

# TRUSHA PATEL SPICE SANCTUARY

BY CAROLYNE KAUSER-ABBOTT

**T**he prospect of a legal career entrenched in the heart of London's financial center focused on capital markets and derivatives might send most of us scurrying for the closest bar. Trusha Patel's demanding background as a lawyer in the fast and furious investment business may have been just the perfect training ground for her relocation to a new continent and into a fresh business venture.

In 2009, Trusha and her husband moved to Canmore in Alberta, Canada. They swapped big city life and an inner-city home for a mountainside perch in a newly-constructed condominium development. This fearless couple embarked on what might be described as a 180-degree conversion, with a solid resolve. They chose this Canadian mountain town with the serrated granite peaks of the Three Sisters and Mount Rundle as the backdrop for their new home. Canmore is ideally situated, embraced by natural beauty with ready proximity to backcountry hiking trails and ski resorts. Yet the urban infrastructure of Calgary's bustling commodity-focused economy is within easy reach in one hour.

The town of Canmore is located just outside the hallowed gates of Banff National Park in Alberta. Celtic for 'Big Head,' the town officially came into being in 1884 when Donald A. Smith, a Canadian Pacific Railway director, gave it the present-day name. Queen Victoria provided the settlement with a purpose when she granted its mining license in 1886. For the next 92 years, Canmore was not much more than a hardscrabble, dusty mining town.

For years, tourists and Calgarians heading to the Canadian Rockies for renowned mountain vistas, pristine glacier-fed lakes and solitary wilderness experiences might not have even noticed Canmore. The town narrowly dodged a death sentence after its mining operations closed in 1979 – the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics provided a vital life raft. It was those world-class athletic performances that helped put Canmore on the world map and in the minds of many around the globe. In a short span of years, Canmore transformed from being nothing more than a quick station stop – a place to fill up with gas and grab a quick snack from one of the retailers on gasoline alley – to a



sought-after resort setting for second home owners from around the world.

The town, with a population of slightly over 12,000, can boast about its rare collection of residents with diverse backgrounds and skill sets, from national team athletes in training to a thriving arts community, and from university professors to avalanche experts. What was once a place in which you never stopped has become that place you must pause for shopping, sought-after sun-baked patio tables, and yoga classes with mountain views.

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The Patels determined that Canmore matched their criteria as a place to develop their careers, complemented by genuine lifestyle balance. This couple's approach to expat living is to be fully committed, knowing that anything less would mean they would not establish a new home. Trusha's husband's job took him back to the United Kingdom for extended periods, so his transition has been tapered. Trusha, on the other hand, jumped in with both feet,

joining a ladies' networking club, taking golf lessons and meeting as many people as she could.

Trusha was able to work remotely for her previous employer for a period of time; this helped financially, but did nothing toward integrating into the community. Yet the notion of retraining to be fully accredited in the Canadian legal marketplace was completely unappealing. Instead, Trusha decided that the timing was perfect to become her own boss – something she had always wanted to do – so she confronted her fears and launched a new, home-based business called the Spice Sanctuary ([www.spicesanctuary.com](http://www.spicesanctuary.com)).

When you meet Trusha, it is easy to understand why she chose the name Spice Sanctuary for her start-up. Her passion for cooking and healthy eating has long been ingrained; during her busy days as a lawyer she found relaxation and comfort in the kitchen – her sanctuary. Rich flavors and exotic tastes have always been elements of her food, from childhood. Trusha knows that those intense smells and taste sensations are only fashioned with the best, fresh ingredients and quality spices.

Despite Canmore's healthy image and bubbling restaurant scene, it is a long way from the fizzy vibe of London, England. As Trusha struggled to acquire the exact ingredients she needed for her recipes, her search for organic spices with identifiable origins came to a dead-end. Hence the birth of the concept and now a reality, Spice Sanctuary sources organic, handpicked spices from certified growers in India and Greece. The product is imported and packaged and then sold to consumers through retail outlets and online.

Trusha credits her legal background for helping get her through the mountains of paperwork required to start a business, deal with Canadian food safety regulations and understand the whole process for importing goods into the country. Organic is the baseline for her products; however, Trusha's criteria for sourcing also includes top-quality, high-flavor and robust taste. Her company's mission is clear: 'To make the best quality organic spices available and easy



to use everyday while employing unique sustainability initiatives and supporting as many Canadian businesses as possible.'

In her early days as an expat, living in a region blanketed by snow more months a year than locals like to admit, Trusha confirms that she had second-thoughts about her entrepreneurial venture, but she continued down the path with the attitude that even a failure could not be that bad. A little over two years post-launch, Spice Sanctuary sales have doubled. Canadian consumers can now find Spice Sanctuary products in over 55 retail stores, at the Canmore Farmers Market and at specialty events throughout the year. The spice range has grown to include 31 spices and proprietary blends. Trusha's spices have even caught the taste buds of some regional executive chefs.

Where does she go from here? Trusha feels that the Canadian consumer market is far from tapped out, so her desire is to increase sales and awareness across the country. In her spare time, Trusha is working on a collaborative project with an Ayurvedic doctor in Canmore: a cookbook that will be focused on healthy, spice-filled eating.

Occasionally, expat realities set in for Trusha; although she fell in love with the jagged Rocky Mountain spires and jaw-dropping views right away, the natural beauty can also be rough, cold and inhospitable. As an expat or simply as a recent transplant to a new place of residence, it would be natural to have feelings that you do not quite belong. Trusha says that initially she was so excited by the adventure that she did not have time to miss home but, as time wears on, she feels a bit unsettled and misses her friends and family.

One might think that a move to Canada, a country that still pledges allegiance to the Queen of England and follows many other British traditions, including spelling, would be straightforward. No, says Trusha; everything presented a learning curve, from driving on the right-hand side, parking rules, banking, currency and so much more. Trusha found some comic relief and helpful information via the British Expat Forum, a website dedicated to helping transplants navigate the challenges of a new home base. She credits the forum and her patient husband with helping her to realize that she was not alone in her frustration.

The winter months in Alberta can drag on well into official spring. Trusha says she does miss spring flowers and that, unless forced to, she tries not to leave the house when the mercury dips anywhere close to -20 Fahrenheit. Trusha and her husband

Trusha with colleagues growing ginger



Spice Sanctuary cookbook



Canmore, Canada



have adopted the Canadian attitude that it is best to 'embrace' the weather and get outdoors to enjoy the over 300 sunny days a year. They acknowledge that no geographic location is nirvana, so their strategy is to live where you are and enjoy the life journey.

It is appropriate that they chose to move to Canmore – a place that was liberated from an uncertain future – to reinvent their careers and start a new venture. ■

Visit [www.spicesanctuary.com](http://www.spicesanctuary.com) for more information.