

Not so trashy

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In case you were wondering, it's been an unusually lovely summer in Toronto. Not a single smog warning so far; the last extreme heat alert was in June. The roads have been clear, as Torontonians head out to enjoy their cottages.

That trash strike you've been hearing so much about? Despite what you may have seen on TV, and read about in Lorne Gunter's Friday Post column (written from Alberta) suggesting that Toronto has become an acrid hellhole ("The Upside of T. O.'s Great Stink"), most of us have hardly noticed.

The city's garbage workers are among 30,000 civic employees who have walked off the job, but the city remains clean. Not perfect: Some roadside trash receptacles are surrounded by bags of garbage, and folks who live near the couple dozen parks designated as temporary dumps are losing patience. But these dumps have not yet attracted anything worse than flies and raccoons. There were TV reports yesterday showing rats running around piles of trash in the downtown Chinatown (nowhere near a temporary dump), but, um, that's nothing new. And in Chinatown, as in most areas across the city, local business associations have hired private trash collectors to come in and clear things away.

The city lost its trash-free lustre years ago; we exchanged our New-York-run-by-the-Swiss vibe to become a far more interesting city. The cliché is true: You can visit every country in the world without ever leaving Toronto.

And since I'm talking to the rest of Canada here, let me add that we're also not overrun with crime --contrary to news reports. Police Chief Bill Blair revealed recently that crime has dropped 30% since 2005's Summer of the Gun, and it was never that bad to begin with. There is still a crazy number of incidents involving young men willing to shoot off their guns in public, but if you're not a troublemaker, it is unlikely to affect you.

There is a lot of poverty, and something should be done about that, but I can tell you it's a pretty good place to be middle-class.

I spent three-quarters of my life in Montreal and Halifax, two places that trained me to dislike Toronto. But since moving here 11 years ago this month, I have found a pleasant, warm, vibrant city that doesn't take itself any more seriously than any other.

Yes, we're having a garbage strike. But please come and visit. Our hotels and restaurants could use the business. You'll enjoy yourself, I promise.

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