

Community Profile

City of Whitehorse, Yukon

Pastoral Search Committee Package



History of Whitehorse and the Yukon

Whitehorse, the capital of Yukon, Canada, has a rich and vibrant history. The city lies on the traditional lands of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Its name derives from the White Horse Rapids, which were said to resemble the flowing manes of white horses. Whitehorse became a critical stopover during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-1898, when thousands of prospectors made their way to the goldfields. The construction of the White Pass and Yukon Route railway in 1900 cemented Whitehorse's importance as a transportation hub. The city was officially incorporated in 1950, and in 1953, it replaced Dawson City as the capital of Yukon.



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Geography & Weather

Whitehorse is located at kilometer 1,425 on the Alaska Highway in the southern Yukon, nestled in the Whitehorse Valley. The Yukon River flows through the city, providing stunning natural scenery and outdoor recreational opportunities. The city's geography is characterized by its proximity to the Coast Mountains to the south and west, and it sits at an elevation of 703 meters (2,306 feet) above sea level.

Whitehorse experiences a subarctic climate with relatively cold winters by Canadian standards, with temperatures occasionally dropping below -40°C. Summers are warm and short, with average high temperatures in July around 20°C. The city receives around 267 mm (10.5 inches) of precipitation annually, making it one of the driest cities in Canada.



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Demographics, Immigration & Language

As of 2023, Whitehorse has a population of approximately 30,253 residents, making it the largest city in Yukon. The city is diverse, with a significant Indigenous population, including members of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. The median age is 39.1 years, and the population is relatively young compared to the national average.

Whitehorse has seen a steady influx of immigrants over the years, contributing to its multicultural fabric. The city attracts newcomers from various countries who come seeking employment opportunities, a high quality of life, and the scenic beauty of the Yukon.

English is the predominant language spoken in Whitehorse, with 85% of residents identifying it as their first language. French is the second most common language, and there are also speakers of various Indigenous languages and other languages (including

Tagalog, Punjabi and German) reflecting the city's multicultural makeup. The two top ethnic groups in the Yukon, after Caucasian and Indigenous, are South Asian and Filipino.

This profound demographic shift is threatening Whitehorse's growth potential. In recent years there has been strong growth in both the size of the Yukon workforce and employment. The number of unemployed people has declined significantly, leaving a rock bottom unemployment rate of only 2.7% in 2018. In addition, the size of the workforce has not increased at all in the past 3 years. Another indication of the growing talent supply shortage is that the number of people in Whitehorse reporting Canada Pension Plan income rose by 58% between 2008 and 2016 – well above the national increase of 29%.

Housing & Homelessness

Housing in Whitehorse is varied, ranging from single-family homes to apartments and townhouses. The housing market has seen significant growth, and housing prices have risen in recent years, reflecting the city's economic vitality and increasing population. The city is actively working on various housing projects to meet the demand for affordable housing.

Homelessness is an ongoing issue in Whitehorse, as it is in many other cities. The city, along with various non-profit organizations, is working to address homelessness through initiatives such as emergency shelters, transitional housing, and support services for individuals experiencing homelessness.



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Religion

Whitehorse is home to a variety of religious communities, including Christianity, which is the dominant religion, represented by multiple denominations such as Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant churches. There are also smaller communities practicing Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and other faiths, reflecting the city's diverse population.

Employment & Education

The economy of Whitehorse is diverse, with key sectors including government services, tourism, retail, construction, and mining. The public sector is a significant employer due to Whitehorse's status as the capital of Yukon. Additionally, the city has a growing tech and innovation sector.

Whitehorse is served by several educational institutions, including public and private schools. Yukon University, located in the city, offers a range of undergraduate and graduate programs and serves as a hub for research and innovation in the region.



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Healthcare

Whitehorse General Hospital is the main healthcare facility in the city, providing comprehensive medical services to residents. The city also has numerous clinics, dental offices, and specialized health services to meet the community's needs.



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First Nations Communities

The Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta’an Kwäch’än Council are integral parts of the Whitehorse community. These First Nations have their own governments and provide various programs and services to their members. They play a crucial role in the cultural and social fabric of the city.

Government Structure

Whitehorse operates under a mayor-council form of government. The city council is composed of the mayor and six councillors who are elected for three-year terms. The council is responsible for setting policies and overseeing the city's administration.

Crime

Whitehorse, like many urban areas, faces challenges related to crime. However, the city is generally considered safe, with a strong community policing presence. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) provides law enforcement services and works closely with the community to maintain public safety.

Transportation

Whitehorse is a transportation hub in the Yukon, with several highways, including the Alaska Highway, providing access to and from the city. Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport offers regular flights to major Canadian cities. Public transportation within the city is provided by the Whitehorse Transit System, which operates several bus routes.

Tourism

Tourism is a vital part of Whitehorse's economy. The city's natural beauty, historical sites, and recreational opportunities attract visitors year-round. Popular attractions include the SS Klondike National Historic Site, the Yukon Wildlife Preserve, and the Takhini Hot Springs.

Recreational Activities

Whitehorse offers a wide range of recreational activities, from hiking and biking in the summer to skiing and snowmobiling in the winter. The city boasts numerous trails, parks, and recreational facilities, including the Canada Games Centre, which offers swimming, skating, and fitness amenities.



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Attractions

Whitehorse has numerous attractions that highlight its rich history and natural beauty. Key sites include the MacBride Museum of Yukon History, the Beringia Interpretive Centre, and Miles Canyon. The Yukon River, with its scenic views and opportunities for boating and fishing, is also a major draw.

Notable People

Whitehorse has produced many notable individuals, including Olympian cross-country skier Emily Nishikawa and writer and artist Jim Robb, known for his depictions of Yukon life and history. The city's vibrant arts and culture scene continues to inspire new generations of creators and leaders.



Media

Whitehorse is served by several media outlets, including newspapers like the Yukon News and the Whitehorse Star, as well as radio stations such as CBC North. These outlets provide news, entertainment, and information to the residents of Whitehorse and the broader Yukon community.

Emergency Services

Emergency services in Whitehorse are well-established, with the Whitehorse Fire Department providing fire protection and emergency response. The RCMP handles law enforcement, while Emergency Medical Services (EMS) offer medical assistance and transport.

Sister Cities

Whitehorse has four Sister Cities:

- Chortkiv, Ukraine
- Juneau, Alaska
- Lancieux, France
- Ushiku, Japan

These relationships help foster cultural exchange and mutual understanding, helping to promote tourism, economic development, and shared knowledge.

Conclusion

Whitehorse is a dynamic and growing city that balances modern amenities with a deep respect for its natural surroundings and cultural heritage. Its diverse population, strong economy, and vibrant community life make it a unique and attractive place to live, work, and visit. Whether exploring its rich history, engaging in outdoor adventures, or participating in community events, there is always something to discover in Whitehorse.