


How to Have an Urban Digital Detox in Downtown Toronto

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Welcome to Part One of a series on Digital Detox; exploring how to do a complete disconnect from technology while travelling to different destinations.

A digital detox is going without technology for a certain period so phones, TV, radio, computers – anything that connects us to the outside world – are all switched off. The benefits of completing a detox means you have time to enjoy hobbies, activities or have a long nap without being distracted.



Toronto CN Tower Photo Melody Wren

The first experience was a three-day Urban detox over a weekend in downtown Toronto. Can I still carry my iPhone to take photos? What if I need to get hold of someone? Take notes how? How will I find where I am going without Waze? Will I have to confiscate the iPhone of the friend travelling with me to ensure there is no sneaking into the bathroom for undercover texting.

These are all challenges I am willing to face in order to turn off.

Out of habit, the first items on the packing list were iPad, Kindle, chargers, and portable battery charger. Crossed off, I felt both anxious and relieved at the possibilities ahead. I was going with one of my oldest friends, and when she told her adult children that she would be

off-grid and if they needed to reach her they would have to call the hotel phone, it was greeted with much eye-rolling.



Photo Melody Wren

There are many apps for doing a digital detox, which does seem like an oxymoron, however, if you need help turning your phone off, the apps can monitor your digital movements so you aren't tempted. After researching apps, I found Flipd, a free, user-friendly app that helps to control device use. Flipd's website says the app is "best used by parents with distracted kids, girlfriends with attention-deficit boyfriends and teachers with device-attached students." If you are out with a friend, husband or teenager and find yourself being snubbed by their phone use, it could be time for them to get "Flipd off." Its two-way locking feature allows you to lock your device for twelve hours or lock a friend's without being invaded. While it sounds a bit invasive to me, it worked for our purposes this weekend.

Taking public transport into Toronto meant we didn't have to worry about parking in the bustling downtown area. However, neither of us knew how to get to the hotel, without instinctively reaching for our phones GPS, so "how did we use to do it" became a regular

theme as we reverted to an old fashioned paper map. We reached the Chelsea Hotel to find it's lobby festively decorated with eight large trees and ten smaller trees as a sustainable tree decorated with boxes that the staff recycled.



Photo Melody Wren

Centrally located close to everything downtown Toronto, staying at the Chelsea meant we could walk almost everywhere. The Chelsea is the largest hotel in Canada with 1500 rooms and one of their key focuses is sustainability. The hotel with heart has special accommodations for guests with disabilities, as well as those staying with the hotel for treatments at local hospitals. They also have certification and program for kids with Autism.

Just off the main lobby, we refueled at the T Bar, a cozy and inviting atmosphere with delicious food. Fresh salmon, jasmine rice and kale salad was clean and simple and didn't weigh us down.

Afterward, walking with a map in hand, we went to the Elgin Theater at 189 Yonge Street to take in the play "Come From Away." The Elgin Theater so decadently decorated, it was freeing to take in the decor and chat with my friend without checking emails or taking photos. The play was a touching, funny, and complete immersion into the experience of the

theme. Returning to the hotel, I read before going to sleep, something I always do, but this time with a real book. That pre-bedtime, last email check, which often keeps me awake was not even a thought, leaving me another freeing escape to sleep and dream of dancing Newfoundlanders.

Speaking of email, what do most people do first thing in the morning? Check emails or texts that often have an urgency attached. Not today! I definitely didn't miss deleting the junk emails that start my day. Today was about adding enjoyment with pampering at the nearby Elmwood Spa. Carrying our bathing suits, I imagined a soak in the whirlpool after exercising in the swimming pool. Pedi, mani, and massage. Was I missing emails and texts? Not a bit.

I asked my co-detoxing friend how it was going for her, and she replied: "It feels good." She did add that she kept reaching for her phone but being without it kept her more in the moment. After indulging in our treatments, with painted fingers and toes, we stayed in spa robes to enjoy lunch at the Terrace Restaurant on the fourth floor. Fabulous fresh spa cuisine, three-course prix-fixe menu, and every part a delicious treat, we languished over lunch, chatting more about everything and nothing.

It was late afternoon by the time we were finished; we were reluctant to change into our street clothes and leave the relaxation bubble but were looking forward to exploring the [Art Gallery of Ontario](#). The Early Rubens Exhibit at the AGO is worth a visit. Reservations are required because of their timed entries. There are many other exhibits to visit while there, and the gift shops are a welcome hit, especially so close to Christmas.



Toronto Christmas Market Photo Melody Wren

Another can't miss destination during December in Toronto is the festive Distillery District Christmas Market at 55 Mill Street. Lights, music and little huts offering hot drinks, wooden nutcrackers all contributed to the festive atmosphere. The enormous Christmas tree was the belle of the ball with Ferris wheel lit up like Christmas. Portable heaters scattered throughout encouraged shoppers to linger longer.

Mid-Detox Observations:

There is more time to read, relax and chat with a friend. With my friend not reaching for or responding to her phone, I felt she was more present in our conversations, a reminder to me to be respectful when I am with family or friends and wait until later to check my phone.

On the final morning, we toured the hotel to check out the family pool and kid zone as we were planning to bring grandchildren on the next visit. A play area, an arcade, a large pool for kids only and the whirlpool was very well set up. An adults-only pool was on another floor with a good-sized gym and whirlpool and weight room. We returned to our room to

play cards and chat before visiting Casa Loma, a Toronto icon neither of us had visited since we were children. Historic with beautiful original furniture, it was fascinating to look through.



Photo Melody Wren

End of Detox observations:

Not being distracted by technology, I tuned in more to my surroundings and stayed more in the moment of what I was doing. At home, I chose to cross things off my to-do list before checking emails, taking control of technology instead of it controlling my subsequent actions.

A three-day digital detox took me 24 hours to get used to, and then, I wasn't ready to end it. Stay tuned for a five-day desert digital detox.

How to Unplug:

- Try to disconnect for 30 minutes a day and build up to half the day.
- Claiming every Sunday as 'no-tech day' in your household and instead plan outdoor activities, board games, or community engagement.
- Focus on what you do, not what you cannot do.
- Spend quality time with family and friends

The benefits of unplugging are great! Be more in the moment, you will find you appreciate nature when you are more present and have more time to enjoy hobbies. How often do you pick up your phone instead of a book?

The author's trip was sponsored by Tourism Toronto and hosted at the Chelsea Hotel. They did not review or approve the article prior to publication.

Although we do our best to provide you with accurate information, all event details are subject to change. Please contact the facility to avoid disappointment.

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About The Author

[Melody Wren](#)

Melody is an Ontario based travel writer who believes travel stories are meant to encourage and inspire and considers her age (over 60) a gift in her journeys, bringing wisdom, experience, humour and a major 'if not now, when' attitude to her writing. A formerly nervous traveller, experiential travel has helped her conquer fears as she snorkelled through the Galapagos islands, glacier trekked in the Northwest Passage, danced around a fire in Africa, learned how to make the perfect tiramisu in Florence, kayaked amongst spawning salmon in Ontario, snow-shoed in Colorado, and sailed in the British Virgin Islands . Her work appears in Canadian Yachting Magazine, Canadian Jewish News, The Toronto Star, Kitchener Waterloo Record, Caribbean Beat Magazine, Cottage Life Magazine, Waypoints Global, Active Over 50, and Inspired Seniors.

