

THE U.S.A. AND CANADA 1: SURPRISING FACTS

by Bulent Akman

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Hello and welcome to another podcast of NaukaBezGranic, LearningWithoutBorders. Today, I'll be your host, Bulent Akman, and today we'll be talking about things people couldn't believe about North America before they moved here. This is part of the presentation I give to student in Poland about Canada and (the) USA today.

One of the things that people find hard to believe until they live in North America is that fruit and vegetables are much more expensive than meat and poultry, this may come as a surprise to many people who haven't visited North America or lived somewhere else.

Another thing that surprises others who come to North America is that you cannot purchase alcohol unless you are 21 years of age but you can purchase a pistol if you are 18.

Another thing is the severe poverty and homelessness. It's not as widespread as in other parts of the world perhaps but I've travelled through North America on the road, the biggest trip I took was 60 days, and if you travel just to New York you can't really say you've been to the United States. The city of New York and especially Manhattan island is not North America. North America is big, it's really big and it has a diverse array of people, personalities, local customs and, for example, when I was driving down the East Coast there were some communities where I saw people, whole families, sitting outside of boarded up apartment buildings in front of cars with no tires, propped up on cinder blocks. There was nowhere to go, there was nothing to do, it was quite disturbing. Partly this has to do with the North American idea that poverty doesn't exist in North America. There's no such thing as a poor person, there are only temporarily embarrassed millionaires. It's the dream of rugged individualism. The belief that with enough hard work and a bit of luck, anyone can get anywhere they believe they deserve. Of course, this doesn't really work out, and the reason rags to riches stories are interesting is because they are so rare. Once upon a time in North America, social mobility, the ability to move between social strata (from middle class to upper class, from labour class to middle class)

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was more possible but increasingly over the last few decades I've found that it's harder and harder. It seems like the system is designed to, if you're rich, keep you rich. And if you're poor, keep you poor.

But moving on, another thing that surprises people is that, generally, no one carries any cash. Everyone uses a debit card or a credit card to make their day to day purchases.

Another thing that surprises foreigners when they visit North America is nobody really cares about FIFA. The World Cup is not an event, even though the USA qualifies. It's just not that important. The most important sports in the United States and Canada are Hockey, Football (American Football in the United States, Canadian Football in Canada, a slightly different game, our balls are bigger) and Basketball. You might think that the national sport of Canada is hockey but it's not. In fact, the official national sport of Canada is Lacrosse.

Another thing that surprises people is that parents can be arrested for physically punishing their children. That includes spanking so be careful if you discipline your children in public you may be arrested. Even if it's just a spank. Like, three short sharp shocks to the bottom. They don't hurt, they're just embarrassing. Followed by a hug, administered immediately after the infraction. This can get you arrested in the United States.

Also, generally speaking, poor people are more obese than the rich. Obese meaning that their weight is a danger to their health and this is largely to do with the fact that a thousand calories of potato chips costs less than a dollar but the same amount of money can buy you about a hundred calories of carrots. So, nutritious food, being more expensive on a calorie-by-calorie basis of comparison means that poor people tend to eat low-quality food, eat more of it because it doesn't satisfy them and as a consequence, they're more obese.

Contrasted with that, you have a smaller group of Americans (that includes Canadians because North America includes Canada, the United States and Mexico for that matter) that are hyper-fit and spend inordinate amounts of time, a lot of time, a huge amount of time, in a gym, exercising on a treadmill, with weights but they are always in a minority despite what you may find on television and instagram.

These are some of the things that are most surprising for foreigners who visit North America for the first time. In our next podcast, we're going to talk about some of the attitudes of Canada and the United States that are different from the attitudes of Europe. But until then, my name is Bulent Akman for NaukaBezGranic, LearningWithoutBorders. Have a good day, have a good afternoon, and if I don't see you later, have a good evening and a good weekend.