

# Canada Cultural Etiquette



## Meeting and Greeting

- In general, Canadians are more reserved and polite than Americans, and take matters of etiquette a little more seriously.
- Shake hands and introduce yourself when meeting Canadians for the first time. Always shake hands firmly when meeting or departing. Eye contact is important.
- When a woman enters or leaves a room, it is polite for men to rise. Men normally offer their hands to women.
- In Quebec, kissing on the cheeks in the French manner is quite common. When close friends and family meet in Quebec, they use first names and kiss both cheeks.
- An older French Canadian man may kiss the hand of a woman. Accept this gesture graciously. A foreign man shouldn't kiss the hand of a French Canadian woman, who would be quite shocked.
- Canadians are somewhat more formal than Americans with regard to names and titles. Use last names and appropriate titles until invited by your Canadian hosts or colleagues to use their first names. First names are normally used only by close friends and family. Western Canadians may use first names more frequently than other Canadians.
- In Quebec, coworkers of similar status generally use first names in private, but always last names in public. The formal "you" is almost always used in a business setting, even after 20 years.
- Academic titles and degrees are important to French Canadians. You should know and use them properly.

## Language

- English and French are both official languages of business in Canada. However, virtually all international business is conducted in English.
- Most French Canadians speak and understand English, but prefer to use French. Check ahead of time to find out if an interpreter will be necessary.

## Body Language

- Generally speaking, Canadians are more reserved than Americans. Canadians generally don't touch very much when conversing. Maintaining a certain amount of personal space is important.
- French Canadians are generally more animated and expressive than other Canadians.
- Take off your hat or sunglasses when speaking with someone.
- Some gestures have different meanings in Quebec. For example, "thumbs down" is considered offensive in Quebec, as is slapping an open palm over a closed fist. Like the rest of their countrymen and women, French-Canadians use the "thumbs up" sign to mean "okay." The "okay" sign made with the index finger and thumb means "zero" in Quebec.
- In Quebec, sit straight with your legs crossed at the knee, or with your knees together. Don't sit with your legs apart, or with your feet propped up on tables or chairs.
- It's considered bad form by many in Quebec to talk with your hands in your pockets.
- Sneeze or blow your nose as quietly as possible using a handkerchief or tissue. If possible, leave the room. Do not yawn or scratch in public. Toothpicks, nail clippers, and combs are never used in public.

## Corporate Culture

- Punctuality is demanded for business meetings and social occasions. If a conflict arises, you are expected to let your Canadian counterpart know immediately. That said, Canadians are not as obsessed with time as Americans.
- Business cards are commonly exchanged in Canada.
- For Quebec, print your business cards in English or French, including your academic degree(s) and/or title. A double-sided business card (one side in English, one side in French) is best.
- Canadians get down to business quickly. Meetings are well-organized, and extraneous discussion is kept to a minimum. A premium is placed on time.
- Business communication is quite direct in Canada, but more reserved than in the United States. Letters and telephone calls should be direct and succinct. Pleasantries are dispensed with very quickly.
- Business culture varies somewhat throughout Canada, depending on the region.
- Although the relationship between Canada and the United States is generally quite good, some Canadians may be wary about the intentions of American businesses and put off by

what they perceive as American arrogance. Some Canadians may dislike the American "hard sell" approach.

## Dining and Entertainment

- To beckon a waiter in Quebec, quietly to say "Monsieur" or "S'il vous plait. Say "Mademoiselle" to beckon a waitress. Never beckon a waiter or waitress by snapping your fingers or shouting.
- The host normally offers first toast. Wait until everyone is served wine and a toast is proposed before drinking. It is acceptable for women to propose a toast.
- Wine is normally served with meals in Quebec.
- In Quebec, it's considered bad form to ask for a martini or scotch before dinner — French Canadians consider them "palate numbing." Typical before-dinner drinks include Pernod, kir, champagne, and vermouth. Cognac, Grand Marnier and/or other liqueurs are served after dinner.
- Business entertainment is common, but the focus usually remains on business. The person who invites is normally expected to pay.
- Etiquette and formalities are more important in Canada than in the United States.
- While continental-style table manners are employed in Quebec, American style table manners are seen in other parts of the country.
- Eating while walking or standing on the street in Quebec is considered bad form.
- Never arrive early for a social occasion. Opt, instead, for being "fashionably late." Showing up early at a bar or disco in Quebec (at, say, 10 o'clock) immediately marks you as an "Anglo."

## Dress

- Generally speaking, Canadians dress more conservatively (and more formally when going out) than their American neighbors, although practices vary by region. Dress in Vancouver, for example, is somewhat more casual; in Toronto more British. French Canadians dress in a more relaxed European style than their fellow Canadians.
- For business meetings, men should wear suits and ties; women should wear conservative suits or dresses.

## Gifts

- Bring flowers, fine wine or chocolates for the hostess when invited to a Canadian home. Avoid red roses (associated with romantic love) and white lilies (associated with funerals).

## Helpful Hints

- Do your homework about Canada. Most Americans are appallingly ignorant of Canadian history, culture and geography.
- Recognize that important regional differences exist in Canada and prepare to adapt.
- When in Quebec, learn a little French; Québécois greatly appreciate it when you take the effort to talk to them in their native language.
- Do not compare Canada with the United States.
- Do not use the term "Native Americans" to refer to indigenous peoples. Many Canadians find the term offensive. Canadians refer to members of these groups as "people of the First Nations."
- Do not take sides in debates about contentious national issues (especially when they concern such issues the status of Quebec, the place of the French and English languages in Canadian society, etc.).

Resource: [http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural\\_etiquette/ce\\_ca.htm](http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_ca.htm)