

Destination Canada – part 1

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Canada, world's second largest country with 9,970,610 square kilometers after Russia, has been a popular destination for immigrants and refugees quite sometime now. Each year Canada accepts about 200,000 new immigrants (250,386 in 2001) in different categories, mostly as skilled workers followed by refugees. Canada, with a population of 31 millions, roughly received about 10 million new immigrants in this century. More than 80 percent of the people live in cities and towns within 250 km of the United States border.

The first settlers in Canada are grouped in three major groups, First nations (Indians), Inuit (Eskimos) and Metis (descendants of English and French Fur traders married to Indian women). European explorers first came to Canada in the 15th century. The British and French were the first two major European groups to settle in Canada in large numbers. Canada was created on July 1st, 1867 when Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick joined together to become confederation.

During 18th and 19th centuries, blacks came from Africa as slaves and later when the slavery ended in Canada, the Blacks came here to escape from slavery in the United States. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries more immigrants came from Europe than other parts of the world because of advertising. When the national railways joining East and West coasts were completed it opened up interior Canada for more settlement.

Today Canada is the home to immigrants from every part of the world making it a truly diverse country. According to Canadian government majority of the immigrants last year (2001) came from China (40,296), India (27,812), Pakistan (15,339), Philippines (12,903), Korea (9,604), USA (5,894), Iran (5,736), Romania (5,585), Sri Lanka (5,514) etc. The top ten countries that also include United Kingdom, Taiwan and Yugoslavia accounted for more than 50% of total immigrants. It would also be interesting to note that about 60% of all immigrants came to Ontario, nearly 50% making Toronto their home. The other three major destinations are Montreal (13%), Vancouver (14%) and Calgary (4%). The majority of the new immigrants are English spoken (46%) as oppose to French (4.5%) and prefers English spoken regions to French spoken Quebec.

A look at a statistics on education (2001) reveals that 34% of all immigrants (principle applicants and dependants) have a bachelor degree, about 10% with a Masters degree proving how importance the Canadian government is paying to education based immigration. This is literally a blessing for educated and skilled people who are interested in emigrating, as there is no country quota.

Every year many Bangladeshi citizens make the journey to Canada as immigrants. Most of these people comes in the skilled category and are highly educated and professional personnel with good many years of experience in their respective fields. Many worked in comparatively advanced countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Saudi Arabia for years. The realization that those countries would not reward them with permanent residency and going back to Bangladesh wasn't a great choice financially and psychologically, they were left with little choice but to look for a new residence someplace different. The usual choices are USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand etc. But considering the fact that immigration to USA is not skilled based and the economic situations in some of the countries are not as promising, the main choice that is left is Canada, which is a prosperous nation with stability, diversity and democratic institutions. United Nations Human Development Report ranked Canada as the best country for 6 consecutive straight years 1995 – 2000, which is based on life expectancy (above 78 years), educational opportunities, income and other qualities of life.

The immigrants contribute heavily in Canadian economy. In 1988 they brought in \$6 billion and with their self-employment, an aptitude for savings and less consumption of public services they (average immigrant-headed household) actually, on average transfers about \$200 to the Canadian born population.

A member of G-7 countries – the richest economies in the world – Canada's per capita purchasing power is second to USA. Despite being a rich source of raw materials and well known for primary products such as wheat, oil, lumber and minerals, in recent years the majority of employment has been in the area of services industries (including community, business and personal), which now employ two-thirds of total work force.

Canada has lot to thank to neighboring USA with which it shares 8,892 kilometers of boundary, for blessing Canadian economy with good business and jobs. As a trading nation about 30% of the country's

total output of good and services (GDP) is exported – mostly to the United States, which is by far the country's biggest market. Trade in goods and services between the two countries supports more than 1.5 million (10% of total work force) jobs in Canada and directly generates 25% of Canada's gross domestic product. The USA purchases 80% of Canada's exports. It is estimated that for every \$1 billion of exports 11,000 Canadian jobs are created or sustained.

Canada is a member of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), which is a comprehensive agreement that came into effect on January 1, 1994, creating the world's largest free trade area. Article 102 of the Agreement details the objectives of NAFTA. Among its main objectives is the liberalization of trade between Canada, Mexico and the United States, stimulate economic growth and give the NAFTA countries equal access to each others markets. This has greatly benefited both Canada and Mexico while allegedly causing more than 400 thousand job losses in USA, mostly in the manufacturing areas. In the year 2001 total export from Canada to USA was 216,969 million US dollar and total import from US was only 163,724 mil, giving Canada a net trade surplus of 54 billion dollars with USA.

Canadians with skill sets in the areas of accounting, architecture, computing, engineering etc also benefit greatly by taking advantage of very convenient TN visas under NAFTA and TC visa under FTA. In particular, the migration of Canadians to the United States using the TC/TN visa has increased by approximately 3,000 to 4,000 (visas granted) per year. It is suggestive that the number of American professional workers immigrating temporarily to Canada has also increased consistently since 1989, although at a substantially slower rate than comparable migration of Canadian TC/TN visa holders.

Job market in Canada is a little unpredictable. Many immigrants with highly skilled profession go through immense trouble in finding a job in their respective areas. The current unemployment rate in Canada is about 7.5% which has gotten a little better in the past months and is much better than 9.5% in the 1997. The total employment rose to 15.6 millions today from 13.5 millions in 1997. But historically the rate of unemployment has been in average 2% more than that of USA making the other side of the border look much prospective. But unfortunately immigrants can not take advantage of TC/TN visas, as they are only offered to Canadian citizens.

Many new immigrants come to Canada without a clear understanding of the Canadian government. Many when first hear of 'Queen of Canada' get utterly surprised. It wouldn't be out of place to say a few words about the governance.

Canada is a democracy, a constitutional monarchy. The head of state is the Queen of Canada, who is also the Queen of Britain, Australia and New Zealand and a host of other countries, scattered around the world from the Bahamas and Grenada to Papua New Guinea and Tuvalu. Every act of government is done in the name of the Queen, but the authority for every act flows from the Canadian people. The Fathers of Confederation, in 1867, freely, deliberately and unanimously chose to vest the formal executive authority in the Queen, Which translates to responsible government, with a cabinet responsible to the House of Commons and the House of Commons answerable to the people. All the Queen's powers are now exercised by her representative, the Governor General (currently Honorable Adrienne Clarkson). The Governor General is appointed by the Queen on the advice of Canada's Prime Minister. In addition to granting Royal Assent to all bills passed by the House of Commons and the Senate, the Governor general reads the Speech from the Throne, which opens Parliament and, on the advice of the Prime Minister, dissolves Parliament before elections. S/he is also the Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Forces.

The Prime Minister (currently Jean Chrétien) is normally a member of the House of Commons. S/he may stay as a Prime Minister even after loosing his (her) seat in an election as long as his (her) party keeps a majority in the House of Commons. But by custom, s/he must win a seat very promptly. The Prime Minister is appointed by the Governor General. Ordinarily the appointment is automatic. If the Opposition wins more than half the seats in an election, or if the government is defeated in the House of Commons and resigns, the Governor General must call on the Leader of the Opposition to form a new government. The Prime Minister chooses the ministers and can also ask any of them to resign; if any of them refuses, the Prime Minister can advise the Governor General to remove that minister and the advice would invariably be followed. Cabinet decisions do not go by majority votes. A strong Prime minister may decide on his own on a certain matter.

* Data obtained from *Statistics Canada, U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Department of Commerce)* etc.