

How to plan your first post-pandemic trip



By Natalie B. Compton

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The ability to travel is just one of the many luxuries temporarily suspended as the novel coronavirus outbreak continues its spread around the world. For now, we've been tasked with putting travel plans on hold and staying home to "flatten the curve."

But although experts are uncertain whether summer travel will be possible, not all future travel is off the table.

"I'm reminding people this thing is not forever," says Robert Reiner, a psychologist and executive director at Behavioral Associates. "It has a beginning, a middle and an end."

In the meantime, we can daydream and use these tips to start planning that glorious first post-pandemic vacation.

Use trip-planning as a coping mechanism, but be flexible

According to Reiner, there are two crises going on during this pandemic: a biological one (the coronavirus outbreak) and a psychological one (coronavirus anxiety, economic uncertainty and social isolation, among other issues).

Trip-planning can be a way to give yourself something to look forward to and provide an uplifting distraction from immediate pandemic problems. However, there are caveats. You'll set yourself up for more stress if you finalize a trip too early. The outbreak could cancel it.

"Right now, especially with people's spirits so low, structuring something that you are excited about is a great thing, as long as you understand the fact that it might not happen," Reiner says.

As you start connecting your travel dots, remember that we can't travel now, and stay-at-home orders as well as restrictions aren't predictable. You may want to keep staying home, even when travel technically becomes allowed.

Reopening dates "do not mean that it will be safe to travel then," says Adam Goldstein, the co-founder and former CEO of the now-shuttered travel aggregation site Hipmunk. "And will it be ethical to travel then? Even if you're technically allowed to — which I think in some states you still are — if you don't need to, you shouldn't, because you might be an asymptomatic [covid-19] carrier."

So instead of planning for summer trips, think long-term, perhaps even into 2021.

"Because companies are so lenient with their cancellation policies right now, there's no reason why you shouldn't look at" travel opportunities, says Misty Belles, the managing director of global PR for Virtuoso, a network of agencies specializing in luxury and experiential travel. "The escapism of being able to look and dream, and think about what you want to do, is ideal."

Window-shop for travel online

If you don't have a specific trip in mind, start fresh. Dedicate some of your screen time to hunting for your next destination.

For example, try using special tools on Kayak, Hopper and Skyscanner that show users the cheapest flights in the world from your home airport at any given time. You may spot affordable routes that lead to your next trip, big or small.

To put entirely new-to-you international destinations on your radar, sign up for Scott's Cheap Flights to get alerts on handpicked flight deals.

Travelers can also browse By The Way's City Guides, each written by a local writer in that destination, and the Instagram page for domestic and international trip inspiration.

Be intentional with your future travel plans

As you're browsing, consider what you want out of your next trip. Think about those you've already taken, and what experiences were the most meaningful, memorable or disappointing.

“This is this rare moment where the entire travel industry and travelers get a pause and a complete reset, which is something we’ve never had before,” says Konrad Waliszewski, CEO and co-founder of TripScout, a travel planning and entertainment platform.

After the pandemic, Waliszewski wants to travel somewhere new to him on every level.

“I’m going to pick a place that’s just a lot further away, literally and figuratively,” he says. “I’m just going to read about it now, watch any documentary or movie about it.”

Dive into the details

Researching beyond basic trip logistics can help us luxuriate in the experience of trip planning.

“The trip-planning is an extension of the trip itself,” Waliszewski says. “It’s a great way to be entertained at home.

In addition to reading books and watching movies about your future destination, he recommends reading about the culture and history of a place, and following locals on Instagram, from chefs to journalists to artists.

Following chefs on Instagram to find restaurants on the road is a trick chefs use when they travel.

“You find people that you like or trust their taste — even though that may be completely arbitrary — and just go for it,” Pok Pok’s chef and owner Andy Ricker said of following chefs on Instagram.

Once you find chefs or other interesting locals to follow, save any of their relevant posts in a folder under your Instagram “Saved” photos for easy access before or on your trip.

Organize your research

As you amass a list of places to see, restaurants you’d like to eat at and museums you’d like to explore, save them on Google Maps so they’re handy.

Star points of interest in Google Maps or create location-specific lists if you want to feel more organized. When your trip approaches, download that map so it’s available even when you don’t have Internet access or cell service.

Other tools can help log your trip research, like Pinterest boards, Google Docs or spreadsheets, and maps on Waliszewski’s TripScout. Try apps like Roadtrippers for organizing road trips or Packpnt if you want to get an extremely early jump on your packing list.

Your normal life routine might not have allowed for such deep dives into all of the eating, drinking and sightseeing opportunities that travel offers. Although the pandemic has taken away much, it has given us time — to really prepare for the next trip and appreciate the travel memories we already have.

As Waliszewski put it, the pandemic is “making me just so grateful for having the opportunity to have traveled in the first place.”