



# Traveling post-coronavirus: How do you book your next trip when so much remains uncertain?

Christopher Elliott | Special to USA TODAY  
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Now what?

That's the question keeping tour operators like Phyllis Stoller up at night. "How do you make travelers feel safe booking their next vacation?" she wonders.

She's considering limiting group sizes, avoiding buffets and bringing an endless supply of masks and hand sanitizers on her trips. Stoller, who is president of The Women's Travel Group, says the changes will be expensive but worth it.

## How to plan a vacation after the virus

A survey by Overseas Leisure Group, a luxury travel operator, suggests that 72% of Americans are already making plans for their next vacation, and a surprising 35% would consider a vacation as early as this summer.

Leisure travelers will be back, says Michael Sheridan, an assistant professor of tourism and hospitality management at Temple University.

"But they will be more cautious," he predicts. "People will choose road trips over flights. They'll book a chain hotel with their brand standards of cleanliness and hygienic conditions, instead of an Airbnb."

**Airbnb to issue cleaning recommendations:** Guidelines include 24 hours between rentals

So how do you book a vacation after the pandemic? Very carefully, according to experts and travelers who are doing it. Do your research and consult a professional before choosing the time and place.

**Life after coronavirus:** Ready to travel as soon as it's safe? So is everyone else

## When to plan a vacation after COVID-19



President Trump said coronavirus won't be coming back in the fall, but Dr. Fauci believes otherwise, contradicting the president's statements.

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The first rule of booking a trip after the pandemic: Wait until it's safe.

Three things have to happen.

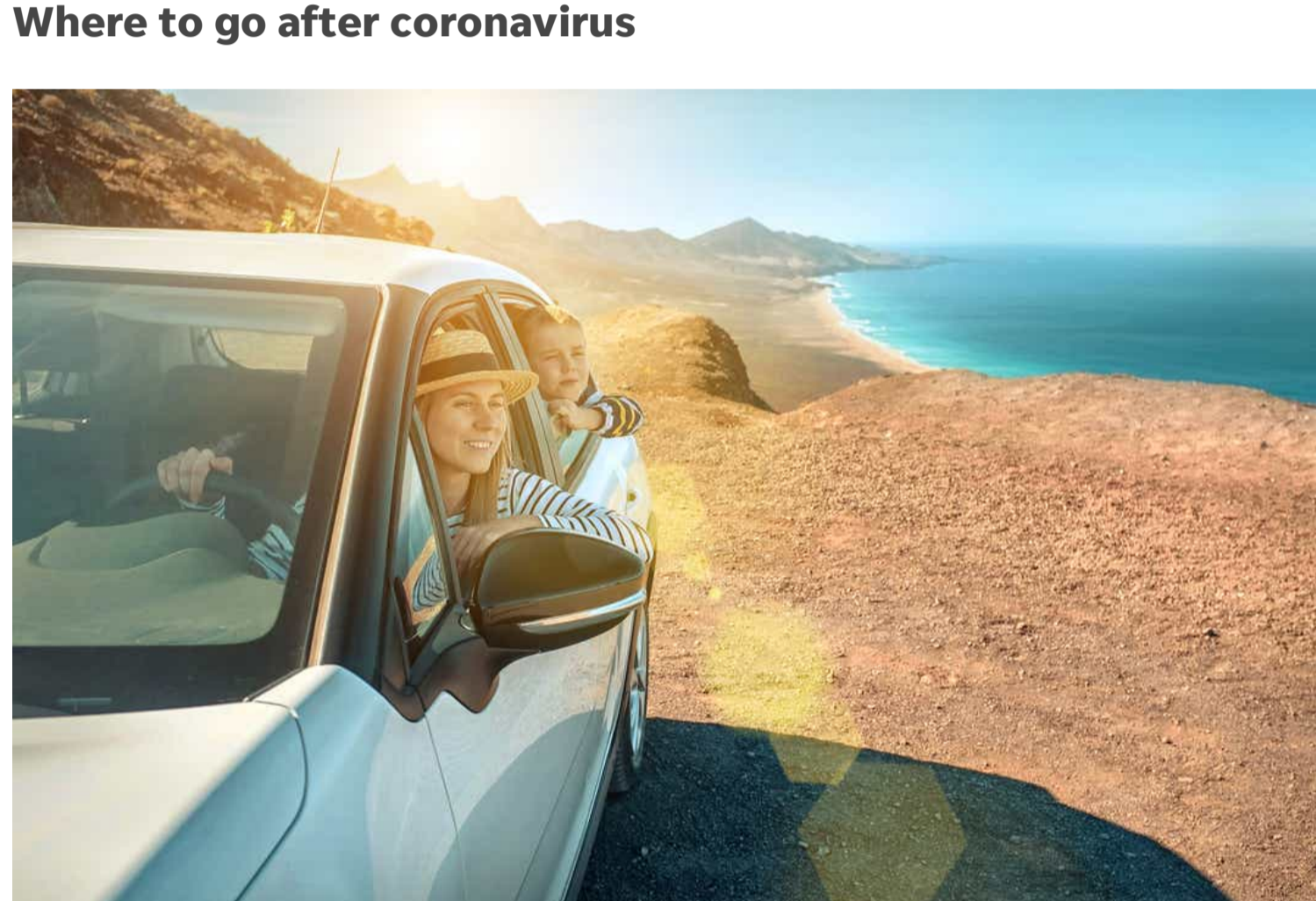
First, the State Department must lift its Level 4 travel advisory. Second, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has to give the "all clear." And finally, the World Health Organization needs to give a thumbs-up to travel.

"It's very difficult to make predictions on where and when it will be safe to travel again," says Betsy Ball, co-founder of Euro Travel Coach. "Making sure that the information you use to make recommendations is legitimate and objective is essential."

And not to get too political; this is one decision you'll probably want to leave to the medical experts. Elected officials have their reasons for wanting to open their states or countries when they do, and they may not always have your health in mind.

**Planning for life after coronavirus:** When will we know it's safe to travel again?

## Where to go after coronavirus



"People are likely to be more comfortable in a controlled car environment that allows for more flexibility," says Kathy McCarthy, a spokeswoman for Meet Minneapolis.

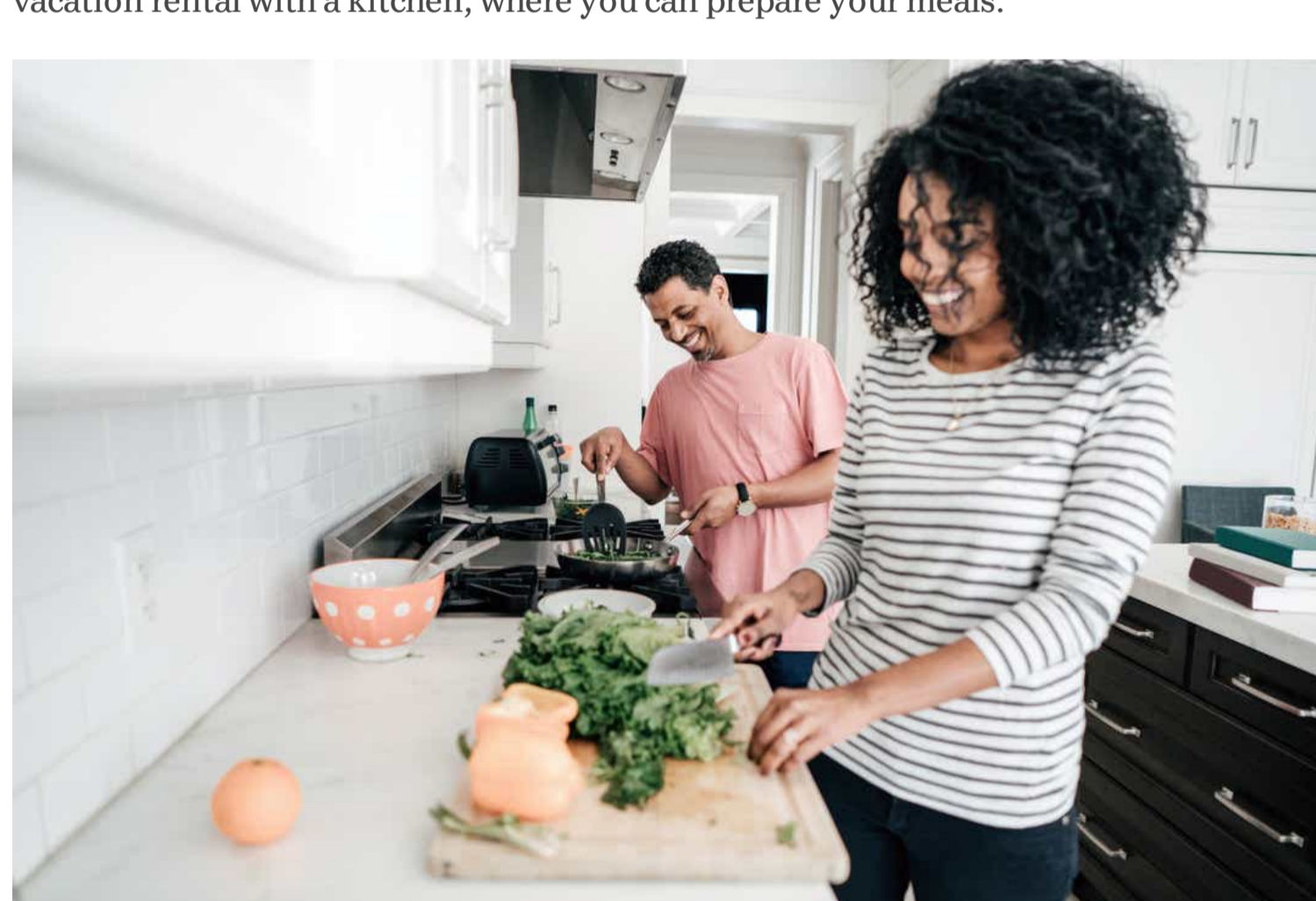
Yuran-78/Getty Images/iStockphoto

For most travelers, safe means close. More travelers are booking domestic vacations for this summer. According to the travel insurance site Squaresmouth.com, 42% of policies purchased for June, July and August are for domestic trips, compared with just 16% for the same period in 2019.

"The first choice for many people will be a close, familiar destination – likely one that's a driving vacation," agrees Kathy McCarthy, a spokeswoman for Meet Minneapolis.

"People are likely to be more comfortable in a controlled car environment that allows for more flexibility."

Select your hotel carefully, say experts. For example, consider choosing a hotel or vacation rental with a kitchen, where you can prepare your meals.



Consider booking a vacation rental where you can have control over who touches your food and utensils.

kate\_sept2004/Getty Images

"Having your own kitchen can help ensure your safety, rather than going to a buffet where everyone touches the forks," says Herbert Laubichler-Pichler, general manager of the Alma Resort in Vietnam. "This idea of a home away from home is perceived as safer, where you don't have to mix with others as much."

If you take a tour, make sure you ask for a list of the safety and health precautions. People like Stoller would be happy to tell you about the steps they're taking to keep their participants safe. If there's no such list, consider another tour.

**Safe summer vacation ideas:** 'Find the place that everyone isn't going to'

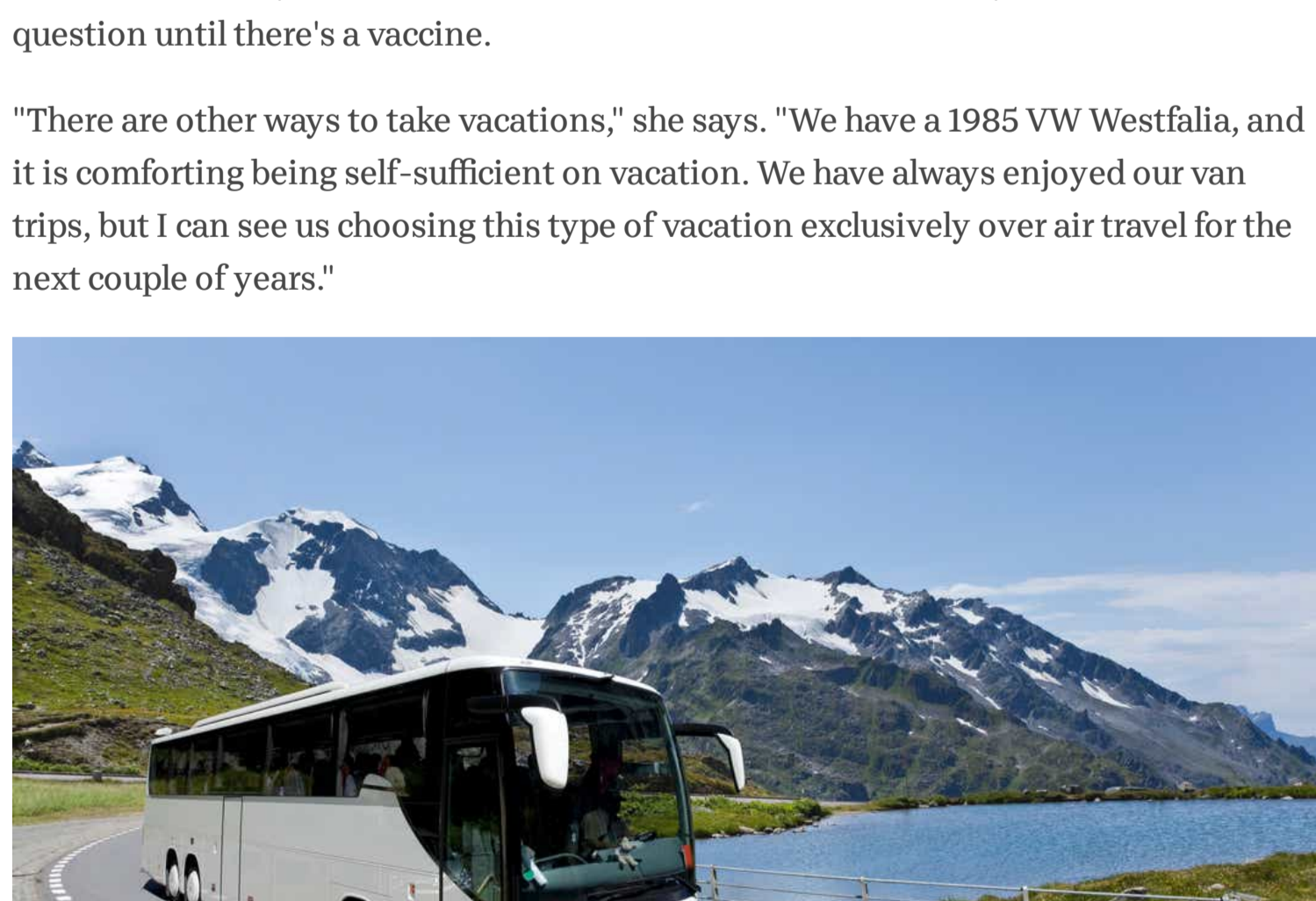
## How to plan a vacation? Be careful out there

People like Bob Aronson are in the "careful" category. He's open to booking a trip, but not sure what kind of trip. Aronson, who lives in Long Beach, California, is waiting for the "all clear" from the government before buying an airline ticket.

"But I'll drive to any place where it's safe," he adds.

For Suchot Sunday, a financial blogger from Winnipeg, Canada, flying is out of the question until there's a vaccine.

"There are other ways to take vacations," she says. "We have a 1985 VW Westfalia, and it is comforting being self-sufficient on vacation. We have always enjoyed our van trips, but I can see us choosing this type of vacation exclusively over air travel for the next couple of years."



Tour operator Phyllis Stoller says she's considering using bigger buses to allow for social distancing and provided masks and hand sanitizer.

Graffissimo, Getty Images

Stoller, the tour operator, says it's not just where you drive, but how. For her tours, she's thinking of using larger buses to allow for more social distancing.

"Spacing is more important than ever," she says.

Bottom line: You can't be too cautious. That may be the only correct answer to the question, "how what?" You have to choose the right time to make your move, select your destination with care and think about everything.

## Expert tips for how to plan a vacation

**Define "dangerous."** You need to have a good idea of your risk tolerance, says Jane Reifert, the vice president of marketing for Incredible Adventures, a tour operator that sells extreme adventure tours such as shark-diving. "Everyone's definition of safe is different," she adds. "After the pandemic, a lot of people are going to feel like they've cheated death, and emerge ready to take new risks."

**Read your contracts carefully.** That's especially true for travel insurance. Helen Prochilo, a travel agent with Promal Vacations on Long Island, New York, says travelers have to go over their policies with a fine-tooth comb. The biggest gotcha is the "force majeure" clause, which tells you if a pandemic is covered. "Read the terms carefully," she says.

**Hire a travel agent.** At times like these, an expert can tell you what's safe – and what isn't. "You'll travel with more peace of mind, knowing you have someone to provide the most up-to-date information on everything from airline changes to itinerary changes and insurance policy updates," says Michael Heflin, a senior vice president for hotel relations at Travel Leaders Group.

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