



COVID-Travel: Dispatches from Around the World



Courtesy Six Senses Bhutan

We're continuing to monitor destinations around the globe that are opening to travel for Americans, including, in recent weeks, the [Maldives](#), [Croatia](#) and [Bermuda](#), which have clear stipulations and protocols for visitors prior to and upon arrival (for more on what's actually possible now, see [Coronavirus Travel Information: What's Open to Americans](#)). But as part of our continued effort to give you a better sense of what it's like in destinations all over the world—especially the ones we love most—right now, Indagare reached out to our network of on-the-ground members, friends and former staffers living everywhere from [Paris](#) and [Florence](#) to [Sydney](#), [Bhutan](#) and beyond for their take on post-COVID travel now. Here's what they had to say.

Contact Indagare for the latest intel on destinations, hotels and restaurants with social-distancing protocols and the safest possible sanitization measures in place, should you be considering travel at this time.

Paris & Basque Country: Practical Magic

Mara Hoberman is a culture writer and art critic based in Paris with her husband and two small children.



Summer in Paris. Courtesy Indagare's Kial Church

“Paris feels emptier, which is nice. The outdoor dining scene is really magical right now. All of the restaurants were allowed to apply to extend their outdoor space into the streets and have basically taken over many of the parking spaces with cute terraces. But lots of hotels, especially the smaller ones in our neighborhood, are still boarded up. I don't know when they will open again.

We were also lucky to escape for the first time to the Basque Country near Spain, where I've never been. We are not getting on an airplane anytime soon, but we have done some train travel and rental cars. I was pleasantly surprised how often the staff came through to clean door handles and bathrooms. Masks are required for the entire ride and in the stations. I was surprised that the dining car was open (I had been told it wouldn't be.) When we rented a car in Saint-Jean de Luz, it was all remote—we signed the paperwork in the office—but no one came with us to inspect the car. Same for the drop. The seaside felt crowded, but with French and Spanish vacationers. The borders are open within the EU, so I think there is a fair amount of inter-European travel going

on.

France did a good job during the lockdown and, as a result, we are having a fairly normal summer. That said, although things were very strict in March, April and May, as soon as everything started to open back up again, people started to relax their confinement habits. We will now be required to wear masks indoors again (it had previously been left up to the stores/venues), which is a good thing. People are acting like the virus has disappeared and I'm glad the government is stepping back in to require people to remain vigilant. There was a strict protocol in my kids' schools for one week and then the government decided that more children should go back to school and all of the social distancing protocols were abandoned. That was a little shocking.

I am expecting things to look different in the fall. To me, Paris looks better than ever right now! Part of it is just the fact that we spent three months locked in our apartment and I'm so happy to be able to go further than one kilometer from my house and stay outside longer than one hour (required during lockdown), but also, the city has fewer cars and more bikes and the terraces have exploded—taking over the streets and corners with tables for eating and drinking outside. It's Paris café culture on overdrive! My other little favorite French thing right now is that all of the cosmetic brands are required to make hand sanitizer, but can only charge the government-established rate, so my purse is always stocked with La Roche-Posay gel!"

Hawaii: A Sense of Quiet

Marley Blandori, Indagare's former Customer Experience Manager, has been living in Hawaii since March.



Hiking in Lanai. Courtesy Marley Blandori

“[Hawaii](#) has had one of the lowest rates of coronavirus in the U.S., so my husband and I feel really lucky to be in a place that feels relatively open and free. There was a short period in the spring when the beach was closed, except for swimming or exercise, and that was tough for the locals—the beach is their way of life here. Masks are mandatory everywhere (except on the beach) and people really do adhere to wearing them.

The lack of tourism is very noticeable. I read that this time last year, around 30,000 people arrived at Honolulu Airport every day. This year, the daily arrivals are around 300. Think about that! You can definitely feel it—the island feels blissfully empty. There is never any traffic, parking is a breeze and locals have taken back Waikiki (normally a place they would shun, like Times Square). We mostly do our beach-hopping and hiking on the weekdays, and we are often the only people at a site.

It’s definitely a double-edged sword, though. The economy is really hurting without tourists. While restaurants etc. are open on Oahu, where we live, I hear that’s not as much the case on the other islands; with no tourists, it’s still pretty much shut down and the islands can’t really sustain themselves. Everyone knows someone who has been laid off or furloughed, and many of our friends here (who work in the Food & Beverage industry) are in support of Hawaii reopening, even if it means more exposure to COVID. So there are definitely mixed feelings between appreciation for a tourist-free state and really depending on them economically.”

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Italy: Ready for Visitors

Alatia Bradley Bach, an Indagare member, is currently living in Florence.



Naples and a quieter Trevi Fountain. Courtesy Alatia Bradley Bach.

“If you can get here, now is the time to travel in Italy. Virus numbers are low and staying low—on average only 185 new cases a day and still mainly in the North. Everyone is respectful, keeps their distance and wears a mask inside or where they cannot social distance. It’s not crowded and yet does not feel sad and empty. Outdoor seating is full and lively. We drove from [Firenze](#) to [Rome](#), then [Naples](#), Pompeii and [Positano](#). [The Colosseum](#) was empty at 4:00 p.m.—evening breezes and no people—epic. We did a family golf cart tour up to Circus Maximus, which was empty—no line for the famous keyhole on Palatine Hill. The Vatican has only limited tickets, so you *must* reserve in advance and as soon as possible. The Italians like to go in the morning, so that books up the fastest. We were able to secure 11:45 a.m.—there’s no AC inside a lot of it, so early (or late) is still better. The garden was empty, the museum had very few people—and maybe 30 in the Sistine Chapel. You can stay in there as long as you like. Never is that possible—it’s *incredible!*”

Pompeii is the same. There were maybe 50 people from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. Our guide

said it's usually 1,000 a day. Florence is the same, Venice, too. Most restaurants are open etc. Positano and Capri are heavenly. They feel full enough that it's not odd or depressing, but no crowds—like it was in the 50s, the locals say. Some hotels will give deals, though many will not. Regarding boat rentals: try to book in advance. There are fewer boats, so they actually can run out. Our friends and our kids took the train home from Naples. They book only one third of the seats and give everyone a bag with wipes, masks, gloves etc. I cannot stress enough how safe and wonderful it is. Italy needs tourists!"

South Africa: Survival Instincts

Serena Crawford is an interior designer and a writer based in South Africa.



Serena Crawford in South Africa. Courtesy Serena Crawford

"[South Africa](#) is not open yet. There are no flights here and we are at Level 3. We are hoping by September or October the flights will be back on track as spring starts here. There is a tragic *lack of tourism*. We need everyone to come back, as it is the most important industry in this country. I think the game reserves are opening in September—and hopefully the whole country. I have no idea what post-COVID South Africa in the cities will be like. I think it will take time to see what has happened to our famous restaurant industry, but I know the hotels will still be wonderful and the safari camps, which are the best in the world, and wildlife will be unchanged by any disease. I

know many of the hoteliers have taken the opportunity to upgrade. Post-COVID travel should be centered around safari and places like Franschoek in the Cape and anything to do with the natural beauty of this country—that will be unchanged.

The protocols are super safe here...ten thousand times stricter than the U.S.A. *Everyone* legally has to wear a mask...everywhere you are doused in sanitizer.! Restaurants, everything is set up for protection. What does the COVID era look like to me? Well, I'm personally not concerned about Corona. I feel energetically and physically well and, hopefully, if I get it, I will be fine. I believe we are all going to get it. So I've accepted it. I'm deeply upset about the impact of it on everything—especially the economy and also travel...my great passion. South Africa has been hard hit. But I think as we come out of it, South Africa, with its safari camps, will boom because people will want to travel knowing that they are helping the world. By visiting our game reserves, you are actually helping wildlife survive. COVID-19 has affected the safety of endangered animals like rhinos, as it has encouraged poaching, as there is no tourist presence. So we need tourists to come and support this most precious precious asset. Nevertheless, the safari camps are doing their best to keep going until the tourists return and doing amazing things like doing virtual game drives. Safari travel is incredibly healthy, as most of your day is outdoors. I'm praying for my country and praying for the world that we bounce back and become more conscious about everything we do. I certainly know it's made a huge impact on me and the way I plan to live my life in the future."

Ireland: A Waiting Game

Rachel Gaffney leads some of Indagare Global Classroom's most popular cooking classes and will host our forthcoming [Insider Journey to Ireland](#) next year.



County Cork View. Courtesy Rachel Gaffney

“I flew from Dallas to [Dublin](#) on July 13. I am currently self-quarantining in County Cork, as required—upon entering Ireland from the United States, you must fill out a COVID-19 locator form. I did hire a car to take me from the airport to my location and stopped only once for a bottle of water. I was the only person in the service station wearing a mask. The Irish Government is set to mandate wearing masks in shops and shopping centers and all public transport. There is, sadly, an anti-American sentiment over here in Ireland at the moment, the reason being that there are Americans traveling to Ireland who feel these rules do not apply to them. They are not self-isolating or abiding by quarantine rules and this makes people very angry. As a result, Irish people have had to abide by very strict lockdown rules. I am in quarantine in the Irish countryside until July 27. It will be interesting to see if I receive a visit or phone call from any officials, enforcing these rules. Although I am not physically out and about yet in Ireland, I am aware that Ireland is suffering greatly from the loss of American tourists. With a two-week, self-imposed quarantine, it eliminates all overseas travel. Indeed Paul Kelly, the Chief of Failte Ireland (Irish Tourism Agency) recently told *The Irish Times* newspaper that the ‘pandemic’s impact on tourism has been catastrophic and dwarfs all previous crises.’ I am thankful to be here. A daily walk outside does wonders for mind and soul. Especially when in an Irish country meadow.”

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Australia: Out and About in the Land Down Under

Carrie Bellotti, an Indagare Ambassador and Member, is currently based in Sydney.



Cape Byron Lighthouse. Courtesy Adri Marie

“As you can imagine, we are all desperate to get out and experience a change of scenery, whatever that may be. In my experience, Aussies are some of the most traveled people in the world and many of us choose to be overseas during our winter holidays (in July), however, we have all adapted and are rediscovering this beautiful country—even in the middle of winter there is so much to offer. Thankfully, some of our internal borders have recently opened. Queensland was closed to everyone until July 10, it probably was an exodus of major proportion, when it did open—as at least it’s warmer up north! We opted to do a road trip up to [Byron Bay](#), far north on the New South Wales coast. It was so heavily booked, but we managed to get two rooms at one of my absolute favorite spots in the entire country, the Halcyon House, an uber chic boutique hotel just 35 minutes north of Byron—charming and perfect on every level! Byron was absolutely bustling with locals and tourists—it felt quite normal, but very likely with some increased precautions in place to keep the sanitization and distance somewhat present. I am right now at Mona Farm, recently turned into an amazing accommodation, just 3.5 hours from [Sydney](#). It’s truly heavenly and a nice way to escape with friends or to celebrate an important occasion.

People are for sure on the move and anticipating the day when we can jump on airplanes again to head overseas. At this time, one must seek permission from the government to travel outside of Australia, and it's mandatory to quarantine for two weeks upon return at a government designated hotel, no exceptions."

Sicily: An Island Apart

Jennifer V. Cole is a writer and Indagare contributor living in Sicily.



Afternoon light in Catania, Sicily. Courtesy Jennifer V. Cole

"After being under a strict lockdown (basically solitary confinement) for months, having the freedom to move around a little has restored my soul and my sanity. So far I've only been traveling around Sicily—I have yet to leave the island. Anyone who enters from outside Sicily has to download a traceability app and affirm they have no symptoms and no fever. When you enter public spaces, ranging from hotels to restaurants to beach clubs, you have to wear a mask, get a temperature check and sign a traceability document with all of your contact information. There's hand sanitizer everywhere. And the service industry professionals, from shop clerks to waiters to pool staff, all wear masks and continuously wipe down surfaces any guest has touched. I was on a boat in Salina last week. It was just the captain and me. And the only time he took off his mask was when I got in the water to swim (thus putting greater distance between us).

Generally, I feel safer, because we've seen a steady drop in cases (typically zero or one to two new cases a day on the island). And no one wants to endure lockdown again, so the majority of people are following mask and social distancing rules.

Italy is a warm country. Everyone is typically greeted with kisses, and personal space is generally less respected (by American standards). But now, it's all elbow bumps and generous spacing between people. Gatherings are still pretty small. It's rare to see a large group at a restaurant—and when you do see one, it's pretty obvious it's a family and not a group of friends. And everyone seems to have masks readily available and scattered throughout their personal property. I've got three in my purse and two in my car—just so I'm never without.

There is a palpable absence of tourists. On one hand, it's nice to have the streets to yourself. But I miss the energy of a packed summer beach town. Places such as Taormina, normally buzzing with visitors this time of year, feel vacant—as if it was February and not peak summer season. Americans are beloved in Sicily, and they make up a huge percentage of annual visitors. Every hotel I've been to, when I ask about how business is doing, generally mumbles an “*Oof...this year...*,” followed by a shoulder shrug and a sigh of ‘We miss the Americans. Without them, we're struggling.’

COVID normal to me, here and now, looks like living life as vigorously as possible while wearing a mask consistently and keeping appropriate distance from other people. Traveling, going to the beach, going to restaurants—as always. But diligently adhering to health and safety protocols. I'll wear a mask for the next two years (or more), if it means I can keep enjoying the beauty of the Sicilian landscape beyond the walls of my apartment.”

Bhutan: The (COVID Normal) View from Here

Samantha Rifkin, a former Indagare staffer, has been living and working for Six Senses in Bhutan for the past year.



The Punakha Dzong in Bhutan. Courtesy Six Senses Bhutan

“Travel is restricted in [Bhutan](#) at the moment, with encouragement from the government to only travel if necessary for official work purposes. Most Bhutanese are staying in the valleys in which they live or returning to their ancestral villages to spend time with family. We expats are mainly in Thimphu staying put, as we need documentation stating a work purpose to travel farther east.

I was recently granted permission to travel to our lodges in Punakha and Gangtey for the first time since February—I generally visit each lodge roughly once per month in normal times. I found that the valleys were serene and life was going on as normal for the residents. Many of the locals in these valleys are farmers or associated with agriculture, which has continued as usual with harvests and plantations over these past few months.

In Thimphu, there has been a shift for those in tourism to find a way to create more sustainable businesses by catering to locals instead of just international visitors. Some hotels are offering special local staycation rates (domestic hotel stays are fairly limited at the moment) and others are hosting special meals and dining experiences during this time without international guests. Local handicraft shops have been hit hard, as many of their expensive items, such as national dress made of silk and other high quality materials, are purchased by tourists visiting and looking for souvenirs. There has been a quick push by many of these shops to begin carrying different designs that cater to local

sensibilities and price points. Some have even started to split their spaces with other businesses, such as grocers, to save on rent.

Many of the Bhutanese have taken this opportunity to spend more time with their families while working at home and some have returned to their villages from the capital city to work various jobs. When the borders first closed, the government and His Majesty encouraged citizens to create gardens at home and increase agricultural activity. In recent months there has been a massive shift from imported vegetables from India to locally-grown produce from your next door neighbors. The resourcefulness and resilience of the Bhutanese never cease to amaze me. There has also been a movement to get outdoors and I am seeing more locals hiking and biking than I ever have in the past. The monastery above our lodge in Thimphu became a hotspot for hikers and it was a delight to see new faces up there each time I visited.

Many Bhutanese have also gone for *Desuung*, voluntary military training, during this time. For many, it is an honor to be able to take this quieter time to train and serve the country. After finishing training, the *Desuups* are the ones out during the evening ensuring curfew is followed and they are also patrolling (on foot!) to secure the porous border with India.

Since the borders are completely closed, and have been for five months now, the country truly feels like Bhutan for the Bhutanese (and those of us lucky enough to live here at the moment). We definitely feel the absence of tourism in Bhutan. The country's second largest industry is tourism and many jobs and livelihoods are affected by the pandemic. However, in true Bhutanese fashion, the locals support one other. His Majesty the King has a special *Kidu* relief fund that is helping to provide financial stability to those affected by the pandemic. So far they provided relief to over 23,000 individuals and their children during the first three months of the pandemic, and the program was recently extended through September. Initially, a 7:00 p.m. curfew was in place and schools were completely shut down. *Tschechus* (religious festivals) were put on in private without spectators and work-from-home became the norm for all office workers. Two weeks ago, some of the restrictions were relaxed—the curfew was extended to 9:00 p.m., Class 10 and 12 students returned to school to take important exams, workers went back to their offices with proper social distancing in place, temples and *dzongs* were reopened to visitors and archery games were able to resume, albeit with 8 players per team instead of 11. Masks are required to visit markets or crowded areas.

Most importantly, any returning nationals or residents are subject to a 21-day institutional quarantine at government facilities, followed by a seven-day home quarantine. This has been essential in containing the virus, as we currently have over

80 cases, but all in quarantine and without any community spread. We do feel safe and protected here, and we are grateful that the government is putting our health and safety first and foremost. COVID normal in Bhutan is peaceful and quiet. In many ways, life is going on as usual in towns and villages since the people have followed instructions to be cautious and alert.”

Portugal: The Algarve and Lisbon at Rest

Shoshana Balistierri, Indagare’s former head of People & Culture, is now living in Lisbon and launching a wellness startup.



Along the Algarve coast. Courtesy Shoshana Balistierri

“Much of my COVID experience was spent in the [Algarve](#) and the Alentejo, where I have been researching communal living models and experimenting with herbs and fermentation. The Algarve is home to some of the most breathtaking beaches and vistas, and it’s also home to many of Portugal’s artisans. The city of Loulé has incredible co-ops supporting local basket, canning and palm weavers—it’s terracotta palm heaven. I am now back home in [Lisbon](#), focused on getting my wellness startup up and running with two other women here. So now, normal days look more like investor calls and team meetings, in between walks in Estrela park and beach breaks in Caparica. Even considering the recent impacts of COVID, life in Lisbon is quite magical. The city is surrounded by nature, Jacaranda trees and a windy breeze from the ever-present Tagus

river. It's certainly surreal to see Lisbon streets without tourists. Instead of tuk-tuks and tourists buzzing in TimeOut Market, Lisbon is resting. Taking stock, finding her own unique way of navigating through these unprecedented times.

I have been witness to some incredible acts of kindness these past several months. Particularly when COVID was at its peak, I saw people bring food and groceries to the elderly neighbors who were unable to leave their homes. There is an immense amount of respect for the city, its traditions and inhabitants. This experience has taught me a great deal about how a community can, and should, show up for one another during crisis. However, it is heartbreaking to see many beloved restaurants and stores close down because they have not been able to survive due to the impact of COVID. The same restrictions that kept many safe did have an impact on local businesses, even the ones that were thriving. Pistola y Corazon, a beloved local spot, closed its doors, leaving dozens of us scratching our heads—how could the most popular spot in town close, despite always being packed full of patrons?

The absence of tourists is palpable, particularly given that we are in peak tourist season. In my humble observation, Portuguese people are resilient. There's a strength, an endurance built up over time—a silent courage that catalyzes one to move forward, despite existing circumstances. Lisboetas and expats alike are considerate and respectful of wearing masks, keeping appropriate distances and observing the rules enforced by the authorities diligently working to manage the existing circumstances. Everyone is required to wear a mask when entering any establishment or public transportation and people are doing their best not to gather in large groups, particularly as restrictions are being enforced around groups of 10 or more. I feel incredibly safe here in Portugal. I'm not sure if we'll ever return to 'normal'—but what's normal anyway?"

Berlin: Traveling Closer to Home

American writer Allison Reiber DiLiegro traveled the world for three years before settling in Berlin in summer 2019.



Berlin Cathedral. Courtesy Amelia Osborne Scott

“My friends have just begun to travel to places like Greece, France and Denmark, but I’ve been using this time to travel locally. I moved to [Berlin](#) in July 2019 and spent much of my pre-COVID weekends traveling internationally and, frankly, neglecting Germany. Over the past few months, my husband, friends and I have been bringing our bikes on the S-bahn (the light rail) and checking out the many lakes in the countryside outside the city. Life is far simpler than before!

People here took things seriously during quarantine, but that feels like a long time ago. There were a few weeks in May when we would meet up with friends in parks and sit in circles so large you could hardly hear one another talk, as the police were out giving tickets. But now, museums, shops, restaurants, biergartens, bars and flea markets are all open again. We have to wear masks to move about most spaces, but once at the table we can take them off. I feel very lucky to have been in Berlin during this time, though I do feel a bit of survivor’s guilt.

I absolutely feel the absence of tourism here. I have a museum pass and it’s been a wonderful time to use it. I live in Friedrichshain, a neighborhood in former East Berlin, where many of the top nightclubs are. The area has felt much quieter with the clubs closed and backpackers and study abroad kids gone. (The outfits on Sunday mornings are also far less entertaining). Mostly, I feel the absence of my American friends coming to visit. One of the best parts of living in Europe is tagging along on friends’ vacations,

and I miss everyone!”

Contact [Indagare](#) for the latest intel and updates on destinations, hotels and restaurants with social-distancing protocols and the safest possible sanitization measures in place, should you be considering travel at this time.

- Jen Barr on July 22, 2020

