

COVID-19: VACCINE TOURISM IS DEVELOPING AROUND THE WORLD



Go on a trip in the hope of getting vaccinated earlier than planned. This is déjà vu in some American states and a new tourist concept in the sights of Cuba or the United Arab Emirates, as well as several travel agencies and luxury concierges around the world.

Vaccine tourism has already been observed for several weeks in the United States, where vaccination is organized state by state. In New Jersey, for example, smokers are among those who should be vaccinated first. **In Florida, the vaccine is offered free and unconditionally to people over 65 years of age, creating an opportunity for Americans with a second home or even wealthy foreigners who have come to be vaccinated.**

Florida Tours

Several American media, such as the local NBC South Florida channel, have reported on Canadian, Brazilian and Argentinean tourists encountered and sometimes questioned in the queues at vaccination centers, particularly those of the "Publix Super Markets" chain that has signed a partnership with the state.

"We receive requests from customers ready to fly to Florida, if they have a guaranteed appointment, and then return home the same day," the vice president of a private jet company based in Toronto, Canada, said

According to the British daily The Guardian, nearly 50,000 doses were injected into tourists or secondary residents over 65 years old in Florida. This figure may seem marginal (3.5% of the total at the end of January), but it prompted Republican Governor Ron DeSantis and Miami Mayor Francis Suarez to call for tighter controls at vaccination centers, as several residents complained that they were unable to make appointments.

As of January 21, it is now necessary to provide an ID card or invoices justifying at least three months of annual attendance in Florida to register in a center. A measure that will not prevent Canadian seniors residing several months in Florida during the winter months from getting vaccinated, according to residents interviewed by CBC.

*** facebook video ***

First Steps around the World

At the international level, the concept of "vaccine tourism" - which can be similar to what already exists for breast or hair implants - was born in India, via the Gem Tours & Travels agency, which is also claiming to have created it. At the end of November, it offered to book 4-day stays from Bombay to New York for Indians with a valid American visa for 10 years. All this for the posted sum of 2000 dollars, according to the local media, which specified that the approach was condemned on the spot by the representative bodies of tourism.

Since then, India launched its vaccination campaign on January 16 and plans to immunize 300

million people by July. But certain sections of the population have priority. Thus, the most vulnerable and most exposed to the disease, including the country's 30 million healthcare workers, will be vaccinated as a priority. Then, by the end of 2021, the over 50s will follow, i.e. no less than 260 million people.

But for the others, some of the country's tour operators, such as Gem Tours & Travels or Zenith Holidays, are already offering to register for "all-inclusive" packages for the United States, the United Kingdom or Russia. In the offer: plane tickets, accommodation, sometimes a small cultural visit and vaccination. The agencies offer to stay on-site (from 3 to 12 weeks currently) to receive the second dose or to make a double trip, via the same offer, explains the Indian newspaper The Print.

Luxury Stays to Get Vaccinated in the Emirates?

From the United Kingdom this time, the very select luxury concierge service, "Knightsbridge Circle", ensures that it has already entered into a partnership with the United Arab Emirates so that its members can leave - most of them by private jet and thanks to the exemptions made for business travel - to be injected with the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine, administered since January 31 in the Gulf State.

"It's very exciting to say that we can offer the vaccine now," founder Stuart McNeill said. "It's as if we're pioneering this new luxury travel vaccine program," said the spokesman for the club, whose annual membership is still set at 25,000 pounds (about 22,000 euros). However, the club has not received approval for the German-American Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, which is reserved for the country's population.

Cuba Promises to Vaccinate Volunteer Tourists in March

Cuba has even made the vaccine a new tourist attraction. In a commercial broadcast on January 23 on Venezuelan television, TeleSUR TV, the director of the Finlay Institute in Havana, Vicente Várez, invites foreigners to schedule a trip to the Caribbean island "starting in March" to combine business with pleasure by getting vaccinated against Covid-19.

The Cuban authorities are already planning to produce "100 million doses" of the Soberana 2 vaccine, one of the four vaccines currently in advanced testing in Cuba. This is enough to vaccinate all of the island's 11.3 million inhabitants. **The vaccine will be free but not compulsory for the Cuban population.**

This production should therefore make it possible to vaccinate tourists who would like to be vaccinated. Cuba has also promised to offer millions of doses of its precious serum to Vietnam, Iran, Venezuela and India. "The production phase" has already begun, said Dr. Várez at the end of January. Even though the Soberana 2 vaccine has not passed the final scientific phase of its research and tests on thousands of volunteers, and is therefore not yet licensed. But there, they are already preparing the tourism of tomorrow.

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