

Chowhound

Is It Safe to Travel This Summer?

There's a lot to consider, and special care you need to take if you do decide to go.

BY KELLY MAGYARICS JULY 26, 2020



*Amid the ongoing **coronavirus pandemic**, a whole host of COVID travel concerns come into play. So it is safe to travel this summer?*

Quarantine fatigue couldn't come at a worse time. The lazy, hazy days of **summer** are when we dream of packing the car—or packing for a flight—to take up outdoor pursuits at the beach, pool, lake, or mountains; sip sunset **cocktails** at a rooftop bar in our favorite city; or explore a new locale. But COVID-19 has completely upended travel, and even those of us who have perpetual wanderlust are a bit hesitant these days to venture beyond our front door. So is traveling this summer a good idea? We talked to professionals in the medical field and hospitality industry about the measures to take (or look for) to reassure you during your stay. Read on and decide if you want to stay put—or go for it.

Weigh the Risks & Take Necessary Precautions

First of all, deciding whether or not to take a summer sojourn is not a one-size-fits-all decision, says Dr. Nadeen White, who practices pediatric medicine and is the travel blogger behind the site [The Sophisticated Life](#). "If you reside in an area that has a high number of COVID-19 cases like areas in Florida, Arizona, and Texas you should consider the fact that while traveling and interacting with others you may unknowingly spread the disease to others," she points out. "If you travel to one of these areas, you could become infected and return home and spread it to others." If you are elderly, deal with a chronic illness like asthma or heart disease or are undergoing cancer treatments you are in a high risk category and also might want to reconsider venturing this season.

"I tell people it is possible to travel, relatively safely but to remember that we are still knee deep in a pandemic and specific steps are required to minimize your risk," says physician and scientist Dr. William Li, author of the book ["Eat to Beat Disease: The New Science of How Your Body Can Heal Itself."](#)

"It's pretty simple: **wear a face mask**, maintain social distance from people outside of your own bubble, wash your hands frequently... avoid enclosed spaces, big crowds, and close-range conversation."


Related Reading: [The Best Places to Buy Face Masks Online](#) | [The Best Places to Buy Face](#)

No matter where you go or your method of traveling, you'll want to tote comfortable masks since you'll be wearing them often. Consider several per member of your group as they'll need to be **cleaned** because of sweat, sunscreen, and dirt.

Spunkwear masks are made of spandex, which is stretchy and wicks moisture away from your mouth; the company's owner and founder Sheilah Ruppert calls them "breathable and less intrusive, especially in the heat." They are also machine-washable. Another good option are the fitted face masks by **SwaddleDesigns**. Designed by a nurse, they are made with 100 percent 180-thread count cotton, adjustable bendable nose pieces, and soft, round ear elastics. They are available in medium and large.

There are many places to **buy masks online**, of course; Chowhound sister site CNET has information on **mask myths** and the **best mask materials** (something tight-knit is ideal).

Hotels



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At Hyatt, the safety and security of our colleagues and guests is always a top priority. Guided by our purpose of care and following medical expert guidance to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, beginning Monday, July 27, all Hyatt hotels in the U.S. and Canada will require face coverings within indoor public areas.

Hyatt will continue to closely monitor the situation as well as local government mandates and consider expanding this mandate to other regions.

For more information on Hyatt's face coverings requirements, visit the link in bio.

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Catherine Hawkins, director of sales and marketing for the **InterContinental Washington, D.C.—The Wharf** believes guests expect a clean environment to mitigate the spread of the virus coupled with the high level of service and hospitality they have come to expect. “Guests are most concerned about their health and safety; after having been in their homes for months they are excited yet cautious to be out in public and exploring again,” she says. Parent company **IHG**'s Way of Clean program was updated as of June 1, 2020 and properties are working alongside the IHG Global Cleanliness Board of Experts to implement new initiatives like a shift from valet to self-park, social distancing at the front desk, check-in amenities including hand sanitizer and gloves, and all employees donning PPE.

In Charlottesville, Virginia, **Quirk Hotel**, part of the **Destination Hotels** brand of boutique properties around the country under the **Hyatt** umbrella, also has similar practices in place. General Manager Matthew Brink sees cleanliness and a hotel's open spaces to be at the forefront of guests' concerns. Their strict sanitization protocol complies with the Hyatt Global Care & Cleanliness Commitment and evolves according to WHO and CDC guidance, with social distancing guidelines in public areas and altered food and beverage service along with touches like signature pink face masks to stay on-brand.

Before booking a room at any hotel or resort, call ahead and speak to the hotel manager to confirm the additional steps management is taking, Dr. Li advises. Look for touchless check-in and room card keys to minimize contact, a “cushion time” of at least a few days in-between putting guests in the same room so any trace of the virus dies off and inquire about cleaning processes. “If you are not satisfied with the answers choose another hotel, don't compromise on your own safety.”

He also suggests bringing your own cleaning supplies or purchasing them on the way to the hotel; as soon as you are in your room don gloves and wipe every surface down with a **disinfectant**.

Lessen contact with staff and others by eschewing or minimizing housekeeping, asking room service trays to be left outside your door, wearing a mask in all public spaces, and practicing elevator etiquette. "Ride alone or only with people in your own bubble," says Dr. Li. "If the elevator has other people, wait for the next empty one and if the one you are riding in stops at a floor with other people trying to get on, ask them if they would not mind waiting for the next one. It is for their and your safety."

Vacation Rentals

If the idea of staying in a hotel or resort with exposure to lots of other guests and employees (even from a distance of six feet) has you a little skittish, a home or villa rental could be a fitting alternative. Stiles Bennet, president of **WIMCO Villas** (West Indies Management Company) touts the villa experience as offering amenities like pools, living and dining areas, and access to beaches and other attractions while allowing guests to maintain distance from others if desired. WIMCO rents out luxury villas in the Caribbean as well as Europe, Mexico and U.S. locations like Big Sky, Nantucket, Taos, and Palm Springs.

"We suggest choosing vacation destinations that are more wide open this year, places where you normally would not encounter crowds," Bennet says, "That could mean renting a house in the Rocky Mountains at a place like Sun Valley or Big Sky, or vacationing on a small island like St. John or St. Barts, or if you really want to splurge, vacationing on a private island." The company has implemented contactless arrivals and concierge service, revised villa housekeeping and cleaning protocols and is providing information to educate and inform would-be vacationers so there are fewer surprises along the way. No matter the rental company selected, villas can generally be pre-stocked with groceries, reducing or eliminating the need to **shop**. Since they have full kitchens and dining areas it's also easy to have meals delivered or order takeout.

We know that's not an option for many, though; in that case, local vacation area rentals can be a great option if lockdowns have been lifted.

If you rent through a more conventional vacation property management company, your home away from home will almost surely have a kitchen, so make a meal plan and thorough shopping list before you go. See our tips for [grocery shopping during the pandemic](#) for more advice, and our guide on [how to cook in a rental kitchen](#) as well. When you get there, you may wish to follow the hotel cleaning procedures outlined above as an extra precaution.

Related Reading: [How to Safely Make Your Own Disinfectant & One Thing You Should Never Do](#)

Road Trips

Road-tripping has become more popular this summer and hotel brands are answering this concern with itineraries that build-in stays at several of their locations. [Pacifica Hotels](#) recently launched a California Road Trip promotion running until September 30, 2020. Guests can customize their own journey based on recommendations and California residents can receive 30 percent off their stays. One suggested itinerary lets the adventurous traveler surf and stay at San Diego's Blue Sea Beach Hotel, have rooftop cocktails overlooking L.A. from The Wayfarer DTLA, fish and bar-hop at the Hotel Hermosa, and stroll to winery tasting rooms, shops, and art galleries at The Kinney SLO in San Luis Obispo; others appeal to couples seeking a romantic getaway, [wine lovers](#), or families. Pacifica Hotels has added more stringent procedures in the COVID-19 via the Pacifica Pure Stay program including deep cleaning, social distancing, [face masks](#), and hand sanitizer for guests, and contactless check-out available via text messaging.

Even if you are hitting the open road and staying with family once you arrive (or perhaps sleeping in an RV during a round-trip itinerary), you'll want to stay safe en route, White says. It's key to interact with as few people as possible. "Bring your own **snacks** and **water** so you can reduce stops along the way," she notes. "Be aware that many public restrooms have been closed, [so] map out your route in advance and check to see which rest areas or shopping centers will have bathroom access [and] bring your own toilet paper and wipes to use." Keep your tank filled, Dr. Li says, and when you have to pump wear gloves and remember to wash your hands or use hand sanitizer right afterwards. Don't forget your masks.

Air Travel



Undoubtedly, **flying** right now brings with it the most anxiety and justified concerns. **Many countries and regions of the world remain closed** to those with a U.S. passport, leading travelers to seek out more domestic flights. Still air travel in the U.S. still remains down almost 80 percent. U.S. airlines are taking extraordinary measures including **mandatory face coverings, enhanced cleanings** and **health acknowledgements** to get travelers in the air again, according to Katherine Estep, communications director for **Airlines for America**, a trade association that represents U.S. airlines. All A4A carriers (Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Hawaiian Airlines, JetBlue Airways, Southwest Airlines, and United Airlines) have a face-covering requirement and have consequences for those who are noncompliant. Many airlines have implemented intensive cleaning protocols including electrostatic cleaning and fogging and are working to sanitize cocktails, cabins, and key touch points like tray tables, armrests, seatbelts, buttons, vents, handles, and lavatories.

If you decide to travel by air, TSA is allowing passengers to bring one 12-ounce bottle of **hand sanitizer** through the security checkpoint. Despite all the precautions, Dr. Li believes an airline cabin is too enclosed of a space to avoid close contact with people for long periods of time, so he isn't flying right now. But if you choose to, he advises to wear a mask or goggles (airlines like Qatar are even requiring face shields right now). "Sit by a window to be as far away from people in and across the aisle as possible, and ask the airline in advance if you can be seated next to an empty middle seat," he says. "Don't use the tray table, avoid using the bathroom if you can, bring your own food and don't drink alcohol on the flight." If possible, choose a seat in business or first class which inherently has more room built in to spread out.

Camping



Finally, **camping** is having its moment, as the idea of bringing your own accommodation, **cooking your own food**, and sleeping out in a wide open space has definite appeal to those who want to travel but remain with their own family unit. Sites like **HipCamp**, **Reserve America**, and **GlampingHub** offer stays no matter if you prefer to rough it, glamp, or something in-between. Still, do your research and select a site that's less crowded—and don't forget the gloves, masks, wipes, and cleaners so you can stay safe under the stars.