

Winter Break Wasn't Canceled for the Rich

Paying for \$1,200 Covid tests, studying up on regional transmission rates, rehearsing "Covid disclaimer" speeches—here's how the jet set are going places during the pandemic.

BY HANNAH N SELIGSON

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Staring down a long, cold Covid-quarantine winter, the wealthy are doing what they have always done: getting out of town.

This probably doesn't come as a huge surprise, unless you've been observing an Instagram blackout. The evidence isn't just limited anecdotally to the influencer set. December was **Virtuoso's**, a travel agency network of 1,100 luxury travel agencies, highest month in terms of bookings for the entire year. Aspen was at 77 percent occupancy on New Year's Eve. St. Barts was at full occupancy on New Year's Eve. And, according to its tourism board, the island is projecting strong demand from travelers in January and February.

Over the holidays, all 40 of the sprawling villas at **The Four Seasons Hotel & Residences in Anguilla** were sold out. Going for between \$15,000 to \$20,000 a night. During the Christmas–New Years period **Jumby Bay Island** in Antigua had more guests on the island than last year (this while operating under social

distancing and safety protocols). Last month **XO**, a private aviation company, saw an unprecedented 95 percent increase in deposit memberships over the previous year.



An aerial view of The Four Seasons Anguilla. All 40 of their villas, which go for between \$5,000 and \$15,000 a night, were sold out during the period between Christmas and New Years.

COURTESY OF THE FOUR SEASONS ANGUILLA

Rehearsing the "Covid disclaimer."

What's different this year, however, is the performative aspect of travel. How people talk—and don't talk—about the controversial nature of travel in the Covid era. Some, like members of the Kardashian family, had no qualms **showcasing** that they were taking their nearest and dearest to a private island—a social media post they were universally clobbered for. Others are trying to spin winter break another way: by going dark. After **Belmond Cap Juluca**, one of Anguilla's most luxurious hotels, opened to visitors at the end of November, the property's general manager, Tiago Moraes Sarmiento, started receiving some unusual requests. Guests who had not historically been particularly discreet suddenly began asking for spaces with blank backgrounds so their Zoom meetings wouldn't betray they were relaxing in a tropical destination. He, of course, obliged.

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Villas at Belmond Cap Juluca on Maundys Bay in Anguilla. The hotel was at 70 percent occupancy during the last weekend of December.

COURTESY OF BELMOND CAP JULUCA

No one wants to be accused, like the Kardashians were, of being tone deaf. So now the travel conversation comes with the Covid disclaimer, assuring everyone they are being *SO* careful. It sounds something like, "We've chartered a private plane, the pilot quarantined, got tested twice, and everyone is getting tested before, after, and during the trip, and then we are quarantining for five days after we get home."

All of the different party lines (or Instagram captions) are indicative of just how fraught the topic of travel is among social groups, giving way to a whole new set of mores and etiquette around what used to be a universal pastime among the rich: going places. Yes, some go full-on Kardashian with no asterisk on their social media posts about jetting off during a global pandemic that has killed nearly half a million Americans, but most people are aware of the sensitivities and judgements that travel raises at this very tense moment.



A Tradewind Aviation plane landing in St. Barts. The boutique airline runs a daily shuttle from Puerto Rico that St. Barts that has been in high demand.

COURTESY OF ST. BARTS TOURISM

Navigating rules and responsibilities.

Like everyone else, the wealthy are keen to preserve some part of their pre-pandemic lifestyle, but it appears that many of them are not waiting for herd immunity to pick up where they left off with their travel plans when the world shut down last March. While the pandemic has hit some of its worst months, many borders have opened.

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People who have traveled recently, or plan to do so in the near future point out that it isn't illegal and that there are solid arguments to be made about supporting a multi-billion dollar industry. They also say the black-and-white thinking about the pandemic and what should be "off-limits," is shifting, albeit slightly, and that now the discussion can be had about how to do certain things safely. For example, on January 13, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo indicated that the state is considering bringing back live, in-person performances well before everyone is vaccinated. If enacted, it would be one of a number of recent state and federal measures that attempt to balance public safety and economic fallout.

One popular position—or justification to avoid shaming, depending on how one looks at it—is that traveling some place with your family that has the jurisdiction to impose the testing protocols is safer and more effective at enforcing it yourself if, say, you're gathering in your living room. Good luck trying to get 16 members of any family to voluntarily agree to the kind of multi-step testing and quarantining required by islands like **Anguilla** and the BVIs. And for the many that have been isolated from their families, going to a warm-weather destination is one way of buying a bit of normal life. In this case, the ability for grandparents to hug and kiss their grandchildren again. Of course, this argument doesn't take into account the staffers at hotels, and any risk of exposure they may face.

It's why almost all of the 40 villas at the Four Seasons in Anguilla were occupied by multi-generational families. And even though many of those guests flew on private jets, commercial flights —still the "C" word in some circles—are not necessarily super-spreader vessels. According to researchers at the **Harvard School of Public Health** transmission risk of Covid-19 on airline flights is very low and below other

routine activities during the pandemic such as grocery shopping or going out to dinner, when using face covering and take other steps.



The Estate House Restaurant on Jumby Bay Island in Antigua.

COURTESY OF JUMBY BAY ISLAND

What role does money play in accessing travel?

There have numerous examples in the past 10 months of wealthy people using their financial resources to game pandemic regulations—most recently the case of a **Canadian couple** who chartered a plane and flew to a remote Yukon village and posed as hotel employees so they could receive vaccines. But many in the travel industry argue there are guard rails in place that prevent even the most generous tippers from floating Covid regulations. Even if the rich wanted to break the rules, they say, no amount of money is going to get you out of testing and quarantine protocols in many of these destinations. Yes, some places are more lenient, but on islands that are in the envious position of having a low risk of contracting Covid,

such as the Cayman Islands, **a teenager was jailed** over breaking the mandatory 14-day quarantine.

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Virtuoso Global Managing Director of Communication Misty Belles said she is hearing from the network's hundreds of luxury travel agencies that travelers are, for the most part, playing by the rules and are doing what they need to do in terms of following state and local laws. "We are not hearing about a lot of disruption. People are just happy to be outside," she said.

This week, the U.S. imposed **more stringent rules** for people coming back from abroad, requiring them to have a negative Covid test taken within 72 hours of boarding their flights. Airlines will turn passengers away without it.

Even with all the restrictions and costs—paying for four-figure Covid tests, wearing a mask at the pool, or being confined to very limited parts of your five-star hotel for anywhere from two to four days—those with the means are willing, at great expense, to proceed with their plans. In accordance with the government of the British Islands, **Rosewood Little Dix Bay**, an elite resort in the British Virgin Islands, listed by **the CDC as level one** (the lowest risk category), could require international visitors to undergo up to four Covid tests for anyone staying eight days. The tropical hideaway, built by Laurence Rockefeller in the 1960s, also imposes a strict quarantine protocol put in place by the Government of the British Virgin Islands. Neither measure has deterred interest from its clientele.



Columbus House Villa at Rosewood Little Dix Bay in the British Virgin Islands. Guests are required to quarantine on the resort's property for the first four days of their stay.

KEN HAYDEN PHOTOGRAPHY

The big business of testing

It follows that pre-travel Covid testing is now a booming cottage industry. Aron Borohov, who works as a Covid tester for **Leaa**, a New York City–based medical concierge service that has a practice dedicated entirely to PCR testing for traveling, said before the holidays he was doing 50 to 60 tests a day in people’s homes. (Leaa charges \$750 per test for same-day turnaround and \$1,200 for results in two to four hours. You can do the math on what a family of four in a time crunch would cost.)

The demographic that Borohov is testing isn’t just going anywhere, he said. “They are flying to destinations with the lowest infection rates,” he said. While “travel” has become a catch-all term for going anywhere, travelers today know that not all destinations are the same in terms of community transmission rates of Covid and, hence, risk. Many have been studying how the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is assessing travel risk by dividing the globe into four Covid categories: very high-risk, high risk, moderate risk, and low risk.

For level-four countries where Covid is rampant, the CDC’s instructions are crystal clear: avoid all travel. But for level-one countries where there is a low risk of Covid, like the Cayman Islands, Australia, and British Virgin Islands, the CDC guidance is more lenient and open-ended, saying: “If you travel, take steps before, during, and after travel to keep yourself and others from getting Covid-19.”

As for the guests at Cap Juluca who didn't want to disclose they were at a tropical paradise, that mentality might be fading. As the weather in the Northeast of the

United States got worse towards the end of December, covering much of it with snow and ice, the stigma General Manager Moraes Sarmento had observed the month before mostly abated. "Travelers," he said, "have gotten out of stealth mode."

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Look no further than Miches for your next escape.

BY NICOLA FUMO

NOV 23, 2019

CLUB MED MICHÈS PLAYA ESMERALDA

Recharge time is important. Our minds and bodies need a break from the stimulation of daily life, especially in the always-on era of screens, notifications, and bottomless social feeds. While there are plenty of ways to implement recharge time in your day-to-day, nothing beats an escape from it all.

What makes for a good one? A change of scenery, a slowing of pace, and connecting with nature, to start. That's why we have our eyes set on the Dominican Republic.

The country's beautiful beaches, lush palm groves, and island pace make it an ideal locale to relax, unwind, and explore. Here are four reasons why you should book a trip *now*.

Luxe, Eco-Friendly Accommodations

CLUB MED MICHÈS PLAYA ESMERALDA

We're eyeing the beachfront town of Miches and the recently opened **Club Med Michès Playa Esmeralda**. The stylish retreat is Club Med's first Exclusive Collection property in North America, and the only resort in the unspoiled paradise of Miches.

Additionally, the resort was designed with ecological sustainability in mind, so you can enjoy the luxurious accommodations knowing the property's daily operations are Green Globe-certified to meet the highest standards of sustainability. The resort's construction is also BREEAM certified to minimize its environmental footprint. Other green initiatives include an in-resort community garden and locally sourced ingredients used at the property's restaurants.

Oceanside Dining

COCO PLUM BEACH LOUNGE

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The weather in Miches is fairly consistent year round, with daytime highs around 80 degrees Fahrenheit and evening lows around 70. With such a pleasant atmosphere, you're going to want to spend as much time as possible outside, including mealtime.

Look no further than **Coco Plum Beach Lounge** for seafood dining on the beachfront. Lively Caribbean vibes complement views of the pristine ocean from the spacious deck—perfect for a fun date night or group dinner with friends or family.

Day Trips and Excursions

CATALINA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC / GETTY IMAGES

Miches is a great home base for easy day trips and bigger excursions. For nearby adventures, explore the Laguna Limón nature reserve or go whale watching in Samaná Bay. Looking for stunning views? Head to Montaña Redonda for an incredible 360-degree vantage point of the island, or check out the 170-foot El Limón Waterfall in Samaná.

Budget time for a day trip to La Romana on the Dominican Republic's southern coast. There, you'll find even more picturesque beaches, plus the opportunity to explore offshore. La Romana is the gateway to Catalina, Catalinita, and Saona Islands, which are home to nesting turtles, thriving coral reef, and shipwrecks teeming with marine life, which beginner and advanced divers can see by snorkel.

Mind and Body Rejuvenation

CLUB MED MICHÈS PLAYA ESMERALDA

No escape is complete without a little pampering. Treat yourself to any one of the spa services at the **Club Med Spa by Cinq Mondes**, which also features hot and cold plunge baths, relaxation areas, and a steam room. Book a purifying scrub or a massage inspired by North African, French Polynesian, or Indian Ayurvedic treatments, or commit to even more relaxation with a two-hour traditional hammam ritual.

From there, give your mind a little love with a scenic yoga or meditation session. Club Med Michès Playa Esmeralda offers classes from professional instructors on its treetop yoga *palapa*, surrounded by the lush palm groves of the Dominican jungle.

The treetop canopy is part of the resort's **Zen Oasis**—an adults-exclusive area designed for peace and relaxation (and located away from the children's clubs and family spaces)—making it the perfect place to start your day or end your evening.

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