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English 11000

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When you think about vacation as an American citizen, what is the first place that comes to mind in your head? Cancun? Hawaii? The Pacific islands? France? Or maybe somewhere different in the states, like Los Angeles, Washington D.C. or Niagara falls. Maybe you are going back to your country of origin. All of these locations are famous vacation destinations all around the world (and these are probably the basic ones. There are hidden vacation gems all over the world that aren't very known). If you were going to travel somewhere new, there's a good chance one of the places I previously mentioned would interest you. Now try to think about the complete opposite vacation location. Where is the LAST place you would think to go? For me, there was only one place that was not my ideal travel spot: Canada. At first I wasn't pleased with Canada being our vacation area, but it only took two days for me to fall in love with its landscapes, weather, and friendliness.

It all began on a very average Saturday afternoon. It was summer, and for a 14 year-old Joel, summer meant many things. First: cartoons - I planned on watching as many cartoons as possible before my adolescent mind found something else to do. My father walked into the living room, looking pretty nonchalant, as usual. "Hey Joel, you and your sister will be going out of state with your mother for a few days". This was rare for our family, since I've only left NYC 2-3 times in my entire lifetime, so

I was immediately excited about the trip. This was basically a vacation for us. “Where are we going?”.

The words that came out of my Dad’s mouth shut down my excitement real quick. “Canada.”

“Canada? What is there to do in Canada?” He explained that we were attending a wedding there.

We were sharing a car with my uncle and his family of 7. My spirits dropped to the negatives.

Everyone around me said it would be a good experience, a new location, fresh scenery... I DID NOT

CARE! For the entire ride, I was skeptical about how much of a new experience I was going to have.

When we drove up to the no man's land area, I made a corny comment in the car: “We aren't on the

map anymore..” No one laughed, as usual. But the worst part...the toll. Now as you may/may not

know, I ABSOLUTELY HATE IT WHEN MY NAME IS MISPRONOUNCED. So much to my

annoyance, when we arrived at the toll, they started inspecting our passports and listed our names to

identify us. When they got to me the man at the toll said my name INCORRECTLY. I know what

you might be thinking.... Joel, he said your name correctly right? WRONG. Everyone in the car (who

knew how to say my name correctly) started laughing hard. My head slumped down into my neck.

After we passed the toll, my uncle told me that my name has different pronunciations in different

countries. It was the first time I realized that my name can be said in many ways, in other countries.

Learning that information made me appreciate my parents, how they immigrated to this country, and

learned English, despite the large language barrier. This moment also made me interested in Canada, so

I ended up loving the trip. When we finally got to our hotel, I got my phone out and tried to get as

much information on Canadian culture as possible. I wanted to learn more about the place that says

my name wrong. At least, that’s what young me is thinking. After sleeping like a 20 year coma patient,

I woke up on the day of the wedding refreshed. With the knowledge I absorbed from my phone

yesterday, I learned that Canada wasn't the extraterrestrial space I thought it was. It was actually similar to New York City in many ways. There were more caucasians than I was accustomed to, since I lived in the hood where the majority of the population were African-American. But all my tension faded away due to the nice treatment I was getting. Who knew that going to a Walmart in Canada would change my perspective so quickly? The smile of an average Canadian is enough to make your frown slap itself into a smile. Before I knew it, I was speaking in a Canadian accent, with a smile so wide you could put the Statue Of Liberty on it with perfect balance. My cousins and even my relatives were looking at me weird, since my face was stuck with a joyful smile, which was weird, since we were 24 hours away from the wedding time, and I wasn't the one getting married. During the after party of the wedding, I even jumped to the center of the ballroom and started dancing with everyone else. If you ask my family, this is crazy for me, because I never dance during these sorts of events. I don't even dance in church during worship and praises, which makes my mom very angry, but i'm going off topic. All in all, I had a blast in Hamilton, Canada. The wedding was beautiful, the food was immaculate (two words - Beef Wellington. Try them, they taste delicious). When we left Canada, I felt better about myself, and I left with a better understanding of English around the world. I learned that English is a flexible language, and there are many ways to speak it. We are all connected through language, no matter where you're from. And if you were thinking this is where my Canadian story ends, it's not. We went back to Canada the following summer for another amazing wedding, but that's another story for another day. Well, it's getting pretty late, so imma head out. Thank you so much for sticking with me, your humble and goofy narrator, until the very end. And remember to never let a language or cultural barrier cloud your judgment. Peace out and stay safe.