma (1 Austin Terrace, 416-923-1171, open 9:30-4, admission \$8 adult and \$4.50 child) is an amazing 98 room mansion smack in the middle of the city. Children will enjoy the two

towers, secret panels and long passageways. There is also a pipe organ and underground tunnels. Tape recorded tour aides are available. There are no human tour guides.

One of the most exciting child-friendly restaurants in Toronto is Marche Movenpick (BCE Plaza, 161 Bay Street, 416-366-8986). The restaurant, which looks like a European marketplace, is made up of different authentic food stations - one serving bread and pastries, another serving pasta, another for seafood, game, etc. Diners buy freshly prepared (to order) foods at the stations and carry a card from which their bill is totaled. Children's portions are available. Seating is scattered throughout the restaurant in different themed locales. Children will be wide eyed at the selections and the exciting food preparation done before their eyes.

For more information about Toronto, go to www.toronto.com or www.torinfo.com.