

Canada

Country name	Canada
State title	Canada
Name of citizen	Canadian
Nationally official languages	English [<i>eng</i>]; French [<i>fra</i>] ¹
Writing systems	Roman script (and Syllabics – see below)
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	CA/CAN
Capital	Ottawa
Area / Population	9,984,670 sq km / 38,794,813 (2024 est.) ²

Introduction

Canada is the second-largest country in the world by total area, occupying the northern portion of North America. It is bordered by the United States to the south, the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and the Arctic Ocean to the north. Canada's diverse geography includes forests, prairie plains, mountain ranges and over two million lakes — more than any other country. It also has the longest coastline in the world.

Canada is a federal parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy, with the British monarch as Head of State. It was inhabited for millennia by Indigenous peoples with diverse cultures and languages. European exploration and colonisation began in the late 15th century, with both French and British settlements shaping early governance. Today, Canada is a bilingual nation (English and French) at the federal level, and maintains a policy of multiculturalism.

Geographical names policy

For HMG use, geographical names should be taken from Canadian official sources. The national names authority is the [Geographical Names Board of Canada](#) (GNBC) (which sits within Natural Resources Canada) and this body maintains the [Canadian Geographical Names Database](#) (CGNDB). The use of the CGNDB and its map application are recommended to establish the approved names of Canada.

It should be noted that Canada is officially bilingual, and this translates to its toponymy at least for federal purposes. The GNBC maintains a list of features (currently 75) of 'pan-Canadian significance', which are approved in English and French for use on federal maps and in federal documents; for

¹ ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

² <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/canada/>

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example, St. Lawrence River/Fleuve Saint-Laurent and Niagara Falls/Chutes Niagara. The full list is available here: [Geographical Names of pan-Canadian significance - Natural Resources Canada](#), and on federal maps both names will be shown. However, for simplicity, PCGN recommends that the English name of these features be shown alone for HMG products.

Beyond these 75 features, the usual approach to toponymy in Canada is that one name form is official, as described in Canada's report to the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names in 2019: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/1st-session/GEGN.2_2019_75_CRP.75_Canada_a_bilingual_country_as_reflected_in_its_toponymy_FINAL.pdf

Beyond French and English, there are significant ongoing efforts to restore traditional names to reflect Indigenous cultures, and the GNBC's Indigenous place names database is a growing resource. It currently contains over 20,000 Indigenous names, drawn from over 60 different Indigenous languages. These names can be shown alongside the official English or French name, though given the general approach to showing one name (described above), it is more usual that on the restoration of the Indigenous name, this becomes the official name replacing English or French, for instance, the Inuktitut [*ike*] name Iqaluit replacing Frobisher Bay (in 1987). See more at: [Indigenous Geographical Names Data - Natural Resources Canada](#)

Recent quarterly amendments approved by the GNBC to the official database are predominantly respellings of Indigenous names to reflect the relevant language's orthography, for instance Kahkeeky in British Colombia becoming q̓aḡeyḡay³ in May 2025.

The linguistic complexity of the names policy in Canada⁴ means that it is recommended simply to follow the forms used in the GNBC's products, such as the national and provincial maps available here: [Reference maps - Natural Resources Canada](#).

³ Reflecting the agreed orthography for the ᑭᐱᑭᑦᑭᐱᑭ (Comox) [coo] language.

⁴ For instance, New Brunswick is officially bilingual, so the single official name can be either French or English (though the alternate language form is always available for the language of the relevant community). PCGN recommends following the form given in GNBC sources – e.g. Vallée-des-Rivières or nearby town Grand Falls.

Languages and writing systems

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Inventory of Characters (and their Unicode encodings)⁷

French contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
À	00C0	à	00E0
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Ë	00CB	ë	00EB
Î	00CE	î	00EE
Ï	00CF	ï	00EF
Ô	00D4	ô	00F4
Œ	0152	œ	0153
Û	00D9	û	00F9
Û	00DB	û	00FB
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
ÿ ⁸	0178	ÿ ⁸	00FF

The characters and diacritical marks used in Indigenous languages cannot reasonably be tabulated in a single location as they are very numerous (being used, as noted above, for over 60 languages, and include diacritical marks, e.g. /t/, IPA characters, e.g. /ʔ/ and numerals, e.g. /7/). The names are all listed in GNBC sources, and PCGN recommends they be taken from/verified with these official sources, which are Unicode encoded and thus universally transferable.

Additionally, the syllabaries described above are encoded with Unicode code points, available in the [Unified Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics](#) block.

⁷ See www.unicode.org.

⁸ rarely encountered

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Map of Canada



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

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Administrative structure

Canada consists of ten provinces and three territories, each having varying degrees of legislative autonomy. As described above, both English and French names are official in Canada, but PCGN recommends the sole use of English-language names for the first-order administrative divisions for HMG purposes.

Division Type	English Name	French Name	ISO 3166-2 Code	Administrative centre ⁹	Location of administrative centre
Province	Alberta	Alberta	CA-AB	Edmonton	53°32'47"N 113°29'22"W
Province	British Columbia	Colombie-Britannique	CA-BC	Victoria	48°25'41"N 123°21'52"W
Province	Manitoba	Manitoba	CA-MB	Winnipeg	49°53'09"N 97°08'52"W
Province	New Brunswick	Nouveau-Brunswick	CA-NB	Fredericton	45°57'50"N 66°38'36"W
Province	Newfoundland and Labrador	Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador	CA-NL	St. John's	47°33'39"N 52°42'44"W
Province	Nova Scotia	Nouvelle-Écosse	CA-NS	Halifax	44°38'58"N 63°35'06"W
Territory	Northwest Territories	Territoires du Nord-Ouest	CA-NT	Yellowknife	62°27'16"N 114°22'38"W
Territory	Nunavut	Nunavut	CA-NU	Iqaluit ¹⁰	63°45'00"N 68°31'47"W
Province	Ontario	Ontario	CA-ON	Toronto	43°39'11"N 79°22'58"W
Province	Prince Edward Island	Île-du-Prince-Édouard	CA-PE	Charlottetown	46°14'07"N 63°07'36"W
Province	Quebec	Québec	CA-QC	Québec	46°48'50"N 71°12'27"W
Province	Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan	CA-SK	Regina	50°26'50"N 104°36'44"W
Territory	Yukon	Yukon	CA-YT	Whitehorse	60°43'00"N 135°03'00"W

⁹ As described in the policy section above, there is a single language form recommended for each of the administrative centre names.

¹⁰ This Inuktitut name was restored in 1987, replacing Frobisher Bay. The Inuktitut syllabics are also official and can be added if desired: ᐃᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕ

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Other Significant Locations

PCGN recommended name	Location	Feature Type
Great Bear Lake	65°50'01"N 120°45'06"W	Lake
Great Slave Lake	61°30'01"N 114°00'04"W	Lake
Lake Athabasca	59°22'01"N 108°00'04"W	Lake
Lake Erie	42°19'36"N 81°10'36"W	Lake
Lake Huron	44°56'39"N 82°13'22"W	Lake
Lake Ontario	43°43'44"N 78°06'23"W	Lake
Lake Superior	48°02'26"N 86°40'41"W	Lake
Lake Winnipeg	52°07'55"N 97°15'40"W	Lake
Mount Logan	60°34'02"N 140°24'19"W	Mountain (5,959m, Canada's high point)
Reindeer Lake	57°37'25"N 102°00'15"W	Lake
Rocky Mountains	43°44'28"N 110°48'07"W	Mountain range
St. Lawrence river	49°30'00"N 64°30'00"W	River (US/Canada)
Yukon River	64°40'57"N 141°00'00" W	River

Useful references

- BBC Country Profile (*no longer updated*): [Canada country profile - BBC News](#)
- Canada's submission to the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names explaining policy: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/1st-session/GEGN.2_2019_75_CRP.75_Canada_a_bilingual_country_as_reflected_in_its_toponymy_FINAL.pdf
- CIA World Factbook: [Canada - The World Factbook](#)
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- FCDO Geographical Names Index (GNI): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geographical-names-and-information>
- Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC): [Geographical Names Board of Canada - Natural Resources Canada](#)
- GNBC database: [Canadian Geographical Names Database](#)
- GNBC list of features of pan-Canadian significance: [Geographical Names of pan-Canadian significance - Natural Resources Canada](#)

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- GNBC Indigenous Names: [Indigenous Geographical Names Data - Natural Resources Canada](#)
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP) entry for Canada: <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:code:3166:CA>
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- PCGN Table of Correspondences between Roman script and Inuktitut syllabics: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ae32690ed915d42f42b5ef2/TABLE_OF_CORRESPONDENCES_FOR_INUKTITUT.pdf
- Unicode: www.unicode.org, including the [Unified Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics](#)
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: [GNS Search & Download WebApp \(nga.mil\)](#)

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