



▶ NORTH AMERICA

Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Canada is the second largest country in the world, after Russia. Due to its vast area of 3,851,788 square miles (9,976,085 square kilometers), Canada features a variety of climates and terrains. British Columbia has a wet climate on its Pacific coastline, near-desert conditions in the interior, and cooler temperatures in the high elevations of the Rocky Mountains and related ranges. Further inland, the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba are dominated by southern prairies and northern forests and tundra.

Much of northern Canada—including parts of the Yukon, Nunavut (a new territory created in 1999), and Northwest Territories—is uninhabited because of the arctic climate and permanently frozen ground. The Great Lakes moderate the climate of southern Ontario, where summers are hot and humid but winters bring snow and freezing temperatures.

East of Ontario is Québec, Canada's largest province. It is more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) east to west and north to south. The Canadian Shield—a huge, U-shaped, rocky expanse surrounding the Hudson Bay—covers most of Québec and includes thousands of miles of coniferous forest. Much of the province's timber, mining, and hydroelectric wealth is found there. Although the Appalachian Mountains extend into northern New Brunswick, most of the Atlantic provinces' interior terrain is fairly low and flat. This landscape gives way to plateaus, valleys, and rocky terrain along the coast.

History. Early native peoples included the Inuit, Inn, Beothuk, Micmac, and Malecite groups. The first Europeans were likely Vikings from Greenland who settled briefly in Newfoundland around AD 1000. English, French, and Basque fishermen came to Canada's Atlantic coast in the 1500s.

French colonists arrived in the 1600s, settling along the Saint Lawrence River in the territory they called New France. Throughout the 1600s, Britain fought with France for the territory. In 1763, the Treaty of Paris gave Britain control over New France, which was renamed Québec. At about the same time, British Loyalists who had left the 13 colonies after the American Revolution also began settling in the area.

In 1791, Québec was divided into Upper and Lower Canada. The two areas became the provinces of Québec and Ontario in 1867. That same year, Québec and Ontario joined with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to establish a confederation called the Dominion of Canada. In the 1870s, Canada purchased the vast northwestern area called Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company (a British trading company). This land became part of Canada and was divided into the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the northern territories (now known as the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut). Prince Edward Island joined the nation in 1873, but Newfoundland remained a separate colony until 1949.

Canada has retained both formal and informal ties with Britain since becoming a confederation. Although Queen Elizabeth II is the official head of state, Britain has had no control over Canada since constitutional changes made in 1982. A Charter of Rights and Freedoms was also established in 1982, guaranteeing fundamental human rights to all Canadians.

Each region in Canada has a unique history and each has faced its own challenges in recent years. Along the Atlantic coast, fishing resources are dwindling and unemployment is high. Some people from that area feel the federal government should do more to stimulate their economy. In the west, self-government for the many indigenous peoples in the region has

Canada

been an important political topic. Some western provinces also have traditionally been at odds with the more liberal political establishment centered in Ontario and Québec. Meanwhile, Québec has dealt with a movement toward secession or receiving special status among provinces. The most recent attempt at independence came in 1995 but was rejected by a slim margin of voters. Since 2006, Québec has been considered a “nation” within Canada by the Canadian government, though such status means little practically. In 2006, the Conservative Party came to power after 12 years of Liberal rule.

THE PEOPLE

Population. About 33.4 million people live in Canada, and the population is growing by 0.9 percent annually. Roughly 38 percent of all Canadians reside in Ontario, 25 percent in Québec, 30 percent in the Western Provinces, and 8 percent in the Atlantic region. Most of the population lives within 100 miles (161 kilometers) of the U.S. border.

Canada has traditionally had a high immigration rate, which has helped it become culturally diverse. The nation is populated not only by those of British, French, and indigenous descent, but also by sizable Chinese, Italian, German, Portuguese, and Polish communities. Roughly 2 percent of the population is composed of indigenous people, including Métis, Inuit, and many other groups. The largest cities are Toronto, with 4.7 million people; Montreal, with 3.4 million; Vancouver, with 2 million; and Ottawa, with 1 million.

Language. English and French are official languages in Canada. English dominates in most of the Atlantic region and in the Western Provinces. However, French is the first language of nearly 80 percent of residents of Québec and is used almost exclusively in some areas. It is also spoken by about a third of the population of New Brunswick. The nationwide demand for people who speak both official languages has prompted many school districts to offer French-immersion programs for English-speaking students.

Nearly one in five Canadians speaks a language other than English or French as their native tongue. In the 1990s, Chinese surpassed Italian as the third most common language in the country. Among indigenous groups, more than 50 languages are spoken.

Canadian spelling of English words follows U.S. standards in some cases (e.g., *organize* rather than *organise*) but British standards in others (*centre*, not *center*), and Canadians call the last letter of the alphabet *zed*, not *zee*. Some Canadians (especially in rural areas) use the word *eh* (pronounced “ay”), which roughly means “Ya know?” or “Isn’t it?”

Religion. About 77 percent of Canadians are Christians, but the beliefs of the different denominations are diverse, and society is highly secularized. The majority of the people are either Catholic (43.6 percent) or Protestant (29.2 percent). In urban centers, Islam (1.9 percent), Judaism (1.1 percent), Buddhism (1 percent), Hinduism (1 percent), and Sikhism (1 percent) are growing because of immigrant populations. Vancouver has the largest Sikh community outside of the Punjab province of India. A growing portion of the population (16.5 percent) claims no religion.

General Attitudes. Most Canadians are proud of their shared cultural heritage, which includes French, British, and other European influences. They are also proud of their multiculturalism; ethnic groups and immigrants are encouraged to maintain their distinct cultures. Atlantic Canadians are considered conservative and traditional. Regional and provincial alle-

giances are strong among Atlantic Canadians and are often placed before national allegiance. To the west, the people of Ontario are considered fairly reserved and formal, while those in the Western Provinces are thought of as more open and friendly. Life in large urban areas is fast-paced, whereas the pace of life in the rest of Canada is more relaxed. The French people of Québec—who are known as *Québécois* or *Québeckers*—are particularly proud of their language and French heritage. They insist that they are different from the rest of Canada and that they should protect their unique cultural institutions.

Canadians take great pride in their nationality. Despite close ties and many similarities between their nation and the United States, Canadians emphasize that they are not just U.S.-type people living in Canada. Indeed, Canadians often dislike U.S. foreign policy and the prevalence of U.S. culture. Despite a close relationship with the United States, Canadians often see people from the United States as more aggressive and materialistic than themselves. Canadians also feel they are more tolerant, community-oriented, and polite. In general, Canadians admire people who are educated, skilled, modest, and polite. In relation to the rest of the world, Canadians see themselves as associated with humanitarianism and fairness.

Personal Appearance. Canadians are generally conservative and somewhat formal in their dress, especially in the workplace. This style of dressing is particularly true in Ontario and Québec. When not at work, people often dress casually in jeans and a comfortable shirt. It is polite to remove sunglasses when speaking to someone and to remove hats in buildings.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. A firm handshake and *Hello, how are you?* are the most common greetings when one meets new people. Otherwise, a wave of the hand or nod of the head is an acceptable gesture when saying *Hello*. French-speaking people might greet friends and relatives with a light kiss on the cheek. Common French greetings include *Bonjour* (Good day) and *Ça va?* (How’s it going?). Friends and young people often prefer to say *Salut* (Hi). When one passes a stranger on the street, a smile and a nod are appropriate. People use first names when addressing others in informal situations or when the more senior person requests it. Titles are used with new acquaintances and on formal occasions. The French term for “Good-bye” is *Au revoir*.

Gestures. Eye contact is important during conversation, and smiles are always welcome. However, Canadian reserve dictates that a generous amount of personal space be allowed when conversing with others. French speakers tend to use hand gestures while talking somewhat more often than do English speakers.

Most gestures, positive and negative, are the same in Canada as in the United States. However, some gestures common in the United States might be offensive to a specific cultural group or in a particular area. Pointing at someone with the index finger is rude; using the entire hand to motion to someone is more polite. The “thumbs down” gesture used in the United States to mean “no” is offensive in Québec.

Visiting. Although Canadians get together often, unannounced visits are not common. Dropping by during regular mealtimes is impolite. During wintertime, visitors nearly always remove their shoes, hats, and coats at the door. Hosts generally offer guests refreshments, including at least a drink and often a small snack. It is appropriate for guests to bring a gift, such as wine, chocolate, or flowers, to the hosts. House parties with

alcoholic drinks and impromptu music are popular in both rural and urban areas. Houseguests staying for longer than a day usually write a thank-you note and give a thank-you gift. Promptness in showing gratitude is important.

Eating. The standard three meals per day are often complemented by afternoon tea and coffee breaks or snacks at work. Tea is popular among those of English heritage. Many people eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. Utensils are placed together on the plate after finishing a meal. One keeps both hands above the table during a meal. Women rest their wrists on the table, men their forearms; elbows may be placed on the table after the meal is finished. However, these formal manners are practiced less often as casual dining becomes more common. Eating on the streets is improper unless one is sitting at an outdoor café or standing at a food stand. At restaurants, tipping about 15 percent is expected.

LIFESTYLE

Family. While the family unit is the center of society, both parents commonly work outside the home. Traditional norms are still valued, particularly in rural areas, but nontraditional households have increased considerably over the last 30 years. About one-third of marriages are expected to end in divorce. A high proportion of children are now born out of wedlock, and there are many single-parent families. The average family has one or two children. Children often live with their parents until they go to college, marry, or get a full-time job.

Housing. Many of Canada's older homes, including Tudor style houses and Victorian mansions, are found on the east coast. As cities get more and more crowded, large-scale housing developments are cropping up outside the major urban centers. For many young people, commutes—sometimes long ones—are becoming the rule rather than the exception.

Some aspects of Canadian housing are distinctive. In Québec, for example, apartments often have their own outside staircases and balconies. Neighborhoods with several of these apartment buildings are called *balconvilles* (balcony cities). In Vancouver, there is considerable architectural variety. Tudor, Victorian, Spanish, Italian, and contemporary homes coexist with the so-called “Vancouver Specials,” houses from the 1960s and 1970s that were all built to the same specifications and made from wood and white stucco.

Dating and Marriage. Dating usually begins between the ages of 13 and 16. Most young people enjoy dancing, going to movies, dining out, going to the beach, and attending sporting events such as hockey games. Casual sexual relationships are common. Fewer young people desire to marry, and if they do, they expect to marry at a later age (at 30 or so). Likewise, couples often wait longer to have children. Many people choose to live together before or instead of marrying. Weddings are usually celebrated with family and friends, but highly elaborate events are somewhat uncommon.

Life Cycle. Life among Canadians is not highly ritualized. Still, the usual milestones—birth, marriage, and death—are generally marked, as sometimes is educational progress. When they go to high school, they are regarded as young adults. On graduation, they are no longer considered children. They can now vote, serve in the army, and get married without their parents' permission.

Funeral rituals vary according to religion. In some religious cultures, there is an official mourning period, which lasts a week or sometimes a month. Among secular Canadians, the

death of a family member is commemorated during an afternoon and evening. Friends and relatives come to the family home, where the deceased lies in a coffin, and pay their respects. Burial usually takes place the next day. Subsequent visits to the grave site may take place on significant dates such as the deceased's birthday, Christmas, and Mother's or Father's Day.

Diet. In the Atlantic area, where fishing is common, seafood is a dietary staple. Dairy products also are consumed in fairly large quantities. A popular Atlantic region dish is *rappée* pie (made with grated potato and ground meat).

Québec regional cuisine displays a definite French influence and includes such foods as pea soup, French pastries, breads, crêpes, special cheeses, lamb, and veal. Potatoes and red meats are common with evening suppers. A favorite fast food is *poutine*, which consists of french fries covered with spicy gravy and cheese curds. Maple syrup is produced in Québec and is a favorite in desserts.

In western cities, hundreds of immigrant communities have made the urban Canadian palate increasingly diverse. Throughout the prairies, one can find wild rice, smoked fish, beef, ethnic (especially Asian) dishes, and a variety of other foods.

People from indigenous tribes eat common North American foods like hamburgers as well as traditional items like *muktaaq* (whale skin), salmon, caribou, berries, and roots.

Recreation. Canada has two national sports: ice hockey during the winter and lacrosse during the summer. Canadians also enjoy fishing, hunting, golf, soccer, cycling, baseball, and bowling. Popular spectator sports include college football, basketball, and curling. Curling gets more international attention during the Olympics. It involves two four-person teams sliding a large stone with a gooseneck handle over ice toward a target.

Other favorite activities include cookouts and beach parties, gardening, hiking, and spending weekends at summer cottages. People also like to visit with friends, shop, watch television, and read. Local festivals and fairs, parks, and museums also offer recreational opportunities.

The Arts. Art galleries and museums are numerous, as are local art groups. After World War I, artists began to develop uniquely Canadian art by focusing on the nation's landscape. Immigrants who have moved to big cities have diversified the arts. Popular crafts include pottery and quilting.

The ocean greatly influences Atlantic Canadian songs, art, poetry, and prose as well as folk festivals and other community events. Prince Edward Island is the birthplace of Lucy Maud Montgomery (author of *Anne of Green Gables*) and a popular destination for those interested in seeing sites associated with her books.

Montréal's annual jazz, comedy, and film festivals are popular attractions. The Canadian filmmaking industry is known for its innovation. Contemporary dance and traditional ballet companies enjoy wide audiences and critical acclaim.

Native American tribes are reviving traditional arts, many of which began before European settlers arrived. These include clothing decorated with paint, beads, and porcupine quills; jewelry; leatherwork; woodwork; and featherwork.

Holidays. Official Canadian holidays include New Year's Day, Easter, Victoria Day (which celebrates the birthday of British Queen Victoria on the third Monday in May), Canada Day (1 July), Labour Day (first Monday in September), Thanksgiving Day (second Monday in October), Remembrance Day (11

Canada

Nov.), Christmas, and Boxing Day (26 Dec.). Boxing Day comes from the old British tradition of presenting small, boxed gifts to servants. It is now a day to visit friends and relatives or to go shopping. In addition to public holidays, annual local festivals throughout the nation commemorate everything from military battles to cultural heritage. Most cities and towns also have a civic holiday, usually in August.

Holidays unique to Québec include the *Carnaval de Québec*, a two-week period in February filled with activities (although normal working hours prevail), and Québec's national holiday, which is distinct from Canada Day, called St. Jean-Baptiste Day (24 June). Also, French-speakers spend Victoria Day celebrating *Dollard Des Ormeaux*, a provincial battle hero in Québec. During the autumn maple-syrup season, maple farms known as *cabanes à sucre* (sugar cabins) serve as party centers and restaurants, serving food along with the latest maple harvest.

SOCIETY

Government. Canada is a confederation with a parliamentary democracy; its government is patterned partly after the United Kingdom's but also has a federal system like the United States. The federal government is responsible for national defense, international relations, the banking system, the criminal code, and the indigenous populations. The provinces are responsible for education, health care, and welfare. The greater resources of the federal government have led to its involvement in matters originally provincial (e.g., employment, insurance, and medicare). Each province has a unicameral legislature.

Ceremonial duties of the head of state are performed by the governor-general (currently Michaëlle Jean), who represents Queen Elizabeth II. Canada's federal Parliament is made up of a Senate composed of as many as 105 senators appointed by the governor-general upon the prime minister's recommendation. The Senate rarely exercises its full powers, whereas the elected, 308-member House of Commons is the real legislative power. The prime minister (currently Stephen Harper) heads the government and is the *de facto* chief executive. The leader of the party that gains the most seats in the House of Commons becomes the prime minister. Parliamentary elections are held at least every five years. The voting age is 18.

Canada's major political parties include the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois, and the New Democratic Party.

Economy. Canada has one of the strongest economies in the world. It is a leader in the production of gold, silver, copper, uranium, oil, natural gas, agriculture, wood pulp, and timber-related products. In 1993, Canada signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and the United States. NAFTA provides for freer movement of capital and goods, more cross-national investment, and a large market for many goods from each NAFTA country. Canada's currency is the Canadian dollar (CAD). Canadians refer to the one-dollar coin as the *loonie*, after the image of the waterbird (the loon) minted on the coin. Likewise, the two-dollar coin is called the *toonie*.

Although most Canadians benefit from the country's general economic prosperity, more than 14 percent of the population lives in poverty. In addition, the Canadian dollar is usually somewhat weaker than the U.S. dollar, though recently that

POPULATION & AREA

Population	33,390,141 (rank=36)
Area, sq. mi.	3,851,788 (rank=2)
Area, sq. km.	9,976,085

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	4 of 177 countries
Adjusted for women	4 of 156 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$33,375
Adult literacy rate	99% (male); 99% (female)
Infant mortality rate	5 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	78 (male); 83 (female)

trend has changed. The Canadian dollar can be affected by variations in the U.S. dollar's value.

Transportation and Communications. In the Atlantic Provinces, ferries are a common way to travel between islands. In sparsely populated areas, private cars are important. In large cities like Montreal, public transportation is well developed and includes subways and buses. Domestic flights and trains are common in all parts of the country.

Communications systems are highly developed. The vast majority of Canadians have telephones and televisions. Numerous cable-television systems provide service to all segments of the population. Television is often dominated by U.S.-made programs, but the federal government actively supports the development of Canadian films and television shows. Major cities all have daily newspapers, and use of the internet is common.

Education. Each province is responsible for its educational system. In all provinces, education is compulsory and free for at least eight years, beginning at age six or seven. Each province also administers its own colleges and universities. While colleges are subsidized by the federal and provincial governments, students must pay tuition. Many students choose to complete a two-year technical training program and enter the workforce. About 40 percent of students seek some form of education beyond high school.

Until fairly recently, religious leaders had a role in directing schools' curricula. Now English or French school boards are in charge, but students in some areas may still choose to have Catholic, Protestant, or general moral education in addition to secular studies.

Health. Canadians generally enjoy good health. However, lung and heart disease from smoking and sedentary lifestyles affect many Canadians, and more than half are overweight. Hospitals and quality of care are excellent, although facilities and personnel are less available in rural and isolated regions. Canada has universal, compulsory national health insurance, which is funded by fairly high taxes. The insurance covers doctors' fees and most hospital costs. While patients must sometimes wait months for elective surgery and certain expensive procedures, all citizens have access to basic health care at public clinics.

AT A GLANCE

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