

National Travel Survey, January and February 2020

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Highlights

In early 2020, the impending pandemic had yet to make a serious impact on the travel decisions of Canadians who made 44.6 million trips within Canada and abroad during January and February, up 8.6% from the same months in 2019.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, collection of the National Travel Survey was suspended for the month of March 2020. As a result, preliminary data for the first quarter of 2020 represent only January and February.

Nevertheless, these data serve as an important benchmark to begin measuring impacts on travel behaviour during 2020. More recent estimates of travel flows are available from the [Travel between Canada and other countries](#) program and from the [Leading indicator of international arrivals to Canada by air](#) and the [Leading indicator of cross-border traveller volume](#).

More Canadians travel overseas early this year

Canadian residents took 2.2 million trips to overseas countries (countries other than the United States) in January and February 2020, up 3.6% from the same period a year earlier.

Similarly, estimated spending on overseas trips over the first two months in 2020 rose 20.0% to \$4.1 billion. The average amount spent by Canadian residents overseas was \$1,838 per trip, up from \$1,586 the previous year.

Accommodation (\$2.0 billion or 49.7%) and food and beverages in restaurants and bars (\$756 million or 18.7%) accounted for the largest shares of total overseas travel expenditures (excluding the cost of commercial transportation to leave and return to Canada).

Other significant expenditures were the costs of commercial transportation within overseas countries visited (\$369 million or 9.1%), recreation (\$190 million or 4.7%) and entertainment (\$163 million or 4.0%).

Warmer destinations were the most popular during these two winter months. Mexico (572,000 visits) was the country most visited by Canadians during January and February 2020, followed by Cuba (322,000 visits) and the Dominican Republic (151,000 visits).

Most Canadians visit the United States for leisure and recreation

Canadian residents made 3.7 million trips across the border in January and February, up 6.9% from the same period in 2019.

While in the United States, Canadians spent an estimated \$3.8 billion during their travels, up 19.9% from the \$3.2 billion spent during January and February in 2019. The average spending per trip in January and February 2020 was \$1,036, up from \$924 during the same months of 2019.

Accommodation was the largest expense (\$1.6 billion) in January and February 2020, representing 41.8% of overall travel spending of Canadians. This was followed by food and beverages in restaurants and bars (\$699 million or 18.2%) and the cost of commercial transportation within the United States (\$243 million or 6.3%).

During the first two months of 2020, most Canadian residents who travelled to the United States did so for holiday, leisure or recreation (1.7 million trips or 46.1%), followed by trips to visit with friends or relatives (737,000 trips or 19.9%) and for non-routine shopping (529,000 trips or 14.3%).



More domestic travel in early 2020

Canadian residents made 38.6 million trips within Canada in the January-February 2020 period, up 9.1% from the same period in 2019.

Total spending on domestic travel was up 13.3% year over year to \$5.9 billion, while average expenses per trip rose from \$148 to \$154.

Canadian travellers spent \$1.4 billion in Canada on accommodation in January and February 2020, up 16.1% from the same period in 2019. A further \$1.3 billion was spent on food and beverages in restaurants and bars (up 10.1%), while \$815 million was spent on vehicle operations (up 8.8%), including gas and repairs, during their travels.

Visiting friends or relatives was the main reason for more than 4 of every 10 (42.5%) domestic trips during these two months, up 6.6% year over year to 16.4 million trips. Meanwhile, 3 of every 10 trips (30.3%) were taken for holidays, leisure or recreation, which increased 18.1% to 11.7 million trips.

Ontario was the province hosting the largest number of Canadian travellers in January and February, with 16.9 million visits. The second most-popular destination was Quebec with 8.5 million domestic visitors, followed by Alberta (4.6 million visits) and British Columbia (3.9 million visits).

Table 1
Travel by Canadian residents in Canada and abroad by trip purpose, January and February 2020

	Trips	Travel expenditures
	thousands	millions of dollars
Trips by Canadian residents in Canada	38,639	5,941
Business	4,646	1,096
Pleasure	11,730	2,441
Visiting friends/relatives	16,435	1,538
Other ¹	5,828	866
Trips by Canadian residents abroad	5,914	7,894
To the United States	3,710	3,843
Business	518	460
Pleasure	1,709	2,694
Visiting friends/relatives	737	487
Other ¹	746	202
To other countries	2,204	4,051
Business	172	567
Pleasure	1,507	2,613
Visiting friends/relatives	483	764
Other ¹	42	108

1. The "Other" category includes travel to shop, to attend a personal conference, convention or trade show, or for other personal reasons.

Source(s):

National Travel Survey (5232).

Table 24-10-0045-01.

Note to readers

The National Travel Survey (NTS) collects information about the domestic and international travel of Canadian residents. The NTS was developed to replace the Travel Survey of Residents of Canada and the Canadian resident component of the International Travel Survey, but is not comparable with either.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, collection of the NTS was suspended from March to June 2020. As a result, preliminary data for the first quarter represent only January and February. The above analysis compares January and February of 2020 with the same two months of 2019. This two-month period in 2020 should not be compared with first quarter results of previous years. Estimates for the month of March 2020 will be incorporated at a later date.

Target population is the civilian, non-institutionalized population 18 years of age and older in Canada's provinces, excluding persons living on Indian reserves and in the territories. Routine trips taken by commuters and diplomatic or military personnel are out-of-scope.

Domestic trips are made by travellers residing in Canada who travelled inside Canada for a period of less than 12 months before returning to their place of residence.

Same-day trips or visits take place within the same calendar day—that is, the traveller left and returned home on the same day— and must be a distance of 40 km or more away (one way).

Trips abroad are made by travellers residing in Canada who travelled outside of Canada for a period of less than 12 months before returning to Canada. Foreign citizens who are residing in Canada and travel abroad are included as Canadian resident travellers.

A trip abroad for persons residing in Canada starts when they cross the border to exit Canada and ends when they first re-enter Canada.

Trips and visits: A trip can consist of one or more visits. A Canadian traveller on a trip abroad may cross into several countries or US states before being recorded as having re-entered Canada. Each of these crossings represents a visit. Similarly, a Canadian resident travelling in Canada may stay in several locations during their trip. Each stay at a Canadian location (for example, a province) within a given trip represents a visit.

Available tables: table [24-10-0045-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5232](#).

Preliminary data from the National Travel Survey for January-February 2020 are now available.

Other tables, including statistical profiles of Canadian travellers, are available upon request. Tables covering January-February of 2018 and 2019 are also available upon request.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).