



By: TA | AP Insight

Make tourism, not war – US tourism groups want to win Canadian visitors back



Appeals from American tourism organizations seemed to be everywhere Josh Loewen looked over the last year.

Billboards and banners proclaimed a state or city's love for Canada. Online and social media ads offered special deals for travelers from north of the border.

As a Vancouver resident and marketing executive himself, Loewen said he understands the conciliatory overtures.

The number of Canadians traveling to the United States plunged after President Donald Trump returned to office with remarks about making Canada the 51st state.

An acrimonious **trade war** between the two countries now is threatening to reinforce the informal boycott just as it appeared to be easing slightly.

"It's such a big ask right now," Loewen, 45, said of the U.S. tourism industry's attempts to woo Canadians like him back before a new president occupies the White House. "It's just a wasted effort."

Relations between the U.S. and Canadian governments have deteriorated sharply since their trade negotiations collapsed last month. Trump imposed import taxes of up to 50% on a range of Canadian products.

Canada's government responded in kind. Trump ordered the U.S. government to change the name of border-spanning **Lake Ontario** to "Lake America."

Canadian Prime Minister **Mark Carney** dismissed insults from members of Trump's Cabinet as childish and undignified.

The **bilateral rift** has not stopped state and local tourism officials and popular destinations like Graceland from trying to persuade Canadian visitors to return.

New York state launched a "NY Loves Canada" promotion this summer, offering discounts at hotels, restaurants and attractions.

Some downtown Las Vegas hotels are treating the Canadian dollar as equivalent to the U.S. dollar to give Canadian visitors more value for their money.

Las Vegas tourism officials went to Canada last month to meet with travel advisers, tour operators and airline representatives.

"We're here to make sure you know that we care about Canada," Steve Hill, president of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, said while in Vancouver.

The outreach is happening at the national level, too. Brand USA, the U.S. tourism industry's marketing organization, is bringing its Travel Week trade-event series to Canada for the first time in October, expanding and rebranding an earlier program known as Canada Connect.

Travel to the U.S. from Canada remains well below 2024 levels

Canada traditionally sent more overnight **international visitors** to the United States than any other country.

Amid last year's consumer-led backlash, both same-day trips and longer stays nosedived.

Canadian residents made 25% fewer return border crossings and spent about \$2.4 billion (CA\$3.3 billion) less on travel to the U.S. in 2025 than they had the year before, according to Canada's national statistical agency, Statistics Canada.

The retreat coincided with other headwinds, including a weaker Canadian dollar that made traveling to the U.S. more expensive and rising prices for airfares and hotels.

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declining in September 2023, Statistics Canada data shows.

But the **abrupt pullback** in stateside travel that accompanied Trump's second presidency and extended into this year signaled "a persistent shift away from the United States by Canadian residents in their travel preferences," agency analysts said in a July report.

Tentative signs of improvement emerged in May, June and July, when border crossings picked up slightly, the agency reported.

The latter two months coincided with the 2026 World Cup, which the U.S., Canada and Mexico cohosted. Canada's national soccer team competed during the tournament's early weeks, giving some Canadians a reason to head south.

Carney attended the final match in New Jersey alongside Trump.

Trips by car accounted for most of the uptick in **cross-border traffic**, while air travel to the U.S. fell from year-earlier levels in every month through June, Statistics Canada said.

The U.S. National Travel and Tourism Office estimates that during the first six months of 2026, Canadians made even fewer overnight visits, which typically generate more tourism spending, than they did during the same period last year.

Snowbirds may provide a barometer of Canadian sentiment

A day after the **World Cup ended**, Trump announced that tariffs on \$20 billion worth of Canadian goods would take effect in 30 days.

The White House said the tariffs were intended to address U.S. complaints over Canadian barriers to American-made automobiles, alcohol and dairy.

"You went from this really high, exciting

moment for the U.S. in terms of international attention, to the next week, it's negative again," said Deborah Friedland, a hospitality consultant at financial services firm Eisner Advisory Group. "It's one step forward and two steps back."

With the summer now winding down, some of the U.S. destinations most dependent on Canadian visitors are heading into their most important season.

Large numbers of Canadian snowbirds typically flock to warm-weather locations in Florida, Arizona and California when temperatures drop at home, making the coming months a test of whether the grassroots boycott will extend into another winter.



Florida saw a 7% decline in Canadian visitors in 2025 compared to the previous year

"I'd be surprised if we're talking a year from now and all of a sudden you see this huge uptick in Canadian travel over the winter months," Friedland said.

Not all tourism officials are worried. Jennifer Adams, tourism director for the Destin-Fort Walton Beach area in Florida's Panhandle, said she never panicked when headlines about Canadians shunning travel to the U.S. first appeared last year.

"I felt our message was strong," she said, adding that, "the thing for us is to let the Canadian family know that they are welcomed here and we are committed to giving them a great experience when they get here."

Florida saw a 7% decline in Canadian visitors in 2025 compared to the previous year, according to state marketing organization Visit Florida.

Sister organization Visit California, citing data from global research and consulting company Tourism Economics, estimated that Canadian visitation to the Golden State fell 20%.

For some Canadians, a promise of a good vacation isn't enough

Loewen, the Vancouver marketing executive, said his family loved visiting the United States. He, his wife and their two children often traveled to San Diego, Portland and Seattle. This year, they chose Mexico instead.

The reluctance, Loewen said, has little to do with whether the U.S. can offer a good vacation.

It's about whether Canadians want to spend their money there while tensions between their country and the U.S. remain so high.

The latest round of tariffs reinforced my initial decision to not travel in the U.S. at all while Trump is in office - Eileen March

Loewen said his family hasn't stepped foot in the U.S. since Trump's inauguration and doesn't plan to until there's a new president.

Eileen March, a life coach from Calgary, said she made a similar decision. Trump's threats to make Canada the 51st state and his trade policies were part of it, as was a broader sense of no longer feeling safe or welcome in the United States, March said.

"As time has worn on, I was beginning to waver," she said. The latest round of tariffs "reinforced my initial decision to not travel in the U.S. at all while he is in office." She refuses even to book flights with layovers in the U.S.

March, 41, knows that staying away for four years is a long time. She is prepared to go even longer.

"I think that'll really depend on who is elected next, their values and the relationship they attempt to foster or repair with Canada," she said.