

Culture Wise **CANADA**

The Essential Guide to Culture,
Customs & Business Etiquette

Graeme Chesters & Sally Jennings





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& Business Etiquette

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Sally Jennings



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WHAT READERS & REVIEWERS HAVE

‘If you need to find out how France works then this book is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions.’

Living France

‘It’s everything you always wanted to ask but didn’t for fear of the contemptuous put down. The best English-language guide. Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to compliment the traditional guidebook.’

Swiss News

‘Rarely has a ‘survival guide’ contained such useful advice. This book dispels doubts for first-time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters. In a word, if you’re planning to move to the US or go there for a long-term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready-reference.’

American Citizens Abroad

‘Let’s say it at once. David Hampshire’s Living and Working in France is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l’Hexagone. It is Hampshire’s meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. Often you think of a supplementary question and search for the answer in vain. With Hampshire this is rarely the case. He writes with great clarity (and gives French equivalents of all key terms), a touch of humour and a ready eye for the odd (and often illuminating) fact. This book is absolutely indispensable.’

The Riviera Reporter

‘A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need. Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches. Highly recommended.’

Reader

‘In answer to the desert island question about the one how-to book on France, this book would be it.’

The Recorder

‘The ultimate reference book. Every subject imaginable is exhaustively explained in simple terms. An excellent introduction to fully enjoy all that this fine country has to offer and save time and money in the process.’

American Club of Zurich

SAID ABOUT SURVIVAL BOOKS

‘The amount of information covered is not short of incredible. I thought I knew enough about my birth country. This book has proved me wrong. Don’t go to France without it. Big mistake if you do. Absolutely priceless!’

Reader

‘When you buy a model plane for your child, a video recorder, or some new computer gizmo, you get with it a leaflet or booklet pleading ‘Read Me First’, or bearing large friendly letters or bold type saying ‘IMPORTANT – follow the instructions carefully’. This book should be similarly supplied to all those entering France with anything more durable than a 5-day return ticket. It is worth reading even if you are just visiting briefly, or if you have lived here for years and feel totally knowledgeable and secure. But if you need to find out how France works then it is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions. Where it is most essential, the book is most up to the minute.

Living France

A comprehensive guide to all things French, written in a highly readable and amusing style, for anyone planning to live, work or retire in France.

The Times

Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life. I know of no other book that could take the place of this one.

France in Print

A concise, thorough account of the Do’s and DONT’s for a foreigner in Switzerland. Crammed with useful information and lightened with humorous quips which make the facts more readable.

American Citizens Abroad

‘I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter. The whole laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what’s involved. Gets my vote!’

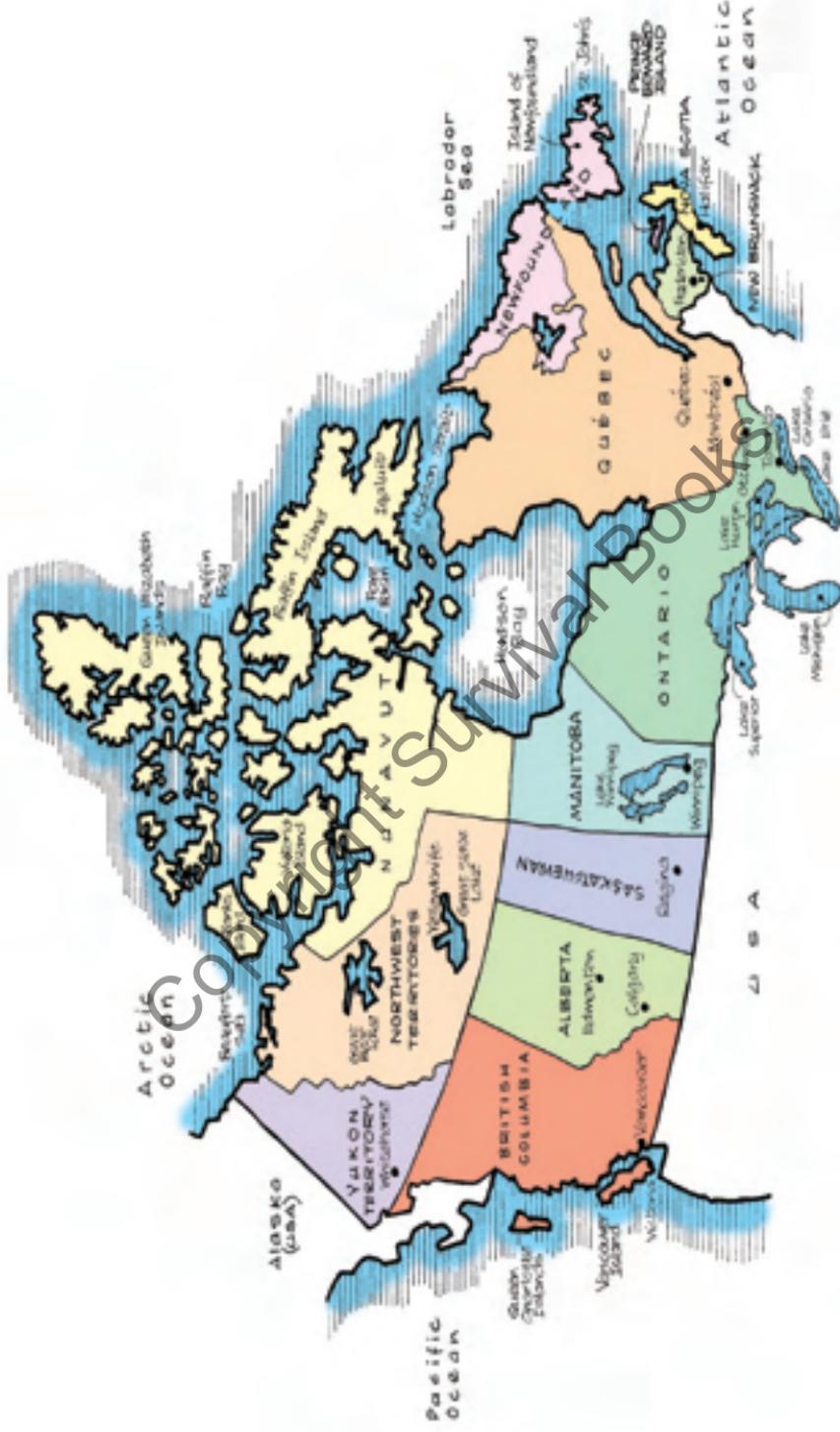
Reader

‘A vital tool in the war against real estate sharks; don’t even think of buying without reading this book first! ’

Everything Spain

‘We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure.’

ICI (Switzerland) AG



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INTRODUCTION

If you're planning a trip to Canada or just want to learn more about the country, you'll find the information contained in *Culture Wise Canada* invaluable. Whether you're travelling on business or pleasure, visiting for a few days or planning to stay for a lifetime, Culture Wise guides enable you to quickly find your feet by removing the anxiety factor when dealing with a foreign culture.

Culture Wise Canada is essential reading for anyone planning to visit Canada, including tourists (particularly travellers planning to stay for a number of weeks or months), business people, migrants, retirees, holiday homeowners and transferees. It's designed to help newcomers avoid cultural and social gaffes; make friends and influence people; improve communications (both verbal and non-verbal); and enhance their understanding of Canada and Canadians. It explains what to expect, how to behave in most situations, and how to get along with the locals and feel at home – rather than feeling like a fish out of water.

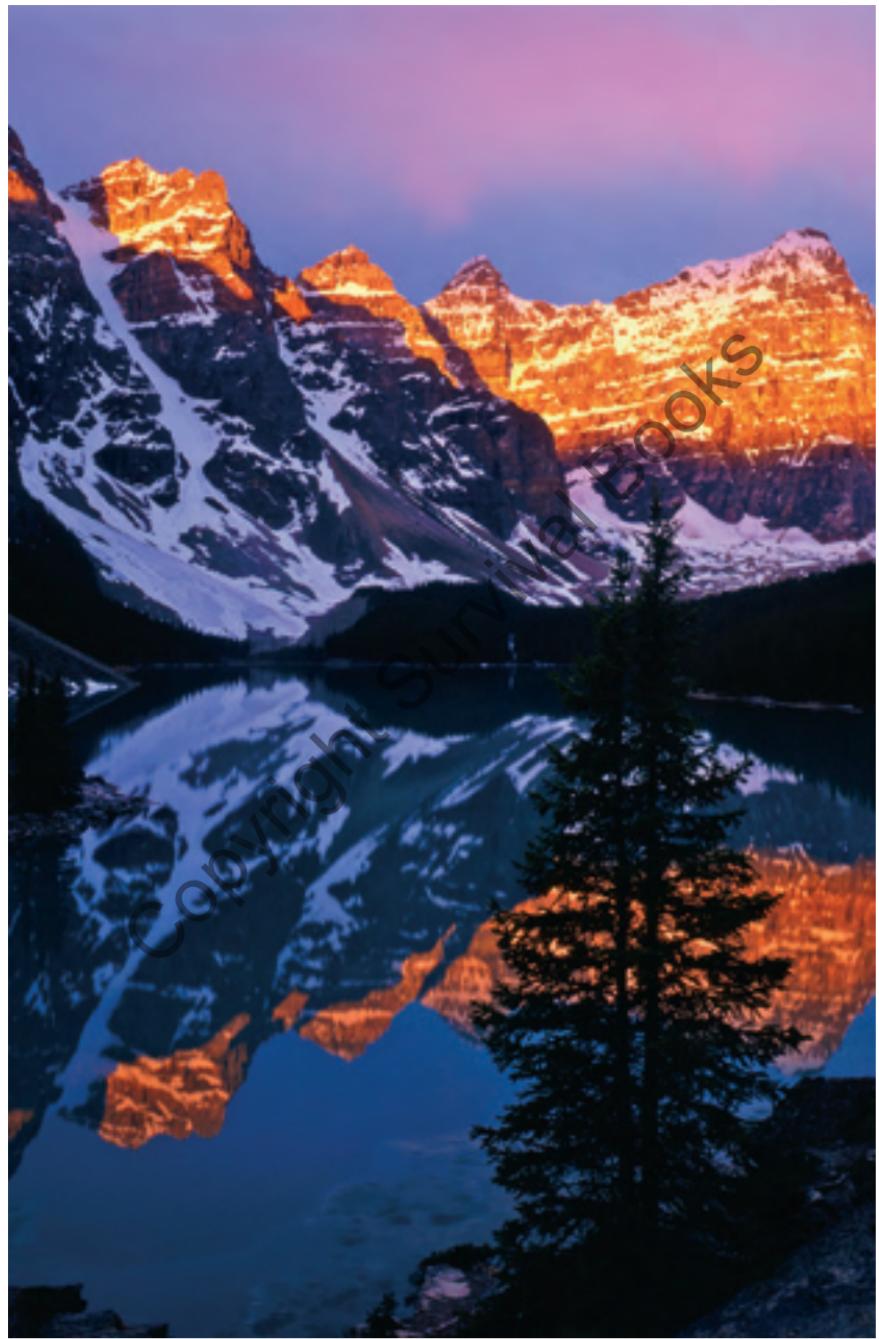
It isn't, however, simply a monologue of dry facts and figures, but a practical and entertaining look at life in Canada – as it really is – and not necessarily as the tourist brochures would have you believe.

Adjusting to a different environment and culture in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience, and Canada is no exception. You need to adapt to new customs and traditions, and discover the Canadian way of doing things; whether it's trying to avoid looking like a gorby on arrival, sharing a few forty pounders with your rigpig mates and not getting snocked, or learning to ski in a whiteout in your new dekey outfit without looking like a chucklehead. Eh? Canada is a land where many things are done differently: where riding a skidoo is as common as riding a bike, where a cross-country trip in winter can be a survival course, and where flying is as common as taking a bus in many other countries.

A period spent in Canada is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and hopefully expand your circle of friends. We trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of visiting or living in Canada and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding stay.

Good luck!

Graeme Chesters & Sally Jennings
July 2007



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1. ADAPTING TO A NEW CULTURE

With almost daily advances in technology, ever-cheaper flights, and knowledge about almost anywhere in the world at our fingertips, travelling, living, working and retiring abroad has never been more accessible, and current migration patterns suggest that it has never been more popular. But although globalisation means the world has in effect 'shrunk', every country is still a 'world' of its own with a unique culture.

Some people find it impossible to adapt to a new life in a different culture – for reasons which are many and varied. According to statistics, partner dissatisfaction is the most common cause, because non-working spouses frequently find themselves without a role in the new country, and sometimes with little to do other than think about what they would be doing if they were at home. Family concerns – which may include the children's education and worries about loved ones – can also deeply affect those living abroad.

Many factors contribute to how well you adapt to a new culture; for example, your personality, education, foreign language skills, mental health, maturity, socio-economic conditions, travel experience, and family and social support systems. How you handle the stress of change, and bring balance and meaning to your life, is the principal indicator of how well you'll adjust to a different country, culture and business environment.

CANADA IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY

Many people underestimate the cultural isolation that can be experienced in a foreign country, particularly one with a different language. Even in a country where you speak the language fluently, you'll find that many aspects of the culture are surprisingly foreign, despite the cosy familiarity

engendered by cinema, television and books. Canada is perceived by many foreigners – particularly the British – as an easy option because of the English language (but don't forget that French is the main language in Quebec), its traditional links with Britain, multicultural society and well-established foreign communities in the major cities.

When you move to Canada,

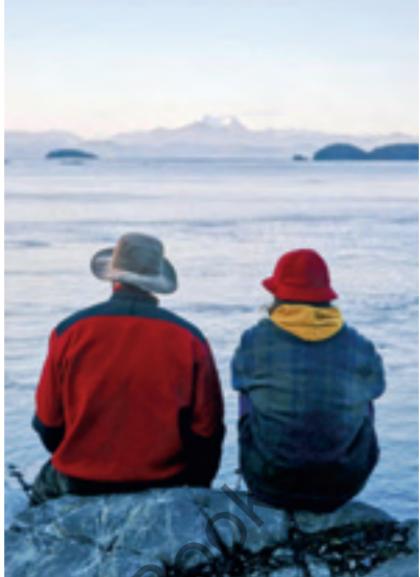
'There are no foreign lands. It is the traveller only who is foreign.'

Robert Louis Stevenson
(Scottish writer)

you'll need to adapt to a totally new environment and new challenges, which may include a new job, a new home and a new physical environment. This can be overwhelming – and all this before you even encounter the local culture! In your home country, you may have left a job where you were the boss, extremely competent and knew everyone. In Canada, you may be virtually a trainee (especially if your English isn't fluent) and not know any of your colleagues. The sensation that you're starting from scratch can be demoralising.

Even if you move to a major city, many things that you're used to and take for granted in your home country may not be available in Canada, e.g. certain kinds of food, opportunities to practise your favourite hobby or sport, or books and television programmes in your language. The lack of home comforts can wear you down. You will also have to contend with an initial lack of a local support network. At home, you have a circle of friends, acquaintances, colleagues and possibly relatives

Canada has many extremes of climate and weather, and you mustn't underestimate the effect that this can have on you. Extreme cold can lead to a feeling of isolation and claustrophobia, due to spending most of your time indoors. In the winter in Canada, just about everywhere is centrally heated, and if you aren't used to this it can be draining and dehydrating



you could rely on for help and support. In Canada, there's no such network, which can leave you feeling lost for a while.

The degree of isolation you feel usually depends on how long you plan to spend in Canada and what you will be doing there. If you're simply going on a short holiday, you may be unaware of many of the cultural differences, although if you are, it will enhance your enjoyment and may save you from a few embarrassing or confusing moments. However, if you're planning a business trip, or intend to spend an extended period in Canada, perhaps working, studying or even living there permanently, **it's essential to understand the culture, customs and etiquette at the earliest opportunity.**

'If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay at home.'

James A. Michener (American writer)

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the term used to describe the psychological and physical state felt by people when arriving in a foreign country, or even moving to a new environment in their home country (where the culture, and in some cases language, may vary considerably by region and social class). Culture shock can be experienced when travelling, living, working or studying abroad. In addition to adapting to new social rules and values, you may need to adjust to a different climate, food and dress. It manifests itself in a lack of direction and the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things, not knowing what's appropriate or inappropriate. You literally feel like a 'fish out of water'.

'When you travel, remember that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable.'

Clifton Fadiman (American writer)

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar rules of behaviour and symbols of social intercourse. These rules and symbols are the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people; when and how to tip; how to buy goods and services; how to use a cash machine or the telephone; when to accept and refuse invitations; and

when to take statements seriously, and when not to. These cues, which may be verbal, a gesture, or facial or hand expressions, are acquired over a lifetime, and are as much a part of our culture and customs as the language we speak or our beliefs. Our peace of mind and efficiency depend on hundreds of these cues, most of which are learned subconsciously.

The symptoms are essentially psychological, and are caused by the sense of alienation you feel when you're bombarded on a daily basis with cultural differences in an environment where there are few, if any, familiar references. However, there can also be physical symptoms, including an increased incidence of minor illnesses (e.g. colds and headaches) and more serious psychosomatic illnesses, brought on by depression. You shouldn't underestimate the consequences of culture shock, although the effects can be lessened if you accept the condition rather than deny it.





Stages of Culture Shock

Severe culture shock – often experienced when moving to a new country with a different language – usually follows a number of stages. The names of these may vary, as may the symptoms and effects, but a typical progression is as follows:

1. The first stage is known as the honeymoon stage, and usually lasts from a few days to a few weeks, although it can last longer, particularly if you're insulated from the usual pressures of life. This stage is essentially a positive (even euphoric) one, when a newcomer finds everything an exciting and interesting novelty. The feeling is similar to being on holiday or a short trip abroad, when you generally experience only the positive effects of culture shock (although this depends very much on where you're from and the country you're visiting – see 'Paris Syndrome' box).
2. The second (rejection or distress) stage is usually completely opposite to the first

and is essentially negative, and a period of crisis. As the initial excitement and holiday feeling wears off, you start to cope with the real conditions of daily life – except of course life is nothing like your previous experiences. This can happen after just a few weeks, and is characterised by a general feeling of disorientation, confusion and loneliness.

Physical exhaustion brought on by jet lag, extremes of hot or cold, and the strain of having hundreds of settling-in tasks to accomplish, is an important symptom of this stage. You may also experience regression, where you spend much of your time speaking your own language, watching television, videos and reading newspapers from your home country, eating food from home, and socialising with expatriates who speak your language. You may also spend a lot of time complaining about the host country and its culture. Your home country suddenly assumes a tremendous

Paris Syndrome

A dozen or so Japanese tourists a year have to be repatriated from the French capital, after falling prey to what's become known as the 'Paris Syndrome'. This is what some polite Japanese tourists suffer when they discover that Parisians can be rude, or that the city doesn't meet their expectations. The experience can apparently be so stressful for some people that they suffer a nervous breakdown, and need to be hospitalised or repatriated under medical supervision.

importance, and is irrationally glorified. All difficulties and problems are forgotten, and only the good things back home are remembered.

3. The third stage is often known as the flight stage (because of the overwhelming desire to escape), and is usually the one that lasts the longest, and is the most difficult to cope with. During this period, you may feel depressed and angry, as well as resentful towards the new country and its people. It may include difficulties such as not being understood, and feelings of discontent, impatience, anger, sadness and incompetence. This is inevitable when you're trying to adapt to a new culture that's very different from your home country. Depression is exacerbated, because at this stage you can see nothing positive or good about the new country, and you focus exclusively on the negative aspects, refusing to acknowledge any positive points.

You may become hostile and develop an aggressive attitude

Transition between your old culture and customs and those of your new country is a difficult process and takes time, during which there can be strong feelings of dissatisfaction.

The period of adjustment can last as long as a year, although there are expatriates who adjust earlier and (although rare) others who never get over the 'flight' stage and are forced to return home.



towards the country, which grows out of the genuine difficulty that you experience in the process of adjustment. If you're frustrated and have an aggressive attitude, people will sense this hostility, and in many cases respond in either a confrontational manner or try to avoid you. There may be problems with the language, your home, job or children's school, transportation... even simple tasks like shopping can be fraught with difficulties – and the fact that the local people are largely indifferent to all these problems only makes matter worse. They try to help but they just don't understand your concerns, and you conclude that they must be insensitive and unsympathetic to you and your problems.

4. The fourth (recovery or autonomy) stage is where you begin to integrate and adapt to the new culture, and accept the customs of the country as simply another way of living. The environment doesn't change



– what changes is your attitude towards it. You become more competent with the language and also feel more comfortable with the customs of the host country, and can move around without feeling anxiety. However, you still have problems with some of the social cues, and you won't understand everything people say (particularly colloquialisms, idioms and humour).

Nevertheless, you have largely adjusted to the new culture, and start to feel more at home and familiar with the country and your place in it, and begin to realise that it has both good and bad points.

5. The fifth stage is termed reverse culture shock and occurs when you return to your home country. Depending on how long you've been away, you may find that

many things have changed (you will also have changed) and that you feel like a foreigner in your homeland. If you've been away for a long time, and have become comfortable with the habits and customs of a new lifestyle, you may find that you no longer feel at ease in your own country.

Reverse culture shock can be difficult to deal with, and some people find it impossible to re-adapt to their home country after living abroad for a number of years.

The above stages are present at different times, and everyone has their own way of reacting to them, with the result that some stages are longer and more difficult than others, while others are shorter and easier to cope with.

‘The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land.’

G. K. Chesterton (English writer)

Reducing the Effects

Experts agree that almost everyone suffers from culture shock and there's no escaping the phenomenon; however, its negative effects can be reduced considerably, and there are a number of things you can do before leaving home:

- **Positive attitude.** The key to reducing the negative effects of culture shock is to have a positive attitude towards

'Travellers never think that THEY are the foreigners.'

Mason Cooley (American aphorist)

Canada (whether you're visiting or planning to live there). If you don't look forward to a trip or relocation, you should question why you're going! There's no greater guarantee for unhappiness in a foreign environment than taking your prejudices with you. It's important when trying to adapt to a new culture to be sensitive to the locals' feelings, and try to put yourself in their shoes wherever possible, which will help you understand why they react as they do. Bear in mind that they have a strong, in-bred cultural code, just as you do, and react in certain ways because they're culturally 'trained' to do so. If you find yourself frustrated by an aspect of the local culture or behaviour, the chances are that they will be equally puzzled by yours!

- **Research.** Discover as much as possible about Canada before you go, so that your arrival and settling-in period doesn't spring as many surprises as it might otherwise. Reading up on Canada and its culture before you leave home will help you familiarise yourself with the local customs, and make the country and its people seem less strange on arrival. You will be

aware of many of the differences in Canada and be better prepared to deal with them. This will help you avoid being upset by real or imaginary cultural slights, and also reduce the chances of you offending the locals by cultural misunderstandings. Being prepared for a certain amount of disorientation and confusion (or worse) makes it easier to cope with it. There are literally hundreds of publications about Canada as well as dozens of websites for expatriates (see Appendices B and C). Many sites provide access to expatriates already living in Canada who can answer questions and provide useful advice. There are also notice boards on many websites where you can post messages or ask questions.

- **Visit Canada first.** If you're planning to live or work in Canada for a number of years or even permanently, it's important to visit the country to see whether you think you would enjoy living there, and would be able to cope with the culture



before making the leap. Before you go, try to find someone in your local area who has visited Canada, and talk to them about it. Some companies organise briefings for families before departure. Rent a property before buying a home, and don't burn your bridges until you're certain that you have made the correct decision.

- **Learn English (or French if you will be living in a French-speaking area). This isn't optional but is absolutely essential.** As well as a positive attitude, overcoming the language barrier will be the most decisive factor in combating culture shock and enjoying your time in Canada. The ability to speak English (or French) and understand the local vernacular (see **Chapter 5**) isn't just a practical and useful tool (the one that will allow you to buy what you need, find your way around, etc.), but is the key to understanding Canada and its culture. If you can speak English



(or French), even at a basic level, your scope for making friends is immediately widened. Obviously not everyone is a linguist, and learning English (or French) can take time and requires motivation. However, with sufficient perseverance, virtually anyone can learn enough English (or French) to participate in the local culture.

- **Make a conscious effort to get involved in Canada's culture; be proactive and go out of your way to make friends.** Join in the activities of the local people, which could be a carnival, a religious festival or a sporting activity. There are often plenty of local clubs where you can practise sport or keep fit, learn to paint, cook local dishes, taste wine, etc. Not only will this fill some of your spare time, giving you less time to miss home, but you'll also meet new people and make friends. If you feel you cannot join a local club, perhaps because your English (or French) isn't good enough, then you can always participate in activities for expatriates, of which there are many in the major cities. Look upon a period spent in Canada as an opportunity to redefine your life objectives, and learn and acquire new perspectives. Culture shock can help you develop a better understanding of yourself and stimulate your creativity.
- **Talk to other expatriates.** Although they may deny it,

many expatriates have been through exactly what you're experiencing, and faced the same feelings of disorientation. Even if they cannot give you any advice, it helps to know that you aren't alone, and that it gets better over time. However, don't make the mistake of mixing only with expatriates, as this will alienate you from the local culture and make it much harder to integrate. Don't rely on social contact with your compatriots to carry you through, because it won't.

- **Keep in touch with home.**

Keeping in touch with your family and friends at home and around the world by telephone, email and letters will help reduce and overcome the effects of culture shock. If you're feeling homesick and it's feasible, make a trip back home.

- **Be happy!** Don't rely on others to make you happy, otherwise you won't find true and lasting happiness. If you need things to change, you must do it yourself. Every day we are surrounded by events over which we have little or no control, and to complain

Culture shock is an unavoidable part of travelling, living and working abroad, but if you're aware of it and take steps to lessen its effects before you go, and while you're abroad, the period of adjustment will be shortened, and its negative and depressing consequences reduced



about them only makes us unhappier. So be your own best friend and nurture your capacity for happiness.

FAMILIES IN CANADA

Family life may be completely different in Canada, and relationships can become strained under the stress of adapting to culture shock. Your family may find itself in a completely new and possibly alien environment, your new home may scarcely resemble your previous one (it may be much more luxurious or significantly smaller), and the climate may differ dramatically from that of your home country. If possible, you should prepare yourself for as many aspects of the new situation as you can, and explain to your children the differences they're likely to encounter, while at the same time dispelling their fears.

'And that's the wonderful thing about family travel: it provides you with experiences that will remain locked forever in the scar tissue of your mind.'

Dave Barry (American author & humorist)



Culture shock can affect non-working spouses and children more than working spouses. The husband (it's usually the husband) has his work to occupy him. He's meeting new colleagues, going out to lunch, and his activities may not differ much from what he was accustomed to at home. The children may be at school all day, making new friends and keeping busy. The wife, however, has to operate in a totally new environment that differs considerably from what she's used to. She will find herself alone more often, a solitude intensified by the fact that there are no close relatives or friends on hand. However, if you're aware that this may arise beforehand, you can act on it and reduce its effects. Working spouses

should pay special attention to the needs and feelings of their non-working partners and children, because the success of a relocation depends on the ability of the whole family to adapt to the new culture.

Good communication between family members is vital, and you should make time to discuss your experiences and feelings, both as a couple and a family. Questions should always be raised and, if possible, answered, particularly when asked by children. However difficult the situation may appear in the beginning, it helps to bear in mind that it's by no means unique, and that most expatriate families experience exactly the same problems, and manage to triumph over them and thoroughly enjoy their stay abroad.

MULTICULTURALISM

The good news for newcomers to Canada is that it's a tolerant, multicultural society (Canadians like to think of it as a multicultural mosaic rather than a melting pot), where people from numerous nationalities live, work and play together in harmony. This has not only greatly enriched the Canadian way of life and added to its diverse range of foods, religions, businesses and ideas, but makes it much easier for immigrants to integrate into society. Virtually all ethnic groups in Canada maintain active clubs and societies where newcomers are warmly welcomed.

Coined in Canada in the '70s, multiculturalism is an ideology advocating that immigrants can

integrate into society, while at the same time retaining and valuing the most important elements of their own culture (including speaking their own language and teaching it to their children). In Canada, migrants are encouraged to maintain ties with their homeland along with its culture – rather than abandon them – while simultaneously being urged to embrace Canadian values. Consequently, Canada has one of the most ethnically diverse societies in the world, with a low level of inter-ethnic conflict and high levels of cooperation. Intermarriage between different ethnic groups is high.

A NEW LIFE

Although you may find some of the information in this chapter a bit daunting, don't be discouraged by the foregoing catalogue of depression and despair; the negative aspects of travelling and living in Canada have been emphasised only to help you prepare for a new culture. Although most people who travel and live in Canada experience occasional feelings of discomfort and disorientation, **the vast majority never suffer the most debilitating effects of culture shock.**

As with settling in and making friends anywhere, even in your home country, the most important thing is to be considerate, kind, open, humble and genuine – qualities that are valued the world over. Selfishness, brashness and arrogance will get you nowhere in Canada, or any other country. Treat Canada and



its people with respect and they will reciprocate.

The majority of foreigners living in Canada would agree that, all things considered, they love living there – and are in no hurry to return home. A period spent in Canada is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, make new friends and maybe even please your bank manager. The authors trust this book will help you avoid some of the pitfalls of life in Canada, and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

'Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.'

Mark Twain (American writer)



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WHO ARE THE CANADIANS?

Canada is renowned for its rugged natural beauty, outdoor lifestyle, unspoilt environment and friendly and unassuming people. Canadians are environmentally aware, fair, hard-working, honest, orderly and rugged outdoors people, and the country is one of the least corrupt, safest (deaths from hand guns number in single digits, while in the US they run into thousands) and most civilised in the world. It's a caring society, where the community comes before the individual, highlighted by the abundance of charitable and voluntary organisations in Canada that do invaluable work, both nationally and internationally.

Canadians are one of the most difficult peoples to categorise, and the country has been described as 'not so much a nation as a collection of different peoples on a continental scale'. For a nation that's made up almost entirely of immigrants, it's hardly surprising that many Canadians have an identity crisis and spend a lot of time pondering the eternal question: "What is a Canadian?". Apart from lifestyle, Canadians have little in common with Americans, and, indeed, are at pains to emphasise the differences between themselves and their neighbours. Canadians *don't like* being mistaken for Americans, who many see as arrogant, brash and vulgar.

Migrants have been drawn to Canada for hundreds of years, particularly from the UK and France. In recent decades, there has been

'Canada is a nation of people who came from somewhere else.'

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an influx of migrants from all corners of the globe, particularly Asia, and the country is one of the most multicultural in the world. (Most immigrants and refugees would really like to go to the US, but are accepted by Canada instead, and eventually realise just how lucky they are.) The country's 30m inhabitants reflect a cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity found almost nowhere else on earth, and today it still welcomes some 200,000 immigrants annually. These diverse peoples generally live, work and play together in harmony, alongside indigenous First Peoples and Inuit, and have enriched the country with their cultures and customs. Canada is recognised as one of the most harmonious societies, and Canadians the most tolerant of races.