

CANADA



A land of vast distances and rich natural resources, Canada became a self-governing dominion in 1867 while retaining ties to the British crown. Although politically established as a parliamentary democracy with Queen Elizabeth II as head of state, historically, economically, environmentally, technologically and politically, Canada has developed in parallel with the US. The strong ties make it all the more intriguing and enlightening to learn about the differences between neighbor nations sharing the world's longest unfortified border. Canada is divided into political divisions of 10 provinces and 3 territories. Similar to U.S. states—each province has its own government to handle local and regional affairs while territories are areas with less self-governance. It is useful to view Canada in terms of regions to understand the diversity of its people and places. Regional divisions traditionally shape Canadian outlooks so that “a traveler crossing Canada sees not one land but many” and so that “the geography does not divide Canada from the US nearly as much as it divides sections of the country from one another.”

QUICK FACTS

Population: 33,476,688 (2011 Census)

Area: 9,984,670 sq km/3,855,102 sq mi (2nd largest country in the world)

Capital: Ottawa-Gatineau National Capital Region (Population 1,236,324)

Languages: English (56.9% mother tongue) and French (21.3% mother tongue) are the country's two official languages. 20.0% of Canada's population speaking a language other than English or French at home. On provincial levels, only New Brunswick is bilingual English/French and only Quebec is unilingual French. Aboriginal languages are recognized in addition to French/English in Nunavut (two Inuit languages) and the Northwest Territories (11 First Nations languages).

EDUCATION

The education system in Canada ranks third in the world according to the OECD --just behind Korea and Finland but ahead of the U.S. (14th). Canada is also a leader in higher education and ranks first in the proportion of adults with a college education (24%). Education is provincially, not federally, regulated under the Canadian constitution. Although this leads to differences, the standards across the country are nonetheless uniformly high since education is so highly valued. Kindergarten attendance is on a voluntary basis but all children begin Grade 1 at age six with a September through June school year. Secondary schools go up to Grade 12 in most provinces. From there, students may attend university, college or CÉGEP studies (a French acronym for College of General and Vocational Education). The latter is two years of general or three years of technical education between high school graduation (Grade 11) and university—a system available only in the province of Québec.

RELIGION

Although the struggle between English Protestants and French Catholics has been significant to Canadian history, Canada has no official religion and religious pluralism has become a valued part of Canada's culture. The 2011 Census shows that 67% of Canadians claim Christianity while 24% claim no religion. Recent waves of immigration to Canada from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East has led to expansive growth of Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, and Hindu communities across the country.

ETHNICITY/NATIONAL IDENTITY

Canada is a multicultural nation with a federal policy that celebrates the “cultural mosaic” of the country. Although a wide range of Aboriginal peoples first inhabited the land, followed by New World settlement by the French and the English, Canada has welcomed newcomers from all over the globe and this has helped it become the diverse nation it is today. Up until sixty years ago, most immigrants came from Europe. Now most newcomers are from Asia. As a result, the number of visible minorities in Canada is growing and, now, one in five Canadians is a new immigrant. Canada treats its immigrants well and is currently ranked 3rd globally in how it receives its newcomers, providing them with fair and equal opportunities.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

Canadians are a family-oriented society. The majority are married households with 70.4% made up of married couples, 13.8% of common-law relationships (the fastest growing group), and the remaining 15.6% of lone-parent families. The society is also largely urban with 79.6% of Canadians living in cities. Given the nation's diversity and its size, it is not surprising that it has multiple regional subcultures that reflect the dominant heritage of each community although, in general, a love of literature, film and the arts is encouraged nationwide. Québec's unique position between European and North American culture is a constant source of inspiration for its artists. A special creativity is fostered there and best recognized by young Americans in the Cirque de Soleil, founded in Québec in 1984. The music scene, particularly jazz and pop, modern dance, literature, theater and cinema also have strong reputations. Canadians are proud of the cultural character Québec brings to the nation and of the acclaim Québec has gained around the world for its endeavors. Canadians also appreciate the diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures in the nation's cultural profile. A distinguishing factor among native peoples now is the degree to which they maintain ancestral ways or have integrated into the structures and adopted the culture of Canada's more industrial society. Even the Métis (mixed-blood indigenous peoples), the most highly integrated into urban and industrial life of the three groups, have always fought for the preservation and recognition of their unique cultural identity and political rights.



CANADIANS IN THE USA

Over 300,000 people cross the 8,891 km-long Canada-US border daily at its 119 crossings. In 2012, for example, about 178,000 Canadians visited the US each day for vacation or work. Conversely, there were 20,213,500 trips by Americans to Canada in 2010. Some sources suggest there are almost 1 million Canadians living in the US but, for the most part, they are culturally invisible from Americans. On average 24,200 Canadians immigrate to the US per year and about 11,000 Americans headed north in 2006, a 30-year high. Anecdotal evidence suggests that post-9/11 policies in the US as well as Canada's generous healthcare system and tolerance for gay marriage may have motivated the moves.



When the new Canadian flag was raised in inauguration on February 15, 1965—on Parliament Hill in Ottawa—the Speaker of the Senate pronounced: “The flag is the symbol of the nation’s unity, for it, beyond any doubt, represents all the citizens

of Canada without distinction of race, language, belief or opinion.” Learn more about the flag and other Canadian symbols at <http://www.pch.gc.ca/eng/1363356053583/1363342021822>.

DID YOU KNOW?

- About 75% of Canada's population lives within 100 miles of the US border.
- “The real McCoy” was born in Ontario, the son of former slaves, whose inventions included the ironing board and lawn sprinkler.
- The magnetic North Pole is within Nunavut, Canada's newest territory (est. 1999).
- Nova Scotia's Bluenose was the fastest schooner ever built and is honored on the back of the Canadian dime.
- Canada's national sport is lacrosse. Hockey and basketball are two other sports invented by Canadians.
- Canada's territories make up 40% of its land area but have less than 1% of its people.
- Canada is the leading foreign source of all types of energy to the US, including oil.
- A few Canadian inventions include AM radio, insulin, the Ski-Doo, IMAX film technology, and the zipper.
- Toronto, considered the world's most ethnically diverse city, is Canada's largest, followed by Montreal and Vancouver.
- Canadian pharmacist John J. McLaughlin invented non-alcoholic ginger beer in 1917 and Canada Dry Ginger Ale is now popular worldwide.
- Canada has about two million lakes and holds almost 1/5 of the world's fresh water supply.
- The first “blue box” curbside recycling program began in Ontario during the early 1970s and was honored with a United Nations award in 1989.
- Cirque de Soleil, Celine Dion, Leonard Cohen, Mordecai Richler and William Shatner are just a few renowned cultural icons exported from Québec.

CONTEMPORARY CANADA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE U.S.

Relations between Canada and the United States are vitally important since they share the world's longest (largely undefended) border. Their history has spanned more than two centuries and includes a shared British cultural heritage, warfare during the 1770s and 1812, and eventual development of one of the most mutually-beneficial international relationships in the modern world. Each is the other's chief economic partner and share a responsibility for environmental stewardship and defense of the continent. Military collaboration began during World War II and continued throughout the Cold War on both a bilateral basis through NORAD and through multilateral participation in NATO. A high volume of trade and migration between the United States and Canada has generated closer ties, especially after the signing of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement in 1988. Few Americans recognize the importance of the Canada-US trade relationship—with overall trade flows adding up to more than \$1.2 billion *per day*. Many, in fact, view Canada as a “51st state”. An American president once said, “Canada is such a close neighbor...our problems are kind of like problems in a home town.” In turn, a Canadian prime minister once likened living next to the U.S to sleeping in bed with an elephant...impossible to ignore. Retaining a distinct cultural identity next to such a powerhouse remains an area of concern for many Canadians. Some still oppose free trade and prefer tariff limits particularly against US-produced TV programs, sale of American books and US financial investment. Learn more at <http://canada.usembassy.gov/canada-us-relations/canada-united-states-relations-overview.html>.

USEFUL LINKS

- K-12 STUDY CANADA / Pacific Northwest NRC on Canada in the US
- About Canada (Government of Canada)
- 2013 Canada-at-a-Glance (Booklet by Statistics Canada)
- Canada Fact Sheet (US Department of State)
- Canada Page (CIA World Factbook)