



2727 COWORKING / RESEARCH & PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

Business visitor or work permit? Short trips to Montreal

Find a practical home for your work at 2727 Coworking in Montreal. Explore private offices, day workspaces and meeting rooms, plus business-address and virtual-mailbox services for your company.

Published by 2727 Coworking · 2026-10-29 · business visitor canada · business visitor vs work permit · can i work in canada as a business visitor

Original article: <https://2727coworking.com/articles/business-visitor-vs-work-permit-canada-meetings-montreal-short-trips>



In this article

1. The short answer: meetings yes, entering the labour market no
 2. What "business visitor" means in the regulations
 3. The two factors IRCC looks at
 4. Activities that usually qualify
 5. Activities that usually need a work permit
 6. Special rules for US and Mexican citizens under CUSMA
 7. Visa or eTA: which one applies to you
 8. Documents to carry at the border
 9. What the Canadian host should put in the invitation letter
 10. Using a Montreal address or meeting room as a non-resident
 11. Mistakes that cause problems at the border
 12. When to apply for a work permit instead
 13. Frequently asked questions
 14. Sources
-

The short answer: meetings yes, entering the labour market no

A foreign professional can usually come to Montreal for meetings, negotiations, conferences, trade fairs, training and similar business without a work permit, as a **business visitor**. The trip stops qualifying when you start **entering the Canadian labour market**: doing hands-on work for a Canadian client, selling to the general public, or being paid from Canada.

Two legal tests decide it, both in the [Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations](#), s. 187(3):

1. your **primary source of remuneration** for the activity is outside Canada; and
2. your **principal place of business and actual place of accrual of profits** stay predominantly outside Canada.

If both are true and the activity is international business rather than a job in Canada, you are likely a business visitor. The rest of this guide applies that line to real trips. It is general information: the border officer decides on your actual facts, so your documents need to show them.

What "business visitor" means in the regulations

Section 186 of the regulations lists people who may work in Canada without a work permit, and paragraph (a) is "a business visitor to Canada within the meaning of section 187" (IRPR s. 186). The regulations on the Justice Laws site were current to 2026-09-30 when we checked, and no amendment note appears under s. 187.

Section 187(1) defines a business visitor as a foreign national described in s. 187(2) or who "seeks to engage in international business activities in Canada without directly entering the Canadian labour market" (IRPR s. 187). Section 187(2) names three groups outright:

- people **purchasing Canadian goods or services** for a foreign business or government, or receiving training or familiarization on those goods or services;
- people **receiving or giving training within a Canadian parent or subsidiary** of the corporation that employs them outside Canada, if any resulting production is incidental;
- people **representing a foreign business or government to sell goods**, if they are not making sales to the general public in Canada.

One point surprises many people. IRCC says these activities are still "work" in the legal sense, because the person may receive wages or commission; the regulation simply exempts them from needing a permit (IRCC, [Business visitors R186\(a\)](#)). A practical consequence: work experience gained as a business visitor cannot be counted for the Canadian Experience Class (same source).

The two factors IRCC looks at

IRCC's officer guidance restates the s. 187(3) tests and adds context (IRCC, [Business visitors R186\(a\)](#)):

Factor	What the officer wants to see	Red flag
Source of remuneration	Your salary, fees or commission are paid by your foreign employer or your own foreign business	A Canadian company pays you for the work done on the trip
Place of business and profits	Your business is run from abroad and its profits accrue abroad	The trip is really the start of a Canadian operation that will earn here
International scope	You deal with business counterparts, not the general public	You sell directly to consumers in Canada
Not competitive in the Canadian market	You are not doing a job a Canadian worker would otherwise be hired to do	You are filling a role on a Canadian client's project

IRCC's client page puts the same idea simply: to qualify, you must show you "don't plan to enter the Canadian labour market" and that your main place of business and source of income are outside Canada (IRCC, [Business visitors attending meetings, events and conferences](#), page dated 2026-08-28).

Activities that usually qualify

IRCC lists these as typical business visitor activities (IRCC [client page](#); IRCC [officer guidance](#)):

- going to **meetings, conferences, conventions or trade fairs**, and exhibiting, as long as you are not selling to the public;
- **buying** Canadian goods or services for a foreign business;
- **taking orders** for goods;
- giving **after-sales service under a warranty** or the original sales agreement;
- receiving or giving **training** between a foreign company and its Canadian branch or supplier;
- attending a **board of directors' meeting**, which the officer guidance addresses separately.

IRCC's help centre adds meeting your company's clients or visiting job sites as part of your job back home (IRCC Help Centre, question 436, modified 2026-09-28), and observing site visits or attending training a Canadian company invited you to (IRCC Help Centre, question 434).

After-sales service has limits. The guidance covers repair, servicing, setting up, testing and supervising for specialized commercial or industrial equipment, including software upgrades on equipment already bought or leased, but only if the service contract is part of, or an extension of, the original sale, lease or rental agreement. Set-up does not include hands-on work typically done by construction or building tradespeople, and a service contract negotiated later with a third party is not covered (IRCC officer guidance).

Activities that usually need a work permit

IRCC's help centre is direct: if you plan to carry out "secretarial, managerial, technical or production activities" or stay longer than six months, you have to apply for a work permit (IRCC Help Centre, question 436). In practice, watch for:

- **Selling to the general public** in Canada, for example running a retail pop-up or selling at a consumer market (IRPR s. 187(2)(c)).
- **Delivering a contract for a Canadian client.** An employee a foreign firm sends to carry out a contract with a Canadian company is not a business visitor and may need a work permit (IRCC Help Centre, question 434).
- **Being paid from Canada**, by a Canadian client as a payroll worker or by a Canadian company you work for, which fails the remuneration test (IRPR s. 187(3)(a)).
- **Long stays.** Business visitors usually stay a few days or weeks and can stay up to 6 months; planning to stay longer or to work may make you a temporary worker (IRCC client page).

Worked examples (illustrative)

Trip	Likely category	Why
Paris founder meets three Montreal investors and a law firm over four days	Business visitor	Meetings; paid by and profits stay with the French company
U.K. sales rep takes orders from Quebec distributors at a trade show	Business visitor	Taking orders, no sales to the public
German engineer services a machine sold with a 2-year warranty	Business visitor, if within the warranty or original agreement	After-sales service under the original agreement
Same engineer installs new machines under a new contract signed with a Montreal plant	Needs a closer look, likely work permit	Not under the original agreement; hands-on contract work
Freelance designer from Lisbon spends six weeks building a website on site for a Montreal agency, invoiced to the agency	Needs a closer look, likely work permit	Canadian client is the source of pay; activity is production work
Founder sells products at a Montreal Christmas market	Work permit question	Sales to the general public

Special rules for US and Mexican citizens under CUSMA

IRCC's officer instructions for **CUSMA business visitors** (updated 2025-12-22) apply only to **citizens** of the U.S. or Mexico, not to permanent residents of either country. The primary source of pay for the activity must stay outside Canada, the activity must be international in scope, and you apply at the port of entry with proof of citizenship and of the activity; an oral declaration, or if needed a letter from your employer, shows where your business and profits are ([IRCC, CUSMA business visitors](#)). The listed activities (CUSMA Appendix 1) go beyond the general list, notably:

- **Research and design:** technical, scientific or statistical researchers working independently or for a U.S. or Mexican enterprise.
- **Marketing:** market researchers and analysts; trade fair staff promoting only their own product.
- **Sales:** representatives taking orders or negotiating contracts for a U.S. or Mexican enterprise, but not delivering the goods or services; buyers for such an enterprise.
- **General service:** professionals in a CUSMA Appendix 2 profession working at a professional level, if paid from outside Canada; management, supervisory and financial services staff on commercial transactions; public relations and advertising staff; translators employed by a U.S. or Mexican enterprise.
- **After-sales service:** installing, repairing or servicing commercial or industrial equipment or software under the original sales or warranty agreement, with no hands-on construction work; expect secondary examination and bring the agreements.

CUSMA, CETA, CPTPP and other agreements also have **business people** categories (professionals, intra-company transferees, investors) who come to work in Canada; those are not business visitors ([IRCC, business people](#), page dated 2026-07-17).

Visa or eTA: which one applies to you

Being a business visitor is about what you may do. Whether you need a **visitor visa** or an **eTA** depends on your passport and how you travel ([IRCC, What you need to enter Canada](#), page dated 2026-07-31):

Traveller	Flying to Montreal	Arriving by land or sea
Visa-exempt passport	eTA + passport	Passport, no eTA
Visa-required passport	Visitor visa + passport (some nationalities may qualify for an eTA for air travel only)	Visitor visa + passport
U.S. citizen	No eTA; passport recommended	No eTA; passport or accepted ID
U.S. lawful permanent resident	No eTA; passport and green card	Green card or equivalent proof of status

On the IRCC page dated 2026-07-31, Mexico is on the visa-required list, and some Mexican citizens may apply for an eTA for air travel if they meet certain requirements (same source). Country lists change, so read the page for your nationality before booking.

Key eTA facts ([IRCC, eTA facts](#)): it is linked to the passport you applied with, it is valid for up to five years or until that passport expires, whichever comes first, and a new passport needs a new eTA. Apply on the official [Government of Canada eTA page](#); most applications are approved within minutes ([IRCC, eTA: how to apply](#)).

Fees as of October 2026

From [IRCC's fee list](#) (modified 2026-09-21) and its [biometrics page](#):

Item	Fee (CAD), as of October 2026
eTA	\$7
Visitor visa, per person	\$100
Visitor visa, family maximum	\$500
Biometrics, per person	\$85
Biometrics, family maximum	\$170
Work permit, per person (for comparison)	\$155

Biometrics (fingerprints and photo) are generally required for visitor visa applications, with exemptions including children under 14 and applicants over 79 ([IRCC biometrics page](#)).

Documents to carry at the border

The officer at entry decides business visitor status. IRCC says to carry, among other things ([IRCC Help Centre, question 437](#), modified 2026-09-28):

- [] the passport you used to apply for your eTA;
- [] a passport or travel document valid for your entire stay;
- [] a **letter of support from your parent company** (your employer abroad);
- [] a **letter of invitation from the Canadian host company**;
- [] relevant warranty or service agreements and contracts;
- [] **24-hour contact details** of your business host in Canada;
- [] proof you have enough money for your stay and your return home.

What the Canadian host should put in the invitation letter

IRCC publishes the expected contents of a business invitation letter ([IRCC, Letter of invitation for business visitors](#), page dated 2023-09-14). A representative of the Canadian company should write it, and it should cover:

About the visitor: full name and date of birth if known; the company they represent and their position; home and work addresses and phone numbers; the relationship between the companies and their business history; whether the signer knows the visitor personally; the purpose of the trip, with context if it is part of a larger

project; the length of the visit and departure date if known; and which accommodation and living expenses the host will pay.

About the signer: full name, job title, address and phone numbers in Canada, and work email.

About the company: full legal name, headquarters address and the addresses of all facilities to be visited, website, date of registration or incorporation, and a short description of the business.

Send each visitor **two originals**: one for the visa application (if one is needed) and one to show on arrival. IRCC is clear that an invitation letter does not guarantee a visa (same source).

Events and conferences. Organizers of an event with at least 10 delegates from visa-required countries can register it with IRCC at least 6 months ahead and receive an event code for participants' visa applications. The code coordinates processing; it does not speed it up or guarantee entry (IRCC, [hosting an international event](#), page dated 2024-11-27).

Using a Montreal address or meeting room as a non-resident

Booking a meeting room or keeping a Montreal mailing address for a Canadian subsidiary does not change your immigration status. A [virtual office in Montreal](#) gives you an address for mail and filings, not a right to work in Canada.

What matters is still the s. 187(3) test. Holding meetings in a rented room in Griffintown is a meeting. But if you incorporate in Quebec, run the business from here and pay yourself from the Canadian company, your source of pay and place of profits are now in Canada and business visitor status no longer fits (IRPR [s. 187\(3\)](#)); you need a work permit route.

Mistakes that cause problems at the border

- **A vague purpose.** Say who you are meeting, why and for how long, with the agenda to back it up.
- **Missing letters.** The host and parent-company letters are both on IRCC's list ([question 437](#)).
- **Describing the trip as a job.** "A month on a project for a Montreal client" is entering the labour market. If that is accurate, you need a permit, not better wording.
- **Mismatched documents.** A contract showing a Canadian company pays you contradicts a claim that you are paid from abroad.

When to apply for a work permit instead

If your plan involves hands-on work for Canadian clients, Canadian pay, or a long stay, look at a work permit. IRCC issues employer-specific and open work permits, and the processing fee is \$155 per person as of October 2026 unless you are exempt (IRCC, [work permit from outside Canada](#)). Common routes:

- **Free trade agreement categories** for specialists, specialized knowledge workers, investors and others under CUSMA, CETA, CPTPP and similar agreements (IRCC, [business people](#)).
- **Start-up Visa** for founders building a Canadian company: see our [Start-up Visa and Quebec incorporation guide](#).

- **Remote work for foreign employers** while staying in Canada: see our [digital nomad guide for Montreal](#).

Eligibility for each route depends on your nationality, occupation and employer, so build processing time into any start date.

Frequently asked questions

Can I sign a contract with a Canadian client while visiting as a business visitor?

Going to business meetings is a listed business visitor activity ([IRCC client page](#)). The question is what happens next: if delivering that contract means doing the work in Canada for the Canadian client, that part likely needs a work permit ([IRCC Help Centre, question 434](#)).

Can I answer email and work for my foreign company while in Montreal for meetings?

IRCC says business activities related to your job back home, such as meeting your company's clients, do not need a work permit ([IRCC Help Centre, question 436](#)). Staying in Canada mainly to work remotely is a different question; see our [digital nomad guide](#).

Do I need a work permit to speak at a Montreal conference?

Usually not. A separate exemption, [IRPR s. 186\(j\)](#), covers a guest speaker making a speech or delivering a paper at a dinner, graduation, convention or similar function, and a commercial speaker or seminar leader delivering a seminar that lasts no longer than five days. IRCC's instructions exclude commercial speakers hired by a Canadian entity to provide training services: that is entering the labour market and needs a work permit ([IRCC, public speakers R186\(j\)](#)).

Does business visitor time count toward permanent residence?

Not for the Canadian Experience Class: IRCC says business visitor work experience cannot be included ([IRCC officer guidance](#)).

If your Montreal visit needs a neutral place to meet, 2727 Coworking's conference room at 2727 Rue Saint-Patrick in Griffintown seats 8 and is from \$300 a day before taxes, as of October 2026 ([book online](#); see also our [Montreal meeting room rates guide](#)).

Sources

1. Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, s. 186 ([Justice Laws Website](#))
2. Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, s. 187 ([Justice Laws Website](#))
3. Business visitors [R186(a)]: Authorization to work without a work permit ([IRCC](#))
4. Business visitors attending meetings, events and conferences in Canada ([IRCC](#))
5. What is a business visitor? ([IRCC Help Centre](#))
6. If I am a business visitor, do I need a work permit to work in Canada? ([IRCC Help Centre](#))
7. I am a business visitor and I do not need a visa. What documents should I bring? ([IRCC Help Centre](#))

8. Business visitors – CUSMA [R186(a)]: Authorization to work without a work permit (IRCC, 2025-12-22)
9. Authorization to work without a work permit – Public speakers [R186(j)] (IRCC)
10. Business people: Work in Canada under a free trade agreement (IRCC)
11. What you need to enter Canada (IRCC)
12. Find out about electronic travel authorization (eTA) (IRCC)
13. Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) (IRCC)
14. Electronic travel authorization (eTA): How to apply (IRCC)
15. Fee list (IRCC)
16. Biometrics: facts (IRCC)
17. Letter of invitation for business visitors to Canada (IRCC)
18. Get visa support when hosting an international event in Canada (IRCC)
19. Work permit application from outside Canada (IRCC)

Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

1. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2002-227/section-187.html>
2. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2002-227/section-186.html>
3. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/temporary-residents/foreign-workers/work-without-permit/business.html>
4. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/business/visitors-events-conferences.html>
5. <https://ircc.canada.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=436&top=16>
6. <https://ircc.canada.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=434&top=16>
7. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/temporary-residents/foreign-workers/international-free-trade-agreements/cusma/business-visitors.html>
8. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/special-instructions/business-people.html>
9. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/entry-requirements-country.html>
10. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/eta/facts.html>
11. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/eta.html>
12. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/eta/apply.html>
13. <https://ircc.canada.ca/english/information/fees/fees.asp>
14. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/campaigns/biometrics/facts.html>
15. <https://ircc.canada.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=437&top=16>
16. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/business/bring-business-guests/letter-invitation.html>
17. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/business/bring-business-guests/organize-international-event-canada.html>
18. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/permit-outside.html>

19. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/temporary-residents/foreign-workers/work-without-permit/authorization-work-without-work-permit-public-speakers.html>
20. <https://booking.2727coworking.com/conference>

THE PUBLISHER

About 2727 Coworking

2727 Coworking is a Montreal workspace and business-address provider. We serve people who need a place to focus, meet, run a small business or establish a professional mailing presence. Our website offers English and French information about workspace options and services, alongside educational resources for operating a business in Canada.

A workspace that fits the day

Our workspace options include private offices, day passes and desks, and a conference room. These formats help individuals and teams compare a dedicated office with more flexible ways to work or hold a meeting. Prospective members can explore the virtual tour, review current pricing and book a visit before choosing a workspace.

Business addresses and mail

2727 Coworking provides business-address and virtual-mailbox services. Our resources explain the documents and practical questions involved, including guidance for people outside Canada. Service eligibility, included features, availability and access arrangements should be confirmed on the applicable service page or with our team.

Resources for Canadian small businesses

We publish guides, research and planning tools about workspace decisions, business addresses and starting a business in Canada. Our incorporation research includes information for people inside Canada and abroad, with jurisdiction-specific material to help readers identify the next questions to investigate. These educational resources complement our workspace and address services; they are not individualized legal, tax or immigration advice.

Visit or contact 2727 Coworking

Explore [private offices](#), [day passes and desks](#), [the conference room](#), [business addresses](#) and [virtual mailboxes](#). [Book a visit](#) or [contact the team](#) to discuss your needs.

A business address alone does not establish tax residence, immigration status, banking approval or eligibility for a government program.

Website: <https://2727coworking.com>

This article is educational. Verify consequential medical, legal, financial, regulatory and technical decisions with appropriate professionals and the cited primary sources. Company services are described separately from the article's research findings.