



ABBOTSFORD
SCHOOL DISTRICT
RESPECT OPPORTUNITY INNOVATION

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Some facts about Canada

Land area:	90, 970, 610 sq. kms.
East to West:	over 8000 kms.
North to South:	over 9000 kms.
Time zones:	6 (Standard, Atlantic, Eastern, Central, Mountain, Pacific)
Official languages:	English and French
Capital City:	Ottawa, Ontario
Provinces and their Capitals:	(East to West) Newfoundland (St. John's) Nova Scotia (Halifax) Prince Edward Island (Charlottetown) New Brunswick (Fredericton) Quebec (Quebec City) Ontario (Toronto) Manitoba (Winnipeg) Saskatchewan (Regina) Alberta (Edmonton) British Columbia (Victoria) <u>Three Territories</u> Northwest Territories (Yellowknife) Yukon (Whitehorse) Nunavut (Iqaluit)
Government:	Parliamentary Democracy. The Federal Government (Parliament in Ottawa) has certain powers e.g. Foreign Policy, Defence. Provinces (Legislatures, such as that in Victoria for British Columbia) have jurisdiction in other areas e.g. Education, Health.
Prime Minister:	Justin Trudeau
Independence:	July 1, 1867 (from England)
Currency:	Canadian dollar
Education:	Compulsory from 6-16 yrs of age

Getting There

Packing:

Think about how long you will be staying in Canada and pack all the things you will need, but don't forget that you must carry all of this luggage.

When packing clothes consider the time of year that you will be living in Canada. For more detail on the type of weather you can expect at different times of the year, please see 'Tips about the Weather' later in this package.

Departure:

- Remember to take your Passport, airplane ticket and Student Authorization.
- Do not pack these items in your 'check-in' luggage, they should be safely on your person or in your 'carry on' bag.

Flights and stopovers:

- Try to get as much sleep on the plane as possible.
- Eat and drink plenty of fluids. Flying dehydrates the body and makes you feel very tired.
- If you have a transit/stop-over, make sure you listen carefully to any directions for a change of flight.
- If you are unsure, ask for assistance from the flight attendants.

Arrival in Vancouver:

- Before leaving the airplane, always check that you have all your personal belongings.
- After leaving the airplane, proceed to Canada Immigration. You will need your Passport and your Student Authorization.
- Then proceed to the luggage carousel to claim your luggage.
- As you leave the arrival area, look for the person who will be meeting you, in order to bring you to Abbotsford.

Welcome to Beautiful British Columbia

Tips for Canadian Weather

The weather in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia is much warmer than most people expect from Canada. There is very little snow in the winter, except on the mountains that surround Vancouver. The Fraser Valley, where Abbotsford is located, has a mild climate and, at times, a lot of rain. Dressing on the West Coast is relatively casual, particularly in the summer time. All schools in Abbotsford have dress codes, which do not allow revealing clothing or clothing that promotes drugs or alcohol.

We have four distinct seasons: Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. Each season requires clothing that is appropriate to the weather.

Spring.....is from the end of March until the middle of May. The evenings are cool with warm days and, frequently, a lot of rain. This is the time when apple and cherry trees blossom and spring flowers appear. Warm clothing and a rain jacket is needed. Toward the end of March, the daytime temperature can reach 20 degrees C.

Summer....is from the end of May until the middle of September. The days are long, with the sun rising at 5 a.m. and setting at 9:00 p.m or later . Summer is the time when the beaches of Vancouver are full of sunbathers. Many people like to go sailing, fishing, camping, mountain biking, canoeing, backpacking and hiking. A sun block of at least 15 spf is a good idea because the temperatures can reach 30 degrees C. and even warmer, in the interior of B.C. Light clothes, shorts and T-shirts are appropriate, although the evenings can be cool, and a light sweater or jacket may be needed.

Fall.....begins in mid September and lasts until November. Often there is an 'Indian Summer' when the days can be warm, gradually cooling from the middle of October on. There can also be a lot of rain, as Fall continues, but there will be no frost until the beginning of December. This is the time the Pacific salmon return to the local rivers to spawn. Remember that the days can be warm and the evenings cool; a sweater or fleece and a raincoat or jacket is important.

Winter.....in Abbotsford is cool and often wet. There are usually two or three weeks of snow but the temperatures rarely dip below -5 C. It is possible to continue most outside pursuits but this is the time for skiing and snowboarding on the local mountains. This is also the perfect time to learn how to skate at the local rink or to watch the N.H.L. Vancouver Canucks play against the best hockey players in the world. Appropriate clothing is important if you are going to take full advantage of all the recreational opportunities available to you. For daytime wear, warm clothing and Gortex type jackets are essential. If you wish to participate in Winter activities, such as skiing or snowboarding, special clothing is essential. It is probably best to rent the equipment you will need. This can be done in many ski stores or on the mountain, when you get there. There are many local stores which sell the appropriate clothing.

Taking care of your body

Remember to:

- get enough sleep (you need at least 8 hours!).
- stay active. Get involved in some kind of outside activity e.g. a sport.
- eat well. If you live with a host family and the food in your Homestay is not to your liking, discuss it with your Homestay parent and, if necessary, with your International Assistant at your school.
- try to not catch a cold.

Don't allow the varying weather in Canada to spoil your time here. If you dress appropriately, you will find that you enjoy the difference.

Financial Matters

Banking:

Abbotsford is served by all the major Canadian banks.

These include:

- Royal Bank
- Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC)
- Scotia Bank
- Bank of Montreal
- Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank of Canada (HSBC)

All these banks have Automated Teller Machines (ATM), for after-hours banking.

There are, also, several Credit Unions, which are similar to banks.

Your homestay parents can assist you in opening an account at a local bank or credit union. Please do not carry large amounts of cash around.

Currency:

- Canadian currency is based on the decimal system. There are 100 cents to one dollar i.e. 100 cents = \$1.00 CDN.
- Paper currency is issued in the following denominations: \$5.00, \$10.00, \$20.00, \$50.00, \$100.00 and \$1000.00. \$1000 bills are rarely used.
- Coin currency is issued in the following denominations: 5c (nickel), 10c (dime), 25c (quarter), \$1.00 (dollar, buck, looney), \$2.00 (tooney).
- Traveller's cheques, in Canadian dollars, are usually acceptable in the larger stores but are best cashed at a bank or credit union.

Credit cards:

Most major credit cards and principal bank cards are honoured in Canada, but check with your home bank before leaving home to make sure.

Bartering:

Prices in Canada are fixed. There is no bartering, unless you are buying goods at a 'Sunday Market' or 'Flea Market' where there may be some bartering.

Health & Safety

Health:

We want you to remain healthy while you are with us in Canada. As part of your registration process you are required to take our health insurance.

Abbotsford is served by many health professionals, including doctors, physical therapists, dentists etc. these professionals usually work as part of a clinic, serving their local community.

In addition, Abbotsford has a major hospital, which provides most services and surgical procedures.

The main way for you to stay healthy is to get sufficient sleep, eat well, and stay active.

If you have concerns or need help, discuss this with your Homestay parents or, if you wish, with your International Assistant. You may also speak to your school counselor. Don't be afraid to talk to these people because they all wish to help you enjoy your stay in Canada.

Safety:

Abbotsford and Vancouver are safe communities but sensible precautions are still needed. Discuss this with your Home-Stay parent or international assistant who will give you the guidance you need to stay safe.

One sensible precaution is to not carry large amounts of cash on your person.

Abbotsford is served by its own police force, which has male and female officers. All officers are fully trained and trustworthy. Do not hesitate to ask for help from a police officer.

There is an emergency number to call in urgent situations and your homestay parent will give you the number and how to make the call.

Shopping and Food

Shopping:

Abbotsford is home to three main shopping malls: Seven Oaks, West Oaks, and Highstreet Shopping Centre, in addition to many other stores. Local communities are served by smaller shopping centres.

Being so close to Vancouver, it is possible to visit the mega centres, such as MetroTown, in Burnaby or Guilford in Surrey.

Supermarkets:

Abbotsford has a number of small food stores and major supermarkets such as Safeway. The large supermarkets usually have a great variety of items and include bakeries, pharmacies and even banking services.

Abbotsford has 'big box' stores, such as Costco, where food, clothes, hardware, stereo and computers can be bought. There are also, electronics and music stores.

Food:

You will find a wide variety of food in Canada. You will find food from all over the world in small stores and large supermarkets.

Dining:

Abbotsford has many different restaurants serving Western food and, of course, fast food such as McDonald's and Wendy's.

There are also restaurants serving Thai, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Korea, Italian and also various other ethnic foods. You will find that you can eat many types of great food in Abbotsford and, of course, Vancouver also has outstanding restaurants from every part of the world. Menus may be confusing, so do not hesitate to ask for help.

In general, Canadians eat from individual plates, using a knife and fork but chopsticks are commonly supplied in Asian restaurants. Rice is popular but not as the main part of the meal.

Canadians tend to eat at home a lot because restaurants could be expensive. Canadians also invite their friends and family to their homes for dinner, particularly on Saturdays and Sundays.

Street vendors are not common in Abbotsford; usually street vendors serve hot dogs and hamburgers. There are more street vendors in the Vancouver area. They are very clean because they are regularly inspected, in the same way as restaurants.

Canadians usually pay for their own meals in restaurants and will often ask for separate checks.

Tipping:

Tipping is usual, for good service, but only in proper restaurants, not in 'fast food' establishments nor to street vendors. Sometimes the tip is added to your bill but not usually. Depending on the quality of the service you received from your server, the tip should range from 10% to 15% of the total bill.

Tipping, in other situations:

Tips for barbers, hairdressers, and taxi drivers will vary between \$1.00 and \$5.00, depending on the cost of the service. Bellhops, doormen, porters (redcaps), etc. are generally tipped \$1.00 to \$1.50 per item of luggage.

Sales Taxes:

British Columbia has a Provincial Sales Tax of 6% added to most items purchased, including meals and hotels.

The Federal Government also levies a Goods and Services Tax (GST). You are entitled to a refund on this cost, on your departure from Canada. You can obtain more information at the Vancouver airport. You will need the receipts for the items you purchased.

Bus and Sky Train Fares:

These fares are not expensive and you should check with your homestay family about the cost. There is a good bus system in Abbotsford and you can reach most parts of the city on it. Sky Train in Vancouver does not reach Abbotsford but is a good option once you arrive at the closest pick-up point.

Taxi Cabs:

In Canada all taxis are safe, strictly regulated and fares are calculated by time meters clearly displayed for you as the passenger. There is an immediate charge for entering the taxi plus a charge for every kilometer. Travelling long distances by taxi is expensive, particularly if you are travelling alone. Most taxi drivers will expect a tip of about \$1.00. If you have luggage there will be a charge for each piece.

Electricity:

Electricity is supplied as an alternating current of 110volts. The frequency of the current is 60Hz. You can buy adaptors and transformers so that you can use the electrical appliances that you bring with you. The plugs most often used are flat and two pronged.

Telephone:

Local calls from a regular land phone are free but all cell phone calls are charged. The cheapest way to communicate with people from far away e.g. at home, is to use e-mail. Discuss this with your Homestay parent so that you do not incur costly long distance charges, which will then be charged to you.

Television:

Canada uses the NTSC system, the same as the United States, which is not compatible with the PAL system, which is used in Europe and Asia. As a result, videotapes recorded in these countries will not play in Canada. They can be converted, however, but the conversion is relatively expensive.

Postal Services:

Canadian postage stamps must be used on all mail posted in Canada. The people at the post office can give you information about the different stamps you will need for different countries.

Stamps can be purchased in Post Offices, pharmacies, grocery stores e.g. Safeway, or from automatic vending machines (located in hotel lobbies, railway stations, airports, bus terminals, retail outlets and newsstands).

Canadian stamps make great collectors items and there are many colorful stamps that show you some of the history and beauty of Canada. Souvenir collections may be purchased in most Post Offices. They make ideal gifts.

Writing Letters:

The way of addressing envelopes and setting out letters may be different in Canada from what you are used to. You may wish to talk to your Homestay family about this.

Laundry & Dry Cleaning:

These services are good, quick and relatively inexpensive. Self-service laundromats are also available. Most people, however including host families have washing and drying machines in their houses and do their own laundry, except for those clothes requiring dry-cleaning.

Smoking:

It is illegal for stores to sell tobacco products to anyone under the of 19. Smoking is also prohibited in all public buildings. Restaurants and hotels may have designated smoking areas.

The Abbotsford School District has a strict no smoking policy, on school grounds. If you are caught smoking on school property, you will be suspended from school attendance. Cigarettes will be taken away from you, if they are seen on school property.

Customs

Shaking hands:

Hand shaking is a common greeting in Canada. This form of greeting is considered formal and is usually done when first meeting someone you are not acquainted with. If you meet this same person again, a spoken 'hello' may be sufficient greeting.

Hugging:

Hugging (putting both arms around a person and holding them close) is much more common now in Canada than it used to be. It is an affectionate greeting for a person who is a close friend or family member.

First Names and Titles:

- First names are frequently used, if the person is about your own age or younger, such as family of your homestay family or other students in your school.
- If the person is older than you, use Miss, Ms., Mrs., or Mr. and their **last** name unless you are invited to use their first name.
- Teachers should always be addressed as Miss, Mrs., or Mr., followed by their last name.

Visiting a Canadian Home:

If you will be living with a Canadian family, you will be going to visit other people's home too.

If you say 'yes' that you will visit, you are obligated to go. Saying 'yes' to be polite, really meaning that you do not wish to go, is incorrect.

It is all right to say 'no' or to ask to check your schedule and to confirm later.

To avoid embarrassment, ask what type of clothes to wear, casual or formal.

Some Notable Characteristics of Canadians

Canadians are self-reliant individuals. They do not like to depend on others and they do not like others to be too dependent upon them. They like to make their own decisions and are very task-oriented. There is a clear distinction between their private life and their work.

Canadians are taught that all people are created equal. The West Coast is more informal than the rest of Canada and differences in social standing is not a big issue.

It may seem to you that Canadians are very informal and you may find that older people are not treated with the same respect that you are used to. If you treat others with respect you will be appreciated.

Take some time to learn the ways to respect others. If you are not sure, ask your Homestay parent or international assistant to explain how to behave in different situations.

Friendships:

Friendships among Canadians tend to be shorter and less intense than those among people from some other cultures. Canadians tend to make friends in different aspects of their life e.g. in school, at home, in sports etc. Often these friendships remain quite separate from each other.

Time:

Punctuality is very important to Canadians. They organize their activities by schedules. It may seem to you that their lives are very organized and that they keep to a very busy schedule.

Canadians may be impatient if they are kept waiting. If you make an appointment try to make sure that you are on time.

Adapting to Canada

Arriving in Canada will be very exciting for you and there will be much for you to learn and many adjustments to be made. Canadians are very accepting people and will help you if you ask for their help. Remember that Canadians will want to learn from you also. They will be happy to teach you about Canada and to learn from you about the ways of your country.

It is normal that you may feel awkward and confused because so many things will be different for you. Your family will be far away and the food, language and customs may be strange to you.

Canadians, particularly your homestay family, will want to help you. Do not be afraid to ask for their help.

Remember it is quite normal to feel lost, sad and lonely, at first. These feelings will slowly fade away as you make new friends and adapt to Canadian ways.

It helps to talk to someone if you feel this way. Talk to your homestay family, or a teacher, or visit the International Student Office. There is always someone you can talk to about your feelings.

Attending your New School

It is always exciting and, at times, scary to attend a new school. Here are some tips to make this easier.

- The International Student Office will arrange for you to visit your new school and introduce you to some people.
- When you first arrive, you will meet with a counsellor who will help you set up your course of studies and your timetable. Your counsellor will always be willing to meet with you so you should make an appointment because they are usually quite busy.
- You will get a Student Agenda that will have important dates already printed in it e.g. holidays, examinations etc. Tape a copy of your own timetable into it. Keep the Agenda with you so that you can enter important things in e.g. dates and times for completing homework and projects.

If you have any problems, discuss them with your Homestay parent, international assistant, or with your counsellor. They are there to help you, so ask for their help, if you need it.

- Get involved in your school, in some way. If you are good at sports, try out for one of the teams. If you love music join the choir or one of the bands. There are many activities that you can join that will help you make friends and make you feel comfortable in your new school.
- Be on time for school in the morning and for your classes. **Being on time is very important.**
- You will be expected to participate (join in) in class. The teacher will understand you if you are too shy at first.
- Never talk when the teacher is talking. Classroom rules may be different from what you are used to but it is not polite or respectful to talk at the same time that a teacher is talking.
- You may have heard that North American schools do not have strong discipline. The rules may be different but they are strictly enforced. If you are confused about how to behave properly, discuss this with your international assistant or your counsellor.
- One of the best ways to learn as much as you can is to sit at the front of the class. You will be able to hear the teacher clearly and to ask questions, if you need to.
- Write down your homework assignments in your Student Agenda so you will not forget them. Write down what the homework assignment is and the date it must be completed and handed in to the teacher. **Completing your homework on time is very important.**
- **Go to every class.** Missing classes will be noticed by the teacher. If you miss school, for any reason, you must have a note from your homestay parent or parent explaining why you were absent. **All Abbotsford schools have strict attendance rules.** We want you safe in school.

Some Characteristics of Canadian Education

- Teachers respect the independence of students. Students are not expected to all be the same.
- Learning is student centered. That means that students are expected to show initiative and do research on their own. It also means that students are expected to complete work on their own and on time.
- Students are expected to participate in class by answering questions, giving ideas or participating in discussions.
- Respect is very important. Teachers show respect for students and students are expected to show respect for teachers.
- There is a flow of ideas between the teacher and the student.
- Intellectual disagreements are seen as good and to stimulate growth in learning.
- It is encouraged to discuss conflict if there is a disagreement.
- Students work individually for grades. There is cooperation for projects and in studying together but marks are given to each person and are not shared.
- School rules are very important.
- Being on time for school, class and completing homework is very important.

Enjoying school and being happy are very important. If you are unhappy and are having problems, your counsellor, your homestay parent, and the International Assistant can help.