



How has COVID-19 shaped the 2021 traveller

lastminute.com reveals its trends and predictions for 2021

November 2020: This year will stick in all our minds, and not for the best reasons. Usually an end of year travel review sees us ticking off all the places we've been to, and looking ahead excitedly to where we're going to go next. A global pandemic might have put a bit of a spanner in the works, with a 60% drop in bookings compared to 2019. The appetite to travel remains undiminished, but has been forced to evolve to tackle the safety issues that have arisen in 2020.

When it comes to habits, lastminute.com has also identified 7 new trends, which they believe, based on comprehensive booking and search data, will shape the 2021 traveller:

The ones who stick to tradition, despite the pandemic

The table below shows data extracted in November, for flight departures for Christmas holidays and how countries rank this year versus last. Does this show a resilience to travel? Even if there is a chance of quarantine, the British public seem determined to continue with their Christmas travel plans, with the long haul destinations proving more popular and surprisingly a decline in staycations:

	FLIGHT ROUTE - COUNTRY	Rank 2019	Rank 2020	Change
1	United Kingdom - Spain	1	1	0
2	Spain - United Kingdom	4	2	2
3	United Kingdom - United States	3	3	0
4	United Kingdom - United Kingdom	2	4	-2
5	United Kingdom - India	6	5	1
6	United Kingdom - Portugal	13	6	7
7	United Kingdom - Netherlands	8	7	1
8	United Kingdom - Brazil	48	8	40
9	United Kingdom - Poland	22	9	13
10	United Kingdom - South Africa	23	10	13

The one that got a lot more last minute

Following Lockdown 1.0, lastminute.com's booking data showed an astonishing rise in lookers, turning to bookers. In the past there has always been an equal divide between long-term bookers and last minute deal finders, but this has all changed rather dramatically in 2020 and lastminute.com is seeing that even the most stringent planners are now booking much sooner than they would have done in the past. Bookings 1-7 days prior to departure have increased compared to the previous year. This takes a big shift in mindset, and we predict this trend will continue into 2021. Think of it less like a bucket list, and more like a research wishlist which can be activated at the drop of a hat.

The one with sustainable travel

Green and sustainable travel has been one of the biggest trends of the last decade. As air travel decreased by 70% in 2020, many holidaymakers took the opportunity to try alternative means of transportation, such as by train or car, to reach their destinations. We also saw a rise in hotel-only bookings in 2020, with people being more flexible and flying less. Over-tourism was the biggest concern facing travellers in 2020, and this has been one bright spot in a bleak year. We've seen places like the Great Barrier Reef recovering, and Venetians enjoying their city for the first time in years.

The one with a staycation

An upside of lockdown was the joy of discovering what's on our own doorstep. Travelling became less about how far you've been, and more about what you've seen. UK staycations were a big trend in 2020, with travellers heading to our myriad of coasts, mountains and national parks, and enjoying cities without the crowds. Although bookings within the UK decreased by 3% this year, this is a much smaller decline compared to international travel.

The one with remote places and green spaces

'Social distancing' is probably one of the most widely used phrases of 2020, and there's nothing like a bit of nature to avoid the crowds and not worry about the two-metre rule. Remote doesn't mean distance - Foula, located in the Shetland Islands, is described as 'the edge of the world'. A few hours away, the Faroe Islands in Denmark offer a truly unique experience, with Germanic, Icelandic and Scottish influences - pure natural beauty and the only crowds are flocks of sheep.

The one with slow travel

One thing is for sure, 2020 has certainly put the brakes on the fast life and given everyone more time to reflect, and whilst this was an initial shock, habits have been formed and we are adapting to a slower pace of life. With more flexibility and ease in all aspects of our life, from advanced technology allowing for home officing and an end to the conventional 9-5 day, this has had an adverse effect on how we have travelled in 2020 and will continue in 2021. Trips of 6 days and 8-14 day duration have grown in share this year. Slow travel does not mean delays, it means going places for longer and taking your time there, visiting more than one place in a country, rather than flying in and straight out. For those with more time they got to sit in front of the Trevi Fountain (without anyone around!) and bathe in the sea off one of the Greek Isles without having to save their spot with a towel. This also factors in those who are taking the opportunity to 'workation'. When there are no time constraints, we believe we will see people taking longer and longer trips, taking advantage of being able to work and play whilst on holiday.

The one for the culture vultures

Many cities and countries in the world have found a way for us to experience any cultural interaction stress-free. We've seen how in 2020 cities have organised cultural events to respect social-distancing, being outdoors when possible, and with reservations in advance. Although many cities are still defining the events for 2021, you can never lose by reserving your place in the Sistine Chapel in Rome and have the privilege to enter this sacred space, or enjoy the views from a socially distanced capsule in the lastminute.com London Eye. We expect some people might still shy away from famous tourist spots in 2021, and it's the perfect opportunity to gasp at the privileged sights.

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