



BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Canada is the second largest country in the world, after Russia, and is slightly larger than the United States. Due to its vast area, 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 the 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 Peoples and Colonization

Early native peoples included the Inuit, Innu, 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.

The Dominion of Canada

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 area around the Hudson Bay (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.

Regional Issues

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 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.

Aboriginal Peoples

Canada has had a troubled history with its aboriginal peoples. In recent years, steps have been taken to improve the relationship between the Canadian government and the country's native population, which has been characterized by conflict over land, natural resources, and economic integration. In 2008, Prime Minister Steven Harper formally apologized for Canada's 20th-century program of forced placement of native children in residential schools, a policy which has since been described as “cultural genocide” in an official report. In May 2016, Canada officially adopted the United Nations declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. An indigenous movement called Idle No More continues to fight for aboriginal rights.

Modern Canada

In addition to regional and aboriginal issues, Canada's national identity has also been shaped by an influx of immigrants. Since assuming office in November 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has continued Canada's strong tradition of multiculturalism by accelerating the acceptance of refugees. Immigrants now account for more than one in five Canadians, a number that is projected to rise in the coming years. Canada's current political challenges include improving public services, making the economy more competitive globally, handling legal and illegal immigration, and dealing with an unpredictable political climate in the United States.

Recent Events and Trends

- **Asylum seekers:** In 2017, Canada recorded its highest number of asylum seekers, many entering the country illegally from the United States, since at least 1989. Canada has been struggling to handle this recent influx of immigrants, spurred in part by anti-immigration sentiment and immigration policy changes in the United States. Although Canadians generally support legal immigration, many oppose illegal immigration.
- **Marijuana legalization:** In June 2018, Canada's Senate voted to legalize the production, sale, and consumption of

recreational marijuana, making Canada the second country in the world, after Uruguay, to legalize the drug nationwide. The legalization of recreational marijuana was a major victory for Trudeau, who pledged to decriminalize the drug during his 2015 campaign.

- **Free-trade agreement:** In September 2018, the leaders of the United States, Canada, and Mexico agreed to a free-trade deal to revise the 24-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Dubbed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the revamped pact includes key changes to rules governing areas such as agriculture, auto manufacturing, intellectual property, and labor rights. The USMCA, which must be approved by the legislatures of all three nations before taking effect, came after months of bitter negotiations that strained relations between the United States and Canada. Trade is vital to Canada's economy, with the United States consuming roughly three-fourths of all Canadian exports.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Roughly 39 percent of all Canadians reside in Ontario, 23 percent in Québec, 32 percent in the western provinces, and almost 7 percent in the Atlantic region. The sparsely populated northern territories account for a very small portion of the population. 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 English, French, and indigenous descent, but also by sizable Scottish, Irish, German, Italian, and Chinese communities. Roughly 4 percent of the population is composed of indigenous people, including Métis, Inuit, and many other groups. The largest urban areas are Toronto, with 6 million people; Montréal, with 4 million; Vancouver, with 2.5 million; Calgary, with 1.3 million; and Ottawa, with 1.3 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 exclusive official language of Québec and the first language of most residents of that province; it is used almost exclusively in some areas. This type of French is spoken with a unique accent known as *Québécois*. French 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, and many younger people are bilingual.

One in five Canadians speaks a language other than English or French as their native tongue. These languages range from Chinese to Tagalog to Italian. Among indigenous groups, more than 60 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?” The term “Canadian raising” refers to a linguistic phenomenon common to western, central, and Atlantic Canada that affects the pronunciation of some diphthongs (adjacent vowels within a word). Among Canadians who speak in this way, the word “out,” for example, may sound like “oat.”

Religion

About 67 percent of Canadians are Christians, but the beliefs of the different denominations are diverse, and society is highly secularized. Even so, religion may play a role in shaping people's social identities and in marking lifecycle milestones. The majority of the people are either Catholic (39 percent) or Protestant (20 percent). In urban centers, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Judaism are growing because of immigrant populations. Canada has the largest Sikh population outside of India. A growing portion of the population (24 percent) claims no religion.

General Attitudes

Most Canadians are proud of their shared cultural heritage, which includes French, British, and other European influences. They also tend to be proud of their multiculturalism; ethnic groups and immigrants are generally encouraged to maintain their distinct cultures. Atlantic Canadians are often considered conservative and traditional. Regional and provincial allegiances tend to be strong among Atlantic Canadians and are often placed before national allegiance. The people of southern Ontario are generally considered to be fairly reserved and formal, while those in the western provinces and the Atlantic coast are often thought of as more open and friendly.

Life in large urban areas is usually fast-paced, whereas the pace of life in the rest of Canada tends to be more relaxed. The French people of Québec—who are known as *Québécois*, or *Québeckers*—tend to be particularly proud of their language and French heritage. Many feel that they are different from the rest of Canada and that their unique cultural institutions need to be protected.

Canadians tend to take great pride in their nationality. Despite close ties and many similarities between their nation and the United States, many Canadians emphasize that they are different from U.S. Americans in many ways. Indeed, Canadians often dislike U.S. foreign policy and the prevalence of U.S. culture throughout the world. Despite a close relationship with the United States, Canadians often see people from the United States as more aggressive and materialistic. Canadians also often feel that, in relation to U.S. Americans, they are more tolerant, community-oriented, and polite. In relation to the rest of the world, Canadians tend to see themselves as associated with humanitarianism and fairness. In general, Canadians admire people who are educated, skilled, modest, and polite.

Personal Appearance

In the business hubs of Ontario and Québec, Canadians are

generally conservative and somewhat formal in their dress, especially in the workplace. When not at work, people often dress casually in jeans and a comfortable shirt. Elsewhere in Canada, dress tends to be more casual. Women don't usually wear much jewelry or makeup, except for on special occasions. It is considered polite to remove sunglasses when speaking to someone and to remove hats in buildings.

Temperature also influences the way Canadians dress. Indigenous peoples who live farther north often require durable outerwear made of heavy hides and thick layers of down to protect them from the cold. However, urban Canadians—especially younger ones—often give more weight to fashion considerations than warmth when choosing winter clothing.

Urban clothing styles tend to mirror those of the United States and the United Kingdom and are influenced by the internet and media, though many Canadians strive to express their individuality through fashion as well. Tattoos, piercings, and colored hair are common. In large cities, brand-name apparel may be closely linked with social status. In rural areas, clothing options tend to be more limited, and comfort is usually a higher priority. A neat appearance is important to most Canadians, wherever they live.

Ethnic and religious clothing such as the Muslim *hijab* (a headscarf for women) or Jewish *kippah* (an embroidered cap for men) may be worn by some Canadians on a daily basis or reserved for significant occasions, such as weddings, funerals, or holidays. Traditional clothing for indigenous peoples includes beaded and embroidered leather clothing of many styles. Vests, boots, jackets, and T-shirts bearing indigenous designs are also popular among these groups.

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*. Women may exchange hugs with each other or with male friends, while men may pat each other on the back. 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 considered important during conversation, and smiles are welcome. Canadians allow a generous amount of personal space 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 considered rude; using the entire hand to motion to someone is considered 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 uncommon, except among the youth. Dropping by during regular mealtimes is considered 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 music are popular among youth in both rural and urban areas. Houseguests staying for longer than a day usually write a note and give a gift to thank the hosts. Promptness in showing gratitude is considered important.

Eating

Canadians typically eat breakfast around 8 a.m., lunch around noon, and dinner around 6 p.m. These standard meals are often complemented by tea, coffee, 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. 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. During the summer months, it is common for people to eat lunch and dinner (especially at restaurants) outside. At restaurants, tipping a minimum of 15 percent is expected. Nuclear families typically eat dinner together, and some extended families still gather on Sunday evening for a formal meal.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

The family is an important part of Canadian society. The average urban family has one or two children. Rural families tend to be larger. However, family makeup is diverse, with the number of nontraditional households having increased considerably in recent decades. Such families include those with single parents, stay-at-home fathers, and same-sex parents. A high proportion of children are now born out of wedlock.

Parents and Children

Children often live with their parents until they go to university, marry, or get a full-time job. However, Canada's fluctuating economy has made it harder for some university graduates to find jobs, and a high number of young adults end

up moving back home after finishing their educations. Even those who do find employment may choose to live with their parents in an effort to save up enough money to afford the high cost of living on their own. It is becoming common for these adult children to pay their parents rent or contribute to monthly expenses such as groceries.

Senior citizens tend to be active and live independently well into their 70s and 80s. Because the Canadian government has repealed the mandatory age of retirement (65), many continue to work into their later years. Those who need additional care typically move into a retirement community rather than staying with an adult child.

Gender Roles

When it comes to gender roles, traditional norms are still generally valued, particularly in rural areas. Throughout the country, women and men are seen as equals but generally occupy distinct roles. Though in urban areas both parents commonly work outside the home, men tend to be considered the primary breadwinners, while women tend to be primarily responsible for cooking, maintaining the house, and childcare. During working hours, children often attend daycare rather than being cared for by a grandparent or other relative.

Gender roles are, however, flexible. Many men are active members of the family, and women do fill leadership roles in the workplace and society. For example, in 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed an equal number of men and women to serve on his cabinet.

Though rates of domestic abuse are declining in the general Canadian population, Aboriginal women are more likely to be subject to domestic violence than are the rest of Canadian women.

Housing

Urban

City living is popular among single young professionals, who often rent small apartments. However, 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. Older city dwellers and those with families may own condominiums or townhouses with two to three bedrooms, one to two bathrooms, and underground parking or a garage.

Couples and larger families typically prefer to live outside of downtown areas, where they can afford bigger homes for a comparable price. Many middle-class Canadians own their homes and may buy and sell several houses over the course of a lifetime. A starter home usually has three bedrooms and one-and-a-half bathrooms. Families with older children often live in a two-storey home with four or more bedrooms, a finished basement, a study, and other specialized rooms. Decorating styles vary considerably, but wood floors and wooden furniture are generally popular. House exteriors consist of siding, stucco, or brick, and lots are usually big enough for flower and vegetable gardens in addition to a lawn. The number of energy efficient homes across Canada is rising as environmental considerations grow.

Rural

Rural homes tend to be larger, are situated on more land, and

are often heated at least partially by wood stoves. The kitchen—traditionally the warmest room in the house—is usually the social center of these homes. Plumbing systems are often based on wells and septic tanks.

Regional Variation

Many of Canada's older homes, including Tudor-style houses and Victorian mansions, are found on the east coast. 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.

Vacation Homes

Owning a summer cottage near the water in the countryside is a Canadian tradition, though not one that all middle-class families can afford. These wooden cottages are usually small and rustic, with outdoor plumbing, though in recent years many of them have been expanded and renovated.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Dating usually begins between the ages of 13 and 16, but one-on-one dating has become less common among teens. Instead, boys and girls tend to socialize with multiple couples or in a group of friends, reflecting the casual outlook urban Canadians have toward romantic relationships. 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.

Marriage in Society

Fewer urban young people desire to marry, and if they do, they expect to marry at a later age (around age 30). Likewise, couples often wait longer to have children. Canadian law allows for same-sex couples to wed, and public schools may promote acceptance of such couples. Many people choose to live together before or instead of marrying. Common-law and civil marriage are common. In Québec, women legally keep their maiden names after marriage, though many use their husband's last name socially.

In rural communities and in suburban areas home to high immigrant populations, religion and tradition encourage marriage (often to a spouse of similar cultural and religious background) and parenthood. However, as members from immigrant communities move to major urban centers, expectations surrounding marriage become more flexible.

Weddings

In more traditional weddings, the festive aspects tend to be emphasized over the ceremonial ones. Family and friends are invited to celebrate with the couple, but highly elaborate weddings (especially among younger generations) are somewhat uncommon. The marriage is usually followed by a reception dinner, speeches, cake cutting, and dancing to music provided by a small band or disc jockey. Guests bring the couple presents, often purchased from a registry at a department or home-decor store, and take home a small gift,

such as chocolates, a picture frame, or other keepsake. Though the ambiance is often casual, the event—including catering and venue rental fees—may cost a lot of money. Expenses are traditionally divided among the parents of the bride and groom, though older couples may foot most or all of the bill.

Some couples save money by opting for a backyard wedding in which they provide the food, drinks, and decorations themselves. Others have destination weddings in places like Mexico, Cuba, or elsewhere in the Caribbean. At these weddings, family members and close friends pay for their own week-long stays at a resort of the couple's choosing.

Life Cycle

Birth

Pregnant women are expected to be treated with respect and given priority seating and parking. As the birth of a child grows close, the expectant mother's female relatives and friends typically throw her an afternoon baby shower, to which guests bring presents for the baby. Among Chinese Canadians, this shower may be held a month after the baby is born. Some parents choose to not find out their baby's sex until birth, selecting both a boy's and a girl's name beforehand. Children are often given a unique first name and a middle name that honors a relative or a couple's cultural heritage. Family members visit the hospital soon after the birth of a baby, bringing gifts and cameras to photograph the new arrival.

Milestones

Among observant Catholic families, rites such as baptism and First Communion are important milestones in a child's life, while Jewish girls may celebrate their *Bat Mitzvah* at age 12 and boys their *Bar Mitzvah* at age 13. Most Canadians consider the 16th birthday (the “sweet 16”) to be special. Its rough equivalent among Hispanics is a girl's 15th birthday, or *fiesta de quince*, also known as a *quinceañera*.

Educational progress may also be cause for celebration. When students enter high school, they are regarded as young adults. At age 18, young people are legally considered adults and can vote, serve in the army, and get married without their parents' permission. However, the 19th birthday tends to be a more significant milestone for youth in most provinces, as it is the legal gambling and drinking age. Even for those who choose not to engage in these activities, the birthday marks the social transition into adulthood. Other important birthdays include those that begin a new decade of life, such as the 30th and 50th. Retirement, usually around age 62, is also a significant event, celebrated by one party at work and one with family.

Death

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, friends and relatives gather at a church or funeral home, where the deceased lies in a coffin, and pay their respects. Donations may be made to the deceased's family. 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.

Canadian cemeteries are open to all, but the graves of various ethnic and religious communities may be informally grouped together. Cremation is a common alternative to burial.

Diet

In the Atlantic area, where fishing is common, seafood is a dietary staple. Dairy products also are consumed in fairly large quantities. 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 for evening meals. A favorite fast food is *poutine*, which consists of french fries covered with gravy and cheese curds. Maple syrup is produced in many parts of the country, including Québec and Ontario, and is a favorite in desserts and breakfast dishes like pancakes, waffles, and crêpes.

In western cities, hundreds of immigrant communities have made the urban Canadian palate increasingly diverse; one can find wild rice, smoked fish, beef, ethnic (especially Asian) dishes, and a variety of other foods. Cuisines from Asia and the Middle East are commonly found in Ontario.

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

Recreation

Sports

Canada has two national sports: lacrosse in the summer and ice hockey in the winter. Devotion to hockey usually starts at a young age, with children supporting their local team or their parents' favorite. Team loyalty typically lasts a lifetime. Free and subsidized hockey camps sponsored by provincial governments and local businesses attract urban and rural girls and boys of all ages and cultures. Many dream of becoming professional players, and most continue playing socially into adulthood.

Children also attend other recreational camps—both day and overnight varieties—that allow them to experience the natural wonders of the Canadian outdoors. Though camps that feature skiing, lacrosse, and horseback riding tend to be costly, ample government funding ensures that such activities are not limited to the wealthy. Free recreation centers are also abundant, and public schools offer opportunities to play on competitive or intramural sports teams.

In their spare time, many Canadians also enjoy fishing, camping, canoeing, hunting, golf, soccer, cycling, baseball, and bowling. Popular spectator sports include college football and basketball. Curling is popular among the older generation. It involves two four-person teams sliding a large stone with a gooseneck handle over ice toward a target.

Leisure

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

Vacation

The average full-time Canadian employee enjoys a minimum of two weeks of vacation time annually. Many opt to spend

that time traveling to a warmer climate during the winter. Popular vacations include cruises and stays on the beaches of Florida, Mexico, Cuba, and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Many Canadian retirees migrate to warmer places like Florida each winter to escape the cold and snowy weather. Others vacation closer to home, perhaps renting cottages or camping. Driving to major U.S. cities such as Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles is another popular choice. Whether traveling abroad, fishing in Nova Scotia, or shopping in downtown Toronto, spending time with family while vacationing is important to nearly all Canadians.

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 (1 January), 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 (which commemorates fallen Canadian soldiers on 11 November), Christmas (25 December), and Boxing Day (26 December).

Easter

Some Christian Canadians attend church on Easter and observe Lent by giving up a food or activity of importance to them for forty days. However, secular traditions—centered on the Easter Bunny—are more common. Boiled eggs are dyed in pastel colors, and chocolates shaped as bunnies or eggs are exchanged among family and friends. Children may hunt for hidden chocolate eggs around their houses or backyards.

Canada Day

Canada Day (1 July) is the country's national holiday and commemorates the day in 1867 when two British colonies (Nova Scotia and New Brunswick) and one British province (the Province of Canada) were united. People spend the day barbecuing, attending free outdoor concerts, and gathering in public squares and parks. Some celebrate with friends in pubs. As night falls, Canadians enjoy large firework displays funded by the provincial governments. It is customary to wear

red and white or apparel decorated with the Canadian flag.

Christmas

The Christmas season is family oriented. The weeks before Christmas are spent shopping for gifts and decorating the house. Some families decorate fake trees, while others buy a live one or make a trip to a tree farm to cut down their own. When their houses are ready for the holiday, friends and family start visiting each other, bringing with them gifts and baked goods. Christmas Day is usually spent with the immediate family, who exchange gifts and generally share a dinner of turkey and ham. The following day, 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. Jewish and Muslim Canadians and those of other religions do not celebrate Christmas but enjoy the time off from work and school.

Other Holidays

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. Canadian Jews may celebrate *Yom Kippur*, a day of fasting and prayer, and Chinese communities hold festivals to mark the Lunar New Year. When the majority of students in an area share a common religion, the public school they attend may recognize some of their religious holidays.

Holidays in Québec

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 Saint-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

Structure

Canada is a confederation with a parliamentary democracy; its government is patterned partly after the United Kingdom's but is also a federal system like the United States. The federal government is responsible for national defense, international relations, the banking system, the criminal code, and policies regarding the indigenous populations. The provincial governments 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, who represents the United Kingdom's Queen Elizabeth II. Canada's federal parliament is made up of a Senate composed of 105 senators appointed by the governor-general upon the prime minister's recommendation

to serve until age 75. The Senate rarely exercises its full powers, whereas the 338-member House of Commons, elected by the Canadian people, is the real legislative power. The prime minister is the head of government. The leader of the party that gains the most seats in the House of Commons becomes the prime minister, though she or he is officially designated by the governor-general. Parliamentary elections are held at least every four years.

Political Landscape

The provinces generally seek to maintain as much autonomy as possible from the federal government, and this dynamic has long been the major issue of Canadian politics, as have relationships between the provinces (especially the wealthier western and the less-wealthy eastern ones). The relationship between the government and the country's indigenous peoples has also been a long-standing political issue. The development of more oil pipelines and other environment-related issues, in addition to issues regarding immigration policy, have become significant in recent years as well.

Canada's major political parties include the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), and the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP). The Bloc Québécois, which largely focuses on independence for Québec, has been a major party in previous years but has declined as support for an independent Québec has declined as well. Several other political parties are dominant on provincial levels, as there is generally a weak connection between parties on a national and provincial level. The LPC and the NDP have long-held requirements to field certain numbers of female candidates in elections.

Government and the People

Canada is widely considered a model of low corruption and transparency in government. The government also has a high level of respect for civil liberties, including freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and religion. In recent elections, voter turnout has been around two-thirds of registered voters. The voting age is 18.

Economy

Canada has one of the strongest economies in the world and provides a high standard of living for most of its residents. Canada's service sector provides most of the country's income, but manufacturing and mining are also important. The country exports motor vehicles and parts, machinery, aircraft, telecommunications equipment, chemicals, plastics, fertilizers, and wood products. Canada has the world's third-largest reserves of petroleum, and its energy sector is an important part of the economy.

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. In 2018, the leaders of Canada, Mexico, and the United States agreed to a deal that would revise NAFTA. The United States consumes roughly three-fourths of all Canadian exports, and the European Union (EU) is Canada's second-largest trading partner.

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*.

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 most large cities, public transportation is well developed and includes subways and buses. Three notable systems include Toronto's streetcars, Vancouver's SkyTrain metro, and Montréal's Société de transport de Montréal. 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. Internet use is widespread, and most homes are equipped with high-speed internet (often wireless), as are cafés and other public gathering places.

Education

Structure

Education in Canada is considered a right, not a privilege. Each province is responsible for its educational system. Education is compulsory until age sixteen in most provinces, beginning at age five or six, and free through the secondary level.

The quality of public education is generally high, though frequent budget cutbacks result in large class sizes and the need for some secondary-level teachers to cover two subjects (a history teacher may also teach social studies, for example). In part because of decreased funding, some secondary schools specialize in a particular area, such as science and math, performing arts, computer sciences, or French. Other schools offer services tailored to students with various learning disabilities and styles. Students may attend the general school closest to their house or their parents may apply for them to go to a more specialized one.

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 attend religious schools (some of them public).

School Life

Private schools, which tend to be better funded and more technologically advanced than their public counterparts, are attended by a minority of Canadian students. Private schools emphasize formality, respect, and discipline in teacher-student interactions. Public primary schools may do the same, but by the secondary school level, friendships and more casual relationships between students and faculty are common. Group activities that encourage discussion are typical of Canadian classrooms.

Higher Education

Colleges and universities are also administered by province. While colleges are subsidized by the federal and provincial

governments, students must pay tuition. Tuition costs, on average, are significantly lower than those in the United States, and students unable to meet them may take advantage of student loans, grants, and scholarships based on both merit and need. Many students choose to complete a two-year technical training program and enter the workforce, though the increasingly competitive nature of the job market is pushing many to pursue undergraduate and post-graduate degrees. Fields traditionally dominated by men (math, sciences) or women (photography, design) are becoming more gender neutral.

Health

Canadians generally enjoy good health. However, cancer and heart disease from smoking and sedentary lifestyles affect many Canadians, and about 30 percent of adults are obese. Diabetes is another problem, especially among older people. 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

Contact Information

Embassy of Canada, 501 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20001; phone (202) 682-1740; web site http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/united_states-etats_unis/washington.aspx?lang=eng. Canadian Consulate General, 1251 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; phone (212) 596-1628; web site http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/united_states-etats_unis/new_york.aspx?lang=eng.

Country and Development Data

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Capital | Ottawa |
| Population | 35,623,680 (rank=38) |
| Area (sq. mi.) | 3,855,101 (rank=2) |
| Area (sq. km.) | 9,984,670 |
| Human Development Index | 10 of 188 countries |
| Gender Inequality Index | 18 of 188 countries |
| GDP (PPP) per capita | \$48,100 |
| Adult Literacy | 99% |
| Infant Mortality | 5 per 1,000 births |
| Life Expectancy | 79 (male); 85 (female) |
| Currency | Canadian dollar |

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