

CANADIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY URGES AUTHORITIES TO REOPEN THE BORDERS



Canada is dragging its feet on allowing fully vaccinated foreign travelers into the country, according to several tourism industry representatives, who fear the economy of the country's major cities will be hit hard.

"Enough is enough: we can't wait any longer. Many businesses [...] are on the verge of losing another summer in major urban centers," said Yves Lalumière, CEO of Tourisme Montréal, at a press conference held at Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport.

Since July 6, **Canadians who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 no longer have to stay in a federally approved hotel upon their return from abroad; nor do they have to quarantine themselves at home, unless they show symptoms of the disease.**

But international tourists are still not welcome in Canada, whether they are vaccinated or not. "If you're a Canadian with two doses of Moderna, you can travel [abroad]. But if you're an international traveler with two doses of vaccine, you can't come to Canada. It doesn't make sense," pointed Michel Leblanc, president and CEO of the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal.

Paris recently reopened its doors to Canadian tourists and urged Ottawa to take a reciprocal approach to French travelers, who cannot travel to Canada if their trip is not deemed essential.

"Canada is on its way to becoming one of the most vaccinated countries in the world, yet we are late in reopening the borders to [double-vaccinated foreign tourists]," said Leblanc.

Tough Times

Montreal's tourism industry is having a tough time in the absence of international tourists. "80% of the business is missing," said Lalumière. "We send people out, but people from outside don't come to us. So, for Canada, it's a loss," said the CEO of Tourisme Montréal, who called on Ottawa to "harmonize" the opening of its borders with the other G7 countries.

"Europeans have taken the lead, so let's adapt," said Leblanc.

Many workers are likely to suffer from the federal government's inaction, said Christophe Hennebelle, Air Transat's vice-president of human resources and public affairs. Jobs that feed thousands of Canadian families cannot wait any longer," he said. It's urgent. Summer is here, the travel season is here. And we risk missing it again this year."

On the sidelines of a press conference in Gaspé last week, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he understood the "optimism and impatience" of the Canadian tourism sector. However, in recent weeks, the Delta variant has continued to gain momentum, both in Canada and other countries, and has even become the dominant variant among new cases detected in the United States, he emphasized.

"It would be a disaster to have to go backwards because we were a few weeks too early, before we

reached the necessary level of vaccination and the necessary level of protection," Trudeau said. "Even though we're nearing the end, we're not done with this pandemic," said the Prime Minister.

It is unlikely that the Canada-U.S. border will reopen on July 21. The Trudeau government has announced in recent days that the border could be reopened once 75% of the population eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine has received its two doses. To date, 50% of Canadians aged 12 and older have been fully vaccinated.

"As the vaccination campaign continues, we will monitor cases, hospitalization and vaccination rates here in Canada and around the world to plan for the next phase. Our decisions will continue to be based on public health advice and scientific data," the office of federal Transport Minister Omar Alghabra wrote to Le Devoir.

Planning the Recovery

At Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport, traffic has picked up slightly since vaccinated Canadians can travel more easily. However, the return of foreign tourists in the city must be planned in advance, said Philippe Rainville, CEO of Montreal Airports.

The latter will have to hire employees to welcome these visitors, which could take "30 to 60 days". "A precise plan is required now to be able to have the necessary time to welcome this qualified workforce that we need," he said.

Rainville also hopes to convince Ottawa to provide "relief" for fully vaccinated foreign travelers, such as by allowing them to be exempt from testing upon arrival in Canada. **Otherwise, international visitors will face "many hours of waiting" due to health constraints upon arrival in the country.** "We're headed for a serious bottleneck," he said.

Mr Rainville is therefore asking Ottawa to make its intentions known quickly. "We can't wait any longer. The month of August is vital to our industry and tourism is essential to Montreal," he concluded.

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