

Cannabis market waiting to be tapped, says tourism researcher

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FULL TEXT

Cannabis tourism is poised for takeoff across the country if regulations are eased to allow cafés and lounges where legal weed products can be consumed, says a Kitchener-based researcher.

When that happens, more tourists will travel to this country for the legal cannabis, said Susan Dupej, the lead author on a research paper published in *Tourism Review International*.

"That would move things very forward," said Dupej, whose post-doctoral research on cannabis tourism is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

"Visitors to Canada need to have a safe place to consume cannabis," said Dupej. "The tourism and cannabis industries are really interested in moving that regulation forward."

Currently, there are eight tour companies offering cannabis-themed holidays to Canada and there are hundreds of short-term rentals online for cannabis users, said Dupej.

There are three café-lounges in Ontario where customers openly consume legal marijuana products - one is a patio operation in Grand Bend, another is in Toronto and the third is in Orono, near Bowmanville, said Dupej.

She is researching cannabis tourism as part of her post-doctoral work at the University of Guelph's school of hospitality, food and tourism management. It is a new field of study as Canada is only the second country to legalize recreational cannabis use after Uruguay.

Canada is sitting on a tourism gold mine with legal cannabis, said Sanjay Nepal, who teaches geography and environmental management at the University of Waterloo.

"Canada could make itself known as a pioneer for promoting tourism like this," he added.

Nepal supervised Dupej's research, and believes cannabis tourism could put Canada back in the top 10 destinations for international travellers.

It has been nine years since the World Economic Forum had Canada on that list.

Cannabis tourism can be modelled on the tours of winemaking regions and organized visits to casinos, said Nepal.

"It does not happen overnight, but the possibility is there," said Nepal.

The first step is easing of regulations around consumption, said Dupej, because cannabis tourists needs more than just retail outlets.

In addition to allowing cafés and lounges, it should also be legal for growers to offer tours of their operations, samplings of their best bud and direct sales, she said.

"This is big in Colorado," said Dupej.

"Everything is in place for cannabis tourism to take off in this country I believe, except for the regulations," said Dupej.

Terry Pender is a Waterloo Region-based reporter focusing on arts and entertainment for *The Record*. Reach him via email: tpender@therecord.com

CAPTION:

Susan Dupej just published a study saying tourism is set to take off if cannabis consumption is allowed in licensed venues. David Bebee Waterloo Region Record

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