



THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

Canadian Social Customs

Here are a few Canadian customs that you may notice during your time in Canada:

- Except in business or formal situations, **Canadians are often very casual**, both in their dress and language. Students wear casual clothing to class and most on-campus events.
- **A typical greeting** is “Hi. How are you?” and the standard reply (no matter how you are really doing) is “Fine. How are you?”
- Canadians often **shake hands** when they meet someone and open doors for others (men and women).
- **Canadians value multiculturalism, diversity, and equality.** Although incidences of abuse, human rights violations, and racism do occur, these behaviours are considered unacceptable and often illegal. Women and men are considered and treated as equal. Discrimination based on age, sex, ethnic background, marital status, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or physical or mental disability is illegal. Due to this, Canadians are usually very careful in their use of inclusive language, preferring terms like “humankind” over less inclusive terms such as “mankind”. Furthermore, expressions or actions that could be insulting to others are usually avoided.
- **Canadians like order** and you will be expected to line up (form a queue) and wait for your turn to speak with Student Central, enter a restaurant, make a purchase, speak with a professor, etc.
- It is important to **be on time** for classes, meetings, and social engagements, as many Canadians are insulted by being made to wait.
- Most Canadians do not **smoke**, and smoking is very offensive to some Canadians. In Manitoba, smoking is prohibited in public places, but smoking outdoors is usually acceptable. Canadians do not usually smoke in another person’s home, and always ask permission of their companions before lighting a cigarette.
- **Making eye contact** is considered a sign of mutual acknowledgement and respect. Finger-pointing and staring are not acceptable.
- Canadians value natural resources and the environment. **Littering** is not usually acceptable. Most Canadians recycle plastics, metals, glass, and paper, and many Canadians compost.
- **“Going out for coffee”** means going to a restaurant or coffee shop to talk. You do not have to drink coffee if you do not want to.
- **If you are invited to dinner**, ask your host if you should bring any food to contribute to the meal. You are free to decline an invitation, or to say “no, thank you” to any drinks or food that you do not wish to eat.
- Don’t be shy to **say “I’m sorry,” “Please,” and “Thank you”** if the situation might require it. Also, say “I’m sorry” or “Excuse me” when walking by a person too closely or bumping into someone.

