

THE BIG DAY

Whether you're watching or taking part,
a citizenship ceremony is an unforgettable event.

It's a very ordinary room in a very ordinary office building in downtown Ottawa. But what's happening inside? Definitely not ordinary!

The room is packed with people sitting on chairs like the ones in a movie theatre. There are excited families and friends, people of all ages and sizes and appearances. It's 34 degrees outside but on this special July day, many people are wearing beautiful dresses or sharp suits or clothing from their home countries. There are lots and lots of red-and-white outfits. Nearly everyone is holding a little maple leaf flag. It feels a bit like a pot bubbling with joy that's about to overflow.

Sprinkled around the room are the 89 people who have filled out all the forms and met all the requirements. Today, they will become Canadians.

A highly respected Ottawa citizen is overseeing this ceremony rather than a citizenship judge. She tells the crowd that her own parents came to

Canada from two different countries in Europe. She reminds them of the rights and responsibilities they will have as Canadians. She encourages them to learn both English and French, and to learn about and from Indigenous Peoples.

It's time to take the oath of citizenship — the last step to becoming a Canadian citizen. Everyone in the room is invited to say the words together, whether they're already citizens or becoming one today. Some new citizens dance a little or cheer when they get their certificate. Afterward, the presider says, "I wish you a long, peaceful and prosperous life in this, your chosen land. Welcome to the Canadian family. Vive le Canada."

Once again, everyone is asked to join together, this time in singing "O Canada." Before it starts, the presider invites the kids to come up and join her at the front. She smiles at the crowd and says, "This is now your national anthem. Sing it with pride."



Parents Lorena and Luis, along with their daughters Maca and Alegria, became Canadian citizens in May 2026. Their ceremony took place at The Forks in Winnipeg. Originally from Ecuador, they came to Canada in 2019. Lorena told *Kayak* about their experience.

When we applied for the ceremony, they asked us to choose if we wanted it to be in person or virtual. For us, it was very important, so we chose to do it in person. When they called us, we stood up and they gave each of us a certificate. It was beautiful.

We had been trying to achieve this for six or seven years. It was really a special thing to become Canadian, to feel that we are a part of this community, that we can be part of decisions that are made here.

It really touched me when the person overseeing the ceremony said, "Welcome home." I hadn't realized until that moment that yes, this is home. I feel safe here. I feel grateful. All countries can improve, but Canada is a very beautiful country with beautiful people and a lot of resources that we have to take care of.

It's also given us a sense of responsibility. We've tried to teach our girls that this is a privilege, and that they need to be a good citizen, to be a good person, to respect other people. It's a privilege to be here and be Canadian.