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OVERCROWDED PLANET?

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by Dean Esmay

In the U.S., one person...is born every 8 seconds.
(Every 13 seconds, one dies.)

Below is the map of a beautiful country named Canada. I'd like you to take particular



note of one of its many fine provinces: Alberta. It's in dark green, with the famed Castle wilderness preserve marked with a star.

Now. Let's ignore Alberta for a little bit and let me point some things out to you about crowded living conditions among humans.

[The City of Chicago](#)—a beautiful city full of rivers, ponds, lakefront property, huge parks, zoos, sporting arenas, universities—houses 2,886,251 residents, at least according to 2002 figures. This is not counting the hundreds of thousands of people who commute in and out

of the city every day. Let's round it off and say that on any given day, as many as 3 million people may be in that fine, beautiful city. The city encompasses 234 square miles. (All figures cited from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page.)

Doing a little simple math (3 million divided by 234) and you can determine for yourself that Chicago boasts a population density of about 12,821 people per square mile. This in an area which, as I've said, includes parks, rivers, ponds, sporting arenas, shipyards, museums, libraries, tree-lined neighborhoods, and world-class universities. Also stock yards, train depots, factories, airports, amusement parks, hotels, and shopping centers. There's even a working farm within the city limits, at an agricultural college.

Mind you, it's not America's most crowded city, let alone the world's. Far from it. As far as major cities around the world go, it's only average in terms of crowding.

The [City of Tokyo](#), one of the world's most populous cities, has a population of 12.275 million people, and takes up only 0.6% (barely 1 half of one percent) of Japan's total land space. This enormous city covers about 844 square miles. That gives it a population density of 14,544 people per square mile. All jammed in to barely one half of one percent of Japan's total land space, and it also including parks, ponds, zoos, universities, museums, sporting arenas, and so on.

The city of [New York, New York](#) has a population of 8 million, spread out over 320 square miles. Giving it a population density of about 25,000 people per square mile, distributed among its many parks, museums, sports arenas, universities, and so on.

The city of [Paris, France](#), universally hailed as one of the most beautiful cities on the planet, encompasses a shockingly tiny 41 square miles (105 square kilometers). It houses over two million people in that area, giving it a population density of (dig this) 48,780 people per square mile, marking it as quite possibly the most crowded city on the planet.

Here's a quick look at some other world cities:

- » [London](#): 11,475 people per square mile.
- » [Rio de Janeiro](#): 16,495 people per square mile.
- » [Moscow](#): 29,016 people per square mile.
- » [Seoul](#): 42,194 people per square mile.

I'll leave it as an exercise for the reader to look up what other beautiful, highly livable cities like Vancouver, Seattle, Mexico City, and so on look like.

Now, the [United States](#) encompasses about 3,717,142 square miles. The [world population](#) is currently estimated at well over 6 billion and is projected to reach 7 billion in 2010. Depending on whose estimates you believe, the population will either peak around 2050 and then begin to decline or, according to more aggressive estimates, may go as high as 11 billion some time after the year 2100. This is depending on whether you believe people around the world will continue to grow wealthier and more prosperous, which they have been throughout most of the world (except in totalitarian regimes) for the last 100 years, because a documented fact is that the more prosperous and healthy people become, the fewer children they tend to have.

Okay, so current estimates have the world population hitting 7 billion in about 6 years. Let's go with that figure. And like I just said above, the current land space in the United States is 3,717,142 square miles (a bit over 9,600,000 square kilometers). This means that if you took the entire world population in 2010 and forcibly relocated every man, woman and child to the United States, we would have a population density in this country of (drum roll, please): 1,883 people per square mile.

This would be about twice the population density of [Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin](#) (813 people per square mile), or about two thirds of the population density of [New Albin, Iowa](#) (2,635 people per square mile).

Current **estimates** have the **world population** hitting **7 billion** in about **6 years**.

In other words, it would be about average for a small rural farming community.

Now, remember where we started this little journey? Oh yes: Alberta. The [Canadian province of Alberta](#), that great nation's 4th largest province, encompasses approximately 260,000 square miles.

Which means that if you took the entire world population in 2010 and forcibly relocated every single one of them to Alberta (we plan to make everyone Canadian, eh!), Alberta would have a population density of 26,923 people per square mile.

In other words, roughly the population density of New York City or Moscow, and considerably less crowded than cities like Paris, the famed City of Lights.

Which means that we could fairly comfortably squeeze the entire world population in 2010 into this massive red area (see diagram on next page).

The rest is for whatever else we want: growing food, wilderness conservation, and so on.



As an exercise for the reader, I invite you to calculate what it would look like if we jammed everybody into Ontario or Quebec instead.

Here's the truth: [Penn & Teller](#) like to say "everybody got a gris-gris," by which they mean, almost everybody has something they are absolutely positive must be true even though it simply is not. This is one that practically everyone has: fear of overcrowding.

Well we can leave aside the debate over how we can feed and provide decent quality of life for the entire population for another time. We had a [pretty good debate on the overpopulation question](#) some months ago that you might want to read. But overcrowded? Not this country, and not any time soon.

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Dean Esmay is a freelance writer, husband, and father. He currently runs one of the most popular weblogs on the Internet, Dean's World, at <http://www.deanesmay.com>, and is currently working on his first novel.

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
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