



# Facts on Canada

## Quebec

### The Land

Bordered by Ontario, New Brunswick and Labrador (the mainland portion of the province of Newfoundland) and by the United States, Quebec has an area of 1 357 812 km<sup>2</sup>, three times that of France and seven times that of Great Britain, making it the largest of Canada's provinces. The province is almost entirely surrounded by water: by Hudson Strait to the north, the St. Lawrence River and Gulf to the south, and James Bay and Hudson Bay to the west.

From north to south, Quebec takes in three main geographical regions: the Canadian Shield, the St. Lawrence Lowlands and the Appalachian Mountains. Extending from the shores of the Canadian Arctic to the Laurentians, the Canadian Shield covers about 60 percent of the land mass and contains some of the world's oldest rocks. Permafrost reigns in the northern part of the Shield; only dwarf birches and lichen are able to grow there.

The St. Lawrence River, the province's dominant geographical feature, links the Atlantic Ocean with the Great Lakes. The St. Lawrence Lowlands are dotted with more than a million lakes and rivers. Quebec's forests are equal in area to those of Sweden and Norway combined. To the south, the foothills of the Appalachians separate Quebec from the United States.

Almost 80 percent of Quebec's population live in urban centres located along the St. Lawrence. Montreal and its suburbs have a population of over 3.4 million; Quebec City is the province's capital.

### The History

The name Quebec, which comes from the Micmac word "Gepèg" meaning "strait," originally meant the narrowing of the St. Lawrence River off what is currently Quebec City. Paleo-Amerindians, whose presence in Quebec can be traced back 10 000 years, preceded the Algonquin and Iroquois Aboriginal people, with whom the Europeans first made contact in the 16th century. The northern part of the province was, and still is, inhabited by the Inuit.

The arrival of the French explorer Jacques Cartier in 1534 marked the first European presence in Quebec. The succeeding two centuries were characterized by the establishment of a thriving fur trade, a fishing industry, interdependent relations with the Aboriginal people and a continuous rivalry between France and Britain.

Founded in 1608, Quebec City gave birth to New France and became its capital. During the French regime, the fortified city was an important military, commercial, administrative and ecclesiastical centre, which prevailed over the development of the colony. Recognized as the cradle of French civilization in America, Quebec, which has conserved its fortifications, was named a World Heritage City by UNESCO in 1985.

French-British rivalry in North America culminated with the Seven Years' War, which saw the fall of Quebec City to British forces in 1759. With the Treaty of Paris in 1763, New France became a colony of Britain. In 1774, under the *Quebec Act*, Britain granted official recognition to French Civil Law, guaranteed religious freedom and authorized the use of the French language.

In 1791, the colony was divided in two to reflect the large influx of Loyalists who, wishing to remain British subjects, fled north after the American Revolution to settle in the western region of the "province of Quebec" of the time. This led to the creation of Upper Canada (now Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec). After rebellions for political reforms in both regions in 1837, the two were reunited by the *Act of Union* in 1840 and became the "Province of Canada." In 1867, Quebec became a founding member of the new Dominion of Canada.

Quebec's mainly rural society was transformed into an industrial society in the second half of the 19th century, at which time the city of Montreal emerged. During this era and until the first few decades of the 20th century, a great number of Quebec residents emigrated to the United States. At the start of the 20th century, a second industrial wave intensified urbanization and led to a higher standard of living.

Beginning in 1960, Quebec entered yet another period of transition: the "Quiet Revolution." It was marked by rapid economic expansion, a democratization of education, national pride and a revamping of public-sector institutions to meet the needs of contemporary society. The Quiet Revolution was also the beginning of a new period of political tension as the province sought to assume greater control over its economy and institutions.

In 1980, a provincial referendum was conducted on negotiating an arrangement for sovereignty association with Canada. The referendum was defeated by a majority of Quebec citizens, as was a second referendum held in 1995. Less than a month after the Quebec sovereignty referendum of October 30, 1995, the Parliament of Canada passed a resolution recognizing Quebec as a distinct society.

Ever since the British conquest of New France in 1760, the survival of the "French fact" in Quebec has been central to the concerns of its citizens. It is this very aspect that most reflects Quebec's distinct place in the Canadian Confederation and greatly contributed to Canada's cultural richness and bilingual character.

## **The People**

Of a total population of over 7 million, roughly 6 million francophones are descended from colonists who came from France in the 17th and 18th centuries. English-speaking residents of Quebec are descended mainly from British immigrants, but also from other ethnic groups seeking a better life in North America. At present, there are more than 590 000 anglophones in Québec, most of whom live in the Montréal area.

The population of Québec also includes some 600 000 immigrants. Italians and Eastern Europeans were traditionally the largest immigrant groups to Quebec, but since 1960 the ranks of new residents have been swollen by Portuguese, Haitians, Lebanese, South Americans and Southeast Asians. Quebec welcomes about 25 000 immigrants from over 100 countries every year.

There are some 72 430 Aboriginal people in Quebec: Mohawk, Cree, Montagnais, Algonquin, Attikamek, Micmac, Huron-Wendat, Abenaki, Malecite and Naskapi, as well as Métis and Inuit.

French is the mother tongue of 81 percent of the population, while approximately 8 percent cite English as their mother tongue.

## **The Economy**

Highly industrialized and quite diversified, Quebec's economy is strong and full of promise. The province has abundant natural resources and energy, along with well-developed agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors.

Quebec's dynamic business sector has seized on the economic potential of the province and produces a wide variety of top quality products for export. Montreal, the province's commercial capital, has developed competitive industries in space and aeronautics, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, energy and transportation. Quebec also exports electricity — about 14.4 percent of global production.

In 1999, Quebec exported 57.7 percent of its total production in relation to its gross domestic product (GDP). In that same year, about 85 percent of Quebec's international exports were to the United States.

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