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The Hamptons of the North: Muskoka, Central Ontario

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The wildly romantic lakes north of Toronto are a well-kept secret. In the summer months, when the Hamptons or the Riviera feel just too crowded, the rich and famous find a haven here, away from the attention of the paparazzi. So far, anyway...

Steven Spielberg spends summer vacations here, as does his friend, movie star Tom Hanks – while many internet millionaires whose faces are unknown and unrecognised have large estates in Muskoka. Early in the 19th Century, wealthy industrialists discovered the pristine beauty of this region of eastern Canada, named after the local Indian Chief Muskoka. In later years, American billionaires such as the Rockefellers, Carnegies and Mellons gravitated here, building – along the banks of the magnificent clear lakes – veritable palaces that they humbly called ‘cottages’.



Located just two hours north of Toronto, Muskoka – with its lakes, rocks and dense pine and maple forests – is a picturesque ideal of Canadian beauty that combines a pleasant degree of wilderness with golf courses, luxurious resorts and a lively cultural life. In early autumn, the Toronto Film Festival is a firm date for Hollywood stars who then go on to enjoy premieres and parties in the region.

It also attracts tourists and celebrity hunters with cameras at the ready, as Muskoka exerted a fascination for celebrities long before Spielberg & Co. "In the thirties, Clark Gable was a regular at the legendary Bigwin Resort", while Ernest Hemingway showed enthusiasm for the fish population of Rosseau. In winter, too, there are the delights of skiing and ice fishing.



The New York Times dubbed Muskoka the Malibu of the North, but the Como of the New World would be equally appropriate, given the elegant motor yachts, sleek racing boats and tiny water racers – the ‘sea fleas’ – that you find around Gravenhurst and Bracebridge.



Those seeking civilised solitude would do well to try a visit to Muskoka. For a truly perfect stay on the edge of a lake, we'd recommend one of the so-called ‘cottages’ available to rent.

Photos: Ed Boutilier for www.cottageblog.ca

Gallery

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