



# Understand Canada

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Oil and the Conservative Party's rise spark political debate, while rock bands and thoughtful filmmakers provide a cultural view.

## **HISTORY ..... 827**

From Viking settlements to the Klondike gold rush, Confederation to Nunavut's formation, browse through Canada's defining moments.

## **OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES ..... 838**

Skiing, snowboarding, hiking, kayaking, cycling, fishing, surfing – we've got the nation's top activities and hot spots covered.

## **ABORIGINAL CULTURES ..... 845**

Learn more about the First Nations, Métis and Inuit people through their history, arts, media and tourism ventures.

## **WINE REGIONS..... 851**

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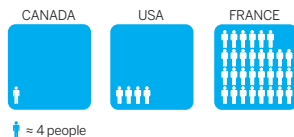
We give Canada's distinctive seafood, ethnic fare and off-the-vine fruits and veggies their due.

## **WILDLIFE..... 861**

How fast do moose run? How fierce are polar bears? Where to see the world's biggest whales? Get the answers here.



## population per sq km



# Canada Today

## Loonie Boons

The Canadian economy kicked butt from 1993 to 2007. That's the year the Loonie reached parity with the greenback for the first time in three decades. Oil and natural gas were the reasons. But like many countries, the GFC brought things to a halt. The economy fell into recession, and Ottawa posted its first fiscal deficit in 2009 after 12 years of surplus.

And then: Canadian banks bounced back, thanks to their tradition of conservative lending. Even with a pesky deficit, Canada is doing a-OK compared to its global brethren. The International Monetary Fund predicts it'll be the only one of the seven major industrialized democracies to return to surplus by 2015.

## The High Price of Oil

Voltaire may have written off Canada as 'a few acres of snow' back in the mid-18th century, but those 'few acres' have yielded vast amounts of oil, timber and other natural resources, that in turn have propelled Canada to a very enviable standard of living.

The only issue: extracting and developing the resources comes with an ecological price, and Canadians debate what to do about it. Oil is a conundrum. Northern Alberta's Athabasca Tar Sands are the world's second-biggest oil reserves, and they've done a big job boosting the economy. They also produce 5% of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions, according to Environment Canada. Environmentalists say the sands are massive polluters. The pro-industry camp says improvements are being made and, when compared to other oil producers such as Saudi

## Top Culture Resources

» **Canadian Broadcasting Corporation** (CBC; [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca)) The country's main purveyor of news and cultural programming via TV and radio.

» **Polaris Music Prize** ([www.polarismusicprize.ca](http://www.polarismusicprize.ca)) Fetes the best Canadian music-maker (based on merit); the website provides links to uber-cool album downloads.

» **Juno Awards** ([www.junoawards.ca](http://www.junoawards.ca)) Honors the best Canadian music-makers (based on sales); a good indicator of who's currently popular.