



CULTURE AND TRADITIONS OF CANADA

Maja Słomian

CULTURE OF CANADA

The **culture of Canada** embodies the artistic, culinary, literary, humour, musical, political and social elements that are representative of Canada and Canadians. Throughout Canada's history, its culture has been influenced by European culture and traditions, especially British and French, and by its own indigenous cultures. Over time, elements of the cultures of Canada's immigrant populations have become incorporated to form a Canadian cultural mosaic. The population has also been influenced by American culture because of a shared language, proximity, television and migration between the two countries.



HISTORY OF CANADA

Centuries before Europeans began to settle in North America, explorers who came here found thriving First Nations and Inuit societies with their own beliefs, way of life and rich history.

When the first European explorers came to Canada they found all regions occupied by native peoples they called “Indians,” thinking they had reached the East Indies. The native people lived off the land, some by hunting and gathering, others by raising crops.

The arrival of European traders, missionaries, soldiers and colonists changed the native way of life forever. Large numbers of Aboriginals died of European diseases to which they lacked immunity. However, Aboriginals and Europeans formed strong economic, religious and military bonds in the first 200 years of coexistence which laid the foundations of Canada.



ORIGIN OF THE NAME "CANADA"

The name "Canada" likely comes from the Huron-Iroquois word "kanata," meaning "village" or "settlement." In 1535, two Aboriginal youths told French explorer Jacques Cartier about the route to kanata; they were actually referring to the village of Stadacona, the site of the present-day City of Québec. For lack of another name, Cartier used the word "Canada" to describe not only the village, but the entire area. The first use of Canada as an official name came in 1791, when the Province of Quebec was divided into the colonies of Upper Canada and Lower Canada. In 1841, the two colonies were united under one name, the Province of Canada.



ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA

The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Indigenous peoples: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. These are three distinct peoples with unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. More than one million people in Canada identify themselves as an Indigenous person



FIRST NATIONS/INDIANS

Before the arrival of Europeans, First Nations were able to satisfy all of their material and spiritual needs through the resources of the natural world around them. There were six groups of First Nations in Canada according to the six main geographic areas of the country. Within each of these six areas, First Nations had very similar cultures, largely shaped by a common environment.

The six groups were: **Woodland First Nations**, who lived in dense boreal forest in the eastern part of the country; **Iroquoian First Nations**, who inhabited the southernmost area; **Plains First Nations**, who lived on the grasslands of the Prairies; **Plateau First Nations**, whose geography ranged from semi-desert conditions in the south to high mountains and dense forest in the north; **Pacific Coast First Nations**; and the **First Nations of the Mackenzie and Yukon River Basins**, whose harsh environment consisted of dark forests and barren lands.



MÉTIS

Métis are people of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry, and one of the three recognized Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The use of the term Métis is complex and contentious, and has different historical and contemporary meanings. The term is used to describe communities of mixed European and Indigenous descent across Canada, and a specific community of people — defined as the Métis Nation — which originated largely in Western Canada and emerged as a political force in the 19th century. The Métis have been recognized as an Aboriginal people with rights enshrined in the Constitution of Canada since 1885.



INUIT

Inuit are the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic. The word Inuit means "the people" in the Inuit language. They are Indigenous people, the majority of whom inhabit the northern regions of Canada. An Inuit person is known as an Inuk. The Inuit homeland is known as Inuit Nunangat, which refers to the land, water and ice contained in the Arctic region.

There are eight main Inuit ethnic groups: the Labradormiut, Nunavimmiut, Baffin Island, Iglulingmiut, Kivallirmiut, Netsilingmiut, Inuinnait and Western Arctic Inuit.

Traditionally, the Inuit were hunters and gatherers who moved seasonally from one camp to another. Large regional groupings were loosely separated into smaller seasonal groups, winter camps of around 100 people and summer hunting groups of fewer than a dozen.



CANADIAN TRADITIONS AND CELEBRATIONS

Canada is a country of considerable diversity born from the immigrant heritage of its people. Canadian traditions were brought over the centuries by its millions of immigrants and their customs were mixed successfully with those already established by the indigenous peoples. The traditions of individual Canadian families can vary greatly based on which customs they've decided to import from their former homeland. Generally speaking, all different areas in Canada have their own traditions and customs.

The different ethnic groups in Canadian districts have their own traditions. Some are shared with the USA, like the celebration of Thanksgiving, while some are shared with most countries across the world, like Christmas.

Most of Canada's rituals and traditions involve commemorating significant dates in someone's life. Weddings, birthdays, funerals or school graduations are celebrated with some of the most well-known Canadian traditions.





CANADIAN TRADITIONS

BIRTHS

Canadian couples generally announce their pregnancy with great pride to friends and family as soon as they're aware, and it's common for friends of the expecting mother to organize a **baby shower** – a small, lighthearted house party – to honour the new mom sometime before she gives birth. Shortly after the child is born, it's similarly customary for friends of the parents to visit and give at least one **baby gift**, usually a toy or clothes, to express congratulations.

When it comes to naming baby, it's a relatively common Canadian tradition for children to be given names from within the family. A son might be named after his father or uncle, for instance; a daughter for her sister or grandmother. **Middle names**, which most Canadians have, are very often chosen this way. Children usually take the **last name** of their father. If children are born to parents who aren't married, or simply don't use the same last name, they are sometimes given a **hyphenated last name** combining the names of both parents.



GRADUATING FROM SCHOOL

Completing a phase of school in Canada is almost always celebrated with a fancy **graduation ceremony**.

In their final year of **high school** (and sometimes **middle school** as well), students usually celebrate the completion of their studies with some sort of party organized by the school, usually known as **prom** or **grad night**. These usually take the form of a fancy dress gala held at a local hotel or banquet hall, complete with a dinner, dancing and limo rides.

The actual act of graduating is commemorated in a whole other ceremony a few days or weeks later, usually called **convocation**. On this day, the successful students don a distinctive “**cap and gown**” outfit and publicly receive rolled **diplomas** certifying their graduation from the head of the school before a packed auditorium full of friends and parents.



WEDDINGS

Most Canadians generally get married in a lavish public ceremony in a church or banquet hall before about a hundred or so close friends and family members. The bride typically wears a beautiful white **wedding dress** purchased especially for the ceremony, while everyone else wears their finest formal wear. Once the gang is assembled, a legally-certified wedding **officiant**, usually a religious leader or judge, publicly leads the bride and groom through special **wedding vows** expressing loyalty to one another, and then proclaims them officially married. The event usually concludes with an equally lavish, but more relaxed **wedding reception**, dinner, or after-party.



FUNERALS

In most Canadian families, the moment someone dies their corpse is shipped to a **mortician** for embalming and preparation. Once that's done, there usually is a **viewing** — where close family can quietly look at the presented body in a special decorative **casket** — followed by a full funeral a few days after that. Depending on the religiosity of the family, funerals may be held in either a church or some manner of secular funeral parlour, and will feature dozens of guests who knew the deceased during life. A few short speeches, or **eulogies**, by close friends or family may be given, followed by another **processional viewing** of the body.





CANADIAN HOLIDAYS

CHRISTMAS

Christmas is by far the biggest holiday on the Canadian calendar. It's a religious celebration commemorating the birth of the Christian savior **Jesus Christ**. In the month-long lead-up to the big day, most Canadians decorate their homes with traditional decorations, the centerpiece being a **Christmas tree** in the family living room. There may be Christmas parties with friends, family, or co-workers, as well as some traditional activities like baking special **Christmas cookies**, or watching Christmas-themed television shows or movies. The night before Christmas, **Christmas Eve**, is usually a quiet evening spent with family, while on **Christmas Day** family members exchange wrapped gifts with one another and dine on a lavish **Christmas dinner**.



NEW YEAR'S EVE

New Year's Eve is a chance for Canadians to drink and party one final night before the year changes over. New Year's parties traditionally run until midnight or later, and usually feature fancy clothes, hors d'oeuvres and copious amounts of **champagne**. When midnight approaches, everyone loudly counts down the final few seconds, then kisses their romantic partner.

New Year's Day begins the first second after midnight, but has no real customs or celebrations associated with it. Some may enjoy a leisurely breakfast or brunch with friends or family while others may simply savor a day to relax after so much late-night partying the night before.



EASTER SUNDAY & GOOD FRIDAY

Easter is one of the holiest days on the Christian calendar. According to Christian religion, Easter commemorates the day when **Jesus Christ** was resurrected, making it a particularly important day of recognition for those who believe in Christ's divinity. In the non-religious version, Easter is a mere celebration of things associated with **spring**, including daffodils, bunnies, baby chicks, and rolling hills of fresh green grass. Kids celebrate it by getting gifts of special seasonally-themed candies from the "**Easter Bunny**" and by hunting for decorated **Easter eggs** hidden around their house or backyard.

Easter is celebrated on wildly different days in either March or April, since its schedule is based on the **spring equinox** (the day when the Sun passes Earth's equator). In addition to Easter itself, Canada also recognizes the Friday immediately preceding it as **Good Friday**, a statutory holiday in most provinces that commemorates Christ's crucifixion.



VICTORIA DAY

During her final years of life, Britain's long-serving monarch, **Queen Victoria** (1819-1901), enjoyed quite an extensive cult of popularity across the Empire, and her death prompted the Canadian Parliament to declare her birthday (May 24) a national holiday. Regardless of its royal origins, in modern Canada Victoria Day is typically viewed as little more than a convenient long weekend (in some provinces, the nickname is simply the "**May Long**"), and an excuse for short spring vacations and camping trips.



Victoria
DAY

CANADA DAY

July 1, 1867 was the date the Canadian Constitution was adopted and ever since, July 1 has been celebrated as the birthday of the Canadian nation, and the day “Canada became a country.” Held in early summer, **Canada Day** (known as “**Dominion Day**” until 1983) offers an opportunity for Canadians to have large parties outdoors, and is usually celebrated with neighbourhood or family barbecues, picnics, and fireworks. Many big Canadian cities organize a whole host of official Canada Day festivities for their community, including parades, live music, and outdoor festivals, ensuring the streets are packed with patriotic revelers from sunup to sundown.



LABOUR DAY

First Monday in September

In the late 19th century, when Canadian workers were not always afforded full rights and dignity from their employers, Canadian governments created a new holiday known as **Labour Day** to acknowledge the contribution of the nation's labourers.

Today Labour Day is mostly a generic day off work perhaps best known for signaling the beginning of the academic year for school-aged children. People very involved in the **organized labour movement**, sometimes stage parades or protests to raise awareness of contemporary issues relating to Canada's working men and women.



REMEMBRANCE DAY

On November 11, 1918, **World War I** (1914-1918) formally came to a close when a truce was declared between the fighting nations, including Canada. On every November 11 since, Canadians have celebrated peace and remembered the horrors of war by observing Remembrance Day, the most sombre holiday of the year.

At 11 o'clock on November 11, all Canadians are expected to stop what they're doing and observe a moment of silence in memory of the soldiers who have given their lives in the various wars in which Canada has fought. Most cities organize a special public ceremony at the town hall or local war memorial as well, at which representatives of various groups, such as the veterans' legion, the Boy Scouts, and the municipal, provincial and federal governments lay wreaths of commemoration.



THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving is a uniquely North American holiday, celebrated in Canada and the United States to commemorate the traditional autumn harvest and give thanks for the wealth and bounty of the New World.

The main event of Thanksgiving is an enormous, lavish **Thanksgiving dinner** composed of turkey, sweet potatoes, corn, Brussels sprouts, cranberries, and pumpkin pie.

Next to Christmas, Thanksgiving is the most important family day of the year for most Canadians, and many travel great distances in order to dine with their relatives.

Thanksgiving foods are unusual, many families put great effort into making them look extra beautiful and exotic on the table, with the creation of a Thanksgiving table centerpiece of flowers, candles, gourds, dried corn and more a popular holiday art project





CELEBRATIONS |

HALLOWEEN

Halloween is a day to celebrate all things scary and ghoulish. The main event is **trick-or-treating**, where children dress up in costumes and walk from door to door in their neighbourhoods all night and are given candies from adults. In recent years, it's also become very popular for teenagers to celebrate the day by setting off fireworks and firecrackers and for adults to host late-night costume parties.

In the lead-up to Halloween, spooky decorations of pumpkins, skeletons, witches, and other such creatures begin to pop up everywhere, particularly in schools, department stores, and bars.

One of the oldest Halloween traditions is carving a pumpkin into a scary face — known as a **jack-o'-lantern** — and putting a lamp in it to greet trick-or-treaters.



ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine's Day is now a secular celebration of all things romantic. Canadian couples, either married or just dating, are expected to buy small gifts for each other, usually cards, chocolate or a special dinner out, and enjoy a romantic evening together. The holiday has also become very popular with elementary school-aged children, who usually give their classmates cheap, mass-produced cards on February 14.



LUNAR NEW YEAR

As Canada's Asian population grows, celebrations of the **Lunar New Year** (sometimes called "Chinese New Year") is starting to become a bigger event in many Canadian cities. Celebrated for six days straight from January 28 to February 2, traditional events include Asian cultural parades and gifts of money in red envelopes.



GROUNDHOG DAY

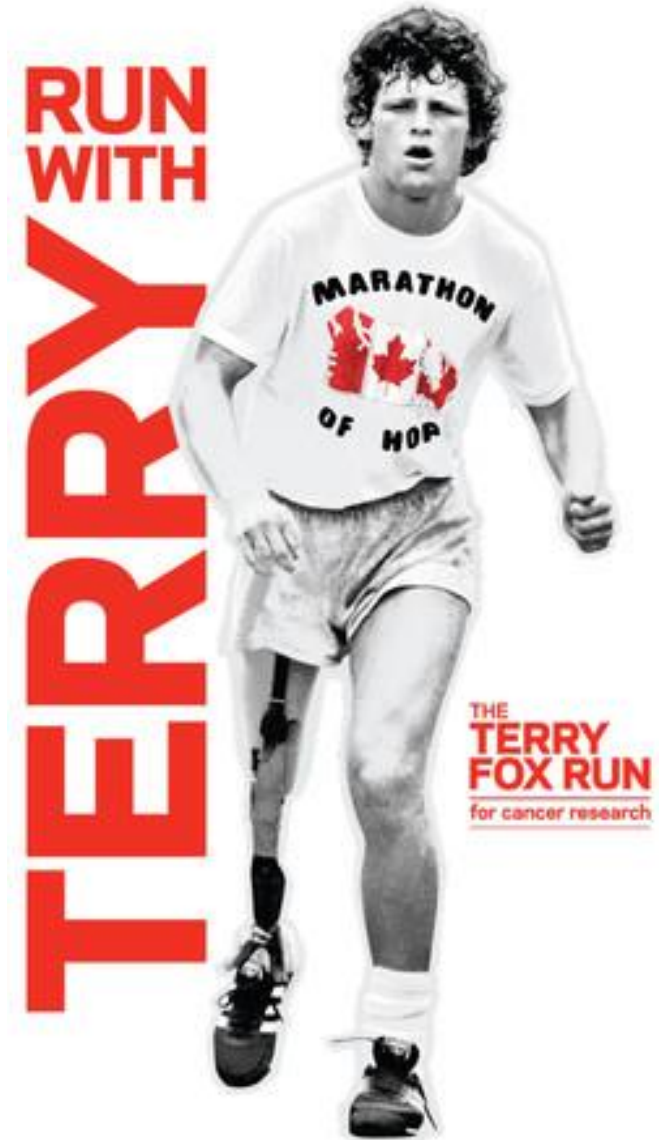
One of Canada's least important, but nevertheless most famous, informal holidays is **Groundhog Day** (February 2). Every year, various zoos and parks across Canada stage a special event where a local groundhog is observed coming out of his burrow. If he "sees its shadow" then it's declared Canada will have "six more weeks of winter." If he doesn't, then an early spring awaits.



TERRY FOX DAY

The **Terry Fox Run** is an annual non-competitive charity event held in numerous regions around the world in commemoration of Canadian cancer activist Terry Fox, and his Marathon of Hope, and to raise money for cancer research. It takes place on August, 3.

The run is informal which means that the distance often varies, usually between 5 and 15 kilometres; participation is considered to be more important than completing the set distance. There are also runs set up by schools of every level, often with shorter distances than the "official" ones.



CANADIAN LUCK TRADITIONS

Thirteen is considered an unlucky number and most Canadian apartments, hotels, storage units and parking lots do not have a 13th floor, locker, or stall. **Friday the 13th** in turn, is considered a uniformly unlucky day and people usually avoid scheduling important events, such as weddings or plane trips, on it. Christians associate the number **666** with Satan, while many Asian-Canadians associate the number **four** with death.

A wide variety of odd actions are considered unlucky. **Opening an umbrella indoors, walking under an open ladder, knocking over a salt shaker, killing a ladybug, or having a black cat cross your path** are all fairly common omens of bad luck, while finding a lone **penny** in the street, picking a **four-leafed clover**, spotting a **shooting star**, **throwing money in a decorative fountain**, or blowing a **lone eyelash** off your finger are considered as examples of good luck.



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