

Leading indicator of international arrivals to Canada by air, fourth quarter 2020

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Wednesday, January 13, 2021

Highlights

International arrivals to Canada by air, which started a steep decline in the second half of March 2020 because of restrictions on international travel, remained low throughout the fourth quarter of 2020.

From October to December, the number of visitors from abroad arriving in airports with electronic kiosks was similar to the number recorded in the third quarter. However, the number of Canadian residents returning from abroad via these same airports steadily increased toward the end of the year.

Although international travel to Canada by air grew steadily since the low reached in April, the number of non-residents and returning Canadians remained well below the pre-pandemic level, plummeting from an annual total of 20.8 million in 2019 to 5.6 million in 2020.

December marks the ninth month of restrictions

Restrictions on non-essential travel into Canada remained throughout the fourth quarter of 2020 as did the mandatory 14-day quarantine period for Canadians returning from abroad.

International flights to Canada have been redirected to four airports since March: Toronto/Pearson, Vancouver International, Montreal/Trudeau and Calgary International.

Major Canadian airlines, after initially suspending many transborder and international flights as well as reducing domestic services, have since resumed operations but at lower capacity.

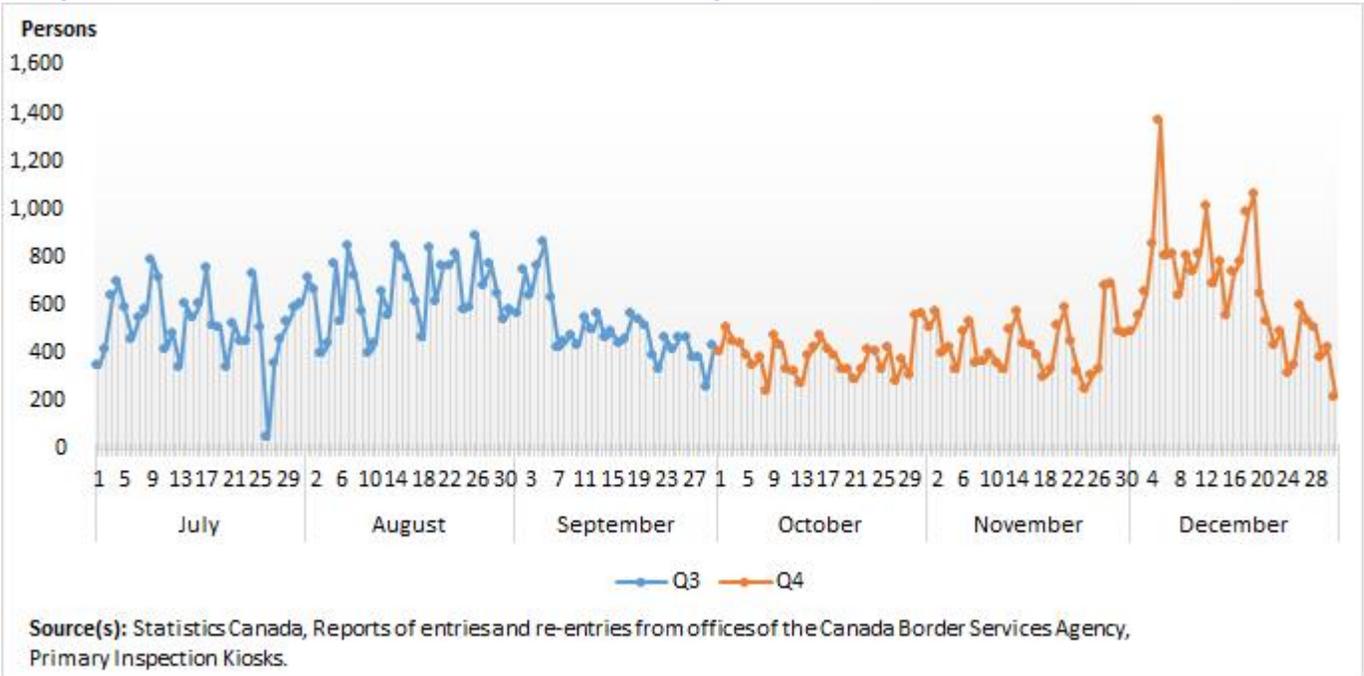
Arrivals from overseas remain low

Air arrivals from overseas countries (other than the United States) at Canadian airports equipped with Primary Inspection Kiosks (PIK) numbered 45,600 in the fourth quarter.

In December, the average daily arrivals reached 662, up from the 436 persons recorded in November.



Infographic 1 – Air travellers from overseas arriving in Canada, third and fourth quarters, 2020



Arrivals from France, a country experiencing a second wave of COVID-19, numbered 5,400 in the fourth quarter.

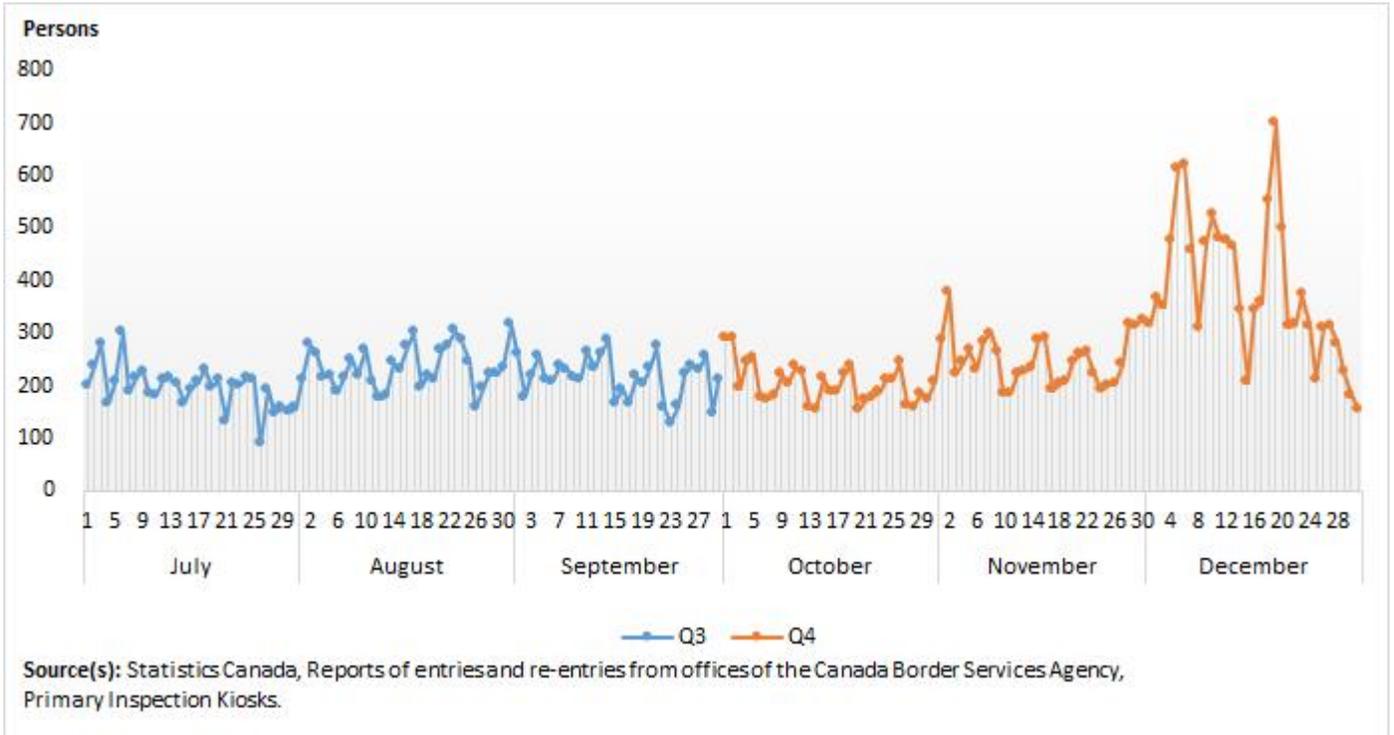
In the fourth quarter, there were 4,800 arrivals from the United Kingdom—the second leading source market for travel from Europe following France. However, air arrivals from the United Kingdom abruptly stopped as of December 23 when the federal government banned all flights from this country because of a new variant of the novel coronavirus.

US air arrivals climb in December

While US air arrivals in Canada have partially recovered since the low reached in April, they remained well below their pre-pandemic volume through the fourth quarter of 2020, despite an upsurge in December.

Air arrivals by US residents to Canada in the fourth quarter reached 25,800, with the average daily volume of air arrivals rising from 204 in October to 250 in November, and then rising to 385 in December.

Infographic 2 – Air travellers from the United States arriving in Canada, third and fourth quarters 2020

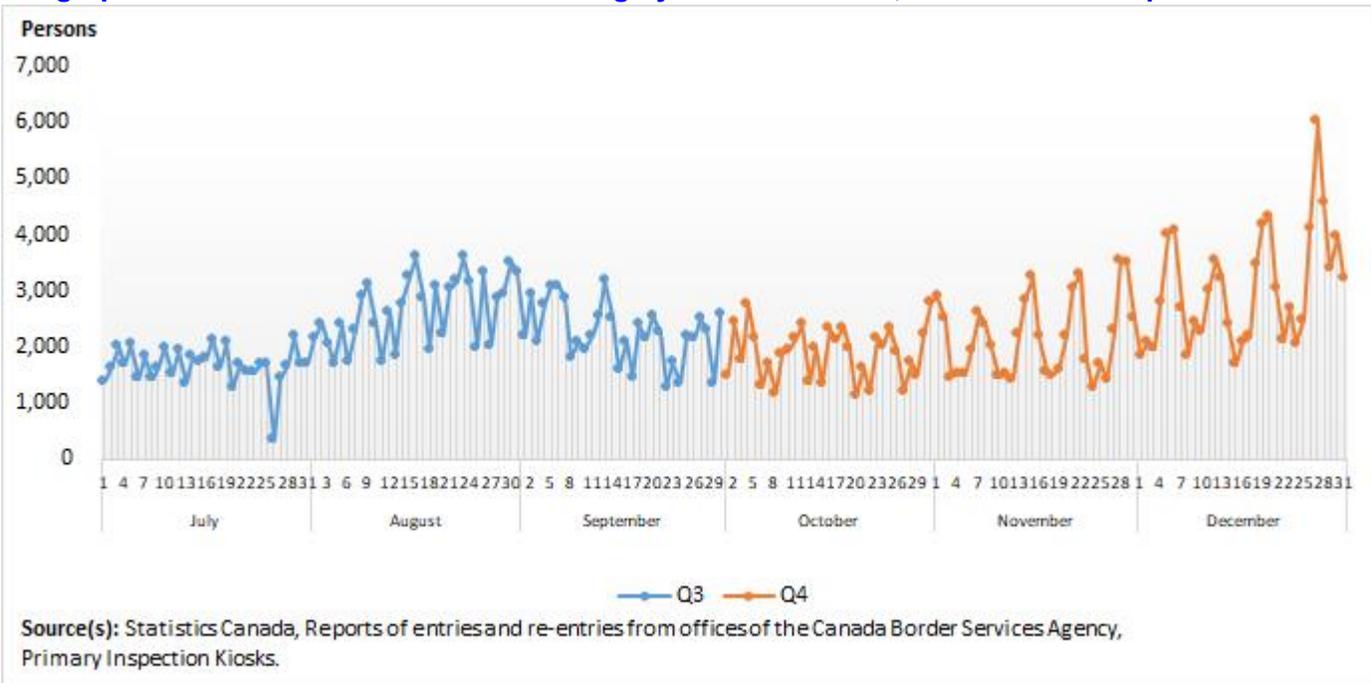


Number of Canadian residents returning from abroad peaks in December

While the number of Canadian residents returning from trips abroad by air has continued to increase since the second quarter, it remained a small fraction of the usual volume. During the fourth quarter, 217,100 Canadian residents returned by air, with a discernible uptick toward the end of December.

The average daily travel volume rose from 1,883 in October to 2,165 in November, and then to 3,025 in December, a month when 93,800 Canadians returned from abroad by air.

Infographic 3 – Canadian residents returning by air from abroad, third and fourth quarters 2020



Note to readers

Statistics Canada's *Frontier Counts* program uses data from the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). One source on travellers entering the country by air is the Primary Inspection Kiosk (PIK) system, which, at most major airports, has replaced the paper E311 Declaration Cards that were completed by travellers and submitted to CBSA officers upon arrival in Canada.

The indicator also excludes air travellers who enter Canada using a NEXUS card, as they are not required to complete PIK or E311, and travellers arriving by private aircraft.

Note that the data used in this analysis exclude Toronto Terminal 1 where PIK has not been fully deployed.

Deployment of the PIK system has been phased in at Canadian airports starting March 2017.

Data users are cautioned that the phased PIK deployment has affected the historical comparability of some data series. Therefore, caution is advised when comparing 2020 data with data from earlier periods for these airports.

Please note that this is the final quarterly release of the Leading indicator of international arrivals by air. Starting with February 2021, the quarterly Leading indicator of international arrivals to Canada by air and the monthly Leading indicator of cross-border traveller volume will be integrated in a single monthly release titled Leading indicator of international arrivals to Canada.

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).