

TRAVEL TALK: STAY LOCAL AND IN THE USA

by Chase Binder

I wrote my last column in the early days of June. We had just made the 1500-mile road trip from Cape Coral, Florida. After two long days on the road, carrying our own food/drink, masks, and disinfecting supplies, we got tested and were happy to be negative for COVID-19. Success!

Back then, we had positive thoughts about travel in the not terribly distant future. Perhaps a summer road trip to Canada. Perhaps quick fall trip to our timeshare in St. Maarten...or even to London if the fares were attractive.

Alas, the month of July brought devastating new levels of infections and deaths in the US. Suddenly (or so it seemed), Americans were not welcome in most countries in Europe. Shockingly, American tourists are now banned from almost 40 countries around the world—as far away as Cambodia and as close as Canada.

For most of us, easy and far-flung travel has come to a full stop. But while no one can predict when travel will return to “normal”, we can be sure it won’t be soon. Meanwhile, how can we adjust to this new world?

STAY IN THE USA

Bud and I have focused on foreign travel for years, saving domestic travel for when we got “old.” Ironically, while we’ve just hit our mid-70’s, we didn’t really consider ourselves old enough quite yet. Enter the virus. Now, we’re exploring not just what the USA has to offer, but also how to travel even within our own country.

Let’s start with the modes of travel. You can still drive, take a bus or train, or even fly to any other state in the union. Those of us lucky enough to live in NH (or New England, for that matter) don’t have to deal with as many of the self-quarantine mandates that can apply to those from virus “hot spots” like Florida or Texas. Still, this changes weekly if not daily, so check before your travel. Visit www.aarp.org for current state-by-state info.

More important is how to travel within the country safely.

Flying creates the most angst. Start by booking nonstop flights to avoid time in connecting airports. Have masks and wipes—and wipe down everything in your seat area, even though airlines have vastly improved cleaning regimens. Don’t stop with the tray table (top, bottom, arms). Do the seat back/top in front of you and the seat itself as long as it’s leather. Don’t forget the underside of the arms, the seatbelt buckle, and the seat pocket and safety cards—dirtiest stuff on the plane! TSA now allows 12 ounces of hand sanitizer, up from the 3 oz. limit. Bring it. Wear your mask. Wear your mask. Wear your mask. If you are asked to fill out a questionnaire on landing, do it.

As for USA destinations, don’t be surprised to see crowds. Folks are traveling closer to home...but they are still traveling. Do keep masking and disinfecting protocols in your mind. If a risk assessment tool will help you pick a destination, try the fascinating one designed by Georgia Tech at <https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu>. It’s a color-coded interactive map of the USA which gauges your risk of encountering a COVID-19 positive person if you attend a gathering of 10, 25, 50 or 100 or more people in each county. In a gathering of 25 in Merrimack County your chance of encountering an infected person is 4%. In Washington DC that risk is 29% and in Davidson County (Nashville, TN) the risk is 87%. This can inform your decisions to go to various attractions, restaurants, and events.

The New York Times also has an interactive travel tool at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/31/travel/coronavirus-travel-risk.html> which leads you through several decision trees to help you decide if and how you should travel. The detailed advice is based on CDC and State Department guidelines and includes discussions of buses and trains. Ignore it or not, you’ll know a lot more about specific risks to yourself and others—both important factors.

STAY IN NH OR NEW ENGLAND

We’re extremely fortunate to be living in the Northeast, where the coronavirus is under control right now. We can pop in our cars and take any number of day trips. Last week Bud and I loaded our Standard Poodles, Maggie and Millie, into



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the car and drove up to Lake Sunapee. The weather was perfect. We stopped at Fenton’s Landing (fentonslanding.com) for a fabulous Reuben sandwich and relaxed at a shady picnic table. Everyone was masked and distanced and we felt safe and surprisingly “normal.” We’ll be doing lots more of this—visiting our daughter in Vermont’s Mad River Valley (bringing our own picnic food/supplies and social distancing) and taking a run up to the Rangeley Lakes Region in Maine are on the list. Think about making your own list of local-ish spots. If you have family members or friends in your “bubble,” why not make a day of it? We find Google maps, right on our phones, easiest for finding restaurants that might be dog-friendly, mountain-view, lakeside or whatever.

STAY AT HOME

I’ll admit it. Some days it’s a chore to even move. The uncertainty and sadness can weigh on us. That’s when we’ll escape into some virtual travel. There’s always Travel Channel and National Geographic but try www.explore.org for live webcams of everything from underwater reefs to mountain gorillas. I love the bears catching salmon in Alaska! It’s also fun to re-live some of our favorite travel. Bud has been videotaping our trips since our first forays to Europe...back in the early 1990’s when big hair and huge shoulder pads ruled. The videos are hoot and bring back great memories.

If you don’t have videos of your trips—or want to dream—stream some Rick Steves or just Google “travel videos Hawaii, Tuscany” ... wherever you’ve been or want to go. We are loving the Smithsonian Channel’s “Mighty Trains” series, stunning video tours of train tours from Canada’s Rocky Mountaineer to India’s Maharaja Express and more. We’ve also enjoyed watching movies and TV series that have been filmed in our favorite places. Casino Royale in the Czech Republic; the Netflix series Wanted in Australia and New Zealand.

For daily travel-related diversions, my favorites are the compelling and informative newsletters from Travel and Leisure (www.travelandleisure.com) and the travel quizzes at www.traveltrivia.com.



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