

SundayTravel

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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‘Immunity pods’ of family and friends start to venture out on private ‘vaxications’

The travel industry has taken note, adding ‘pod concierges’ and arranging private excursions

BY JON MARCUS | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT



STAFF PHOTO ILLUSTRATION, STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Rising from the rain forest on one of the least-populated islands in the Caribbean, each of the 10 spread-out, tree-house-style cabins at Secret Bay in Dominica is completely self-contained, with its own plunge pool and kitchen.

Guests can order meals and even private concerts on their terraces overlooking the aqua-blue ocean below, or wander to the private beach protected by sand-colored cliffs. Besides the personal chefs and concierges, there's rarely a sign of other people.

This kind of seclusion normally attracts honeymooners and couples seeking romantic escapes. But suddenly a new breed of visitor is discovering Secret Bay: groups of travelers who have all been vaccinated against COVID-19 and want to stick together in “immunity

pods,” away from conventional hotels, restaurants, activities, and crowds.

“Traveling together in vaccinated pods is giving people an increased level of confidence,” said Kristin Hughes, a travel health and wellness expert. “They’re excited to go back out there, but it’s also a matter of control.”

Travelers who are already vaccinated are 20 percent more likely than those who aren’t to have already booked their next vacation, a survey by the travel agency association Travel Leaders Network found.

But many are returning to the world with caution.

“One of the most exciting parts of travel is interacting with locals, meeting new people, trying new foods, and even the mishaps,” Hughes said. “But right now I think people are easing into travel after taking a big break. And this is at least something.”

Pods of family or friends are renting cottages together in the

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Love animals? Here are some things not to do on your next vacation.

By Diane Bair
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Most people love animals and don’t want to see them abused. But the sad truth is that animal lovers — in their desire to be close to wildlife — inadvertently contribute, in a major way, to animal suffering,” says Ben Williamson of World Animal Protection, an international nonprofit animal welfare organization (www.worldanimalprotection.us). Whether it’s riding elephants in Asia or going to see an orca show at a marine mammal park, our patronage of captive animal entertainment presents a real threat to captive animals and their wild counterparts, Williamson says.



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Simply put: Cute cat videos aside, animals are not entertainers. The tricks animals in captivity are forced to perform are completely unnatural, Williamson says. In real life, bears don’t dance, and dolphins don’t walk on their tails. Biologically, elephants were not built to carry humans on their spines. That once-in-a-lifetime experience for you might mean a lifetime of suffering for the animals.

As travel journalists, we have participated in many activities like this in the name of adventure. Those close-up encounters that once seemed irresistible now get a hard pass. Bottle-feeding a baby tiger may garner more Instagram “likes” than a distant view of a big cat on safari, but, no.

“This is about animal welfare, but

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Inside



HEADS UP

A SOLID CHOICE

This shampoo comes in a bar, making for travel free from the mess of liquid soaps

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The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Please help me get a \$1,443 refund from Pacific Holidays

Q In 2019, I booked a tour of the Baltics through Pacific Holidays, a tour operator. Pacific Holidays canceled the trip because of COVID-19 in March 2020. In July, a Pacific Holidays representative promised me a full refund.

I have since developed metastatic breast cancer and can no longer travel. I have contacted Pacific Holidays numerous times, but so far I have not received a refund. I've paid \$1,443 for services charged and not received. Please help me and intervene in this dispute. Thank you for your help.

HELENE ROSENTHAL,
Bedford, Mass.

A I'm so sorry to hear about your health challenges and hope you are on the road to recovery. But your medical issues have nothing to do with this refund. If Pacific Holidays promised a refund, you should receive a refund — no matter your personal circumstances.

Your situation is a little complicated. According to the correspondence you shared with me, Pacific Holidays postponed your Baltic trip to October, and you accepted the new itinerary. But then when you developed health problems, you asked for a refund. Pacific Holidays granted you a refund in writing.

After three months of silence, you decided to dispute the charges on your credit card. Unfortunately, under the Fair Credit Billing Act, you only have 60 days to dispute a charge, and those 60 days started in Septem-



ADOBE STOCK

ber 2019. Banks may make an exception, but yours didn't. And that brought you to my doorstep.

I think that you handled this by the book. You kept your correspondence in writing and saved all of your e-mails. You might have appealed your case to a company executive. They're pretty easy to find online. All e-mail addresses at Pacific Holidays are firstname@pacificholiday-sinc.com. A brief, polite appeal to one of them might have fixed this for you.

I contacted Pacific Holidays on your behalf. It refunded your tour minus a \$600 cancellation fee. Why? Since you accepted the reboked tour and then canceled because of your illness, a cancellation fee would apply. The fee "covers our many hours and many weeks arranging this trip," a Pacific Holidays representative told you.

I reviewed your correspondence with the company, and it looks like Pacific Holidays promised you a refund for your tour — but not a full refund. That leaves some room for cancellation fees. I've seen this before. When Pacific Holidays initially canceled your tour, you could have asked for a full refund. But when you accepted the rescheduled tour, the usual terms applied. But a partial refund is much better than none.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.



Tracey Zhen at Crane Beach in Ipswich.

THE VIP LOUNGE

WHEN SHE NEEDS A BREAK, SHE ZIPS DOWN TO THE CAPE FOR A LOBSTER ROLL

When she wants to get away and unwind, Tracey Zhen, president of Boston-based Zipcar, looks no further than Cape Cod for what she describes as its relaxed vibe, pristine beaches, and delicious seafood. Zhen, 44, is one of six speakers at an April 7 forum, "Celebrating Art, Science, Service & Commerce: Leadership Sharing Experiences," being presented by Friends of Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway (ArmenianHeritagePark.org). Zhen said she is looking forward to the event and sharing advice from her impressive career, which includes executive positions at Expedia and TripAdvisor. "I always advise people to choose people before company when searching for a

job," she said. "In my career, I've taken pay cuts to work for people whom I just generally admire, and for me it's been really rewarding in many ways." A New York City native, Zhen and her husband, Daniel Wells, a law school student, live in Newton. They are excited to be welcoming a new puppy to their family in the next couple of weeks. We caught up with Zhen to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

I'm a big fan of local destinations. There are so many spots in New England that are accessible, charming and allow you to be active. I'm not planning to venture too far for vacation this year and will head to one of my favorite local destinations: Cape Cod. It's

so easy to get to from Boston, especially in a Zipcar for the weekend. It's beautiful all year-round — I love the relaxed vibe, the delicious seafood, and the pristine beaches. My favorite parts of the Cape are Chatham and Provincetown. I love visiting beaches north of Boston, too, like Crane Beach in Ipswich.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

If on the Cape, it's lobster rolls with a little butter and pepper. It's so simple but quintessential New England. I love that you can get a great lobster roll off a food truck or in a fine dining restaurant.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't?

I'd love to visit New Zealand, but it's one of those trips where you need time given the distance. I enjoy visiting places where there's natural beauty but also a rich local culture. My husband and I love to take trips where we can go hiking or skiing, and New Zealand has been on our bucket list for some time. I also got the opportunity to meet the prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, and she is someone whom I admire and respect.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling?

I have this travel pouch that's always packed and ready to go with essentials like a phone charger, noise-canceling headphones, my passport and these days, a mask and hand sanitizer.

Aisle or window?

It depends on the trip. For business travel, I prefer the aisle seat because I like to get off the plane as quickly as possible since I'm usually rushing to a meeting. If I'm taking a long-haul flight, I prefer the window seat.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

In elementary school, my mother used to take me to visit family in Asia during summer break. We'd go on monthlong trips visiting family and sightseeing. It was always an adventure for me because the culture was so different from my day-to-day life in NYC, and it was also a way for me to experience my familial roots and connect with family that I didn't see very often.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

If I have the time, I love stopping in at a local yoga studio for a class. It's a nice way to relax and to squeeze in some exercise after a long flight. I also like to visit friends when I'm traveling for business. Instead of ordering room service back at the hotel, I try to grab dinner or drinks with old friends at the end of my workday.

Best travel tip?

Get TSA Pre-Check. If you are a frequent traveler, it's worth it given all the time you save. Bring noise-canceling headphones — I always keep them with my travel pack. They are great when trying to sleep or get work done on a plane. And if you're traveling to a US city, my biggest tip is a Zipcar membership! Sometimes your most desired destinations may be a ways outside the city center, and with a Zipcar membership, you can conveniently book a vehicle nearby for an affordable way to take a day-trip excursion.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

Deep discounts on Rhode Island hotels

Rhode Island's Second Annual Hotel Week (April 17-30) hopes to entice visitors ready for a much-needed getaway to visit one or more of 38 hotels located throughout its six tourism regions: Blackstone Valley, Block Island, Newport County, Providence, South County, and Warwick. Take advantage of at least 30-percent savings at a wide variety of accommodations at luxury hotels, historic inns and cozy B&Bs offered at a fixed-rate of \$100, \$200, \$300, or \$400 per night. As an added bonus, some properties' rates are inclusive of complimentary amenities, such as dining credits, room upgrades, parking, and tickets to local attractions. To ensure travelers feel safe about venturing away from home, each participating property reports on its cleanliness and safety procedures on the COVID Details section of its listing. www.visitrhodeisland.com/rhode-island-hotel-week

Classic Maine hotel gets 21st century makeover

Fans of the fabulous KRC properties in Kennebunkport will be delighted to learn that hotelier Tim Harrington and his business partner Debbie Lennon have turned their attention and skills to reinvigorating The Claremont, a Southwest Harbor 1884 landmark situated at the mouth of Somes Sound on Mount Desert Island. The top-to-bottom refresh of the six-acre shore-front property boasts 51 accommodations, including 12 cottages, four suites, a three-bedroom waterfront haven and 34 guestrooms, as well as on-site spa, heated infinity swimming pool, four food and beverage venues, expansive gardens and croquet club. The hotel can arrange for guest activities such as hiking or mountain biking in nearby Acadia National Park; golfing; theater and museum visits; and an array of fresh and saltwater activities including swimming, kayaking, canoeing, and sailing. Bookings avail-

able now for stays beginning May 27. Opening rates from \$375. 800-244-5036, thclaremonthotel.com.

THERE

Assemblages and sketches by Betye Saar

Fans of acclaimed African-American artist Betye Saar's collages and assemblages won't want to miss her soon-to-open exhibition at the Mississippi Museum of Art, "Betye Saar: Call and Response" (April 10 through July 11). Those unfamiliar with the artist will be delighted to discover her groundbreaking and incisive work that, since the 1960s, has confronted and reclaimed racist imagery while reflecting on African-American identity, spirituality, gender, and the connectedness between different cultures. The exhibition features a selection of sketches and approximately 18 corresponding assemblages and collages, alongside approximately a dozen of her travel sketchbooks. (Notably, this



is the first time Saar has shared her sketchbooks with the public.) Selections cover a broad span of her career, from the 1970s through a sculptural installation made specifically for this exhibition. 601-960-1515, www.ms-museumart.org.

Rocky Mountains resort plans fall opening

If Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, mountain biking, and fly-fishing sound like your kind of vacation getaway, mark your calendars for the November opening of Montage Big Sky. Located in the Rocky Mountains of southern Montana, within Big Sky's 3,530-acre Spanish Peaks enclave, the new ultra-luxury resort's mountain-modern design will feature 150 guestrooms and suites and 39 Montage Residences. Amenities include dining options, lobby bar and lounge, market, recreation room with bowling alley, indoor lap pool, family swimming pool, fitness center, signature Spa Montage, and more. The resort's proximity to additional outdoor amenities includes ski-in/ski-out access to Big Sky Resort's 5,800 skiable acres, access to the onsite 18-hole Tom Weiskopf-designed golf course, and an easy visit to Yellowstone National Park, less than an hour's drive away. Rates from \$795. 800-700-9977, www.montagehotels.com

EVERYWHERE

New daypack design utilizes recycled materials

Getting ready for a daylong hike? You can pack everything you need in REI's new Recycled Daypack. The 18-liter Co-op Ruckpack, made with rugged, recycled ripstop nylon, has features to help keep your stuff organized, such as full-zip design to make packing and unpacking easy; hidden daisy chain on the front that lets you lash on gear; bottle holder for easy access when you're hiking; convenient side panels for travel essentials; access port to accommodate hidden reservoir tube (not included); and more. Comfort



features include lightly padded shoulder straps, and compression straps that keep the weight of the pack close to your back for stability. Available in five colors. \$64.95. www.rei.com

Nourishment for go-anywhere hair

Newest favorite travel object: A shampoo bar (similar to a bar of soap) that is easy to pack and won't leak in your suitcase or duffel bag — as liquid soaps are prone to do. The Spit & Polish three-ounce Shampoo Bar is a solid, long-lasting conditioning shampoo, made with eucalyptus and tea tree essential oils, that lathers up quickly. The bar can easily be stashed in its handy carrying container whenever you're ready to change hotels or campgrounds and hit the road again. \$9.95 www.dubuthtrading.com

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