

Travel Time WITH CHASE & BUD

Last month I promised that my January column would cover everything you need to know about flying in 2021. Back then, the world of travel seemed on a fairly optimistic trajectory. New vaccines with incredible efficacy had arrived. All we had to do was vaccinate people. The early and mid-fall COVID-19 spread seemed at least potentially manageable as long as people masked up and restricted some activities.

Many of us who watch the travel world were thinking that flights around the world would approach normality by the end of March—and surely, surely in time for summer forays to Europe. We would have a few new protocols—testing, proof of vaccinations—but we'd be back on the move. Bud and I couldn't wait!

Alas, there have been setbacks. A new, more contagious coronavirus strain has emerged and is whisking around the world. Vaccinating a population has proven a daunting task. People's resistance to public health restrictions has exploded with the COVID-19 virus.

What has this done to industry predictions? Let me get a bit wonky. As of the third quarter, passenger arrivals in North America were down 48% over 2019. In Europe, they were down 70%. Airlines had been putting their aircraft in storage for months—17,000 worldwide, and over 1000 here in the US, many in the California desert, some on unused runways at larger airports. In addition, older aircraft slated for retirement in 2022-24 had their retirements pushed up to 2020 and 2021. Bottom line: demand cratered and, predictably, airlines reduced their available aircraft to try and mitigate the financial damage. The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest shock to world travel since WWII.

Travel Talk has a new name and a new look! We'll always include an image from our current or past travels.

It can be a bit of nostalgia for the world of travel as it used to be, but also perhaps inspiration for the world of travel as it evolves.

Next month: The best ways to travel do "virtual" travel.



Speaking of the old days in the air! Bud and I enjoyed a cocktail in Lufthansa's First Class section before the first leg of our 2012 trip to Egypt and Kenya. Flight attendants convert these seats into lie-flat beds, complete with designer bedding and comfy pajamas—all for maximum passenger comfort.

How to get out of this? The IATA (International Air Transportation Association, www.iata.org) has some thoughts. First, airlines are going to stay with what works for them. The big ones will concentrate on hub-to-hub—think JFK to Heathrow, not Charlotte to Gatwick. The smaller airlines will try and pick up point-to-point routes, say Allegiant adding some mid-west routes to smaller airports. Loads will be smaller, so prices will be higher, at least initially—some predictions are as much as 70% increase in business class and 20% in economy over last year. But with flights down, airports will be looking for business, so will be reducing access fees—which will reduce airline costs and open things up.

So what, you ask? Well, there is hope. The IATA makes the excellent point that normal international travel likely won't resume until the world can do testing without quarantine and have a speedy, secure digital means of vaccination verification. Makes so much sense. But this requires a global information infrastructure to manage border control requirements. Some of this exists—think passports, Global Entry, even International Driver Licenses.

I admit, I do love the idea of an IATA Travel Pass. Meantime, industry experts are saying that it will be Q 3 or Q 4 before the vaccine has a significant impact on air travel. Looking further ahead, their best guess of "normal" travel is 2024.

Here's what we all can do to speed things up. Follow CDC guidelines. Get vaccinated and carry proof. Check restrictions and requirements for your favorite airlines, your favorite destinations and always, always keep in touch with info at www.travel.state.gov.

As one of the few good things to come out of the pandemic, most airlines are eliminating change fees at all levels of travel. But note that if you do change your flights, you will likely have to pay any fare differential.

My last words this month—do take heart. This won't last forever.

BOW, SALEM AND *RIGHT TO KNOW*

If you don't think the First Amendment and the Right to Know law are key to an informed public, consider recent events in Bow and Salem. Bow residents have recently learned that 10 of the 11 officers of their police department voted no confidence in their police chief. They also learned that they paid a \$9,000 bill for an investigation into the matter. They further learned that town officials have refused to share the full report with the public that paid for it.

Residents should thank their weekly Bow Times newspaper for ferreting out this news, which had been discussed in a non-public session of the selectmen. As Bow Times publisher Chuck Douglas noted in an editorial, communications are in a bit of trouble in Bow. It took a tip to the press, along with the newspaper's right to know request, to bring the situation to light.

In Salem, the right to know request to ferret out pertinent information came from that town's manager. If it hadn't been filed, residents would still not know that two of their five selectmen used a non-public session to try to have that manager fired.

Apparently the two don't like the way Town Manager Christopher Dillon has been working to cooperate with the New Hampshire Attorney General in an ongoing probe of Salem's troubled police department.

The two selectmen were outvoted by their three colleagues. The AG's probe plods on. And in Salem's version of Gunsmoke, Manager Dillon still has his office.

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