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TRAVEL

‘We’ve never seen anything like it.’ The rush is on to book summer rentals

It’s shaping up to be a blockbuster vacation year for the pandemic weary, now that they’ve got shots in their arms

By [Christopher Muther](#) Globe Staff, Updated April 8, 2021, 7:46 a.m.



Alexander Smorczewski of Danvers dug in on vacation last summer. Plenty more people are expected to hit the beach this year. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

The bookings began in December and continued at a rapid clip through December, January, and February. In the winter of our pandemic discontent, people were mentally escaping by dreaming of a luminous New England day at the beach in record numbers.

Alison Courtois at Tamarack Rentals in Old Orchard Beach, Maine, said she is now explaining to potential renters that many of the prime summer weeks and holidays already have been booked. She still has inventory, but all of the coveted beachfront rentals are full.

“When I tell them we have nothing left for a particular week, they’re like, ‘We usually don’t call until late April, and we’ve never had a problem before,’” Courtois said.

Long before the CDC told Americans it would be safe to travel domestically after being vaccinated, a vacation-starved nation began booking trips. New Englanders hoping to stay local began snatching up rentals, hotel rooms, and home shares when it was still snowing. Not only are rentals and hotel rooms going fast, but in many cases they're outpacing 2019 numbers. In Newport, R.I., William Rademacher, general manager of the Wayfinder, said small group bookings — primarily extended families looking to vacation together — are up 30 percent over where they were in 2019.

“In a nutshell, we are sort of back to the future here,” said Wendy Northcross, chief executive officer of the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce. “We haven’t seen people booking this far in advance in about 20 years. Over the years our local northeastern guests learned to wait and wait until the last minute to try to grab a deal online. But with the pandemic and the tremendous desire to get back to normal, or just get away, we are seeing people committing and booking, even in the face of some rising case numbers.”



Eddie Miranda and his daughters, Niya, left, and Eva at Old Orchard Beach, Maine, last August. ROBERT F. BUKATY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

At Chatham Bars Inn, managing director Gary Thulander said he's also seeing bookings for 2021 quickly outpacing 2019 totals. So far, there are 6,400 more nights booked in 2021 than 2019.

“There’s so much pent-up demand, and people have a passion for travel,” he said “They’ve done their home improvements and projects around the house and the yard. They’re ready to travel.”

Bookings also are brisk at Red Jacket Resorts, a group of properties on the Cape that includes Green Harbor Resort and Riviera Beach Resort in West Yarmouth. Spokesman Matthew Pitta said 2021 reservations already “easily exceed” 2019 numbers. He said the most popular lodging category — free-standing cottages with kitchens — are nearly all booked for summer.



Travelers aboard a fully booked Jet Blue flight from Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport to Orlando, Fla., on Feb. 24. Americans who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 can safely travel at home and abroad, as long as they take basic precautions like wearing masks, federal health officials announced earlier this month. ERIN SCHAFF/NYT

Since the start of the pandemic, there have been countless surveys about how badly Americans are itching to travel again. A personal favorite [is a survey that found](#) that 17 percent of people would spend a night in prison and 18 percent said they would give up sex for a year if they could travel again with no restrictions. That's some pretty intense travel demand.

Kooky survey results are one thing, actual bookings are another. National flight searches and ticket purchases are up. Anticipating demand, airlines are adding dozens of new routes and restoring others that were eliminated last year when demand was nonexistent. The CDC announcement that [travel is safe for the fully vaccinated](#) has buoyed hope that 2021 will allow some level of air travel normalcy.

According to airline search engine Hopper, searches for domestic flights this summer have surged past 2019 numbers. Top trending destinations Maine, Montana, South Carolina, and Hawaii have seen a 100 percent increase in searches over the past six weeks, and when Iceland announced it was opening to vaccinated US tourists, searches for flight prices to the country increased by 93 percent.

Americans are so desperate to travel that they're booking cruises, even though cruise companies are currently not allowed to operate in the United States. This summer, cruise lines such as Royal Caribbean, Celebrity Cruises, and Crystal Cruises are going around the CDC by offering cruises in the Bahamas, Bermuda, and the Caribbean. Passengers over the age of 18 will be required to be vaccinated and ships will operate at reduced capacity. Luxury brand Crystal Cruises recorded its biggest single day of bookings in company history when it opened reservations for a Bahamas cruise that will debut July 3.

"The all-Bahamas cruises means there is no risk of border closures, alleviating concerns related to a multiple-country itinerary that may be impacted by differing travel restrictions," Jack Anderson, Crystal interim president and CEO, said in a statement.



A survey of 2,000 campgrounds by campgroundviews.com found advance reservations are up 50 percent over average pre-pandemic numbers. ROMAIN ETIENNE/ITEM

One of last summer's biggest vacation trends — camping — is coming back. A survey of 2,000 campgrounds by campgroundviews.com found advance reservations are up 50 percent over average pre-pandemic numbers. RV companies are [unable to keep up with consumer demand](#).

If you haven't planned a New England summer trip, it's not too late, but those in the industry say it's probably best to lock down arrangements soon. Even making restaurant reservations now might save a lot of stress come July. In Rhode Island, availability already is limited on Block Island, and Narragansett is filling quickly.

"We're not fully booked," said Heather Kelley at Sunrise Properties in Narragansett. "But demand has been extraordinary. People are really just looking for a day at the beach, and finally a chance to escape."