

O Canada, never stop being weird

They say my adopted country, 150 this year, is dull. From puppets to survivalism, the truth is far stranger. *Emer O'Toole, 29 June 2017, theguardian.com*

- 5 Canada Day is approaching, and it's a big one, because the country [turns 150 this year](#). I recently became a permanent resident of Canada, and received an armful of magazines and pamphlets intended to acclimatise me to life here in America's hat. The [Welcome to Canada handbook](#) details the nation's geography, climate, system of government, rights and freedoms, laws, and more. Yet it left me strangely bereft of information on the Canadian character.
- 10 Certainly, less is known about Canadians than about their shouty downstairs neighbours. There's a preconception that Canada is boring. Even Canadians share this preconception, because they have no idea how weird they are. They've been swimming in the strange for so long it feels like water. I reckon, therefore, that other travellers and immigrants to [Canada](#) might benefit from the insights I've gleaned from my four years among these odd yet
- 15 charming people.

An entire generation of Canadians were traumatised by puppets

- In the 80s and 90s, Canada televised many terrifying public service announcements that offer insights into the current national psyche. In one representative example, [Astar the Robot falls through whirring blades](#) that chop off his arm. He then informs the watching children: "I am
- 20 Astar, a robot. I can put my arm back on, you can't. So play safe", giving them horrible nightmares and teaching them nothing except to avoid falling through a pit of chainsaws.

- The most disturbing of these informative videos is undoubtedly [Don't Put It In Your Mouth](#), in which two fluffy blue puppets sing a song about the dangers of oral fixation. If you're wondering why everyone at dinner lays claim to complex and unlikely food intolerances, this
- 25 could be why.

There is a correct side of the pavement

- Sorry, of the sidewalk. If you find yourself walking down a street and thinking, "Woah – Canadians are so friendly, except when they're walking places", this is because you are on the left side of the pavement.
- 30 You might think there isn't a correct side of the pavement, for a pavement is not like a road; you might think that people could simply walk around each other without much fuss. Do not suggest this. Stick to your side.

The sweetness belies a cold reality

- Look, Canadians are nicer than pie. But this is a country of hardcore survivalists. I had no
- 35 idea what -30C felt like until my first Canadian Christmas when I found that the conditions you're subject to while popping out for a smoke are a highly effective cessation aid.

40 But Canadians have been doing this all their lives. They know that for approximately five months of the year simply being in the open air can kill them. They might be smiling sweetly at you, but they are also mentally preparing to eat you if you die first while stranded in an ice storm.

Canadians have no idea how brilliant Canada is

“I can’t believe how long I’ve been on hold,” says the Canadian who’s been on hold for the length of time it takes a kettle to boil.

45 “I can’t believe this train is so late,” says the Canadian who has waited three minutes for a train that will arrive in another three minutes.

“Why aren’t these streets clearly signposted?” complains a Canadian, aware that in a block or two there will be a street sign informing them, with geospatial precision, exactly where they are. Shut up Canadians!

50 You don’t understand late trains! You live in a land of inhuman efficiency. Your country is brilliant, OK?