

Canada's best small cities

Kingston, Ontario: A small place with big-city features



WHY KINGSTON?

- // Youthful & vibrant community
- // Progressive thinkers & welcoming residents
- // Support for entrepreneurs & small businesses

KINGSTON GAVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO COLLABORATE, LEARN, AND GROW OUR SUSTAINABLE FOOD IDEA.

– Bellen Tong, Co-Owner & Founder, Miss Bào



Zach Fang, Co-Owner & Project Coordinator

A math whiz turned restaurant owner, Zach first came to Kingston in 2009 to study at Queen's University. He returned with the vision of a remarkable business.

Bellen Tong, Co-Owner & Operations Manager

An engineer and professional chef, Bellen first came to Kingston for high school. She returned with the mission to start a restaurant revolution.



Miss Bào Restaurant & Cocktail Bar

Bellen and Zach are defining a more sustainable food culture with their zero-waste operation – and an eclectic use of ingredients and techniques.

They are just one part of Kingston's flourishing hospitality scene that delivers unique culinary experiences and events all year round.

KINGSTON

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There must be something in the water – or the air – in Kingston, Ont., a 450-square-kilometre city that spans east to west along the shores of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario, near-equidistant from Toronto and Montreal.

This historic community of just over 168,000 residents brims with accolades – including this year's number three ranking among Canada's Best Small Cities – that often surprise those unfamiliar with the place. Most Canadians are likely unaware, for instance, that Kingston has the smartest workforce in the country, with the highest number of PhD graduates per capita, according to Statistics Canada. Or that its homegrown musicians have bagged a collective total of 25 Juno Awards.

"We've always had a thriving music scene in Kingston," says Moira Demorest, Tourism Kingston's music commissioner – a new role created this year to further advance music and musicians in the city. "And yes, area musicians have collected a wealth of Junos, including 17 awarded to The Tragically Hip, who hail from Kingston."

The city's thriving music scene is poised for post-pandemic growth. Kingston recently launched a creative industries strategy, which was the impetus for the music portfolio at Tourism Kingston led by Ms. Demorest. Working in partnership with the Kingston Canadian Film Festival, KPP Concerts and RAW Design, this work has already resulted in a new all-ages venue for both music and film, called the Broom Factory, and a music video program that pairs local musicians with local media production companies.

"We have other initiatives as well geared to all stages of the artist journey, from aspiring to already established," says Ms. Demorest. "I'm really proud of the work we're doing here."

A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

Ms. Demorest has other reasons to feel proud of the city that's been home for most of her life. Kingston is a centre of culture, creativity and history, with more than two dozen museums, galleries and historic sites, including Fort Henry, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Foodies have a diverse menu of restaurants, distilleries, craft breweries, bespoke culinary events and food retailers to choose from, including Kingston Public Market – Ontario's oldest market, dating back to 1801. The city boasts more restaurants per capita than almost any other place in Canada, according to the Ontario East Economic Development Commission. In 2020, Kingston welcomed a notable addition to its diverse, evolving and expansive local culinary scene: a restaurant that not only offers delectable Asian fusion-inspired menu items and innovative cocktails – but also has a zero-waste approach.

"To be accurate, our waste diversion rate is more like 99.5 per cent," says Bellen Tong, co-owner of Miss Bào Restaurant + Cocktail Bar. "There's still that .5 per cent from waste from our washrooms, baby diapers, feminine products and the occasional packaging that a supplier sends, as a last-minute substitute, that we cannot divert from landfill."

To achieve near-zero waste, Ms. Tong and her partner Zach Fang installed a \$30,000 composter in the back of the restaurant that turns organic waste into nutritional soil. They send this soil to the farmer who supplies them with vegetables.

"A lot of what we do today is possible because Kingston has a well-established ecosystem of sustainable businesses," says Ms. Tong, who earned a biomechanical engineering degree from Queen's University before deciding to pursue her passion for food. "There are a lot of small players like us – we love working with them and we always tag them on Instagram."

Sports and recreation are also big in Kingston, which has more than 100 sports facilities. Its windy waterfront attracts hundreds of boats each year, earning Kingston its widely acknowledged status as the sailing capital of the world. With more than 200 shipwrecks beneath its waters, Kingston is also home to some of the best freshwater diving in the world.

"The lifestyle here is excellent," says Timothy Smith, CEO and co-founder of Octane Medical Group, a Kingston-based medical technology company that develops advanced bioprocesses, biomaterials and bioreactors for regenerative medicine. "Kingston really is a small big city. It has everything many big cities have – like good restaurants, theatre and sports – but without the negative big-city features like traffic. People don't have to travel far to enjoy all that the city has to offer."

SKILLED TALENT FOR INNOVATIVE COMPANIES

Employers like Octane don't have to venture far either to find the skilled talent they need. Kingston's three post-secondary schools – Queen's University, St. Lawrence College and the Royal Military College of Canada – provide companies with an ongoing stream of graduates trained in a wide range of disciplines.

Over its 15-year history, Octane – which is part of Kingston's rapidly growing cell and gene therapy sectors – has hired dozens of students from Queen's and St. Lawrence College, notes Mr. Smith, who graduated from Queen's engineering school in the late 1980s. Octane also sponsors a number of biotechnology students each year for semester-long learning and work placements.

"The students we've hired or sponsored from the schools here have been very well trained in their fields," says Mr. Smith. "They tend to come out of school with practical, hands-on skills so they can hit the ground running even when they don't have industry experience."

Octane has also been successful in bringing talent from other parts of the world to come and work in the company's ventures, which focus on cutting-edge innovations such as engineered tissue for orthopedic repair, bioelectric stimulation and a spinal implant made with advanced biocomposite material.

Ian Grant, Octane's chief operating officer and co-founder, attributes this in large part to the quality of life in Kingston.

"It's a very walkable city, with a downtown core that has a historic character and a number of buildings that are, really, quite grand," he says. "Even our business partners love coming here."

It helps to have a number of part-



How do you define a high quality of life? For many Canadians, access to outdoor activities, delicious food and entertainment play a role, and Kingston gets top marks on all these parameters. SUPPLIED

ners in key markets within easy reach, adds Mr. Grant. New York or Pennsylvania, for example, are just a few hours by car. For business meetings that require getting onboard a plane, the airports in Montreal and Toronto are each less than three hours away.

A WELCOMING PLACE FOR CLEAN- AND CLIMATE-TECH STARTUPS

This ease of access to markets was an important consideration for Ahmad Ghahreman when he co-founded Cyclic Materials, an innovative cleantech company that recovers and recycles rare earth metals used in high-performance magnets for electric vehicle, wind turbines and phones.

"For the electric vehicle market, easy access to cities like Detroit will be a big advantage for us," says Mr. Ghahreman, who moved to Kingston from Vancouver in 2014 after accepting a faculty position in the mining engineering department at Queen's.

In July 2021, he left his post at Queen's to focus on Cyclic Materials, where he led the development of a process for recovering and recycling

rare earth elements in a way that uses between 70 and 90 per cent less water and produces significantly less carbon dioxide than other processes.

"Kingston has a very welcoming environment for startups, especially those in cleantech or climate tech," says Mr. Ghahreman. "The city's economic development office has been wonderful with us throughout the past year, helping us make connections, hire people and identify companies we can work with."

Like Octane, Cyclic Materials has found it easy to recruit Kingston-based employees with the right skills.

"The graduates from Queen's – in particular those coming from chemical engineering and mechanical engineering – are among the best in Canada," says Mr. Ghahreman. "And it's not just their technical skills and knowledge that make them a great fit for us. It's also their concern for the environment and their awareness of how they can make difference, from right here in their community, by being part of a company that's advancing a sustainable solution."

BEST SMALL CITIES RANKINGS

In Canada, almost 82 per cent of the population lives in cities. Canadians are reconsidering where they want to call home. They increasingly choose hometowns that are more affordable, calmer and closer to the outdoors. Resonance Consultancy ranked Canada's best small cities (municipalities with populations of less than 200,000) by using a combination of statistical performance and qualitative evaluations by locals and visitors in six core categories:

PLACE

Quantifying a city's physical sense of place includes evaluating the perceived quality of its natural and built environment, from how often the sun shines to the safety of the streets, and more.

PRODUCT

Ranking a city's "hardware" looks at key institutions, attractions and infrastructure that shape the city's identity via the quantity, quality and reputation of these products.

PROGRAMMING

This category measures the experiential pillars of a great visit: food, shows, shopping and nightlife – the mosaic of cultural programming and lifestyle experiences.

PEOPLE

Human capital is often a city's most valuable resource. Looking at diversity, for example, can speak to a city's ability to attract talent.

PROSPERITY

A well-paid, economically secure citizenry facilitates stewardship and innovation. Beyond statistics related to the income of citizens, standards of living and ability to own a home, this category considers self-employed residents as a measure of startups and innovation.

PROMOTION

This represents the ability of a city to tell its story through media stories, online articles, references and place-based recommendations, which all influence our perception of cities.

More information at www.bestcities.org/rankings/canadas-best-small-cities



A vibrant city centre is valued by many urbanites. Among Kingston's attractions are Ontario's oldest public market, museums and historic sites, and top-notch shopping and entertainment. What's more, it's a walkable city. SUPPLIED