

MAGNIFICENT MOSAIC

At 150, Canada celebrates its rich multicultural heritage

BY ERIC LUCAS

On a chilly winter night in Vancouver, British Columbia, I sit inside a packed Dinesty Dumpling House and bite into the soft pillow of a pork soup dumpling. A burst of savory juice paints my taste buds. The morsel is a departure from the Cantonese-style Chinese cuisine North Americans are most familiar with, and it intrigues me. I ask my evening's guide, Condrea Fung, about its provenance.

"In Vancouver, we have every kind of Chinese food there is; this is northern Chinese style," explains the radio host and Hong Kong-born immigrant to Canada.

My dining trek on Vancouver's Robson Avenue demonstrates not only that visiting Canada uncovers fresh, cosmopolitan delights, it also illustrates how our northerly neighbor's very character makes this so. As Canada celebrates its 150th anniversary on July 1, it's both a great time to visit and a compelling occasion to reflect on the country's tolerant and welcoming nature.

ALL FOR ONE, EH?

Although it straddled a continent, "Canada" was simply a loose-knit collection of British colonies until nationalist impulses and outside forces—such as America's acquisition of Alaska in March 1867—led New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and what was then called Canada (Ontario and Quebec) to form an independent dominion under the Constitution Act of 1867. That action took place in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, on July 1, now Canada Day.

"There had long been American movements to annex Canada to the United States, and the British and Canadians realized they needed to protect their interests," says Lee A. Farrow, a history professor at Auburn University at Montgomery in Alabama.

Today, 10 provinces and three territories comprise this dominion of more than 36 million people and 3.9 million square miles. Three of the planet's five major oceans wash Canada's shores. It has apples, artichokes, cacti, polar bears, rattlesnakes, salmon, vineyards, walrus, whales, and zucchini. Canada's residents are crazy about hockey—and golf. The country's heritage ranges from Inuit to Athabaskan to East Indian and Hindustani, along with English, Irish, Scots, and French. The land of the maple leaf recognizes two official languages—English and French—and its citizens speak hundreds more. In 1911, it created the world's first national parks agency, and its status as the terminus of the Underground Railroad for escaping American slaves marked its long-standing dedication to fairness, freedom, and safety.

"No country in the world has more deliberately sought to be multicultural than Canada," observes famed geographer-explorer Wade Davis, who teaches cultural anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Immigration policies, a welcoming attitude toward refugees, and Canada's membership in the 52-member Commonwealth of Nations all have bolstered the country's diversity. Toronto and Vancouver lay claim to more than 90 languages among their citizens; half of Toronto's residents were born outside Canada.

In Richmond, Vancouver's southerly suburb, the "Highway to Heaven"—a 2-mile stretch of Number 5 Road—has more than 20 houses of worship representing Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh faiths. Leaders of the various temples, mosques, and churches on this thoroughfare delight in telling visitors that, among other things, their proximity enables shared parking, as official days of worship vary among the faiths.



FIRST NATIONS HERITAGE

Underpinning Canada's multicultural society are the First Nations. "We First Peoples have forgotten that we were this continent's original businesspeople," says Theo Assu, business development manager of the Haida Enterprise Corporation, a quasi-public agency whose businesses include wilderness guest lodges in Haida Gwaii, the Haida home islands off the north British Columbia coast. Long before Europeans arrived, indigenous peoples traded up and down the Pacific coast as far as Mexico and Alaska and even across the Pacific to Polynesia. "We have an important role to play now in the Canadian economy," Assu says.

Assu, like many indigenous North Americans, wears his various identities—Haida, aboriginal, Canadian—and he's proud to describe the common Canadian characteristics, such as courtesy, that make the country a global exemplar.

"This really is a place where people make a point of holding a door open for me, or picking up something I drop," Assu says. "Little kindnesses like that illustrate what it means to be Canadian. It's not an accident that this country advocates for peace and justice around the world."

Nor is it an accident that one of Canada's newest attractions, the 2014 Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), shines bright in Winnipeg, Manitoba, amid miles of prairie. This glittering postmodern facility holds 12 storytelling galleries devoted to the idea that all human beings enjoy intrinsic rights as a simple fact of existence—health and safety, for instance, and the right to play.

Israel Asper, a Winnipeg businessman of Jewish heritage, envisioned CMHR after organizing student field trips to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. He says he often wondered: *Why don't we have a similar museum in Canada?* He began a drive to create a facility devoted to the principle that, as the museum puts it, "All human beings

are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

"This is the very rare museum built around an idea," explains Maureen Fitzhenry, CMHR spokesperson. "We tell stories of oppression, but we focus more on the good news. We like to say we cover rights, not wrongs."

The museum doesn't avoid wrongs, however. For example, it addresses the Canadian government's official suppression of First Nations culture during the 19th and early 20th centuries by telling the story of the notorious residential schools where First Nations children were taught to reject their heritage.

Years ago, when I visited the Haida homeland (then called Queen Charlotte Islands), my guide was an indigenous artist who had been sent to such a school as a boy—and had been forbidden to draw, as his drawings were said to be too "native." Today he is one of the many practitioners of formline design, the powerful geometric art form depicting the Pacific Coast's land and creatures. Modern Canada's openness to its past is one of its hallmarks.

CULTURE CLUB

My trips to Canada over the past quarter century have encompassed many memorable moments.

I've caught flashing trout at wilderness lakes, paddled a cedar canoe across an ocean inlet, and peered over the edge of a buffalo jump used by native peoples for thousands of years. I've gawked at bears, eagles, whales, otters, minks, and ravens. I've had afternoon tea, British colonial style, in Victoria's famous Empress Hotel; and I've eaten campfire-

SESQUICENTENNIAL INTEL

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roasted musk ox in Alberta's remote Wood Buffalo National Park, home of North America's only indigenous bison population.

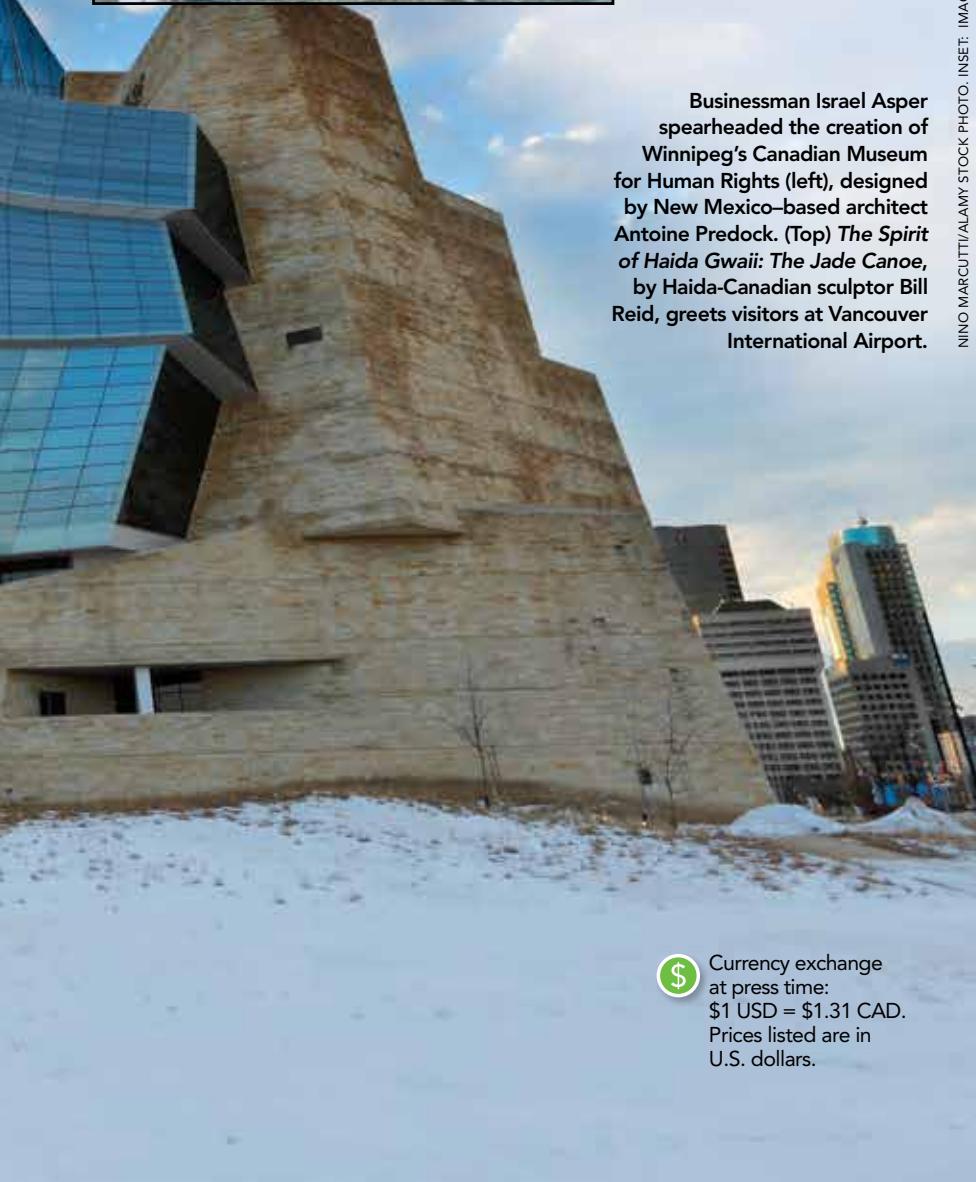
But perhaps my favorite Canadian experience remains arriving at Vancouver International Airport and stopping for a meditative moment at *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe*, Haida-Canadian Bill Reid's massive bronze that depicts the world's creatures sharing one vessel. Faces poke out from the group; there's some minor squabbling among the passengers, as Wolf snaps at Eagle and Bear keeps a

watchful eye on Raven, the trickster. Reid himself is the paddler at the back of the canoe. *Jade Canoe* is his quintessentially Canadian message to us humans—we are all on the same vessel.



Seattle-based Eric Lucas is the author of *Michelin guides to Vancouver, British Columbia; Alaska; Hawaii; and the Pacific Northwest*.

Businessman Israel Asper spearheaded the creation of Winnipeg's Canadian Museum for Human Rights (left), designed by New Mexico-based architect Antoine Predock. (Top) *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe*, by Haida-Canadian sculptor Bill Reid, greets visitors at Vancouver International Airport.



GO CANADA

Province House in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, is where delegates met in September 1864 to first discuss Canadian confederation, an idea that culminated in Canada's formation almost three years later. The building is currently closed for renovation, but Parks Canada and the Confederation Centre of the Arts have created a replica of the Confederation Chamber in the Centre's upper foyer. Visitors can tour the exhibition, called "The Story of Confederation," for free. The Confederation Players (800-565-0278; confederationcentre.com) will lead walking tours (about \$7.50 and \$11) July 1–August 26. They also present historic vignettes around Queen's Square and Province House that tell the story of Canada's birth (9:30 a.m.–5 p.m. Tuesday–Saturday; free). (902) 629-1864; discovercharlottetown.com.

Canadian Museum for Human Rights is open daily (except Mondays during winter) in Winnipeg, Manitoba. 10 a.m.–5 p.m. (Wednesdays to 9 p.m.). Admission is about \$13. (204) 289-2000; humanrights.ca.

More information about Canada is at us-keepexploring.canada.travel.

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