

Home-grown hangovers

Delve into Toronto's beer culture by exploring some of the many microbreweries that add another aspect to the uniqueness of the city.

Text **Lucy Corne**

My first trip to the Toronto area was all about wine. After two days of exploring the city's museums and galleries, I headed straight for Niagara's vineyards and began to work my way through the region's many vintages. But as I explored Canada further it soon became apparent that beer, rather than wine, is the tipples of choice for most Canadians, with Toronto being something of a mecca to those who favour the amber nectar.

▲ Mill Street Brew Pub, Toronto's most popular craft brewery, has the perfect outdoor seating area to glug a late afternoon beer.



Courtesy: Great Lakes Brewery



Courtesy: Great Lakes Brewery

Excited to return another day to try the pumpkin and green tea beers, we left with clinking bags and an unusual souvenir created for the board game enthusiast – Beeropoly.

▲ Clockwise from below: Try some of Great Lakes Brewery's stronger ales; The microbrewery tours are not just about beer tasting, they also give you chance to discover how your choice of drink is prepared.

Canadians drink over two billion litres of beer every year and while most of that is mass-produced lager served in ice-cold pitchers, craft beers are really taking off in Toronto. Ontario has close to 50 breweries, large and small, many of which are clustered in and around the province's largest city, known to locals simply as T.O. Putting thoughts of wine out of my mind, we set off to sample four of the city's finest places to guzzle ale.

It seemed apt for our quaffing session to begin where Toronto's craft brewing culture did – at the Great Lakes Brewery. Founded in 1987, it's the city's oldest microbrewery and churns out some quirky pints as well as a few old favourites. We were treated to an enthusiastic tour and while we'd managed to drop in on a day when brewing wasn't in action, our guide still made the tour enthralling with his infectious enthusiasm

for all things beer related. Of course, we were eager to get to the tasting room and were happily rewarded with samples of four different brews. Their two lagers are perfect for those used to a lighter flavour, while the Devil's Pale Ale offers a more complex tang. Personally, I enjoyed the original taste of the Orange Peel Ale, one of four seasonal brews that hit the shelves for a limited time each year. Each uses all natural ingredients so the citrusy ale I was sipping was actually made with chunks of orange peel, rather than artificial flavourings. Excited to return another day to try the pumpkin and green tea beers, we left with clinking bags and an unusual souvenir created for the board game enthusiast – Beeropoly.

Still skirting the city centre, we headed for the Granite Brewery. Originally set up in Halifax, the family-run outfit decided to



Courtesy: Great Lakes Brewery



Courtesy: Granite Brewery

▲ Above: Dine and drink at the atmospheric back patio at the Granite Brewery. Below: Pale ales, stouts, lagers and exotic flavours...take your pick.

branch out and in the early '90s they set up shop in Toronto. It's not tough to see why they are doing so well and we could easily have spent the rest of the day in their atmospheric bar, highly reminiscent of cosy pubs in my native England. The beers were similarly evocative of home and we worked our way through a duo of pale ales before moving on to their fine English style bitters. While I loved the moniker of their



Courtesy: Granite Brewery

Brewing directions

Brewery: Great Lakes Brewery

Address: 30 Queen Elizabeth Blvd, Etobicoke

Tel: 416-255-4510

Web: www.greatlakesbeer.com

Beers: Two light lagers, a devilishly-good pale ale and some unique and characterful seasonal brews.

The writer recommends: Booking ahead to guarantee a fascinating tour of the brewery (CAD5).

Brewery: Granite Brewery

Address: 245 Eglinton Ave East, Toronto

Tel: 416-322-0723

Web: www.granitebrewery.ca

Beers: Ten different brands ranging from light fruity ales to super strength brews. The Peculiar Ale is divine.

The writer recommends: Enjoying a hearty brunch on the patio and stocking up on beer to take away. Free tours are available.

Brewery: Mill Street Brew Pub

Address: 55 Mill Street, Toronto

Tel: 416-681-0338

Web: www.millstreetbrewpub.ca

Beers: A wide range including the flavourful Organic Lager and some excellent stouts and porters.

The writer recommends: Stopping by for a lingering lunch of mussels simmered in organic ale; ordering a sampler of their top beers.

Brewery: C'est What?

Address: 67 Front Street East, Toronto

Tel: 416-867-9499

Web: www.cestwhat.com

Beers: Something for everyone with close to 50 beers from craft breweries across Canada.

The writer recommends: Visiting mid-afternoon before the crowds descend; drinking half pints to allow you to taste a wider range of beers; clearing an afternoon in your schedule – you'll need it to make a dent in their menu!



Courtesy: Mill Street Brewery

▲ Above & below: Sample popular Canadian dishes along with the home brews at Mill Street Brew Pub.

hop-filled ‘Hopping Mad Ale’, I found the raspberry undertones of the Ringberry Ale better suited to pre-lunch drinking. Those seeking something a little stronger could try the Irish-style stout or the robust Gin Lane barley wine – not for the beer novice at 9% ABV! I would have needed to partake of one of Granite’s hearty lunches if I’d stuck around for further supping, but with two more stops on our agenda we had to keep moving.

We’d heard a lot about the **Mill Street Brew Pub**, Toronto’s most popular craft brewery, and were not disappointed with its cheery exterior, its warm, welcoming décor or its range of excellent hand-crafted brews. Those only concerned with liquid refreshment can head straight to the shop where taps are hooked up to offer a ‘try before you buy’ policy, but after a tipsy morning we opted instead for a boozy lunch to soak up all the samples. We were thrilled to find that the menu lived up to the reputation it has gained as a great

place to sample Canadian dishes such as poutine and chicken wings alongside mussels, stews and pies all containing the essential ingredient – a tot of fresh ale. To wash things down we started with the sampler – half a dozen tasters of the most popular beers, including the light and flavourful wheat beer and the renowned, rich tasting organic lager. Having tried a few, we ordered a pint of our favourite and were glad we didn’t have far to stumble to the last leg of our tour.

On reaching the final stop on our brief beery tour, we were sure we’d chosen the venues in the right order. *C’est What* doesn’t actually brew beer on the premises, but their cosy basement bar offers a vast range of beers, making it a great place for a beer novice to begin or for travellers short on time to get a feel for real Canadian beer. Once you’ve navigated the dizzying selection, including a *C’est What* range brewed especially for the bar, it’s a fine place to chill out and snuggle up to



Courtesy: Mill Street Brewery



Courtesy: C'est What

▲ Above & below: Once you are done glancing at the impressive selection of beers at C'est What, settle down at their basement bar and enjoy your choice for the day.
Right: Home-grown Hemp set, available at C'est What.

a warming pint of stout or to refresh with a light summer ale. Some of their brews are pretty self-explanatory, like the Coffee Porter, or Chocolate Ale, while others have more intriguing names, including Dead Elephant Ale and the fabulously titled Big Butt. And if you feel you're over indulging, remembering the bar's beer manifesto should save you some guilt. Your beer is guaranteed to be fresh, the ingredients are all natural and every sip you enjoy was hand-brewed

Fact file

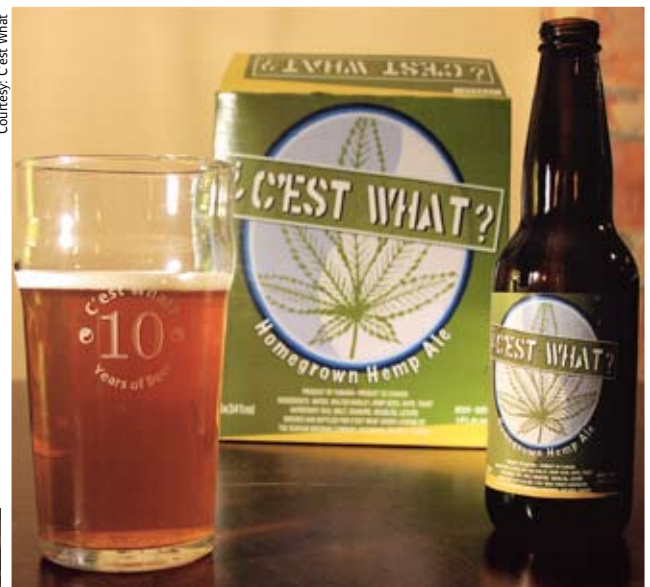
Getting there

Jet Airways has daily flights to Toronto from Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai and Brussels.

Accommodation

Victorian mansions, modern five-star hotels, countryside inns, B&Bs and even comfortable backpacker hostels... you'd be spoiled for choice when it comes to stay options in Toronto.

For more information: Log on to www.toronto.ca



Courtesy: C'est What

The cosy basement bar at C'est What offers a vast range of beers, making it a great place for travellers to get a feel for Canadian beer.

in Canada. So if you end your Toronto trip with an aching head at least you'll know you're suffering with a home-grown hangover!