Canada

Location

Canada is the second largest country in the world in area (after Russia) but one of the most sparsely populated. Canada occupies about two-fifths of the North American continent. Its total area, including the Canadian share of the Great Lakes, is 3,849,674 square miles of which 291,576 square miles are inland water. Also included are its adjacent islands except Greenland. It is bounded on the north by the Arctic Ocean, on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, on the south by 12 states of the United States, and on the west by the Pacific Ocean and the U.S. state of Alaska. Canada shares a 5,527 mile border with the United States. In longitude, Canada extends approximately 52 W to 141 W, a distance that spans six time zones. In latitude, it extends from approximately 42 N to 83 N. With its vast Arctic and subarctic territories, Canada is often considered a country only of the far north.

Geography

Most of Canada's farmland and densely populated areas are located along a narrow strip that rims the U.S. border. In general, the landform structure of Canada can be considered as a vast basin more than 3,220 miles in diameter. The Cordillera in the west, the Appalachians in the southeast, the mountains of northern Labrador and of Baffin Island in the northeast, and the Inanition Mountains in the north form its high rim, while Hudson Bay, set close to the center of the enormous platform of the Canadian Shield, occupies the basin bottom. The western rim of the basin is higher and more massive than its eastern counterpart and pieces of the rim (notably in the far northwest
and in the south), are missing. The main lines of Canadian landforms continue well into the U.S., intimately linking the geography north to south of the border. The Canadian north remains one of the least settled and least exploited parts of the world. Canada can be divided into several physical regions, including the Canadian Shield, the interior plains, the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence lowlands, the Appalachian region, the Western Cordillera, and the Arctic Archipelago.

Climate

Because of its great latitudinal extent, Canada has a variety of climates. The Pacific coast, like that of the U.S. northwest coast, has a climate similar to that of England, with heavy precipitation and moderate winter and summer temperatures. The northern two-thirds of the country has a climate similar to that of northern Scandinavia, with very cold winters, hot summers, and relatively sparse precipitation. Southern Ontario and Quebec have a climate with hot, humid summers and cold, snowy winters, similar to that of some portions of the American Midwest. All of Canada, except the west coast, has a winter season with average temperatures below freezing and with continuous snow cover. Those parts of the country farthest from open water are the coldest, so that in the interior plains and in the north, the winters are extremely cold. In July, those parts of Canada farthest from open water are the warmest.

Important Dates

The holidays celebrated in Canada are New Year’s Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Victoria Day (Monday preceding May 25), Canada Day (July 1 except when it is a Sunday then it is July 2), Labor Day (1st Monday of Sept.), Thanksgiving Day (2nd Monday in October), Remembrance Day (Nov. 11), Christmas, and Boxing Day (Dec. 26).
Population

In the year 2000, the population was projected to be about 31,472,000. The population density in 1998 was 1 person per square mile with the population then at 30,677,000. Canada has a birth rate of 12.5 per 1,000 of the population. The death rate per 1,000 of population is 7.2 and the natural increase rate is 5.3 per 1,000. In 1996, the life expectancy for males was 74.9 years and for females was 81.2 years (births, death, and natural increase rates were all from 1996 statistics).

Currency

The official currency of Canada is the Canadian dollar.

Education

Elementary education, also called primary education, is the first stage traditionally found in formal education. It begins at about age 5 to 7, and ends at about age 11 to 13. All 10 provinces have the right to govern and organize their own educational systems. Elementary education is often followed by secondary education.

Secondary education, the second stage traditionally found in formal education, begins about age 11 to 13 and ends usually at age 15 to 18. The dichotomy between elementary education and secondary education has gradually become less marked, not only in curricula but also in organization. The proliferation of middle schools, junior schools, junior high schools, and other divisions has produced systems with more than two stages. After secondary education there is a good selection of universities to choose from if a student wants to continue his/her education further.
Language

The two official languages of Canada are English and French. English is spoken pretty much everywhere you go, so tourists that speak English should have no trouble getting around.

Trade

In the early days, Canada’s economic development was dependent upon the export of large volumes of raw materials. Over the years raw materials have declined as a percentage of Canada’s exports, while processed, fabricated, and manufactured goods have increased. In 1990, processed products accounted for approximately 80 percent of Canada’s exports. Since about the mid-1970’s, the leading Canadian exports have been automobiles and automobile parts, and other types of machinery and equipment, including such high-technology products as portable electrical transformers, computerized communication systems, and nuclear reactors. Fabricated metals and other materials and forestry products, including wood pulp and newsprint, are other important exports. The largest proportion of imports in Canadian trading history has always fallen within the manufacturing category. Automobiles and automobile parts lead the list of imports, followed by industrial machinery. Other significant imports are chemical products, textiles and clothing, and such foods as vegetables in the winter season and tropical and subtropical fruits and nuts.

NAFTA plays a large part in Canadian trade with the U.S. and Mexico. Canada also retains strong ties with EEC and other traditional European trading nations, but newly emerging trade patterns may decrease somewhat Canada’s dependence on its traditional trade partners. Foremost among these new patterns is that which has
developed within the Pacific Rim. The growing Japanese market resulted in Japan’s replacing the U.K. as the second largest market for Canadian exports by the mid-1970's.

Food

The food in Canada consists of American and French cuisine. American cuisine is everywhere, but French cuisine is found in select places where there is more of the French influence.

Agriculture

Although agriculture employs only about 5 percent of the Canadian labor force, it is a very important Canadian industry, producing large volumes of food for both the domestic and export markets and providing raw materials for the food processing industry and the food wholesale and retail industry. The trends in the industry are toward larger farm units, mechanized farm operations, specialization in fewer products, and the use of improved varieties, breeds, and farming methods.

There are distinctive types of farming across the country. The Prairies are known for grain (particularly wheat), oilseeds, and cattle grazing. Central and eastern Canada have a wider variety of crops and livestock, and farmers tend to specialize in either a particular cash crop or livestock type. Southwestern Ontario produces large amounts of corn for grain, and soy and white field beans. Both southwestern Ontario and southwestern British Columbia produce a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. Dairying is important around all the major cities.

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