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# The Future of Travel

How the industry will change after the pandemic.

By every measure, the coronavirus pandemic has decimated the travel industry.

The images of the world's shutdown are eerie, the numbers are staggering. Approximately 100 million travel sector jobs, according to one global estimate, have been eliminated or will be. Passenger traffic on U.S. airlines is down 95 percent compared to last year, while international passenger revenues are expected to decrease by more than \$300 billion. Domestic hotel occupancy rates fell off a cliff and now hover around 25 percent.

Regions and countries are beginning to open up, but the outbreak will undoubtedly change how we think, act and travel, at least in the short term.

“The pandemic is going to fade slowly, with aftereffects, a lot of which will be psychological,” said Frank Farley, a Temple University psychology professor and the former president of the American Psychological Association. “There’s so much uncertainty the average folk might want to know everything about travel,” he said. “What’s the escape hatch? What are the safety issues?”

Yet the desire to travel will not go away: [In a recent survey by Skift Research](#), the research arm of the travel trade publication, one-third of Americans said they hope to travel within three months after restrictions are lifted.

To learn how the landscape might change, we talked to dozens of experts, from academics to tour operators to airport architects. Across the board, they highlighted issues of privacy and cleanliness and the push-pull of people wanting to see the world while also wanting to stay safe. Here, answers to 14 of the most pressing questions about travel's future.

Tour Operators

## Will travelers sign up? ■

The logistical ease of group tours comes with a trade-off: traveling with strangers.

“I certainly appreciate the paradox: There is safety in numbers, there is risk in numbers,” said Jennifer Tombaugh, the president of [Tauck](#), a high-end tour and cruise company. One solution, Ms. Tombaugh said, will be smaller groups with lower guest-to-guide ratios — a trend that had already been predicted to rise, pre-pandemic, by the [United States Tour Operators Association](#).

Debra Asberry, the founder and president of [Women Traveling Together](#), which runs affordably priced small-group tours for women over 50, expects the national parks trips to rebound first, just as they did after 9/11.

“It really saved us in 2002, and we think the same thing's going to happen here: We'll have a much heavier emphasis on domestic tourists, especially into the first half of 2021,” Ms. Asberry said.

After being cooped up for months, tour-goers may gravitate toward wellness experiences. “If 2020 proves to be a year we spend a lot of time indoors, 2021 will be about getting outdoors and getting active, with tours centered around things like cycling, trekking and mindfulness,” said James Thornton, chief executive of [Intrepid Travel](#), which runs tours on all seven continents.

And overtourism, an industrywide concern, has renewed importance. “Ten years ago, people wanted crowded markets and big, well-known cities,” said Bruce Poon Tip, founder of [G Adventures](#), a community-tourism-focused tour company whose eight-day trips range from \$650 to \$3,200 per person. “Now there’s a real push for tours in Antarctica, the Galápagos, Mongolia and Tibet — all wide, open spaces.”

Exactly when and where touring resumes will depend upon several factors, including travel advisories and consumer confidence, particularly about developing countries with insufficient medical care.

“We want to make sure that we can do this in a way that allows guests to be present and soak in all they’ve desired to experience,” Ms. Tombaugh said.

— SARAH FIRSHEIN

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/06/travel/coronavirus-travel-questions.html>