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GTA

# Canadian travel representatives call for reopening of Canada to international and interprovincial travel

By **Kevin McGran** Staff Reporter

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With summer around the corner, Canada's travel and tourism industry is demanding that the country be reopened to international and cross-provincial travel.

"Just like we are reopening the front doors of our homes and businesses, we need to reopen the doors of our provinces, territories — and our country," reads an open letter to the Prime Minister and provincial premiers from the Canadian Travel and Tourism Roundtable. "It's time our governments allow Canadians to travel freely."

More than 100 leaders of the industry, including representatives of Air Canada, WestJet, Porter Airlines, travel agencies, tourism boards and airports across the country, attached their names to the letter. Many began tweeting it on Thursday with the hashtag #TimeToTravel and posted links to the letter from company websites.

Much of the travel industry shut down in mid-March as the country went into lockdown in an attempt to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Air travel, for example, was down by some counts as much as 95 per cent. Bus and rail travel, likewise, declined. Hotels shut and areas that rely on tourists remain empty thanks to stay-at-home orders.

Some provinces have begun to reopen. Parts of Ontario will allow larger gatherings, for example, starting this weekend.

Now the travel industry is saying many of the precautions put in place are unnecessary.

"Like you, we believe personal safety is critical," says the letter. "However many of the travel restrictions currently in place are simply too broad or unnecessary. Limitations on interprovincial travel that restrict Canadians from freely exploring our country should be removed. Canadians should be allowed to travel across Canada."

They said Canada should follow the lead of countries such as Germany, France, Italy and Australia which have started to reopen borders to safe countries.

"We also need a more targeted approach to international travel. The mandatory 14-day quarantine and complete closure of our country to all visitors from abroad is no longer necessary and is out of step with other countries across the globe."

More than 97,000 Canadians have contracted COVID-19, and nearly 8,000 have died. The hardest struck provinces, Ontario and Quebec, have seen a promising decline in new cases. Other provinces seem to have the virus under control, although health experts warn of a coming second wave as people venture back outside and workplaces open up.

The roundtable highlighted the many hygiene and safety measures now in place in airports, on airplanes and in hotels.

The group said the travel and tourism industry employs 1.8 million people, and contributes \$102 billion to the economy in an average year. Many are now off work.

“It relies on the summer season to survive,” says the letter. “As Canadians we wait all year to travel during the summer. We need the summer.”

The letter says the country has gotten through the “worst” of the pandemic. “As we reopen, we are learning to live with the virus, not hide from it or from each other.”



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