

LOCAL LOVE

YOUR GUIDE TO LIVING WELL & DOING GOOD





Why healthcare providers are prescribing museum visits

Got the blues? These GTA cultural institutions are just what the doctor ordered

BY AMY VALM

Breathe deep, stand back and take in the view of a vibrant painting, each brush stroke thoughtfully placed. Look up at an awe-inspiring whale skeleton, suspended from the ceiling and filling up an entire room. Brush your hand across a soft and satisfyingly textured fabric, created by a master weaver.

Museums and art galleries are great places to admire beautiful, interesting and historic things, but research suggests they can also help people experiencing depression, chronic pain, anxiety and stress to reduce their symptoms, as part of a holistic treatment plan.

People who have been diagnosed with these conditions can benefit from therapies and medications, but healthcare providers are supplementing these conventional approaches by recommending social activities that involve getting out into the community, connecting with others, and engaging in light physical exercise. These activities can lead to an increase in serotonin (the “happy chemical”), which promotes feelings of well-being. After successful trials in the UK and Montreal, more doctors and social workers are adding visits to museums and art galleries to their patients’ prescriptions.

To get a sense of how impactful social visits can be, consider depression. “It’s an illness that makes people see the world as a dark place, robbing them of their motivation,” says Dr. Mark Linder, a general practitioner at Ellis Park Medical in Toronto. “If you have more community and more engagement around you, you do better.”

In December 2018, Toronto’s Royal Ontario Museum announced a year-long pilot project that will enable patients and their loved ones to visit for free — if a healthcare provider, community professional or social worker refers them. Noting that financial struggles can be a trigger for mental health, Linder says the notion of a freebie can in itself boost morale. It sends the message: ““Hey, your society cares about you and wants you to feel better, so here’s a free ticket.””

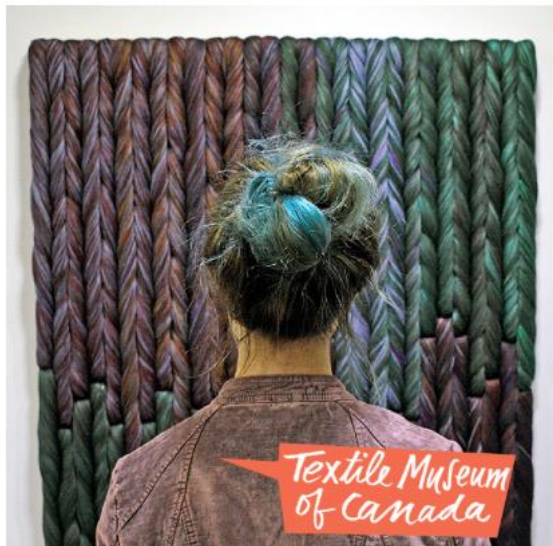
While this particular project is currently restricted to the ROM, public library users can also access free passes to a range of cultural institutions across the GTA. So if you feel like a social visit would do you good, here are some museums and galleries worth the visit—no prescription required.



ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

The sprawling downtown gallery is an obvious choice, and not just for its inspiring architecture and impressive collections that include works by the Group of Seven, Rebecca Belmore and Pablo Picasso. The gallery has drawing and painting workshops and a new talk series that covers the livability of the city (beginning in April). Topics include housing costs, transportation and creating a more inclusive Toronto. *(Photograph courtesy of the AGO)*

317 Dundas St W, Toronto, ago.ca



TEXTILE MUSEUM OF CANADA

Dedicated exclusively to textiles—think complex beadwork, woven works of art and intricate embroidery—the museum is a sensory playground. People who are visually impaired can book touch tours to enjoy the tactile qualities of exhibits. The museum features works from around the world, with items from over 200 regions, which may help newcomers feel a sense of connection between their old and new homes. *(Photograph courtesy of Textile Museum of Canada)*

55 Centre Ave, Toronto, textilemuseum.ca



MCMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION

Located northwest of the city in Kleinburg, this gallery sits on 100 acres of woodlands along the picturesque Humber River. On the grounds, visitors can walk through a sculpture garden, explore Tom Thomson's shack and explore the network of hiking trails and paths to enjoy the soothing effects of nature. There's plenty to see inside, too, with a large collection including contemporary, First Nations, Inuit and Group of Seven art. *(Photograph courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Collection)*

10365 Islington Ave, Kleinburg, mcmichael.com



GARDINER MUSEUM

Walking through a large museum can be overwhelming, which is why the guided tours included in the price of admission here are a welcome touch for any visitor who's already feeling overloaded by life. The Gardiner is one of the only museums in the world to specialize in ceramics. Visitors can explore over 4,000 objects, from European porcelain to contemporary pottery (and we're not just talking dinnerware — think busts and intricate sculptures, too). Drop-in pottery classes are also available, where you can experience the therapeutic world of working with clay via hand-building and wheel-throwing, as well as meeting people in an informal and welcoming environment. *(Photograph courtesy of the Gardiner Museum)*

11 Queens Park, Toronto, gardinermuseum.on.ca



SCARBOROUGH MUSEUM

If large crowds are an issue, or you're craving an escape from modern stressors, get a blast from the past at this charming four-building museum, comprised of a farmhouse, log house, carriage works and farm outbuilding. This City of Toronto-run museum is on the walking trails of Thomson Memorial Park. In warmer months, the flower gardens are another uplifting reason to make the trek. *(Photograph courtesy of the City of Toronto)*

Thomson Memorial Park, 1007 Brimley Rd, Scarborough, toronto.ca ♥

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