



THE NEW NOMADS

Now that the vaccine rollout has begun, a 'new normal' for travel is gradually emerging. Eugene Yiga considers what we can expect from the rest of 2021 and beyond

THE MOTIVES AND THE MODES

There's no denying that Covid-19 has changed everything. One common shift has been the way we view our relationships – with each other and with the world. Lockdown has left many people feeling closer to their families or other loved ones, but also eager to explore the world beyond their backyard. And let's not forget those who survived on their own and now have the courage to travel alone.

In all of these groups, the appetite for travel is undeniable and palpable. After all, nothing can fuel the desire to wander quite like having the freedom to do so taken away. With closed borders having separated loved ones against their will for longer than they could have imagined, there is likely to be a boon in multigenerational travel as borders reopen and families are able to reunite.

With people increasingly uncomfortable in crowds, however, large group tours with a flag-waving guide are a thing of the past, at least in the short-term. Instead, people will prefer to travel with familiar faces on private tours or DIY self-drive holidays to places that put health, safety and social distancing first.

WHERE ARE THEY GOING AND WHY?

Many destinations are doing whatever they can to attract tourists. The enviable pace of vaccine rollouts in the US and Europe is leading to the launch of things like travel corridors, a return to cruising (several lines are sailing for only vaccinated guests) and open arms for fully vaccinated tourists in several countries, including Spain, Iceland, Croatia and the Seychelles.

The latter has just announced that even (previously banned) South Africans are now welcome – under certain conditions, most pivotal of which is proof of vaccination.

Given that long-term travellers contribute more to an economy than short-term tourists, many countries are looking to attract digital nomads for distance-learning and remote work.

Thanks to lockdown, we've learnt that

we don't have to be chained to our desks or offices, and many destinations (such as Mauritius and the Bahamas) are capitalising on this with special visas for long-term-stay foreign workers. Thailand, similarly, has introduced a special tourist visa that allows visitors to stay in the country for up to nine months.

Other countries are using the promise of vaccination as a hook for long-term visitors. Dubai, for instance, is offering a 12-month working visa that entitles the holder to be vaccinated. In Mauritius, long-term-visitor visas also include the right to free immunisation. And recently the Maldives said it would soon be offering shots as part of holiday packages.

STICKING WITH AFRICA

Unfortunately, with the ongoing uncertainty in SA surrounding the third wave, the slow vaccine rollout, and the continued outright ban on South African tourists in several countries, long-haul international travel for most of us is a way off.

For now, we're all about travelling domestically and within sub-Saharan Africa – places such as Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe, where the only condition for entry is a negative PCR test.

Luckily, we live in one of the most beautiful countries in the world, with plenty of diverse activities and breathtaking sites.

The same applies to Africa as a whole, filled as it is with incredible spots beyond the typical headlines that don't always brand the continent in the best light. With the dearth of northern hemisphere travellers and amazing deals attempting to lure South Africans, now is the perfect time to explore the motherland, not only to make ourselves feel better but also to support an industry that's on the verge of collapse.

DEVELOPING TRANSPORTATION

Hot terms for travel's evolution include hyperloop trains (a super-speed, ground-level transportation system in which people travel in a hovering pod inside a vacuum

tube at speeds as high as 1,220km/h) and supersonic jets. A US firm called Aerion claims it will offer civil supersonic flight by the end of the decade. Then there are autonomous flying taxis, currently in development by the likes of Boeing, Hyundai, Airbus, Toyota and Uber.

For the immediate future, one trend that is already racing ahead is "micro mobility" (think scooters and electric bikes), mostly because people don't want to be stuck inside a cramped bus. But since you can only go so far on two wheels, the big trend is for shared mobility in the city (think Uber and Bolt) or self-drive excursions a little further out.

BACK TO THE SKIES

The aviation industry has taken a massive hit due to the travel shutdown (losing billions of dollars in Africa alone) and airlines are doing whatever they can to start the recovery.

Eventually, unless we only travel regionally, we'll have to overcome our fears and get used to how flying has changed.

That might mean paying more for tickets, dealing with longer waits, and (obviously) wearing a mask. It could also mean putting up with more airline strikes and cancelled flights in the next year or two. It will certainly mean having to produce proof of negative Covid tests or vaccinations to board a plane.

Airline industry body Iata, however, has outlined an "optimistic" outlook for the Covid-19 recovery. Iata's director-general Willie Walsh said recently that the industry's crisis was no longer being caused by the health situation, but by the restrictions put in place by governments. As these are slowly lifting, Walsh forecast that pre-crisis global passenger numbers would be exceeded as soon as 2023.

Aviation, however, will continue to evolve in ways that make the experience better, if not for the people then at least for the planet. Indeed, even before Covid-19, there was talk about how to make flying more responsible in the face of climate

change. There were many interesting ideas on making flying greener and reducing carbon emissions, from hybrid airlines dominating the skies to planes that fly in formation like geese to save fuel.

Now, rather than forcing passengers to pay for carbon taxes, many airlines have no choice but to become more environmentally friendly as part of their bailout deals.

And while some are using Covid-19 as an excuse for going back on their climate commitments, others are seeing this as a chance to emerge from the crisis leaner and greener. Anything that gets us on a path to zero-carbon flying is a win for all.

#TRAVELGOALS

As Covid has forced us to face our mortality, it's possible that people (as soon as it's feasible) will finally book trips to those destinations they always thought they'd get to "one day" – and then, for a minute there, thought maybe they never would.

But rather than ticking off the once-trendy checklists of where to go and what to do, we'll choose less-trammelled destinations instead. We'll also choose places that matter to us based on our values – even if it means returning to the destinations that had meaning in the past.

And when we do travel, it's also likely to be for longer periods of time. Yes, there are some who will still make last-minute bookings for a quick getaway, but people will be more deliberate in choosing a slower and more immersive form of travel.

ONWARDS AND OUTWARDS

Many people have been dreaming about their next big holiday – now is the time to take it. The main priority is that we want to know the places we're going to are safe, with socially distanced attractions, and have adapted their operations to cater to a new reality.

Indeed, travel is powerful and will bounce back eventually, no matter how long it takes. No virus can crush the human spirit for adventure. © Eugene Yiga