

Immigration in Port Hope

Jercy David

Home to roughly 16 000 people according to a 2017 statistic, Port Hope is the smallest town I've ever stayed in for an extended period of time. The immigrant and ethnic diversity within the population is low, with 10% immigrants, 3.5% a visible minority, and 1.7% indigenous according to Statistics Canada in 2011. In short, I would not have been surprised to have mostly seen white people during my visit.

I was pleasantly proven wrong. As I helped with and participated in the festival I was surprised to see so many people of colour. Most were Southeast Asian or East Asian families with kids and elderly relatives coming to visit for the weekend. When asked, they said they were enjoying the unseasonal warm weather by fishing, taking photographs, partaking in the festival, and generally exploring Port Hope. What surprised me most was that many of them travelled by car or van, not by tour bus.

As a full disclosure, I've never

lived in a small town, and I don't plan on living in one soon. My surprise came from my own experience as a person of colour who immigrated to Canada. Many immigrants—especially those of ethnic backgrounds—generally gravitate to big cities for economic opportunities and the cultural communities already established there.

Most people don't leave the city, and for various reasons. Some want to avoid cultural barriers of going into a small town with less cultural diversity; some are undocumented and are afraid to go into a place where almost everyone was born in the country; some simply do not have a reason to go to a small town if their family and cultural community is in the city and not a small town. From personal experience, my own family doesn't live in a small town nor do we visit them often because small town life is hard to approach. My mother explains that it's "scary" entering a small community where you know nobody, and nobody knows you.

The most popular reason I've seen ethnic immigrants leave a city to visit a small town is because they're part of a bus tour—hence my surprise that many families came to Port Hope that weekend by car or van. The reality for many racialized immigrants is that travelling alone is expensive, and sometimes dangerous when visiting an unfamiliar place. Bus tours with a guide who can speak their native language are a popular way for many people to travel. From my own experience, when I see a large group of Asians in a tourist location, they're likely traveling in a bus tour.

So seeing many diverse faces that weekend became an educational experience beyond what I was doing for class. Watching people of different backgrounds, ages, and experiences come together to appreciate what Port Hope had to offer was exciting. Listening to community stories and hopes for Port Hope's future for diversity and cultural growth showed me a different side of small town life.

