



Countries of the Commonwealth

The second Monday in March is Commonwealth Day, an annual celebration of the Commonwealth of Nations. A special service is held in Westminster Abbey in London, attended by Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of the Commonwealth. What does the day celebrate?

The Commonwealth of Nations is a **loose collection**¹ of nations, most of which were former colonies of the British Empire. The Commonwealth was formed gradually as colonies of the empire became more independent. Those states which **retain**² the British monarch as the head of state, such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, are called constitutional monarchies. The role of the **sovereign**³ is very limited by the individual **constitutions**⁴ of the nations. Generally, the sovereign has only a symbolic role and does not participate in the politics of the member states. Instead, a representative of the monarch called the Governor General fills the role of the monarch by **signing bills**⁵ or appearing at official ceremonies. Some countries, such as India, have become republics.

Finding a common characteristic of the member states is quite difficult as they vary greatly **in terms of**⁶ political systems, cultures and even languages. English, while widespread and used in official circumstances, is not spoken by all people in the Commonwealth. There are over 50 members of the Commonwealth, but here is a closer look only at some of the biggest English-speaking ones.



Canada

Capital: Ottawa

Population: about 33 million

Canada is the second largest country in the world by area. However, even smaller countries like Poland have bigger populations. Most Canadians live in the southern part of the country since conditions in the northern areas, like Nunavut, are cold and harsh. The lowest recorded temperature in Canada was -62.8°C in the Yukon Territory. About three quarters of Canadians live **within**⁷ 150 kilometers of the US border.

Canada's geography is varied, with mountains and forests, flat prairies suitable for agriculture in the south-west, and tundra and ice in the north. The country has the longest coastline and most lakes in the world. It is home to varied flora and fauna, including the North American **beaver**⁸, one of the Canada's national symbols.

Canada is a very popular destination for people looking to emigrate. It has one of the highest immigration rates in the world. 252,179 immigrants came to Canada in 2009, most of them from China, India, and the Philippines. An important destination for immigrants is Toronto, the most

populous Canadian city (over 8 million people live there, which is almost one quarter of Canada's population). Almost half of Toronto's residents were born outside Canada, making it one of the most **diverse**⁹ and cosmopolitan cities in the world. The country's two official languages are English and French, with most of the French-speaking population residing in the province of Quebec.

Canada is a constitutional monarchy, but the Queen has very limited political power. The parliament consists of the House of Commons and the Senate. The head of government is the prime minister, who is the leader of the political party which has the most elected seats in the House of Commons.

Max Arambulo (Canada)





Australia

Capital: Canberra
Population: about 22 million

Australia is the smallest continent and the sixth largest country in the world. The majority of the population (some 89%) live in cities on the coast, leaving the **interior**¹⁰ largely empty. The reason for this is the heat and dryness. There is simply not enough water in the centre to support large populations. This means the image of Australians living in the bush, like Crocodile Dundee, is a myth.

Most of Australia is desert, but the northern part has woodlands and rainforests. Because of the country's isolation, it has many flower and animal species which are endemic, meaning they do not live anywhere else in the world (e.g. the kangaroo, koala and **platypus**¹¹).

Despite the size of the country and its large **deposits of iron ore**¹², coal and gold, most of the economy is based on the **service sector**¹³. Tourism and education are among the biggest contributors to the economy. On the other hand, Australia manufactures very little and must import most commercial products.

Australia is a constitutional monarchy and a federal political system. The country is divided into six states and two territories. Each state has its own parliament, so there are two levels of government, the state and the federal, and people must vote in both elections. Only residents of a given state can vote in that state's election. Interestingly, voting in the federal election is **compulsory**¹⁴ for all people over 18 years of age. The head of the government at the federal level is called the prime minister. The head of the government in each state is called the premier.

Ryan Scott (Australia)

New Zealand

Capital: Wellington
Population: about 4 million

Famous as the setting of *The Lord of the Rings* movies, New Zealand **is comprised of**¹⁵ several islands in the South Pacific. One of the important geographical features of the country is its mountains, most of which are found in the South Island. The highest peak is Mt Cook, which is 3,754 metres above sea level. The North Island is characterized by great volcanic activity, including active volcanoes, hot **springs**¹⁶ and boiling **mud pools**¹⁷. The country sits on a **fault line**¹⁸, so **earthquakes**¹⁹ are common. Like Australia, New Zealand has many endemic plants and animals, the most famous one is the **flightless**²⁰ bird the kiwi, which has become the country's national symbol.

New Zealand has tried to **rectify**²¹ past **injustices**²² toward the Maori population and to integrate the European and Maori populations. One of the clearest examples of this is that the Maori language is one of New Zealand's official languages, along with English. All government buildings, official documents and most place names are given in both languages. For example, the name of the country in Maori is Aotearoa and Mt Cook is also known as Aorak.

New Zealand is a constitutional monarchy, with a parliament and cabinet led by the prime minister. It has no formal written constitution like Australia or the United States. Instead, the rules of government come from various documents, such as laws and **treaties**²³. In practice, these documents maintain New Zealand's democratic and parliamentary nature and **outline**²⁴ the role of the British monarch. One of the most important documents is the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), which officially **set out the terms**²⁵ of British settlement. However, the English and Maori versions differ and to this day debate continues over what the treaty guaranteed. Despite these problems, the document is viewed as the symbolic start of the New Zealand nation.

Ryan Scott (Australia)



VOCABULARY

¹ **loose collection** [lu:s] – volně uskupení

² **to retain** [ri'teɪn] – ponechat si

³ **sovereign** ['sɒvrɪn] – panovník

⁴ **constitution** [kɒnstɪ'tju:ʃ(ə)n] – ústava

⁵ **to sign bills** ['saɪn] – podepisovat návrhy zákonů

⁶ **in terms of** [tɜ:mz] – pokud jde o

CANADA

⁷ **within** [wɪð'ɪn] – do vzdálenosti

⁸ **beaver** ['bi:və] – bobr

⁹ **diverse** [daɪ'vɜ:s] – rozmanitý

AUSTRALIA

¹⁰ **interior** [ɪn'tɪəriə] – vnitrozemí

¹¹ **platypus** ['plætɪpəs] – ptakopysk

¹² **deposits of iron ore** [dɪ'pɒzɪts 'aɪən ɔ:] – naleziště železné rudy

¹³ **service sector** ['sɜ:vɪs 'sektə] – sektor služeb

¹⁴ **compulsory** [kəm'pʌls(ə)rɪ] – povinný

NEW ZEALAND

¹⁵ **to be comprised of** [kəm'praɪzd] – sestávat, skládat se z

¹⁶ **spring** – pramen

¹⁷ **mud pool** [mʌd pu:l] – bahenní sopka

¹⁸ **fault line** [fɔ:lt] – geologický zlom

¹⁹ **earthquake** ['ɜ:θkweɪk] – zemětřesení

²⁰ **flightless** ['flaɪtlɪs] – neschopný letu

²¹ **to rectify** ['rektɪfaɪ] – napravit

²² **injustice** [ɪn'dʒʌstɪs] – nespravedlnost, křivda

²³ **treaty** ['tri:tɪ] – dohoda

²⁴ **to outline** ['aʊtlaɪn] – vymezit

²⁵ **to set out the terms** – stanovit podmínky