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Still Down for Wheels Up: The Trips We're Booking When Coronavirus Is in the Rearview

By Maggie Fuller 03.26.20



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We can't wait to return to Italy to pedal up and down the rolling hills of Tuscan wine country.

COVID-19 may have grounded us for now, but that doesn't mean we've stopped being travelers.

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"Still down for wheels up." A reader wrote to us recently, closing with that upbeat statement. We all [agree that now is the time to stay home](#), but even in the face of [closed borders](#) and [locked-down countries](#), we're still globe-trotting in our minds. Over on the [@afarmedia](#) Instagram page, we've been channeling our wanderlust into the [#travelathomechallenge](#), re-creating our favorite travel experiences in backyards and one-bedroom apartments. Another way we're placating our incessant travel bugs? Throwing ourselves into planning our great, postpandemic escape.

It's OK to think that future exists as you browse dreamy Instagrams of far-off places and click through itineraries from your favorite travel companies. Some of these epic trips need to be planned and booked a year in advance anyway; if you can, consider booking sooner rather than later, to support the companies you love most. The travel industry faces its [worst shock since 9/11 with COVID-19](#), read the headlines. Tour operators tell us that their customers have been canceling their 2020 trips since late January, when news broke that the novel coronavirus had spread to Europe. Some destinations, such as Machu Picchu, will miss their entire busy season this year, and small guiding and hospitality businesses that rely on tourism may not make it.

Here's some inspiration for that blissful time when coronavirus, quarantine, and closed borders are a distant memory.

A cycling trip through Italy's wine country

One of the countries with the most COVID-19 cases so far, Italy faces a long road to recovery. As we've seen with destinations [hit by disaster in the past](#), one of the best things you can do to help, when the time is right, is visit. And we're probably going to want to stretch our legs a little.

Cycle the gentle hills of Umbria or Tuscany, stopping to sip sangioveses, chiantis, and barolos at villas and farms in the Italian countryside. Consider an Italy-based tour company like [Ciclismo Classico](#) that works directly with small local businesses; the company's A Feast in Umbria trip winds through "the green heart of Italy," giving guests the opportunity to experience local festivals and plenty of homemade pasta. We're also eyeing DuVine's [Tuscan Harvest Bike Tour](#) for next fall or the one after—truffle hunting, fresh-pressed olive

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oil, and wine? Sign us up.



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We're dreaming of floating on a boat on Zhangjiajie National Forest Park's Baofeng Lake.

A tour of China's natural wonders

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Last year, China was just starting to become a popular outdoor adventure destination for Americans. Its national parks, such as [Zhangjiajie](#) and Huangshan, are downright breathtaking, full of natural bridges, waterfalls, and mist-covered mountains. You could spend days hiking the karst peaks of Guilin or opt for a truly off-the-beaten-track trek to see the rainbow mountains at Zhangye Danxia Landform Geological Park in Northern China.

Beijing-based [WildChina](#) can show travelers a side of the country that most tourists never see, whether that means less-visited natural wonders, pottery lessons with a master ceramist in Jiangxi, or an education-focused trip with a scholar of Chinese history and archaeology. Better still, it offers a mix of private and group tours.

An epic safari

If there's anything farther than self-quarantine, it's an African safari, where you'll sleep in beautiful canvas tents and lodges, and dine heartily after adventure-packed days of animal-spotting in wide-open spaces. Most safaris should be booked about six months to a year in advance—especially if it's your first time tackling the planning process. And because safari season generally runs from May through October, now is the perfect time to start thinking about one. Will you go on a walking tour with [Journeys by Design](#) or will you get a firsthand look at [conservation in the national parks of Zambia and Zimbabwe](#) with African Bush Camps? Watch Tanzania's Great Migration in luxury with [ROAR Africa](#) or explore local cuisine on Thompson Safari's [food-focused trip with chef Tanya Holland](#) of Brown Sugar Kitchen? Check out AFAR's [resource-packed safari tips](#) to find the right safari for you.

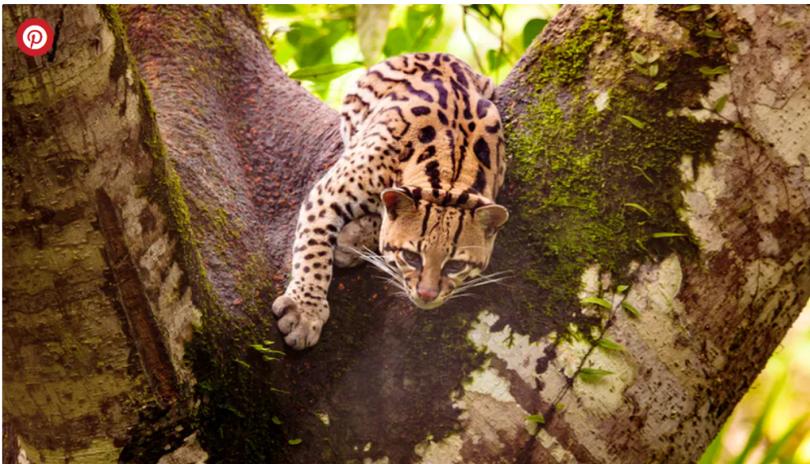




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Cat lovers, wildlife enthusiasts, and photographers will all love a big cat-themed safari in Costa Rica.

An active adventure in Costa Rica

For cooped-up families that faced “shelter-in-place” orders with a limited selection of board games, a trip to Costa Rica is the perfect place to break free. In [Manuel Antonio National Park](#), for example, one person can relax on the beach while another hikes in the rain forest that hugs the shore and still others splash in the clear water or scan the treetops for spider monkeys.

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Explore Costa Rica’s legendary biodiversity on a [wildcat conservation safari](#) with Natural World Safaris: You’ll white water raft to your jungle accommodation and learn to place a camera trap to help local conservation organizations monitor the jaguars, pumas, ocelots, and margays. Or pamper yourself at the new [Navara Tented Camp](#), where you can split your time between a private, hot spring-fed plunge pool, the onsite sloth sanctuary, and trips to the nearby Arenal Volcano.

An expedition cruise

All [major cruise lines have suspended service](#) due to the coronavirus pandemic. What cruises will lure us back on the water in the future? [Celebrity Flora](#), the 100-passenger yacht from Celebrity Cruises, is based in the Galápagos and has deck-top glamping cabanas and a small footprint on the local ecology. [Hurtigruten](#) has a fleet of ships designed specifically for Arctic sailings and [promises](#) that passengers on winter trips will be able to take in the Northern Lights from deck. Quark Expeditions’ new polar vessel [Ultramarine](#) is [equipped with sea kayaks and gear for snow camping](#) for adrenaline junkies on its Greenland voyages. And [Ponant’s luxury expeditions to Antarctica](#) are perfect for polar explorers who might not be so tough after all.

Even if you’re in it more for the much-needed R&R in the ship’s spa, with some itineraries, you can add on [extraordinary shore excursions](#) such as a visit to the reindeer herders and eagle hunters of Mongolia or a tour of the Louvre.

A culinary tour of Japan

With the [2020 Olympics postponed until next summer at the latest](#), we all need to reshape our next big trips to Japan. Instead of mapping out itineraries around opening ceremonies, swim meets, and soccer matches, indulge in the culinary scene of a country that takes its food very seriously. Follow in [Helen Rosner’s footsteps](#) to learn that patience and long lines in Tokyo lead to life-changing ramen. Or join Intrepid on a [12-day trip that covers the epicurean spectrum](#) from grab-and-go tonkatsu to high-end sushi and wagyu beef, with plenty of yakitori in between.

Or wait until spring to attend one of Japan’s much anticipated cherry blossom festivals. The celebrations are always a big deal, but this year, most were [either canceled or toned down](#) because of the coronavirus. We’re hoping that next year’s celebrations will be better than ever, so you may want to start planning now. May we suggest a long trip in late March and early April to festival hop? AFAR’s [Everything Guide to Cherry Blossom Season in Japan](#) will tell you all you need to know.

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