

# Guide for Families Moving to Vancouver

## Introduction

Welcome to Eaton Arrowsmith School (EAS)! Welcome to Canada!

This guide has been prepared by international families like yours who have undertaken the enormous task of relocating to Canada to enable a student to attend EAS. Our goal is to share our collective knowledge and experiences to make your transition as smooth as possible. This guide collects our practical tips about immigration, moving, setting up a household, and finding things to do. It is meant to save you time and give you confidence but not to offer legal advice, especially regarding immigration law! Here is our first tip: everything that you have heard about Vancouver being one of the world's most livable cities is absolutely true. As your family settles into a new routine you will soon appreciate the area's beauty, convenience, safety, and rich culture.

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## **Immigration and Visas**

The best place to start your visa process is the Immigration Canada website, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/index.asp>. EAS students qualify for student visas. Visas for family members depend on your country of origin. Our families have found the following to be very helpful:

Fill out all of the required Immigration Canada forms completely, in detail, exactly as the instructions describe. Fortunately the forms for a student visa application are straightforward and most of our families complete them without professional help. Keep these points in mind:

- Proof of income or means of support is very important. Bring strong documentation such as bank statements and proof of employment or other income showing that the family will be supported for the duration of the Arrowsmith Program.
- Bring a letter from your physician stating that EAS will benefit the student.
- One of the first questions that we often get from Immigration Canada officials is, “Why do you need to bring the child to Canada?” EAS is happy to draft an admission letter stating that the Arrowsmith Program is not available in your home country or area.
- Clearly state that you plan to remain a resident of your home country and are in Canada only as students / visitors.

As the Immigration Canada instructions state (in fine print), citizens of many countries, which are all listed in the instructions, can apply for student visas at the point of entry on their day of arrival in Canada. When all the needed documentation is in good shape our families have found this to be a fast and reliable process. U.S. parents have had no trouble receiving long-term visitor permits at the point of entry when the student receives his/her student visa.

For U.S. citizens, driving to the Blaine, WA border crossing on a mid-week morning has resulted in the shortest wait times for processing the student visa application.

The student will need to have a legal guardian in British Columbia until he/she turns nineteen. If a parent is not accompanying the student be sure to arrange for a guardian as detailed in Immigration Canada’s instructions.

As noted above, the immigration forms are straightforward. If you do have questions about how to complete the forms we have regrettably found that Consulates in the U.S. are difficult to communicate with and offer little help, even when visited in person. Many immigration attorneys practice in Vancouver and some will book hourly telephone appointments to address your questions. Our families have found that when there are no unusual issues, such as needing a Canadian work permit, they have not required the support of an immigration attorney to complete the visa and immigration process.

### *Nexus pass:*

For U.S. citizens and residents the Nexus pass is an excellent time saver when you cross the border in either direction. Nexus pass holders are able to use special lanes at airport and highway border crossings. Information and applications are available at:

<http://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/prog/nexus/application-demande-eng.html>

## **Housing**

Compared with many other major cities, family rental housing is relatively plentiful in Vancouver. For a large urban center, Vancouver has a surprising number of single family homes and small apartment buildings.

### *Locations:*

Most of the international families at EAS rent in the neighborhoods west of MacDonald Street in order to be close to the school. The following links will provide information about neighbourhoods on the west side of Vancouver, or that are of great interest to newly relocated families. Many of our families live in the neighbourhoods of Point Grey, Kitsilano, Dunbar or Kerrisdale, due to their proximity to EAS. These areas are somewhat more expensive, however, as are any areas west of Main St.

<http://www.johomaps.com/na/canada/bc/vancouver/neighbourhoods.html>

<http://www.vancouver.worldweb.com/SightsAttractions/DistrictsNeighbourhoods/>

### *Timing:*

Allow two weeks “on the ground” in Vancouver to find a suitable house or apartment. Many families will start with a weekly or monthly rental as they get settled while others will send a member ahead to secure long term housing before the rest of the family arrives.

### *Contracts:*

Rental contracts are typically for one year for the first year with monthly termination possible thereafter. Heat and water are often included in apartment rents while electricity (called “Hydro” because of the utility, BC Hydro), cable, etc., are not.

*Resources for Finding Housing:*

For weekly/monthly rentals:

Vancouver Rental Suites: [www.vancouverrentalsuites.com](http://www.vancouverrentalsuites.com)

Skytofly: [www.skytofly.com](http://www.skytofly.com)

Make Yourself At Home: <http://www.makeyourselfathome.com/>

For long-term rentals:

Unique Accommodations: [www.uniqueaccommodations.com](http://www.uniqueaccommodations.com)

The Rental Guide: [www.therentalguide.ca](http://www.therentalguide.ca) (budget-oriented)

Craigslist (Our families have had mixed experiences with Craigslist for rentals in Vancouver)  
<http://vancouver.en.craigslist.ca/>

Sabbatical Homes [www.sabbaticalhomes.com](http://www.sabbaticalhomes.com). Professors at the University of British Columbia offer their homes for the school year through this site.

Academic homes: [www.academichomes.com](http://www.academichomes.com)

Company	Phone	Address	Website	Notes
Bruce Ward Realty	(604) 684-8957	Suite 400-1525 Robson Street	<a href="http://www.bruceward.com/">www.bruceward.com/</a>  <a href="http://www.bruceward.com/property-management.php">www.bruceward.com/property-management.php</a>	Offers property management for single apartment rentals
Colyvan Pacific Prop. Mgmt	Office (604) 683-8399 Rentals – Ken Blake (604) 506-3557	300 – 2150 W Broadway, Vancouver	<a href="http://www.colyvanpacific.com">www.colyvanpacific.com</a>	Offers property management for single apartment rentals
Crosby Prop. Mgmt	Office (604) 683-8900 Rentals – Heddy (604) 648-6990	777 Hornby, Vancouver	<a href="http://www.crosbypm.com/services_rentals.html">www.crosbypm.com/services_rentals.html</a>	Offers property management for single apartment rentals
Rancho Prop. Mgmt	(604) 684-4508	701-1190 Hornby Street, Vancouver	<a href="http://www.ranchovan.com">www.ranchovan.com</a>	Offers property management for single apartment rentals

Homestay company: [www.easystays.ca](http://www.easystays.ca) Contact person: Carrie Almas. This company offers the opportunity to live with a Vancouver family. Many of the families are located on the west side of Vancouver, close to Eaton Arrowsmith School.

## **Internet / phone / TV / utilities**

### *Household Utilities:*

Setup of household utilities and communication services is pretty easy. Water will have been activated by your landlord and as noted above, water is typically included in monthly rent. Electricity (often referred to as “Hydro”) is billed bi-monthly by the utility, BC Hydro. If your electricity has not already been activated just call BC Hydro: 1-800-224-9376, or visit: [www.bchydro.com](http://www.bchydro.com)

### *Recycle/Garbage service:*

Recycling and garbage pick-up by the city may not happen on the same day each week. Each neighborhood will have a schedule, depending on the location and holidays. Recycling is broken down into (a) newspapers; (b) cardboard/other paper and (c) everything else (cans, plastic, bottles).

### *Internet providers:*

There are several internet providers offering an array of prices and bundles. Deals change frequently and there is enough competition to keep pricing at reasonable levels. Bundles often include TV and landline telephone.

Telus: [www.telus.com](http://www.telus.com)

Shaw: [www.shaw.ca](http://www.shaw.ca)

Lightspeed: [www.lightspeed.ca](http://www.lightspeed.ca)

Urban Networks: [www.ubn.ca](http://www.ubn.ca)

Bell: [www.bell.ca](http://www.bell.ca)

### *Television:*

Canada uses the same ATSC digital broadcast standard as the U.S. (and South Korea). However, since most families will use a cable or satellite TV service the standard really doesn't matter and almost any set that you bring with you will work. If you are like many of us and watch a lot of television programming over the internet there are some advantages and disadvantages here in Vancouver. Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) content is available online, as are quite a few BBC programs. Some of the most popular U.S. services including Netflix and Hulu are unavailable here.

### *Mobile phone:*

You will get a major price shock in Canada if you try to use your international mobile phone for more than a few days. International charges for incoming and outgoing calls, text messages, and data are extremely high! For making calls inside of Canada and receiving calls while in Canada it is much more cost effective to sign up with a local mobile service provider such as one of the following:

Fido: [www.fido.ca](http://www.fido.ca)

Telus: [www.telus.com](http://www.telus.com)

Rogers: [www.rogers.ca](http://www.rogers.ca)

Bell: [www.bell.ca](http://www.bell.ca)

Saving money on international calls from Canada: Many families will use a VOIP service such as Skype for their outgoing international calls. We have yet to find a VOIP service for incoming calls (you can not establish an incoming Skype number in Canada) that does not require paying for a home landline service.

## **Money & Banking**

### *Banking:*

Services, costs, and access are similar for the major Canadian retail banks. The best option is to pick a bank with branches that are located conveniently for you. Several banks have international branches including HSBC and Royal Bank (RBC) and offer the benefit of avoiding wire transfer fees. If such a bank has a branch near you in your home country it is worth looking into their total fee structure. Pay special attention to foreign exchange fees and currency conversion rates as you make your banking decision. Some of the banks with many branches in Vancouver are:

Bank of Montreal (BMO)

Vancity

Royal Bank of Canada (RBC)

Toronto-Dominion Bank (TD)

Bank of Nova Scotia (Scotia Bank)

Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC)

### *Money*

The currency in Canada is the Canadian dollar. Exchange houses are available and banks will exchange some of the most common currencies. U.S. dollars are not typically accepted in stores. Dollar coins are called “Loonies,” while two-dollar coins are called “Toonies.”

We strongly recommend getting credit cards, Visa or Mastercard, from your Canadian bank ASAP to avoid the typical 3% foreign exchange fee on transactions with international credit cards. Do not be surprised if the bank requires you to open a savings account (a certificate of deposit called a “GIC”) equal to your credit limit to fully collateralize the credit card: Canadian banks are conservative with credit. Savings and chequing accounts are available to non-residents but brokerage accounts are not therefore as a non-resident you are unable to invest in securities traded only on the Toronto Stock Exchange.

### *Managing the fluctuating exchange rates:*

Living in Vancouver is not cheap. Everyone has a different situation therefore our advice is to discuss the issue with your investment advisor bearing in mind that exchange rate changes are virtually impossible to predict.

## **Health care**

Medical care is readily available in Vancouver. There are numerous doctors’ offices and walk-in medical clinics for primary care, although it is difficult to secure a family doctor. Additionally, there are a number of hospitals for serious and emergency care, including the University of British Columbia Hospital two blocks from EAS. An internet search of “hospitals in Vancouver, BC” underscores the wide availability of medical facilities.

### *Health Insurance*

Student’s residing in Canada for 6 months or more must sign up for Medical Services Plan (MSP). There is a three month waiting period which is calculated from the date of your arrival, however, it is recommended that you submit the forms as soon as possible rather than waiting until the end of the waiting period, so as to allow adequate time to process your application. Once you have attained MSP coverage you will be issued a Care Card. You must present this whenever you seek medical care.

MSP covers medically required services provided by physicians and supplementary health care practitioners, laboratory services and diagnostic procedures. It does not cover for ambulance trips, eyeglasses, plastic surgery, hearing aids, acupuncture, physiotherapists and other services not deemed medically required. Please call 1-800-663-7100 for more information about specific services that are and are not covered. The BC Nurse’s line is accessed free of charge for anyone with a Care Card by calling 811, and is an excellent resource. Also, [www.health.gov.bc.ca](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca) is well worth viewing.

New residents from other parts of Canada should maintain coverage with their former medical plan during the waiting period. New or returning residents arriving from outside Canada should contact a private insurance company for coverage during this period. To enroll for basic medical coverage, please visit <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/msp/infoben/eligible.html#enroll>

Of course it is very important to consult the terms and conditions of your current private medical insurance to determine how your cost and coverage is impacted by your move to Vancouver.

## **Transportation**

### *Public Transit:*

Vancouver has an excellent system of busses, trains, and ferries. Details of routes and rates are available at [www.translink.ca](http://www.translink.ca). Many international families find that they drive much less in Vancouver than they do at home, and therefore it is not necessary to purchase a car. If a car is needed, there are a variety of rental agencies around town, such as Budget, National, Hertz. Another option is the cooperative car system that is flourishing in Vancouver. For more information, consult:

[www.cooperativeauto.net](http://www.cooperativeauto.net)

[www.zipcar.com](http://www.zipcar.com)

Many students take public transportation to and from EAS. The EAS student ID card enables you to buy discounted monthly transit passes at 7-11, a local corner store, and other outlets.

Vancouver is bicycle-friendly. Bicycles can be carried on all busses, ferries, and trains. There are a variety of designated bike routes around town.

<http://www.trek.ubc.ca/maps/imgs/bikeRouteMap.pdf>

### *Air travel:*

Flights in and out of YVR are typically expensive. Two alternatives are Bellingham International (BLI) and Seattle-Tacoma International (“Seatac,” SEA) one half hour and three hours across the U.S. border respectively. Bellingham flights are limited while Seatac has an abundance of flights but is too distant to be used for day trips.

### *Driving:*

Traffic is relatively light in Vancouver when compared with other major cities, in part due to the extensive use of public transit, walking, and bicycles. On-street parking is usually available even in the heart of the city (Parking garages are called “Parkades”). Canada drives on the right side of the road. Traffic signs and signals and rules of the road are highly similar to those in the U.S. One difference that we all notice is the “flashing green light,” commonly found at the intersection of a

major road and a small cross street. Details for the flashing green light, formally called a “pedestrian controlled signal,” and all other rules of the road in Canada, can be found in the booklet at this site:

[http://www.icbc.com/driver-licensing/getting-licensed/pass-veh/roadsense-drivers#Variables\\_frag](http://www.icbc.com/driver-licensing/getting-licensed/pass-veh/roadsense-drivers#Variables_frag)

Note: students who do not have a drivers’ license and are age twelve or over can get a B.C. Identification (BCID) cards are very useful if you are not a driver, and do not have a British Columbia driver's license. BCID cards are typically used as identification in any situation where you might use a driver's license. (You must, however, have a valid driver's license to drive a car in B.C.) Getting a BCID is not mandatory, but is helpful when required. Here is the link with more information about the card: [http://www.icbc.com/licensing/lic\\_utility\\_id\\_cardPU.asp](http://www.icbc.com/licensing/lic_utility_id_cardPU.asp)

#### *Car Insurance:*

Most U.S. car insurance companies have provisions for extending your coverage to your situation in Canada and your agent should be able to easily provide you with details. If you are not a U.S. citizen then insurance is available from a variety of companies here.

## **Shopping**

As in most major cities shopping in Vancouver can be cheap or expensive: it all depends on where you go. Major discounters and superstores such as WalMart, Costco, Home Depot, Lowes, and Ikea have locations in Vancouver. Here are some of the stores that we like for quality, cost, and convenience.

#### *Groceries:*

Safeway, Save On Foods, Price Mart, NoFrills, IGA, Real Canadian Superstore, Costco, Whole Foods. Fresh produce stores are very popular in Vancouver and can be found in virtually every shopping district. They often have the best prices and most fresh selection.

#### *Furniture:*

There are a number of discount furniture stores in Richmond along Bridgeport Road leading up to Ikea. Thrift or second-hand shops are popular in Vancouver. Run by non-profit organizations such as animal shelters and the Salvation Army they are an excellent source of very low-cost furniture, appliances, DVDs, books, and even clothing. Thrift shops can be found in most shopping districts.

#### *Malls:*

In Vancouver there are Oakridge Mall, Metrotown (technically in Burnaby, but it is a very big and popular mall) and Pacific Centre. On the North Shore (North and West Vancouver) Park Royal and Capilano Malls are popular. In Bellingham, WA, one hour south on highway 99 / US-5, is the Bellis Fair Mall.

*Miscellaneous:*

Canadian Tire. The name is misleading. It is a major hardware and appliance chain (and they do sell tires, too).

Shoppers Drug Mart. A major pharmacy/health/beauty chain with many locations including on the UBC campus near the bus depot.

London Drugs. Similar to Shopper's Drug Mart and found throughout Vancouver.

**Activities/sites for the first couple of months**

After the first frenzied weeks of setting up our homes comes the time when we face that big question, "What do we do this weekend?" Fortunately Vancouver is loaded with sites and family activities. Among our families' favourites are:

- The Vancouver Aquarium
- Science World
- Museum of Anthropology at UBC
- Bike riding and walks/hikes, especially in Pacific Spirit Park (50K of trails for hiking and mountain biking) and Stanley Park. The west side of Vancouver, where many of EAS' international families live, has very nice beaches such as Jericho , Kits, Spanish, and Locarno. It is also fun to simply walk around one of Vancouver's many interesting neighborhoods.
- Skiing: Cypress (site of many 2010 Olympic events), Grouse Mountain, and Mount Seymour, are all within an easy hour of the city.
- Snowshoeing or tubing at Mount Seymour
- The Vancouver Symphony
- [www.tourismvancouver.com](http://www.tourismvancouver.com)

If you want to take a longer day or weekend trip outside of Vancouver there are many excellent possibilities. Whistler, site of many 2010 Olympic skiing and sliding events, and Blackcomb Mountains are only a two hour drive away and offers world-class skiing in the winter and mountain biking in spring, summer and fall. The city of Victoria with its renowned Butchart Gardens and high-tea at the Empress Hotel is a short "float plane" or ferry ride away.