

- According to the 1996 Census, Canada has 13 300 painters and sculptors, 35 310 graphic artists, 24 610 interior and product designers, 11 000 architects 11 515 professional photographers, 8385 dancers and actors, 27 020 musicians, singers, composers, arrangers and conductors, 15 900 producers, directors, and choreographers, and 18 685 artisans and craftspeople.
- In 1997/98, over 114 million visitors were welcomed to more than 2500 not-for-profit heritage institutions in Canada, including nature parks (60 million) and museums and galleries (54 million).

From our earliest days, Canadian leaders have recognized that the arts are vital to our social well-being. Aboriginal peoples have kept their traditions and customs alive and meaningful through oral history, storytelling, music, dance and other arts. The first settlers brought their diversions with them, and used them to keep their minds active and creative during the difficult years of founding their communities. The arts have been nurtured and developed here in ways that reflect life in Canada. New expressions of talent have marked each new development in our history. Our multicultural background has also had its impact on the arts, melding and creating a truly original voice.

Canada has a rich tradition of various annual festivals and special arts events. Thousands of visitors attend the Sunshine Coast Festival of the Written Arts, while over a million flock to the Montreal International Jazz Festival. The events allow visitors to sample the work of artists from all regions of the country. More than 150 international or interprovincial festivals are held in Canada annually.

More than 50 years ago, in Stratford, Ontario, professional theatre in Canada received a major boost with the founding of the Stratford Festival and the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in Montreal. Since then, Toronto has become the world's third-largest centre for English-language, hard on the heels of New York and London. Meanwhile, other theatre companies have sprung up across the country.

Canada offers visitors an excellent transportation, tourism and communications infrastructure. With so much to choose from, where should you start? The Attractions Canada Web site (www.attractionscanada.ca) lets visitors begin by exploring Canada on-line. Each year, it holds a competition to identify Canada's top seven tourist destinations. In 2000, these were the winners:

- The Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre stands within a 36-square-kilometre wildlife management area in Manitoba. It provides a host of indoor and outdoor activities for visitors to enjoy.