

Snowbirds caught in pandemic turbulence feed economy, seek stability, and still face uncertainty

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Snowbirds—the hundreds of thousands of Canadian retirees who travel south for the winter—faced numerous hurdles due to travel restrictions imposed during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new study

of media reporting has found.

Simon Fraser University geography professor Valorie Crooks and health sciences professor Jeremy Snyder examined the plight of snowbirds as portrayed in the media during the pandemic's critical first year. Their research is published this month in the journal *The Canadian Geographer*.

"Unlike vacationers who've had to divert plans during various stages of the pandemic, snowbirds see themselves differently, with relocating being a critical part of their lifestyle and often tied to health considerations," says Crooks, who holds a Canada research chair in health service geographies, and has for years studied those flocking to snowbird communities in regions like Florida and Arizona.

The researchers' analysis of 187 Canadian newspaper articles identified key themes or factors attributed to snowbirds as the pandemic advanced:

- Consumers who contribute to [local communities](#): A focus on the importance of snowbirds to business, [local economies](#) and their destinations' tourism sectors, including gains for specific Canadian businesses, such as winterized recreational vehicle (RV) parks selling out of spaces, and issues related to snowbirds and travel insurance.
- Travelers searching for stability: The impact of enduring lockdowns and closures and the desire to live with restrictions in a warmer climate over the winter. Some media accounts framed snowbirds as entitled/privileged people who sometimes make risky decisions to achieve stability and comfort, for example the ability to get vaccinated sooner in the U.S. than if they had stayed in Canada.
- Facing new uncertainties: Uncertainty related to travel for snowbirds as international retirement 'migrants' was a dominant

media focus. While they faced issues returning home from abroad following U.S. land border closures to non-essential travelers, there was also great uncertainty over whether snowbirds could return to their seasonal residences in 2021, while ongoing pandemic measures continue to impact snowbird [travel](#).

The researchers note that fewer stories dealt with snowbird health or as travelers, their ability to transmit or spread the virus. They suggest further research could involve interviews with snowbirds to see if their experiences are reflected in the [media](#), as well as how home communities and social networks play a role in helping them cope with restrictions and other [pandemic](#) changes that impact them.

More information: Jessica Tate et al, Altering consumer practices, facing uncertainties, and seeking stability: Canadian news media framings of international retirement migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic, *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/cag.12739](https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12739)

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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