

Canada's local charms

International students in Canada enjoy participating in local events and experiencing new customs, as BETHAN NORRIS finds out.

Canada is the second-largest country in the world, after the Russian Federation, and international students are often taken by surprise at the abundance of space and open countryside which is taken for granted by the local Canadian people.

“[International students] don’t understand that Canada itself has many unpopulated areas,” says Diane Desrosiers, Language Coordinator at the Grande Prairie Regional College in Alberta. “They often don’t understand that the skies are truly blue and the night skies are filled with stars.”

According to Desrosiers, students who study in Grande Prairie in northern Alberta are given the chance to experience “a real taste of the essence of living in Canada”. She explains, “The pace of living is slower and friendlier. [The city] is located in

a rather isolated area so upon leaving the outskirts you are immediately in a countryside setting, with farms and forests.”

The easy accessibility of the natural environment to students studying in even the largest of Canada’s cities provides many opportunities for them to take part in a variety outdoor activities.

Language schools throughout Canada, such as the Canadian College of English Language in Vancouver, are keen for their students to make the most of the surrounding environment. Dale Lockhart, Director of the college, explains that from the city, “[Students can go] whale watching, skiing and snowboarding, horseback

riding, rafting, dog [sledging], ocean kayaking, wine tasting and [we also arrange] trips to the Rocky Mountains and the Northwest Territories for the Aurora Borealis [Northern Lights].”

Vancouver is situated between the Pacific Ocean and the Rocky Mountains and, according to Haruko Pomerleau, at LaSalle College International in Vancouver, has “some of the most spectacular scenery in the world”. The city’s temperate climate as well as its surrounding natural features mean that students studying there can spend their free-time in a variety of different ways. Pomerleau draws attention to the fact that,



The province of Nunavut
Established in 1999, Nunavut is Canada's newest province and home to a large Inuit population. The Inuits – meaning “the people” in their native language – are indigenous to Canada

Agent viewpoint



“I tell [students] to expect friendliness and helpfulness in a multicultural community. Many want to do winter sports such as snowboarding, or to go

to a ranch for horseback riding. Most clients are very satisfied [with their stay in Canada]. They appreciate the quality of instruction in the schools there, as well as the friendly, informal atmosphere. The only difficulty is normally before they depart for Canada, or indeed register. The

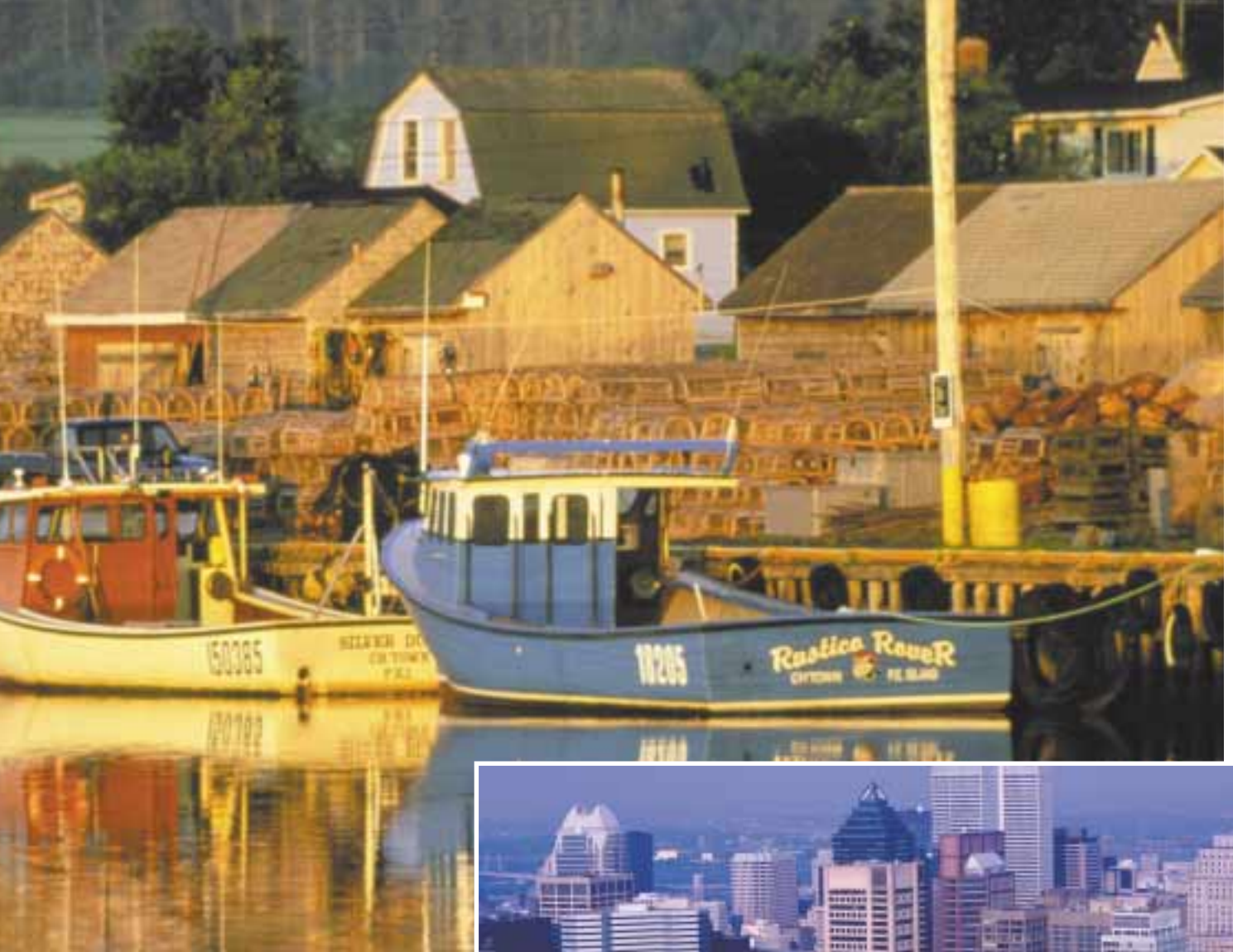
Swiss are great planners and many ask for exact information long before the Canadians have even begun to think about what they are going to be offering so far in the future.”

Mary McKay Vilén, Canada Live, Switzerland



“Canada is a very hospitable country. It is a country of immigrants [and] has a tradition of stimulating multicultural diversity. Almost all ethnic groups are

represented in Canada and as a result it has almost all kinds of cooking styles from all over the world and a great variety of leisure activities associated with specific cultures. [Canada] is [also] a safe place to study with a beautiful natural environment, from mountains to lakes and the beautiful coast. If they are smart, students can take [advantage of] a bilingual nation which can offer them the possibility to come back to Brazil with perfect English and French. Canada is considered



Prince Edward Island (above) is the smallest of Canada's provinces while Montreal (right), situated in Quebec, is the second largest city in Canada



"[Vancouver] and its surrounding area offers some of the world's best skiing, as well as various water activities which can be enjoyed at any time of the year".

The famous ski resort of Whistler lies near Vancouver and students can go on day or weekend trips year-round to one of Canada's largest ski resorts. Blackcomb Mountain has the largest downhill ski area in North America, with 1,600 metres of continuous skiing and a glacier that provides the only summer skiing in Canada.

Students studying in Vancouver are also well placed to take part in one activity right on their doorstep, as Lockhart points out.

"Vancouver and Vancouver Island offer some of the top scuba diving spots in North America, including Campbell River, which was rated as one of the top diving spots in the world by Jacques Cousteau," he says.

For students keen to brush up on their cultural knowledge, the Centre for Second Language Instruction at the University of

Saskatchewan in Saskatoon offers students the opportunity to learn about the indigenous culture of Canada through local excursions to aboriginal heritage sites. The local Wanuskewin Heritage Park contains a 6,000-year-old "buffalo jump" where Native Indians used to herd buffalo off the edge of a cliff whilst hunting for food.

The park was originally the hunting and occasional wintering ground of a number of Indian tribes of the northern plains. Today, the park hosts displays, special events and activities heavily influenced by the Cree culture, which is the most prevalent in the region, and also represents other First Nations, such as the Saulteaux, Lakotah, Nakoda and Dene.

by the United Nations to be the best country to live in and this is due to the quality of life, security, low rates of violence and good health system."

Luciane Stallivieri, International Relations Department, University of Caxias do Sul, Brazil



"For Mexicans, Canada is a well known country. [It is] a place with friendly people, a safe environment, beautiful sightseeing and also there is an economical advantage

[for Mexican students to study there]. Students are pretty happy with their trip and look forward to going back someday. Many of the students stay in a homestay. I always mention to students that Canadian families love to welcome Mexican students into their home and the relationship will be as warm and close as the students wish. The families open their arms for long-term friendship."

Myriam Gonzalez de Pérez, ESL Representative, Mexico

Organised trips give students the chance to experience some of the area's other natural attractions. "[Students] are always surprised by the untouched natural prairie landscape with spectacular skies and sunsets – [Saskatchewan] is known as the 'land of the living skies'," says David Parkinson, Director of the language centre.

However, the centre also recognises the importance of students integrating with local people and participating in local events in

order for them to gain a true insight into Canadian life. Parkinson says, "Saskatoon is an environment that thrives on volunteerism and community involvement. Students become a part of this and benefit from it.

Students are placed as volunteers in community events such as the Fringe Theatre Festival and Folk Music Festival. The school team [also] participates in the local dragon boat race."

In Regina, the capital of Saskatchewan, Livia Castellanos, Marketing Officer at the Language Institute at the University of Regina, agrees that there are plenty of activities for students to take part in. "Regina is well known for its socio-cultural, commercial and sporting events, such as the dragon boat races, lanterns on the lake and Buffalo Days," she says. Buffalo Days is an annual exhibition which features parades, fireworks, fair rides and competitions, well attended by locals and tourists alike.

In Canada's eastern province of Quebec, students staying at certain times of the year can witness and take part in another local seasonal custom. Sandrine Chantre, Coordinator of LaSalle College International in Montreal, says that the school organises a "sugaring-off party in the spring". Sugaring-off is a tradition which dates back centuries to when the native Indians first taught early settlers how to turn

the sap from the many maple trees in the area into maple syrup. In March and April every year, the many local syrup producers in Quebec start to drain the sap out of the maple trees and then boil it until it becomes a thick syrup. Visitors can

sample a hot "maple taffy" where the syrup is poured onto fresh snow and scooped up with wooden sticks.

Montreal also offers typical city pursuits, as the second-largest city in Canada. Its French and English populations mean that it is one of the largest bilingual cities in the world, and students studying there can experience at first-hand the dual nature of Canada's rich heritage. "With its French and

British roots, [Montreal] attracts tourists and newcomers from all over the globe," says Chantre. "The result is a cultural life unparalleled in its variety and vibrancy."

Kelly Lynn, Programme Coordinator at Geos Language Academy in Montreal agrees. "Montreal has a great European



Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Established in 1873, the "Mounties" were set up to bring law and order into Canada's developing west. They were based near Pile O'Bones Creek, which later became known as Regina

atmosphere, with great cafés, shopping and amazing summer festivals," she says. "During the summer, thousands of tourists come to the international jazz festival, fireworks festivals, the Formula One racing, as well as many other celebrations involving art, music and culture."

The city also boasts "the greatest nightlife in Canada", according to Lynn. "All our bars and

dance clubs are open until 3am and there are a few open all night. Dancing and spending time in outdoor cafés or enjoying the outdoor concerts and weekly fireworks are how most young people spend their evenings."

In Toronto, there is a similarly lively nightlife scene, according to Barry Beale at the Canadian Language Academy. "There are a number of culturally distinct nightclubs in Toronto that students like to go to," he explains. "Mexican, French, Portuguese... we often find that Mexican students will get a group of students together and go to say, a Mexican nightclub, or vice versa."

The city also has many seasonal activities that students enjoy, as well as major tourist attractions such as the CN Tower. Beale says that weekend camping trips are very popular with students in summer as well as trips to the Toronto Islands, for picnics and afternoon sports, while in the winter, students like to skate and ski.

Prince Edward Island (PEI) in the eastern part of Canada offers another different experience for students staying there, and again, there are many opportunities for outside activities. "There's lots of open spaces, so students can go cycling, visit parks, go on harbour cruises, go fishing," says Patrick Davis at Study Abroad Canada, based in Charlottetown. He adds that because Charlottetown is the birthplace of confederation, there is an annual Festival of the Fathers every summer, which sees guides in period costume touring the streets and a re-enactment of the meetings that led to Canadian nationhood.

Another local highlight in the summer is the Anne of Green Gables musical, according to Davis. "Quite a lot of people come to see that," he says. "It is the longest-running musical in Canada."

"During the Olympic Games this year, we organised the foreign students to watch the men's ice hockey final at the local pub. Our foreign students held their breath before each goal, cheered after every Canadian goal and celebrated after Canada won gold. Not only did they have a great time, they felt like a Canadian for that moment"

Tong Zang, International Admissions Counsellor, LaSalle College International, Toronto



Whale watching
A number of different species of whale can be seen off the coast in British Columbia, in the St Lawrence River in Quebec and in the Atlantic Ocean off the east coast of Canada