

Chinese Immigrant Orientation Program

Module 5

General Information about Canada

Objective

This module will help you to understand how Canada came to be and the Canadian value system.

Goals

You will learn about:

Canada's Geography
The History of Canada
Government
Economy
Canadian Values

Geography

Canada consists of 10 provinces and three territories in five main regions: the Atlantic region, Central Canada, the Prairies, the West Coast and the North. The culture and population are different in each region.

The Atlantic region consists of the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Activities such as fishing, farming, forestry, tourism and mining are important to the Atlantic economy.

Central Canada consists of the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. This is the most populated region of the country. Together, Ontario and Quebec produce more than three-quarters of all Canadian manufactured goods.

The Prairies include the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Much of the land is flat and fertile, excellent for farming and rich in energy resources. In western Alberta, the Prairies end and the Rocky Mountains begin. The Canadian Rockies include some of the largest peaks in North America. On the West Coast, the province of British Columbia is famous for its mountain ranges and forests. Natural resources such as lumber and fish are important to the economy. Fruit farming is also a major industry, as is tourism.

The North consists of Canada's three territories: Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Together, they make up over one-third of Canada's land mass. Northern resources include oil, natural gas, gold, lead and zinc.

Distances

Distances in Canada are measured in kilometres. Canada is over 7,000 kilometres from east to west. You would need seven days to drive from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Vancouver, British Columbia. By airplane, the same trip would take about seven hours.

Population

Canada has about 31 million people. More than 80 percent of all the people in Canada live in towns and cities within 250 kilometres of the United States border. Ottawa is Canada's capital city, with a population of nearly one million. It is located in the province of Ontario. Canada's largest cities are Toronto, Ontario (4.4 million people); Montréal, Quebec (3.4 million); and Vancouver, British Columbia (1.9 million).

The Francophone population

French is the mother tongue of 6.6 million Canadians. Most Francophones live in Quebec, but almost one million Francophones live in Canada's other provinces and territories. About 76 percent of Francophones living outside Quebec live in Ontario and New Brunswick. Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia each have approximately 50,000 Francophones, while Nova Scotia has 35,000 and Saskatchewan has fewer than 20,000. The areas with the smallest French-speaking populations are Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the three territories. For information on Francophone communities outside Quebec, visit the following Web sites: franco.ca/atlas/ or www.ocolclo.gc.ca/links_liens.asp#B

Slide: The Francophone population

There are about 6.6 million Canadians who speak French as their mother tongue. Most live in Quebec but about 1 million live in other provinces.

History

Canada is a land of many cultures and many peoples. Aboriginal peoples have occupied the territory now called Canada for several thousands of years. Everybody else, either by birth or by descent, has been an immigrant -- we have all come from somewhere else.

It has been said that Canada is a "nation of immigrants." There are three main groups of Aboriginal peoples in Canada: the First Nations, the Inuit and the Métis. There are more than 50 different languages spoken by Canada's Aboriginal peoples, most of which are spoken only in Canada. In fact, the name "Canada" may have come from the word "Kanata," which means a settlement in the language of the Huron-Iroquois First Nations peoples.

As a country, Canada came into being on July 1, 1867. This event is known as "Confederation." Before 1867, the French arrived first, then the British. Each brought their own language, system of government, laws and culture. In 1763, after a long war between the British and the French, all of Canada came under British rule and was known as "British North America."

In the late 18th and into the 19th century, during and after the time of the American Revolution, many African-Americans and United Empire Loyalists fled the United States for Canada, where British ties remained and slavery had been abolished. During the mid- to late 19th and early 20th century, waves of immigrants arrived from Europe, attracted by the opportunity of a new and better life in Canada. Some settled in towns and cities; others worked in factories, mines and lumber camps. Many were farmers who turned the Prairie region into wheat fields. Asian immigrants from China, Japan and India settled mainly in the western provinces during this time. Many immigrants helped build Canada's national railways, which joined the east and west coasts and opened up the interior for settlement. After both world wars, thousands of Europeans came to Canada as immigrants and refugees and helped build Canada's post-war economy.

Canada's experience during and after the Second World War raised awareness of the needs of refugees and the desire of families to be together. Over the last 50 years, people from all over the globe have sought a better life or have sought refuge in Canada, fleeing civil wars, political unrest and natural disasters. Canada still needs the skills, talents and enthusiasm of newcomers to build our country, together with those who have come before them. All of this has been reflected in Canada's immigration and refugee policies.

Today, Canada is home to immigrants from more than 240 countries. Most newcomers decide to become citizens of Canada, after they are settled and have met the requirements of Canadian citizenship.

Economy

Canada has a diversified economy. Natural resources industries, such as forestry, mining, oil and gas extraction, farming and fishing, are important sources of jobs and export earnings. Canada is also a world leader in the fields of telecommunications, biotechnology, aerospace technologies and pharmaceuticals. More and more jobs involve work in service industries or in information technology. Along with the United States and Mexico, Canada is a partner in the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Canada has a decimal system of currency. The Canadian dollar is the basic unit of money. The most common paper bills are the \$5, \$10 and \$20, but \$50 and \$100 bills are also used. Canadian coins include the penny (one cent), nickel (five cents), dime (10 cents), quarter (25 cents), loonie (\$1) and toonie (\$2).

Government

Canada is a federation, with a parliamentary system of government. Being a federation means that powers and responsibilities are divided between the federal government and the 10 provincial governments. Canada also has three territorial jurisdictions. Canada has three levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal (cities and towns). These governments are elected by the citizens of Canada.

Federal government
(Government of Canada)

The federal government is responsible for:

- defence;
- foreign policy and foreign relations;
- banking;
- the postal service;
- criminal law;
- immigration; and
- citizenship.

Provincial governments
Provincial governments are responsible for:

- education; and
- municipal institutions.

They also share responsibility with the federal government for:

- health services;
- farming;
- social assistance;
- transportation; and
- the environment.

Territorial governments

The Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut are not sovereign units. They get their powers from the federal parliament, but they have elected assemblies that follow many of the same practices as the provincial governments.

Municipal governments

Municipal governments have functions delegated to them by other levels of government. They are responsible for local matters and services. These include:

- police and fire protection;

- water and sewer services;
- recreation; and
- local public transportation.

If you are interested, the Web site canada.gc.ca/howgoc/glance_e.html has more information about how Canadians govern themselves.

Bilingualism

Under the Official Languages Act, Canada is an officially bilingual country. This means that Canadians have the right to get federal government services in English or French, no matter what part of Canada they are living in.

New Brunswick is the only province that is officially bilingual. New Brunswick residents receive services in both official languages from all of their provincial government departments and agencies.

In Quebec, French is the official language and in most cases, provincial and municipal services are provided in French.

In the other provinces and territories, English is the official language, and the availability of provincial services in both official languages varies.

At the municipal level, the availability of services in both official languages varies greatly.

Multiculturalism

Canada is populated by people who have come from every part of the world. Through the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, the government encourages Canadians to take pride in their language, religion and heritage and to keep their customs and traditions, as long as they don't break Canadian laws.

Protecting the environment -- Sustainable development

Canada has a beautiful natural environment. Because we have lots of land and a small population, most of our country is wild and unspoiled. However, it is becoming harder to preserve our environment as our population and cities grow. Pollution helps cause large-scale environmental problems, such as acid rain. And as more people use and live in natural areas, threats to the environment increase. Canadians are very concerned about environmental issues. They know that damage to the environment can be hard to fix.

Canadians know that economic growth is crucial for the future prosperity of Canada. But growth must be managed carefully so that it does not harm the environment. The Canadian government is committed to "sustainable development," which is economic growth that does not hurt the environment and helps people.

A healthy environment is important to quality of life. Everyone living in Canada should act in a responsible way, both toward the environment and within their community. This way, future Canadians have the opportunity to live in a country that is clean and prosperous. Both individuals and groups can help Canada develop in a sustainable way.

Here are a few things you can do to help protect quality of life:

- throw waste paper and other garbage in public garbage cans;
- compost, recycle and re-use as many products as possible, such as paper, glass and cans;
- conserve energy and water by turning off lights and taps when you are not using them;
- walk, join a car pool, or use a bicycle or public transit whenever possible;
- use products that are environmentally friendly;
- plant trees or grow a garden, but avoid using chemicals;
- never pour paint, oil or other harmful chemicals down sinks or toilets, into sewers or onto the ground (telephone your local government to find out where you can throw out these hazardous materials);
- volunteer with a local organization; and
- educate yourself and your children about environmental issues.

Contact your local government to find out about the services and bylaws that protect the environment (for example, garbage disposal schedules, water management and recycling programs). You can find local government telephone numbers in the Blue Pages of the telephone book