

The ultimate guide to summer travel for Seattle and WA travelers

June 21, 2022 at 6:00 am | Updated June 21, 2022 at 4:13 pm



Passengers from the first international flight to arrive at the new international arrivals facility at... (Ellen M. Banner / The Seattle Times) [More](#) ▾

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Special to The Seattle Times

Who wants to travel like a pro this summer?

Mark Beales, a retired mortgage banker from Mill Creek, does. So when he booked a flight to San Francisco, he wondered what a pro would do. Should he fly out of Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, as usual, or give nearby Paine Field a try?

“Seattle is crowded, which means you have to show up two or more hours before your domestic flight to get through [TSA checkpoints](#),” he says. “But only one airline serves Paine Field to a limited number of destinations, including San Francisco. So going through TSA is quick. There are no crowds.”

Given the craziness of [travel this summer](#), you may be considering postponing your summer vacation. If you do hit the road, here are tips to [vacation wisely](#).

It’s hard to travel like a pro this summer

As Seattle residents gear up for their summer vacation, they’re faced with many decisions. Where should they go? Should they fly or [drive](#)? What if something goes wrong?

“The travel floodgates have opened this summer,” says Valentina O’Kane, owner of [Incognito Global Travel](#). “People are rushing to get out there again.”

What awaits them? Travel pros like O’Kane say popular tourist destinations are overbooked, with little — if any — availability. They’ll also be [overcrowded](#) and overpriced.

“Travelers should expect [much higher rates](#) than pre-pandemic years for everything from accommodations, to transportation, to food and tours,” she says. “At the same time, they should lower their expectations when it

comes to service as the industry is still struggling with staffing and inventory issues.”

Beales discovered one way to avoid the crowds. He decided to book a flight from Paine Field, which is closer to home and rated as one of the least stressful airports in America.

“I’m looking forward to the 20-minute drive to catch my upcoming flight from Paine Field to San Francisco,” he says.

Good move? Maybe, says Narendra Khatri, principal of travel insurance company [Insubuy](#).

“If you can find an alternate airport with flights to your destination, they can be an excellent way to avoid crowds,” he says. “Just keep in mind that if an airline cancels a flight from a smaller airport, the chances of being able to catch a different flight to the same destination are lower. You could have to put up with a longer delay and fewer airport amenities.”

What else do you need to travel like a pro this summer? Here are the most common questions:

How do you handle mass flight cancellations?

[Mass airline cancellations](#) seem to be happening with greater frequency. If you want to travel like a pro, you need to know about this. Domestic airlines canceled more than 2,800 flights on [Memorial Day weekend](#), blaming the weather, COVID-19 and air traffic.

“Mass flight cancellations are a travel nightmare and are happening so frequently now it borders on chaos,” says Beth Schulberg, owner of [Cruise & Travel Specialists](#). “Staffing shortages are set to continue all summer, so it’s not likely to get any better.”

What if you’re stuck in one of these? Call your travel professional immediately for help. If you booked through an online travel agency, call or text the company to find your options. And if that doesn’t work, try social media.

If your airline canceled your flight because of weather or an act of God, it generally either owes you a full refund or has to rebook you on the next available flight. But if the airline cancels because of something within its control, like a broken plane, it has a higher duty of care. You should expect it to take care of [meals](#), [lodging](#) and [ground transportation](#) while waiting for your next flight.

If you want to travel like a pro, you should get ahead of the cancellations as soon as possible. Confirm your flight and check in 24 hours before your departure. Once you start seeing several cancellations at your airport, contact your travel adviser or online agency to find alternative ways to get to your destination. Don’t wait.

What if you test positive for coronavirus while you’re on vacation?

One of the summer’s biggest travel worries is: What if I get sick? Until this month, air travelers returning to the United States had to present a negative coronavirus test to get on the plane. The CDC [rescinded that requirement on June 12](#).

So what happens now?

John Rose, chief risk and security officer for [ALTOUR](#), a travel management company, suggests that if you get COVID, you should wait until you are [no longer contagious](#) to others. He adds, “You may also be subject to quarantine and having a negative test before you can fly, but this is country-specific as many countries no longer have testing requirements.

As a practical matter, no one is going to screen you before you get on a flight. [Get tested](#) and then voluntarily [quarantine](#) if you feel unwell.

COVID is still a problem in Asia. What are the rules for traveling there?

Some countries, like Japan, recently opened up to tourism again, but [there's a lot of paperwork](#). South Korea is also open, [but with some restrictions](#). China [remains closed to most American visitors](#).

“The rules vary,” says Valerie Edman, owner of [Cultured Travel LLC](#).

But even if you can go, *should* you? To find out, you have to check two key sources. The first is [Sherpa](#), a site that lists all the entry requirements. Don't just go to the website; check the sources and read them for yourself to ensure you fully understand the requirements.

The second source is the [State Department's travel site](#), which rates countries based on risk. China, Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong have Level 3 advisories because of COVID. (Level 3 is the second-highest warning, urging Americans to reconsider travel because of “serious risks.”)

“Asia is not opening up as quickly as Europe has, and there are still many COVID restrictions that must be followed for travel to different countries in Asia,” says Kim Johnston, a travel adviser with [Travel Leaders](#) in Tacoma. “I may even recommend waiting for another six months to consider travel to Asia. I think we will eventually see it become as open as the rest of the world.”

What are the most popular destinations from Seattle this summer?

If you'd rather stay closer to home this summer, there are plenty of options. According to the State of Washington Tourism, one of the summer hot spots is [Long Beach Peninsula](#) in the southwest corner of the state. Seafood, seemingly endless beaches, and rainforests attract summer visitors. Go there if you want to travel like a pro.

Other destinations across the Pacific Northwest are also high on everyone's list this summer. The vacation rental site [Vrbo](#) says Wenatchee and Bend, Oregon, are among the most visited destinations for Washington residents (they're numbers one and three.) Also popular are Cle Elum, Kittitas County; Ocean Shores, Grays Harbor County; and Friday Harbor, San Juan County.

But [staycations](#) are also trendy during this time of uncertainty, says Alison Kwong, a Vrbo spokesperson. “Summer is a popular time to visit Seattle because it's not as rainy and temperatures are warm, but not brutally hot,” she says.

In contrast, travel adviser Schulberg says Seattle residents who feel adventurous are heading to Western Europe and Iceland this summer. Or, if you can wait until early October, she says Air Tahiti Nui starts [nonstop flights](#) to Tahiti.