

Toronto on a budget

Toronto is perhaps the most under-appreciated city in North America. In the popular consciousness it is best known for its dearly departed party animal mayor Rob Ford, but aside from that Toronto proves to be a cosmopolitan city, on par with New York or Chicago in terms of its cultural, culinary and tourist attractions.

Unfortunately it also rivals those cities for how expensive it can be to visit, even in spite of the U.S. dollar’s advantage over the Canadian dollar. With a few thrifty modifications to one’s itinerary, a trip to Toronto can be an semi-affordable getaway, leaving a little extra cash for when you care to splurge.

First of all, when you arrive at Pearson Airport (your most likely point of entry), opt for taking the Union-Pearson Express, a direct light rail line to downtown’s Union Station, in lieu of a taxi. Toronto is notorious for its traffic jams and the UP Express will offer transport to downtown faster and far cheaper than a taxi ride. As a bonus upon arriving downtown, Union Station hosts a food market during the summer months comprised of booths featuring scaled-down menus from award-winning restaurants (i.e. David Chang’s Momofuku).

There are a few lodging options close to downtown and equidistant to neighborhoods that offer a great opportunity to people watch (Kensington Market and Queen Street). The most interesting is the Super 8 motel located in the top floor of Chinatown Centre. The Super 8 itself is as unremarkable as a chain motel could be, save for the fact that it sits on the top floor of a quirky mall that has seen better days — many lights are burnt out and escalators not functioning.

In spite of the needed



J.D. KINDLE
Comment



Photo by J.D. Kindle

Toronto City Hall is one of the Candian city’s landmarks.



Photo by J.D. Kindle

Jesus Brand, one of the many unique stores inside Toronto’s Chinatown Centre.

upgrades Chinatown Centre is rather quaint, featuring an array of boutiques hawking bootleg

DVDs and knockoff designer clothing. The food court, full of stalls selling Chinese barbecue

and fresh fruit juices (the quality far superior to mall’s upkeep) faces an outdoor plaza where old men congregate to play Go.

The most iconic landmark to visit in Toronto is the CN Tower, the tallest structure in the western hemisphere. But of course one needs to shell out a pretty penny for the 147-story elevator ride and wait a couple hours to set foot inside (hint, show up as soon as it opens to avoid the line). However, the equally iconic Toronto City Hall costs nothing and offers just as many photo ops to share on your Facebook account.

Guitar enthusiasts should check Shy Boy and Tex Repair Company on Queen Street. Blink and you’ll miss the nondescript door wedged between a spa and yarn retailer that leads up to a second story office suite crammed with restored vintage guitars and amplifiers. Shy Boy

and Tex (the nicknames of the proprietors) specialize in the restoration of Fender guitars, though they have a few oddball models from limited production runs. Tex also has a side business building his own line of guitar amps, counting Jeff Tweedy of Wilco as one of his more high-profile clients. Even if you don’t plan on taking a guitar home, Shyboy and Tex are kind enough to let you fondle their handiwork.

Perhaps the most fantastic attraction for the budget-conscious traveler is the Harbourfront Centre. Once a derelict shipping dock on the shore of Lake Ontario, the Harbourfront has been transformed into a sprawling public park that houses a free contemporary art museum (The Power Plant, which, as its name implies, is a repurposed decommissioned power plant), a food court featuring international vendors, green spaces, and a 1,300-seat outdoor concert venue. Every weekend during the summer sees the staging of a different free festival that imports world class performers.

No trip to Canada is complete without a serving of poutine, the country’s de facto signature dish. A humble mound of french fries topped with brown gravy and cheese curds, poutine tends to be best consumed after a night of bar hopping and purchased from a street vendor. There is no need to hit up a fancy restaurant for such a simple meal.

Before heading back home be sure to swing back to the Chinatown Centre to pick up the most affordable souvenirs for your family and friends. The Canada Store is stuffed to the gills with apparel emblazoned with maple leaves, carry-on luggage-sized bottles of maple syrup, and all manner of kitschy magnets, fittingly all manufactured in China.

J.D. Kindle is a Pendleton musician, executive director of the Oregon East Symphony and an entertainment columnist for the East Oregonian.

Carrot and quinoa mini-muffins are great snacks or breakfast

By MELISSA D’ARABIAN
Associated Press

The reason cupcakes took the baking world by storm a few years ago is because, in short, they are awesome. A sweet little package of moist, crumbly goodness topped with a dollop of creamy, fatty frosting — I understand my four daughter’s (and America’s) obsession.

For the healthy eater, cupcakes might seem like a non-starter; completely off the table. Except, my 10-year-old daughter, Charlotte, did something very wise that changed everything for me last year.

At someone else’s party, she chose a mini-cupcake over a regular-sized cupcake, which frankly puzzled me, given the “more-is-more” tendency normally driving my children’s sugary-treat decisions. Her reason? Because it was “cuter.” To her, tiny was darling, and that made it better. I could use that to my advantage, I decided. And so can you.

I have always loved the automatic portion control that comes with using a regular muffin tin — I bake up everything from scalloped potatoes to huevos rancheros muffin-sized. And mini-muffins are perfect for healthier muffin batters — the smaller size is more forgiving on the texture front, so you can load up batters with protein and fiber (think whole grain flours, nuts, seeds, shredded veggies) and they will still be tasty, where full-sized muffins can feel denser more easily.

I make all sorts of flavors of mini-muffins, and keep them in my freezer in resealable plastic bags for last minute snacks and even breakfast on the go — they thaw in minutes on the counter.

Using my carrot and (leftover, repurposed) quinoa mini-muffin as a base, I added a reduced sugar frosting out of cream cheese and orange juice, and voila: the mini-muffin became a “cupcake.” Suddenly, I had very reasonable dessert! And, if you want to skip the frosting altogether, then keep this little guy as a mini-muffin, no problem — they are a treat either way.



Melissa d'Arabian via AP

MINI QUINOA-CARROT CAKES

- Start to finish:** 30 minutes, plus cooling time
Servings: 20 mini cupcakes
- 1 ¼ cups finely-milled almond flour
 - ½ cup cooked quinoa
 - ½ teaspoon baking powder
 - ½ teaspoon baking soda
 - 1 teaspoon ground pumpkin pie spice (or ground cinnamon)
 - ¼ teaspoon salt
 - 2 tablespoons coconut oil, melted
 - 2 eggs
 - ¼ cup sugar (agave or maple syrup could also be used)
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - ¼ teaspoon almond extract
 - 1 tablespoon fresh orange juice (or other citrus)
 - 1 large banana, mashed well until creamy (about ½ cup)
 - ½ cup finely-grated carrot (about one carrot), gently squeezed dry in a paper towel

- Cream Cheese Frosting (optional):**
- 4 ounces (1/2 cup) light cream cheese
 - ¼ cup powdered sugar
 - 1-2 tablespoons fresh orange juice (or other citrus)
 - Orange zest, for garnish, optional

Preheat oven to 350 F. In a large bowl, whisk together the almond flour, quinoa, baking powder, baking soda, pumpkin pie spice, and salt and set aside. In a small bowl, vigorously whisk the oil, sugar, eggs, vanilla extract, almond extract and orange juice until pale and creamy (about 2 minutes). Mix wet ingredients into dry ingredients and stir with a wooden spoon until blended. Add the banana and carrot and mix well. Spoon into mini-muffin tin lined with paper liners (or sprayed well with nonstick spray). Fill about 2/3 full. Bake until cooked through, about 15 minutes. Meanwhile make the frosting by whisking together the cream cheese, powdered sugar and lemon juice until completely smooth. Cool cupcakes completely, and frost if desired.

Nutrition information per serving: 95 calories; 55 calories from fat; 6 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 24 mg cholesterol; 112 mg sodium; 8 g carbohydrate; 1 g fiber; 5 g sugar; 3 g protein.



Melissa d'Arabian via AP

Baked chicken with potatoes.

Lemon juice makes a chicken and potato bake into a breeze

By MELISSA D’ARABIAN
Associated Press

Autumn might be the official season of the one-pot wonder. Kids are back in school, the office watercooler gets crowded as we trickle back from summer vacations, and suddenly dinnertime feels like more of a time-squeeze.

Busy lives need quick meals that don’t require a ton of prep, crazy ingredients or lots of dishes because the last thing I want to do after a long day of work, kids activities and homework-checking is a counter loaded up with dishes.

Baked dinners are a classic weeknight solution, but how to make one that is healthy, flavorful, and easy? This basic chicken and potato bake is so simple, you might breeze right past the recipe.

But the trick is: lots of lemon juice. Half a cup sounds like a ton, but it’s what makes the chicken super flavorful in just minutes. The high acid level gets right into the chicken and tenderizes it, and yet as it bakes, the acid mellowers and softens into a gorgeous gentle tang. The second trick to this dinner-in-a-pan is a super quick turn in the microwave for some baby potatoes (Note: you can cube up larger potatoes if you don’t have tiny ones).

I’m using boneless skinless chicken breast, but you can use pork chops (bone-in recommended) or even fish. My weeknight strategy: pop this pan into the oven, toss together a green salad, and set the table while the chicken cooks. Easy, healthy, and even comforting in a fall-night sort of way.

BAKED CHICKEN & POTATO DINNER

- Start to finish:** 30 minutes
Servings: 4
- ½ cup lemon juice
 - 3 tablespoons olive oil
 - 1 teaspoon granulated garlic, or 1 garlic clove, minced
 - 1 pound fingerling potatoes, cleaned
 - 1 ½ pound boneless skinless chicken breasts, trimmed
 - 1 red onion, sliced lengthwise
 - ½ cup small cherry tomatoes
 - lemon wedges, for garnish
 - 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
 - Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 375 F. In a large bowl, mix together the lemon juice, olive oil, granulated garlic and salt and pepper. Pierce each potato a couple of times with a fork (to allow steam to escape), and place the potatoes in a medium microwave-safe bowl and toss with 1 tablespoon of the lemon juice mixture. Cover with a lid slightly askew to allow steam to escape, and microwave on high until potatoes begin to soften, about 4 minutes.

Meanwhile, place the chicken breasts, onion and tomatoes in the lemon juice mixture and toss to coat. Let sit for a few minutes.

Spray an oven-safe baking pan with nonstick spray. Pour the potatoes on the bottom of the baking sheet. Pour the chicken, onions, tomatoes and remaining marinade on top of the potatoes. Bake until chicken is cooked through and potatoes are tender, about 30 minutes. Sprinkle with fresh thyme and serve with a green salad.

Nutrition information per serving: 401 calories; 131 calories from fat; 15 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 124 mg cholesterol; 326 mg sodium; 25 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 41 g protein.