

Ontario, the most populous of Canada's ten provinces – 8.6 million people out of the country's 24 million – is the second largest in size, covering more than a million square kilometres. Although it is larger in area than France and Spain combined, 90 per cent of Ontario's population lives in the southern 14 per cent of the province's land surface.

Economically, Ontario is the industrial heart of the country, producing nearly half of Canada's manufactured goods, 37 per cent of its total exports and 68 per cent of its fully manufactured exports. It accounts for 38 per cent of Canada's gross national product and its consumers control 37 per cent of the country's spending power.

Transportation links include complex road and rail networks and the St. Lawrence Seaway, by which ocean-going ships have access not only to industry but to the interior of North America *via* the Great Lakes. The waterways have been vital in the development of Ontario's rich resources, particularly minerals and forests.

The province possesses great cultural diversity in its many prosperous cities, as well as great natural beauty throughout – farmland, lake country and seemingly unlimited wilderness.

### *Geography and climate*

The Great Lakes are the most visible result of the ice age in Ontario and the biggest, Lake Superior, is the world's largest body of fresh water. All but one of the Great Lakes border Ontario and the province has a freshwater shore nearly 4 000 kilometres long. There are also 1 000 kilometres of saltwater coastline along Hudson Bay.

Excluding the Great Lakes, nearly one-fifth of Ontario's surface is water. Most of the rest is covered by deciduous hardwood forests in the south and by immense expanses of coniferous softwoods in the north. The Rainy River/Dryden area in northern Ontario is rich in timber resources and the waterways are used to transport pulpwood to nearby mills.

There are three main physical regions in Ontario – the Hudson Bay Lowlands, the Canadian Shield and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands.

The Hudson Bay Lowlands are narrow coastal plains bordering Hudson Bay and James Bay. The land is wet and boggy and covered by scrub growth. The Canadian Shield, a vast rocky plateau covering the rest of northern Ontario, extends into the southern part of the province. Some of the oldest land on earth is found here. Although the soil is fine and not well suited for large-scale farming, there is a wealth of minerals, forests and water power.