

Cannabis tourism: How a new travel trend is taking off

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Legal cannabis consumption [rose](#) in the [U.S.](#) and [Europe](#) during the COVID pandemic, with some people turning to marijuana to help them [cope](#) with lockdowns and [broken routines](#). Meanwhile, fewer people

today view the drug as [harmful](#) compared to previous decades.

These factors may have contributed to a trend towards cannabis-related tourism, with destinations developing new holiday products to tempt customers, and rising travel bookings to destinations where cannabis is [legal](#). But there are risks for both destinations and tourists in embracing this trend.

Work by [MMGY Travel Intelligence](#) found [29% of leisure travelers](#) are interested in cannabis-related tourism. A study by the Dutch government revealed that [58%](#) of international tourists choose Amsterdam in order to consume drugs. And business in Dutch coffee shops has [increased](#) since the start of the pandemic.

Nine months after Illinois legalized recreational cannabis in January 2020, nearly [30% of purchases](#) were by non-residents. Thailand has [just announced](#) it has legalized cannabis and is hoping this will boost tourism.

The tourism sector and [specific destinations](#) have reacted quickly to the demand for cannabis, hemp and CBD-related products by designing experiences that include those elements. They are also responding to the [expected economic potential](#) related to increased [hotel occupancy](#), [tax revenues](#), increased [land values](#), business expansion, jobs and [public health and safety benefits](#) that could be connected to cannabis sales.

Yet although tourism to other destinations with legalized cannabis is growing in [popularity](#), [data](#) is only [beginning](#) to be collected. And so far no destination is ready to be labeled as the "[next Amsterdam](#)".

Big potential

While cannabis-related travelers are believed to be [high spending and well educated](#), authorities [don't want](#) to replicate the Dutch model, which

led to massive concentration of cannabis coffee shops in Amsterdam and raised concerns over [hard drug use and criminality](#).

New business models are focusing on agri-tourism (meet-the-farmer sessions) and culinary tourism and events such as cannabis [festivals](#). Tourists can choose from [farm tours](#), "[bud and breakfast](#)" hotels, [city tours](#), [cannabis festivals](#), [cannabis trails](#), [food, wine and marijuana pairings](#), "ganja [yoga](#)", and packages that combine [accommodation](#) and [cannabis experiences](#).

The potential for cannabis tourism is widespread around the world. More than 19 U.S. states and [Washington DC](#) have now legalized recreational cannabis, along with [Canada](#), [Mexico](#), [Uruguay](#) and [others](#). In Europe, Luxembourg allows the consumption of personally cultivated cannabis, while [Switzerland](#) is trialing cannabis sales from pharmacies for recreational purposes.

[Malaysia](#) and [Thailand](#) have made initial steps towards legalizing recreational use. [Costa Rica](#) and [Morocco](#) have also approved legalization for medicinal purposes.

Risks for tourists

However, few countries have clarified the legality of cannabis use by tourists with legislation directed at recreational use by residents. This means tourists risk breaking the law [unintentionally](#), by interacting with [street dealers and police](#) as well as the health implications of consuming real and [fake drugs](#).

There is some evidence cannabis can [improve some mental health conditions and provide pain relief](#). But tourists with pre-existing mental health disorders, for example, may risk their [physical and psychological well-being](#). Cannabis-related mental health events including [depression](#)

can also occur among those who have [not been diagnosed](#) with [mental health issues](#).

A patchwork of [complicated laws and regulations](#) regarding [recreational cannabis](#) use by [overseas tourists](#) means questions remain about the legality of consumption, the transport of cannabis vape pens overseas as well as issues of insurance cover and health care, during and after travel.

While Uruguay is planning to [allow](#) consumption by [tourists](#), countries like Portugal, where cannabis has been decriminalized since 2001, still doesn't allow them to buy it legally. In Spain, [cannabis clubs](#) allow visitors to donate to the club instead of purchasing a product. But [Spain](#) and other large markets [like South Africa](#) are focused on [domestic cannabis tourism](#) rather than international visitors.

Few countries have carried out a [cost-benefit analysis](#) around legal cannabis and tourism, or fully discussed issues of land and water use, police powers and benefits to local communities. While cannabis tourism can generate tourism and jobs, and reduce the power of organized crime, the goal of sustainable development is threatened by theft, racism, and a market stacked [against](#) small local operators who often can not secure funding or insurance. There are also possible increases in pollution and [public health](#) and [safety concerns](#).

[Mexico](#) and [Canada](#) have promised funding for indigenously owned businesses to aid social and [racial equality](#), while [New York](#) plans to create a US\$200 million (£162 million) public-private fund to support social equity goals. [Resident support](#), and [continual conversations](#) with communities on how to plan the sustainable development of cannabis tourism should be a vital part of development of the sector.

While it appears that the COVID pandemic helped [stimulate](#) and [legitimize](#) the use of marijuana, with dispensaries declared [an essential](#)

[service](#) in parts of the US during the pandemic, tourism could expand and [normalize acceptance](#) of its use.

Perceived risks may fade and and tourist [guilt](#) may dissipate. Cannabis [tourism](#) is likely to become just another segment of the holiday industry.

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