

An American's Guide to Gay Square Dancing in Vancouver (Version 3.6)

By Allan Hurst - Last updated 3/08/2015

The information in this article was originally collected in March of 2000, then rechecked and updated in March of 2001 in preparation for the IAGSDC 2001 "Make Magic" convention. I updated the article in 2003 for Americans planning to visit Vancouver for "A Little More Magic" (the 2003 Lesbian & Gay Advanced & Challenge Square Dance Fly-In), and/or those planning to attend "Weave The Rain" (the 20th Anniversary 2003 Squares Across the Border fly-in).

NOTE: Unless otherwise stated, all prices in this article are given in Canadian dollars (abbreviated as "CDN\$"). Given the dynamic nature of the US/Canada currency exchange rates, some of the sample prices quoted below may have changed slightly by the time you arrive.

INTRODUCTION: "AMERICAN, EH?"

So, you're all booked for your first trip to Canada, eh? Don't be nervous. It's a wonderful place, with friendly people, and excellent dancing! Canadians take square dancing more seriously than do Americans. (Each year, Canada holds Junior Grand National Championships, aimed at middle and high school students, with some terrifyingly tough choreography.) However, this isn't a reason to avoid square dancing in Canada; if anything, it assures you of both a terrific dance experience and a great vacation!

Some years ago, I watched a pair of (otherwise) charming American dancers inadvertently tick off their gracious Canadian hosts. I later asked the fuming Canadians just how many first-time American visitors really don't possess basic knowledge of Canada? The answer wasn't pretty, and it made me appreciate that my Canadian friends still talk to me, given some of the things I said when I visited Canada for the first time.

Let's start off with the tough stuff:

- Most Canadians think we Americans are weird, but they can be rather fond of us all the same.
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This little guide was originally written to explain some of the basics of visiting our Canadian counterparts, to dispel common (American) misconceptions about Canada, and provide some suggestions for fun things to do while visiting Vancouver, BC.

GETTING THERE: THE LEGALITIES

In the past, it was easy to enter and leave Canada with just a U.S. Driver's License. Since 9/11, however, officials on both sides of the border have substantially tightened up security. *You must have a current passport to enter Canada*

If you don't already have a passport, you can obtain and process an application form at most U.S. Post Offices.

Recently, Paul Findlay ran across some updated border-crossing information that may be useful to some people. He suggested I insert the following links into this document, and I agree that it's good information to be prepared with:

What to know about crossing the border into Canada, including what you can – and can't – bring in with you:
<http://gocanada.about.com/library/weekly/aa070200a.htm>

Things on your legal record that could prevent you from entering Canada:
<http://gocanada.about.com/library/weekly/aa111900a.htm>

UH ... WHAT DO I SAY TO THE NICE OFFICER?

When a Canadian customs official asks you what you're doing in Canada, it's usually best to tell the truth, and simply say you're on vacation, visiting friends or family.

Sometimes a Customs officer asks me if I know anybody in Canada. By reflex, (I'm too darn honest) I usually say yes, which must trigger a flag somewhere, because they usually check their computer screen and ask me WHO? I tell them I have a number of friends in one of the local square dance clubs. (In this particular case, "Squares Across the Border.") That usually stops them dead in their tracks, and they pass me on through. On a couple of occasions, however, the customs officer has actually checked my answer against their computer. (Oh, those subversive square dancers...)

On the average, I observe more problems with United States citizens re-entering the U.S. than when entering Canada. (Usually this is because they don't carry a passport or birth certificate.)

It's a bad idea to be rude or sarcastic with customs officials from either side of the border. Smart-alecks are usually whisked away into nasty little back rooms where they and their baggage are thoroughly and unpleasantly searched. Save the jokes and cute comments for the people you'll be dancing with.

GETTING THERE BY CAR: THE PRACTICALITIES

If you're driving, you can expect anywhere from a few minutes' to a couple of hours' delay at the border, in either direction. If you're traveling during a peak period (holidays and weekends - especially Friday and Sunday evenings), expect a lengthy border delay. (A couple of hours isn't uncommon during peak periods.) If you have friends in the Vancouver, Portland or Seattle clubs, ask them what their experiences have been on weekdays preceding holiday weekends.

Keith from Seattle reports:

Crossing into Canada from Washington State, there are 4 border crossings:

1. One on I-5 (the Peace Arch),
2. the truck crossing,
3. Aldergrove (hwy 539), and
4. Sumas/Huntingdon (hwy 9).

The secret is out...most Washingtonians never use the Peach Arch crossing.

The time that it takes to cross through customs varies greatly by time of day, day of week, holidays, etc fortunately, most Radio stations in the area now broadcast border reports every 1/2 hour or so, along with traffic and the weather.

Once you are within an hour of the border (either side) tune-in an "all-talk" radio station (generally, an AM station). The stations are also listed on road signs. This will let you know which crossing has the shortest wait time.

Consider stopping at a duty free shop. They are located on both sides of each border (except the I-5 Peace Arch). You can buy discounted liquor, tobacco, perfume, and even chocolate without taxes.

There are some rules associated with duty-free shopping, however. If you stop at duty-free on your way into Canada, they expect you to be bringing it into Canada to consume it there. It's a nice place to buy a gift for your gracious Canadian host or hostess! After paying for your "gifts" you will be directed back into line.

Please note, it is considered bad form to shop and not buy any thing as it looks like you're just line jumping.

GETTING THERE BY AIR: THE LITTLE PLEASURES

Arriving at YVR from the USA or other international cities is one of the biggest "little pleasures" of traveling to Vancouver.

If you're flying into Vancouver from the US, stop in your tracks as soon as you hit the Customs Hall. Take a moment, take a deep breath, and turn around. (Trust me, it'll only take a minute.)

Vancouver is the only airport in the world I've seen that has a waterfall running down the middle of the arrivals hall. The First Nations carvings, textiles, and art are authentic and quite beautiful. Signs at the top and bottom of the escalators provide information on the First Nations art, including the myths and stories that each piece represents.

Savor the room now ... this is the only chance you'll have to see it. Departing passengers are hidden away behind screens in area of the building, and can't see this section of the hall.

Note: A catalog of YVR's art can be found at: <http://www.yvr.com/guide/todo/art/index.asp> but it's a poor substitute for viewing the real thing "live and in person."

GETTING FROM YVR TO YOUR HOTEL

Unfortunately, Vancouver's light rail system doesn't extend to the airport, but there are other ways of getting from YVR to your hotel. If you're not being picked up by a friend, don't worry. There are three easy choices: SkyTrain, taxi, or private limo. Here are the cheapest, fastest, and easiest transfer methods:

- **CHEAPEST/FASTEST/EASIEST:** Skytrain's Canada Line will deliver you to downtown Vancouver in 26 minutes. There's a \$5 surcharge on all airport fares. See <http://www.yvr.ca/en/getting-to-from-yvr/public-transportation.aspx> for more details.
- **PRIVATE AIRPORT TRANSFERS:** Taxi or private limousines are available if you want a more private transit experience, with a surprising twist: the limo is cheaper and more comfortable. Taxi fares run between CDN\$28 and \$45, depending upon traffic. Given that there's no freeway or expressway between YVR and central Vancouver (no, really!), a taxicab via surface streets in bad weather or peak traffic periods can become quite expensive.

Contrast taxi service with the airport limousine service to and from YVR, which is charged at a fixed price of CDN \$39 per trip (NOT per person!), and is much more comfortable than a taxicab. Many of the limo drivers also hire themselves out as tourguides and private transportation. If you run into a driver that you enjoy talking with, he or she will probably be happy to give you a business card if you ask.

- **HOW TO BUY THE AIRPORT TRANSFER:** There's a "Visitors Information Bureau" desk in the final arrivals area (you'll know you're in the right area when you see a Royal Bank ATM & money-changing window against the far wall). Purchase your round-trip limo or bus vouchers at that desk **BEFORE** you leave the enclosed final arrivals area. (You can buy a voucher outside the enclosed area, but the lines on that side of the desk are sometimes longer, and it's a noisier, crowded, and more confusing area.)

Full details on YVR airport transfers can be found at <http://www.yvr.ca/en/getting-to-from-yvr.aspx>

TELLING YOU WHERE TO GO IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS

If you don't have a resident to escort you about the town, try one (or both) of my two favorite guidebooks for Vancouver. Both volumes have proven themselves invaluable to me and to others over the years. (No, I don't get commissions for each copy sold.)

"Vancouver: The Ultimate Guide" by Terri Wershler & Judi Lees

Greystone, 1999; ISBN 1550546597

Despite the book's advanced age and lack of updating, this is still my favorite general guide to Vancouver, listing stores and restaurants, parks and hidden attractions that even some life-long residents don't know about. If you buy only one book about Vancouver, buy this one. It's a great mix of tourist information, basic area history, and practical advice. This is definitely my favorite general guide to the city, and even after many years of visiting Vancouver, I still carry a copy with me on every trip. There's just that much good reference material in there.

"Vancouver: Secrets of The City" by Shawn Blore & the staff of Vancouver Magazine
Arsenal Pulp Press Ltd; ISBN: 1551520915

This is the second, updated edition of the "Hollywood Babylon" of Vancouver guidebooks. If you want to know where the bodies are buried (some, literally), where certain TV shows (such as "The X-Files") and movies were filmed, or where the best local political scandals erupted, this is the book for you. This book shatters many Americans' stereotypes of Canada.

Some of the items in this book aren't practical, but they DO answer questions such as "what's in that little room over the bridge?" or "where is there an underground lake in downtown Vancouver?" OK, these may be questions you never thought to ask, but it's still a fun book. There are a number of restaurants and fun stores in this book that aren't in the "Ultimate Guide", and vice-versa.

GETTING AROUND ONCE YOU'RE THERE

Vancouver is one of the best "walking cities" in the world. If you prefer riding, however, the area boasts an excellent transit system called "TransLink" (formerly known as "BC Transit"). There are diesel and electric trolley buses, light rail (called "SkyTrain"), and even boats (the SeaBus). The TransLink Transit Map is available from most bookstores or convenience stores, and is well worth the \$2 ... even if you're not planning on using a lot of transit during your trip. Their website offers a trip planner, system map, and timetables:

<http://www.translink.bc.ca>

WILL A CANADIAN STORE TAKE AMERICAN EXPRESS?

Relax. One of the least confusing things about Canada is its money system. Canada's money is denominated in dollars and cents, just like the United States. The primary difference is the currency exchange rate. The exchange rate in Canada is roughly two-thirds of a US Dollar to each Canadian Dollar, and changes nearly every day.

Unless you have professional financial connections, it's not worth worrying about the exchange rate, or trying to find someplace to charge money before you leave the US.

Most businesses will happily take American money, but the exchange rate they provide generally isn't to your advantage. I suggest taking minimal American cash, and stopping at the first ATM you see once you've arrived in Vancouver and grabbing some Canadian cash that way. (I have often stopped at the Royal Bank ATM in YVR's final arrivals hall.)

The easiest way I've found to financially maneuver around Canada is to use an ATM card. Unfortunately, after a long history of "free" ATMs ... many of Canada's banks have fallen prey to the nasty American habit of charging fees to "foreign" ATM users. However, not all Canadian ATMs charge fees. Find an ATM that includes the symbol for your home bank's network to minimize (or eliminate) your fees.

Most stores will happily accept ATM cards as well as credit cards or cash. The rate of exchange via ATM is as good as you'd get at any bank window (and is often better), and is updated on a daily basis. The only problem is figuring out exactly how much each ATM transaction will cost by the time it hits your bank account in US Dollars.

(Note: Some U.S. banks charge a "foreign currency conversion" fee if you use your ATM card outside the country. Check with your bank to be certain.)

If you whip out an ATM or debit card, don't be surprised if you're asked "credit or Interac?" Interac is the predominant point of sale network used to process ATM or debit card transactions in Canada.

Most of the credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, American Express, etc.) that we take for granted in the States work just as well up in Canada. This goes for both retail businesses and banks.

MORE ABOUT MONEY

Canada no longer uses paper singles. Instead, Canada issues CDN\$1 and CDN\$2 coins, which are respectively nicknamed "Loonies" and "Toonies".

Loonies are bronze-colored, have 11 facets, and are between the size of a US quarter and half-dollar piece. Loonies were originally so-named because they had an image of a loon (bird) on one side, and Her Maj (Liz) on the other. (Not that anyone is calling the Queen of England crazy, you understand...)

Toonies have five sets of ridged and smooth edge areas on a silver ring which surrounds a bronze center, and are quite visually striking. They have a bear behind...er, that is, a picture of a bear on the reverse side.

Using coins instead of small bills can be a little annoying in terms of having more weighty pocket change, but the coins are quite practical in terms of lasting longer and being harder to counterfeit. Most vending machines take loonies.

Other than loonies and toonies, US and Canadian money are the same - dimes are called dimes, quarters are called quarters, etcetera.

Canadian paper money is brightly colored, and each denomination has a different color. It is considered rude for American visitors to make comments such as "Monopoly money!" or "Funny money!" when presented with Canadian money. You may think their money looks odd, but even though they think our money is ugly, boring, and terribly confusing being all the same color, I've rarely heard Canadians complain about it.

Please note ... it is considered quite ignorant (if not actually rude) to thrust a handful of change at a Canadian, and tell them to "take what you need".

"SCTV" DOESN'T KNOW EVERYTHING.

Most of us only know about Canada from watching "SCTV" reruns. Here are some things to know about Canadian English that you won't see on "SCTV".

- "Eh" is used in conversation, but not nearly as often as SCTV implies. I tend to think of "Eh" as the Canadian version of ",like," (as in, "So, like, I went to this mall, like, and..."). You don't need to use it to communicate with Canadians, and it's considered just a bit rude to laugh at them for using it. Be warned, however: it's quite infectious. After an extended visit, you may well find yourself inserting "eh" into sentences unconsciously.
- I have never heard a Canadian (at least not from Vancouver or Toronto) call anyone else a "hoser".
- There are definitely different types of Canadian accents, but none are quite as pronounced or monolithic as SCTV suggests. Just as there are many American accents (think Baltimore versus Dallas versus Boston), there are many types of Canadian accents, most of them a bit subtle to American ears.
- In America, people talk about "Indians", "Native Americans", or even "Aboriginal North Americans". Canada has a much more sensible, politically correct term: "First Nations" or "First People". It sounds a bit odd to

American ears at first, but the more it's used, the easier it becomes, and if the term offends anyone, I've never noticed.

TALKING ABOUT TABLE MANNERS

- Canadians don't use "flatware", they use "cutlery". ("Silverware" usually refers to fine metal trays, teapots, coffee services, and the like.)
- A Canadian will pass you a paper napkin if you ask for one, but they may figure out what you want more quickly if you ask them for a "serviette".
- Canadians often use the word "pop" instead of "soda", "soda pop", or "soft drink".
- Do you prefer wheat bread? Ask for "brown bread" to get what you want.
- Some Canadians call fried potatoes "fries" or "french fries", some call them "chips". Whatever works.
- Don't be surprised if you're asked if you want ketchup or vinegar with your fries.
- "Poutine" are fries, layered with cheese curds and topped with thin gravy.
- If you're diabetic, and someone offers you a "Nanaimo bar" ... run. It's a terrifyingly rich concoction that is best described as the illegitimate child of a fudge brownie and a slice of Boston Cream Pie. If you're not a diabetic (or you have plenty of insulin readily available), by all means, try one. They're sinfully delicious. (And it's pronounced "na-NIME-o", by the way, to rhyme with "the-TIME-oh".)

GETTING DRUGS! (THE LEGAL KIND)

In the States, we have two varieties of drugs: "prescription only" and "over the counter".

In Canada, they have three varieties:

- "prescription only" (same as ours),
- "over the counter" (must be requested from a pharmacy employee behind a counter), and
- "off the shelf" (same as the American "over the counter").

ALLERGIC?

For many years, allergic or asthmatic people visiting Canada for the first time thought they were in heaven, since Canada sold nearly all of the prescription-only antihistamines from the States as off-the-shelf products. If you need to buy antihistamines on your trip, be aware that Zyrtec is called "Reactine" in Canada. Allegra, and Claritin are both available off-the-shelf as well.

MUSCLE PAINS? HEADACHES?

In Canada, "Aspirin" is a trademark of Bayer Canada, and that's the brand-name product you'll be handed if you ask for aspirin.

- If you want non-Bayer aspirin, ask for "ASA" (which is available "off the shelf").
- If you want aspirin with codeine (which is a prescription-only drug in the States), it's available "over the counter" in Canada under the brand name of "222" or generic name of "AC&C" (which stands for "ASA, Caffeine, and Codeine").

Everything else, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen, is available under the same generic names as in the States. Some of the brand names and packaging may be slightly different from what you're used to, but it's all the same stuff.

Note: if you use Aleve (naproxen sodium) or Orudis (ketoprofen) as a pain reliever/anti-inflammatory ... bring it with you from the States. It's available only by prescription in Canada, and asking the pharmacist for it will only get you a strange look.

Motion-sickness? Dramamine is known in Canada as "Gravol".

HUGGING AFTER DANCING (OR IN GENERAL)

Americans have different ideas of what constitutes "appropriate personal space" than do Canadians. Not all Canadians like being hugged to death after dancing in a square, or when meeting people for the first time.

If you start talking with a Canadian, and they start to back away ... it's a hint that you may be standing a bit too close. (That, or you had too much garlic at lunch.) Take the hint, and don't keep advancing.

If you're an inveterate hugger, and you want to hug someone you don't know (or just met), it's appropriate to first ask, "Do you hug?"

NAVIGATING BUILDINGS AND STAYING WARM

Americans rent apartments. Canadians rent suites. (Although I've heard the term "apartment" used interchangeably with "suite".)

American shopping centers have "Parking Lots" or multi-level "Parking Structures". Many shopping centers in Canada have either "Parking Lots" or multi-level "Parkades".

Some older Canadian buildings follow the British convention of numbering upper floors starting at 1 (where the first level is called "Lobby" or "Ground", the second floor is "1", the third floor is "2", etcetera.). This isn't done consistently, so it's worth paying careful attention to what your current floor is labeled when you enter an elevator at ground level.

On cold days, Americans wear a "knit cap", which is what Canadians call a "toque" (rhymes with "Luke").

The weather in Vancouver is quite similar to Seattle or Portland. Most websites such as Yahoo! carry weather information for major Canadian cities, so it's easy to check up on what to wear before you leave the States.

COFFEE AND CIGARETTES

Coffee drinker will find at least half a dozen excellent local coffeehouses and coffee chains in Vancouver, and of course, the ever-present evil empire (Starbuck's). Even if you like Starbuck's, you owe it to yourself to try some of the local blends once or twice during your stay. Ask locals for pointers to popular coffeehouses. Delaney's on Denman Street, is one example of a popular local hangout, as is Blenz on Davie.

Compared to the Western United States, nearly everybody seems to smoke in Canada. (But it probably only seems that way to me because so few people smoke in California.) In British Columbia, a province-wide ban on smoking in any place of employment went into effect on January 1, 2000. Smoking is outlawed in most public places, but enforcement can be spotty.

STUFF TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT DANCING

Take a hike! No, I'm not being rude; my favorite contemplative walk (although I've seen people hiking and running it) with staggeringly beautiful views is the seawall surrounding Stanley Park.

The Stanley Park seawall is about a 9 kilometer walk (roughly 5.5 miles) around the park perimeter, offering a 270-degree view of English Bay and Burrard Inlet. The walk is thoughtfully separated, in half for bicyclists/skateboarders and walkers/runners/hikers. The walk runs from the West End entrance of Stanley Park to the Westin Bayshore (site of the "Make Magic!" 2001 IAGSDC convention). You can start the walk from either end. It's fun, it's free, and it's legal. One can't ask for much more than that.

Vancouver has some wonderful museums. Go see them. Be warned, it'll take several visits to the area to catch them all. Here are some of my favorites:

- **The Vancouver Museum** ... for a walk-through history of Vancouver and BC, try this low-key museum. They usually have several fascinating offbeat temporary exhibits at any given time of year. (For example, the history of neon signs in Vancouver.) <http://www.vanmuseum.bc.ca/>
- **MacMillan Space Centre** ... did you know that the Space Shuttle's maneuvering arm was invented and built in Canada? (Its proper name is "The Canada Arm".) The Space Centre – which shares a building with the Vancouver Museum – has displays on space exploration in general, and on Canada's many (sometimes surprising!) contributions to the American space program. The planetarium stages laser shows Thursday through Sunday nights. <http://www.hrmacmillanspacecentre.com/>
- **The Museum of Anthropology at UBC** ... also known as "Vancouver's Favorite Museum", this is one of the largest collections of First Nations totem poles (housed in a huge, breathtaking glass atrium) and artifacts in the world. Unlike most museums, the MOA's collection is fully accessible (in glassed-over pull-out drawers) to the public. For more info, see <http://www.moa.ubc.ca>
- **Vancouver Police Museum** ... Mystery reader? Uniform fetish? The Vancouver Police Centennial Museum offers a view of the darker side of life in Vancouver. Exhibits portray everything from the first female VPD officers to re-enactments of famous Vancouver crimes. <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/police/museum/>
- **The Vancouver Aquarium** ... compact, but well maintained with wonderful exhibits, the Aquarium offers a pleasant two to four hours of diversion. (More if you're a fish watching buff.) <http://www.vanaqua.org/>

MORE STUFF TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT DANCING

If you like scenic views, take a trip to the top of Grouse Mountain. The tram ride is a bit pricey, but the view from up there is incredible. (What other North American city offers skiing within the city limits?) The "Ultimate Guide" guidebook has excellent directions on getting to Grouse Mountain via public transit.

<http://www.grousemountain.com/>

There are several (male) bathhouses in Vancouver. F212 has locations in Vancouver and New Westminster, and Club Vancouver is located downtown. Recently, F212's owners opened up a leather-and-levi's playspace called M2M Vancouver. (Sorry, I don't know of any similar places for women.)

<http://www.f212.com>

<http://www.clubvancouver.com>

Vancouver is home to not just one, but several excellent gay choruses. Among them: the Vancouver Mens Chorus, Rainy City Gay Men's Chorus, A Vancouver Womens Chorus, and the Vancouver Lesbian & Gay Choir. If they have any performances during your visit, go hear them. (At press time, websites were available for only two of the groups listed.)

<http://www.vancouvermenschorus.org/>

<http://www.rainycity.ca/>

Little Sister's Book & Art Emporium, on Davie Street, is a terrific lesbigay book and gift store, with a wonderful selection of books, many of them unusual enough to be not quite easily findable in similar U.S. stores. They have a good selection of amusing T-shirts and gifts, too.

<http://www.littlesistersbookstore.com/>

WHAT IF I JUST WANT TO SPEND A COUPLE OF HOURS VIEWING THE CITY?

My suggestion for the Best Cheap Trip With Incredible Views:

1. Go to any SkyTrain station. Using one of the ticket machines, buy yourself a TransLink all-three-zones day pass. (You can also pick up TransLink day passes at convenience stores, or any retail establishment displaying a "Fare Dealer" sign.)
2. Board a train headed for King George. Ride the train all the way to the end of line, disembark, and get on another train coming back.

Note: Since this article was originally published, new SkyTrain lines – the Millennium and Canada Lines – have opened. An alternative trip would be to board an Eastbound train at Metrotown, ride it all the way to King George, then ride a train back to Columbia station, where you can transfer to an Eastbound Millennium Line train, which will loop back through Coquitlam and Burnaby to Broadway station. However, the author hasn't spent sufficient time in Vancouver to discuss fun rides on the Canada Line, so you're on your own there.

3. Ride this train to the end of the line (Waterfront Station). At Waterfront Station, disembark and transfer to the SeaBus.
4. Take the SeaBus over to North Vancouver, and browse a while at the shopping center at Lonsdale Quay (look for the big rotating "Q" sign). When you're done, take the SeaBus back to SkyTrain. (By the way, "Quay" is pronounced "key".)

The whole trip takes a little over two hours, and offers some amazing scenic views. Most of the locals will think you're crazy for wanting to ride SkyTrain to the end of the line and back again, but they've lived there so long that they've become jaded, and are immune to the gorgeous scenery viewable from the elevated trains.

At CDN \$9.75 for a day pass, this is definitely one of THE touring bargains of Vancouver. If you're so inclined, you can disembark from SkyTrain at any point to browse shopping centers, local stores, or restaurants.

SHOPPING!

- The 2003 A&C Fly-In was held in Metrotown, which boasts a huge, full-service shopping mall, complete with movie theatres. ("Metrotown" is also the name of the SkyTrain station next to the fly-in host hotel.)
- Best place to buy First Nations art, jewelry, sculpture, and gifts: museum shops. Many people have admired my stylized First Nations name badge dangles ... all of which are actually earrings from various museum gift shops. The Museum of Anthropology at UBC, the Vancouver Museum/MacMillan Space Center, and Vancouver Aquarium are my three favorite shopping stops for First Nations items. These stores generally buy directly from tribal artists or collectives, don't mark up the prices as highly as commercial galleries, and the proceeds go towards supporting the museum.
- I tend to avoid buying anything at Vancouver's commercial galleries (especially in Gastown), as the prices usually seem inflated, and I've never been quite sure that the original artist really gets their fair share of the selling price.
- If you crave handmade and unique jewelry, go to the museum shops listed above, or browse through some of the local jewelry stores on Granville Island or at Lonsdale Quay (at the North Van terminus of the SeaBus line).
- Bookworm? Chapters is a Canadian cross between Border's Books and Barnes & Noble ... but that description doesn't really do it justice. Aside from an incredible (and huge!) salt-water fish tank built into the wall of one of the reading rooms, Chapters has a terrific selection of books. There are also many small, specialized bookstores scattered all over Vancouver. (Read the guidebook, "Vancouver: The

Ultimate Guide" for a more complete listing. Some specialized bookstores – such as those dealing in rare books, mysteries, or science-fiction - are also listed in "Vancouver: Secrets Of The City".)

DO I HAVE TO PAY SALES TAX?

Yes, you do. Americans aren't exempt from paying sales tax in Canada at the time of purchase. Furthermore, in British Columbia, there are two sales taxes, one federal, and one provincial.

As of April 1, 2007, it is no longer possible to apply for a refund of GST (Goods & Services Tax) paid on large purchases and hotel rooms. Neither is BC social services tax refundable.

GETTING HOME AGAIN (BY AIR)

If you're flying home from YVR, take advantage of the shopping area and restaurants before checking in at the airline counter. Once you've checked in with the airline, you're required to pass straight through to US Customs and into the secure waiting area. While there are some rudimentary shops and eating places inside the US Departures waiting area, I think they're neither as extensive nor as nice as the ones in the main terminal.

YVR has some nice shops and restaurants in their public areas, most of which are reasonably priced under an airport-wide voluntary program to keep airport prices to roughly what you'd pay at a similar establishment outside the airport.

Movie buffs may recognize the YVR International Departures ticketing area from the opening scene in Christopher Guest's "Best in Show", much of which was filmed in Vancouver. (There are many movie & TV shooting sites listed in [Vancouver: Secrets of the City](#).)

Near the food court, you'll find an amazing Bill Reid statue called "The Spirit of Haida Gwaii", which is well worth a five minute stroll around.

YVR has a mandatory airport facilities improvements fee (CDN\$10 for US destinations), which must be paid by every departing passenger. Look for the "AIF" ("Airport Improvement Fee") vending machine, and slip in your credit card or ATM card to get your AIF voucher. (Note: People who don't have their airline ticket, passport, customs form and AIF voucher handy are shunted into a "slow lane" at US Customs.)

To check in at the airline desk, you will need: (1) your airline ticket, (2) your passport (or equivalent), AND (3) a filled-out US Customs form. Blank US Customs forms are available as you enter the terminal. Fill out and assemble all of these items before attempting to check in for your flight.

A full online guide to YVR and its services may be found at: <http://www.yvr.com/>

WHAT A FUNNY TITLE FOR AN ARTICLE!

This article's title was plagiarized from wonderfully humorous web site set up and maintained by Emily Way, an American who now lives in Canada. Her site is called "An American's Guide To Canada", and is located at:

<http://www.americansguide.ca/>

I've asked several Canadian friends to look over the site, and all have confirmed that it's fairly accurate, and quite funny. It's a great way to get "pre-oriented" before you head Up North. She also has a great photo album on the site of "Big Things" that she's found in her travels.

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