

## Canada – Not All Hockey and Snow

I'm mad at the Canadians. It started a few weeks ago when their men's and women's Olympic hockey teams knocked out the Americans for the second straight winter Olympics.

Their NHL Olympians appear to be better than our NHL Olympians. This could have something to do with the fact that their entire country is pretty much a sheet of ice year-round, except for a few brief moments late in July that you'll miss if you blink.

As many of you know, almost the entire country of Canada is north of the lower 48 U.S. states. It stands to reason that the warmest, southernmost regions of Canada will almost always be colder than the coldest northernmost regions of the U.S. So quit your whining.

LuAnn and I scheduled our spring skiing near Calgary this year, anticipating that the snow would be a little less slushy farther north. When we arrived last Saturday, the temperature was -13 F degrees, and the following two days had lows of -22 and highs of -14 and -4. Before factoring in wind chill.

"It's not so bad," said the hotel shuttle driver, smoking a cigarette just outside the lobby doors.

*FINE.* To preserve our extremities, the first couple of days we went sightseeing instead of skiing. We visited the Canadian Athletic Hall of Fame outside Calgary, and to my surprise it was housed in a facility larger than your average McDonalds and there were athletes featured who actually were not named Wayne Gretzky.

It turns out that many of the athletes featured there were ones I had always assumed were Americans, like Steve Nash, Bobby Orr and Bronko Nagurski. I don't think I'm alone here – most Americans are less than knowledgeable about our neighbor to the north, the U.S.'s largest trading partner and the world's second-largest country by size.

As you might guess, not all Canadians are that smart about Canada either. In a Dominion Institute survey, 47 per cent of Canadians did not know the first line of their national anthem, about one-quarter couldn't name Pierre Trudeau or Wayne Gretzky and 39 per cent couldn't identify Canada's year of Confederation (1867).

Regarding Americans' typical misconceptions, not all Canadians constantly say "eh" and "aboot"; their capitol is Ottawa – not Toronto or Quebec; the Mounties only wear red on ceremonial occasions and their national sport isn't hockey, it's lacrosse. Civilization does extend this far north; you could wake up one morning in Calgary and swear you were in Minneapolis, if it weren't for the Canadian flags flying everywhere.

I arrogantly assumed I could spend my U.S. dollars anywhere, but they become less accepted as you get farther away from our common border. We ended up having an ATM spit out some new Canadian 20-dollar bills, which are now printed on a clear polymer plastic (cool!). The value of the Canadian dollar is within shouting distance of the U.S. dollar, so we didn't have to worry about accidentally paying \$50 for a Pepsi.

At least they drive on the right side of the road, although they insist on using something called "kilometers." There's not even a secondary MPH indicator dial in their rental cars. But it IS fun going 110 something-or-other-per-hour on their highways. Don't ask me about "centigrade" – I can't figure out how fast I'm driving, let alone how cold I am.

Even though over two-thirds of Canadians can't speak French, absolutely everything is dual-labeled. I almost couldn't find my favorite Oatmeal Crisp breakfast cereal at the supermarket (yes, they have those!) because the French translation side of the box – "Avoine Croquante" - was facing out.

You know, I guess I'm not really mad at Canadians after all - they're actually a lot like us. If you haven't visited Canada yet, why not wait until summer then see what it's all about, eh?

*Writers Group Member Dave Parsons would consider Canadians Justin Bieber, Ryan Gosling, William Shatner and Rachel McAdams to be among his closest friends, but he hasn't actually met any of them yet.*