

Keeping an illustrated journal on my trip to Toronto, Canada

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A holiday is a chance to get away from daily stress, and tap into your creative side.

Recently, I went to Toronto with my partner Simon who is a citizen of Canada as he was born there. It was a momentous trip as it was just after getting his Canadian passport renewed and a bit of a homecoming (although he only lived in the country as a baby).

I'd only stopped in Vancouver airport for a few hours previously and visited Banff on a skiing holiday as a teenager (no, I can't ski) but in general Canada was new for me.

The city of Toronto & beyond

Toronto seems to me like a typical North American city. It's somewhat lacking in the rich history that you normally get in places like Europe but makes up for it in grandeur and size. Everything is huge in Toronto, including the portion sizes, vehicles, and buildings. I was very surprised that you can only buy alcohol in dedicated shops called LCBOs. This is

to control drinking, although apparently there are big problems with shoplifting booze.

Most of the people in Toronto were lovely and friendly, with strangers often being warm and welcoming to us. One of the highlights was trudging back in the deep snow from Rouge National Park and having a bus driver stop the bus to pick us up – especially when we weren't near the bus stop. His friendliness and kindness (by also letting us on for free) left a deep impression on me.

Going to Niagara Falls was incredible. The falls were powerful and majestic, although a lot of the river was frozen over with ice due to the snow and low temperatures.



Overall there are A LOT of snow, which is nice because it's not something we get much of in the UK. Canada was very good at keeping the roads and pavements clear so life could still go on. We were the only mad ones to go to a national park in 15 inches of snow, and I was terrified that I would die. I fell over on the ice so much that I hurt my arm.

Illustrated journal

As well as exploring a new place, it's good to go inwards and tap into your creativity. One thing I've learned is that it's very difficult to draw outside when the weather is very cold. I've been experimenting with drawing from photographs which I take on my travels.

I'm also trying out a daily illustration practice where I draw the things I like, every day. In practice, I'm often too busy to complete an illustration a day, and it becomes more like a weekly ritual.

Illustrated journals are good because they help you feel a lot more engaged in your environment. A lot of modern society encourages us to be passive consumers, snapping mindless photos and rushing to consume the next tourist attraction or nature spot. We never really stop to absorb, reflect, or express our own impressions of an experience. I think this makes experiences unsatisfying and superficial, prompting us to look for the next "fix" instead of feeling truly fulfilled.

That's why I like to illustrate the things I see and do.

How do you try to engage more with your environment when on holiday or elsewhere?

I also follow some amazing illustrators on Instagram. I've always been a fan of illustrating although I've never thought of myself as an illustrator. But really, if you draw anything then you can be an illustrator.

I draw boxes or other shapes on the blank pages of my notebook which I then fill with illustrations as I'm going about my holiday. They're nice to look back on and other people are generally very interested in them. In this case I didn't really do that, but I did draw some illustrations inspired by my time in Canada.



Photography

This time I didn't take my DSLR camera because it was too much to fit in my hand luggage but I did take some nice photos on my Vivo smartphone. The camera is not bad and the sunlight was very bright so this made for some good looking photographs.

Sometimes I think using a smartphone is better than my DSLR because it allows for much more spontaneous image-taking and the settings are completely automated.





Do you have any examples of holidays you have taken where you were more creative than usual?



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