

Tech-Friendly Toronto  
[Canada, June 2017](#)



Photo: Rendering of Hotel X Toronto © HOTEL X TORONTO

By [Ron Bernthal](#) - June 1, 2017

IN MID-JANUARY, as a biting wind off Lake Ontario blew across the 30th-story rooftop of the not-yet-completed [Hotel X Toronto](#), Celso Thompson, the property's director of sales, surveyed the 360-degree view of [Toronto's](#) gleaming skyscrapers, residential neighborhoods and the distant water plume of Niagara Falls at the edge of the lake's horizon, 36 nautical miles away. Not far from the hotel, aircraft from Porter Airlines looked like toys as they took off and landed at Billy Bishop Airport.

As Thompson waved his arm across this vibrant urban scene, he gushed about the three-story Peregrine Skybar and two swimming pools that would occupy part of the rooftop, along with a four-story, 90,000-square-foot indoor fitness and wellness center being constructed on the ground

below and the 404 guestrooms and suites that will fill the tower when it opens this summer.

The Hotel X Toronto is just one project of dozens expected to dramatically enhance Toronto's cultural, recreational and technological presence in the world. New projects in the Greater Toronto Area attract businesses and entrepreneurs, with a net migration of about 100,000 people each year, many settling in the fast-growing surrounding municipalities such as Brampton, Milton and Bradford West Gwillimbury, as well as downtown near the lakeshore and along the Yonge subway corridor. High-rise condominiums and mixed-use office towers sprout like wildflowers as rising real estate prices make affordable private homes difficult to find. Last year, more than 29,186 condo units were sold across the GTA, a 30 percent increase over 2015. The tallest towers include Number One Bloor (75 stories, 2017), Harbour Place Residences East (66 stories, 2017), Eau de Soleil Sky Tower (66 stories, 2018) and Ten York (65 stories, 2019). Presently, Toronto ranks second to New York in the number and size of major buildings under construction in North America.

The real estate firm Newmark Knight Frank Devencore reported more than 2.2 million square feet of new office space will come to the downtown market in 2017, more than double the space created last year. "Driving much of the leasing activity are tenants in the financial services, legal, media entertainment and high-tech sectors," said Allan Schaffer, president and broker of record at the firm's downtown Toronto office. "Demand continues to be strong for office space in the new towers, and many built-out sublease spaces are attracting multiple offers and do not remain on the market for very long."

Cutting-edge firms — many founded in Toronto, others moving from Montréal, Vancouver and Silicon Valley — spur the incredible downtown revitalization. Influitive, Wattpad, EventMobi and QD Solar are local startup companies, as is the MaRS Discovery District, established in 2000 and one of the world's largest urban innovation hubs. The MaRS Toronto building, with 1.5 million square feet, houses startups involved in health, science and technology.

Toronto boasts the most prolific saturation of tech companies in Canada, housing the headquarters of almost half of the top 250 technology firms in Canada. The city is the third-largest tech hub in North America, behind Silicon Valley and New York, with major global firms like Google, Facebook and Microsoft occupying offices downtown. Approximately 168,000 people work at more than 15,000 technology companies in the GTA, generating annual revenues of about \$38 billion.

Since 57 percent of the city's workforce is under age 45, many high-tech firms outfit their downtown offices with wellness and fitness amenities. Shopify's Toronto office took up the wellness mantra with a strategy that says, "What is all that work if you can't also play once in a while?" Its workplace offers guitars, foosball and Ping Pong tables, a Red Bull fridge and a full suite of video game systems all tucked in a low-ceilinged space to keep the noise low.

[Ubisoft Toronto](#) won a recent Best Office Gym award from Techvibes.com for its U.Fit gym space; but if hard-working Torontonians don't have an office gym, they can visit Hubba Toronto (voted Best Yoga Studio by Techvibes.com) or Elmwood Spa, which recently completed a \$700,000 renovation.

Downtown hotels also promote wellness. At the [Omni King Edward Hotel](#), the rejuvenated Nouvelle Maria Spa will complement the new look and feel of the refurbished hotel and provide first-class spa services to guests and locals. The spa introduces La Peau anti-aging gel from Switzerland with a revolutionary BeCell molecular complex.



FOUR SEASONS TORONTO HOTEL  
SPA TERRACE © FOUR SEASONS  
HOTEL TORONTO

One of the largest and most elegant spas in the city remains the Spa at the [Four Seasons Hotel Toronto](#), with 30,000 square feet offering 17 oversized treatment rooms; two

steam rooms; five deluxe suites for two; and a salon with hair, manicure and pedicure stations. Located on the ninth floor, the spa adjoins the indoor relaxation pool, co-ed whirlpool and outdoor terrace overlooking the city. Locker facilities feature steam rooms and personal grooming amenities; and a 24-hour, 3,500-square-foot fitness center on the eighth floor is available to Four Seasons guests and residents only. The spa offers extensive wellness therapies including Traditional Chinese Medicine techniques related to sleep and dream management, fatigue and women's health issues, along with pain, anxiety and stress relief. A spiritual advisor is on hand.

For Toronto visitors who want a more private, do-it-yourself wellness experience, all the Canadian Le Germain properties offer a "Nama Stay" experience, providing guests four online videos and a Lululemon yoga mat to practice relaxation in the privacy of their room.

The City of Toronto offers hundreds of fitness and swimming classes for residents and visitors at affordable rates at 40 facilities. Purchase \$9 pay-as-you-go, one-day passes; punch-card 10-day passes; or unlimited-visit passports.

At the new Hotel X Toronto, the innovative Ten X Toronto athletic facility includes four Deco Turf indoor tennis courts with 50-foot ceilings; nine glassbacked squash courts; yoga, Pilates, spinning and group fitness studios; a golf simulator; physiotherapy and chiropractic clinics; a 4,500-square-foot, full-service spa; and a nutrition and juice bar.

Although the [Bisha Hotel & Residences](#), the city's other big summer hotel opening, will not contain a wellness or yoga studio, it is the newest private-label boutique hotel brand to originate in Toronto since Four Seasons arrived in the 1960s. Rising 44 stories and designed by Toronto's Wallman Architects, the property offers 355 suites, a rooftop restaurant and pool, and a lounge-style café and bar. Toronto's Charles Khabouth created the Bisha concept as a place where guests can eat dinner, party and stay the night. Khabouth, CEO, Ink Entertainment, made his name as the city's "king of clubs," and this new venture will surely attract the A-list crowd.

Nobu Hospitality, the luxury restaurant and hotel chain founded by Robert De Niro and Japanese chef Nobu Matsuhisa, is planning Canada's first Nobu-branded condo complex on Mercer Street in Toronto's entertainment district. Two 49-story towers will rise above the historic Pilkington Glass Factory and include 700 condo units, a hotel, meeting spaces, a restaurant, ground-floor retail space and an outdoor Zen garden.



WATERFRONT TORONTO SIMCOE  
WAVEDECK © WATERFRONT  
TORONTO

The largest project in Toronto, however, is the multibillion-dollar, 2,000-acre revitalization of the waterfront districts, including West Don Lands, East Bayfront, the Port

Lands and Queens Quay. Once a post-industrial wasteland, the waterfront projects currently underway and those scheduled in the years ahead will feature residential and office towers, parkland and recreational areas skirting the lakeshore, and commercial and cultural districts, all with savvy design features.

## DIVERSIONS

Last month the [Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto Canada](#) re-opened in the trendy, revitalized Lower Junction area. MOCA's mandate is to exhibit, research, collect and promote innovative art by Canadian and international artists whose works engage and address challenging issues and themes relevant to our times. The new museum occupies the first two and a half floors of Toronto's iconic 1919 Tower Automotive Building and will become the focal point of a new eight-acre residential, arts and cultural community when the project is completed in several years.



THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART WILL OPEN THIS FALL IN A RESTORED 1919 BUILDING © MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The Art Gallery of Ontario offers a special Georgia O’Keeffe exhibition and the interesting, Canadainspired “Every. Now. Then: Reframing Nationhood” as part of Canada’s 150th anniversary. At the Royal Ontario Museum, the “Out of the Depths: The Blue Whale Story” exhibit is open to visitors.

The \$25 million Bentway project, aka the “Under Gardiner” will transform a mile of vacant land underneath Toronto’s Gardiner Expressway into an urban corridor offering pedestrian and bike paths, gardens, a skating rink, recreational amenities, public markets, public art, special exhibitions, festivals and theater and musical performances when it opens in July.

#### CHECKING IN WITH GEORGE SPEZZA

Director, Business Growth Services, City of Toronto Economic Development and Culture

#### **Which Toronto neighborhoods have experienced positive results from revitalization and restoration?**

Many neighborhoods have been successful in their business plans for regeneration. In the past 10 years the historic Distillery District, east of downtown, turned into a vibrant residential, retail, restaurant and arts center. Developers transformed a group of Victorian-era industrial buildings into a destination for both residents and visitors, opening in 2003 and improving each year with new venues and residential amenities. In Liberty Village, just west of downtown, ongoing development brought about living lofts, offices and creative industries from former factories and warehouses. Everyone loves the brick and beam concept here, which continues to evolve.



DISTILLERY DISTRICT © TOURISM TORONTO

**The Waterfront Project meets a long-term goal to link the eastern areas of downtown with the lakeshore. Will this be good for the city?**

It will be great for the city. This is a huge project involving many new mixed-use structures, commercial and residential space and lots of creative industries like design and high-tech firms. The opportunities are significant because the projects are close to the downtown core, and the proximity to Lake Ontario is vital for the city's growth potential.

### **How is the restoration of Union Station coming along?**

There has already been improvement in the shops, restaurant venues and residential areas around Union Station, opened in 1927, and to the portions of the station owned by the city, including an overhaul of the concourses. We have already seen benefits with several new office developments in the area. The beauty of the restored station livens up Front Street, and the newly built York concourse is now open and ready.

### **Toronto Info to Go**

Most domestic and international flights arrive at Pearson International Airport, about 15 miles (25–40 minutes) from downtown. The best way to travel to/from Pearson is by Union Pearson Express, a modern train running every 15 minutes to two city UP stations and downtown's Union Rail Station (25 minutes; \$5.30–12, children 12 and under free). The train offers free WiFi, power outlets, luggage racks and flight information screens.

Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, on Centre Island, connects to downtown by a short tunnel (10 minutes). It is the hub for Porter Airlines, offering flights to 15 Canadian cities and eight U.S. gateways. Billy Bishop received

top marks in the Skytrax 2016 World Airport Awards for fast check-in, ease of access to the terminal and courtesy and efficiency of airport staff.

## COMING AND GOING

For tourist visits to Canada of less than 180 days, U.S. citizens do not need visas but must have a passport or membership in the NEXUS trusted traveler program. Other types of travel (work, study or immigration) generally require visas. Children under 16 must present proof of U.S. citizenship.

## OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

English and French in Canada, with English used mostly in Toronto

Toronto: Just the Facts

**Time zone:** GMT-4

**Phone code:** Country code: 1 City codes: 416, 647, 437

**Currency:** Canadian dollar

**Key industries:** Financial services, health/life sciences, fashion/apparel, educational services, design, aerospace, food and beverage, technology

Where to Stay in Toronto

**FOUR SEASONS HOTEL TORONTO** This 5-star, 55-story flagship (with private FS apartments on the top 25 floors) opened in 2012 with 1,700 works by Canadian artists. Enjoy Café Boulud, the popular d|bar and a luxurious spa and fitness center. *60 Yorkville Ave.* \$\$\$\$

**HOTEL X TORONTO** Part of the Library Hotel Collection, the 404- room hotel boasts numerous dining venues, rooftop swimming and SkyBar, VIP check-in, a four-story athletic facility, underground parking and views of city and lake. *111 Princes' Blvd.* \$\$\$–\$\$\$\$

**SHANGRI-LA HOTEL TORONTO** The downtown location offers 159 spacious guestrooms; 49 suites; Bosk fine-dining restaurant; a 9,000-square-foot health/wellness club and yoga studio; an indoor swimming pool; and



Moroccan-French Miraj Hammam Spa. David Chang's Momofuku restaurant is adjacent. *188 University Ave.* \$\$\$\$

## Restaurants in Toronto

**ALO** Chef Patrick Kriss' nightly multicourse tasting menu may include steelhead trout, caviar and Hokkaido sea scallops. Alo topped the 2017 list by *Canada's 100 Best Restaurants* magazine. Reservations necessary, open Tuesday– Saturday, dinner only. *163 Spandina Ave.* \$\$\$\$

**LUCKEE** Located in the chic Metropolitan Hotel, Luckee's varied menu includes dim sum, dumplings, baked sweet soya-glazed cod and Hong Kongstyle steamed sea bass. Reserve a counter seat at the glass-walled open kitchen. *Metropolitan Hotel, 318 Wellington St. W.* \$\$\$–\$\$\$\$

**STK** The steak chain opened its first Canadian property last year in Toronto's upscale Yorkville neighborhood. The high-quality steaks, inventive cocktails, Las Vegas-style vibe, friendly staff and DJ music ensure you leave satisfied. *153 Yorkville Ave.* \$\$\$