

ONTARIO

Flip through a handful of tourist postcards from Ontario, Canada's most populous province.

Images from the south appear: Toronto's gleaming high-rise skyline; the mist and thunder of Niagara Falls; the blossoming fruit orchards of Niagara; Shakespearian actors on the Stratford Festival stage; a resort, nestled between lake and fairway, near Collingwood; Ottawa's bikepaths winding along the historic Rideau Canal.

To the north, a different set of images emerges: a float plane soaring above a carpet of green forest dotted with thousands of silver lakes; a cloud of white vapour hanging in the frozen stillness of sub-arctic winter above the gold-mining town of Hemlo; a lone angler landing a thrashing 15-kg muskelunge, a legendary adversary; the enormous grain elevators at Thunder Bay, the lakehead port where much of Canada's prairie grain sets sail for world markets.

Ontario is two distinct realities — the urban, industrialized south and the sparsely populated, resource-based north. A range of climatic, vegetational, geological and other factors distinguish these regions and their differing economies, landscapes and lifestyles.

Land and Water

"Ontario" is an Iroquoian word meaning "beautiful water." Bordered on the south by the freshwater inland seas of the Great Lakes, and on the north by the frigid salt waters of Hudson Bay, Ontario's terrain is covered by some 177 390 km² of rivers, streams and lakes — one-sixth of the province's total area.

Two main geological regions make up Ontario: the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Lowlands and the Canadian Shield. The Shield sweeps north from Lake Superior to the remote Hudson Bay Lowlands. Beneath the thin soils of the northern forest, the Shield's ancient rocks contain one of the world's great storehouses of mineral wealth.

Algonquin Provincial Park



Toronto skyline

Northern Ontario, with 90 per cent of Ontario's 1 068 580 km² of territory, is home to only 10 per cent of the population. Northern Ontario's towns were built because of the railroad and today, rails and roads carry the fruits of the mines and mills southward. North of these ribbons of steel and concrete, travel is often limited to the air and the water.

The extremes of the northern climate are a fact of life here. At Winisk, near Hudson Bay, mean daily temperatures in July reach only 12 to 15°C, while in January mean temperatures dip to -25°C.

The land is one of Ontario's great resources. Many natural and wilderness areas throughout the province are protected through a network of 220 provincial parks. The oldest of these is Algonquin Park, established in 1893, with 7 600 km² of land offering 1 600 km of lake and river canoe routes.

The Lowlands include the Windsor-Lake Simcoe-Thousand Islands triangle and the St. Lawrence-Ottawa

Valley region. By Canadian standards, the climate is temperate. Winter weather is more severe and stormy to the east of the Great Lakes, milder in their lee to the west. Mean annual summer temperatures reach 22°C in the Lowlands' more southerly areas.

The temperate climate and fertile soils of southern Ontario nurture a major agricultural industry. This small area lays claim to just over 50 per cent of Canada's most productive farmland. Overall, Ontario's farmers produce half the nation's food on one-fifth of Canada's total available farmland.

One in two Ontarians lives in or around the cities and towns of the "golden horseshoe." This area, wrapped around the western end of Lake Ontario from Niagara Falls through Metropolitan Toronto to Oshawa, is a semi-circle of Canada's most valuable agricultural and commercial real estate.

Toronto, Ontario's capital and Canada's largest city, with a regional population approaching four million, is a thriving multicultural metropolis