

Things to know before moving to Canada



Canada is a vast country defined by its breathtaking wilderness, modern city living and diverse, tolerant communities - a unique combination that's hard to find anywhere else.

HSBC has had a presence in Canada since 1981, so we know a thing or two about helping people settle into the country. This guide will equip you with some of the essential information you need to make a successful start to life in Canada.

| Banking in Canada

Canada has one of the strongest and most competitive financial systems in the world. Get your banking set up before you arrive, and you'll find it easier to settle into your new home. At HSBC, we're here to support your banking needs so that you get off to the best possible start.

How to open a bank account in Canada from overseas

The Canadian Bankers Association estimates that more than 99%² of all Canadians have a bank account. You'll need one to pay bills, receive your salary and get access to cash.

In Canada, there are two main bank account types: chequing (also called current, in some countries) and savings. A chequing account is used for daily banking, paying bills, and having your salary paid in. While a savings account will earn you interest, it also comes with a limited number of debits and can incur transactional fees.

If you're at least 18 years old and an HSBC customer, or you're moving to Canada and have a valid reason for opening an account, you can apply online for a personal or student bank account.

Overseas applicants who are not planning to move to Canada can also apply for an HSBC Canada account online if they:

- are already an HSBC customer in another market
- meet the requirements
- are not living in a restricted jurisdiction (currently Austria, Brunei, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia or South Korea)

How to transfer money to Canada

The most common way to send money to Canada is through the SWIFT system. To receive funds from overseas, you must provide the sender with your full name and address, account number and transit number, institution number and address,

and SWIFT/BIC Code. HSBC and other banks in Canada do not have an IBAN (International Standard for Bank Account Number).

If you hold multiple HSBC accounts in different countries and regions, these can be linked and viewed in one place through our Global View service. This allows you to then make fee-free Global Transfers between eligible HSBC accounts in over 30 markets, including Canada. Global Transfers can be used to conveniently pay your bills and mortgage payments in one country or region while living in another.

Credit and debit cards

Many banks will issue you a debit card when you open a chequing account. And depending on the account, you may also qualify for a credit card. It's wise to carefully check all the fees and charges associated with any card before you use it. To protect new customers, HSBC will not automatically mail debit cards outside of Canada. Once in Canada, you can pick up a temporary card at a branch or have it mailed to your local address.

Charging bills that must be paid monthly to your credit card (and then paying it off in full) is a great way to boost your credit score in a new country. You can even pay your rent on your credit card if you use an intermediary company. There are companies set up specifically to help you do this.

In Canada, both credit and debit cards issued by a federally regulated financial institution offer protection from fraudulent transactions. The maximum amount you can be liable for is CAD50. If you're unsure about your card agreement, get in contact with the service provider.

You can find out more about using credit and debit cards in Canada on the [Government of Canada website](#).

Top tip: In Canada, credit cards and debit cards are widely accepted, but it's always a good idea to carry some cash with you for smaller day-to-day purchases.

Building good credit history in Canada

Your credit score from home may not be transferable to Canada, so it's important to start building a solid credit history when you arrive. A higher credit score can result in preferential interest rates, larger home loans and the ability to secure deposits.

HSBC Canada will support you in building up your Canadian credit history. We automatically waive the need to have a Canadian credit bureau to provide credit up to CAD6,000. And if you already have credit with HSBC in another market, we will match your existing limit up to CAD50,000.

| Getting connected

Internet - In Canada, ISPs often offer bundles that include a landline connection and TV packages, so shop around for the best deal.

When you apply for internet service, you may need to provide documentation that includes your current Canadian address and Canadian bank account details, phone number, Social Insurance Number, and a valid, government-issued photo ID, such as your passport. Check with your ISP before you apply as there may be different requirements for each company.

Mobile - You can choose from a pay-as-you-go SIM card that you top up with your credit card or cash, a SIM-only deal, or a handset with a contract. Canada is known to have some of the most expensive mobile plans in the world, so brace yourself if you are the kind of person who likes to use a lot of data!

As Canada is such a large country, there might be additional charges if you call outside your city or region. If you think you'll need to make regular long-distance calls, look for a plan that includes coast-to-coast free calls.

Top tip: Find a mobile plan as you shop. In Canada, nearly every shopping mall has a counter selling plans for all the major mobile providers. Simply walk up and ask!



| Finding accommodation

How to rent in Canada

Many realtors have sites that will give you a good indication as to how much you can expect to pay for rent. It's also worth looking at local social media groups for information about different neighbourhoods.

Once you've found a place you'd like to rent, you'll need to sign a rental agreement with the landlord. Make sure you have several months' rent available in your local bank account to deal with paying the initial rent, the rental deposit and other set-up costs.

Landlords in Canada will often ask for a "void cheque" to confirm your account details. As most Canadian don't even use cheques anymore, you can download one through online banking and give that to the landlord instead.

If you don't have a Canadian bank account yet, you may be able to open one before you arrive.

To start renting, you may need to show a letter from your employer stating your income, a bank statement to show you have sufficient funds to cover several months' rent, and references from previous landlords. Your landlord will probably also conduct a credit score check. As a newcomer to Canada, you won't have a local credit score yet, so you might be asked to pay a higher deposit.

Top tip: Go through a fee-free agent. Real estate agents charge neither the buyer nor the renter, so you can use their services for free to help you find a place to live.

How to buy property in the Canada

Buying a home as a new arrival to Canada can definitely be done, but there are a few extra things to consider.

Are you looking at property but not planning to move? You'll have to establish whether you'll be considered a resident of Canada. Non-residents may have to pay a higher down payment - about 35% of the purchase price is common - and additional taxes. The property rules may vary by province.

Most people buy property with a mortgage mortgage [This link will open in a new window.](#) You can approach lenders directly or use a mortgage broker. A conventional mortgage for residents usually requires about a 20% deposit. It's possible to get a mortgage with a smaller deposit (5% or more) but you'll need to take out mortgage default insurance. This is covered as part of the application process. Unlike other types of insurance for buyers, however, this one's in place to protect the lender from possible loan defaults.

As well as Canadian citizens, permanent and non-permanent residents who are permitted to work in the country may be eligible for a First-Time Home Buyer Incentive. This enables you to borrow up 5% to 10% of the home's purchase price to add to your down payment.

Understand where you want to live, what type of home you'd like, and what's important to you in a neighbourhood. Then find a reputable real estate agent who is knowledgeable in that location.

Once you've found a property you like, the next step is making an offer. An offer is a legal contract that your real estate agent or lawyer should prepare carefully. The offer only becomes binding once all the conditions listed in it have been met. You'll have to provide a deposit as part of your offer, which will depend on the purchase price of the home. Don't forget to factor that into your budget!

| Immigration and taxes

The Canadian government has created a comprehensive website that should answer most of your initial questions about arriving in Canada and address any current COVID restrictions that apply to new arrivals.

[Find out more about Canadian immigration](#)

Visas

In most instances, you'll need to get a work permit in order to take up employment in Canada. There are two types available: the open work permit, which allows you to work for any employer in Canada; and the employer-specific permit. Most likely, you'll be applying for an employer-specific work permit, which states the permitted location and duration of your employment.

If you're planning to study as an international student at a Canadian university, you will need to apply for a study permit. While this permit allows you to study, it doesn't let you enter the country - you will still need to apply for a visa. Eligible students who graduate from designated learning institutions can then apply for the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program. Whichever route you choose, we recommend you start your research early and prepare all documents and fees in advance.

Tax

As soon as you start working in Canada, you will be liable for tax on your income. Technically, you become a resident of Canada for taxation purposes when you establish residential ties to the country, which is usually considered to be the date you arrived in the country.

Being a taxpayer in Canada brings with it substantial benefits and credits, including childcare. You'll find more information about [income tax in Canada](#) on the Government of Canada website.

Social Insurance Number

You will also need to apply for a Social Insurance Number (SIN) in order to work legally in Canada. The Canadian SIN is similar to a Social Security number (SSN) in the US; the Aadhaar card in India; and the Hong Kong Identification Number in Hong Kong, for example.

This nine-digit national identification code gives you access to government programmes and benefits. Once you're in Canada, applying for your SIN is straightforward: you can do it online or by mail.

Find out more about [how the Social Insurance Number works](#)

| Education and healthcare



Education

Children in Canada usually start school at kindergarten before enrolling in elementary and then high school. There are plenty of options available, including free public schools, paid private schools and home schooling. The language of education can be English or French, depending on which province you're living in. Take time to read up the school board pertaining to your particular province.

When it comes to tertiary education, you can find out what courses are available at Canada's universities by visiting the government of Canada's [list of designated educational institutions](#)

Are you applying for a Canadian study permit? Certain foreign students, including those from mainland China, India, Pakistan and the Philippines, can have their permits fast-tracked through the Canadian government's Student Direct Stream (SDS) program if they meet the eligibility requirements.

To participate, you will need a Canadian bank account. The HSBC Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC) program helps you fulfill the financial criteria for your application by showing proof of funds.

[Check out our International Student GIC Program](#)

Healthcare

Canada's healthcare system is publicly funded, with universal healthcare² provided on the basis of need rather than the ability to pay. That said, only Canadian citizens and permanent residents, as well as some foreign workers and international students, will have access to it. As a newcomer, you are unlikely to have coverage for the first three months, so consider taking out health insurance before you arrive in the country.

[Understand how healthcare works in Canada](#)

| Wrapping up your first 3 months

We hope you find this guide useful in getting off to a great start in Canada. At HSBC, we're here to give you the right level of planning and support so you can make a success of the experience. Learn more about our [international services](#) to see how we can help.

Ready to open an overseas account?

We can tell you about the best way for you to apply. Select your current location and where you would like to open an account. We'll walk you through the steps.

[Apply now](#)

1. HSBC in Canada
2. CBA Banks and Consumers, <https://cba.ca/banks-and-consumers>
3. Available for HSBC Premier and HSBC Advance customers in Canada. Global View and Global Transfers are not available in all countries and regions where HSBC Premier and HSBC Advance are offered.