

My Moving Experience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Cross-country move during COVID-19? Where do I even begin?

Back in April when I received the employment offer, which I was very grateful for, I knew I would be facing very challenging, unprecedented, and unusual circumstances: moving from Toronto to Vancouver amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving to B.C. is a dream come true for me, but my mind was spinning on how I was going to make this happen.

The situation was getting worse and worse as both cities had high numbers of affected cases and both the federal and provincial government were changing the rules and travel restrictions daily. Since the government was contemplating closing borders with the U.S., as well as limiting inter-provincial travel, it made sense to leave Toronto as soon as possible. I had about two weeks to pack my belongings and needed to add two more weeks for voluntary confinement when I arrived in B.C. which would line up nicely for the start of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting.

One of the biggest dilemmas I faced was the decision to either drive or fly to B.C. If I decide to drive with my car, I will have to decide what route should I take and how I would move with my belongings. If I decide to fly, I will have to hire a transport company to ship my car and my belongings.

I initially decided to drive to B.C. via Washington State with a stop-over in Chicago to briefly visit my family. Many people shared their experiences online while stopping and visiting some cool spots, so this presented to me with a once in a lifetime opportunity to enjoy driving through some of those scenic views and also the ideal opportunity to visit Yellowstone National Park. I had planned a 3-day trip based on an 11-hour daily drive from Chicago to Vancouver. I was also able to secure a shared-load trucking company to transport my furniture and belongings. I thought I had it all figured out. However, shortly after that, as the COVID-19 situation swiftly deteriorated, I start to realize that this option was not feasible anymore as the borders with the U.S. were closing.

So, if I still wanted to drive to Vancouver, it would mean that I must drive through northern Ontario, across the prairies, and then through the Coquihalla highway. A much longer route that is much more dangerous with harsh wintery conditions. In addition to that, restaurants and hotels along highways were starting to close making the trip even more challenging.

After considering the multiple challenges I would have faced by driving, I decided that flying instead would be the least risky option, and not to mention, a much shorter one (5 hours vs. 5 days). Nonetheless, flying presented its own challenges as the airplane's circulated air could lead to passengers contracting the virus quite easily but the advantages over driving made it the lesser of two evils.

After conducting extended research online and communicating with several moving and trucking companies, I started to understand how truly unregulated this industry is. I had initially booked a company to aid in my move, but to my big surprise, I was shocked and very disappointed to hear that the staff who initially helped me with the quote thought I was a business rather than an individual. This meant that they could not transport my belongings anymore and with their new restrictions in place due to COVID-19, they could not take my main furniture anymore. It was a very frustrating experience.

In the end, I was able to find a more reputable company that would be able to take my personal boxes. Unfortunately, they were not able to ship any large items, so those were either sold or donated in the end. Moving my belongings: sorted – though my car did arrive 3 weeks later than expected.

I still had to figure out where I would live on a short-term basis once I arrived in B.C. Because I was not comfortable staying at an Airbnb, I reached out to my friends in Squamish who were very understanding and happy to accommodate me until I got my own place. With that in mind, I would have to drive about 80km each way, 5 times a week from Squamish to Richmond via the Sea to Sky Highway. I knew the drive would be long but the joy of driving on that highway would outpace any commuting concerns. Living in Squamish was perfect as I was close to the Stawamus Chief, Garibaldi, Howe Sound, and so many other amazing places and trails around.

I reluctantly held back from informing my family and friends to only couple of days prior to my trip as I did not want them be too concerned or stressed out. It was difficult and unfortunate not to be able to have a proper goodbye. Nevertheless, they were very understanding and supportive. I promised them that I will come back to Toronto to visit once this pandemic is over.

With all the pieces in place, I was ready to leave Ontario after calling it home for over 17 years. The usually busy Highway 401 was empty and so was the airport - in fact, there were more airport staff than travelers! I never thought I would see this; the broader impact of the pandemic started to hit me.

The flight to Vancouver was very empty - not even 10 passengers on it. After a 5-hour-long flight I finally landed at YVR. It was just as deserted as Pearson. Outside, it was very sunny and beautiful, about 15 degrees that day. I couldn't help but feel elated and smile as I said to myself with, "Congratulations Omar! You amazingly pulled it off and now, you are ready to start your new journey in your new home in beautiful British Columbia."

After my two-week quarantine, I was ready to begin a new chapter of my life in B.C. and start my new role as Controller. I am deeply thankful to the Dupuis Langen team who gave me this opportunity - my new family in my new home!

