

Look in your own backyard

by BRIAN LOCKHART

During the current time, there's a lot of people lamenting the fact that they can't travel.

That is understandable. For many people, travel is a way of life and something they really enjoy.

However, it seems many people in Ontario always need to travel outside of the province to get away.

I'm sure there are a lot of Ontarians who don't realize exactly how big this province is. In fact, I'll bet that most of the population of Toronto doesn't even realize towns and cities exist past Highway 7.

At 1,076,395 square kilometres, Ontario is larger than Venezuela, Germany, France, and a whole lot of other countries.

Much of it, however, is uninhabited. Just do a search on Google Earth and go north of Sudbury.

Trees, thousands and thousands of lakes, and a lot of granite, is pretty much all you're going to see. But you'll never see it if you don't go there.

There is plenty to see and do in this province. Even if you like to play only in populated areas, the drive in the most heavily populated area in the province, between Windsor and Ottawa, is an 800-kilometre stretch that will take though several major centres as well as small towns.

I have been fortunate enough to have visited more towns in Ontario than anyone I know. This is due to a combination of compassless road trips, and a couple of jobs that I've had that routinely sent me to many towns I had never even heard of.

There is always something different to see.

Along the north shoreline of Lake Erie there is a lot to see and do. From water sports, camping, and discovering strange new places, it and the nearby towns are one of my favourite regions.

Traveling north up along the shore of Lake Huron, the water is beautiful and so are the towns.

In the east end of the province, there are plenty of places to visit. Ottawa is a terrific city with lots of museums, galleries, and points of interest.

I was lucky enough to be on a film crew that travelling in an old steam train from Ottawa up through the Gatineau hills.

In between these points are a huge number of small towns, each with their history and quirks.

I've been in some hamlets that were so small I think I met the entire town in one afternoon, but every place has something different and interesting if you look for it.

If I'm on a road trip and see a sign for the 'world's largest ball of twine' or some local history museum, more often than not I'll pull over to take a look. You meet some very interesting people at those type of places.

Heading north, to most people in southern Ontario, means going to Muskoka or the Kawarthas.

Being 'in the north' at your cottage means you have barely even entered Northern Ontario. There's still another 900 kilometres to go before you hit the northern border, and that's a place almost no Ontarians will ever see.

A trip to Thunder Bay will be almost as long as a drive as heading south to Florida. Once you're there, you've entered a whole different world.

You can take a detour and visit Ouimet Canyon ? a huge gorge with 100 metre sheer cliffs and spectacular views. Ask anyone in Southern Ontario, and most people have never even heard of this outstanding provincial park.

While you're in the area you can explore the wild and untamed north shore of Lake Superior.

One trip on my bucket list is to visit Moosonee on the shores of James Bay. It isn't even accessible by road. You have to take the train or fly in to get to the town.

If you visit Moosonee, don't expect to be staying at the Ritz or eating at a five-star restaurant.

It's not the kind of trip for people who insist on luxury all the time.

However, you will be visiting a place that few people have experienced on the only salt water port in the province. That is pretty close to being in in Arctic territory.

If the travel bug is biting you and you feel the need to break away from the pandemic and do some exploring, it's all here in your own backyard.

You can explore, play, and find some fascinating places that will take days to drive to, without even leaving your own province.