

# ROAD TO RECOVERY STILL LONG FOR TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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Canada's travel and tourism industry was at its height in 2019, enjoying unprecedented growth.

"Many consumers moved from being really focused on goods to [being focused on] experiences," said Wendy Paradis, president of the Association of Canadian Travel Agencies. "We were at our strongest right before the pandemic."

Then COVID-19 hit, and for the past 16 months, Paradis says revenue has been down by more than 90 per cent across the sector.

Canadians are beginning to make tentative vacation plans as vaccination rates rise and travel restrictions loosen, but Paradis doesn't expect the industry to enjoy the benefits of those plans for months.

"Canadians are booking for Christmas holidays and winter vacations right now," Paradis said. "But we can't recover until they actually travel, so it's

months away."

Based on consumer polling and search trends on travel booking platforms like Expedia, Canadians are eager to return to international travel as soon as they're fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and travel restrictions allow it.

According to data from Travelweek's June 2021 consumer survey of 2,599 Canadian respondents, 15.7 per cent said they were already researching travel destinations. More than 34.7 per cent said they would travel within Canada once restrictions lifted, 19.7 per cent said they would travel to the United States and 18.1 hoped to head to the Caribbean. Overall, 59.7 per cent of respondents said they hope to travel outside of Canada this year.

Most — 46.9 per cent — are interested in a beach vacation, while 15.4 per cent want to travel for history and culture and 13.1 per cent hope to take a cruise. These numbers align with Expedia's search data, which reveals most

prospective vacationers are dreaming of sun and sand.

"Canadians are craving sun, beach, pools and warm weather and we're seeing this with Mexico and U.S. sun destinations topping the charts with interest for the back end of the year," said Expedia spokesperson Mary Zajac.

Additionally, between June 7 and 13 — the week the federal government announced it planned to start easing travel restrictions — Expedia saw an almost 15 per cent increase in international and domestic searches for hotels.

"I think this really comes back to there being so much pent-up travel demand over the last year and a half," Zajac said, adding "Canadians are definitely eager and excited for the future and to get away once possible again."

Travelweek's data also supports Zajac's observation, with 63.5 per cent of respondents having saved money throughout the pandemic for potential future travel, and 39 per cent saying they hope to travel between one and



Richard Lautens photo  
Survey and online search data show Canadians are eager to pack their suitcases and take to the skies - or roads - again.

three months after restrictions lift.

Recovery is almost within reach, but industry organizations worry the boom won't benefit businesses that don't survive long enough to enjoy it. Many Canadian hotels, restaurants and attractions that rely on international summer tourism have lost another season of business, and with federal financial supports such as the Canada Emergency

Wage Subsidy (CEWS) and Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS) set to wind down in September, some say they won't make it through the year.

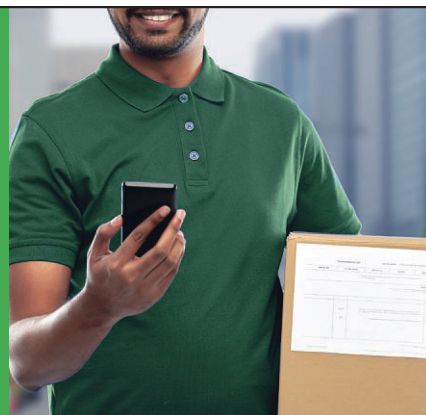
A recent survey of Canadian travel and tourism businesses by the Coalition of Hardest Hit Businesses found 60 per cent expect to fail before the end of 2021.

The coalition is calling on the federal government to establish a tailored wage and fixed-cost support program for businesses experiencing pandemic revenue losses of more than 40 per cent.

"If businesses in the hardest-hit sectors are allowed to fall victim to the...CEWS and CERS withdrawal, staggered travel and tourism reopening and Canadians' unavoidable urge to exit the country in the cold months, we will see the loss of our vibrant tourism and travel industry," reads a letter from the coalition to Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland.

"Much of the investment the government made into keeping these businesses afloat will be lost if they become insolvent just a few months before they are allowed to recover."

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