

THE ART of the Weekend Getaway

As summer days slide into brilliant fall colours there's no better time for a cozy weekend getaway in the quaint country hamlets of Ontario.

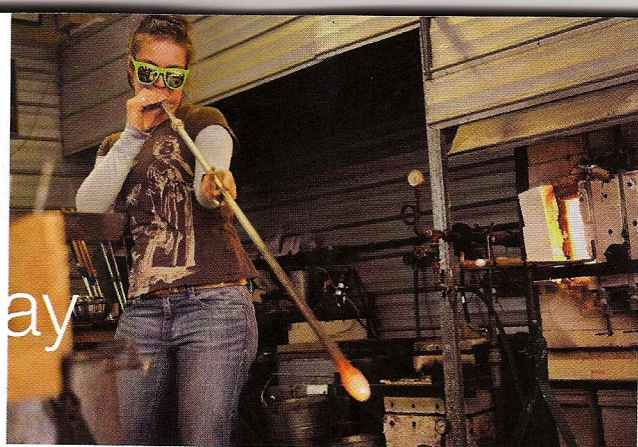


PHOTO: OTTAWA VALLEY TOURIST ASSOCIATION

As summer days slide into brilliant Fall colors there's no better time for a cozy weekend getaway. Better still, some of the best Ontario has to offer is right next door. Just hours from Ottawa lie the breathtaking landscapes and quaint country hamlets of Ontario's Highlands.

Ontario's Highlands is a new name for a travel region which spans a large part of Eastern Ontario, that includes some of the area that you already know and love, such as Pembroke, Bancroft, Haliburton, Madoc, Smiths Falls, Stirling and Perth. These destinations are perfect getaways for Ottawa residents seeking to shake off city stress. Ontario's Highlands is also home to the Ottawa Valley which stretches from Ottawa westward to the edge of Ontario's Algonquin Park. From hiking to canoeing to more urban pursuits such as art gazing, antique shopping and fine dining – Ontario's Highlands can't be beat.

Fall is an especially good time to venture out in Ontario's Highlands – particularly for art lovers. For four weekends from September 10-11 to October 1-2, the Ottawa Valley hosts its annual Rural Ramble. Art studios open up their doors to the public, allowing art buffs to see and speak with artists.

Melissa Marquardt, Marketing Coordinator of the Ottawa Valley Tourist Association, said the Rural Ramble is the Ottawa Valley's Fall signature event with up to 5,000 tourists attending each year.

Along with the art sampling, the Ramble is "a great way to see the country-side, the beautiful foliage and experience rural living," Marquardt said.

In partnership with the Rural Ramble, the Madawaska Valley Studio Tour also within the Ottawa Valley, takes place on October 1-2, where visitors can watch 27 top artists forge knives, make handmade soap blow glass, paint, weave and create stain glass and pottery.

But the Fall delights don't stop there in Ontario's Highlands. The region includes Lanark County and the nearby by Land O'Lakes area, which also have a lot to offer. While the area's signature art event takes place over Labour Day weekend there is still much to see and do.

Marie White, Tourism Manager at Lanark County Tourism said Lanark is steeped in artistic tradition. "Our families have been here for generations and different skills have been passed down that are close to our Irish and Scottish heritage." Artists, Ms. White said, are drawn to the beauty of the area for inspiration. Lanark Country is the Maple Syrup Capital of Ontario and has a high concentration of sugar maples. In the fall, golden sugar maple leaves make a gorgeous contrast with rich red maple leaves and white pines.

Other areas of the Ontario's Highlands region present even more self-guided driving studio tours. In Hastings County, the second largest county in Ontario, you will find the Bancroft and Area Autumn Studio Tour (September 24 and 25 and October 1 and 2.) This studio tour offers the public access to 11 studios from L'Amable through to Lake St. Peter. Established in 1992, the Bancroft tour features ornamental ironwork, fibre arts, wood furniture and carving and leather goods among others.

A glassblower displays her craft during the Rural Ramble.

Hastings County is also home to the Hastings Arts Route (www.artsroute.com), which offers a trail of painting, pottery, jewelry and photography all unique to the area. An example of the delights to be found is jewelry by Kathryn McDonald – who makes stones and shoreline objects enveloped in copper and sterling silver. To help visitors stick to the arts trail, Hastings County has a series of helpful tourist route signs.

Travelling to the western end of Ontario's Highlands, the Haliburton County Studio Tour also offers a wide selection of original works and crafts.

While in Haliburton, you won't want to miss the annual ColourFest (www.colourfest.ca) celebration of fall, scheduled for October 1. In addition to being another great event/location to experience local artists, music is also a highlight of the festival. The lineup includes the Simply Befuddled Musical Trio, The Great Busker Show featuring Mark and Gustavo and the award winning Anne Lindsay Quartet, to name a few. Other highlights include a vintage car parade, a scarecrow contest and a Kid's Colour Splash aptly described as a "gallery art attack on patio." Another family favourite is the ColourFest Pet Contest which has awards for best kisser, looks most like owner and best smile.

This Fall, add Ontario's Highlands to your list of getaway destinations. Whether you visit for a day, a weekend, or more, you won't be disappointed. For more information, please visit www.ontariohighlands.ca/ottawa. ■