

TRAVEL TALES

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THE JEWISH TRAVELLER

By MIKE COHEN

TORONTO FOR THE WEEK: My family and I recently returned from a nice extended stay in downtown Toronto (www.seetorontonow.com). This is a great area to select as a base for it is in such a dynamic location. First and foremost, the amazing Eaton Centre (www.torontoeatoncentre.com) is just a few blocks away. Thanks to Mirvish Productions (www.mirvish.com), Toronto

is Canada's answer to Broadway. The Andrew Lloyd Weber version of The Wizard of Oz (www.wizard-of-oz-themusical.com) has been bringing in the crowds to the Ed Mirvish Theatre since December 2012, with lead performer Daniele Wade showing everyone who watched her win the role on a CBC TV reality show in the fall that she is the real thing. Its run has been extended to early

June, with a US tour to follow. The Tony Award winning musical The Book of Mormon comes to the Prince of Wales Theatre April 30 to June 9 while Anything Goes hits the same venue July 16 to August 18.

ACCOMMODATIONS: The Grand Hotel and Suites (www.grand-hoteltoronto.com) is located at 225 Jarvis Street, near Dundas. This beautiful

locale is only 13 years old and still looks spanking new. It features 177 extraordinary guest suites. For families, the 550 square foot junior two bedroom suite feature a spacious living room/work area separated from the two bedroom areas by sets of double French glass doors with vertical blinds. The bedroom areas contain king and queen size beds, LCD
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TVs and dual-line tele-phones with dataport. A separate living area contains a double sofa-bed, TV, DVD Player, CD Player and a work desk with a dual-line telephone. There is a fully equipped kitchenette with a microwave, fridge, coffeemaker and cutlery. You can slip into a plush bathrobe, use the iron and ironing board and enjoy the convenience of the laptop size in-room safe.

There is complimentary wireless internet access in each room. Indeed the Grand Hotel has all of the comforts of home, which is why many guests capitalize on the options of extended stay packages for 21 consecutive days or more. The kitchenette is a definite bonus and something kosher guests in particular will find useful as they can prepare some of their own meals. A very large Metro supermarket is just a block and a half away.

All guests get to en-

joy a splendid breakfast buffet, free of charge, with an extensive array of items to choose from. There is also a fitness centre, the two-storey neo-classical pool indoor pool (surrounded by exquisite hand painted murals) and two whirlpools on the rooftop garden, which provides a panoramic view of Toronto. The latter is a real plus something guests take advantage of year-round, even with below zero temperatures.

There is 24 hour room service, twice-daily maid service, valet and underground parking, a friendly concierge, a restaurant, 10,000 square feet of meeting space and a fully equipped business centre. Shuttle services are available to anywhere in the financial core. Make sure to bring your Aeroplan card in order to earn 500 miles per night.

Hotel GM Heidi Wengle told us that there are ongoing renovations to guest rooms. Plans to modify the main lobby and the Citrus restaurant are in the works for the near future.

DINNER: The closest kosher restaurant in downtown Toronto is the Oasis Café at 100 King Street West. It closes at 4 p.m. but offer kosher food on the go so you might want to consider an early dinner if you decide to eat there.

We dined at the Jewish-owned and operated P.F. Chang's China Bistro Restaurant, located at the newly redeveloped and trendy Shops at Don Mills. This has the distinction of being the first P.F. Chang's in Canada, with the second set for Montreal's Blue Bonnets plaza in April. Montreal Jewish businessman Michael Aronovici is the

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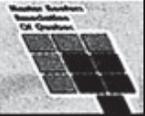
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man responsible for bringing the popular chain to Canada. His director of operations is Cary Mausner, a successful Jewish restaurateur who originally hails from Brooklyn.

P.F. Chang's has more than 200 restaurants in the United States and over 18 internationally. The

menu offers cuisine inspired from five regions of China (Mongolian, Sichuan, Beijing, Shanghai and Hunan) along with unique desserts and signature drinks while also delivering impeccable service. The restaurant caters to different dietary and cultural needs, also offering a vast selection of gluten free and vegetarian dishes. The menu also features a much appreciated calorie count next to each item.

JEWISH CONNECTION: The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) has a vibrant, growing Jewish community of over 180,000. At last count, there were some 118 synagogues. In the downtown area you will find the First Narayever Congregation (www.narayever.com) at 187 Brunswick Ave, just a few steps north of Harbord Street. This is a warm and welcoming traditional-egalitarian synagogue. The Annex Shul, based at the Wolfond Centre on Harbord Street, is another congregation serving the downtown area.

Mike Cohen's email address is info@mikecohen.ca. Follow his travels at www.sandboxworld.com/travel.

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