

Cultural Kaleidoscope

For the first two decades of my life, the bustling streets of Mumbai were my playground, my classroom, and my sanctuary. Born and raised in the same house in the heart of India's financial capital, I had woven the tapestry of my existence into the very fabric of the city. But one fateful day, a decision was made that would redefine my world, stretching over 12,000 kilometres from my familiar Mumbai streets to the picturesque city of Kamloops in Canada. I embarked on this transformative journey as an international student, leaving behind everything I once held dear.

In the days leading up to my departure, my home in Mumbai became a museum of cherished memories. I felt like every object in the house was reminding me of a wonderful experience that begged me to reconsider my choice to leave. From a fully furnished 2BHK apartment with all the necessary (and some even luxury) amenities in Mumbai, I now moved to a room with 3 pieces of furniture: a mattress, a table, and a wardrobe. The stark contrast between these two worlds felt jarring.

All the expectations that I had built (thanks to movies and my wild imagination) about the idea of a fresh start in a new place and community seemed thrilling, romantic, and electrifying. The reality however, was not that colorful.

With newfound freedom came a slew of new life lessons, such as time management, budgeting, and operating a thermostat. My vision of a vibrant and carefree life was quickly replaced by the sobering challenges of independence.

In those initial months in Kamloops, the city didn't feel like home. I yearned for the familiarity of Mumbai and counted the days until my return. I longed for the comforting embrace of my family and the joy of unburdened conversations that didn't require a keyboard and a laptop screen. I missed the familiar scents and sounds and the red-dyed pavement that I would walk home from school on. I've always associated the idea of my home with the same scents of streetside vendors selling daily wares and shouting beckoning for people to get their fill amidst the bustle of Mumbai, my hometown.

A pit in my stomach formed over the idea of feeling at home without all of those things felt dissonant. I couldn't separate the idea of what my memory told me my home was supposed to be, as opposed to the home I now inhabited here in Kamloops.

It was only two or probably three months later, following an exhausting 8-hour shift spent crafting and slicing pizzas, that I found myself back in my Kamloops dwelling. I took a hot shower and, in a moment of tranquillity, lay on my mattress with my eyes gently closed. In that serene space, something extraordinary happened; I felt 'at home.'

At that moment I asked myself, "What is home?" Is it a place where one feels a sense of belonging, comfort, and familiarity? And that got me thinking... What if two places gave you the same kind of feeling?

Does that mean you have 2 homes?

If so, is it acceptable to have two homes?

If I had to be completely honest, as someone who's growing to develop an identification of home in more than one place, it is taking me a long time to embrace the idea that home for me, isn't as clearly defined as it formerly was. I took the time to grasp that while time does modify a home, this isn't always a terrible thing.

Mumbai, my birthplace, was and forever will be my home.

When I first moved from Mumbai, I found myself struggling. I felt guilty about alienating my friends and loved ones. I felt lonely because everything that defined me was back in Mumbai. It felt like I'd left a part of me back home when I decided to move all the way across the globe. At times I even questioned myself, wondering what I'd do if all the sacrifices I'd made to get here weren't worth it in the end.

But today, after one year of living in Kamloops, I can confidently vouch that Kamloops has most definitely become a significant part of my story.

Kamloops, a city nestled in the interior of British Columbia, is often characterized by its stunning natural beauty. The vast expanse of mountains, lakes, and forests is a constant reminder of the boundless wonders of Canada. It's a place where adventure beckons, and the call of the wild echoes through every season. But beyond the breathtaking landscapes, it's the people who define the soul of Kamloops.

One of the most remarkable aspects of my journey has been the connections I've forged with people from different corners of the world. As an international student, I was initially apprehensive about how I would fit into the local community. The warmth and friendliness of the people I encountered however, quickly put my fears to rest.

The Thompson Rivers university (TRU) campus itself is a microcosm of this rich diversity, where stories from India, China, Japan, Europe and beyond converge. I have been fortunate to have had the privilege of making friends from diverse backgrounds, each offering a unique perspective on life, culture, and tradition. The exchange of ideas, the sharing of stories, and the celebration of our differences have been an invaluable part of my journey.

One particularly memorable experience was the sharing of Diwali, the festival of lights, with my friends and fellow students in Kamloops. I vividly remember the joyous moments of preparing traditional Indian sweets, lighting diyas (lamps), and decorating our homes with vibrant rangoli patterns. The warmth and curiosity with which my friends embraced this festival was heartening. It was an opportunity not only to share my culture but also to learn about the traditions of others.

The cultural tapestry of Kamloops extends far beyond the festivals. It's woven into the daily life of the city. Exploring the local food culture and cuisine has been an adventure in itself. The city boasts an array of international restaurants and eateries, each offering a taste of home to the diverse population. From savoring mouth-watering sushi to indulging in authentic butter chicken, Kamloops is a place where culinary diversity thrives.

One of the most cherished aspects of my journey has been the warm and welcoming Canadian culture. The locals in Kamloops have a reputation for their friendliness and

politeness. I've been fortunate to witness this firsthand, from the cheerful greetings of my neighbours to the kindness of strangers who offered guidance when I was finding my way in a new place.

The beauty of Kamloops extends beyond its landscapes to the art and culture that permeate the city. The Kamloops Art Gallery, with its diverse collection, has been a place of inspiration and reflection. It's a space where art from different cultures converges, offering a glimpse into the global art scene.

The welcoming spirit of Kamloops is not limited to the international community but extends to indigenous cultures as well. I've had the privilege of learning about the rich traditions of the Secwepemc and other indigenous communities that call this land home. The cultural exchange with indigenous peoples has been a humbling and enlightening experience, deepening my appreciation for the diverse cultural fabric of Kamloops.

Beyond the celebrations and traditions, it's the daily interactions and conversations with people from various backgrounds that have truly enriched my understanding of the place. These conversations have broken down cultural barriers, shattered stereotypes, and reinforced the idea that the world is a tapestry of unique stories waiting to be shared.

In this cultural kaleidoscope, I've not only learned about others but also discovered facets of myself that were previously unexplored. The immersion in Kamloops has deepened my understanding of the world and expanded my horizons. It has shown me that home is not limited to a single place; it can be a feeling, a sense of belonging, and a connection with people and cultures across the globe.

As an international student from Mumbai, my journey in Kamloops has been a transformational odyssey. It's a story of leaving behind the known and embracing the unknown, of discovering the beauty of diversity and the warmth of a welcoming community. Kamloops, with its melting pot of beautiful cultural and indigenous diversity has become a second home, a place where my heart finds solace amidst the mountains and my soul dances to the rhythm of global stories.

As I jot down these thoughts on a flight from Heathrow to Vancouver, returning to my home in Kamloops, I'm not sure whether I'll ever truly accept being split like this. But I do know that living in two places has forever altered my perspective of the world. My viewpoints have been forced to broaden, forcing me to become a more open-minded individual with a greater knowledge of my place in the larger world, for which I will be eternally grateful.

Kamloops and Mumbai- two homes, two worlds, two stories. A kaleidoscope of experiences that have shaped my identity and broadened my view of the world.