

Center for Student Missions

What Americans Need to Know When Coming to Canada

By John Torrens

When you come to Toronto, you will be coming to a different country. The following guidelines are offered to prepare you for both crossing the border, and for the differences you will discover between Canada and the U.S.

1. At the border, you will be asked for some form of identification to prove your citizenship. A passport or birth certificate is accepted; a driver's licence is not. You will also be asked for some photo ID. U.S. citizens may enter Canada without a visa. If you are not a U.S. citizen, you should check with authorities before you come to be sure you would not have problems re-entering the U.S.
2. Toronto has been strongly influenced by Canada's open immigration policy. Each year close to 100,000 new immigrants come to Toronto alone. For this reason *tolerance* is a characteristic that has been elevated as the highest value. This is an attempt to head off racism. It also has had the effect of making it difficult to talk about religion (e.g. you have no right to tell me what to believe). This value has also helped to promote the acceptance of other lifestyles (e.g. homosexuality).
3. Toronto is predominantly English speaking. Canada is officially bilingual, but French is spoken mostly in the province of Quebec.
4. Bring winter clothing from November through April and expect to have cold weather. A warm coat and extra sweaters and socks, as well as boots, hat and gloves are advisable. June through September can be hot, so bring shorts, etc. Other months are quite variable, so come prepared for anything.
5. Canada has its own currency, so change your money into Canadian dollars before you arrive. American dollars are not widely accepted, and where they are, the exchange rate is usually very unfavourable.
6. Remember that, during your stay, *you are guests* of another country. Respect the differences you encounter (and don't make fun of them!). You are the one who has the funny accent here!
7. On the surface, some things may seem familiar, but are actually quite different. For example, blacks in the U.S. often look to Africa for their roots and prefer the label "African-American". In Toronto, 85% of the black population are of West Indian descent. In Canada, most blacks think of themselves as Jamaican, Barbadian, etc.
8. You may run into some anti-American sentiments. Don't try to defend your country --just be friendly.
9. Canada uses the metric system of measurement. Traffic speed limits are posted in kilometers per hour (kph) rather than miles per hour (mph). For example, 100 kph=65 mph. Temperature is measured in degrees Celsius, not Fahrenheit. For example, 0 degrees Celsius=32 degrees Fahrenheit. Gasoline is measured in litres, not gallons. For example, 3.785 litres=1 U.S. gallon.
10. If you are using a borrowed vehicle, be sure to have a letter of permission from the owner, as well as the vehicle's registration and insurance information.
11. If you are taking prescription drugs, be sure that they are in a clearly marked container.
12. Expect to pay up to twice as much for gasoline as you would pay in the U.S.