

HOME TOWN TRAVEL'S FABULOUS FRIDAY

AUGUST 21, 2020



The U.S. State Department on Aug. 6 [relaxed](#) its pandemic warnings about international travel, which means more Americans may be thinking about big trips. Certainly, more people are boarding planes. Government tallies show that 831,789 travelers went through [TSA airport checkpoints](#) on Sunday, far below last year's numbers, but the highest total since March 17.

For those planning international vacations, there are at least two big questions to consider:

Your Passport

If you need a new or renewed passport, it is difficult to predict when you might receive it. Though the State Department has chipped away at its backlog of passport applications, it still has a long way to go and a reduced workforce at its passport offices nationwide. The agency says its main priority now is processing passport requests for life-or-death emergencies, and it will not estimate how long it will take to process conventional requests, whether new or in the pipeline.

The State Department updates its passport-backlog statistics every Thursday. On [Thursday](#), officials reported that they'd issued 213,000 passports in the previous week and received 139,000 applications. That left the agency's backlog at 1.06 million, a number that officials say is not uncommon for the busiest weeks in a normal year.

The State Department's [passport pages](#) include details on contact information, which offices are open, how the process works, how you may be able to get a status update and why the agency continues to cash checks promptly while running behind in its other tasks.

The short answer: Government workers can process your payments while working from home but can handle secure documents such as birth certificates only in a government office. And most of those remain at reduced capacities.

Your destination?

The State Department on Thursday did [back off its warnings](#) (in place since March) that Americans should avoid all international travel. The move follows major advances made by many nations in reducing COVID-19 cases and deaths.

However, as a spokesperson said, health and safety conditions are “improving in some countries and potentially deteriorating in others.” Also, many countries are wary of American visitors because U.S. infection and death totals are higher than everyone else’s.

The [European Union decided](#) on Saturday to keep the U.S. on its list of countries whose travelers are most stringently restricted. The [United Kingdom](#) continues to require a 14-day quarantine. Meanwhile, State Department officials urge would-be travelers to check out the department’s updated country-by-country risk-level rankings of 1 to 4: One for “exercise normal precautions” to 4 for “do not travel.”

The CDC’s country rankings use three risk categories: 1 for low, 2 for moderate and 3 for high. North and South America and most of Europe and Asia are [rated high risk](#). New Zealand and Thailand are among the handful of countries with low-risk assessments.

The CDC analyses also give details on case counts from country to country; you can find more country-specific pandemic information on the [World Health Organization website](#).



Star Clippers Yellow Bird

INGREDIENTS:

2 ounces Vodka

1 ounce Galliano

1 ounce Banana Liqueur

2 ounces Orange juice

DIRECTIONS:

Shake all ingredients with ice cubes and pour into glass
all four ingredients to a cocktail shake with three ice cubes and shake quickly.

Pour into an old fashion glass and adorn with a orange or cherry

Home Town Travel is the most honest, reliable and informative travel agency I have ever had the opportunity to deal with. They treat you like family and will always tell you like it is while getting you the best deal possible. Having dealt with Nancy and Tara for many years, I would sincerely recommend them for all your travel needs.

Mary Ann, Jackson, NJ

Another thank you!

If we have made a difference or you would like to tell us of a highlight of one of your vacations booked through us, write a blurb or send us a photo (or both) and we can publish in our blast!

Also, if you have any ideas or suggestions for a group that would be of interest to you, give us the opportunity of putting that together.

Travel may be currently on hold, but it will come back!!

Dear Nancy,

Thank you for all of your efforts and hard work planning our trips, which have been phenomenal. Sadly, we had to cancel our upcoming National Parks Tour, but because of your persistence and hard work, we are receiving a full refund, for which we are so grateful. Cannot wait to see what adventure you will have in store for us, hopefully soon.

With much gratitude,

Gary & Anne

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ST. FRANCIS TRIP TO IRELAND 2.0 (2021) WITH FATHER KEVIN

Father Kevin will escort a private journey to Ireland with Belfast and Giants Causeway

April 8-16, 2021

Round trip airfare on United from Newark, seven hotel nights (2-Westport, 1-Donnegal, 2-Belfast & 2-Dublin) with private facilities and full Irish breakfast; including day of arrival. Six dinners including Taste n' Tour Belfast and a dinner show at Taylors Three Rock. Highlights include: Cliffs of Moher, Achill Island, Mass at Knock Shrine, giants Causeway, Guinness Brewery, and Titanic Belfast along with a city tour and in Dublin and Derry.

\$3,499.00 per person double plus insurance of \$250.00

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Join Tara and Father Kevin for an informative presentation at 4:00pm on Wednesday, September 9, 2020 at the Parish Center. Because of space and social distancing, limited seating will be available so please call the office by August 28th to RSVP (609) 597 5100. If you have already signed up, come by, and meet your fellow travelers.

This tour is limited to only our group with same bus and same tour director for the entire time. If you have any questions or concerns about going, please call or come to the presentation.

First Mediterranean Cruise Sets Sail With Mandatory Coronavirus Tests

Cruise ship passengers had their temperatures checked and took COVID-19 tests Sunday so they could set sail on what is being billed as the first Mediterranean cruise after Italy's pandemic lockdown.

The cruise ship company MSC has made the procedures, for crew as well as passengers, part of its new health and safety protocols. The *MSC Grandiosa*, which was christened last year, set sail from the northern Italian port of Genoa on Sunday evening for a seven-night cruise in the western Mediterranean.

Anyone testing positive, or with a fever, or having other COVID-19 symptoms was denied boarding, the company said. Guests must wear face masks in elevators and other areas where social distancing is not possible. The crew spent time in quarantine before the start of the cruise.

Earlier this month, the Italian government gave its approval for cruise ships to depart from Italy's ports but limited cruise ships to sailing once again with 70 percent capacity.

MSC declined to say how many passengers were sailing on this cruise. Among the port calls for the *Grandiosa*, MSC's flagship, are Naples; Palermo, Sicily; and Valletta, Malta.

For now, MSC was limiting its guests to the residents of Europe's 26-nation Schengen visa free travel zone.

MSC said every guest and crew member on board will be given a wristband that "facilitates contactless transactions around the ship as well as providing contact and proximity tracing."

Cruise ships and the business they bring to many Italian cities during port excursions make up an important segment of Italy's vital tourism industry. An estimated 12 million cruise ship passengers arrived or departed from Italian ports last year or made port calls in Italy.



SWEET AND SOUR GLAZED SHRIMP

2 teaspoons soy sauce

1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

1 1/4 pounds medium shrimp, peeled and deveined and tails removed

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon peanut oil

2 scallions, thinly sliced (white and green parts kept separate)

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

1 teaspoon finely chopped peeled fresh ginger

3 tablespoons unseasoned rice wine vinegar

Cooked white rice, for serving, optional

1. Stir together the plum sauce, ketchup, soy sauce and pepper flakes in a small bowl and set aside.
2. Sprinkle the shrimp with salt and pepper. Heat the oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add the shrimp to the skillet and cook, stirring occasionally, until just cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a plate.
3. Add the scallion whites, garlic and ginger to the skillet and cook, stirring constantly, until soft, about 1 minute. Add the vinegar and scrape up any brown bits that cling to the bottom of the skillet. Add the plum-ketchup sauce and bring to a simmer. Return the shrimp to the skillet along with the scallion greens and give the skillet a swirl to bring everything together. Divide among 4 plates and serve with white rice if using..



I can't believe that summer is almost over and I am missing my pool time and tanning weekends. While the door to the world might be just about closed; thankfully it is slowly but surely opening up. I am so looking forward to my cruise for Thanksgiving while Tara and her family can't wait to get to the Dominican Republic.

Think travel and all the happy thoughts that go with it. Enjoy what is left of summer and start thinking about where you want to go next as I am sure you need to get out there and we are here to help with those plans.

As always, be safe, stay healthy and think happy thoughts! Nancy