

Travel Writers: How Our Travels Will Change in 2021

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No matter where we live, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed our lives in so many ways. We asked some of our GOT Contributors to share their perspectives on how it will alter their travel plans in 2021.

Some common threads: Travel will be slower, closer to home, and more sustainable, socially-distanced, and focused on the outdoors. Health and safety, for ourselves and others, will be a primary consideration, and we'll still be wearing masks. We will be less likely to travel by air, and more likely to travel by foot, car or train.

That said, all of our contributors expressed a more profound appreciation for past experiences. What hasn't changed is our desire to share our stories to inspire others and bring the world closer together.

Exploring parklands

Jennifer Bain



Marvelling at the aurora borealis in Banff National Park (credit: Travel Alberta)

I see travel's future, and it's full of wilderness parks, open spaces, mountains, forests, lakes, rivers, birds, moose, deer and bears.

Like most Canadians, I'm a realist/pessimist when it comes to 2021. I believe it will be the fall before everyone is vaccinated against COVID-19, that the land border between Canada and the United States will stay closed to non-essential travel, that there will be frustrating and ever-changing rules about international travel, and that the need to quarantine for two weeks if returning from abroad will quash most people's desire to leave the country.

Gone, perhaps forever, are my days of taking 25 annual trips around the world as a travel writer. For most of 2020, I stayed within five drivable hours of my home in Toronto (except for one flight to Alberta for a dark sky festival). This year, I will devote myself to telling stories that make people want to connect with our natural and cultural environment.

I'm the new (and first) Canadian editor of *National Parks Traveler*, an editorially independent, non-profit, online publication based in Utah. The *Traveler*, under founder and editor-in-chief Kurt Repanshek, launched in 2005 to cover America's national parks and nurture advocates for them. I can't think of a more appropriate mission right now. Under the care of Parks Canada, are 47 national parks, one national urban park, five national marine conservation areas and 171 national historic sites. That's 224 reasons to leave home — safely — this year.

Committing to more responsible travel

Anita Breland and Tom Fakler



Ponte de Lima, a great base for exploring Portugal's vinho verde wine region, is Portugal's oldest chartered town (credit: Tom Fakler)

Prior to the 2020 pandemic, we had planned an extensive train journey across Europe, originating in Porto, Portugal, where we live. Our aim was to highlight responsible travel in consideration of climate change. After almost a year at home under various stages of confinement, we look forward to our coronavirus vaccinations, and to traveling again, as circumstances allow. These days, we feel an increased responsibility to protect the people around us, as well as keep ourselves safe

We live in a top destination, but have often ventured far afield. In 2021, we foresee fewer trips and an awareness of local pandemic concerns. As travel restrictions allow, we are making short local excursions in Portugal and across the Galician border in northern Spain. Come summer, we are eager to head to Asturias and Cantabria. We want to explore the Basque country, and the wineries of Rioja. We want to support and highlight locations and tourism providers taking the necessary precautions to make tourism safer. We will likely stay in higher-end accommodations with secure practices in place.

The “why” of our travel has not changed: we still want to experience and learn from the people we meet, the foods we taste, and share our discoveries along the way. The “how” of our travel will change, though, as we opt out of air travel and explore the Iberian Peninsula. Now, more than ever, we are committed to encouraging slow, responsible travel that protects our planet.

Thinking local

Linda Barnard



Surfer at sunset on Chesterman Beach, Tofino, British Columbia. (credit: Linda Barnard)

Hand sanitizer in a hotel room will be more important than a chocolate on the pillow in 2021. Safety will be a priority. As travelers increasingly seek open spaces and fewer people, will wariness about crowds mean the end is finally in sight for mass tourism?

The financial hit of the global pandemic and a predicted increase in air travel prices will see the close-to-home travel trend of 2020 continue. International destinations may be chosen for how well they handled the pandemic as much as what sites to see.

It's going to be tough to be spontaneous. Border closures, which may come and go throughout the year, along with 14-day quarantine requirements, will make international weeklong getaways impossible.

Road trips, RV-ing and camping will be popular. It's a very different way of traveling, but I don't see these as hardships.

As domestic travel began to open up in my home province of British Columbia last summer, I went on oceanside hikes, had a week in wine country, and took day trips to picturesque towns. I read stories from travelers who similarly found delightful new experiences close to home.

The hashtag #buylocal could be the best slogan for 2021 travel.

Yearning to see more

Laura E. Kelly



Someday I hope to take in this view of Estoril, on the Portuguese Riviera, in person (Credit: CC)

I had big plans for my 60th birthday in August 2020. Over the years, I'd watched as my friends traveled to Portugal and came back raving about their experiences. It seemed everyone had been to this wonderful small country except me—I was long overdue! However, just as I started planning for this special trip, the first wave of the pandemic started.

Now I'm looking at fall 2021 to resume my cancelled trip—assuming Portugal will let us virus-ridden Americans inside its borders. (Portugal itself at this writing is doing fine if you look at its [COVID stats](#).) By then, I should have proof of COVID-19 vaccination and some robust trip insurance (hoping THAT will still be affordable).

As you may gather from the above, I don't plan to substantially change how my husband and I travel (plane, train, rent a car or splurge occasionally on a private driver) or where we stay (hotels, inns, airbnbs). As usual, I plan to interact with the people around us while we travel, to share info and experiences—even if we're all wearing masks.

The pandemic has made many of us pause and look closer at our hamster-wheel lives. I realized that getting out of my backyard and seeing more of the world remains top of my YOLO list, even if it means I court risk by leaving my cocoon. I can't wait.

If you have any travel tips for Portugal—*since I know you've been there!*—please share in the comments.

Waiting patiently

Irene S. Levine



Swan Lake at Rockefeller State Park Preserve, Pleasantville, NY (credit: Irene S. Levine)

The pandemic's "great pause" certainly caught us by surprise, especially those of us who are intrepid travelers. Before the pause, my husband and I were always on the go—returning to favorite destinations to dig deeper and finding new ones to explore. Nothing much could stop us...except for a pandemic, that is.

Now, planning trips for 2021, especially foreign travels, seems risky due to all the uncertainties associated with pandemic travel. What could change our minds? Of course, getting vaccinated would make us feel much safer. But there are still no precise timelines for when the vaccine will be available; rough estimates suggest it might not be until the fall. There are also unanswered questions about vaccine effectiveness in terms of transmitting the virus to others and length of immunity.

We worry about high infection rates and changing border restrictions, quarantine requirements, and getting there (anywhere) safely—through crowded airports and densely packed long-haul flights.

So we remain largely housebound—only traveling from room to room—while we depend on grocery deliveries, and curbside pickups from the library, drug store and restaurants. We are taking advantage of local parks, many of which are stunning, but even a weekend jaunt to a

nearby hotel or inn seems daunting at the moment.

Yet, just as the pandemic's "great pause" was unexpected, I'm hopeful that circumstances will change sooner than we think. In the interim, we're getting ready—watching foreign movies, TV series and YouTube walking tours; reading novels set in different locales; trying to brush up on Italian; and looking back at inspiring photos of people and places we discovered in the past.

Revisiting and reflecting

Deborah Burst



Precious memory of train travel from Denver to San Francisco (credit: Deborah Burst)

Like most of us, we had high hopes for the New Year, especially for 2021. Sipping champagne on New Year's Eve, visions of COVID vaccines danced in my head. By midnight what should appear, but a long list of dream destinations. But alas, it took less than a week for 2021 to reign supreme, like a spoiled child determined to rise above the pandemic drama.

My list seems a bit tarnished now and the thrill of travel a bit murky, but then January is a month of deep reflection, a time to revisit the past when traveling was all about the journey. Both travel writers and the travel industry are stepping up their game in the new year,

working hard to promote creative destinations and responsible modes of travel.

It's time for the baby boomers to share the thrill of slow travel, a forgotten art. Memories of childhood travels, piling into the car winding through the mountains and stopping at picnic tables along the way.

Hop on a train, not a plane. Hit the road in a rental car, maybe a convertible, something new and exciting, stay in cabins or cottages rather than hotels. Listen to poets of the past, the master songwriters, Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, and Bob Dylan. Seek our country's glorious outdoors, picnic among a field of flowers, and soak in nature's healing vibes.

Broadening understanding

Ann Nelson



Walking around downtown San Diego with Megan and Ava (credit: Ann Nelson)

For me, travel is synonymous with freedom of movement, nature and adventure. While the shape of these qualities changed over the course of 2020, the desire to seek out the new or unfamiliar did not. Through the course of the year, I began to view flexibility and adaptability

as vehicles to deeper joy and contentment.

The option to travel feels even more valuable now. With this heightened appreciation, I want to bring more intentionality to my future plans. I once took it for granted and assumed that if I had enough funds and free time, I could go anywhere. 2020 opened my eyes to the limits of this thinking, and highlighted the many opportunities just outside my doorstep in San Diego.

I'm embracing the idea of slow travel this year. Days will be filled with short trips, undiscovered hikes and bike rides. Packing picnics and picking up food from local restaurants will replace dining inside. Supporting small businesses will be prioritized. Rather than flying or taking trains, I'll mostly be traveling by foot and car. I'm excited to discover new neighborhood paths with my dogs, Megan and Ava. I'm currently researching kayaking in nearby La Jolla and hiking in the historic mountain town of Julian, two activities I've always wanted to do. As I become more familiar with my immediate surroundings, I will broaden my understanding of what constitutes travel and exploration.

Embracing slow travel

Lori Tripoli



People will be choosing to vacation near lakes or rivers where it's easy to social distance (credit: M. Ciavardini)

For 2021, travelers are likely to look to places less traveled—at least I will be. I imagine they will begin to vacation as people did after the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic that lingered until 1920. People began escaping big cities like New York for pastoral lakeside destinations within driving distance or a train commute.

I'll likely be going a bit farther than that this year, but not much. Concerned about requirements to quarantine should a state line be crossed, travelers may limit themselves to road trips within their home states. I will, too. I am looking at destinations like Lake George, Lake Placid, and Old Forge, New York.

This year, I am also embracing “slow” travel. Rather than hopping from hotel to hotel and city to city, I'll choose one destination and stay there. Instead of getting up early and hitting every museum and attraction, I'll be kicking back, mostly limiting my forays beyond the grounds of whichever accommodation I choose. Reading plenty of books and getting healthy doses of fresh air and sunshine will be the primary entries on any vacation agenda. Likely choices for accommodation now are full-service resorts where social distancing will be easy.

Recognizing the privilege of travel

Gwen Pratesi



One of my most memorable travel moments was meeting Miss Ba, a conical haymaker in a small village along the Mekong River in Vietnam (credit: Gwen Pratesi)

While at home this past year since the pandemic began, I've been reminiscing about the places I've been fortunate to visit in my lifetime and dreaming about future travel to new destinations. This lockdown has made me even more thankful for the opportunities I've had in the past and regretful about the trips I've had to pass up over the years.

I realize now more than ever what a privilege it is to travel and think about the relative ease with which we used to move between destinations worldwide. I miss the personal connections I have made with many of the people I've met, and thankfully, staying in touch with many of them has been a blessing during this time.

When we can resume travel, especially internationally, things may look very different from our last overseas adventure. I expect that we'll see strict travel restrictions for flying and entering into countries, staying in hotels and sailing on cruises. In addition to other safety protocols, requirements will include proof of vaccinations and negative COVID tests.

I also believe that when we can embrace travel again, we will see more people taking those bucket list trips to far-flung destinations around the globe sooner rather than later. I think that traveling more and further from home will become a priority for many people because, as we

now know and have experienced during the pandemic, the ability and freedom to travel isn't a given. Travel is a privilege, and it can be taken away from us at any moment.

Pondering a new normal

Hilary Nangle



Watching daylight cede to nightfall aboard the Bella Degagnes, a hybrid cruise-container ship hopscotching the Lower North Shore communities along St. Lawrence River. (credit: Hilary Nangle)

Predicting travel's future is a crapshoot. The world has shifted. Over-tourism, sustainability, diversity awareness, respect for local residents, political events, climate change, even viral mutations all feed an evolving new normal. The words that keep popping up in tourism-related news releases and headlines: rethinking, redefining, restoring.

I don't expect to be boarding a plane anytime soon. Nor do I expect the Canadian border to open in the short term. As a Maine resident, I consider Quebec and Atlantic Canada my backyard, and it pains me not to be able to hop across the border and explore. Through late summer, I'll be researching a new edition of my Moon-series Coastal Maine guidebook — I update one of my three Maine titles annually. Beyond that, I'll be sharing Maine-related stories, ruminating about past trips, and rethinking previously written stories.

Pre-Covid-19, I often returned to a destination to dig deeper into its stories, get more off its beaten track, befriend locals who know it best, and experience the activities, food, and accommodations unique to it. I don't see that changing. Nor do I see curtailing travels to

new-to-me destinations. I do expect to travel with a lighter footprint and a better awareness of what tourism means to a destination; how it helps as well as harms.

Travel has the power to open minds, temper prejudices, overcome differences, and benefit communities. I envision its evolving new normal as recognizing and rectifying past wrongs while re-examining and building upon travel's power for the greater good.

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TRAVEL WRITERS SHARE THOUGHTS ABOUT TRAVEL IN 2021





We'd love to hear your thoughts on travel in 2021? (feel free to comment below)
