



## Culture Shock

Back home we do things differently, everything from greeting each other to the food that we eat and all the little differences in between. These little differences that we don't even notice when we are in our home countries play a big role in our lives when we travel to a new place. In Canada things are a little different than they are here, which is why culture shock can have a big impact when **traveling abroad**, especially for the first time. **Culture shock** can be defined as a personal disorientation which is felt when experiencing a different way of life. This comes from the contradiction between our **accustomed** way of life and the conflict in trying to **maintain** that in a new cultural environment.

**Common** symptoms of culture shock include: extreme **homesickness**, sleep **disturbances**, extreme concerns over **sanitation** and safety, stereotyping and excessive critical reactions. Since I have been living in Reunion for almost three years, I have begun to forget about all the differences that could make a visitor feel disoriented, however, my recent visit from my family has reminded me of some of them.

For example, kissing everyone you meet instead of **shaking hands** takes some getting used to. Also, language barriers can add to the feeling of being disorientated, and left out of general conversations. In Canada even though we are used to seeing French written everywhere we are also used to always having the English translation to follow. When I first arrived in France it took me awhile before I stopped turning over every jar or label looking for the English side. Another difference between the two countries is the culture of **tipping**. In Canada it is **customary**, even expected that one leaves at least a 15% tip at the end of every meal. Now, imagine the look of surprise when my mum left a six euro tip at a snack bar here. One of the biggest differences though between Canada and Reunion is our definition of the word WINTER. In Canada this means snow, **slush**, **mittens**, scarves, hats, and temperatures that drop below -25°C. So, when my mum arrived for winter in Reunion she was surprised to be wearing a t-shirt and see people laying on the beach. However, as soon as the sun set and the temperature dropped to 17°C, my house seemed **freezing** to her. This is because in Canada all the houses have **central heating**, which means that the temperature inside rarely drops below 23°C and we can walk around in t-shirts indoors all year round.

These are just a few of the many **noticeable** differences, but what about the social differences? These tend to be a little more subtle: facial expressions, gestures, social norms and customs which are all learned unconsciously. I can still remember when I arrived in France four years ago, how uncomfortable even a basic conversation could be when I **misinterpreted** all the social cues that went along with it. Basically, when moving to or even visiting a new country we must relearn many of our learned behaviours and the older we get the more difficult this may become.

How can we **overcome** culture shock? First of all it helps to remember that we are not born with culture, but we are born with the capacity to learn from our **surroundings**, and this continues throughout life. Adapting to a new culture requires relearning what we might already feel comfortable with. Learning the language of the country is a big help, this can be very difficult, but over time it is the best way to integrate oneself in a different culture. Most important is to keep an **open mind**, understand and **embrace** the differences and this will help one adjust to all the changes they may **encounter**. As Theodore Roosevelt once said "There can be no life without change, and to be afraid of what is different or unfamiliar is to be afraid of life."

### Vocabulary

culture shock - choc culturel  
travel abroad - voyager à l'étranger  
accustomed - habituel  
maintain - maintenir  
common - ordinaire

homesickness - mal du pays  
disturbance - troubles  
sanitation - hygiène publique  
shake hands - serrer la main  
tip - pourboire

customary - coutumier  
slush - la neige fondue  
mittens - moufles  
freezing - glacial  
central heating - chauffage central

noticeable - visible  
misinterpret - mal comprendre  
overcome - surmonter  
surroundings - alentours  
open mind - esprit ouvert

embrace - adopter  
encounter - rencontrer

