

EDITORS' PICK | 1,033 views | May 1, 2020, 07:20am EDT

Why Right Now Is The Best Time To Plan Your Travel Bucket List

**Larry Olmsted** Senior Contributor ⓘ

ForbesLife

I am an award winning travel journalist & bestselling author. Follow me on Instagram [travelfoodguy](#) or Twitter [@travelfoodguy](#)



What's on your travel Bucket List? Whatever it is, here is how to make it actually happen. GETTY

“When we travel again, having had time to think about how much we miss travelling and exploring, will we do anything differently? Will we make better use of our time investment by ensuring that our travels have a defined goal in mind?”

I sure hope so.

The question above was posed by Philippe Brown, founder of London-based [Brown and Hudson](#), one of the world's top bespoke travel agencies,

in a personal essay he recently wrote titled, [“Why Travel At All?”](#) He argues that many of us have been traveling for the wrong reasons, putting the ‘where’ above the ‘why,’ and I agree with much of what he says. Fortunately, this is a perfect opportunity to change all that with a new leisure paradigm.

Travel advice is something I have dispensed freely and expertly for the past two decades, but once the coronavirus pandemic and spread of COVID-19 began, people stopped asking about it.

Now it’s starting again. One friend was thinking about planning a trip out to the great Western National Parks in August - too soon? Another was wondering about bookings for next ski season. Others asked about returning to Las Vegas and Walt Disney World.

Today In: [ForbesLife](#)



30 Best Bucket List Trips For Your Lifetime: African Safari

Libertine’s Wild Ales Enrich California’s Central Coast

May’s Birthstone Emerald: Rich In History And The Color Of Hope



No picture can capture all of Iguazu Falls, the world's most impressive waterfall - you literally ...

[+] GETTY

Unfortunately, any leisure travel soon is probably too soon, but what this surging interest suggests is that many people (including myself) are starving for travel, and when it's safe to take vacations again, some of us will embrace them, and we should. But we should also travel better than before.

This pandemic is not the first major disruption to travel, and besides other outbreaks, from SARS to Zika, there have been volcanic eruptions halting international air travel, terrorist attacks shutting down domestic travel, and hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes or wildfires shutting down entire parts of the world. But because this is so widespread and long lasting, I for one will emerge with a newfound sense of seizing the moment. Life is short enough without not knowing when the next shoe will drop. A lesson to be learned right now is that if there are things you want to do in your life, you should get a move on it.

In terms of travel, this is not a new idea since the pandemic. Two years ago at the annual Virtuoso Travel Week in Las Vegas, the nation's biggest luxury travel trade show, I was surprised to hear about a new and fast emerging trend emerging among top travel advisors ([Virtuoso](#) is a consortium of thousands of the world's best travel agents/advisors, who pool their clout to get lots of special benefits, extras and discounts from partner suppliers including top luxury hotel, cruise and tourism brands, which they then pass on to clients - in other words, when you book trips through [a Virtuoso member](#), you often get more bang for your same buck, from room upgrades to spa and dining credits - plus expertise). I've written extensively here at Forbes about why you should use a Travel Advisor even if you are geographically, and technologically savvy, and this is even more important for these Dream Trips ([read more about why here](#)).



From Venice (shown) to Tuscany to Sicily, Italy is high on many people's wish list. GETTY

Several advisors independently told me that their top clients were changing the entire way they view travel planning and starting to look at their travel advisors the same way as their financial advisors, mapping out detailed 5, 10 and 20 year plans specifically to meet her goals.

The first travel expert who advised me of this trend was Jack Ezon, then head of the \$400 million a year luxury division of [Ovation Travel Group](#), among the nation's ten largest agencies. Shortly after making the financial planner analogy to me, he launched a new company and concept in the luxury travel space, a firm called [Embark Beyond](#), where the advisors were partners, structured like a law firm (he is also a reformed lawyer). His clientele already included lots of celebrities, ultra-wealthy individuals and professional athletes, but in an interview with Skift.com, Ezon explained that Embark was a reinvention of the luxury travel advisor model for the next generation. "We will aim to evolve as advisors to our clients, helping them enrich their lives personally - guiding them in finding their purpose, their legacy, their passions and adding zest to their lives. We aspire to help people embark on their journey to greatness however they choose to interpret it... We intend to engage lifestyle verticals in providing seamless and trusted experiences for a client's personal needs and aspirations."



Wildlife safaris may just be the Mother of all Bucket List vacations! GETTY

Philippe Brown takes a similar approach, and his firm describes its ethos as, “Each trip we create is by definition unique. What all of our trips share in common is the belief that any journey worth taking should be a rich personal story set within the larger narrative of your life.”

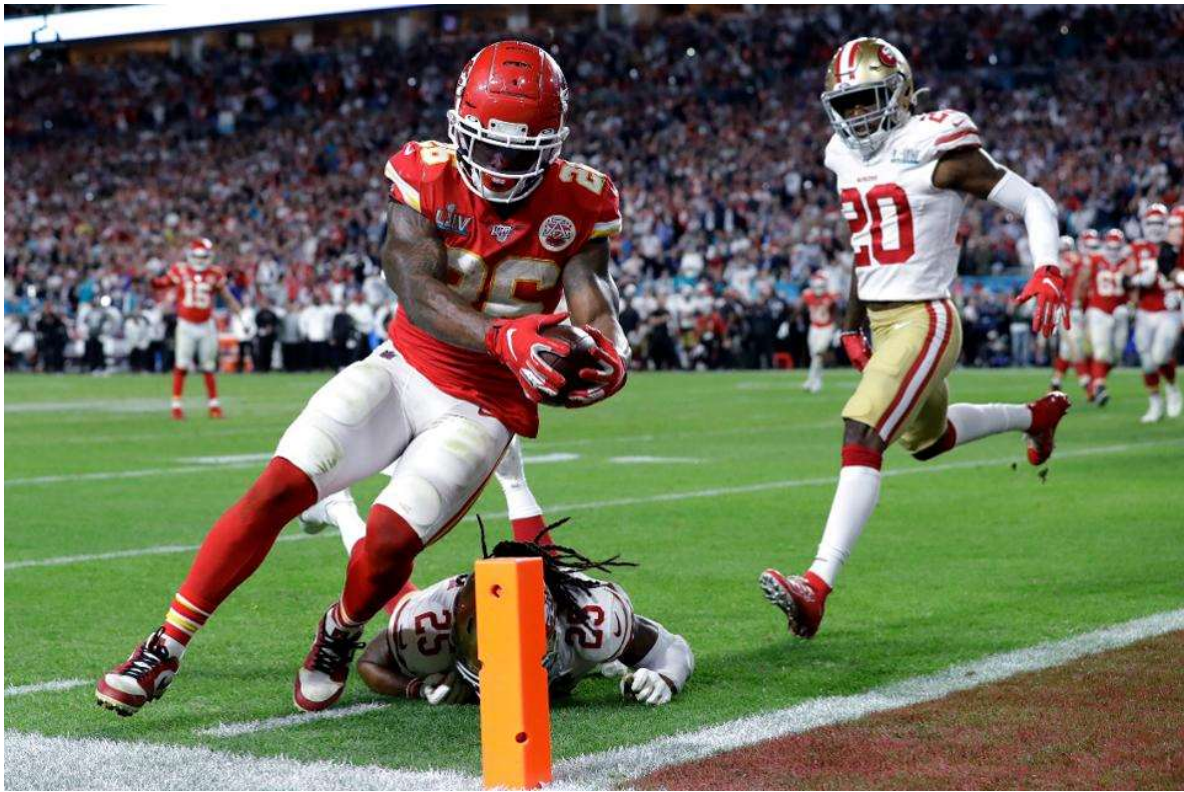
The current pandemic led the company to launch a new digital platform called “Where to Why” to examine the nature of our passion for travel, the why, over the more traditional question of “where to next?”

In his “Why Travel At All?” essay he concludes that, “So, in this time of reflection, how can we make the most of the opportunity to plan our future travels? The first question should be why, rather than where. Because travel is so freely available at a moment’s notice, we tend to rush through this question. The resulting travel is not focused enough on our motives and desired outcomes and ends up feeling...flat or at best a repeat of how you felt last time... The bulk of luxury travel that puts the ‘where’ above the ‘why’, follows such a predictable blueprint. It’s a blueprint that realistically hasn’t changed since the days of the Grand Tour. In the 17th and 18th centuries... We visit the Louvre, tour the Pantheon and ride the London Eye. We do all these things automatically because they’re what you’re meant to do.”

That is why you need to think about all this right now, when many of us have extra time on our hands, internet access and the entire family gathered at home - often for the first time in years. What do you really want to do or see? Ask everyone in your family. Take votes. Rank them, research them. Create your own Bucket List, potentially in multiple categories: personal passion, family trips, couples' trips. Then think about a timetable over years for getting them all in.

“People have busy lives, leading them to typically be cash rich and time poor,” Misty Ewing Belles told me. Belles is the longtime Managing Director of Global Public Relations for Virtuoso. “This pandemic has made it so that time is the one thing people have in abundance, which makes the escapism of planning dream trips even more desirable. And this forced break is actually the optimal time to start planning those big trips that require more research and forethought - anything with limited capacity or the more exotic destinations. We may also see tighter restrictions in place in terms of visitors to some of the most coveted sights, which makes advanced planning and guidance from well-connected travel advisors even more important.”

“Even before COVID-19, we were seeing a movement toward long-term travel planning that was akin to curating a financial plan, with purpose and under the guidance of a professional. We created an interactive and highly personalized travel planning program called Virtuoso Wanderlist and designated specially trained travel advisors to share it with their clients. Creating a travel portfolio ensures people don't miss out on their travel dreams, while also letting them take advantage of seasonal rates and currency fluctuations to maximize their budget.”



From the Super Bowl to KY Derby to Masters, sports fans have their own long travel Bucket List

ASSOCIATED PRESS

This multi-year calendar approach makes a lot of sense for many reasons. First, some of the most special trips, from African safaris to small expedition trips to chef/expert led departures to one off specialties like around the world cruises often need to be planned a couple of years in advance to get prime spots. Bucket List sporting events from the Kentucky Derby to Masters to Superbowl to playing the Old Course at St. Andrews also benefit from booking a year out. The Olympics or World Cup take even more planning. Anything that requires a special permit, from climbing Everest to trekking with gorillas, is also a long lead time trip.

In addition, some trips can be done by just about anyone, while others require a modicum of fitness and mobility that may mandate simply not waiting too long. If you want to trek to Machu Picchu on the Inca Trail, summit Kilimanjaro, run with the bulls, or heli-ski in Alaska, those should be closer to the front of your list.

There are also some destinations or types of wildlife threatened with extinction or adversely affected by climate change that you have to see before they are gone, rather than the other way around.



Recently the Maldives in the Indian Ocean have been high on travelers' wish lists. GETTY

More and more families are planning big multi-generational trips, or ones tied to a future event - advisors tell me it is not uncommon for clients to start planning a big family vacation like a safari or cruise to celebrate a child's college graduation - as soon as they begin their freshmen year.

But besides these logistical issues, the biggest reason to plan a Bucket List calendar for life is to make sure you get what you want in before you go, and do it in a way you can afford. Just as Brown describes with visiting attractions because we feel we are "supposed to," I've seen way too many people simply wing their vacations based on sales or the path of least resistance or worse, repetition. I don't consider going to the same beach resort on the same island for spring break year after year a vacation, it's more of a chore or obligation. The world is just too big and interesting not to explore, so use some of your downtime right now so you can emerge from this crisis with a better sense of all the things you want to do and see.

I'm more the back of the napkin kind of guy, but the [Wanderlist platform](#) Belles mentioned is a good tool for this. If you've ever planned a group trip for your family or friends, you already know how difficult it can be to please everyone. The Wanderlist process starts when a Virtuoso advisor

sends a very visual and game-like online questionnaire to every member of your group (family, friends, colleagues, club, etc.). which asks questions about desired destinations (there are 160 to choose from) and experiences (over 1,500). Once everyone completes the survey, the tool syncs and streamlines opinions, producing a roadmap for future travels. It is modeled after a financial planning tool and also takes into consideration economic conditions and major scheduled events. The goal is a blueprint of future dream trips, such as New Zealand in 2022, Africa in 2025, etc.

Currently, the Top 10 destinations Wanderlist users have picked are (in order) New Zealand, Greece, Italy, Australia, the Galapagos Islands, South Africa, Japan, Ireland, Iceland and the Maldives. Top experiences include Active Adventure, Local Food & Wine, Safari Nature and Ancient Ruins/History.

The bottom line is that your dream trips should be your dream trips, but in many cases, there are compelling and interesting destinations and experiences that may really appeal to you that you do not know about. So, in the interest of jump starting everyone's, Bucket List, Wanderlist, To-Do List, or whatever you call it, over the next month I will be presenting 30 Bucket List vacation ideas, curated with the help of top travel experts. I'm kicking this off with my personal all-time favorite vacation, the [African Wildlife Safari](#). You can [find all 30 entries here](#) throughout May and afterwards. I hope this inspires and helps you.

Get A First-Class Guide To Luxury Travel

Explore the finest destinations and experiences around the world in the Forbes Passport newsletter.

Sign up

You may opt out any time. [Terms and Conditions](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

Follow me on [Twitter](#). Check out my [website](#) or some of my other work [here](#).



Larry Olmsted

Follow

I am the NY Times Bestselling author of Real Food, Fake Food and have been traveling the world as a journalist and passionate fan of all things fun for 20 years. I have... **Read More**

Site Feedback

Tips

Corrections

Reprints & Permissions

Terms

Privacy

AdChoices

© 2020 Forbes Media LLC. All Rights Reserved.

ADVERTISEMENT

Cookies on Forbes