

MIKE BENNETT, TRAVEL EDITOR
MBENNETT@THESPEC.COM
905-526-3279

TRAVEL

WORLD'S LONGEST FLIGHT

Qatar Airways launches new Auckland route

Qatar Airways has launched the world's longest scheduled commercial airline route with the arrival of its flight from Doha to Auckland, New Zealand.

The Gulf carrier said flight QR920 touched down in Auckland early on Monday after covering a distance of 14,535 kilometres, or 9,032 miles.

That is the furthest distance between any two cities linked by direct flights. The outbound journey is scheduled to take 16 hours and 20 minutes on the Boeing 777-200LR. That's relatively short compared to the return trip of 17 hours and 30 minutes, which is slower because of headwinds.
The Associated Press



PHOTO COURTESY OF NIAGARA ARTS & CULTURAL CENTER

The suspension bridge near Niagara Falls that Harriet Tubman used to spirit slaves across the border into Canada.

Escape to the promised land

During Black History Month visit the Underground Railroad sites in Buffalo-Niagara used by fugitive slaves

ANNE BOKMA

She's the most celebrated face of the Underground Railroad — and it's a face destined to become even more famous since the U.S. Treasury announced that Harriet Tubman will replace Andrew Jackson on the front of the \$20 bill. Known as the "Moses of her people," Tubman, an escaped slave from Maryland, guided other fugitives to freedom in Canada across a wooden suspension bridge in Niagara Falls, often by hiding them in fruit wagons and railroad cattle cars.

Before the construction of the bridge in 1848, the only option for runaway slaves was to cross the Niagara River by rowboat under the cover of night or by climbing aboard ferries and steamboats operated by sympathetic captains. Some risked their lives by swimming across the river at its calmer points or clung to pieces of wood in a desperate attempt to make it to Canada, considered the Promised Land.

Buffalo-Niagara was a hotbed of Underground Railroad activity from the early 1800s until 1865 when the Civil War outlawed slavery. (Canada had already banned the importing of slaves back in 1793.)

February's Black History Month is an ideal time to visit some of the significant sites of this network of secret routes, safe houses and hiding places that represented the first racially-integrated U.S. civil rights movement in which blacks and whites worked together to actively oppose the federal laws that condoned slavery.

In Niagara Falls, the Niagara Arts & Cultural



PHOTO BY ANNE BOKMA

The Freedom Crossing monument commemorating the Underground Railroad in Lewiston N.Y. portrays a family being loaded into a boat to make the Niagara River crossing.

Center's Freedom Crossing: The Underground Railroad in Greater Niagara, tells the story of the Underground Railroad movement in Buffalo-Niagara through historic photos and artifacts.

In addition to Tubman and her fellow famous abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, you can learn about the lives of many lesser known, mostly anonymous, "conductors," who played a pivotal role in helping an estimated 50,000 freedom seekers escape to Canada.

These included the hundreds of African-Americans who worked as cooks, waiters, drivers and porters at grand hotels such as the Cataract House, once the largest hotel in Niagara Falls. These hotel workers led double lives, serving rich hotel guests

— many of whom were plantation owners, accompanied by their enslaved maids and valets, who vacationed in Niagara Falls to get away from the oppressive heat of the southern states — and then helping spirit those slaves into small rowboats located just a few blocks away at the base of the American Falls.

Canada was just a 15-minute crossing, but it was a dangerous ride since bounty hunters and federal agents constantly patrolled the area.

Local safe houses are also highlighted in the exhibit, including the McClew farm, now called Murphy's Orchards, where a hiding room under a trap door in the barn can still be viewed today.

Railroad continues // G12

Buffalo and Niagara was a hotbed of Underground Railroad activity from the early 1800s until 1865.

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The exhibit also features the famous image of "Gordon," a runaway slave with dozens of horrific welts on his back — the result of whippings by his overseer. This photo was mass produced in the early 1860s and recognized as a searing indictment of slavery.

In nearby Lewiston, N.Y. the Freedom Crossing Monument is a larger-than-life bronze sculpture that honours the courage of fugitive slaves and depicts a family of four being loaded into a rowboat on the banks of the Niagara River by the town's Underground Railroad "station master," Josiah Tyron. He served as the pastor at Lewiston's First Presbyterian Church, also a safe haven for escaping slaves.

Buffalo's Broderick Park once housed the docks for the Black Rock Ferry, which was a key means of escape for fugitive slaves, especially before bridges were built over the Niagara River.

Also in Buffalo, the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor features a trio of sites with a significant African-American history. The Michigan Street Baptist Church, one of the oldest black churches in the U.S., played a central role in the struggle to end slavery. Runaway slaves found safe harbour here — a secret room hidden by a staircase at the back of the church can still be viewed. It was also an important meeting place for abolitionists and anti-lynching activists such as W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington.

The nearby Nash House Museum, the elegantly preserved home of Rev. J. Edward Nash, the pastor of the Michigan Street Baptist Church for 60 years, is billed as "the home where a community was built." Nash, a founding member of the NAACP, ensured his church was a focal point of civil rights activity at the turn of the 20th century.

A short walk away is the re-



PHOTO COURTESY OF NIAGARA ARTS & CULTURAL CENTER

Harriet Tubman

nowned Colored Musicians Club, celebrating its 100th year. It was not only the union hall for black musicians at a time when unions were segregated, but also a favourite informal stop for jazz greats such as Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald.

The music continues to this day upstairs on the second floor while the first floor is devoted to a museum with multimedia displays and interactive exhibits that offer an opportunity to learn the difference between blues, swing, bebop, ragtime, Big Band, boogie-woogie and New Orleans jazz.

The Underground Railroad was one of the most significant social protest movements in American history and this celebrated route is about to be further commemorated with the opening next year of the \$1 million Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Interpretive Centre. It will be located in the old U.S. Customs building — right across the site where Tubman once guided fugitive slaves to freedom.

Several tour companies, including Motherland Connections, are available to escort visitors to historic Underground Railroad sites. The Niagara Falls Underground Rail-

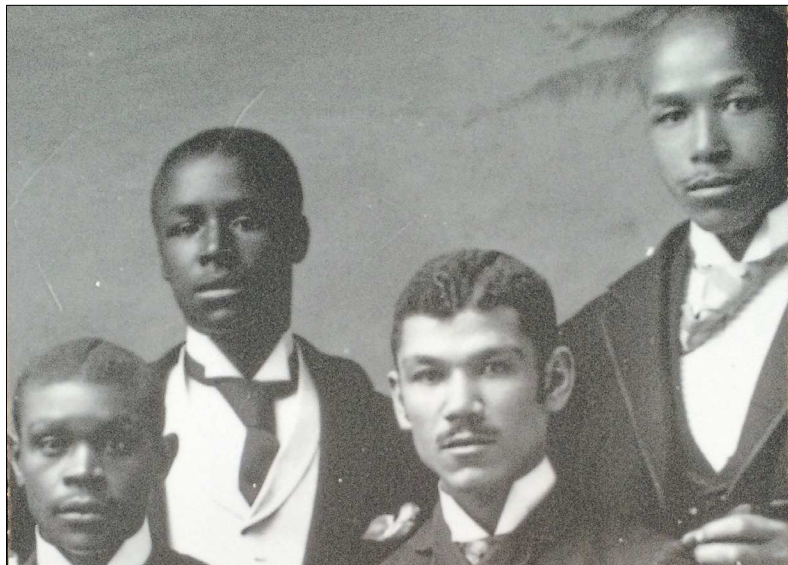


PHOTO COURTESY OF NIAGARA FALLS UNDERGROUND RAILROAD HERITAGE AREA

Image of African American waiters who played a key role in helping the slaves of southern hotel guests escape.

road Heritage Area organization also lists more than 25 key sites and has a self-guided driving and walking app for mobile phones: <https://niagarafallsundergroundrailroad.oncell.com/en/home-36462.html>

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Anne Bokma is a travel writer based in Hamilton.



PHOTO BY ANNE BOKMA

George Scott, president and band leader at the Colored Musicians Club and Museum.

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