

CANNABIS TOURISM IN CANADA MAY BRING GREAT BENEFITS



Tour operators believe that Canada will exploit a commercial gold mine after the legalization of cannabis, but others fear that it will represent nothing but low-quality tourism. Cannabis tourism is a hot issue in the country.

Canada is set to be the second country in the Americas (after Uruguay) to legalize marijuana for recreational use. **The bill, which was approved last week, opens the door to a tourism segment that the North American country did not foresee.**

“Although the new regulation has only come into effect recently, cities such as Toronto and Vancouver had a long tradition of advocating for the soft drug, and support a good number of coffee shops and clinics that existed before the eyes of the authorities,” explains Michele Simpson, Media Relations Manager for Tourism Toronto, to The Independent.

Legalization will be a business that many will want to take advantage of – and cannabis tourism in Canada will be a part of it. According to a Deloitte report, it is expected that consumption will grow by 35%, and sales will reach 4.7 billion euros.

This will suppose real estate and commercial activity that should be taken into account: the province of British Columbia received 100 applications to open cannabis stores, Alberta has 250 forms to manage, and Ontario has “hundreds more” waiting.

A mirror of Amsterdam

As an officer for tourism development in charge of promoting the coastal destinations of Newfoundland, Andrew Hiscock says the province can take advantage of being only five hours away from London.

Marijuana growers in Canada consider offering guided tours and tastings, just as wineries and distilleries do.

Somehow, many tour operators and agencies expect the country to have an additional boost as Amsterdam usually does, where up to 30% of the visitors who arrive in the Dutch city look for cannabis tourism experience in the local coffee shops.

Others warn that this may attract an unwanted tourism segment, whose purpose is visiting with no other interest than smoking freely.

The Pretext of Experiential Tourism

But there are those who think different, and remember that experiential tourism can be a gateway to combine both factors.

For example, in California, where recreational consumption has also been legalized, wine tours are offered along with marijuana tastings.

The idea is to replicate the business model of wineries and distilleries, which offer tours through plantations and vineyards, showing the process of making and resting the alcohol, and finish the itinerary with tasting of wines, rums, or whiskeys.

That is what Canopy Growth, a company based south of Ottawa, intends to do, aiming to be the world's largest cannabis producer. To give a different public image, it will open a visitor center in a former Hershey's chocolate factory, where crops will be seen and the effects of the drug will be taught to the public.

Boom of Openings

Some places plan on taking advantage of the imminent boom to remove the degradation label that usually accompanies the consumption of cannabis. Tokyo Smoke, which has five stores in Toronto and another one in Calgary, expects to open new locations in Hamilton, Montreal and Regina, and exploit its presence in Queen Street West, Vancouver, which according to Vogue is the second most hipster street in the world.

Although consumption is now officially decriminalized, the Canadian border service reminds the public that entering the country with cannabis is strictly forbidden.

A Cafe 66 chain will open soon in Toronto. It will be an elegant pastry shop near the National Tower of Canada where, in addition to cakes and desserts, the recreational drug can be bought and consumed.

Border Officers Warning

However, this decriminalization bill is not a passport for its promotion. **The Canadian Medical Association recalled that use of cannabis implies different health risks, including long-term effects on the brain.**

Additionally, the Canadian Border Services Agency warns that entering the country with marijuana is still illegal, that even though consumption has been decriminalized, it doesn't mean that anyone is free to enter carrying any amount of cannabis in their possession. "If you have cannabis, report it to the CBSA," the agency said on Twitter.

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