

# La Belle Province

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Quebec has a unique history. So naturally it has its own unique symbols.



My favourite symbol is the fleur-de-lis, because it reminds me how much the people of Quebec remain proud and attached to their roots ever since the Conquest (by the British). It reminds me of our French origins.” —Nathan, 15, Rimouski, Que.

## The national motto

The licence plates in Quebec say “Je me souviens,” which means “I remember.” This is the national motto of Quebec, and has been used since the end of the 19th century. Eugène-Étienne Taché, the architect of the Hôtel du Parlement (provincial government buildings) in Quebec City, had these three words engraved in stone above the main door. From 1963 to 1977, Quebec licence plates had a different motto: “La belle province,” which translates as “The beautiful province.” However, this saying was never as common in Quebec as in English Canada and France, so in 1978, the national motto “Je me souviens” returned. This expression is very important in Quebec. It refers to the difficulties that French-speaking people have gone through in their history.



## Provincial or national?

But wait ... why are we talking about **national** emblems and symbols in Quebec rather than **provincial** ones as we do in other parts of Canada? It's because Quebec is considered a distinct nation — the only fully French-speaking province within Canada. This is why, for instance, what would be called provincial parks elsewhere are called national parks and run by the Quebec government. (Just to keep things interesting, in Quebec there are also national parks and historic sites run by Parks Canada, part of the federal government!) There is also the National Assembly (the government of Quebec) and the Fête nationale du Québec (National Holiday) celebrated on June 24, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.



## The coat of arms

Quebec's official coat of arms was adopted in 1939. It represents the historical realities of Quebec. Three golden fleurs-de-lis on a blue background reflect its beginnings as a French colony. The golden lion on a red background reminds us of the British regime. And the branch with a triple maple leaf refers to the time before Canada became a country at Confederation. At the bottom is Quebec's national motto. The crown on top represents Great Britain.



## Symbolic plants and animals

The official tree of Quebec is the yellow birch, which underlines the importance of forests to the province. The northern blue flag iris is Quebec's signature flower, reminding us that water and wetlands are vital. The snowy owl is the national bird of Quebec. It highlights our wildlife and also symbolizes the whiteness of our winters, our northern climate and our very large territory.

