



By Krystal Sato

国際交流員コーナー

CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Canada

Last July, I wrote about how the United States celebrates Independence Day on July 4. However, our neighbor to the north, Canada, celebrates its national day, Canada Day, on July 1. There are some similarities between the history and culture of Canada and America, but also many differences. This month, I am going to introduce Canada.

Canada is made up of ten provinces and three territories, and is the second largest country in the world. For such a large country, the population is relatively small (about 39 million people). Most Canadians live near the Canada-US border. The further north you go towards the Arctic region, the harsher the winter gets, so few people live there. Since the population density is so low, the wilderness is vast and pristine. In fact, Canada's nickname is "The Great White North."



Banff National Park, Alberta

As an American, I haven't really studied much Canadian history. However, I do know that up until right before the American Revolutionary War, both France and the UK had colonies in present-day Canada. After France lost to the UK in the Seven Years War in 1763, the UK took control of France's colony. French language and culture had already taken root there, so in order to avoid another independence movement like the one brewing in the American colonies, the UK allowed it. Therefore, even today there are two official languages in Canada: English and French. French Canadians live mainly in the province of Québec, and they study English in school. The other provinces use English, and they study French in school. Even though Canada has two official languages, only 18% of Canadians are English-French bilinguals.



A map of Canada. The capital is Ottawa, Ontario.



Like America, Canada has people of all difference races, religions, and cultures. In fact, about 1/4 of Canadians are immigrants, compared to only 14% of Americans. Canada is very open to immigration compared to other countries, and warmly welcomes many immigrants and refugees from all over the world.



First Nations Totem Poles in Stanley Park, Vancouver

In addition, Canada is also home to many Indigenous peoples. The Canadian constitution recognizes three types of Indigenous peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. The First Nations are comprised of Indigenous peoples who do not fall under the category of Inuit or Métis. There are 634 First Nations communities, each with their own languages and cultures. The Inuit are the Indigenous people of the Arctic. The Métis are people with mixed Indigenous and European ancestry. Indigenous peoples make up about 5% of Canada’s population. In America, they are only 1%.

As for Canadian food, the most famous are definitely maple syrup and *poutine*. For all of the pancake, waffle, and French toast lovers, the province of Québec produces more than 70% of the world’s maple syrup. *Poutine* is another food originally from Québec, but it is now eaten throughout Canada. It’s a fast-food dish of French fries topped with cheese curds and brown gravy. It’s even on the menu of McDonald’s in Canada.



Even though it takes only three hours by car to get to Vancouver, Canada from my hometown of Seattle, I had never been there until after I moved to Japan. In 2015, I was teaching English at a private school in Sapporo, and I accompanied the third year junior high school students on their school trip to Vancouver. I thought it was a very nice city. The weather and scenery resembles Seattle, so it reminded me of home. Plus, Canadians are really friendly. I felt they are more polite than Americans are, and they are quick to apologize. They’re always saying, “I’m sorry.”



Vancouver is cloudy and rainy, like my hometown, Seattle.

By the way, the day I arrived in Canada in 2015 was actually Election Day. Unlike in America, Canadian Election Day is a national holiday, so that all Canadians have a chance to vote. That evening, I was watching TV in my hotel room, and every channel was showing election news. A charismatic, young, handsome politician drew my attention. It was the first time I had ever seen him, and the first time I had ever heard the name *Justin Trudeau*. He won the election that day, and is currently Canada’s Prime Minister.



I like Canada a lot. I plan to live in Japan permanently, but if I were to live in a different country, I would not choose America; I would choose Canada. ★

Contact Information
 Ebetsu City Board of Education
 Takasago 24-6, Ebetsu, Hokkaido 〒067-0074
 Tel: 011-381-1049 Fax: 011-382-3434