

# 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, 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.”

## 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  
Languages: English (56.9% mother tongue) and French (21.3% mother tongue). On a provincial level, only New Brunswick is bilingual and only Quebec is unilingual (French). Nunavut (two Inuit languages) and the NWT (11 First Nations languages) also recognize aboriginal languages.

## EDUCATION

Canada's education system is #3 in the world according to the OECD—behind Korea and Finland but ahead of the U.S. (#14). Canada ranks #1 in the proportion of adults with a college education (24%). Although education is provincially regulated, standards across the country are uniformly high. Kindergarten attendance is voluntary but all children begin Grade 1 at age 6 with a September - June school year. Secondary schools go up to Gr. 12 in most provinces (Gr. 11 in Québec). From there, students may attend university, college or CÉGEP studies (College of General and Vocational Education). The latter is a 2 or 3 year program between high school graduation 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. Religious pluralism is a valued part of Canada's culture.

## 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. The number of visible minorities in Canada is growing and one in five Canadians today is a new immigrant. Canada treats is currently ranked #3 globally in how well it provides newcomers 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% living in cities. Given the nation's diversity and size, it is not surprising that regional subcultures have grown reflect the dominant heritage of each community.

Québec's unique position between European and North American culture is a constant source of inspiration for its artists. The Cirque de Soleil, founded in Québec in 1984, is perhaps best known. The music scene, particularly jazz and pop, modern dance, literature, theater and cinema also have strong reputations. Canadians are proud of the cultural character and acclaim that Québec brings to the nation.

Canadians also appreciate the diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures. 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

Daily, over 300,000 people cross the 8,891 km-long Canada-US border at 119 crossings. In 2012, for example, about 178,000 Canadians visited the US each day for vacation or work. 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.



Toronto skyline.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- About 75% of Canadians live within 100 miles of the US border.
- “The real McCoy”, the son of former slaves, was born in Ontario and his inventions include the ironing board and lawn sprinkler.
- The magnetic North Pole is within Nunavut, Canada’s newest territory.
- The Bluenose, on Canada’s dime, was the fastest schooner ever built.
- Canada’s national sport is lacrosse though hockey is more popular.
- Canada’s territories have 1% of the population but 40% of its land.
- Canada is the #1 source of all energy imports to the US, including oil.
- Canadian inventions include insulin, the Ski-Doo, IMAX and the zipper.
- Toronto, the world’s most ethnically diverse city, is Canada’s largest.
- Canadian pharmacist John J. McLaughlin invented non-alcoholic ginger beer in 1917 and Canada Dry Ginger Ale is now popular worldwide.
- Canada has about 2 million lakes and 20% of the world’s fresh water.
- The first “blue box” curbside recycling program began in Ontario and was honored with a United Nations award in 1989.

Justin Beiber, Jim Carrey, Avril Lavigne and Seth Rogan are just a few renowned Canadian cultural icons.



- When Canada’s new flag was inaugurated on February 15, 1965—on Parliament Hill in Ottawa—it was said: “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 at <http://www.pch.gc.ca/eng/1363356053583/1363342021822>.



Peace Arch border crossing between Blaine, WA and Surrey, B.C.

## CONTEMPORARY CANADA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE U.S.

Relations between Canada and the U.S. are vitally important since they share the world’s longest (largely undefended) border. Their history 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. They share the world’s largest trade relationship and few Americans realize that overall trade flows add up to more than \$1.2 billion *per day*. The two also share responsibility for environmental stewardship and defense of North America.

The countries are so close that 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. Indeed, retaining a distinct cultural identity next to such a powerhouse remains an area of concern for many Canadians.

### USEFUL LINKS

- **K-12 STUDY CANADA** · [www.k12studycanada.org](http://www.k12studycanada.org)
- **Government of Canada - About Canada**  
[www.gc.ca/aboutcanada-menu-eng.html](http://www.gc.ca/aboutcanada-menu-eng.html)
- **2013 Canada-at-a-Glance**  
[www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-581-x/12-581-x2013000-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-581-x/12-581-x2013000-eng.htm)
- **US Department of State - Canada Fact Sheet**  
[www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2089.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2089.htm)
- **CIA World Factbook (select “Canada”)**  
[www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook)