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Things to Know While Traveling in Canada from the U.S.

TRAVEL TIPS(!)

Johanna Read, Leaf Group ; Updated March 15, 2018



“Peace, order and good government” versus “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Next-door neighbors

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and the United States have much in common, but key differences between the two countries can be summed up in these phrases from the Canadian Constitution and the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

American visitors to Canada will find much that's familiar, including the weather, on each side of the world's longest undefended border. But enough is different that they'll know they're visiting another country.

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The Weather

Despite the handful of Americans who go north across the border every July kitted out with jackets, mitts and skis, expecting snow, the weather in most parts of Canada is similar to that in the states that sit just south of the border. Yes, the weather report says that summer temperatures in [Toronto](http://traveltips.usatoday.com/toronto-canada/) (<http://traveltips.usatoday.com/toronto-canada/>), are in the 30s, but that's because [Canada](http://i.viglink.com/?key=61b366eca462f79ffdc8582e414718ce&insertId=8cfa16dcbf9f377833e7d94951b76fae&type=CD&mid=undefined&url=http://www.tripadvisor.com/Search%3Fq%3Dcanada&title=Things%20to%20traveling-canada-us-109264.html&v=1&out=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tripadvisor.com%2FSearch%3Fq%3Dcanada&title=Things%20to%20traveling-canada-us-109264.html&v=1&out=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tripadvisor.com%2FSearch%3Fq%3Dcanada&title=Things%20to%20traveling-canada-us-109264.html) (<http://i.viglink.com/?key=61b366eca462f79ffdc8582e414718ce&insertId=8cfa16dcbf9f377833e7d94951b76fae&type=CD&mid=undefined&url=http://www.tripadvisor.com/Search%3Fq%3Dcanada&title=Things%20to%20traveling-canada-us-109264.html&v=1&out=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tripadvisor.com%2FSearch%3Fq%3Dcanada&title=Things%20to%20traveling-canada-us-109264.html>) like most of the world, uses Celsius, not Fahrenheit. A quick primer: Water freezes at zero Celsius; 10 Celsius is a cool fall day; 20 is room temperature; 30 is a nice summer day (translating to 86 degrees Fahrenheit); and temperatures of 40, or 104 degrees Fahrenheit, are rare.

Farther north above the 60th parallel, it's cooler. Summer highs in the northern city of Yellowknife, for example, are in the high 60s F but can reach into the mid-80s. In January, a typical day in Yellowknife will be minus 13 degrees F. Despite these temperatures, Canadians don't live in igloos. Igloos occasionally are built in the winter for tourists – and sometimes by the Inuit for shelter in the North away from cities and towns.

Different Names, Different Light and Different Money

Canadians sometimes use different names than their American neighbors do. For example, Inuit is the word used in Canada for Eskimos; it means “the people” in the Inuk language, Inuktitut. Don't use the term “American Indians” when referring to Canadian indigenous people. Instead, say “indigenous peoples” when speaking generally, and “First Nations,” “Metis” or “Inuit” if you're talking about one of these groups.

When talking about the country geographically, Eastern Canada refers to the four Atlantic provinces, not to Ontario and Quebec, even though they sit just north of the eastern U.S. states. Ontario and Quebec are called “Central Canada,” even though the center of Canada, measured from east to west, is near Winnipeg in Manitoba, one of the four western provinces. North of the 60th parallel are Canada's three territories, Yukon, the Northwest Territories and the newest territory, Nunavut, created in 1999. Collectively, the three territories are called “the North.”

The light does change significantly as you move farther north in Canada, sometimes to the alarm of first-time visitors to those latitudes. In the [Alberta](http://traveltips.usatoday.com/alberta-canada/) (<http://traveltips.usatoday.com/alberta-canada/>) capital of Edmonton, for example, the sun sets after 10:00 p.m. at the height of summer and at 4:15 p.m. in the dead of winter. The length of the day is even more dramatic farther north. In Inuvik, a city close to the Arctic Ocean, the sun doesn't set at all from May 25 to July 20, and it doesn't rise from December 6 until January 6.

Canada is a bilingual country, with French spoken widely in the provinces of Quebec and New Brunswick. Tourists will find English in Montreal, Quebec City and on the Quebec side of the National Capital Region, though less easily in smaller Quebec towns. New Brunswick is officially a bilingual province. Regardless of language, each province is quite different from the others, just as each American state is unique.

Though they'll understand when you ask for the “restroom,” Canadians use the word “washroom,” or, less politely, “bathroom.” Most Canadians won't understand that you're referring to a tuque when you say “beanie.” The letter “Z” is pronounced “zed,” and what many Americans call Canadian bacon is “back

bacon” in Canada. Canadians also use a different term for their heads of government; Canada has a prime minister rather than a president. The polite form of addressing him is just “Prime Minister,” not “Mr. Prime Minister.”

As in the U.S., Canada also calls its currency the dollar. But Canada no longer has one- and two-dollar bills. As a cost-saving measure, Canada substituted them with coins they call “loonies” (because the dollar coin has an image of a loon on it) and “toonies.” Canada also got rid of the penny in 2013, so your change will be rounded up or down to the nearest nickel when paying with cash. Canadian bills are made of colorful polymer, not paper, to make them more difficult to counterfeit and easier to differentiate. As Canada is a constitutional monarchy with the Queen as head of state, Canadian money features the portraits of the Queen and of famous Canadians.

The value of the Canadian dollar fluctuates against the U.S. dollar, and the two currencies have not been on par since early 2013. This means many goods and services will seem less expensive to those accustomed to the U.S. dollar, though keep in mind that Canada has a 5 percent national goods and services tax, and most provinces also have a sales tax. It ranges from 6 percent in Saskatchewan to 10 percent in each of the Atlantic provinces. Alberta and the three northern territories do not charge a provincial sales tax.

Peace, Order and Good Government

Canadians greatly value peace, order and good government, and these words are part of the Constitution. Citizens and visitors alike are expected to obey all laws. To get into Canada, U.S. citizens need neither a visa nor a passport, though U.S. [passport regulations](http://traveltips.usatoday.com/united-states-canada-passport-regulations-21672.html) require Americans to have one to return home. Visitors to Canada with criminal records, even for misdemeanors and drunk-driving offenses, may not be allowed to cross the border. Canada also has strict firearms laws. For example, anyone wanting to bring firearms or ammunition into Canada must make a written declaration, and only authorized people are legally allowed to carry handguns, for example, if they are required for their jobs.

Canada is generally a very safe country, ranked as the eighth-safest in the world with a 2017 Global Peace Index of 1.371. The United States was ranked 114th with a peace index score of 2.232. While some of the benefits of good government extend to visitors to Canada, the universal health care system is not one of them. Be sure to purchase travel insurance in case you need to visit a doctor or hospital while traveling in Canada.

Following social norms is also important, and Canadians value politeness in visitors as much as they value it in themselves. For example, Canadians may think you’re rude if you say, “I want,” instead of “I would like,” and if you don’t use “please” and “thank you” often. And the Canadian response to “thank you” is “you’re welcome”, not “uh huh.”



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