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# Strike Out from Toronto for an Ontario Craft Beer Road Trip

BY DAVID ORT



Block Three Brewing Company is worth the drive to St. Jacobs

A distinctive feature of any craft beer is that the personal touch of its brewer tends to be quite obvious. In the past few years, more and more Ontarians have joined the club of brewers, adding their own signature to the local beer scene. In Toronto, beer drinkers have an exciting number of opportunities to taste the interesting new lagers, porters and ales being produced outside the city, but there's not nearly enough retail space for those of us looking to purchase more than a pint or two at a restaurant. That's a compelling reason, I think, to pack the car and spend a few days discovering some of the province's best breweries for yourself.

## **HEAD NORTH**

For many Canadians there exists a fundamental connection between beer and cottages, so the Muskoka area is a

logical base for some of our best breweries. [Muskoka Brewery](#) has been in business since 1996, but really hit its stride over the past few years with distinctive creations like the Mad Tom IPA. The brewery's Bracebridge retail store tends to be the first place to find its delicious seasonal releases, like the Legendary Muskoka Oddity.

Also make note of [Sawdust City Brewing Company](#), just a short drive away in Gravenhurst: owners Sam Corbeil and Rob Engman will be opening the physical home for their brewery [very soon](#). (Until now their respected, cheekily named beers had been brewed on contract by other operations.) The seasonal Belgian golden ale, dubbed The Princess Wears Girl Pants, is a favourite of mine.

### **TRAVEL EAST**

[Barley Days Brewery](#) is a long-established operation in Prince Edward County, another corner of the province better known for making wine than beer. Barley Days's mainstream creations tend to be available in the LCBO, but a visit to the brewery itself, just outside of Picton, is more likely to yield a taste of a seasonal one-off like the Scrimshaw Oyster Stout or the oak-aged Yuletide Cherry Porter.



Oast House Brew ers is hard to miss in Niagara

## DRIVE SOUTH

Walk into the tasting room at [Niagara Oast House Brewers](#) on any weekend during the summer and you're likely to find a few dozen new friends with their figurative ties loosened after a day of sampling Niagara's excellent wines. Appropriately, all three of the brewery's owners, Cian MacNeill, Mike Berlis, and Kevin Somerville, have professional backgrounds in the wine industry. Oast House's lineup is built around two beers—a very good saison and an even *biere de garde*—that, like wine, are both built for cellaring.

[Silversmith Brewing](#) produces rare styles—like a black lager—just up Niagara Stone Road from Oast House. The brewery boasts a welcoming environment that's well-suited to its sessionable beers.

## TREK WEST

[Block Three Brewing Company](#) was started when its four partners decided that their beer club just wasn't enough to satisfy their obsessive thirst for craft brews. A rotation of interesting seasonal releases complements Block Three's very drinkable King Street Saison. Pair a visit to this St. Jacobs brewery with a trip to the town's renowned farmers' market to enjoy one of the best food-and-drink road trips in Southern Ontario.

You might also consider a Saturday afternoon stop in Guelph for a tour of [Wellington Brewery](#), the oldest independent microbrewery in Canada. Wellington offers a rare combination of solid, well-made regular offerings—from the sessionable Arkell Best Bitter to the thick and rich Russian Imperial Stout—and inventive, experimental “Welly One-Offs.”

## AND DON'T FORGET

Planning for an overnight stay is the responsible choice after a day of brewery touring. Even if you don't think it'll be necessary, you're likely to find that meeting Ontario's passionate brewers and tasting their excellent beers is so engrossing that you won't want to leave anytime soon.

David Ort is a Toronto-based food-and-drink writer and the author of [The Canadian Craft Beer Cookbook](#).



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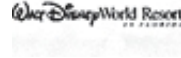
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