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## ONTARIO

# Summer theatre trips in southern Ontario

BY JIM FOX, SPECIAL TO QMI AGENCY

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The Festival Theatre is the centrepiece of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival marking its 60th season. (Erin Samuelli/Handout)

The curtain is rising on scenic theatre trips around southern Ontario this summer.

Combined with some of the best theatre experiences is a one-stop-shopping reservations portal that allows visitors to book their getaway packages online.

This includes theatre tickets and accommodations, heritage tours and fine dining as well as hiking and relaxing beach escapes.

### All the world's a stage

From world-class Shakespeare productions and musical favourites to Monty Python's hilarious take on the search for the Holy Grail, theatre buffs should be able to find something on the playbill to keep them entertained.

That's just within the tourism region made up of Huron, Perth, Waterloo and Wellington as promoted by a new group called Regional Tourism Organization Four.

It was incorporated by a volunteer board and supported by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sports.

"We're incredibly fortunate to have 12 professional theatre venues in our region," said Napier Simpson, the organization's chief marketing officer and director of operations.

"They offer guests great variety and terrific entertainment value, whether they want to see a smaller, more-intimate production or something on a much grander scale," he added.

With plays by William Shakespeare at its foundations, the Stratford Festival has set the standard for classical theatre across North America for more than 50 years from its home base in the picturesque city on the Avon River.

Among the 12 plays being performed this summer in Stratford are Shakespeare's Measure for Measure through Sept. 21; the classic rock band

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The Who's Broadway hit, Tommy, until Oct. 19; and Noel Coward's enduring comedy, Blithe Spirit, to Oct. 20. [stratfordfestival.ca](http://stratfordfestival.ca)

### Up around the bend

Over in Grand Bend, on the shores of Lake Huron, are the perfect spots for summer theatre at the Huron County Playhouse and Playhouse II.

They're part of seven intimate theatre venues operated by Drayton Entertainment and offering more than two dozen productions.

Other venues are the Drayton Festival Theatre; St. Jacobs Country Playhouse and Schoolhouse Theatre; Cambridge's Dunfield Theatre; and King's Wharf Theatre in Penetanguishene.

"The Drayton Experience is all about discovering hidden gems in unique communities throughout Ontario," said Alex Mustakas, artistic director and CEO.

These "extremely intimate" theatres offer big-time Broadway-calibre productions at small-town prices where audiences "can't help but become emotionally invested, he added.

Among the plays in this season's line-up at Drayton are the gourmet farce Too Many Cooks, July 10-27 and Oliver! from Aug. 14-31.

Monty Python's Spamalot runs from June 26-July 13 at the Huron County Playhouse and from July 17-Aug. 3 at the St. Jacobs Country Playhouse.

The new 500-seat Dunfield Theatre beside the Grand River in Cambridge, presents Sorry, I'm Canadian, July 10-Aug. 3, the Buddy Holly Story, Aug. 7-31 and Lend Me a Tenor, Sept. 25-Oct. 12. For show details and tickets: [www.draytonentertainment.com](http://www.draytonentertainment.com); 1-855-372-9866

Other scenic small-town theatre experiences include the Blyth Festival in Huron County that has been providing a year-round venue for original Canadian productions since 1975.

This season, the theatre is producing six plays, including the Beyond the Farm Show, June 26-Aug. 16 and Yorkville – the Musical, from July 3-Aug. 11. [blythfestival.com](http://blythfestival.com)

Another resource is the link to the 21 members the Association of Summer Theatres 'Round Ontario: [summertheatre.ca](http://summertheatre.ca)

[onetanktrips@hotmail.com](mailto:onetanktrips@hotmail.com)

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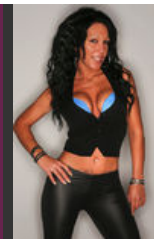
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