

# Experiencing the open road



Beautiful scenery and little traffic help to make driving in Canada a mostly enjoyable experience

Over the past few issues of *Emigrate Canada* we've looked at such road-based issues as the types of cars people drive in Canada, how much they pay for them, and why it's almost essential to own one in the land of the maple leaf, writes **David Fuller**.

But while you may now know that Canucks drive on the 'wrong' side of the road and that the roads or 'highways' over there tend to be much wider and the cars bigger than in the UK, you may still be wondering what it is like to actually drive in the country.

Well, if the British immigrants we've spoken to our anything to go by, the answer would appear to be better than it is in Britain.

"Our experience of driving in Canada has been positive on the whole," says Hillary Stokes. "There's so much less traffic here, at least around Northern Ontario where we live. We commute twice the distance to work we did in England, but the journey time is the same."

Darren Hobden, who lives in British Columbia, has also noticed that the roads in Canada are a lot quieter than in Britain. "We have found that there are not many traffic queues on Vancouver Island and they are nothing like the queues on the M25 'car park'," he says. "We had been here around five months and were coming back from a day out in Victoria one Bank Holiday evening when we sat in a queue. After a couple of minutes we both realised that this was the first queue we had been in since we moved here. "In England we would have done this every day, twice a day in rush hours."

Okay, so you can probably expect not to have to face so much traffic once you hit the road in Canada – although in the larger cities traffic will obviously be slightly more prevalent – but what about safety? After all, with the adverse weather conditions that Canada endures you would expect to encounter at least some problems when driving in the country.

"No, Canada's not really a dangerous country to drive in, no more so than the UK, anyway," states Joanna Lilley, who lives in the Yukon territory where driving conditions are likely to be about as treacherous as they can get. "We have only had one incident so far, where we nearly hit a dog that was in the middle of the highway during a snow storm. We swerved and thankfully missed the dog but only just avoided veering right off the road and rolling."

"There are things you can do to help you deal with the winter conditions, however, such as get snow tyres fitted," adds Joanna.

Not that this is to say your safety on the roads in Canada will only be down to you. "Canada has its fair share of bad drivers – we've seen plenty of crazy overtaking manoeuvres since we've been here," says Hillary.

In fact, according to Transport Canada statistics, the traffic-related accident rate for the country is fairly high. In 2005 there were 2,923 fatalities as a result of Canadian traffic accidents, 17,529 serious injuries and 210,629 other injuries. While all these figures are slightly less than those recorded in the UK – where in the same year there were 3,201 people killed, 28,954 serious injuries and 271,017 other injuries on the road – when you consider that the UK has a population almost twice that of Canada, the accidents per person rate is actually lower in Britain.

So while you may encounter fewer cars on your Canadian journeys, and there are precautions you can take to make driving in hazardous conditions that little bit safer, you'll still need to keep your wits about you at all times.

Brushing up on Canada's highway code before you start driving in the country on a permanent basis is one way to make sure you are road safe as Canada does have some vagaries in its road rules to Britain – and indeed from province to province.

"One difference when driving in BC is that you can turn right at a red traffic light, if it is clear to go," says Darren. "Another is that if you are following a school bus and it stops and puts on red flashing lights you must stop from both directions until the children are off the bus and safely away from the road and the red lights are turned off."

These rules will not necessarily be enforced in every province, so it is essential that you check out the road rules for the province you will be driving in before you get behind the wheel.

Some rules of the road which are standard throughout Canada are: that U-turns are prohibited in built-up areas and city centres where a single or double solid line runs down the middle of the road; that drivers must slow down to 60 kilometres an hour when passing emergency vehicles stopped on the roadside that have their lights flashing, including tow trucks; and that seatbelts must be used at all times – for drivers and any passengers.

So while Hillary, Joanna and Darren all agree that driving in Canada is more enjoyable than in the UK, this isn't to say you won't need to maintain your concentration at all times when you get behind the wheel in your new homeland.