

With beautiful scenery, lots of adventure activities, lively cities and traditional towns, Canada offers language travellers wanting to learn English or French a colourful collection of experiences, as GILLIAN EVANS finds out.

Canada is a truly diverse country. It has mountains, lakes, rivers and dense forests as well as wide-open prairies and windswept beaches. There are modern lively cities and historic towns and villages. Its people are truly multicultural and the country has two official languages, French and English. All these assets have made Canada a popular destination for those seeking an English or French language learning experience.

On a more practical level, there are other advantages of choosing to study in Canada. Adriana Gamboa Soto at the Vancouver English Centre (VEC) in Vancouver, British Columbia, mentions, “Costs are lower in Canada [and] it is also easier for students to obtain a visa to study in Canada.”

Other reasons for choosing Canada, according to Helen Chadwick at St Lawrence College in Kingston, Ontario, include assurances of safety and the accepting nature of Canadians.

In general, Canadians are good hosts to international students, with school sources throughout the country keen to highlight the friendliness of the people. Marilyn Livingston of ESL Wilderness Adventure in Enderby, British Columbia, says that “the whole community wel-



Whistler Village, BC
Whistler is a popular place for skiers and snowboarders in winter and hikers in the summer. Whistler Mountain was originally named London Mountain by British naval officers in the 1860s

comes and embraces all of our guests”, while Maureen Sargent, Director of the Tesl Centre at St Mary’s University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, claims, “Students love Halifax for its world-famous hospitality.”

Halifax also boasts a wide range of educational institutions – as well as a lively atmosphere. Dubbed one of the hippest cities in North America by *Harper’s Bazaar* magazine, it offers a range of programmes at its six universities, three community colleges and several private colleges and language schools. As a result, says Sargent, “Halifax is a lively student-centred city.”

Founded in 1749 as the first British settlement in Canada, Halifax’s varied architecture makes it a natural location for moviemaking, according to Sargent. “With its rich mix of old and new... and it has stood in for cities like London, Boston, Moscow and Salt Lake City in a variety of movies and TV shows,” she says.



Similarly, in Toronto, says Ian Gillanders from Access International school, “It is not unusual for residents of Toronto to see actors on the street as there are many Hollywood films made here.” But it is

not only its celluloid reputation that attracts students. Canada’s largest city, Toronto offers students a whole range of experiences. One of the city’s most famous attractions is the CN Tower, the highest building in the world, which offers spectacular views of the city from its glass floor at the top. Other attractions include numerous museums, such as the Art Gallery of Toronto and the Ontario Science Centre, and a number of different cultural features. “Toronto is home to the largest multicultural population in the world,” claims Gillanders. “Because of this, we have countless varieties of restaurants, shops and cultural celebrations to discover.”

On Canada’s west coast, Vancouver also boasts a multicultural population, which has shaped its restaurants, shops and annual festivals. Janice Kent from Canadian Business English in Vancouver says that students are often unaware of the “world class restaurants” that are located throughout the city.

Canadian collage

Kinuseo Falls, near Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia (main picture)

Agent viewpoint



"The main attraction of Canada is because it is a safe country. [In addition] the cost of living in general is 40 per cent less in comparison with

Europe. Homestays [generally offer] excellent services and people are always ready to help students as they are considered valuable tourists. Canada offers beautiful, impressive scenery with lots of open spaces and spectacular nature and wildlife. It is rated as best country in the world by the United Nations and according to the Corporate Research group in Geneva, Vancouver has been rated as one of the best cities in the

world as far as quality of life goes. Personal safety is very good due to a low crime rate. In general, the Canadian population is very cheerful, friendly, polite and courteous. [Also], food in Canada is good and very inexpensive."

Ivan Galileos, Team Galileo, Canada



"The safety of Canada is one of the strongest attractions [for our students]. The friendliness of the people, great nature, world standard English and inexpensive [cost of living] are some of the [other] points that attract Japanese students.

Vancouver is also blessed by its beautiful location between the sea and mountains, which makes it a very attractive place to stay, according to Gamboa Soto. "Vancouver is rated as one of the most liveable cities in the world and is ideal for [English language students]," she says. "The English spoken here is standard, proper and easily understood. Vancouver is clean, safe and blessed with a year-round mild climate."

There are good shopping opportunities to be found in the city. "Students love to shop on Robson Street," relates Gamboa Soto. "Just one block from VEC, this popular street boasts a variety of fashionable

"Being a multicultural port city, an amazing variety of foods is available," she says. "I always recommend that students visit Granville Island to experience this. They can

take the aquabus from downtown to Granville Island and find a wide range of seafood [as well as] free musical performances and beautiful sunsets."

Vancouver is the most popular city among our clients, followed by Toronto."

Junji Kotani, Pure Canada, Japan



"Students travelling to Canada enjoy finding new places to visit, from breathtaking landscapes in the wilderness to ancient and rich historical locations. Sightseeing around the cities and discovering ethnic communities is very popular for students. Many students choose Canada because of the possibility of the combination of studying English or French with some of the

typical outdoor activities like skiing, cycling, hiking, camping etc. Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal [are the most popular cities]. Many visitors like Montreal more than Paris. It has the largest concentration of French speaking people outside of France – ideal for learning French in an attractive surrounding – [and] offers fine restaurants, historic buildings, lively streets and sidewalk cafés."

Timo Niestedt, Sprachschulsout, Germany

"Canada is a vast and exciting country in which visitors can do it all: go to a jazz festival in Montreal, ski in Whistler, camp and hike in one of



the many provincial parks, and try a variety of food from all around the globe. All this can be enjoyed in an affordable, safe and friendly environment. Toronto is popular: the most multicultural city in the world, it is the largest city in Canada with five million inhabitants [and] has international attractions like the CN Tower and Skydome. It is only 60 minutes away from the beautiful Niagara Falls. In terms of what surprises students about Canada: they are most surprised about being able to see squirrels and raccoons in their backyards!"

Yolanda Osorno, Hola Canada, Canada

stores, cafés and restaurants. Robson Street hums with activity."

Another of Canada's livelier cities is Calgary, Alberta, set in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. According to Sean Mailey at Bow Valley College in Calgary, the city boasts "some of the best nightlife in Canada". It is also the country's fastest-growing city, with a population of over one million, and has the highest per capita income in Canada. Nevertheless, Calgary retains a certain traditional cowboy atmosphere. Each year, the city hosts the Calgary Stampede, a 10-day long rodeo and Western celebration, which attracts many visitors.

Like many cities in Canada, Calgary plays host to a number of festivals and celebrations throughout the year that involve the whole community. The most popular of these include Globalfest, which features an international firework competition over the lake at Elliston Park; Carifest, which is a Caribbean festival complete with authentic food, music and crafts; Asian heritage month; and the Scottish Highland games.

However, despite a strong tradition of celebrating the varied backgrounds of local residents, Calgary also provides visitors with the chance to have a true Canadian experience, according to Mailey. "Students and family members

who visit from Europe tell me that this is what they imagined when they pictured Canada in their minds: mountains, rolling hills, rivers, lakes, cowboys, Aboriginal peoples, skiing, skating, big modern cities with new, clean, safe, urban areas, [and] relaxed easy-going people," he says.

Offering a very unique experience of Canada is ESL Wilderness Adventure. The school is set in a working Canadian ranch, situated in the true cowboy country of the Chilcotin area, an eight-hour drive from Vancouver. "This is an [English language] experience [where] the students participate in the daily activities of ranch life," explains Livingston. This can include driving a tractor, "riding the range" to check on the cattle and harvesting the hay. "Time has stood still in this beautiful area," continues Livingston. "There are vast cattle ranches, small communities with a general store and quaint little school houses."

As well as getting the chance to see some of Canada's less seen indigenous wildlife, such as deer, moose and the occasional bear, studying in some of the country's more remote areas also allows students to experi-

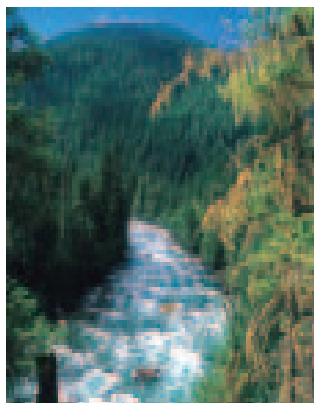
ence some of the country's simpler pleasures. "The guest ranch hugs the shores of the pristine turquoise blue Eagle Lake [where] the students enjoy the white sandy beaches and swim in the clean and clear water," relates Livingston. "The area is unique even to Canadians [and] this is a safe way to see how adventurous Canadians live. We promote a basic lifestyle such as healthy food, exercise, tranquility and lots of laughs around the kitchen table."

For another experience of rural Canada, students can choose to study at Acadia University in Wolfville, located in the agricultural region of Nova Scotia, 100 kilometres from Halifax. "Apple orchards, farmlands, and U-pick farms for strawberries, blueberries and raspberries

surround the community," says Simone Jucker at Acadia University. She maintains that by studying in a small town such as Wolfville, students automatically become "completely immersed in Canadian life".

According to Jucker, Nova Scotia is "Canada's best kept secret" and is also home to the Bay of Fundy, which experiences some of the largest tides in the world. Every day, one hundred billion tonnes of water flows in and out of the bay, creating a difference in water level of 16 metres at the head of the bay. This creates a unique ecosystem, which includes eight species of whale – many of which come to the bay to give birth – as well as large populations of seals, dolphins and porpoises.

Near Wolfville is the Grand Pre National Historical site, which marks the site of the expulsion of the local indigenous Acadians in 1755 and has become a symbol for the preservation of the Acadian people. "This 14-acre site features formal gardens, various statues and monuments, a 19th-century blacksmith shop and a stained glass window depicting the deportation," explains Jucker.



Nahatlach River, BC
Visitors are drawn to the Nahatlach River for its rapids and scenic valleys that provide ideal conditions for rafting. Rapids include the Meatgrinder, Headwall, Twisted Sister and Lose yer Lunch



"[Canada] is a safe environment for students, plus [has] many tourist attractions and a good reputation for education services. Big cities like Vancouver and Toronto [are popular with students] because there is a lot [for them] to do in their free time, many places to visit – shopping malls and nightclubs – and people from many different countries to [get to] know. Visiting mountains, lakes and beaches [are popular pastimes with students]. Students like to practise aquatic sports, rafting, camping and [go on] excursions."

Ofelia Larios, Canada Incredible, Mexico



"Koreans are well informed of the benefits of study in Canada. They know of a beautiful, spacious land with safe environments and a special standard of English accent that is highly desired to learn. Cities such as Vancouver and Toronto are very well known throughout the world for both size and population. Both of these cities are popular destinations for those wishing to travel to Canada to learn English. The increasing trend [for Koreans] seems to be to seek smaller cities so that they might be more surrounded by local colour and atmosphere and not by so many others of their own

nationality. The diversity and multiculturalism throughout Canada is a truly surprising revelation to most Korean visitors."

Jun Young Park, J&C Cultural Exchanges, Korea



"[Canada] is a highly developed, wealthy country and the cost of living index is considerably lower compared to the UK and USA. Vancouver is the most popular city – the climate is more preferable compared with other cities in Canada."

Burcin Turkan, USEH International Training and Educational Services, Turkey

Manjula Karunaratne at Immersion Baie-des-Chaleurs school, which has centres in the small towns on the Gaspé peninsula in French-speaking Quebec, says that the friendliness of the local people makes it easy for students to become immersed in local life.

"Newcomers are often accepted very quickly and students receive invitations by locals to participate in activities, visit other regions and go out quite often," she says. "There is a particular love for Latin American/South American coun-



Banff, AB
Located in the centre of Banff National Park, the town of Banff offers an ideal location from which to explore the Rocky Mountains. Popular attractions include the Banff Gondola and the hot springs

tries and people, therefore students from these countries integrate very well into our communities."

She adds that because of this attitude of the local people, "going to restaurants, post offices, pharmacies, etc. is not a stressful experience for second language students because the people are

very patient".

Owing to its location, Immersion Baie-des-Chaleurs combines French language learning with an exciting range of activities. "The main attractions here are the recrea-

tional activities available that allow us to take advantage of our location," says Karunaratne. "We offer many watersports as a part of our programme, including wakeboarding, sailing, boating, whale watching tours, fishing, etc. The ocean, lakes and rivers allow unlimited occasions to enjoy these types of sports."

The nearby Chic Choc Mountains also provide an ideal location for visitors to participate in outdoor sports such as hiking in the summer and snow sports – including snowshoeing and cross-country skiing – in the winter. "Adventure travellers can spend a week or more skiing between chalets as they cross several mountain ranges in winter," adds Karunaratne.

PHOTOGRAPHS: TOURISM BRITISH COLUMBIA