

Quebec Woos the Foreign Investor



Quebec is not only an excellent place for the visitor, but it is also an ideal investment location. A large number of British companies – ICI, Rolls-Royce and Tioxide among them – have long recognised the province's potential and set up major subsidiaries there.

What makes Quebec so attractive? For one thing, its booming economy. For the last eight years Quebec's GDP has grown more quickly than that of most of the OECD member countries. For another, it is rich in natural resources; and it boasts a well educated and stable workforce.

Furthermore, the province's location is strategic, with 90 million consumers in Canada and the United States living within a 600-mile radius of Montreal.

The United States is in fact, an important customer for Quebec; it accounts for more than 75 percent of the province's exports. This is one of the reasons Quebec has strongly supported the Free Trade Agreement that Canada has signed with its neighbour to the south. 'Both countries will benefit from the agreement, and in a number of areas will set an example for other countries, especially with respect to ongoing multilateral trade talks,' says a recent Quebec government report.

Strong commitment to high technology

Quebec is a technological powerhouse with a strong commitment to high-tech industries – notably the manufacture of transportation equipment, electrical and electronic products, data processing and telecommunications equipment, paper and paper products, chemicals and pharmaceuticals.

Research and development is particularly strong.

The private sector carries out some 60 percent of the province's R&D. Spar Aerospace, for instance, has developed telecommunications and surveillance satellites; Matrox has developed a new video-disc system; while Merck Frosst is spending about £60 million on developing new products aimed at treating respiratory, inflammatory and skin diseases.

In the public sector, one of the best known institutions is the Biotechnology Research Unit in Montreal; it employs some 200 scientists and technicians working on research into biochemical and genetic engineering as well as protein and molecular immunology engineering.

The St Hyacinthe Food Research Centre is also important; and so, too, is the Canadian Workplace Automation Research Centre in Laval, and of course the Industrial Research Centre, with major facilities in Quebec City and Montreal.

High-level research is also carried out at Quebec's seven universities. The University of Sherbrooke, for instance, is conducting a research programme on safer use of asbestos; Laval University is doing applied research into computer image processing, metrology and laser operations; while the University of Quebec is looking into new technologies for the recycling of paper.

Good continental and overseas links

The province is also an important transportation centre. A key link is the St Lawrence River and the Seaway system, which enables ocean-going ships to travel some 1400 miles inland, and which serves an area larger than Western Europe. The province has more than ten ports open all the year round, of which Montreal is the most important.

Montreal is in fact, Canada's largest container port, with six modern terminals that handle half a million containers a year. Fifty shipping lines call there, linking the port with 200 other ports on all five continents. Transit times (including loading and unloading) are kept to a minimum: containers bound for Western Europe normally reach their destination in about two weeks.

Transporting goods from the port into the hinterland is also well organised. Montreal is Eastern Canada's main railway centre, with a rail network that links the city to all other major Canadian and American cities. It is also headquarters for CN Rail, CP Rail and VIA Rail Canada.

The road system is also excellent, allowing the trucking industry to deliver goods inside a 500-mile radius within 24 hours. Boston is six hours from Montreal by road, New York eight hours away, and Chicago 15 hours away.

In addition, Quebec has very good international air links. Mirabel airport in Montreal is closer to Europe than any other major airport on the North American continent. Some 50 major airlines call there, and it is the only airport in North America that offers unrestricted trans-shipment services for cargo carried on chartered or scheduled flights.

Cheap and abundant energy supplies

For industrial concerns, one of the province's key attractions is its abundance of energy. Quebec's level of energy self-sufficiency is around 75 percent – higher than that of most developed countries.

About 40 percent of Quebec's energy needs are provided by electricity, in which the province is completely self-sufficient. Electricity production has more than doubled in the past 15 years, with

1 General Motors 'Classic' bus manufactured in the suburbs of Montreal

2 Pratt & Whitney Canada is the world's leader in the design and manufacture of general aviation and regional transportation turbines

3 With sales of £750 million the Quebec aeronautics industry employs about 20 000 people

4 Quebec also makes its mark in a number of high-tech sectors

