

Canada's 'Nicest' City? Vancouver the big winner

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There are numerous international rankings of Canadian cities on a variety of indicators from the economy to culture to livability. But in daily conversation when Canadians exchange views around their cities discussion often centres around which is "nicest". That characterization usually refers to the aesthetic or physical beauty of the city but it may also be interpreted as the best place to live. To test which city Canadians regard as the nicest the Association for Canadian Studies commissioned the firm Leger Marketing to survey more than 1500 Canadians. The survey was conducted via web panel during the week of June 20th, 2011. The margin of error for an equivalent phone survey was 2.9 points 19 times out of 20.

As observed below Vancouver tops the list with one in four Canadians making it their first choice when asked to pick the country's "nicest" city. Quebec City lands the second spot with one in five Canadians making it their first choice. Ottawa lands well behind in third spot at 12% ahead of Montreal and Toronto at 9% each (just over one in ten Canadians said it was a city not placed on the list we established).

Which of the following cities do you think is the nicest city in Canada? Your first choice	
	Canada
Vancouver	25
Quebec City	20
Ottawa	12
Other Canadian city	11
Montreal	9
Toronto	9
Halifax	6
Calgary	4
Edmonton	3
Winnipeg	2

Part of the explanation for Vancouver’s dominance is in the degree to which its own residents overwhelmingly made it their first choice in comparison to other cities which were more divided on the issue. As observed below some 95% of Vancouverites chose their city. Indeed more Calgarians put their city behind Vancouver when asked to rank which is the “nicest”. This was not the case in Edmonton where more people put their city ahead of Vancouver. Still some 25% made Vancouver their first choice.

Which of the following cities do you think is the nicest city in Canada? Your first choice				
	Vancouver	Vancouver Island	Calgary	Edmonton
Montreal	1.8%	1.8%	9.8%	
Toronto			11.8%	
Vancouver	94.7%	35.1%	35.3%	25.0%
Ottawa	3.5%	3.5%	2.0%	16.7%
Calgary			27.5%	4.2%
Edmonton		3.5%	2.0%	31.3%
Winnipeg				
Halifax		3.5%	3.9%	8.3%
Quebec City		1.8%	3.9%	4.2%
Other Canadian city		50.9%	3.9%	10.4%

Torontians put their city first but not by a huge margin and some one in five picked Vancouver first. By contrast, respondents in Ottawa put their city first by a larger margin likely accounting for their better score overall. Montrealers put their city ahead of Vancouver but behind Quebec City a choice which helped propel Quebec City into second place overall. In the case of Ottawa, respondents in that city made it their first choice well ahead of Vancouver and hence that contributed to improving Ottawa’s overall score.

Which of the following cities do you think is the nicest city in Canada? Your first choice	Ontario			Quebec	
	Hamilton - Niagara Peninsula	Greater Ottawa area	Greater Toronto area	Montréal	Gatineau/Outaouais
Montreal	10.6%	6.7%	7.4%	25.0%	4.5%
Toronto	12.1%	1.3%	33.5%	13.6%	.0%

Vancouver	21.2%	25.3%	19.6%		18.2%	13.6%
Ottawa	13.6%	48.0%	7.4%		4.5%	54.5%
Calgary	4.5%	1.3%	2.6%		2.3%	
Edmonton	.8%	1.3%	1.7%			
Winnipeg	1.5%		.4%		2.3%	
Halifax	14.4%	2.7%	6.5%		2.3%	
Quebec City	10.6%	9.3%	9.6%		29.5%	
Other Canadian city	10.6%	4.0%	11.3%		2.3%	

Being the nicest city doesn't make it the most livable and in that regard findings from the rest of the survey to be released during the week of July 11th, 2011 will cast things in a different light. More to follow.....