

Boycotts & Borders

What is happening?

There is no ignoring the rising tension between Canada and the United States and this tension is directly impacting travel. It has been two months since the inauguration of President Donald J.

Trump on January 20th, 2025 and according to the Official Airline Guide's (OAG) Aviation Market Analysis the decrease of travel between Canada and the States "is striking — bookings are down by over 70% in every month through to the end of September." Whether or not you believe in travel boycotts, the words "51st State" seem to illicit a visceral reaction in everyone north and south of the border. This notion is being propagated not only by the President himself but by others in the White House including spokeswoman Anna Kelly who The Wall Street Journal reported stating that "Canadians will no longer have to worry about the inconveniences of international travel when they become American citizens as residents of our cherished 51st state." Comments such as this one are adding fuel to the fire.

Who is affected?

Many questions arise amidst the travel boycott, including, what happens to small businesses south of the border that become collateral damage? Sterling Morse, business owner of the Point Of View Inn in Maine, reported to Global News "that more than 90% of his family-run hotel's bookings for the summer season began getting paused or cancelled entirely." Sadly, this is due in part to the fact that the Inn relies on visitors from Quebec. Other businesses in the state of Maine that rely on tourism have also witnessed firsthand the difference in bookings, including the Paradise Park Resort. The operator of the Resort, Mike Halle, says "We're up to over 100 cancellations, which is up significantly, 250 per cent or so from what would be normal this time of year." There have been campaigns to counteract this decline, which encourage the support of small businesses, but there is concern over who will win out.

Florida is another state which benefits from Canadian tourism. One source I spoke with said that they wanted to be part of a small protest. They don't feel comfortable with the unrest and disrespect that Canada has felt since Donald Trump has taken Presidency. They feel it is part of a larger shift and many of their friends who vacation in Florida have returned early this year from their extended holidays as snowbirds. These sentiments align with the findings of MDPI journal entitled "Beyond Efficacy: How Self-Esteem and Guilt Drive Participation in Tourism Boycotts" by Minhyung Park and Hochan Jang. The literature on boycotts suggests there are a number of reasons why consumers are motivated to engage in them including "psychological motivations such as the desire to do the right thing or to punish a target." Trump being the target in this particular case.

What are people saying?

Further insight came from speaking with a travel agent for the North American travel company Direct Travel. This source explained that consumers who believe they are boycotting the United States by travelling to Europe are still indirectly supporting America because the cruises they choose are all American owned. She highlighted how difficult it is to find locally owned companies because they are not booked directly from Canada. She

expressed the differences in consumers, including those who are somewhere in the middle when it comes to the boycott. She relates to this personally because she loves travel too much to change her plans and feels it is almost impossible to avoid America altogether when it comes to travel.

Another socially driven part of the boycott is the human craving for community and connection. Marsha Jones from Georgetown, Ontario feels that the boycott is bringing Canadians closer together by buying more Canadian items, choosing Home Hardware over Home Depot and “taking care of ourselves first.” However, this begs the question: are those who are preaching unity in the name of patriotism creating further division and isolation?

The argument from Nick Taylor-Vaisey entitled “Why anti-Trump travel boycotts won’t work” in MacLean's magazine was originally stated in 2017 but is more topical and relevant than ever before. He states that “any collective cold shoulder would invite a tragic conclusion: we’d no longer hear those countless voices that tell the modern American story in all its beauty and ugliness.” He believes we need to have open dialogue and create community with “Americans who live behind enemy lines in their own country.” When we value borders over people how do we learn from one another?

Overall impact

The Conversation brings out the point that during this time of political upheaval “people are using the one tool that is available to them: their power as consumers.” Objectively, however, “history suggests travel boycotts don’t tend to be very effective at changing policies.” In the words of Antonio Gramsci “history teaches, but has no pupils.” After analyzing the emotional motivators, it begs the question of whether or not the decisions behind travel boycotts ultimately breed allegiance or ignorance.