

**School District  
#8 Kootenay  
Lake  
International  
Program**

# 10 things to know about Canadian Culture

From the office of

March 27, 2009

1. **Expect Canadians to be more talkative and outspoken in the classroom.** It may be startling the first time you're sitting in a Canadian classroom and a student, not the teacher, is addressing the class. In many countries students are not expected to talk in class, but simply listen and take notes. In Canada, this is called a lecture. In a discussion class, students are encouraged to talk and are usually graded on "class participation." The Canadian education system values "critical thinking" and teachers will often ask students for their opinion on an issue.
2. **Time Matters.** The pace of life in Canada is fast and Canadians value their time. Day planners and agendas schedule their days. Being on time is important, whether you are meeting a friend for coffee, or arriving to a class. You will hear the expression that you are expected "on time". This means you should arrive at the given time exactly or a few minutes early. The only exception to this rule is an informal gathering or party.
3. **They aren't trying to be rude.** Canadians are typically very busy people, moving from one activity to another throughout the day. It is common for a Canadian to pass by the same person everyday on the way to class or downtown and not say hello. This can be shocking to international students, since in many cultures it is usual practice to say hello to even vaguely familiar people. Don't take it as a sign of rudeness. Try nodding or smiling and it won't be long before the classmate you see in class or the library says hello back.
4. **Laws are laws.** In Canada, laws are created and are expected to be followed by everyone. All international students are subject to Canadian laws and not knowing a law is not an excuse to break it. It is illegal to drink alcohol or take any kind of illegal drug. Familiarize yourself with Canadian law and to see how our laws differ in your country before you arrive in Canada.
5. **Expect straight talk.** International students are sometimes surprised with the "straightforward" talk, questions and comments made by Canadians. Honesty is an important value to Canadian and it is common for them to give a straight answer and not speak around an issue or "beat around the bush." Again, this is not a sign of disrespect or rudeness. Generally if a question is asked, an honest, direct answer is best.
6. **Casual dress and mannerisms.** Canadians usually dress in a casual manner with the exception of special parties, weddings and work related situations. It is common to see a high school student in denim jeans, baseball hats, athletic shoes and a t-shirt. In addition, it is common for Canadians to use slang and cut words down in speech. This may be shocking if you are from a country where dress and language is formal. However, when addressing a teacher or other adult, it is always best to address them properly and use a more formal approach.
7. **Difficulty with an accent.** It is unsettling when even the best English speaking International students are asked repeatedly to explain what they mean and repeat themselves. Although Canadians love to learn about



## Continued from page 1

7. other cultures and languages, they may not be used to hearing different accents. Don't give up or get upset when you ask a question and a Canadian responds with "what?" Try speaking slowly and repeat the question again using different words. If that doesn't work, use some sign language or actions.
8. **Canadians like their space.** It seems that in Canada, everyone has or wants a big car, a large house and lots of land or yard. Canadians are used to personal space and become uncomfortable if that personal space is breached. You may notice that Canadians stand a few feet away from each other. In some cultures it is acceptable to stand closer or lean in towards the person when talking, but when you are in a conversation with a Canadian, give them their space.
9. **Canadian will ask questions.** Once in Canada, you may feel bombarded with questions: what do you want? How do you feel? How are your classes? How is your homestay? How much did you pay for that? What do you want to eat? What do you want to do? Some of these questions are not acceptable in other countries. Canadians are not asking these questions to make you feel uncomfortable; on the contrary, they are asking them because they want to get to know you better. If you would rather not answer a question, it is acceptable to change the conversation subject or simply say that you are not comfortable answering the question.
10. **Canadians will expect you to know English.** English is spoken everywhere in Canada. Many Canadians speak French as Canada is a bilingual country but most Canadians will expect to communicate with you in English. In many countries around the world, it is common to hear two or three languages spoken by government officials, schools, and common citizens. This is not true in Canada. English is spoken in schools and business is conducted in English. This may be a worry for you at first but do the best you can and carry a dictionary or translating device with you until you feel confident speaking in English. **Also, make sure to carry your student card with you so that your homestay family can be contacted by the person trying to assist or communicate with you.**

## What to pack for life in Canada - suggested basic list

- 1 warm winter jacket and winter boots
- 1 light spring/fall jacket
- 1 warm winter hat or scarf and gloves or mittens
- 2 pairs of blue jeans and 2 pairs of corduroy pants or other material such as cotton
- 1 pair of running shoes, 1 pair of casual shoes, 1 pair of formal shoes, 1 pair of flip-flops
- 5 shirts - long sleeved and 5 t-shirts—short sleeved (two may be sleeves for warm days)
- 2 pairs of shorts
- bathing suit
- 2 pairs of shorts
- 14 pairs of underclothing and socks
- A more formal set of clothes for dressy events with family and friends, this may include a skirt or dress for girls
- Pictures of your family to share with people here and keep in your bedroom
- Sports equipment—if you decide to ski or snowboard but this can be purchased in Nelson.
- A pouch or handbag for your passport and important documents
- Personal toiletries and vitamins etc
- School supplies—see list on website and in package but these may also be purchased in Nelson if so desired.
- Laptop computer—(optional)

**Make sure your luggage does not exceed 30 kg per bag if travelling with Air Canada as penalties apply.**

Bring a pocketbook translator with you or some form of electronic translator to help with difficult English vocabulary and on the spot conversations with Canadians.

