



Toronto

City of Toronto

Geographical area: 630 sq. km

Total population: 2,615,060

Percentage of total national population living in the city: 7.8%

Education level – percentage with degree level or higher: 38.1%

GDP (PPP) million: US\$124,098

Percentage creative industries employment: 9.7%

Like Canada itself, Toronto has often been overshadowed by its more boisterous American neighbours. Yet, just as the success of Canada's economic and social model has increasingly been recognised in the last decade, so too have Toronto's growing strengths. (It will, for instance, host the Pan-American Games in 2015.) Nowhere is this more true than in the field of culture. Through a combination of major capital projects, enlightened municipal leadership and the efforts of some of the city's most noted cultural figures, Toronto is well-placed to take advantage of its greatest resource: its talented, hugely diverse population. As such, it is starting to emerge as a significant presence on the world stage in many areas of culture.

Toronto's signature event is the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). TIFF started modestly in 1976 as a round-up of the best films from film festivals around the world. From these humble beginnings – the inaugural festival was

attended by 35,000 people – TIFF has grown to become one of the most prestigious events in the film calendar, arguably second only to Cannes as a showcase for high-profile films and stars and as a focus for market activity. The TIFF Bell Lightbox cultural centre was opened in 2010 to provide a suitable headquarters for the Festival. This growing confidence in what Toronto can achieve has been replicated across much of the city's cultural scene in recent years.

The cultural landscape of Toronto has changed dramatically since May 2002, when the federal and provincial governments announced multi-million dollar investment contributions to seven Toronto cultural projects. Among these were the Royal Ontario Museum, which embarked on a C\$270m renovation and expansion project, transforming the building with a striking Daniel Libeskind-designed main entrance and galleries, now officially known as the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal. In 2004 the Art Gallery of Ontario embarked on a radical C\$276m redevelopment led by the Canadian-born architect Frank Gehry, which increased its art viewing space by 47%. In 2006 the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, a 2,071-seat theatre complex, opened after a three-year construction estimated to have cost C\$181m. The design of its main auditorium, the R. Fraser Elliott Hall, has won acclaim for its superb acoustics. Together these projects have been dubbed 'Toronto's Cultural Renaissance'. They are helping to position the city as a leading global creative capital and build civic pride.

Toronto's cultural policy recommends that the city try to keep pace with international competitors by making a firm commitment to sustain its cultural sector,

but is also keen to stress the equitable distribution of cultural services through the city and to all segments of the population. The Toronto City Council 2011 report, *Creative Capital Gains – An Action Plan for Toronto*, urges the city to ensure access and opportunity for cultural participation to all citizens, regardless of age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, geography or socioeconomic status. This is particularly important given that Toronto is such a diverse place: in 2011 it was estimated that 49% of those living in the city were foreign-born. The City Council is working to weave immigrants into the fabric of the city's cultural life by using its presence on non-profit boards and as well through its formal multi-year funding contracts with major cultural organisations to ensure that these cultural groups are mindful of the need to embrace diversity. One example of this will be seen in 2014, when Toronto hosts World Pride, an event that promotes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues on an international level through parades, festivals and other cultural activities.

Municipal cultural planning in the city is also working to provide access to affordable and sustainable space for both individual artists and cultural industries. As in many global cities of the developed world, Toronto's cultural sector is squeezed by the rising price of real estate market and the gentrification of city neighbourhoods. City planners are working together across departments to require developers to provide affordable and sustainable creative space. Artscape, a not for profit urban development organisation specialising in creative place-making while transforming communities, has been the City's key partner in working with local developers to do this. Located in downtown Toronto and opened in 2012, Artscape's Daniels Spectrum is a cultural landmark and event venue in the heart

of \$1 B (CAN) revitalization of the Regent Park Neighbourhood, Canada's oldest and largest social housing development. Daniels Spectrum recently named as one of five nominees for "Best New Venue for Meetings and Events in North America" for the BizBash Awards with the winner to be announced at the BizBash IdeaFest in New York later this year.

The City of Toronto is aware the importance of informal cultural activities, both for their often undervalued financial power and their essential contribution to a vibrant cultural sector. While the 'formal' cultural sector is largely rooted in European art forms (such as classical music, opera, ballet and visual art) the newer forms of mass cultural participation, including film and performing arts festivals, are making great efforts to embrace the so-called "fringe", to harness the energy, the innovation and diversity of artists and cultural practices within the city. The City produces *Nuit Blanche*, a free all-night contemporary art event, which provides opportunities for young local artists to display their work to an estimated audience of one million. The Toronto Fringe Festival, which started in 1989, is an annual summer theatre festival featuring experimental and edgy plays by both unknown and established artists. It is held across 30 venues and attracts more than 90,000 people per year. The Toronto Arts Council (TAC) is also a very important body in the funding the local arts scene. Last year, the TAC funded 421 arts and cultural organizations (from 619 applications) and 272 individual artists (from 943 applications).

While Canada has escaped the worst of the global economic problems of recent years, its authorities still have to operate in a climate of fiscal restraint. The City of Toronto is no exception, and in the cultural field it is exploring ways to boost non-conventional funding from the private sector and other levels of



Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) Courtesy of City of Toronto

government. New funding models are being put into place to try and help the cultural sector replace lost income streams. For instance, following a 12-year campaign led by a group of young artists, Toronto's billboards will now be taxed to generate more funding for culture. This 'third-party sign tax' has been the spark to help Toronto start to provide longer-term sustainable arts funding that over time will be funded through the property tax base with the money being phased in gradually over the next four years. The City may then reach its oft-stated goal of increasing its per capita spending on the arts from C\$18.30 to C\$25.

Toronto, then, is a global city which has made a sustained commitment to boosting its cultural 'offer'. The impact of this has already been felt in the way that culture is consumed in the city; the challenge now will be to translate it into cultural production too, to give Toronto its own distinctive urban voice.

City of Toronto: www.toronto.ca/culture
Official website of Tourism Toronto:
www.seetorontonow.com/arts-theatre-culture
Toronto International Film Festival: tiff.net