

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Spring Break Without a Border: Why Youth Travel Is Collapsing Between Canada and the U.S. and Why the USMCA Tourism Resiliency Act Can't Wait**

(March 3, 2026) – Families across Canada and the United States are counting down to spring break, but our shared border has never felt more fragile or more off-limits for the very young people who should be discovering the world.

Spring break has always been about more than beaches and sightseeing; it is when young people shape world perspectives, form cross-border friendships, and see themselves as part of a broader, global community. If we allow today's mix of over-scrutiny, policy drift, and political theatrics to harden into the new normal, we will have failed this generation.

Instead of hockey tournaments, school exchanges, campus visits, and road trips, we are watching a historic collapse in cross-border travel that is reshaping youth and student mobility in ways that should alarm every government on both sides. Passing the **USMCA Travel and Tourism Resiliency Act** and using it to rebuild a safe, smart, and welcoming border is the most important step we can take right now to keep the door open.

New data confirms that 2025 was the worst year for Canada–U.S. cross-border travel since 9/11 (25 years ago), with no sign of a rebound as we enter the crucial spring-break and graduation-trip period. Canadian automobile trips to the U.S. fell 30.9 percent in 2025 (about 7.6 million fewer vehicle trips), while Canadian-resident return trips from the U.S. were down 30.2 percent in December alone and a further 24.3 percent this January. American tourism to Canada has also fallen in recent months, with U.S.-resident trips in December 2025 down 7.5 per cent year-over-year to about 1.6 million visits, including a 7.5 per cent drop in car arrivals, most of them same-day trips. This decline in U.S. visitors contributed to an overall 10.9 per cent decrease in international arrivals to Canada in 2025 compared with 2024.

Those numbers represent cancelled school band tours, scrapped sports tournaments, postponed graduation trips, and families deciding that taking their kids south simply no longer feels worth the stress, cost, or risk. And the chill is just as evident in the air. Transborder air passengers between Canada and the U.S. now make up a smaller share of screened airport travellers, and airlines have responded by cutting 450,000 seats on Canada–U.S. routes in the first quarter of 2026 alone. This is a 10 percent reduction, with some carriers slashing U.S. capacity by nearly 60 percent. When flight options disappear or prices spike, it is youth and students travelling on tight budgets, often in groups, who are first priced out of cross-border experiences that once felt routine.

“Student and youth travel is where lifelong curiosity, confidence, and cross-border friendships begin, and those opportunities are vanishing just when young people need them most,” said Carylann Assante, CEO of the Student & Youth Travel Association and co-chair of the Beyond Borders Tourism Coalition. “If we allow today's border frictions and policy uncertainty to make

international trips feel out of reach for schools and families, we will pay the price in lost learning, diminished trust, and a generation that sees borders as barriers instead of bridges.”

At the same time, the rhythm of border travel is being reshaped by new layers of real or perceived scrutiny. Proposals to expand data collection under the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), including years of personal contact history, detailed family information, and mandatory social-media identifiers, have already had a documented “chilling effect” on lawful, low-risk travellers from trusted countries. Surveys show that more than a third of potential visitors would be less likely to travel to the United States if these intrusive requirements move ahead, with a projected 23 percent drop from Visa Waiver Program countries alone.

For young people who live online, the idea that their social-media presence could be scrutinized by an opaque algorithm is particularly corrosive to confidence. Students and youth group organizers are understandably wary of asking participants to surrender years of digital life and family details for a weekend tournament or a spring-break campus tour. Even when policies do not apply directly to Canadians, the drip-feed of headlines about added surveillance, surprise fees, and new enforcement actions at the U.S. border creates a shared sense that crossing has become unpredictable, and that uncertainty alone is enough to deter risk-averse parents, teachers, and school boards.

Nowhere are the human consequences more visible than for Indigenous youth whose homelands and families straddle the 49th parallel. Indigenous Services Canada has issued formal guidance strongly recommending that First Nations travellers carry passports in addition to their secure status cards, acknowledging that Jay Treaty rights to free movement are not being reliably honoured at the U.S. border. This follows travel advisories from First Nations and tribal organizations warning of detentions and status-card confiscations by U.S. authorities. For Indigenous youth, that erosion of trust is devastating: it means cultural exchanges cancelled, ceremonies missed, language camps disrupted, and cross-border sports and arts programming quietly dropped because organizers cannot guarantee a safe, respectful crossing experience.

“Indigenous tourism was built on open, respectful cross-border relationships, and right now those bridges are being quietly pulled up for our young people,” said Keith Henry, CEO of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, and Beyond Borders Tourism Coalition co-chair. “When Indigenous youth are forced to cancel cultural exchanges, sports tournaments, and visits with family across the line because they cannot count on a safe, predictable border experience, we are not just losing business, we are undermining living cultures and the next generation of leaders.”

The damage is landing hardest in the border communities that have long welcomed youth and student travellers. A U.S. congressional report notes that passenger vehicle crossings fell nearly 20 percent in the first ten months of 2025, with states like Vermont and Montana seeing declines close to 30 percent. These numbers translate into empty hotel blocks, shuttered diner booths, and student-rate tickets going unsold, with operators in places like Old Orchard Beach, Maine, and Kalispell, Montana, reporting it is even worse than COVID. Those lost trips are not being rescheduled; they are being rerouted, as Canadians increase trips to overseas

destinations and within Canada itself, signaling a structural reorientation rather than a short-term protest.

All of this is happening ahead of a once-in-a-generation convergence of events: North America's shared hosting of the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the United States' 250th anniversary, even as travel and tourism still have no formal seat in the USMCA framework that governs our trilateral economic relationship. The bipartisan USMCA Travel and Tourism Resiliency Act changes that at precisely the moment we need it most. The Act would direct the U.S. Trade Representative to establish a dedicated Travel and Tourism Trade Working Group as part of the 2026 USMCA joint review, with a mandate to identify and remove trade-related barriers to travel, improve border fluidity, coordinate crisis responses, and ensure that policies on security, data, and infrastructure are weighed against their impacts on jobs, youth mobility, and cultural exchange.

As the Beyond Borders Tourism Coalition, our members (tour operators, destination organizations, motorcoach and rail companies, Indigenous tourism associations, and community-based enterprises) have built their livelihoods and identities around an open, welcoming border. We are united in our message to policymakers: the current trajectory is unsustainable, and the spring-break season now upon us will either mark the start of recovery or cement a generational retreat from cross-border travel.

Therefore, we call on:

- Members of the U.S. Congress to advance the USMCA Travel and Tourism Resiliency Act quickly through the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees so that tourism has a formal voice in the July 2026 USMCA joint review.
- The Canadian government to treat the collapse in Canada–U.S. youth and student travel as a strategic threat, not a mere redistribution of tourism, and to engage fully in a trilateral tourism working group once established.
- Both governments to pause or recalibrate new data-collection and border-processing measures that add friction without demonstrable security benefit, and to work with industry and Indigenous partners on rights-respecting solutions.

To learn more about the Beyond Borders Tourism Coalition and its members or to join the call for a saner, more sustainable approach to cross-border tourism, visit [www.beyondborderstourismcoalition.com](http://www.beyondborderstourismcoalition.com).

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