

# Chinese Immigrant Orientation Program

## Module 1

### Getting Ready – Before you Leave for Canada

#### *Objectives*

This module will provide you with the basic information you need to know before you leave so you can prepare for your new life in Canada.

#### *Goals*

You will learn about:

Paperwork to bring  
Medicare  
Job Searching  
Canada's Communities, Climate and Schools

### ***Essential documents***

When you travel to Canada, here are the documents you need to bring:

- a Canadian immigrant visa and Confirmation of Permanent Residence for each family member travelling with you;
- a valid passport or other travel document for each family member travelling with you;
- two copies of a detailed list of all the personal or household items you are bringing with you; and
- two copies of a list of items that are arriving later. (The lists should state how much your personal and household items are worth.)

You must also bring with you enough money to cover living expenses such as rent, food, clothing and transportation for a six-month period. You may be asked to show proof that you have this money.

Do not pack your documents in a suitcase. You will need to have them available to show to immigration and customs officials.

When you are deciding how much money to bring into Canada, it helps to research the cost of living in the part of Canada where you plan to live. This information can be found on provincial and territorial Web sites.

Make two copies of these lists -- one for you to keep and one for the Canada Customs officer. You can get the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency form for this purpose from the Internet. The website address is available in the Resource Centre of this course.

### ***Important documents***

The following list of documents are not essential, but are very important. If you have these documents you should bring them with you.

- birth or baptismal certificates;
- marriage certificates;
- adoption, separation or divorce papers;
- school records, diplomas or degrees for each family member travelling with you;
- trade or professional certificates and licences;
- letters of reference from former employers;
- a list of your educational and professional qualifications and job experience (this is also called a résumé);
- immunization, vaccination, dental and other health records for each family member;
- driver's licence, including an International Driver's Permit, and a reference from your insurance company;
- photocopies of all essential and important documents, in case the originals get lost (be sure to keep the photocopies in a separate place from the originals); and
- car registration documents (if you are importing a motor vehicle into Canada).

If possible, get all of your documents translated into English or French by a qualified translator before you leave for Canada.

### ***What you should know about health care***

The Canadian public health-care system is known as "medicare." It provides insurance coverage for health-care services to all Canadian citizens and permanent residents. You will be a "permanent resident." The federal government sets health-care standards for the whole country, but the programs are run by the provincial ministries of health. More information on the health-care system can be found in ***Your first few days in Canada*** in Module 3.

You should apply for provincial health-care coverage as soon as possible after you arrive in the province where you plan to live. Some provinces have a three-month waiting period before you can receive medicare coverage. If you are planning to settle in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec or New Brunswick, you should buy private health insurance coverage for the first three months.

Make sure to bring a supply of your medications with you to allow you time to find a family doctor in Canada from whom you will have to get new prescriptions.

### ***What you can bring into Canada***

There are strict laws about what you can bring into Canada.

Cars must meet Canadian safety and pollution control standards. Many cars are not allowed into the country. Contact Transport Canada for more information before you ship your car. You can find the contact information for Transport Canada in the Resource Centre of this course.

### ***The following items cannot be brought into Canada:***

- unauthorized firearms, explosives, fireworks and ammunition;
- narcotics, other than prescription drugs;
- meat, dairy products, fresh fruits and vegetables;
- plants, flowers and soil;
- endangered species of animals or products made from animal parts, such as the skin, feathers, fur, bones and ivory;
- cultural property, including antique and cultural objects considered to have historical significance in their country of origin (you may, however, bring family heirlooms);
- more than 200 cigarettes (you must pay tax on the excess amount) per person over 18 years of age if you are immigrating to Quebec, Alberta, Saskatchewan or Manitoba, or per person over 19 if you are immigrating to Ontario or any of the other provinces; and
- more than 1.5 litres of commercial alcohol (you must pay tax on the excess amount) per person over 19 years of age.

If you are not sure about an item, you can write to or telephone Canada Customs and Revenue Agency. The contact information can be found in the Resource page.

### ***Getting ready to look for work***

If possible, have your documents translated into English or French before you leave for Canada. Essential documents for looking for work include:

- a résumé of your education, work and volunteer experience, and your skills and qualifications;
- diplomas, degrees, certificates and other qualifications;
- letters of recommendation; and
- school records or transcripts.

Improving your English or French before coming to Canada would be extremely beneficial.

Research the labour market in the part of Canada where you plan to settle. There are many agencies that can help you. Look at the Resource Centre for links to helpful websites.

To be better prepared to look for work in Canada, have your credentials evaluated and compared with the Canadian education system to make it easier for employers to determine whether you meet their job requirements. See [International educational assessment services in Canada](#) on the Resource Centre page.

Professionals in government-regulated occupations should contact the licensing body in their province of destination. See [Employment in regulated professions and trades](#).

### ***Getting ready if you are a business immigrant***

If you are coming to Canada as a business immigrant, use the Internet to find out about sources of financing, business opportunities, export and investment services, self-employment assistance and information for small businesses. There are many rules for starting a business in Canada.

### ***Communities across Canada***

Most newcomers to Canada tend to settle in the three biggest cities -- Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver. But many newcomers and many Canadians choose to live in the medium-sized cities, which they feel have as much to offer as the larger cities with a better quality of life. Among the medium-sized cities are Halifax, Québec City, Ottawa, London, Windsor, Sudbury, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton and Victoria.

All of the medium-sized cities have diverse, multi-ethnic populations ranging in size from approximately 100,000 to one million people, and all have the variety of public and private institutions and services found in the largest cities. The Resource Centre has a link to a map of Canada to help you to locate these medium-sized cities.

Some newcomers like the idea of living in smaller cities or towns like Moncton, Fredericton, Red Deer and Kelowna, or prefer to live in a rural area. Depending on your skills or professional qualifications, some regions may have better job opportunities than others. Outside the larger cities, the costs of housing, higher education and services are often much lower.

Each Web site has a list of government departments and agencies. In the bigger provinces, some government departments may have their own Web sites, with more detailed information. You may also find a directory of on-line services, a link to educational institutions, and a link to major cities and towns. Most of the Web sites also have a tourism section, where you can discover the special attractions of each province and territory.

Research carefully the labour market trends or access to your profession in the province and city where you wish to live

### ***The Canadian climate: What to expect and what clothes to bring***

Most of Canada has four distinct seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter. The temperatures and weather in each season can be different from one part of the country to another. Here is what you can expect:

**Spring:** Spring is a rainy season in most parts of Canada. Daytime temperatures rise steadily, but the nights remain cool. Average daytime temperatures are about 12°C in March, April and early May.

**Summer:** Summer officially begins on June 21, but July and August are summer for most Canadians. In summer, the weather is very warm in most parts of the country. In southern Canada, daytime temperatures are normally above 20°C and can sometimes rise above 30°C.

**Autumn:** The autumn season, or fall, as it's often called, begins in September. The weather cools and the leaves on many trees change colour and fall to the ground. It can also be very rainy at this time of year. In some parts of Canada, especially northern or mountain regions, snow may begin to fall by late October. Average daytime temperatures are about 10°C to 12°C in most of the country. The autumn months are September, October and November.

**Winter:** During the winter months (December, January and February), the temperature in most of the country usually stays below 0°C, day and night. Temperatures in some parts of the country periodically drop below -25°C, while along the West Coast, the temperature rarely drops below 0°C. In most of Canada, snow will be on the ground from mid-December to the middle of March. The higher in elevation and the farther north you go, the longer and colder winter becomes.

If you arrive in Canada in the winter, you will need warm clothing such as insulated, waterproof boots; an overcoat; a scarf for your neck; a hat that covers your ears; and gloves or mittens. If you come from a warm climate, buy some winter clothes before you leave for Canada, if possible. Or, be ready to buy winter clothes soon after arriving (note also that winter clothes are more expensive than summer clothes). You may wish to contact an immigrant-serving organization in your new community for help.

You can find detailed weather information for each region of Canada on the Environment Canada Web site: [weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca](http://weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca).

## ***Schools and universities***

There is no national school system in Canada. Schools and universities are run by the provinces; therefore, education varies somewhat from province to province. Most elementary and secondary schooling is public, meaning it is free and open to everyone.

Depending on the individual province, primary education starts at pre-kindergarten and continues to the end of grade 6 or 8. This is followed by secondary education or high school. In some provinces this may be divided into junior high (grades 7 to 9) and senior high (grades 10 to 12). Normally, students must complete the required academic courses in high school in order to be admitted to university or college.

The regular school year runs from late August or early September until mid- to late June. New students can usually be registered throughout the school year. Most schools are closed on national holidays. Also, all schools are closed between Christmas Eve and New Year's Day, and most are closed for a week in March for spring break. The longest school holiday occurs over the summer months of July and August.

Universities and community colleges hold their regular classes from late August or early September until April, although some courses are offered from January to April and a smaller number are available over the summer months. University and community college courses are not free and the costs vary among the provinces.

When you register your children at the local school or school board office, you must take with you:

- Canadian immigrant visa (Record of Landing);
- birth certificate or baptismal certificate;
- vaccination certificate;
- any previous school records.

Your children's language and mathematical skills will be assessed, if necessary, and they will be placed in the program the school thinks is best for them.

For information about the educational system in Canada, visit the provincial or territorial Web sites at [canada.gc.ca/othergov/prov\\_e.html](http://canada.gc.ca/othergov/prov_e.html), or visit [ceris.schoolnet.ca/e/](http://ceris.schoolnet.ca/e/), [www.aucc.ca](http://www.aucc.ca) or [www.accc.ca](http://www.accc.ca)

Education in Canada is available in English and French. Many Canadian parents, even if they do not speak French themselves, believe it is good for their children to be able to speak both English and French. Some put their children in a French immersion program, where children learn most of the regular subjects in French.