

# Travel Time WITH CHASE & BUD

Let's say you can't resist the urge to squeeze in some international travel over the next few months. Perhaps you have got COVID-19 fatigue. Perhaps you have a friend or relative living abroad. Perhaps the political and cultural climate in our diverse and complicated country has you tearing your hair out. Where can you go? What countries are even open to American tourists?

The answer is complex and requires significant attention to detail. And, of course, by the time you read this, the answers may have changed. So, I'll sketch out some current (as of early December) information and also explain how to stay up to date on which countries are open/closed.

First, if you are doing any research, you see the terms "open, partially open, opening soon, and closed" often. Seems easy, but it's not—with the exception of "closed" which means just forget about it and applies only to a handful of countries like Argentina, Venezuela, Afghanistan, and Thailand. The other categories vary so widely in definition, restrictions, and requirements that your best advice is to research each country individually. A good place to start is [www.kayak.com/travel-restrictions](http://www.kayak.com/travel-restrictions), a color-coded interactive map that is updated daily. Click on a country and up pops very detailed info – updated daily. You'll find that the term "open" does not mean it's restriction-free (with the exception of Brazil - but who

would go there now?), just that US citizens aren't completely banned.

What kind of restrictions are we talking about? While virtually no two countries are alike, some common themes are emerging. Some, like St. Maarten and many other Caribbean countries, now require you to fill out an online embarkation/debarkation form—a bit like a visa. You need to give all the expected ID (name, passport number, etc.) but also specific in-country location info (think contact tracing) as well as proof of a negative COVID-19 test with a certain time period (often 72 hours). In addition, many require proof of health insurance to cover you for COVID-19 treatment. And now that we have vaccines

on the horizon, we'll no doubt see a requirement for proof of vaccination on the horizon.

Countries that do not have this online capability normally have embarkation/debarkation forms that must be filled out and submitted to passport control on entry. It's best to have official copies of any and all tests/vaccines/insurance with you, and I suggest multiple copies. I always travel with multiple copies of my passport's picture page.

And here is where you need to really dig into the details. Some countries require specific kinds of tests. The absolute best place to find that level of detail is on the country's official tourism website—not that of the tour company, the airline, or the resort. You might even print out the appropriate page from the official website.

The other type of restriction that can impact your trip is the requirement to quarantine on arrival. Some countries in Europe



In late 2012 President Obama became the first US President to visit Myanmar (formerly Burma). Bud and I followed a few weeks later, among the first US tourists to explore the country in 50 years. The country was fascinating, a unique Asian culture with remnants of British colonial rule here and there. Lake Inle, the second largest lake in Myanmar, was especially interesting for its many floating villages and temples—all built on stilts. Residents even grow their produce in large floating blocks of sod.

Francisco, LAX. Types of tests, costs and protocols vary, so work on this well in advance of your trip.

Now, suppose things happen when you are abroad? Having travel insurance that will get you home (repatriation clause, hopefully to your home port) will help as will medical travel insurance (Medicare Supplement Plans F, G and N provide some foreign travel coverage). But you'll also want to register your trip with the STEP program (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, <https://step.state.gov>) which lets the State Department know where you are.

And speaking of government agencies with the mission to protect US citizens, don't forget to check travel advice/info on the CDC website ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) as well as the State Department website (<https://travel.state.gov>), which also has links to country embassies.

Now, as you are contemplating your trip abroad, be aware that mask-wearing and social distancing are approached quite differently outside of the US. Most countries consider it a requirement and a social courtesy, not a political statement. As travel in non-COVID-19 times, we Americans do best when we respect local culture and customs.

Is all this too much trouble? It's a personal choice, but I would say no, definitely not. For one thing, this is the way travel will be for a long time. Perhaps forever. It means more attention to details, documents, and protocols, but for those of us itching to get back out and see the world? We can live with it!



Up in the mountains of Myanmar, roads are built by hand — and by elderly women.

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: Everything you need to know about flying during COVID-19.