



_PHOTO: RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR

The Yonge Street Reference Library may be the crown jewel of the TPL system, but smaller neighbourhood branches have much to offer, too.

TUE JAN 15, 2013



PLACES

Ten reasons to love the Toronto Public Library

BY: KIM HUGHES

If there is a public library system on the planet better than the Toronto Public Library—the world’s busiest—we’d like to know about it. A shining, seemingly rare example of tax dollars working hard and wisely for every member of the community, the TPL raises book borrowing—and movie-watching, eBook devouring, museum-going, computer-using, and lecture-attending—to an art form. Or at least, the library makes all those things a whole lot more accessible to everyone from grannies to tweens, new Canadians to new moms.

In fact, the TPL offers so many way-cool, free services that a lot of users—even regulars—might not know about them all. And if you’re not already a regular visitor, you are totally missing out. Stop making Heather Reisman richer. Skip Indigo (and all their overpriced home-decor trappings) and head down to your local library branch for your next nail-biter novel or copy of *Chatelaine*. Here are 10 highly compelling reasons (plucked from a smorgasbord of many) of why you should.

1. Any book can be sent to any branch

Even if your local branch is puny and light on stock, you can place a hold on a desired title and the TPL will ship it in from another branch, giving you a full week to pick it up (though fining you \$1 if you don’t bother, which seems reasonable). Plus, you’ll be notified by email or automated phone call (your choice) when your materials are ready for pick-up at the designated branch.

2. They’ll buy books for you

Suppose you read about a book in the *New York Times* that sounds amazing but has a highly niche focus... say, sociologist Eric Klinenberg’s excellent 2002 entry *Heat Wave*, chronicling the widespread social breakdown that led to the deaths of nearly 800 Chicagoans during a blistering summer season in 1995. Said book—which might not have been ordered on release—can be ordered retroactively by the TPL if a member submits a “request for purchase” at a branch. (Forms

will be available soon via email.) The TPL ordered this very book for me based on a request for purchase and they delivered it to my local branch, all free. Yeah, I know, awesome.

3. Free museum passes

Multiple branches, usually located in less affluent neighbourhoods, offer free passes to museums, galleries, and other cultural hubs that might otherwise be too costly and inaccessible. And they include some places you may have heard of: the ROM, the AGO, Black Creek Pioneer Village, the Bata Shoe Museum, and Ontario Science Centre. Granted, passes are limited but, given that general admission to the ROM is \$15 for adults and \$12 for kids (and that TPL passes are good for two adults and up to five children), those passes are well worth queuing up for.

4. TPL is totally wired

Internet access (wireless and otherwise), Microsoft Office, and computer classes are free in every library branch. That means low- or fixed-income people, seniors, and so-called latch-key kids can access the web for research help, potential job listings, health information, public-transit schedules, weather advisories, etc., while creating sharp-looking documents such as résumés. And, speaking of the web, members can manage their accounts (place or cancel holds, renew materials, reserve computers, track fines and so on) through the very comprehensive TPL website. All you need is a library card to log in.

5. Even knuckle-draggers get some love

Despite the advent of Netflix, some of us still watch DVDs on DVD players. TPL loans out DVDs (and CDs); both can be reserved like books and sent to your preferred branch.

6. They also loan out pricey, up-to-the-minute periodicals

Such as: *Vanity Fair*, *Rolling Stone*, *Bon Appétit*, *Vogue*, the *New Yorker*, *Architectural Digest*, the *Economist*, and the celebrity tabloids. And TPL subscribes to all the daily newspapers. Plus, the reading areas are surprisingly comfortable; the Pape/Danforth branch, for instance, has deep, Le Corbusier-type chairs.

7. TPL hosts a range of cultural events

Beyond readings, lectures, and book clubs—though all are on offer—the TPL also presents live music. Witness two upcoming February performances at the North York Central branch by pianist Mboya Nicholson spotlighting Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, and the music of New Orleans. Many branches also screen movies for both adults and children.

8. The staff are actually friendly

In a decade of weekly (or greater) TPL use, I honestly don't recall encountering a surly, short-tempered, or unhelpful staffer. I don't know where they find these gentle souls, but someone from TTC HR should be discreetly looking into this, like, today.

9. Their newsletter tells you stuff you can use

A recent edition, for example, let me know that "Toronto Public Library is pleased to provide space for art exhibits which reflect the diverse cultural interests of Toronto and its neighbourhoods." Cool, no? This, in addition to listing upcoming lectures ("Teaching Your Kids about Money") and tutorials ("Introduction to eBooks & eAudiobooks") teeing up Family Literacy Day (Jan. 27), while offering recommended reading lists. Sign up here.

10. TPL is ours, damnit!

According to their site, over 19 million people visited 98 branches in 2011, up from 18 million people in 2010. Those savvy Torontonians borrowed 33 million items (!), up from 32 million items in 2010. They also attended ESL classes, health and wellness programs, received career and job search guidance, enjoyed March Break game nights, accessed all manner of accessibility features like Braille printers and audio books, and probably had a nice chat with a staffer about the weather. If that's not something to celebrate, nothing is.

What do you love about your library? Tell us in the comments section below.

TAGS Education, Toronto Public Library



post a comment 

Latest 

Anonymous

I'm sorry, but they won't buy you a book. You can make suggestions which then go to a committee, if you're lucky. Budget is so tight they will almost certainly not buy something requested by only one patron.



The free museum pass "service" is or was so easy to cheat on that people were actually caught re-selling these passes outside the relevant institutions. If museums, etc. want to give out free passes, why don't they do it themselves? It's a waste of library staff time and our money to have them providing this "service" which is done a free publicity for the institutions involved.

 1  3

11:33 pm on February 11, 2013 [↪ Reply](#) [⚠ Report](#)

DES_Toronto

You forgot some of the online treasures you can get through the TPL, such as Naxos Music, which offers over a million tracks of mostly classical music, and JStor, a repository of academic journals.

 3  0

5:32 am on January 22, 2013 [↪ Reply](#) [⚠ Report](#)

EJD from Dartmouth

As someone who is legally blind & physically disabled, I really appreciate the TPL, I have very fond

memories of the East Mall & burnhamthorpe branch as well as the Jane & Dundas branch, but my personal fave, is at Wellesley Community center..

I currently live in Dartmouth N.S & the libraries here, just dont compare, there accessible computers are so out of date that its sickening, the ones in TPL, were reserved for blind/low-vision (CNIB cardholders as well as physically disabled people) it was a huge help, also the access to accessible format books is the BEST in Canada, even better than CNIB's own online digital library, as the TPL collection of talking books, does not require the use of a hugely expensive machine to listen to them, nor do they require you to deal with ppl only over a phone or online!!

I also regard highly the TPL's collection of Large Print books, amazing selection & the staff are incredible at finding the one your looking for, going as far as to call several other branches, hunting the book down..

I miss the TPL horribly & cant wait to get to move back to Toronto in 5 yrs, to be able to come back to my beloved TPL...

 6  0

10:15 pm on January 21, 2013

 Reply  Report

 **Wil B**

I hope you make it back here soon 😊

I'm sure Dartmouth is lovely but there are advantages to being in a big city too!

 1  0

4:13 am on January 22, 2013

 Report

P.M.

It's strange that this post knocks DVD and CD users as 'knuckle-draggers.' Netflix is not free. Movies and music are not free, just like books are not free.

If you think that everything is free on the internet, consider the cost of internet access itself, and the cost of computers and electronics.

 18  2

3:22 pm on January 21, 2013

 Reply  Report

 **Wil B**

Sometimes the internet makes me feel like an old geezer.

Everybody understands why you use the library for books. After all, most people couldn't possibly afford to buy every book they wanted or needed.

But when it comes to movies, people are like, 'just use netflix' or 'just download it.'

Do people really think that they can download everything with absolute impunity and zero cost? Everything is free now? And where are they doing all this free unlimited downloading? At the library, I suppose (so maybe you do need the library after all?)

Oh well, I'm 35 now, so maybe I *am* an old geezer. I might as well admit it! 😊

 5  1

4:07 am on January 22, 2013

 Report

fanofToronto

I have been going to libraries my whole life....shout out to the Donlands/Pape, Fairview and North York locations. However...I have recently moved to the Yonge/Bloor area 3 years ago and I have to say the its the worst one...I know its the biggest one and what not, but man!...

1) The computers on the 3rd/4th floor are constantly being hawked by the homeless/weirdos...I personally don't use the computers there, but on more than one occasion I seen them viewing inappropriate videos on sites..They talk loudly and complain and what not when watching videos of underage girls swimming on youtube...

2) The slow elevators.....Really? You invest money in an art gallery/coffee bistro, but can't replace the cables on the elevators? My roommate works in an elevator service company and he told me right off the bat the reason the elevators are slowed (on purpose by the library) is to reduce the friction of the wheels against the cable... Basically trying to save money at the expense of us.

3) The staff... There was a group of teens talking loudly (as if they were outside or on a bus) and at least 4 people complained to the staff, including myself. This was on the 4th floor. The lady there told us that it wasn't her job to tell them to be quiet and her job was to help people find books.... We went downstairs to security and found all 4 of them by the exit...barely looking at people's backpacks and trying to hit on girls... I was so mad I walked out with 3 library books and they barely looked into my bag... So now I make a habit of taking at least 1 or 2 books when leaving the library! .. I have been to "main libraries" around different cities and for most tourists, they would claim this library to be our main one, but it's embarrassing...

 13  32

2:56 pm on January 21, 2013

 Reply  Report

Joe Clark

Who's up for a good doxing, to use a current buzzword? Admitted thief fanofToronto (sic) really needs an unmasking. (And his tales of other patrons' and guards' impermissible behaviour at TRL need to be addressed.)

 10  0

3:11 pm on January 21, 2013

 Report

P.M.

Let's have a bit of perspective here, shall we?

The library, like any other public place, is a microcosm of society. There are weirdos and creeps and rude people. And yes, there are annoyances too, like slow elevators or renovations. That's life.

Library staff are not the behaviour police. If they spent their time speaking to every group of kids goofing off, or every loud person talking on the phone, they'd have no time to do anything else. That really isn't their job.

You say that the Reference Library security are hitting on girls. If this really is happening, go ahead and report it. But I have a feeling that you're just exaggerating because you feel that the staff weren't attentive enough to you. Yours sounds like a complaining, 'customer service' kind of attitude.

And if you really do steal books from the library, you are downright despicable.

 20  11

3:47 pm on January 21, 2013

 Report

fanofToronto

To P.M...

Please re-read, I am not exaggerating about not getting 'attention'...I was the fifth person to go and complain...you say it's not their job to apply the library rules? Please...I'm not talking about the other branches, I'm specifically talking about the reference branch. Very few of them actually walk around....I volunteered at a library when I was younger so I know what "tasks" are to be done..I'm not asking for them to shush every person, but 4-5 complaints in means something...

not "go downstairs to security while I do my Sudoku puzzle"... Yes she was doing it! She is 50ish and wears rimmed glasses...Everytime I see her, shes doing the puzzle! Not even on break!

And what annoyance? Re-read please P.M!!!! They are using funds for other things (gallery? Really?) instead of fixing the elevator! Do you know how hard it is for handicap challenged people to go up the flight of stairs? On average its a 3 minute wait. But they put in a cafe that is actually more expensive than a Timmies/Timothys and even Starbucks!. I beg of you to go there on any day of the week/weekend and go up to the 3rd 4th 5th floors and walk around. See whats playing on the screens.. This doesnt happen on the main floor as they actually have 'walkers' who monitor whats being surfed on the web.

And as a tax-payer, I have the right to 'complain' if something is not at an acceptable level...Im not asking for top notch, A++++ service...just the same amount of service I get from other libraries... Now you remind me of the type to just keep quiet and bear a grin...and I dont blame you....Im just like you...HOWEVER, one can only take enough of this bs and what not.. Please...I am venting so lets go past that...but I encourage ANYONE this weekend to go to the reference library...10-5pm...Just walk around...shizzz...And wonder why all the physically challenged people are on the main floor only and not on other floors! And how one persons job is to go upstairs to find the books for them! Because the elevator is slow/always filled with people!...

And yes I took the books...didnt rip anything off or anything like that...the security guard barely looks at my bag...its so sad.. I seen a guy steal the keyboard (LOL)... and I seen another girl bring 5 bags of McDonald (Not exaggerating at all) upstairs...Im all for eating as in snacks...but not full meals... and what do you know!...the ones eating the Mcdonalds were also the ones talking out loud!

 10  13

7:59 pm on January 21, 2013

 Report

 **P.M.**

Oh ok, I get it now.

You have lots of complaints, and you think each one is perfectly justified.

And your theft of library materials, that's justified too. You have your reasons.

Guess I had it wrong when I thought you were a whiner and a thief. I didn't realize you were special.

 12  4

10:58 pm on January 21, 2013

 Report

anonymous

The TPL also has shelves and shelves of sheet music both classical and popular that can be borrowed .

 18  0

1:33 pm on January 21, 2013

 Reply  Report

david kelly

The one thing that wasn't mentioned was architectural excellence. This is an institution that actually cares about public space, both inside and out. The new library on College and the addition to Bloor/Gladstone are both beautiful. It is good to know there is something in this city whichy actually works.

 9  1

Albin

My experience with physically returning the third book I ever checked out was not good – handed it back over the counter, didn't think to request a written receipt (recommended) and it was declared "lost" – after several phone calls including my request to check the surveillance video (I'd run in to the branch book in hand in my running tights), a staffer finally overwrote the system for me.

Since then, I've stuck to the very good Overdrive ebook / audiobook service, my one complaint being that the Amazon catalog has not been opened to Kindle-reader on Overdrive, as has been done in the USA.

 6  4

7:16 pm on January 20, 2013

[↪ Reply](#) [↑ Report](#) **Joe Clark**

Are you saying the book you handed back was never set to Claimed Return status? It isn't correct procedure to skip right past that step to Trace (let alone Missing).

 0  0

1:25 pm on January 27, 2013

[↑ Report](#)**Erica**

11. Access (sometimes remote) to expensive research and business databases that most people can only use if they are affiliated with a university. These databases can give small businesses and charities a chance to access information like market research that can help them to thrive. Also, as more newspapers throw up pay walls, these databases will only become more valuable for the public.

I also want to add that not everyone uses TPL for entertainment and free internet. I've used it to improve my French, fine tune my health regimen, host community events (cheap rental fees) and that's just off the top of my head. Its benefits are immeasurable.

 14  0

1:13 pm on January 19, 2013

[↪ Reply](#) [↑ Report](#)**Lisa K**

The TPL does indeed have e-books. They can be accessed on their homepage via "Downloads and E-Books". I think it's fantastic, especially for people who can't get out easily.

 10  0

9:41 am on January 19, 2013

[↪ Reply](#) [↑ Report](#) **Andrew**

yeah, but no Kindle support unfortunately

 1  4

11:31 am on January 19, 2013

[↑ Report](#) **Jane W**

@Andrew – That's because Kindle borrowing isn't supported in Canada. TPL does have limited .mobi formats, which can be read on Kindles, I think.

 6  0

4:25 pm on January 19, 2013

 Report

Cassandra

The West Toronto Junction Historical Society keeps its archives at the Annette Street branch, and hosts monthly lectures on local history. Yet another awesome thing to add to the list.

 9  0

5:08 pm on January 16, 2013

 Reply  Report

Apples

I'm a big fan of the library. Honestly, there's nothing like opening a book. No piece of technology will replace that process for me. It's the whole textural experience. I also really like being able to order books to my branch. There's always a pile of books/graphing novels hanging around by my bed.

I especially like the Toronto Reference Library, and finding all the old books. There's something about the atmosphere, too. I don't care if it makes me a dweeb; sometimes I just pick and topic and go explore. Any other people in their 20s who just get a kick out of hanging around there?

 9  0

9:58 am on January 16, 2013

 Reply  Report



Apples

*graphic novels.
(Turns out, I can't type and talk to people at the same time.)

 2  1

9:59 am on January 16, 2013

 Report

varun

@patrick – there's more to a library than movies. Oh wait! did you say you were a student of sociology? Is that a euphemism for I-pour-coffee-for-a-living and consider the ability to use a telephone the height of technological sophistication.

donkeh

 1  21

9:29 pm on January 15, 2013

 Reply  Report

Patrick

TPL will lost popularity when the "techno-phobic" baby-boomers are phased out of society and the media-savvy internet generation takes over.

Here's why: they actually know how to use the internet outside of facebook/hotmail and can access all of the media (and alot more the TPL doesn't carry) via blu-ray quality torrents and high-quality video-streaming index sites. They also get e-books as well as pretty much any music you can imagine (something the TPL doesn't carry).

Right now the only sway TPL has over the younger generation is its free-access to the internet for those without any access to it due to socio-economic reasons which represents a large portion of the population.

As older computers are sold off and become superfluous you will find this demographic change from one of 'internet poverty' to one of 'internet affluence'.

I have nothing against the Library system, I just am a student of sociology and reading the future is something we do with eager relish.

-P

 3  59

7:11 pm on January 15, 2013

 Reply  Report

 1 2 