

# National Travel Survey, second quarter 2021

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## Highlights

Canadians took over 38.7 million trips within Canada or abroad in the second quarter. With ongoing health restrictions and with borders closed to non-essential travel, the volume was quantitatively and qualitatively different compared with the same quarter in 2019, pre-pandemic.

The number of trips made by Canadians from April to June 2021 was half (50.4%) the number made during the same period in 2019. In 2021 however, virtually all (99.1%) trips were domestic, while before the pandemic, roughly 15% were to the United States or overseas destinations.

With fewer overall trips by Canadians in the second quarter, tourism spending at home and abroad was just over one-quarter (27.1%) of the total amount spent during the same quarter in 2019.

More recent data on international travel by Canadian residents are available from the monthly "[Travel between Canada and other countries](#)."

## Advisories continue and restrictions remain

In 2020, travel and tourism was among the first and hardest-hit sectors of the economy as a result of restrictions to contain the spread of COVID-19. The first quarter was stunted by the mid-March pandemic declaration and travel during the second quarter came to a near standstill.

With this declaration, collection of the National Travel Survey was suspended during March until June (see Note to readers). While some public health restrictions were eased in the third quarter, travel restrictions remained in effect and were tightened in many provinces, resulting in a lacklustre fourth quarter.

In February 2021, new restrictions were introduced for international air travellers arriving in Canada, namely testing upon arrival with a hotel stopover. With the advisory against non-essential travel outside Canada remaining in effect throughout the second quarter, these measures halted nearly all air arrivals into Canada, and international trips made by Canadians were hindered.

## Domestic travel curtailed

Canadians made 38.4 million domestic trips in the second quarter, down 42.7% compared with the same quarter in 2019. The number of same-day trips decreased 39.9% to 27.0 million from the same three months (April to June) of 2019, while overnight trips declined 48.4% to 11.4 million.

In the second quarter, spending on these trips fell to a total of \$5.5 billion from \$13.7 billion in the second quarter of 2019. Average spending declined to \$142 per trip in 2021 from \$204 in 2019, with Canadians spending \$78 per same-day trip and \$295 per overnight trip.

The largest spending component—vehicle operations—was \$1.4 billion during the second quarter, down 49.3% compared with the second quarter of 2019. With fewer overnight trips, spending on accommodation, the second largest expense category, declined 50.1% to \$1.2 billion. Spending on entertainment (-91.6%) and on commercial transportation (-88.3%) recorded the largest percentage declines.

With public health restrictions in effect, the \$749.6 million spent in restaurants and bars was down 68.9% from the second quarter of 2019.

The most popular trip activities were very different in the second quarter of 2021. The top three trip activities in the second quarter of 2019—visiting friends or family, going to a restaurant, and shopping—were down 57.0%, 70.7% and 59.2%, respectively, in 2021. These trip activities accounted for 37.2% of all reported domestic trip activity in the second quarter of 2021, down from 51.2% in 2019.



Outdoor activities, however, fared better during the second quarter of 2021. For instance, going to a beach (+35.7%), hiking (+19.8%) and camping (+31.8%) all recorded increases from the second quarter of 2019. The share of these activities, which accounted for 5.9% of Canadians' domestic trip activity in 2019, grew to 14.0% in 2021.

**Table 1**  
**Domestic activities, top ten by decrease, second quarter 2021 compared with second quarter 2019**

	Activities, second quarter 2021	Change, second quarter 2019 to second quarter 2021	Change, second quarter 2019 to second quarter 2021
	thousands	%	thousands
Visit friends or family	14,535	-57.0	-19,291
Dine out/go to restaurant, bar or club	4,803	-70.7	-11,613
Shopping	5,797	-59.2	-8,400
Sightseeing	5,268	-41.6	-3,759
Business meeting, conference or seminar	570	-82.3	-2,660
Other activity	4,676	-32.5	-2,256
Sports event as a spectator	95	-95.4	-1,957
Performance such as a play or concert	43	-97.4	-1,578
Museum or art gallery	314	-82.0	-1,429
Go to the movies	54	-95.9	-1,256

**Note(s):** Multiple counts: respondents can indicate multiple activities done on any given trip.

**Source(s):** National Travel Survey (5232).

**Table 2**  
**Domestic activities, top ten by increase, second quarter 2021 compared with second quarter 2019**

	Activities, second quarter 2021	Change, second quarter 2019 to second quarter 2021	Change, second quarter 2019 to second quarter 2021
	thousands	%	thousands
Beach	3,089	35.7	814
Hiking or backpacking	4,126	19.8	682
Camping	2,217	31.8	535
Canoeing or kayaking	1,693	38.2	468
National, provincial, or nature park	4,188	10.6	403
Cycling	1,420	31.3	339
Go wildlife viewing or bird watching	2,275	6.5	138
Cross-country skiing or snowshoeing	70	159.4	43
Snowmobiling	51	46.1	16
Golfing	976	0.7	7

**Note(s):** Multiple counts: respondents can indicate multiple activities done on any given trip.

**Source(s):** National Travel Survey (5232).

## Travel to the United States dwindles

With the land border restricted to essential trips, Canadian residents made 243,300 trips to the United States in the second quarter of 2021, down from 7.3 million during the same quarter in 2019. As such, the \$224.5 million spent by Canadian residents while in the United States was down from \$5.5 billion in the same quarter of 2019.

A similar drop was felt across most trip purposes. Business related travel, such as attending conferences or regular sales, fell sharply by 98.5% from 2019 to 16,200 trips in the second quarter. As expected, holidays, leisure, or recreation trips declined sharply by 94.9% from the second quarter of 2019 to 162,500 trips during the second quarter, while visiting friends or family was down 97.3% to 41,100 trips from 2019.

With fewer business and holiday trips, the total spent by Canadians in the United States on accommodation and in restaurants and bars—typically the two largest expenses—both fell sharply during the second quarter. Compared with the same quarter of 2019, spending on accommodation declined by 96.1% to \$89.5 million, while spending in restaurants and bars was down by 97.9% to \$20.9 million.

However, despite the overall decrease, Canadians spent an average of \$923 per trip during the second quarter, up from \$753 in the same quarter of 2019.

### Fewer Canadians travel overseas

During the second quarter of 2021, 92,200 Canadian residents returned from trips to countries other than the United States, down 96.4% from April to June 2019.

Despite an advisory against international travel in the second quarter of 2021, 27,700 Canadians (30.0% of the total who made trips to countries other than the United States) made overseas trips for holiday, leisure or recreation, down 98.4% compared with the second quarter of 2019. Meanwhile, Canadians made 31,300 trips to visit friends or relatives in the second quarter, down 94.8% compared with 2019.

With fewer trips, the \$855.1 million spent overseas by travellers in the second quarter of 2021 was less than 20% of that spent in the same quarter of 2019 (\$5.0 billion). Again, the drop was felt across most categories: spending on restaurants and bars fell by 97.0% to \$26.7 million, on accommodation by 91.6% to \$200.4 million and on entertainment during travel by 99.0% to \$2.8 million.

**Table 3**  
**Travel by Canadian residents in Canada and abroad by trip purpose, second quarter 2021**

	Trips	Travel expenditures
	thousands	millions of dollars
<b>Trips by Canadian residents in Canada</b>	<b>38,414</b>	<b>5,469</b>
Business	3,269	639
Pleasure	16,338	2,714
Visiting friends or relatives	12,058	1,084
Other	6,749	1,033
<b>Trips by Canadian residents abroad</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>1,080</b>
<b>To the United States</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>225</b>
Business	16	22
Pleasure	162	92
Visiting friends or relatives	41	21
Other	23	89
<b>To other countries</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>855</b>
Business	16	558
Pleasure	28	114
Visiting friends or relatives	31	25
Other	17	158

Source(s): National Travel Survey (5232).

### Note to readers

The National Travel Survey (NTS) collects information about the domestic and international travel of Canadian residents.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, collection of the NTS was suspended from March until June 2020. As a result, preliminary estimates for the second quarter of 2020 will be available at a later date.

With fewer Canadian residents travelling abroad during the pandemic, estimates for international travel have higher levels of variability. As such, users are advised to note the quality indicators associated with these estimates.

Please also note that the measure of total domestic visit-expenditures now includes commercial air expenditures incurred at the point of origin of the trip.

**Target population** is the civilian, non-institutionalized population aged 18 years 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 in 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 the country for a period of less than 12 months before returning to Canada. Foreign citizens who reside in Canada and travel abroad are included as Canadian resident travellers.

**A trip abroad** for people 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](#).

Data from the second quarter of 2021 from the National Travel Survey are now available. Other tables, including statistical profiles of Canadian travellers, are 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; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).