

Travel in the COVID world – is there a way to stay on the move?

John and Tara Newby bought a van, converted it into a place they could eat and sleep, and set off in search of adventure.

By The Travel Magazine - Sep 4, 2020



Travelling in a converted van and stopping to enjoy alpine views in Austria

You must stay at home" Boris utters five crushing words, and that's it; eight flights cancelled, hotel bookings doomed and the supermarkets run out of toilet rolls. A new normal we are told, well, it doesn't feel very normal to me.

There are 193 countries in this wonderful world of ours, on seven continents. I have been fortunate enough to visit 163 of them, and the plan is to visit all 193, so when Boris told me that I must stay at home, it came as, well... a bit of a blow.

Let's be clear from the start, COVID-19 has been horrible, and I fully agree that being socially responsible comes first, however, I couldn't help but feel that there must be opportunity hidden in the doom and gloom.

And so, this is our story: Today is the 4th of September, and we're sat on a ferry departing Helsinki, Finland, heading to Tallinn, Estonia. At the beginning of June, the UK lockdown restrictions started to ease, and since then my wife and I have travelled to 10 European countries including alpine Austria, and counting, in our self converted camper van.



“In Finland for example, there hasn’t been a mask in sight..... The Finns are confused by the concept”

Not every country in Europe has been like Finland. Since leaving the UK two months ago, we have been on the road, watching the news, reading daily COVID reports and guiding ourselves toward safer destinations, and of course, wherever possible, some sunshine.

Belgium required us to wear masks even before the UK had concluded procrastinations regarding the value of them. It felt sensible to us, Belgium isn't Finland and it's a tricky business to stay 2 meters apart. Belgium may have felt busy, but places like Brugge, a normally packed tourist town, were empty, allowing for relaxing strolls, finding a table for supper was easy and

queuing for a waffle took 2 minutes instead of half a day. COVID stopped most flights, and almost all long-haul flights. Travelling to far-flung regions of the world to pick up my last 30 countries feels like a pipe dream for the foreseeable. Sorry Saudi Arabia, thanks for the new visa, but not today.

This meant if I wanted to travel I needed to look closer to home. Having already travelled to every European country several times, the thought of more Euro-trashing didn't inspire me much, so I started looking at places that had made it onto the "I will get there one day" list. Turns out, there's quite a lot of them.

I'm now on a mission to revisit every European country, but this time, nudge into the corners, take advantage of the quiet tourist hotspots and most importantly, with no long haul flights in sight, take my time to enjoy it. And, with a new African wife who hasn't seen much of Europe, I'm now a tour guide and tourist.

And let me tell you the real sweet spot of travel during a pandemic. Standing alone on the insta-famous cliff edge called Pulpit Rock, usually heaving with tourists, we looked out towards a mind-bendingly beautiful Norwegian wilderness and had only our thoughts for company. How's that for social distancing.



Disneyland and Other California Theme Parks Get Rules for Reopening

Large parks must be in the state's "yellow" tier for economic recovery, with the virus largely contained, which could be a long wait.

By Tariro Mzezewa
Oct. 20, 2020



Disneyland, in Anaheim, Calif., has been closed since March. Credit...David Mcnew/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

California health officials issued long-awaited guidance for reopening theme parks in the state on Tuesday, setting targets for when attractions like Disneyland Resort, in Anaheim, and Universal Studios Hollywood, in Los Angeles, can open their doors. For the big parks, it could be a long road: their counties must reach the least-restrictive "yellow" tier of the state's four-tier Covid-19 economic-reopening plan.

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In terms of coronavirus cases, Orange County, home to Disneyland, is currently in the "red," or second, tier and Los Angeles County, Universal Studios' location, is currently in the most restrictive "purple" tier. It could be months before either county meets the guidelines for the "yellow" tier, which requires there be fewer than one

case a day per 100,000 residents and a testing positivity rate of less than 2 percent. The parks have been closed since March.

The secretary of California's Health and Human Services Agency, Dr. Mark Ghaly, issued the guidelines in a video conference on Tuesday and said that he believes that the tier guidelines can be reached. He said that San Francisco County had already met them.

"There's lots of work we can do together — both state, local, business leaders, community leaders, individuals — to do what we can to make sure that we reduce transmission throughout our county and there is a path forward there," Dr. Ghaly said. "We do not know when, but we do know how, and I think we'll continue to put in the hard work to get us there one county at a time."



However, Disneyland Resort's president, Ken Potrock, said in a statement that the guidelines are "arbitrary" and "unworkable."

"We have proven that we can responsibly reopen, with science-based health and safety protocols strictly enforced at our theme park properties around the world," Mr. Potrock said. "Nevertheless, the State of California continues to ignore this fact, instead mandating arbitrary guidelines that it knows are unworkable and that hold us to a standard vastly different from other reopened businesses and state-operated facilities."

When parks do reopen, they will have to implement a reservation system allowing guests to book visits ahead of time. They will also have to screen guests for symptoms and mandate masks everywhere inside the park, except when people are eating and drinking. Larger parks, like Disneyland and Universal Studios Hollywood, will have to limit capacity to 25 percent.

Smaller parks in California can reopen when they reach the third or "orange" tier. They will be allowed to have up to 25 percent capacity or 500 guests, depending on which number is less, and only people from the park's home county will be allowed to visit.

Disney World, the company's Orlando, Fla., park, reopened in July with strict social distancing and capacity requirements and there have been no major outbreaks of the coronavirus associated with the park. But low attendance has led the company to start layoffs there. The pandemic has cut off many of Disney's lines of business, including films, theater productions and cruises. Disneyland generated an estimated \$3.8 billion in revenue last year, according to

Michael Nathanson, a media analyst. On Monday, a coalition of unions representing thousands of workers at Disneyland told California Gov. Gavin Newsom that it is generally satisfied with the health measures laid out by the company for operating safely.

