



The English-Speaking World



The Commonwealth

English-speaking countries can describe countries such as the UK, Ireland, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand where the majority of the population speaks English as their native language. However, it can also refer to countries such as India, Pakistan and South Africa where English is spoken widely as a second language. Generally speaking, English is spoken in Ireland, the UK, the USA and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth, established in the 20th century, is made up of 52 former British colonies (2.3 billion people) that were granted self-governance. Queen Elizabeth II is considered the head of state in 16 of these member states.

Australia



Australia is the largest country on the Australian continent (otherwise known as Oceania) and the world's sixth-largest country. The capital is Canberra but Sydney is the largest city. Much of Australia is flat, but there are some mountains of which Uluru (Ayers Rock) is the best known. Australia's climate is quite unique. It is the driest inhabited country on earth and has one of the lowest rates of rainfall in the world. About three-quarters of the country is arid or semi-arid.

Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders lived in what is now called Australia before the Europeans arrived. Different languages and cultures varied between the groups, depending on which part of the country they lived in. In 1606, European explorers learned about the existence of the huge island but it wasn't until 1770, that British Captain James Cook made a scientific voyage to the South Pacific and mapped Australia's eastern coast. He was the first to claim the country for the British. The country was used as a penal colony, meaning prisoners would be sent there. In 1788, 11 ships carrying 1500 people, mostly convicts, arrived in what is now known as Sydney Harbor. Until 1868, thousands of men and women were brought to Australia as prisoners. Tragically, the new settlers brought new illnesses and many of the indigenous people died.



In 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia was founded and New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania became sovereign states. Later in the same year, a federation united the six states under a single constitution. It now has a federal government that operates as a democratic, federal state system with Queen Elizabeth II as its monarch.

The majority of the population lives in the country's large cities such as Melbourne and Sydney. Although English is the country's official language, over 200 languages are spoken in Australia. Australia celebrates Australia Day on 26th January to remember the day the first British ships came to the country in 1788. At the end of April, the country celebrates Anzac Day to commemorate Australian soldiers that have been killed in wars.

The Australian flag is dark blue, with the British flag in the upper left-hand corner. The lower left-hand corner contains a seven-pointed star known as the Commonwealth Star. Each of the star's points represents one of the six sovereign states and the seventh point represents all of the territories. The rest of the flag is a picture of the Southern Cross constellation, which can only be seen in the southern hemisphere. It has one small star and four larger ones

Canada



Canada is the second-largest country in the world (9,984,670 sq km) and 891,163 sq km is covered with rivers and lakes, including the Great Lakes within the Canadian border. It has a population of 32.8 million people and the capital city is Ottawa. Canada also has the world's longest coastline (more than 243,000 km). Most of Canada's population lives south of the 50th parallel which also runs through Prague. Canada can be very cold but the inhabited areas are more temperate than you might expect.

Canada's history began when migrants from Asia travelled to North America. By 1600, more than 250,000 of their descendants inhabited what is now Canada. Many died when the Europeans arrived, bringing new diseases. European colonisation began after 1480 when the explorers were looking for a north-west sea passage from Europe to Asia's riches and saw Canada as an obstacle as well as potentially useful. John Cabot's voyage to Newfoundland in 1497 set the groundwork for English claims to Canada.

Canada was a British colony until Confederation in 1867 when the Dominion of Canada was born and the first Prime Minister, Sir John Alexander Macdonald, began to build the country we recognise today. Canada has a long history of rivalries between French and English settlers but the constitution was written to protect the interests of both.

Canada is a constitutional monarchy. As a Commonwealth country, Queen Elizabeth II is the reigning monarch. She is the head of state and the Governor General is her representative in Canada. He must sign all new laws before they can be passed. Canada has a party system in parliament with the majority party in government. Their party leader is the prime minister.

Canada's national holiday is the 1st July known as Canada Day. It marks the founding of the Dominion of Canada in 1867 and is celebrated with fireworks and barbecues and parades. Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday in October and is a time to give thanks for the harvest and enjoy elaborate meals of roast turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce.



Canada's National Flag was established in 1964. It has a central maple leaf emblem and is red and white, Canada's official colours. Canada's aboriginal population discovered the food properties of maple sap, which they gathered every spring. During the World Wars, the maple leaf was the dominant symbol used by Canadian soldiers.

New Zealand



New Zealand consists of two islands that are located south-east of Oceania in the South Pacific. Both islands are famous for their beautiful scenery. There are active volcanoes, caves, deep glacial lakes, amazing fjords, and long sandy beaches. The majority of the people live on the North Island, mainly for its mild climate and economic potential, since the capital city, Wellington, as well as the largest city, Auckland, are also situated here. New Zealand's largest natural lake, the Taupo, is also to be found on the North Island. On the South Island, you can find the Southern Alps, a 300-mile long mountain range. Mount Cook is the highest summit (3,754 metres) and there are more than 360 glaciers.

It is generally agreed that the first settlers in New Zealand came from Eastern Polynesia in the Central Pacific around AD 800. These were the ancestors of the Maori population. The first European to reach New Zealand was a Dutch sailor, Abel Tasman, in 1642. Nonetheless, it was the British naval officer James Cook who really explored the country. Colonists and tradesmen soon followed him to the islands. Great Britain took control of the South Island by right of discovery. The North Island also became a British colony in 1840, when the Treaty of Waitangi was signed by the Maori northern chiefs. The Maori population was guaranteed protection but a few years later war broke out between the Maori and the British. Some Maori were not willing to sell their land to them and felt deceived by the Treaty. The Maori resistance was more or less defeated by 1870. Efforts to claim independence from the UK culminated after WWII. New Zealand became independent in 1947.



New Zealand is a constitutional monarchy. Queen Elizabeth II is the formal head of state and appoints a governor-general. Legislative power resides with the single-chamber House of Representatives (Parliament), whose members are elected for three-year terms. The party that has a majority in the House forms the government, which comprises the prime minister (the leader of the winning party) and their ministers. There are two major parties – National and Labour. The current PM is Jacinda Ardern of the Labour party.

The majority of the population (about 74%) are made up of those of European descent. The Maoris form the second largest group (13.5 %). New Zealanders are known for being warm and friendly.

Since 1960, February 6 is celebrated by New Zealanders as Waitangi Day. It is an occasion for giving thanks and commemorating the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Some New Zealanders recognise Anzac Day, a public holiday held on 25th April each year. On this day, people in New Zealand pay homage to their fellow Kiwis who were killed in the two World Wars. The holiday celebrates the nation's values: comradeship, unity, courage, self-sacrifice, and loyalty.

New Zealand's flag has a navy blue background with a small Union Jack in the top-left corner. The four five-pointed red stars represent the Southern Cross star formation that is found in the Southern Hemisphere.