



Travelers looking for a pod to travel alongside this summer are in luck: group tour operations in the United States and beyond are returning after a year on pause due to the [coronavirus](#) pandemic. Operators are beginning to announce full resumptions of their U.S. departures, both international and domestic, as well as expanded U.S. domestic offerings, as vaccinations ramp up for Americans. And as some tourism-dependent destinations welcome inoculated American travelers back, some tour companies are even restarting their international trips.

Tour companies [Tauck](#) and [EF Go Ahead Tours](#), both of which offer guided trips across all seven continents, announced last week their departures would return this April and May, respectively. [Intrepid Travel](#) and [REI Adventures](#) have also broadened their U.S. domestic offerings for this summer to appeal to those not yet ready to leave the country for a getaway. Tauck has already begun its [resumption of group departures](#) via trips to Georgia and South Carolina, with New Orleans tours to follow; the company expects all of its U.S. tour offerings to be running again by July 1. On the international front, EF's Go Ahead is planning international departures to Costa Rica and Iceland beginning in May, with its U.S. National Parks offerings also resuming next month.

Some returning tours have already been through test runs: Tauck's decision to restart its U.S. offerings was determined following the success of several January and February departures of its *Yellowstone in Winter* itinerary.

"Guests told us they loved their tours, and their positive feedback proved conclusively that we can deliver a true Tauck-level experience while still following all of the appropriate health and safety protocols," Tauck CEO Dan Mahar said in a statement.

The U.S. has seen faster vaccination rates than other popular destinations like Europe, despite the recent reopening of Greece to *vaccinated Americans* and plans for *France to do the same* this summer. Tauck, which is resuming only its U.S. tours, surveyed customers and found that 95 percent of respondents were already at least partially vaccinated against the coronavirus.

To meet that increased demand stateside, REI and Canada/Australia-based Intrepid Travel are expanding their U.S. offerings. Following a 28 percent spike in domestic-trip interest, REI Adventures has launched 19 new itineraries, including a seven-day *Capitol Reef & Escalante Hiking* and a six-day *Arches & Canyonlands Hiking* trip. Intrepid's U.S. options now include a *Zion ranch stay* and an *Alaska adventure*, both of which sold out for February 2021 and prompted more departures for each to be added for the remainder of the year.

Tour operators are also enacting health protocols to reduce the risk of travelers getting COVID-19, including smaller group sizes, required pre-trip testing, and social distancing measures throughout the journey, although measures vary from company to company. Assistance for those who do test positive are also increasingly being included in bookings: For example, Go Ahead's *Covid Care Promise* guarantees included support for any quarantine meals, lodging, translation needs, and health services if and when any traveler tests positive for COVID-19 abroad.

The strategy to avoid that scenario? Creating small, COVID-free pods. Group limits that typically reached anywhere from a dozen to more than 40 travelers, depending on the company, are being scaled down. Go Ahead's previous group size of up to 38 has been slashed to 10 to 22 travelers; *G Adventures*, which has group departures scheduled for late April, previously capped at 12 to 16 travelers, but will no longer group more than 12 participants. *Exodus Travels*, which has scheduled departures for this summer, also reduced its group size to cap departures at 10 travelers or fewer.

These size caps are likely why tours are selling out fast: EF reports that many near-term Go Ahead trips are sold out, with demand for late-2021 tours mounting now. Booking early is the solution for most people with vaccinations scheduled and a return to travel in mind for the busy summer months.

<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/after-a-year-on-pause-group-tours-are-back-and-already-selling-out>