

A World Away

Toronto Islands offer a respite from the hustle and bustle of the city

By Heather Hudson

When the glamor and grit of our bustling city becomes too much, you can escape it all in 13 minutes flat.

A quick jaunt by ferry across Lake Ontario will transport you to the Toronto Islands. Also known as “the Island,” it’s really a cluster of 15 islands connected by pathways and bridges. It’s a mere five kilometres from end to end, so you can experience everything in a day.

A LATE START TO THE SEASON

Heavy rainfall this spring resulted in flood warnings throughout the city, including the Toronto Islands, which were closed to the general public from May until late July. Check the current status by visiting Toronto.ca and searching “Toronto Islands” or by calling 416-392-8193.

CENTREVILLE AMUSEMENT PARK

This charming theme park boasts 30 rides, games and food kiosks but offers a quaint, small-town feel. Think bumper boats, a twirling teacup ride, an antique carousel, plus the only indoor disco scrambler in Toronto, complete with light and sound show. Perfect for families with young children or couples looking for a whimsical first date.

FAR ENOUGH FARM

A short walk from Centreville is a delightful little working farm that doubles as a petting zoo. Visitors get up close and personal with more than 40 species of farmyard animals and exotic birds, including Jersey cows, mini potbelly pigs, alpacas, rabbits and ponies. Pet the animals, meet the farmers and enjoy fun farm games while you’re there.

FRANKLIN’S CHILDREN’S GARDEN

Who can resist Franklin the Turtle and his delightful friends from the celebrated storybooks by Paulette Bourgeois? Just a short walk off the main pathway and you’ll be in Franklin’s



Toronto Island Bicycle Rental

"ONE OF THE CITY'S GREATEST PLEASURES IS BOARDING THE FERRY WITH A BICYCLE AND RIDING THE ISLAND FROM END TO END."



TORONTO ISLANDS

Garden, divided into seven sections, where children and families can enjoy hands-on gardening and play in a treehouse. Don't leave without posing beside all seven of the Franklin and friends sculptures.

ECLECTIC NEIGHBOURHOODS

Believe it or not, more than 620 residents call Ward's and Algonquin Islands home. Visitors can admire the eclectic and often colourful homes and gardens by ambling along narrow laneways lined by native grasses. The serene surroundings will have you dreaming of making this vehicle-free oasis your home. But you'll need patience – the waiting list opens only every two to three years and you'll wait about 35 years before a house becomes available!

CYCLING

One of the city's greatest pleasures is boarding the ferry with a bicycle and riding the Island from end to end. You'll pass all the major attractions, including the enormously popular central fountain and the huge green spaces where families picnic, play Frisbee and stretch out for a nap. If you're looking for more secluded surroundings, there are plenty of quiet niches

along lonely stretches of sand and shade within copses of trees. Didn't bring a bike? Toronto Island Bicycle Rental can set you up with a single, tandem or four-seater quadricycle!

BEACHES

Toronto Island is home to three sandy beaches:

- Hanlan's Point beach is a 10-minute stroll from the Hanlan's Point ferry dock. The south side of the beach is a popular clothing-optional beach and offers plenty of privacy.
- Centre Island beach is closer to the heart of the action, near Centreville, bike rentals and picnic areas, but there's still lots of room to stretch out and catch some sun.
- Ward's Island beach is a five-minute walk from the Ward's Island ferry dock, just past the Island Café. When you've had enough sun, take any of the many pathways that lead through sand dunes to serene meadows alive with wildflowers.

Insider tip: All three of the Island's beaches have achieved Blue Flag status – awarded to beaches and marinas that meet strict standards for water quality, environmental management

The Rectory Café, on Ward's Island, has a lovely outdoor patio on the outer harbour



The Rectory Café



The double-deck ferry William Inglis is shown here transporting tourists to Toronto Islands

Zoran Karapancev/Shutterstock.com

and education, safety and services. Water is sampled daily between June and September to check for the presence of E. coli bacteria. If there is a concern, a flag will warn swimmers.

DINING

Don't worry if you didn't pack a picnic – you won't go hungry on the Toronto Islands! The Island Café and the Rectory Café are quiet options for simple cuisine. The Carousel Café and Shopsy's Restaurant, both located near Centreville, are where you'll find families chowing down on burgers and French fries. For quicker bites, there are a number of Pizza Pizza outlets and a Centreville food court.

GETTING THERE

Head to Jack Layton Ferry Terminal (at Bay Street and Queen's Quay) and buy a ticket (adult \$7.71; senior and ages 15-19 \$5.05; ages 2 to 14 \$3.72; 2 and under free). Hop any of the three ferries headed to different points of the island.

Insider tip: The lines for the Hanlan's Point and Ward's Island ferries are usually shorter (and the ferries less crowded) than the Centre Island ferry. Even if Centreville is your main attraction, you'll be within easy walking distance from the other docks. **IT'S**



View of the city from the Island

maxi_love/Shutterstock.com



Centreville swan rides

Kiev Victor/Shutterstock.com