

# Is this the Era of the Travel Advisor?

(from TRAVELMARKETREPORT)

They may still be using “agent” instead of “advisor,” but consumer media is continuing to see what’s been so obvious for most of the population connected to the travel trade for so long—despite the devastation that occurred at the beginning of the pandemic, the travel trade is now more important than ever in the new world of ever-changing rules, regulations, and protocols.

This week, Barron’s Penta, a vertical for “wealthy individuals,” ran an article about how, in light of the impact of COVID, trip planning has become more complicated. And that’s where travel advisors have come in, to the delight of so many clients.

“Enter the travel agent—or, as they’re more often called these days, the travel advisor. They’re organizers, destination experts, and a 24-hour concierge who can tailor a trip, replan, reschedule, and even keep a momentous holiday from crumbling to pieces,” the author, Tracey Kaler, wrote in a piece published on Sunday.

“While travel portals such as Tripadvisor, Booking.com, and Expedia Group have exploded in the past decade—with many people taking the lead to plan their own vacations—websites and apps can’t replace an individual offering personalized advice or curating a bespoke experience. And jetsetters are in agreement. In 2021, in particular, travel agencies are in the middle of a boom,” Kaler writes.

Barron’s is not the only publication that has taken note of the rebirth of the travel advisor industry. Advisors have been highlighted by the Wall Street Journal, by CNBC, and the New York Times, among major publications. While COVID has certainly caused a massive amount of pain amongst travel advisors, it has also brought with it a renaissance of public interest in the profession that is now fully alive.

“A business that lost ground to do-it-yourself online travel booking is back with the added complications of cancellations, border restrictions, and testing requirements,” the Wall Street Journal wrote in the lead of its piece on advisors.

“The pandemic ruined travel for travel advisors and their clients the last 15 months. However, people who didn’t book with an advisor had no advocate and were much worse off,” CNBC wrote in its piece.

Even local news is picking up on the trend, including Washington D.C.’s WTOP, which wrote that “Planning a trip has become more complicated during the pandemic, but that has meant a new opportunity for travel agencies: providing a foolproof way to plan trips during the pandemic” in an article from three weeks ago.

Aside from that data from Virtuoso, numbers from the American Society of Travel Advisors also shows support for the idea of 2021 being a new era for advisors. In a survey from last month, ASTA found that while 27% of travelers always or often used an advisor prior to COVID, 44% say they are more likely to do so following the pandemic, almost double.

It also found that those who do use an advisor are likely to keep doing so, with 94% of longtime clients plan to continue to use their travel advisor according to that same survey. Come see us and we can help with ALL your travel needs.



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# TSA Bumps Mask Fines to Up to \$3,000

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) this week increased penalties for those not complying with mask mandates on airplanes or at airports.

Starting now, first-time offenders will now be fined between \$500 to \$1,000, up from \$250 prior, while repeat offenders will be faced with fines somewhere between \$1,000 and \$3,000.

The mandates, which have been in place by the TSA since February 2021 though some airlines had implemented earlier in the pandemic, will remain in place until at least Jan 18, 2022.

“Wearing a mask protects the traveling public and all of the personnel who make the travel experience safe, secure, and comfortable,” said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas. “We will continue to enforce the mask mandate as long as necessary to protect public health and safety.”

“We appreciate the majority of travelers each day who voluntarily follow the requirement, but find this action necessary to maximize the protections for those who use and work within the transportation system, and to contain COVID-19,” said TSA Administrator David Pekoske. “By doubling the range of penalties, we seek to reinforce the importance of voluntary adherence.”

The TSA also reminded passengers that these mask mandate-related civil penalties are separate from the civil penalties the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issues for individuals who engage in unruly and unsafe behavior.

As of last month, those FAA fines now exceed more than \$1 million across 3,889 incidents in the sky. About 75% of those incidents have come from passengers refusing to comply with the face mask mandate.



## BACK ON THE ICONIC KONA COAST

Outrigger’s premier beach resort brand and world class hospitality is back on Hawaii Island. Perched on a lava rock cliff with stunning oceanfront views of the Pacific, Outrigger Kona Resort and Spa captures the awe-inspiring beauty and sense of adventure of the Kona Coast.

The lush 22-acre resort includes an oceanfront pool and waterslide, spa, wedding chapel, and cultural center.

Perfect for those in search of a sun-filled, fun-filled getaway. From hiking trails to guided tours of ancient cultural sites, the wild beauty of Kona inspires endless exploration.

Special experiences include snorkeling with giant manta rays, or watching them glide through the water from a guest room lanai. Catch a show at the Feast & Fire Luau, celebrating the historic Keauhou region.

After an action-packed day, your clients can rejuvenate with traditional spa therapies at the **Ho’oia Spa** - including our unique Himalayan Salt Room.

Aloha and Mahalo to all our valued clients!







## Turks and Caicos Mandates All Visitors to be Fully Vaccinated

The **Turks and Caicos Islands** last week announced an update to its travel requirements, mandating all visitors 16 years and over to be fully vaccinated before arriving in the destination. Travelers will be required to present proof of vaccination through **TCI Assured**, a quality assurance pre-travel program and portal, prior to entering the country. Travelers must be fully vaccinated, with the second shot taken over two weeks prior to traveling, or the one shot of the **Johnson & Johnson** vaccine taken over two weeks prior. The vaccines that are currently being accepted are Johnson & Johnson, **Pfizer**, **Moderna**, **AstraZeneca**, **Comirnaty**, **Spikevax** and **Vaxzevria**. The TCI Assured portal will accept a digital or paper copy of proof of vaccination (unless exempted under regulation).

The vaccination requirement is in addition to TCI Assured's existing protocols, which require a negative **COVID-19** RT-PCR, NAA, RNA or Antigen test result taken within three days of travel, medical/travel insurance that covers medevac, a completed health screening questionnaire, and certification that the traveler has read and agreed to the privacy policy document. These requirements must be complete and uploaded to the TCI Assured portal, which is available on the **Turks and Caicos Islands Tourist Board** website ([www.turksandcaicostourism.com](http://www.turksandcaicostourism.com)), in advance of arrival.

Any fully vaccinated visitor who tests positive prior to leaving the Turks and Caicos Islands will be required to quarantine with all accompanying persons at their own expense for 10 days, then undergo a mandatory COVID-19 test on Day Seven prior to release.

The new rule underscores the destination's commitment to health and safety and expands on its already vigilant travel protocols, which have been in place for travelers since July 22, 2020, when the destination opened its borders to tourists. The Turks and Caicos Islands also continues to promote its vaccine campaign among residents, with over 70 percent of the adult population being fully vaccinated with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

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# Europe Airfares Are at Historic Lows— but That Likely Won't Last



With the lifting of U.S. entry restrictions for vaccinated arrivals, suddenly travelers on both sides of the pond are chasing the same airline seats. New York to Paris for less than \$200 one way. San Francisco to Zurich for under \$400 roundtrip—during ski season, no less. As these deals from recent flight searches indicate, one of the few bright spots in transatlantic travel in the past 18 months has been a raft of airfare bargains even in traditional peak-season periods.

But with the U.S. planning to loosen entry restrictions for vaccinated visitors starting in November—and European nations having eased their own quarantine rules and other limits on American travelers—people on both sides of the pond will be chasing the same airline seats. And, some experts say, that means prices will inevitably rise.

Prices are even lower in some popular destinations. To Madrid, for example, air tickets were recently selling for \$427 roundtrip from several U.S. gateways, down 33 percent from 2019 prices. At press time, fares from the United States to Lisbon, Barcelona, and Dublin could be found for well under \$500 roundtrip for autumn travel. Hopper says searches for flights to and from Europe have already shot up 30 percent following the U.S. announcement.

But not all airlines will be rushing to add seats. Airlines with a lot of widebody planes in their fleets may be concerned about flooding the market, given the financial losses they've incurred in the past year. Take Lufthansa, which together with Austrian and Swiss operates more than 200 weekly flights to 17 U.S. cities. The German carrier said in a statement sent to AFAR that even though bookings had jumped by 40 percent following the relaxation of U.S. travel restrictions, "at this moment, we already have a robust offering to the United States." The carrier acknowledged, though, that "the situation is very fluid and Lufthansa is capable of expanding its capacity quite quickly."

But as the U.S. airlines found recently when they tried to ramp up operations too quickly, it can take time for international flights to pick up steam. Airlines will "cautiously add back routes" heading into the holiday season and may even be back to a full, pre-pandemic schedule for summer 2022.

The bottom line? There's no guarantee that international air fares will stay as low as they have been for much longer. So if you see a great fare, you may want to pounce and call us as soon as possible.



# Covid test shortage puts stress on travelers waiting for results

As demand for Covid testing outstrips supply in the U.S., advisors are keeping a close eye on test kit shortages, lab delays and the potential impact on the travel sector.

Demand for at-home rapid tests that are CDC-approved for travel, such as Abbott's BinaxNOW Covid-19 Home Test, are also on the rise. Unlike regular at-home rapid tests, these tests are video-guided on virtual platforms and supervised by a trained professional, offering certified results.



## FAA: Getting tough with unruly passengers is paying off

The rate of unruly-passenger incidents on U.S. flights has dropped by about half since January but remains more than double the rate of late 2020, according to the FAA.

"Our work is having an impact and the trend is moving in the right direction. But we need the progress to continue," FAA administrator Steve Dickson said in prepared remarks Thursday.

Dickson said the agency will continue to enforce the zero-tolerance policy on unruly passenger behavior that it started early this year, meaning that it will continue its approach of not issuing warning letters and moving directly to enforcement.

So far in 2021, the FAA has received 4,385 unruly-passenger reports, including 3,199 related to wearing masks. The agency has initiated 789 investigations and 162 civil enforcement cases. Enforcement action typically involves fines.

As of last week, unruly-passenger incidents were occurring approximately six times per 10,000 flights, the FAA said.

The agency put out its latest statement on unruly passengers just hours after the House Aviation Subcommittee held a hearing on the topic. In testimony before the subcommittee, Lauren Beyer, vice president of security and facilitation for Airlines for America, repeated the trade group's call for the Justice Department to bring criminal cases against unruly passengers.

Flight attendants' unions also called for more action, including the creation of a federal no-fly list for disruptive passengers, criminal prosecution and the confiscation of all alcohol at TSA checkpoints.

The FAA said it plans to host unruly-passenger working sessions with aviation industry stakeholders in the coming days in order to develop additional steps the government can take to curb the problem.

