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SECTION T SATURDAY, JULY 5, 2025 TORONTO STAR

ON 03

# TRAVEL



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## Destination: SUMMER FUN

The Star's new road-trip  
series kicks off with our guide  
to Niagara-on-the-Lake  
T7



STEVENMCFEETERS/GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

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ONTARIO ROAD TRIP



DAVID COOPER/SHAW FESTIVAL

This season's shows at the Shaw Festival include a production of Cole Porter's 1934 musical, "Anything Goes."

JESSICA HURAS  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

# How to summer in Niagara-on-the-Lake

Where to have a perfect picnic, sip Chardonnay and scoop the best peach sundae

Come summer, Niagara-on-the-Lake hits its stride. In this pocket of Ontario wine country, vineyard patios fill with visitors sipping flights and lingering over unhurried lunches in the sun. With its rows of historic storefronts, Queen Street — the town's main drag — offers a walkable mix of cafés, specialty shops and old-world charm. And just beyond downtown, road-side stands spill over with just-picked peaches, while shaded riverbanks offer the ideal spot to lounge with a picnic blanket and cold drink. About a two-hour drive from Toronto, Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) is also known as much for its arts and culture as its wineries. The Shaw Festival in particular brings theatre lovers to town all summer long. Whether you go for the Cabernet Franc, a curtain call or

the cute boutiques in Old Town, this is the kind of destination where a quick detour can easily stretch into a full-day wander, and a weekend away feels like a total reset.

Here are some of the best things to do in and around town.

**Visit a historic site turned creative hub**

A quiet stretch of the Niagara River

is home to the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre, a community-focused gallery in a restored 19th-century pumphouse.

There's always something on, including rotating exhibitions highlighting regional and national artists across mediums, drop-in workshops and art classes. On now (until July 27) is a solo show by Canadian painter Robert

Crosby, whose dreamy acrylics capture East Coast life. The gallery is about a 20-minute walk from Old Town, so grab a zingy Clockwork Orange cold-pressed juice from Niagara Juice Co. before you stroll over.

**Pack a picnic for a riverside lunch**

Start at Cheese Secrets, an inviting fromagerie where glass-fronted cases are stocked with wedges of local blue, Merlot-marinated cheddar and sheep's milk Manchego. You can build your own spread with artisanal crackers and small-batch jams, or pre-order a ready-to-go picnic basket.

Browse the shelves at the cosy Old Niagara Bookshop next door, then make your way to the riverfront Queen's Royal Park, where shaded lawns and sweeping views of Fort Niagara make for a picture-perfect al fresco lunch.

SEE NOTL, T8

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# Great food, family fun and serenity

**NOTL FROM T7**

**Cool off at a retro ice cream shop**

A 15-minute drive from Old Town, Avondale Dairy Bar has been a rural staple since 1955. Here, more than 40 flavours are blended by hand using milk from the dairy farm next door. You can't go wrong with any scoop. Still, if your timing's right, the fresh peach sundae is summer in a cup.

Expect a lineup, but the wait is just part of tradition. If you're travelling in a group with kids, head to the swing set at the edge of the parking lot to keep them entertained while someone else holds your place in line.

**Stroll flower fields and stop for a Chardonnay**

Part farm, part apothecary, Neob Lavender is a peaceful spot where you can walk through fields of purple blooms, pick your own bouquet or join an open-air event (like sunset yoga). The 12-acre property is home to 20,000 lavender plants and a seasonal flower garden open from June to October. Inside the shop, browse more than 150 small-batch products, from patchouli-lavender soaps to luxe body oils. Afterwards, swing by the nearby Southbrook Vineyards, where you can admire vineyard views from the terrace with a glass of Triomphe Chardonnay, a bright white with citrus and stone fruit notes.

**Book tickets for a world-class show**

Running through October, the Shaw Festival brings a full season of polished productions to its two landmark theatres on Queen's Parade. From sweeping period dramas to sharp-witted comedies, this long-standing festival puts on both classic texts and contemporary shows with equal flair. Don't miss



**Pick up picnic provisions at Cheese Secrets and take your lunch to the waterfront.**

CHEESE SECRETS

Cole Porter's 1934 musical, "Anything Goes." It's the kind of joyful, old-school spectacle that leaves audiences humming all the way home.

**Dine where the locals do**

The Garrison House is the laid-back hangout where Niagara wine-makers, chefs and in-the-know locals go for Ontario brews and unpretentious plates. Chef David Watt's ever-evolving menu draws on global flavours, from Thai to Italian, but stays focused on regional ingredients. The Garrison burger is a signature: a juicy beef brisket patty from Cumbræ's farms topped with double-smoked bacon, zippy horseradish mayo and red-wine-caramelized onions. The sunny patio buzzes in summer, especially during happy hour. It's family-friendly, cyclist-approved and a solid bet for good-value dining in wine country.

**Take a side-trip to a huge attraction and a hidden gem**

About a half-hour drive south of NOTL is Ontario's most famous tourist attraction: Niagara Falls. And a kilometre south of Horse-shoe Falls is one of the region's most serene escapes, Dufferin Islands, with its canopy of trees, lily-covered ponds and winding trails. This cluster of small islands, linked by foot-bridges and walking paths, was partly shaped by a nearby hydro project in the early 1900s. Today, it's a beloved retreat for birdwatchers, photographers and anyone looking to slip away from the crowds.

**If you stay**

124 on Queen Hotel & Spa will lodge you in contemporary style right in Old Town — the location couldn't be better. The boutique hotel has 76 rooms, a hydrotherapy spa and an acclaimed farm-to-table restaurant, Treadwell Cuisine.

**READ MORE ON THESTAR.COM/TRAVEL**

Want more food and drink recommendations in the Niagara region? Visit thestar.com/travel for "Where Chefs Eat," featuring Daniel Hadida of the acclaimed Restaurant Pearl Morisette.



**Chef Daniel Hadida is co-owner of Restaurant Pearl Morisette.**



**Chef Hadida's picks include Revalee Brunch Café in Vineland, Ont.**



**Tide & Vine Oyster House is noted for its seafood.**

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**BOOK by JULY 7**

## Cruise Deals including Flights from Toronto

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<p><b>Brilliance of the Seas   Southern Caribbean</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return air from Toronto <b>January 10 - 18</b></li> <li>7-night sailing Roundtrip San Juan in a <b>Balcony</b></li> <li>Visits: St. Lucia • St. Kitts • Antigua • Tortola • St. Thomas</li> <li><b>1-night pre-cruise</b> hotel in San Juan</li> <li><b>BONUS: Specialty Dining for Two + \$50USD Shipboard Credit</b></li> </ul> <p><b>\$2,523</b></p>
<p><b>Allure of the Seas   Western Mediterranean</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return air from Toronto <b>October 17 - 26</b></li> <li>7-night sailing Roundtrip Barcelona in a <b>Balcony</b></li> <li>Visits: Palma de Mallorca • Livorno • Rome • Capri</li> <li><b>1-night pre-cruise</b> hotel in Barcelona</li> <li><b>BONUS: \$50USD Shipboard Credit</b></li> </ul> <p><b>\$3,033</b></p>
<p><b>Celebrity Constellation   Western Caribbean</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return air from Toronto <b>December 27 - January 4</b></li> <li>7-night sailing Roundtrip Tampa in a <b>Balcony</b></li> <li>Visits: Costa Maya • Belize City • Cozumel</li> <li><b>1-night pre-cruise</b> hotel in Tampa</li> <li><b>BONUS: \$100USD Shipboard Credit</b></li> </ul> <p><b>\$2,969</b></p>

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