



Travel Trends 2021: What to Know for the Year Ahead, According to Our Experts



Courtesy Indagare

In our recent Indagare Future of Travel Summit, we gathered many of our top industry partners and journalists to talk about where travel is headed next, the ongoing impact of Covid-19 in the year ahead and how to travel as safely as possible now or in the future. While Pfizer and Moderna's announcements about promising Covid-19 vaccines (up to 90 and 94.5 percent effective, respectively) make us evermore hopeful, we know it may take time for widespread distribution and adoption. Until then, we remain committed to meeting you where you are with regard to your own comfort level for travel, reporting on what we're learning and providing up-to-date information, insights and trip-planning inspiration. Here is a look at some of the trends we're seeing and what travelers are likely to experience in the coming months.

Contact Indagare or your Trip Designer to start planning a future trip. Our team can match you with the accommodations and activities that are right for you and provide information on [coronavirus travel safety](#), [destinations that are open to travel](#), [Covid-19 hotel policies](#), [transportation options](#), [private villas](#)

and charters and more.

Expect the Unexpected—and, Yes, More PCR Testing...

The primary concern for travelers continues to be how to travel safely during the pandemic, should you opt to do so. At Indagare's summit, our panel of experts agreed that testing requirements will continue to be a priority and a necessity for entry around the world; they can also be a gauge of how states and countries are handling the virus. Last week, Tri-State area and New England residents saw more stringent Covid guidelines, as Hawaii loosened some of theirs, and all have added testing requirements for some out-of-state travel. For 2021, we expect changes like these to be in flux with the projected rise of Covid-19 cases in the U.S.

We continue to monitor the latest guidelines from a variety of sources, including the CDC, WHO, the U.S State Department, as well as country-specific updates from our network of insiders on-the-ground in destinations as far-ranging as Antarctica, Turks & Caicos, Costa Rica, Paris, Sweden, the Maldives, Rwanda and beyond. While new tests with faster results are now available (12-minute nasal swab or saliva), the PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) Covid-19 test, which allows for genetic photocopying and the rapid detection of bacteria and viruses, remains the gold standard, for now—even though scoring an appointment and a timely test result within two or three days may also be the ultimate test of your patience. *See [Coronavirus Travel Safety and What Is Being Done as the World Opens](#) for more on testing requirements across the country and around the world.*

Related: [Covid-19 Travel and Testing: Practical Tips for International Travel During Covid](#)

In the Air

Minimizing your risk of exposure to the virus is still the number one consideration when it comes to air travel and spending time in public spaces. For now, Etihad Airways Vice President, Americas, Vincent Frascogna likened the recent changes implemented in the airline industry—such as HEPA filters that capture up to 99.9 percent of particles and constant sanitization—to being an extra layer of protection: “The theater of security that came about after 9/11 all became part of normal business,” he said, during our summit panel on How to Travel Safely Now, adding that “the theater of cleanliness”—stepped-up sanitization policies and social-distancing protocols—are likely to continue for the foreseeable future as a key safety measure. He also believes that masks will be an important part of the protection process against the virus for some time, when we are in public spaces. Whether or not they will be officially mandated may continue to vary

state-to-state in the U.S. and country-to-country in the rest of the world.

Open Season: What to Know About Eating Out

NYU Langone's Medical Director of Travel Medicine and infectious disease specialist Dr. Scott Weisenberg also agrees that masks are the best protective option in public places and offered his take on being in "tight spaces": Situations in which you're in close proximity to other people without good air ventilation for more than 15 minutes are best avoided. Spaces with HEPA filters wearing masks, shields or other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) while traveling are preferred. His recommendation about tented dining: exercise caution. If air is not regularly circulated through an area, it may not be worth the risk. "Personally, until there's more data about the tents, I'd shy away from outdoor tented dining, if it looks crowded," he said. As winter approaches, this may mean evaluating restaurants more closely and choosing those with wide-open outdoor spaces, especially when traveling in warmer climates. A study just published in *Nature* also suggests that more crowded locations, including restaurants, hotels and gyms pose a higher risk of Covid, but that reducing capacity in those locations is likely to lower the risk of transmission significantly.

Playing it Safe(r): Travel Evacuation and Insurance Options

When it comes to seeking extra protection and peace of mind through a travel evacuation policy or travel insurance should you become sick while traveling, now may be the time to consider both options. Be sure to read the fine print and fully understand what you're signing on for and what's included (or not, as the case may be). Medjet COO John Gobbels explained that evacuation protection, such as its popular MedjetAssist and MedjetHorizon programs, offer varying levels of care and enable more rapid transport from a local hospital to your preferred hospital in your home country, should you determine that is what you want. (Note that one person is able to accompany you en route to your final destination, but they would need a separate policy to receive any medical care while in transit.)

Travel insurance, by contrast, usually has more limited medical coverage for these services, so it is important to understand what is covered in any policy. Likewise, both standard travel insurance policies and Cancel For Any Reason (CFAR) policies may have a pandemic exclusion, because the illness was "foreseeable," especially now that more flexible cancellation policies are being offered by most airlines and travel companies. Regardless, patience and a more tactical approach will be necessary in the days ahead.

See [Coronavirus Travel Safety and What is Being Done as the World Opens](#) for more detailed information about insurance.

Safety-First Approach: The Covid Hotel Experience

Hotel companies have put into practice more Covid-cleaning protocols than ever before to combat the virus. Last summer the hotel industry mandated mask-wearing at most hotels. Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts has even collaborated with Johns Hopkins to establish new health safety standards. Through its Lead With Care program, resorts are now required to have an on-site hygiene officer, daily inspections, hourly cleanings of public areas, and provide masks, wipes and sanitization stations for guests, as well as maintain social-distancing protocols and reduced restaurant dining capacity. It was also an opportunity for other positive changes: “We’ve put in place things that we’d been talking about for years, like contactless check-in and QR code menus, that we had been very scared of applying and giving to our guests,” said Thibaut Drege, [Four Seasons Hotel George V](#) manager, in our panel on what’s changed (and changing) in Paris since March, “but we can see that the reaction was very positive. I’m not sure we’ll go back.” Similarly, since Covid’s arrival, Indagare is always looking at hotels with the highest standards of hygiene and staff-testing protocols, plenty of space on-property (and social-distancing measures), and will continue to do so. Ensuring masks are also worn by guests, a practice mandated at all Four Seasons properties, Mandarin Oriental and most European and Asian luxury hotels—in order to protect the hotel staff—typically depends on a hotel region’s enforcement of protocols, but our goal is for our community to feel comfortable wherever they may be traveling.

The Quest for Privacy

Luxury properties are currently seeing an uptick in demand for private villa options, a welcome boost for business. Brett Armitage, Chief Commercial Officer of Kerzner International, says One&Only properties are “seeing resorts selling from the top down. Larger villas are selling first, pool suites especially.” The appeal? They are places “where guests can create their own bubble,” he explains. To be sure, the draw of more sequestered and spacious villas—like the kind you find at [Eden Rock St. Barth’s](#), where guests might also ask to be attended to by the same staff for extended periods—makes complete sense right now. General Manager Fabrice Moizan enthusiastically revealed that Villa Rockstar, one of its most famous villas, is sold out for many months and does accommodate special guest requests; their villa rental business off-property is also booming. And Ben Trodd of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts agreed that “People are looking for seclusion and to create their own controlled space.” That means “private islands are also booked a long time in advance.”

Private yacht charters are another way to ensure that the guest experience is more protected, personalized and private. Because of closer quarters, crew members are also required to quarantine and take regular PCR tests prior to guests’ arrival. “All aspects

of a guest's stay are thought out, even special requests (as long as they are legal and within reason," said Burgess Yachts Partner Craig Cohen)—including upholding hygiene standards and assessing the islands they plan to visit (some are actually Covid-restricted). Being on a boat means plenty of time outside for connecting on (and in) the water and a shared sailing adventure together. Whether they are engaging guests in water olympics, telling stories or playing an instrument, "the crew has also gotten very good at entertaining the guests," adds Cohen.

Related: [The Benefits of Going Private](#)

Going Remote: The Latest Options for Single Nomads (and Families)

From our panel on remote travel, we were excited to learn more about the new travel benefits of going remote—being able to work (and stay longer) almost anywhere. Aleksandra Vukojevic, Managing Director at [Jumby Bay](#), the private island resort on Antigua, "where you can have the feeling of the bubble," said she was seeing pent-up demand (it just reopened last week). At [Turtle Inn](#), from the Family Coppola Hideaways in Belize, G.M. Martin Krediet recently had a guest stay for three months "to immerse themselves in the local culture." We were surprised that even luxury hotel brands like Aman are willing to negotiate rates up to as much as 30 percent for longer-term stays. So whether you are looking to hole up off-season in the Caribbean or head to Hawaii or far-flung destinations that are still open to American travelers, now may be the time to do it.

Some luxury companies are also offering programs that allow more than just single digital nomads to take advantage of these travel options. Family programs have been introduced at many properties to keep kids occupied and stimulated. At Turtle Inn, they might learn about local culture and language, learn to play the guitar or go birding. [Amanyara](#) is one of the luxury resorts offering tutoring, as well as camps on everything from conservation, oceanography to moon and stars. The Rosewood Explorer's Club is designed to inspire kids through culture, adventure, sustainability around the resort. At [Rosewood Phuket](#) in Thailand, this means kids can learn about coral reef regeneration, build an ocean in a bottle, upcycle items into art, and take plant-based cooking classes with ingredients from the property's gardens, explained Director of Sales Rosemarie Domdom. Our panel of experts said they were seeing guests taking longer trips *and* sneaking in short stays more spontaneously, Covid permitting—and they hope to see the trend of longer stays continue.

The Road to (Covid) Wellness

For those truly looking to focus on well-being and self-care and improving their mental health right now, there are also options to do so safely, whether you consider a destination spa (or even adopt your own health and wellness programs and routines at home). Many of our top wellness and spa partners are seeing more guests looking to focus on mental and physical wellness, and they had plenty to say about what they are doing to keep them healthy in mind, body and spirit. Our Wellness panel moderator, Danielle Pergament, a *New York Times* contributor joked that during lockdown it was as if “Mother nature sent us all to our rooms to think about what we have done.” She might not be wrong, but many spas, like [Canyon Ranch](#) in the Berkshires and Miraval, have adjusted their programming to address Covid concerns and upped the ante on outdoor activities, offering more hiking, biking as well as fitness, yoga, meditation classes and even spa treatments outside. Simon Marxer, Miraval’s Director of Spa and Well-being, summed up the pandemic possibilities perfectly when he said, now is also the time to “discover the joy in our lives, not the fear of missing it.” One of his best suggestions for limiting screen time: a cell phone sleeping bag, given to guests. You can literally put the phone away, “so that you can remain connected to yourselves.” And Dietmar Mueller-Elmau, CEO of [Schloss-Elmau](#), in the Bavarian Alps, offered this distillation of Covid’s impact on our well-being, just as businesses were beginning to shut down again in Germany: “Everything is more intense,” he said. “Security will only come with a vaccine. We expect three to four waves this winter—we will be opening and closing....We are learning to live with it much more....We are aware of time and health and touch and music and all the things that make life beautiful. Before, we always lived in the future, rather than the moment. Live here—enjoy the moment.” We couldn’t agree more.

Where to Go in 2021 & Taking a More Considered Approach

We get asked all the time about where we’re headed next—and we will be sharing our full list soon. Right now, we’re craving destinations we can’t get to like New Zealand and Japan, Switzerland, Sweden and Paris. But we’re also eyeing opportunities in a few far-flung places such as the Maldives and parts of Africa (like [South Africa](#), which just reopened) with strict protocols, low case numbers (and a low volume of travelers), where there’s a window of opportunity, if you’re willing. Indagare CEO Melissa Biggs Bradley is currently leading two [Indagare Insider Journeys](#) in Rwanda with gorilla-trekking and a stay in Kigali this month. She was also recently in [Kenya](#) scouting an Insider Journey she is leading in January. (Read her account of her travels and what she did to protect herself for the trip in our latest Indagare Magazine, [here](#).) She reports that the first group in Rwanda quarantined upon arrival for 24 hours and cleared their second Covid-19 tests to ensure the endangered gorillas remain protected from the virus. The group is having incredible wildlife-viewing experiences and the trip directly

contributes to anti-poaching efforts, especially important now since poaching has increased during the pandemic. For 2021, Melissa will also lead our first [Indagare Impact Journey to Antarctica](#) next September aboard the Quark *Ultramarine*. Indagare has committed to reducing our carbon footprint by carbon-offsetting future trips in 2021.

Closer to home, Indagare has been planning more trips than ever before for members seeking experiences in nature—whether in national parks or at some of our favorite retreats with plenty of outdoor activities in wide-open spaces such as Utah’s [Amangiri](#) and [Lodge at Blue Sky](#), [Dunton Hot Springs](#) in Colorado, [Ranch at Rock Creek](#) and [Paws Up](#) in Montana, and at top resorts like [Twin Farms](#) in Vermont and [Blackberry Farm](#) in Tennessee. Right now, we recognize that many members of our community may not be traveling far this year. We are happy to help you find the accommodations that are right for you, as well as navigate testing and travel requirements or provide inspiration for future adventures.

No matter your plan, we hope that when you are able you will be able to experience the joys of travel once again. As Melissa Biggs Bradley said in her keynote address during our Future of Travel Summit, one thing is for certain: “Among all of the things that travel gives us, perhaps the most universal is that it opens a world of possibilities, and it is within these possibilities that we find the best parts of ourselves and of each other.” We look forward to the possibilities that await all of us in 2021.

Related: [Best Winter Vacation Ideas for 2020-2021: 25 Trip Ideas from Antigua to Zambia](#)

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- Jen Barr on November 11, 2020

