

Wine Festivals Near Toronto

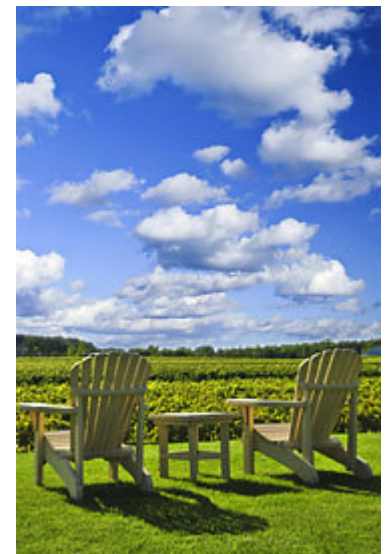
by Elizabeth Willoughby



Most famous for its natural beauty, the popularity of Canada is spreading into a new realm: festivals. The [Toronto International Film Festival \(TIFF\)](#), one of the most important film festivals in the world, begins as children return to school and ends as the first autumn leaves start to change colour in rural Ontario. This kicks off the fall fair season celebrated in communities across the province, some that would be of interest to an outsider – especially one who likes good wine, good food and good music. If you're in the city for the film fest anyhow, you should definitely make these side trips from Toronto.

Niagara Wine Festival

TIFF is perfectly timed to end as the [Niagara Wine Festival](#) begins, just over an hour's drive away. Cradled between Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment, the Niagara region enjoys a micro climate well suited to wine production. For about two weeks each year, with a particularly full schedule on the weekends, the Niagara Wine Festival provides over 100 events for visitors to attend, including wine and culinary tastings, tours, seminars and live entertainment. It is a family event participated in by the whole region, and 2009's was the largest wine festival in the country. Literally dozens of wineries offer wine and cuisine pairings in the scenic settings of their own vineyards, some overlooking Lake Ontario. Take a guided tour of a winery and then sample its wines with appetizers. Steven Page of the Barenaked Ladies performed at last year's opening night concert; Canada's largest street parade entertained the crowds that lined the streets. If "Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay Sur Lies paired with tangy berry-glazed meatballs and portobello nestled on garlic-soaked baguette slices" sounds good to you, get yourself a [Discovery Pass](#) for event discounts, and buy tickets in advance if you know what you want to attend.



En route from the Toronto festival to the Niagara festival, make a pit stop at charming [East Dell Estates](#) in Beamsville and have lunch in the winery's restaurant, View, that overlooks rolling hills striped with parallel rows of grape vines. Also, keep an eye out for [Dan Aykroyd wines](#). An original Blues Brother and Ghostbuster, the Canadian comedian, actor and screenplay writer is now a prize-winning vintner.



While you're visiting Niagara region wineries, make the historical village of [Niagara-on-the-Lake](#), the first capital of Upper Canada, your home base. Built in Victorian, Regency and Edwardian architecture, it's pretty and it's conveniently located to wineries as well as to [Niagara Falls](#) less than 30 kilometres away. Forgive the Canadians for what they've done to their "Honeymoon City" of Niagara Falls, unless you like theme parks, neon lights, haunted houses and casinos, in which case enjoy the spectacle. The Horseshoe Falls will leave a much better lasting impression. Visit the Falls by

boat, helicopter, walk in behind them or simply gaze at them from ground level. They're the most powerful falls in North America, and they're beautiful.

Be sure to take advantage of [The Shaw Festival](#), which plays in four theatres in Niagara-on-the-Lake (1,700 seats in total). The Shaw is the only theatre in the world that specializes exclusively in period plays by George Bernard Shaw and his contemporaries.

Where to Stay:

The Victorian elegance of the [Prince of Wales](#) sets visitors right on the main street of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and the [Pillar and Post Inn](#) and spa is nearby. The Georgian-style [Queen's Landing](#) on the scenic waterfront offers an alternative to the busy downtown strip.

Prince Edward County's "[Celebration of Regional Cuisine](#)"

The Niagara Wine Festival is perfectly timed to end while Prince Edward County (PEC), 2.5 hours east of Toronto, begins setting up for their wine and cuisine fest. This annual one-day contest that features regional chefs, growers, winemakers, beers, ciders and cuisine is billed as eastern Ontario's premier epicurean experience. At the fairgrounds in the small town of Picton, Prince Edward County chefs, growers and vintners offer their best work, often pairing their efforts. Live jazz plays while up to 2000 guests sample the delights. Register and get your tickets in advance for the privilege of being first to taste such winners as corn and pickerel fritters with sweet and salty dill and mustard sauce, oxtail poutine with five-year-old Black River cheddar, or spiced pumpkin pot de crème with caramel foam, accompanied by award-winning Chardonnays, Rieslings, Baco Noirs, Pino Noirs, ciders and ales.



Although the event lasts only one day, PEC's "Taste Trail" can occupy foodies for several. The trail links food producers, growers, restaurants, wineries, cideries and breweries that use local ingredients. Cultivated from a history of bountiful harvests and quality produce, PEC calls it "terroir-based gastronomy at its best."

A picturesque island, [Prince Edward County](#) offers the highest quality of life in Ontario and has been voted one of Canada's top ten places for rural living. For visitors, this translates into comfortable accommodations and lots to do – on the water and off. Besides the Taste Trail, nature, artisan and wine themed tours are also available, both guided and self-guided.

Where to stay:



Centrally located in this finger lake region and close to the Celebration of Regional Cuisine Festival in Picton is the [Claramount Inn & Spa](#), a colonial mansion that sits on the shore above Picton Bay's PEC Cruising Club. Alternatively, the charming [Waring House](#) is just outside of town.