

A complete guide for you to visit - and fall in love with - historic Brantford

We have lived in Toronto for almost 10 years and, yet, I am amazed at how much we still have to know and explore areas and towns around the city. Last weekend we went to visit the city of Brantford for the first time and I was amazed by what we saw and lived: the city is full of history and beautiful places to visit, besides having great restaurants and very friendly people. Brantford made the list of my must-see places for anyone coming to Toronto and I really fell in love with the place and I want to come back in the summer to explore more. The purpose of this post is to bring all possible information for those who want to visit the city: how to get there, where to stay, what to see, what to do, what to eat, among other information.

Where is Brantford and how to get there?

Brantford is a municipality in the southwestern region of Ontario, 100 km from downtown Toronto and 40 km from downtown Hamilton, on the edge of the Grand River. The city has 72.5 km² of extension and approximately 100,000 inhabitants. Getting there by car from Toronto is very easy: take the Gardiner Expressway west, then take the ON-403 west (which is called Queen Elizabeth Way to Hamilton and then turn to Alexander Graham Bell Pkwy) and from there take Wayne Gretzky Pkwy who will take you to the city center.

You can visit the city by train and bus: GO Transit, Greyhound and VIA Rail transport arrive in Brantford, including the fact that the GO Transit station is very central (address: 5 Wadsworth Street, Brantford). My “concern” is that if you visit the city using public transport - and not by car - you may miss many attractions that are a little far away. Nothing is too far from the center (everything is around 15 minutes) but instead of taking a taxi and Uber I think a better option would be to go by car. And if you choose to go by car and have an electric car like us, it is worth mentioning that there are several electric chargers around the city but no Tesla super chargers. So, plan if you travel with one like us.

What to do in Brantford?

As I wrote previously, I was amazed by everything I saw and lived in the city. I didn't realize that near Toronto there was a place with so much history and that it was so important for some aspects of modern life. We were visiting the city with our family - and it includes our two boys: Thomas, age 4 and Ian, age 1 - and that certainly didn't let us explore all the museums and all the history of the place. Below, I will talk in detail everything we did but I will also list everything you can visit in the city, which is amazing.

Bell Homestead National Historic Site

Certainly, a must-see for anyone visiting Brantford - and I'd say more, those visiting Toronto - is the Bell Homestead National Historic Site. This is where Alexander Graham Bell (the inventor of the telephone) lived with his family and where he invented the telephone. Alexander Graham Bell, his parents and sister-in-law arrived in Canada from Scotland and England in August 1870 and settled on a small farm outside Brantford - where the museum is located (15 minutes from the city center). Alexander was then 23 years old and was ill. His parents feared that he had tuberculosis as did his brothers, who had died of the same disease. The Bells hoped that Canada's clean air would help it improve Alexander's health. After eight months on the farm, Alexander was fine again and went to work as a teacher at the Boston Deaf School in the United States. He always came back to Brantford in the summer to spend the holidays with his family. On July 26, 1874 he invented the telephone at Brantford. The following summer he wrote the first copy of his patent plans. And in August 1876 he made the world's first successful long-distance phone call between Brantford and Paris. As it all happened in Brantford, the city became known as "The City of the Telephone".

After Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, his father, Melville, and a close friend, Reverend Henderson, founded the Bell Telephone Company in Brantford in 1877. The first telephone office was at Reverend Henderson's home. The two men ran the company until 1880. Today, Henderson Home is next to Homestead, with the original telephone exchange and other monitors for visitors to see.

This must-see attraction includes the Bells' house (with most of the original artifacts from the time they lived in this house), the first Bell company telephone office (where you can make a phone call as they used to do in the past), a café (open only in the hot months) and a shop with books and interesting products. The place is very visited, especially for educational tours. It is worth mentioning that you can choose to take a guided tour or not, but you will always have a team member who takes care of the place with you.

I was impressed by the story and how it all makes sense after you understand what his father did, what his mother was and how he got to Canada. It is worth mentioning that all the original furniture, photos and artifacts are in perfect condition and through letters exchanged between Bell and his mother the staff of the museum knew exactly where to place each of the objects in the house. An unmissable visit! And to know about opening days, times and values check their website.

Brantford Farmers 'Market

Whenever we visit a city we like to go to the public market of this place, because for us this type of attraction shows a lot about the city. And we were impressed with the Farmers 'Market in Brantford. That's because it has been operating since 1848 and is one of the oldest in Ontario. The site has 49 internal vendors offering their products all year round and another 15 or 20 external vendors open during the high season from May to October. We were unable to

explore the local products in detail because the children were not cooperating but I saw that the variety of products is incredible: fresh products, meats, deli cuts, dairy products, flowers, bakery products, sweets, homemade crafts, in addition to a space that serves breakfast and lunch with hot foods and other natural products. It is worth mentioning that the market is only open on Fridays from 9:00 am until 5:00 pm and on Saturdays from 7:00 am until 2:00 pm.

Wayne Gretzky Sports Center

In addition to the story behind the phone and the indigenous people, Brantford is famous for being the city where Wayne Gretzky was born. He is considered the best ice hockey player of all time. For those who do not know the most popular sport in Canada is ice hockey, so I imagine that Wayne Gretzky is for Canadians the same thing that Pelé is for Brazilians. Wayne Gretzky played 20 seasons in the National Hockey League (NHL) for four teams, from 1979 to 1999. He retired in 1999 and remains the top scorer in NHL history, with more goals and assists than any other player. He has several records and I note that the city is super proud of him being born into it.

Wayne Gretzky Sports Center is a Brantford sports and leisure center that honors Wayne Gretzky. At the entrance, there is a bronze statue of the player raising the Stanley Cup and a real depiction of Wayne as a child with his parents, Walter and Phyllis Gretzky. It is worth mentioning that the father still resides in the house where the player was born and raised in Brantford. The site features The Brantford & Area Sports Hall of Recognition, which recognizes the city's sportsmen, with free admission. Inside it is incredible: several pools, gym, an indoor track, shop, pub, areas for activities and, believe me, 4 hockey arenas of official size. That's right: four! I was impressed and loved that the boys sat down and got to see a little bit of a game that was going on. It is worth the visit because there are always hockey games.

Artisan's Village

Since 2012, the site historically known as "Brantford Cordage" at 111 Sherwood Drive has been rejuvenated and transformed into the Artisan's Village, a vibrant community of artisans and local businesses. The artisans' village spans 13 acres of land and brings new life to more than 18,000 square meters of construction. The area offers exclusive products and services for those who enjoy a unique experience in a historic location in the city. The site was a string factory in the British Empire and the various centenary buildings (dating from 1901) were once one of the largest and best known industries in the city. There were about 900 people working on the site at the same time as trains arrived and loaded cars with exports. This site is Brantford's oldest surviving industrial heritage.

As I wrote earlier there are many companies, stores and art galleries on the site. The reason that made us visit Artisan's Village was Mash Paddle Brewing Co, a craft brewery. The brewery started in a small kitchen, where the owners made their first batches of beer on a small rental stove. For more than 5 years, owner and master brewer Matty, his wife and father Theo have served fresh local beer in and around Brantford. We arrived at the place waiting for a brewery

and found an incredible family party: there was live music, lots of families (and lots of kids!) And an incredible atmosphere. Everything being enjoyed with a delicious beer, according to my husband. In the space there are sofas, games and lots of comfort for you to enjoy your beer while enjoying music. It is through their Instagram - this one - that you learn about everything that happens in this space. Certainly, an unmissable stop for anyone going to Brantford.

Her Majesty's Royal Chapel of the Mohawks National Historic Site

I was already enjoying the city of Brantford a lot but it was because of this church that I fell in love completely. It was on Sunday morning, on a blue sky and very cold day, that we took a guided tour of what was the first Protestant church in Upper Canada and the oldest church in Ontario. Built in 1785 (and completing 235 years this year) it is the only remaining building in the Mohawk village that was in here.

The stained-glass windows in the 8 chapel windows came from England and were installed in the 1960s and 1961. They tell in detail the history of the indigenous peoples in the region - called The Six Nations - and everything that happened to them in the region. The coat of arms that is on display in the chapel came from Europe and dates from 1787. It is one of the most beautiful pieces of the place because it was carved out of a single piece of wood. Other impressive pieces of the site are three panels that describe Mohawk Language's first written recording and depict the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. The two panels at the ends are original (1712) and the middle one is more recent because it was destroyed in a fire.

A little bit of the history of this chapel and these peoples can be found here. If you want to know when there will be an event at the place - masses take place on special dates - just follow their Facebook page, this one. In the hot months (from Victoria Day to Thanksgiving) the chapel is open for visits from Tuesdays to Sundays, from 10am to 3pm. In other months, it is only open when a reservation is made.

It was very special to be in such a historic place and to understand a little about the history of the region and Canada, the country where my children were born. I was touched at times because I could see all the passion of our guide in telling that story and all of her knowledge in answering our questions and answering our questions. I left reflective on how the Indians here also lost land and were mistreated, just as we saw in the history of Brazil. At the same time, I was happy to know that there are places like this still preserved.

Woodland Cultural Center and Mohawk Institute Residential School

Close to the church - about a 1 minute drive - you will notice a huge and stately building. This is the Mohawk Institute Residential School, which was a residential school for Indians that operated under the government of Canada from 1885 to 1970. Before 1885, the Anglican Church of Canada was involved in operating a residential school on the same site, which was founded in 1828. School enrollment ranged from 90 to 200 students per year. Many alumni

described being physically, sexually and emotionally abused at school and I was very sad and amazed at how little I read about it. When the school was closed in 1970 the Woodland Cultural Center was opened on its side, focusing on research, history and art of the indigenous people of the region. The cultural and historical programming of this cultural center uses the historic building of the Mohawk Institute to teach about the history of residential schools in Canada.

In 2013, a leak in the roof of the residential school building caused significant damage to the historic site. Because of this leak, the Six Nations community was asked what they wanted to do with the building. Surprisingly, the majority voted that they wanted to save the building and a fundraising campaign started the following year, called Save the Evidence. The aim is to raise money to preserve the Mohawk Institute and to raise awareness about the history of residential schools. We didn't visit the Woodland Cultural Center from the inside, but we drove by and read a lot about the history. It is certainly a place we want to visit the next time we go to Brantford.

Downtown Brantford

The center of Brantford is full of old buildings and a lot of history. We went on a very cold weekend (on Saturday it was - 18C) and we were unable to explore the center as we would like. But I really liked everything I saw. I will try to summarize for you everything you can see and visit in the city center.

First of all, you cannot miss visiting Harmony Square, which is the most popular place in the city, with several festivals throughout the year such as the Brantford International Jazz Festival, which takes place in September. In the cold months, the place has an ice skating rink that was quite full when we went. It was in Harmony Square that we had lunch on Sunday, at Hudson Public (I'll talk more about the experience below). Across Harmony Square, you will find the Sanderson Center for the Performing Arts, an entertainment destination in downtown Brantford since 1919. The theater has hosted 1125 spectators.

In downtown Brantford the campuses of two educational institutions are located (Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College). Close to these campuses is Victoria Park, which is beautiful and has important city buildings like the city hall and the supreme court of justice. There is also the building of The Bell Company of Canada, with a huge statue of Alexander Graham Bell. In fact, there are several monuments in the city intended for him.

Around the Brantford Public Library are located some murals of public art. In addition, an art exhibition is taking place in the city called Brantford's Grand Exhibit, which is a project done in partnership with the Glenhyrst Art Gallery in Brant to reproduce 12 pieces from the permanent outdoor collection, which were selected from the 600 pieces of the museum by community members. Our tour included a visit to this art gallery but we were unable to, so it was nice to see some of the pieces displayed outdoors in important points of the city.

Trails

The city is known for being the site where several Ontario trails meet. We saw several signs around the city and surroundings indicating different trails and tours for visitors to take. There are more than 70km of trails in Brantford only. We obviously didn't do any - winter + small children - but I was curious to see the Brock's Route, which is a trail that crosses Brantford from Hamilton to Port Dover and is part of the historic route that Sir Isaac Brock himself took during the War of 1812.

Other museums to visit in the region

I was impressed with the rich history of the region and the number of museums. In addition to the sites we've visited - Bell Homestead National Historic Site, Woodland Cultural Center and Her Majesty's Royal Chapel of the Mohawks - I have listed below other museums and historic places you can visit when you are in Brantford.

Adelaide Hunter Hoodless Homestead NHS: home and museum where Adelaide Hunter Hoodless lived, a Canadian educational reformer who founded the international women's organization known as the Women's Institute, in addition to other important contributions to women in the country.

Chiefswood National Historic Site: this house was built by Mohawk indigenous chief Geroge HM Johnson, as a gift to his British wife Emily Howells. The place shows the role that this family played in relations between indigenous and European peoples. The place was also the home where the poet E. Pauline Johnson - the couple's daughter - was born and grew up.

Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant: Located in the Glenhyrst Gardens, a 16-acre landscaped park on the banks of the Grand River, this Art Gallery offers a beautiful promenade and stunning views of the site. Throughout the year, the Gallery offers contemporary art exhibitions, guided tours, classes and lectures, in addition to a permanent collection of more than 600 works of art.

Brant Museum and Archives: the rich history of the region is kept in these two museums that were established in 1908. The objective is to keep artifacts that tell the history of the region, whether related to indigenous peoples or the invention of the telephone.

Where to eat?

I was impressed by the number of delicious restaurants in Brantford and the quality of all the places we went. And yet, I was more impressed with the attention and delicacy that we were treated everywhere we went. Brantford cuisine is certainly something that deserves attention, so when you go to the city be sure to venture out on some of them. Below I am quoting 4 that we visited and approved.

GameTime Eatery & Entertainment

GameTime Eatery is a huge restaurant and a space with arcades, games, ax throwing and virtual reality. It was the perfect place to have dinner as soon as we arrived in the city, because the children were tired of being in the car and could see the lights of the games, play and run in a huge space. They have a very complete kids' menu and include the meal, drink, dessert and a toy. The boys ate pasta and chicken with vegetables. Juliano and I ordered fish and chips (it was delicious!) And two lava cakes with ice cream for dessert. For those who do not know lava cake is a chocolate cake served hot whose interior has melted chocolate: you cut the cake and this filling falls like lava from a volcano. The entire menu can be found here. While we were having dinner, we were having a magic show and it was the first time that Thomas saw someone doing magic: he loved it! It is worth mentioning that if you eat at the restaurant and go to play later, you can buy cards for the games with 20% discount. It is worth mentioning that this restaurant also has a store in Mississauga, which is very close to Toronto.

Mercasa Little Italy Eatery & Catering

This new restaurant in Brantford is the perfect place to enjoy delicious, homemade and ready to eat Italian dishes. Mercasa has introduced a new style of eating in the city of Brantford, the popular Italian fast casual restaurant. This trend has conquered the Italian market, as it meets the needs of the busy lifestyle of our generation: it combines the convenience of fast food with home-made Italian cuisine, offering an elegant atmosphere for meals. In summary, Mercasa Little Italy Eatery & Catering is a restaurant that has a buffet of Italian food and that you can also customize to your taste. In addition, the price is great. We got there and couldn't resist and ordered several pizzas. The dough was wonderful - super crispy - and the flavors and fillings equally delicious. It was a long time since we had eaten such a delicious pizza. We also ordered pasta with butter for the boys and although they didn't have it at the buffet, they made it for us. In addition, there were a few different dishes like lasagna, veal and eggplant delights. And an entire session dedicated to Italian gelato, which we didn't even can try because we were so happy with the pile of pizza we had eaten.

Fume Restobar

Those who accompany us know how we like to eat well, go out to dinner in nice restaurants and have a real gastronomic experience in the places we visit. And we couldn't help but do that on our visit to Brantford. The highlight of our gastronomic tour was certainly at Fume Restobar, a super elegant restaurant with a beautiful atmosphere in the city. We got there early because we were with the boys and we were the first to enter the restaurant. But behold, it was 6pm and boom! the place was packed. All the tables were full - and no family with a child. Even so the staff was super kind and, despite not having a kids' menu, we got a dish that the boys enjoyed. Her husband and I ate fillet mignon and it was just divine. It is worth mentioning that the place also serves lunch and brunch.

Hudson Public Kitchen + Bar

Our last meal in Brantford was our Sunday lunch at the Hudson Public Kitchen + Bar, which is located at the Harmony Square (the city's main square). The place has a super cool atmosphere and is all glass: so even in the cold you can stay there eating and watching people skate in the square. I found the menu great and very complete for a bar: boys ate meat with white rice (the place has kids' menu and activity sheet) and me and Juliano (guess what?) fish and chips. The starter was spectacular and included nachos with different types of beans and pretzel bites with a wonderful cheese sauce. A great place to eat while you are exploring the city center.

Where to stay?

We stayed at the Holiday Inn Express & Suites located on the side of the road, just before the city entrance (27 Sinclair Blvd. Building 1, Brantford). We love the hotel and think everything is perfect. Below I list some reasons that made me have this opinion:

- Huge room (super spacious), super clean and with an entrance hall that is perfect for those traveling with children and want to have space to leave all the "junk".
- Microwave, fridge with great size and coffee machine in the room.
- The hotel is quite new - I think it is only 2 years old - so everything is beautiful and in great condition. I really like the Holiday Inn chain and it is almost always the chain that we choose to stay with when we go on trips like this.
- The internet is free and fast.
- Breakfast is included in your daily rate and is super complete: juices, coffees, yoghurts, cereal, breads, cakes, eggs, sausages, pancakes, fruits and other delicacies. Everything the boys eat in the morning at home had on site, which made Mom's life here a lot easier.
- The hotel has some treats for guests such as warm cookies in the late afternoon and coffees / teas always available and free.
- The hotel has a 24-hour shop with some basic items such as medicine, snacks and water. I thought it was great because then nobody needs to go out and buy these things if necessary.
- The hotel has an indoor heated pool and a very large gym. We were unable to enjoy the pool because of Ian's ear surgery (he can't get his ear wet) but he wanted to because the space is incredible.

Where to start your trip to Brantford

My tip is that when you arrive in the region you should stop by the Brantford Visitor and Tourism Center (399 Wayne Gretzky Parkway, Brantford) to get the map of the region and find out more about what is going on in the city on the days you will be visiting. We did it and it was very worth it. The place has a lot of maps and information and as much as everything is very detailed on the Tourism Brantford website - this one - it is always good to clear your doubts

with people who know about the subject. Some of the materials, maps and pamphlets that you can pick up at the tourist office are available online on their website.

What I want to do on my next visit to Brantford

I swear I thought 2 full days - we arrived Friday afternoon and we left Sunday afternoon - would be enough to explore Brantford, but no! The city has a lot of cool things to visit and a lot of history. What touched me most on this trip was the fact that I was in such a historic, Canadian and inspiring place just a few kilometers from Canada's largest city. I really think that people who come here for a walk (or those who live here) should have this experience to understand a little bit about the Canadian lifestyle. Below are some places that I would have liked to visit but we were unable to due to lack of time or the climate. We will certainly go back and explore the region further.

The Olde School Restaurant: super traditional restaurant in the city that has been open since 1982 in a place that used to operate a school dating from 1870. The place has 7 spaces to eat and each one has a theme. The Queen of England has already dined here. The tip here is to eat brunch - and several people who live in the region indicated me.

The Blue Dog Café: super cute cafe in the city center that has a collection of board games where visitors can have fun while sampling the local delicacies. From the reviews, I read it is one of the best local cafes in the city and on top of that it is in an old building, so an unmissable place to visit if you are looking for some caffeine while you are in town.

Grand Wellness Spa: of course, it is impossible to spend the day (or even a few hours) at a spa when we are traveling with young children, but I swear I wanted to. This spa has several treatments including a Beer Spa and Salt Cave. It is worth mentioning that the environment of the place seems to be beautiful from the photos I saw and it is located on the banks of the Grand River.

Mohawk Park: a park located next to the region's indigenous reserve. We didn't visit the park because we went in the winter but the photos we saw called our attention to the beauty of the place. Still, it seems to be a place with great structure: playground for the little ones, place for a covered picnic and much more. It is worth mentioning that the park is on the edge of Lake Mohawk and there are trails and places to enjoy the beauty of nature in the region.

Bathtub Bakery: store of bath products inspired by bakery delights: cupcakes, ice cream, popsicles ... everything you can imagine, but to use in the bath. They have a huge variety of bath salts that can be mixed to the consumer's taste. It was a store I really wanted to visit but it is already noted for me to stop by the next time we go to the city.

Canadian Military Heritage Museum: and it is not that there is a military museum in Brantford. That's right! And my husband who loves war museums was really upset about not having visited

the place. Obviously traveling with children, we would never go to a museum with this theme, but here is a tip for those who enjoy and want to know more about the subject.

Elements Casino Brantford: although I don't really enjoy this kind of experience, I could not fail to include here for you the information that Brantford has a casino practically in the center of the city. Like all casinos besides games they have a restaurant.

The Windmill Country Market: This Dutch market - with windmill and everything - is not exactly in Brantford, but 10 minutes from the city center. It's an incredible market that I've had the pleasure of visiting - but when we went I didn't take any pictures (it was on this tour here). We had separated to visit the place on Sunday and when I put it on the GPS I saw that the place would not open on Sunday. I was CRAZY to buy some delicacies but I will have to wait for the next one.

I hope you enjoyed the post and found reasons to visit the region. Finally, I would like to thank Tourism Brantford for having us and helped us put together this incredible, super affordable itinerary for our family with young children. If you are planning a trip to the city, it is worth visiting the Tourism Brantford website and seeing all the information about the region, including events that are happening in the city. They also have a super cool search tool where you can search for the activities you want to do in the region by season and categories.

If you want to see more photos and see the original post – written in Brazilian Portuguese – you have to access <https://gabynocanada.com/2020/03/05/um-guia-completo-para-voce-visitar-e-se-apaixonar-pela-historica-brantford/>

Written by GabynoCanada Blog