

Culture Shock in France | A Canadian's Experience
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwDpCOJQ2-U>
transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/canada-france.pdf>

What's up guys?

Welcome, or welcome back, to my channel and welcome to Paris!

So I moved to France about two years ago and I've been living here on and off for over three years.

And over those years I've sort of experienced things that really shocked me and were so different from the way I lived my life back home.

And so in today's video, I want to talk about those things, and I guess more so, the culture shock I experienced when I moved to France.

So I guess one thing that shocked me as a Canadian was the mildness of the climate in France,

In Canada, I was so used to having, like very cold, very long winters.

I remember the winter before I came to France, we had snow from October right until May, so that's like a solid seven or eight month long winter.

Over the last three years, ever since I moved here, I've never experienced a winter like that and I actually spent, um, the winter months one year in the mountains.

I spent it in Grenoble, which is close to the Alps.

It's by the mountains, it's where you would go skiing and the winter just wasn't, it wasn't, as cold and it wasn't as snowy.

And because our winters are so long and they're so cold we have a ton of, like, activities that we do.

You know, we'll go skating, but outdoors.

We'll do tobogganing down snowy hills, we'll go skiing, stuff like that and in France I really didn't get any of that.

Um, I think that like, one thing that makes winter so magical is the snow and when I was living this year in Paris during the winter it was just gray and sad.

So I guess I'm shocked by the shortness and the mildness of winter here.

The second thing that really shocked me is just how much people smoke.

I feel like that's something everyone knows about.

France, maybe Europe in general, is that they do smoke a lot more, but I don't think I was ready for the extent to which people smoke cigarettes in France.

I know in Canada, we have like certain laws where you have to be a certain amount of meters away from a building to smoke and there's not that many young people who do smoke, um, leisurely.

Whereas in France, everyone smokes everywhere, and it's really tough as a non-smoker, because you'll want to go to a cafe or patio and you'll be sitting there trying to enjoy your meal, your drink and you'll just have every Parisian, every French person blowing smoke into your airspace.

Another thing too, is that smoking is like super social, it's a huge social aspect in France, um, both professionally, but also just, you know, socially with your friends.

I remember my first day in school and the teacher stopped the class halfway through and said, okay, um, you guys can have a smoke break.

And all of the French kids left to go have their smoke break and I was just like sitting in the classroom so awkwardly because I was like, what do I do, I don't smoke you know.

Everyone's, like in a circle, you know, sharing their lighters and smoking together. I just felt so awkward.

I also noticed this like, social aspect when I was working.

I just finished up an internship that I did with Chanel here in Paris and what I noticed is that people would take their smoke breaks and socialize with each other.

And anyone who didn't take a smoke break really didn't get that sort of, out of office, you know, social time.

Not only was this like colleague to colleague but it was also like colleague to manager.

I felt so excluded sometimes because I didn't go take my smoke break and so I didn't really socialize with the managers and people higher up on the food chain.

It just really shocked me how many people smoked, but also like the importance of smoking when you're trying to form friendships or professional relationships.

It's, it's integral to the way that people socialize.

So, another thing that really shocked me but I guess in a good way, is the way that French people eat.

My whole life I had sit down dinners with my family and we would always have our plate and it would always, you know, have everything on it.

It was sort of like dinner was one meal you know, you sat down and you ate together.

It was one meal whereas in France you don't just have your plate on one meal.

First you have like, apéro which is small snacks and a little drink, it could be a liqueur, it could be a soft drink, but you know, you start with an apéro and then before you get to the dinner, you have your entree.

And this isn't just like at a restaurant, I mean, like, families will do this, you know, before eating dinner they'll have like entrees.

It could be salads, it could be charcuterie, it could be like little fish, like shrimps or sardines but they enjoy sort of their entree, before moving on then to the main meal which is mostly carbs and meat.

From my experience in France the main plate really doesn't have ~~much~~ many vegetables on it, it is like a hearty meal, meat and rice, meat and potatoes and sometimes you'll have like a salad and then after you've had your apéro, your entree, and then your meal.

Then you move on to dessert.

However I don't know about you, but when I think dessert, I think like you know, sugary bad for you cake, cookies, ice cream.

Like that's what I think when people say dessert.

And so I remember the first time, one of the first times, I was eating with my boyfriend's family, after we had finished all the steps to the meal they then offered me dessert.

And I was like, oh, amazing, a French dessert, I can't wait!

No, what their dessert is, is like, it's healthy.

The desserts that people keep offering in France are either yogurts or fruits.

I'm like, I eat those for breakfast, so yeah, the way that they eat their meals is definitely different.

But I think it's also a good thing because when you have the apéro, you have your entrees and then you move on to dinner.

I feel like it's a more social experience, you know, you talk more, dinner lasts a lot longer.

Also what shocked me about dinner is that they eat so late and this was so hard for me because back home in my family we would eat like, at 6 PM, that was dinner time.

In France, you're looking at like, 8 or 9 PM.

A less interesting topic than food, um, would be their ~~administration systems~~ administrative practices.

Again, this is something that I feel like people generally stereotype with friends, like, the slow long complicated administration, which is all very true, but what really shocked me is that everything for the French government, for French companies, no matter what, if you need anything you have to present your documents, not only like, as a hard copy, a paper version, but you need to present the original as well as a photocopy.

Which is crazy, because I know for some things, like when I was doing my driver's license or my health card back in Canada, like I was able to send a pdf to someone in order to get whatever card or paperwork that I needed.

In France, like, no, you need to book an appointment.

You need to wait in line.

You need to go to whatever facility they direct you to and you need to present every single piece of paper as a hard copy with the original and a photocopy.

An example of this to show like, to what extent this is, um, I have been trying to close one of my bank accounts in France for months.

And it's because when I asked them to close my bank account they told me I had to cut up my credit card, I had to mail them the credit card.

I then had to write them a handwritten letter and sign it saying that I wanted to close my bank account.

And then I had to print out the account number for my new bank account and send it off with all the rest of the paperwork.

I literally, I read the email and I was like, all of that could be done online!

All of these things I could transmit like, via pdf, via an email, like, I was stunned that I had to cut up my credit card and mail the physical credit card, the original, to the bank in order to close my account like that.

Something else that really shocked me about living in France is ~~the normalization of~~ [that everyone is] living in apartments and that might sound like strange to say, but in Canada no matter where I've lived over the past like, 25 years of my life, I have always lived in a house.

Either I lived with my family in a house or when I was staying at university, I lived in a house but with roommates.

Like when I was a student, I didn't even consider moving into an apartment, like that just wasn't a thing.

Like, everyone just like moved into a roommate situation in the, in the houses, beside the university.

That was the normal thing to do and it wasn't more expensive or less expensive.

It was, I guess, the same price as renting an apartment except with a house like, you have your room, you have a massive kitchen, you have a living room, you have a backyard you have a front yard like, I don't know.

I was really used to having all of that space.

In France because like, their cities are so dense, everybody lives an apartment no matter.

No matter where I've been over the past three years I have always lived in an apartment and so I've gotten used to it by now but it's just so different.

It's so different because you have a lot less space to yourself you don't have your garden, you don't have your front driveway, you have your basketball net in the driveway.

Like I don't know, I feel like it's just like downsizing, I had to downsize.

A less happy thing that really shocked me when I moved to France was the feeling of being a lot less safe.

I remember my first semester as an international student in France I was living in Grenoble.

Every week you would you would hear about some crazy thing that happened.

I think that one of the craziest things that I had heard of is one

of my friends, she was living in one of the student residences and just one night out of the blue, someone had just, like, lit someone else's car on fire and it was just, like, blowing in flames in the parking lot.

And I guess that doesn't sound very extreme but that's just not something I had ever even come close to experiencing like outside of a student residence.

I remember, also, when I was in Grenoble like, my boyfriend's car got broken into three times.

It wasn't like a normal break-in that I'm used to like in Canada.

I've only experienced one break-in and that's because the car was left unlocked and what they took was the GPS and that was it, there was no damage.

My boyfriend's car, on the other hand, when someone broke into his car, twice it happened to him, twice they smashed in the windows of his car.

I saw that and I was, like, oh my god, like so violent.

They probably took so many things, but, also, oh my god, it was so expensive to repair!

Another time, the third time that his car got broken into, he had forgotten to lock his car and so someone came in and stole his things and not just his things but they took out his radio.

They stole the car radio which is like, very common in France.

It happened to my boyfriend and a ton of other people I know and that's not something I've ever thought about in Canada.

Like stealing someone's radio? What?

And this is a difference that my boyfriend noticed too.

He tells this story to everyone.

One time he came to visit me, um, in Ottawa.

Like I said, I lived in a neighborhood with houses and you know every house had a porch and he noticed the first day he got there someone had received like, um, like, a delivery of some package.

I don't know clothing, or I don't know, someone had done some online shopping and the postman had left their package on their front doorstep and my boyfriend watched that package for days and then like five days after he arrivedm he was like, it's crazy like, like, that person's package is still on their porch.

Um, in France that would have been stolen in literally one hour upon

arrival.

As a person who doesn't even lock her front door back home I was like, uh, of course it's still there, like who's gonna take it?

Yeah, no, like he said in France, it would have disappeared.

So another really cool thing that surprised me about living in France was their health care system.

So, like, right off the bat, it's very similar to the healthcare in Canada.

In Canada, like, all of your healthcare is free.

However healthcare is only free for Canadian citizens and maybe for permanent residents, but it's definitely not free for international students or international workers, you would have to pay for insurance.

In France, me, as an international student, a non-European and non-French person, I got to benefit from their really inexpensive health care system as soon as I entered the country.

And so, in France they don't cover 100 percent of the healthcare costs, they cover 70 percent.

But what's really great about the system, like I said, is it covers international students without you having to take out like, a massive health insurance package and have to talk with your insurance agency before you go to a doctor, blah, blah.

What is really cool about the French healthcare system though, is that not only does this 70% coverage, cover healthcare, but it also covers dental.

And I thought that was great, because in Canada dental is not covered by the healthcare system, you have to have insurance or you have to pay out of pocket.

And it's so, so, so expensive!

I remember one time I had a cleaning done, I had a couple of x-rays done and, and my bill was hundreds of dollars, hundreds!

And in France I go and have a cleaning and the cleaning cost me 23 euros but minus the 70%, I paid something like 4 euros, 3 euros and 50 cents for my dental cleaning.

Which, which, is just unheard of in Canada and so that was a really cool shock that I had because it meant that I could keep up my dental hygiene without like, paying out of pocket.

I feel like this should have been number one on my on my list of cultural shocks but definitely like, la bise, kissing everyone hello, it was such a huge culture shock for me.

My boyfriend tells this story to absolutely everyone because it was, it was, hysterical ~~in the moment~~, [at the time] but I remember when I was, I had just been in France for a little while, and I went to a party.

And this guy who I didn't know, this just random guy that I didn't know, greeted me and like, leaned in to like, give me the la bise, like the hello in French and I immediately, I flipped out.

I was like, I, I was like, no, because it's such an intimate thing to give someone a kiss.

But it's actually really offensive if you don't say hello with the kiss.

And there are so many rules to la bise.

There are regional rules.

I know we have some Parisian relatives who want four kisses.

We have the family in the countryside that only need two kisses but what's also crazy is that not only is la bise for greeting people on like, a daily basis wherever you go, if you're seeing someone you'll give them a kiss.

But something even crazier happened to me when I was living with my boyfriend's family for Christmas.

I was living with his family and every morning when we got up, whenever we like, saw, um, his sister or his mom or his dad, we had to greet them with la bise.

So, not only do you like, give la bise when you're meeting someone but then you give it to someone when you wake up in the morning and you see them.

I just, I thought that was so funny because you would never see that in Canada.

I don't know, you just say good morning.

It's something that I'm still not super comfortable with because I just feel so strange kissing strangers on the cheek.

But, yeah, if you're gonna live in France it's definitely something that you need to get used to.

Another thing that super shocked me was how the French live a less commercial life than we do in North America or in Canada.

In Canada, I feel like we're a lot more materialistic.

We focus a lot on like, the things we're buying and bigger and better, fancier, updating, modern, you know all that, all that jazz.

What shocked me and annoyed me at first was that in France, um, Sundays everything is closed.

There's no bakeries open, there's no stores open, like there are, but very, very few and definitely not in proximity.

And at first I found that so annoying because like, as someone who's coming from that, you know, materialistic culture I'm like, but I go shopping every day.

Uh, you know, Sunday I need to do my groceries and I, I want everything to be open.

But in actuality, what I started to realize in France is that because the shopping malls were closed and because the stores were closed, people instead, like, really focus on their family and friends on the weekends.

Which I feel, like, is something that we don't do as much in Canada or in North America.

And so while it shocked me at first, like, I think it's something really cool about France.

I think it's, I think it's really important that they value spending their time not on possessions but on people.

So, wow, I feel like I've been talking literally forever.

I'm looking at the camera.

I've been talking for an hour, wow!

Honestly, I could go on, there are so many more things that have shocked me living this country.

Maybe I'll make a second video but, yeah, anyways, I hope these things were useful to you if you're planning on moving to France.

Or, maybe, if you're already living here, and you're feeling like, frustrated about something that you know shocked you, like, the grocery stores being closed on Sunday, just know you're not alone.

Let me know down below if there's any other things that shocked you in France that I didn't mention and if you liked this video please give it a thumbs up and subscribe.

Um, I post videos, I try to post videos every Monday Wednesday and Saturday and yeah thanks so much for watching and I will see you in the next video.