

Just why do we celebrate this weekend?

Fireworks, picnics, and a cold case of beer, are the way most Canadians spend the Victoria Day long weekend. It's the first holiday of the summer, a time for cottages and barbecues, a weekend of simple pleasures associated with the warmer weather.

It seems common enough, but Victoria Day is actually a distinctly Canadian tradition that no other Commonwealth country observes. Victoria Day is named for Queen Victoria, the longest reigning British monarch, and is observed on May 24, or the Monday before, to celebrate the Queen's birthday.

Canada's parliament declared the Queen's birthday a national holiday in 1845 and Canadians have been using it as a day to celebrate her and the current reigning monarch's birthday ever since.

Queen Victoria is culturally Canada's most significant monarch as she's known as the Mother of Confederation. Canada's identity as an independent country was de-



finned under her reign and so a celebration of her life is almost an extension of celebrating Canadian identity as a whole. The only part of Canada that doesn't observe Victoria Day

is Quebec which celebrates La Journée Nationale des Patriotes (National Patriots Day) to honour the Anglophone and Francophone activists who fought for a democratic government in 19th century Quebec.

In the 1800s, thousands would gather in front of Government House in Toronto to chant a cheer to the Queen on Victoria Day. Now the holiday is marked with more independent celebrations as people set off fireworks in their backyards and take picnics to the park, while Victoria, British Columbia hosts a popular Victoria Day parade in honour of the city's namesake.

However you choose to celebrate the upcoming long weekend, keep in mind its uniquely Canadian status and raise a toast to Canada's Mother of Confederation.

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