

# The West Coast Challenge

## Are people really that friendly?



THE INCONTROVERTIBLE PROOF arrived like lightning during Christmas week at my local branch of TD Canada Trust. The manager, who, I must point out, was modelling a Santa hat with his business suit, flashed a broad smile and chirruped “Hi Dave!” with impossible jollity.

I came to some time later, confused and with the unmistakable aromas of bank carpet and smelling salts competing in my nostrils. I strained to focus on the blurred cluster of faces staring down at me. “He said ‘Hello’... and was positively charming!”, I sputtered. “That’s how it is here, David... even with bank managers” replied a kindly voice from somewhere near: “Don’t be afraid.”

There had been other clues. The Nanaimo notary public, for example, who spent two (admittedly highly efficient) minutes dealing with my enquiry, then a joy-filled seven presenting a display of her Jack Russell dancing for treats. Please note that this was in her office.

Maybe I should have seen it in the Sandwich Artist™ at Chemainus Subway? Served with such jocular and flamboyance was I, that I swore at the time she’d been inhaling laughing gas on her break. Either that, or she was genuinely insane.

But to you West Coasters, my dear new homies,

I presume that mirthful food servers, lawyers with performing pets and non-terrifying bank managers are *de rigueur* here? More pertinently, I guess such insouciant behaviour and unabashed *friendliness* during such encounters is par for the course, yes? Then please excuse my surprise, as it certainly is *not* whence I came.

While I have not, in moving from England, departed the world’s most dour and misanthropic country, the high level of everyday interaction here is simply incredible. You people actually say hello to strangers in the street! Sometimes, it spills into fully-fledged conversation. When you say “Have a nice day” in stores, I believe you mean it! I’ve met polite teenagers! Unbelievable! Are you all androids? Have I, in fact, moved to Stepford?

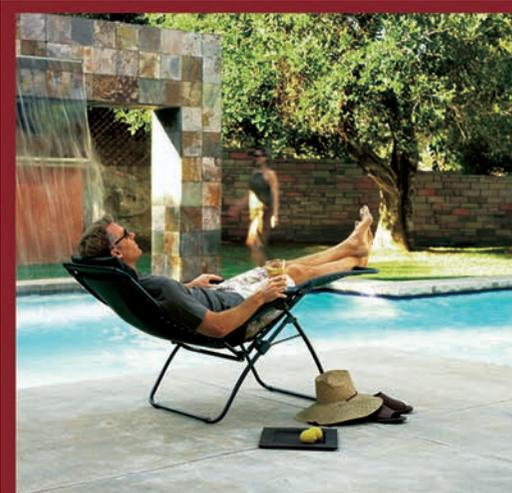
I’ve travelled a lot, including within Canada. This state of affairs is *not* the norm. Most everywhere else, shuffling along avoiding eye contact or charging about without a single thought for any other human is the norm. Despite my West Coast awakening, I still possess this trait. Witness the uncanny, random observation from a woman in Liquidation World: “You look formal”. Hey lady, I’m trying here! These levels of neighbourliness are alien to me!

West Coasters, you’re special. But why?

Personally, I think it’s obvious. Since arriving here, I feel great, younger, a *better person* even... just by admiring the scenery. Therein lies the secret, maybe?

I believe, as famously reported by the Economist Intelligence Unit (what-ever) in deeming Vancouver the world’s most livable city, that it has much to do with “the proximity of urban living to sea and mountains” that shapes a more considerate society. A simplistic conclusion from a wide-eyed romantic? Perhaps, but go look at a mountain then tell me how you feel. See?

Okay, gotta dash; I need to get down to the clinic to have my upper lip de-stiffened. Toodle-pip! —David Morrison 



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