



World Travel is Back, But Not Without Challenges

While international travel has experienced a steady recovery for fully-vaccinated travelers, the CDC announcement last week eliminating COVID tests for returning American travelers should boost leisure travel this year beyond levels not seen since 2019.

I recently met one-on-one with more than 50 travel partners, ranging from cruise lines to tour operators, from destination management companies to hotel and villa representatives. The overwhelming consensus: international travel is back but not without a variety of issues requiring patience.

Please let me share a few insights gleaned from those meetings:

- The average price of airline tickets is higher today than it has been since 2007 and, given the current administration's energy policies, you can expect airline tickets to increase even more as we get deeper into 2022. The message: if you are planning travel any time in the next 10 months or so, now's the time to purchase your tickets before they cost even more.

[Tip: Many cruise lines offer bulk air at reduced pricing versus published air prices; so, price air for cruises both ways.]

- While Europe remains the number one destination for international travel this year – particularly London, Paris, Rome, and Athens – special travel values are still available. At the same time, many American travelers are opting for smaller cities and destinations in more remote regions: Cinque Terre, Italy; Lyon, France; and Porto, Portugal, for example.

[Tip: I recommend travel to the Continent during the fall shoulder season with fewer crowds and milder weather. You also can find availability and outstanding pricing for various river cruise itineraries in November and December. Meanwhile, the strength of the U.S. dollar may make travel to Europe a better value than domestic travel despite the higher cost of air.]

- If you consider yourself an explorer, you may wish to investigate several travel options available on new luxury ships cruising to remote destinations such as the Gallipolis Islands, the Antarctic and several other remote destinations around the world. Most of these new builds are small ships accommodating fewer than 700 guests.



The five villages along Italy's Cinque Terre coast are a great spot to escape big city masses but these beaches get crowded, too.

- Should you desire a different cruise experience, I would recommend a luxury canal barge cruise in the Burgundy region of southern France. In fact, as few as four to six couples might consider chartering an entire boat for a leisurely cruise that plunges you into the local culture. While ocean liners typically travel at 20 miles per hour and riverboats at about 10 mph, canal boats will cover only about three miles an hour.
- Multi-generational travel has become quite popular since the pandemic subsided. Increasingly, parents are being left at home, while grandparents create special travel memories for the grandchildren.

[Tip: I highly recommend contemporary cruise ships for such travel and, given its onboard kids' programs, Royal Caribbean represents the best option for family cruise travel.]

- Look for increasing opportunities for cruising American rivers and the Great Lakes. It's possible to cruise the length of the Mississippi River, for example, from Minnesota to New Orleans but I recommend a shorter Memphis-to-New Orleans itinerary with a couple of days in Memphis pre-cruise (a great itinerary created for Elvis fans).
- Major cruise lines have all of their ships back in service and are offering special pricing for Caribbean cruises the second half of 2022. Most ships are sailing at about 75 percent of capacity or higher, so wait until school's back in session or elect a premium or deluxe cruise brand.

[Tip: Current pricing for Oceania and Azamara small ships carrying fewer than 700 guests is outstanding but selling out quickly, especially for 2022 and 2023 itineraries.]

I alluded earlier to issues requiring patience on the part of travelers this year and potentially beyond. If you tried to contact a travel supplier recently, you undoubtedly experienced a long hold time. The entire travel industry remains understaffed and cannot fill vacant positions quickly enough. Airlines struggling to find pilots and flight crews, for example, have consolidated, delayed or canceled thousands of flights already this year and the situation does not seem to be improving.

Hotels and resorts also remain understaffed, so you may have to request daily room service and fresh towels, traditionally taken for granted. Meanwhile, checking into a hotel has become a "touchless" process. In fact, you may be requested to check-in in advance much the way you do when checking-in for a flight.

As the summer wears on and the number of travelers continues to increase, realize these issues will grow as well. So, stay calm, enjoy the fact we can travel again and never leave home without travel insurance. Stuff happens as we travel, and in the post-COVID environment it will happen more frequently. Stay safe and stay happy!

Yours in Travel,



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