

FRUGAL TRAVELER

See the World, in Canada

The country plans to open to vaccinated travelers from the United States in August. For those not yet ready to cross an ocean, America's northern neighbor offers a taste of many cultures.

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Beginning Aug. 9, Canada plans to reopen its border to nonessential American visitors — including tourists — as long as they are fully vaccinated. The decision comes after months of public pressure, largely from states and communities that share the 5,500-mile border and experienced more than a year of family separation, lost work and social upheaval. In recent weeks, Canada's vaccination rate has surged — Oxford University's Our World in Data site shows Canada leading the world in vaccinations — with 70 percent of residents at least partially vaccinated, approaching Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's vaccine targets for reopening.

Americans traveling to Canada must be fully vaccinated with one of the vaccines approved in Canada — including Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson — and submit proof via the government's ArriveCAN app or website. They must also provide proof of a negative Covid-19 test taken within 72 hours of arrival in Canada.

With the relaxed restrictions, tourism officials are banking on an influx of visitors, not just to see family and friends, but to travel in a vast country rich with cultural influences from around the world.

From the 17th-century French founding of Québec City to the immigrant waves from China to the Vancouver area, many parts of Canada bear the influence of other places. For those Americans who aren't yet ready to cross an ocean as the world continues to reckon with Covid-19, Canada offers the world without requiring you leave North America, all at a favorable exchange rate — one U.S. dollar is currently about 1.28 Canadian dollars.

"There are so many parts of Canada that feel like you've traveled halfway around the world and are in a foreign destination," said Laurie Keith, a travel adviser and the owner of Boutique Travel Services, based in Hamilton, Ontario, who called out the wineries of the Niagara Peninsula in Ontario as resembling European vineyards, and the Northwest Territories for suggesting Iceland.

Canada, of course, was formed on Indigenous land, and the recent discovery of the remains of hundreds of Indigenous children outside of boarding schools designed to assimilate them attests to the violence of that history. For those who want to get a taste of the country's oldest cultures, there are a number of ways to explore Indigenous tourism, and suggestions are included in some of the following destinations.

Bear in mind that Covid rules, restrictions and business reopening dates may vary by province, territory or city and that many restaurants and attractions require advance reservations.



Rue du Cul-de-Sac, also known as Umbrella Alley, was once at the heart of the New France port in Old Québec City. Emmanuel Coveney, Office du tourisme de Québec

Instead of Paris, try Québec City

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/20/travel/canada-reopening.html>

In 1608, the French explorer Samuel de Champlain founded Québec City on the rising banks of the St. Lawrence River; the city would become the center of the New France colony in North America, until the British conquest in 1759. That colonial reign left a lasting impression on local language, architecture, food and culture generally.

“I often call Québec City ‘Paris without the jet lag,’” Robert Mercure, the general manager of Québec City Tourism, said.

There’s no Eiffel Tower, of course, but there’s enough 17th-century ambience to make a convincing case for provenance, particularly in central Old Québec, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the only walled city in North America outside of Mexico. Here, you’ll find the grand Notre-Dame de Québec Cathedral-Basilica; the Québec Ursulines Convent, the continent’s oldest school for girls (museum admission, 12 Canadian dollars, or about \$9.50); and nearly three miles of walls encircling the city that visitors can walk upon.

Outdoor living is a hallmark of life in Québec (even in winter, when the city holds its popular Winter Carnival). In summer, many of Old Québec’s lanes are closed to cars, allowing pedestrian-only access to shop-lined Rue Saint-Jean and the cafes of cobblestoned Rue du Petit-Champlain.

“Québec City is probably the most European city in all of North America,” said Allison Van Rassel, a local resident and food columnist for Radio-Canada and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). “It’s really centered around that very heavy heritage of French culture, but it’s Nouvelle France, with a North American influence and modern approach,” including sourcing local products, she added.

Meals run the gamut — from a jambon beurre or ham sandwich (8.95 dollars) at the bakery cafe Paillard to multicourse tasting menus that may include foraged ingredients in a stone cellar at Tanière3 (from 150 dollars).

Sleeping in the heritage section of town usually comes at a premium, but Manoir Sur-le-Cap near the landmark luxury hotel Fairmont Le Château Frontenac has 14 reasonable rooms, some with stone walls (from 149 dollars, May through October).



Biking near the glacial Lake Minnewanka in the Banff area. Paul Zizka/Banff & Lake Louise Tourism

Instead of the Alps, try Banff National Park

In southern Alberta, the Banff region offers mountain majesty with an Alpine connection. Long after Indigenous peoples sought healing in the region’s hot springs, the Canadian Pacific Railway chose the Bow Valley to build a grand hotel, one in a string designed to encourage cross-country tourism. For more than 50 years, beginning in 1899, the company brought in Swiss mountaineers to safely guide climbers

and hikers in exploring the area — now Banff National Park, Canada's first national park.

"I walk out the same doors they did," said Jeff Douglas, the lead guide at Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise resort, where adventures like hiking and canoeing in summer, and skiing and snowshoeing in winter have supplanted Alpine summiting.

"Banff National Park offers sights you wouldn't otherwise experience in France, Italy or Switzerland, like our local grizzly bear populations," said Kim Gray, a Calgary-based writer and publisher of the Canadian travel blog Toque & Canoe.

She recommends taking a medicine walk in the park with an Indigenous guide through Mahikan Trails (65 dollars), and a scenic ride to about 7,500 feet aboard the Banff Gondola (55 dollars).

One of the original railway hotels in the town of Banff, the Fairmont Banff Springs, with peaked roofs, dormers and lavish interiors, is reminiscent of the grand hotels of Europe (the fondue at its Bavarian cottage restaurant Waldhaus Pub & Biergarten, 89 dollars, is worth the splurge). Save by renting a cabin with its own kitchen and wood-burning stove at Castle Mountain Chalets (from 210 dollars) at the foot of Castle Mountain between Banff and Lake Louise.

During the pandemic, a two-block stretch of main street in downtown Banff has been turned into a pedestrian zone with outdoor dining tables for savoring mountain views over meals (there's even valet parking for bikes). Nearby, the new Three Bears Brewery and Restaurant has a retractable roof for stargazing.



Empire Seafood, a Chinese restaurant in Richmond (in the Vancouver area), is a mainstay on "The Dumpling Trail." Above, a dim sum spread. Tourism Richmond

Instead of China, try the Vancouver area

When Judy Lam Maxwell, the owner of Historical Chinatown Tours, guides her three-hour food and walking tours of Chinatown in Vancouver (100 dollars), she introduces travelers to the private heritage buildings in the district that once served Chinese immigrants, who came in the late 1800s to build Canada's transcontinental railroad. They housed associations that provided accommodation, banking, social events and protection against discrimination.

"It's fun to go in and see the elders playing mahjong and the insides of these buildings, which are like museums," said Ms. Lam Maxwell, who continues the tour with a two-hour lesson in dumpling making, which she describes as central to Chinese culture: "It's bonding and sharing food."

A wave of immigration preceded the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule; another more recent wave has been linked to China's booming economy.

Many newcomers settled in the suburb of Richmond, which is 54 percent ethnic Chinese, according to a 2016 census, and home to Asian shopping malls, the International Buddhist Temple and, most famously, food, including more than 800 restaurants, a "dumpling trail" of more than 20 restaurants, including Empire Seafood, and a night market reopening July 23.

"In North America, Chinese food is pasteurized in so many ways," said Alex Chen, who emigrated to the area from Malaysia as a teenager and is the executive chef at Vancouver's Boulevard Kitchen & Oyster Bar, where the cooking is grounded in French techniques.

Around Vancouver, the Chinese options are regional, he added, or specialize in hot pot dishes, noodles, fried rice and more. Among his Richmond favorites are HK BBQ Master for Peking duck and Chef Tony Seafood Restaurant for innovative dim sum.

"We are so blessed and lucky to have lots of choices at the very highest standards," he said.

Back around Vancouver's original Chinatown, stay at Skwachàys Lodge, a boutique hotel devoted to Indigenous art and culture (from 170 dollars), just a few blocks from the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden.



The Tom Patterson Theatre, a venue for the Stratford Festival.
Ann Baggeley/Stratford Festival

Instead of Stratford, England, try Stratford, Ontario

For theater lovers, going to Stratford-upon-Avon in England, home of William Shakespeare and the Royal Shakespeare Company, is going to the source for classic theater.

For Shakespeare lovers on this side of the Atlantic, Stratford, Ontario, is a similar mecca. Since 1953, the Stratford Festival has been performing a robust repertoire of Shakespearean classics — with actors from Alec Guinness and Maggie Smith to Colm Feore and Chilina Kennedy — as well as large-scale musicals and intimate cabarets.

After a pandemic pause in 2020, the 2021 festival is back through Oct. 5, albeit smaller — six plays and five cabarets — and with most performances outside and not in repertory to protect the actors from mingling. (A maximum of eight performers per show makes for some interesting double casting.)

Stratford's evolution as an English doppelgänger was serendipitous, according to John Kastner, the general manager of the history-focused Stratford Perth Museum. When the town's economic reliance on railway maintenance cratered around 1950, Tom Patterson, a local community booster inspired by the city's English namesake, proposed the town found a performing arts festival, which soon flourished. Before the pandemic, the Stratford Festival typically drew 500,000 attendees during its usual April-to-October run.

Visitors will note the Shakespearean references around town — in the Avon River, a street named Falstaff and schools named for Hamlet and Romeo. Inns and B&Bs fill many Victorian-era buildings; the literary-themed B&B Allison's Brunswick House has rooms from 120 dollars.

“The town itself is filled with vibrant young business owners charting a new path, far, far from the fustiness of the ‘Ye Olde English’ cliché,” said Antoni Cimolino, the artistic director of the Stratford Festival. On the culinary front, these include the worker-owned restaurant The Red Rabbit, the farm-to-table Restaurant at The Bruce, and local breweries, including Black Swan.

Stratford is also known for the rich farmland that surrounds it. “The river, the trees, the local nature of the food network that manifests itself in many restaurants and shops, is something I experienced in Stratford-upon-Avon,” said Loreena McKennitt, the Celtic musician who is based in Stratford, but has lived in the English Stratford.



Dancing to traditional Scottish music at Cape Breton's Highland Village in Nova Scotia. Tourism Nova Scotia

Instead of Scotland, try Nova Scotia

With the forced evictions of many from the highlands and islands of Scotland beginning in the mid-18th century, many Gaelic speakers found their way to Nova Scotia, where, in places like Cape Breton Island, their descendants have kept their culture, traditions and language alive.

“The people of Cape Breton Island were very protectionist of who they were and their music, dance and language,” said Rodney MacDonald, the president of the Gaelic College in St. Ann's on Cape Breton and the former premier of Nova Scotia. “Ironically, because of the isolation of the island, there was a certain integrity maintained. Step dancing, for example, was brought back to Scotland from Cape Breton Island.”

Though suspended this year, the college normally offers immersive weeklong summer sessions that introduce visitors to the Gaelic language, fiddling, weaving, dancing and more (roughly 900 dollars, including accommodation and meals). But travelers can still visit the museum (admission 10 dollars) and drop in for a “cèilidh” (pronounced KAY-lee), or concert, over lunch (15 dollars) or on Wednesday nights (10 dollars).

Elsewhere on Cape Breton, in Iona, the 40-acre Highland Village (free through August) is a living history museum devoted to the Gaelic experience in the province, with a blacksmith shop and a farm that includes sheep.

So much in the culture revolves around music, as explored at the Celtic Music Interpretive Center in coastal Judique, which offers exhibitions and lunchtime cèilidhs in its restaurant.

In nearby Mabou, the Red Shoe Pub, owned by the musical Rankin Family, serves food and programs music daily.

“Gaelic probably survived as long as it did because of song,” said Heather Rankin, a vocalist and co-owner of the pub, adding that cèilidhs and dances can be found around Cape Breton any night of the week in summer. “The cover is usually 10 or six dollars. It’s affordable world-class music.”

Nearby, travelers can check into a room at the Glenora Inn & Distillery (from 159 dollars), maker of Scottish-style single malt whisky.

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