

QUEBEC

Quebec, Canada's largest province, is a land of fascinating contrasts. It is the principal French-language enclave in North America, preserving its linguistic and cultural identity, despite the predominance of the English language around it.

Resolutely North American, Quebec is rooted in a past that is both French and Anglo-Saxon. While its main social, legal and community institutions are the fruit of the French regime (for example, its legal system is governed by the Civil Code rather than English Common Law), Quebec owes most of its political institutions as well as its democratic tradition to England. European settlement began a mere 450 years ago. Today, Quebec is a modern, dynamic society — but one that is also steeped in history and tradition.

Geography

Bordered by the provinces of Ontario, New Brunswick and Newfoundland, and by the American states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York, Quebec occupies 1 540 680 km² — an area three times the size of France and seven times that of Great Britain. The province is almost entirely surrounded by water: by the Hudson Strait to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the St. Lawrence River and Gulf to the south, and James Bay to the west.

Its most important geographic feature, the St. Lawrence River, allows navigation from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes. The Quebec landscape is dotted with more than a million lakes and streams. Its forests cover a surface equal to the combined areas of Norway and Sweden.

The Canadian Shield, the world's oldest rock formation (Precambrian), covers about 60 per cent of Quebec's landmass and runs from the St. Lawrence Plain to the Hudson Strait, more than 2 000 km north of Montreal. On Quebec's southern border lie the foothills of the Appalachians, which separate the province from the United States.



Montreal

Village of Trois Pistoles



Quebec City
Winter Carnival

Almost 80 per cent of Quebecers live in urban areas, most of which are located along the St. Lawrence River. Montreal is the province's largest city, with over one million inhabitants. Quebec, the provincial capital, is the third-largest city (after Laval) and has a population of more than 160 000.

People

A majority of Quebecers (roughly 5.1 million) claim French origin. Quebecers of British origin (about 488 000) form the next largest group. About 82 000 Amerindians (Mohawk, Cree, Montagnais, Algonkian, Attikamek, Micmac, Huron, Abenaki and Naskapi) and Inuit also live in Quebec.

Since the end of World War II, more than 500 000 immigrants from more than 80 countries have made Quebec (particularly Montreal) their

home. Eastern Europeans and Italians were traditionally the most important ethnic groups. Since 1960, they have been joined by Portuguese, Haitians and Southeast Asians.

A vast majority of Quebecers (81.9 per cent) cite French as their mother tongue. About 16 per cent of the population is English-speaking.

History

The early recorded history of Quebec, where French explorer Jacques Cartier landed in 1534, is characterized by the establishment of a thriving fur trade, relatively friendly relations with local Indian bands and a continuous rivalry between French settlers and the English colonies.

British colonization in Quebec occurred after a British expeditionary force took Quebec City in 1759. It was not until the Quebec Act of 1774 that