

None of us knew how long the Covid-19 pandemic would last. At the start, Australia enjoyed a level of normality while the rest of the world played defence against the fast-spreading virus. It was difficult to watch from afar, but we found solace in being an island continent. However, as the case numbers inevitably rose, we too were thrust into yo-yo lockdowns - with widespread vaccinations being the only viable 'out.'

For many Australians, there's been a lot of time at home... days filled with worry and contemplation over whether or not life will ever be the same. While awaiting press announcements, we were managing a collective fear. A constant state of fight or flight and that unsettling anxiety in the pit of our stomachs.

Only now, more than 18 months later, do we look towards regaining a sense of normality once we achieve an 80% national vaccination rate (in adults 16 years and over). With promises of restrictions easing and the possibility of international travel resuming, we are starting to consider where we *can* go and what we *can* do.

We're all been longing for exotic destinations but hopping on a plane might feel overwhelming. Image: Jag_cz

International flights are set to resume on December 18th, 2021. According to the most recent announcement, the focus will initially be on low-risk countries. Australians will be able to travel to London, Los Angeles, Honolulu, Vancouver, Singapore, Tokyo, and Fiji. The travel bubble to New Zealand will also be reinstated around this time, with other destinations opening up in the new year.

This excitement will bring with it a mixed bag of emotions - and likely, more questions than answers.

- I want to travel but is it safe?
- Will I be able to plan a trip in my Christmas holidays?
- Should I wait until next year?
- What about travel insurance? Am I covered if something goes wrong?
- Is it smart to travel when we could go into lockdown again?
- What about the Delta variant?
- Is it selfish to start making travel plans when there's been so much loss?

Booking flights, accommodation, or even a table in a restaurant can trigger feelings of uncertainty.

Anxiety is normal... and you're not alone

Regardless of whether you've spent months in lockdown or are grieving the loss of your unattained plans, this is a confusing time! Most of us are ready to leave this chapter behind and reignite those itineraries to far-flung destinations. On the other hand, we're nervous about putting time, money, and hope into planning a trip that might not happen.

There's a lot to navigate and it's normal to feel apprehension about getting out on the road, booking a flight or surrounding yourself with strangers again. Take your time reintegrating, don't rush it until you feel comfortable, and remember that we're all going through this - so,

there's a collective understanding and level of respect. We all just want to get on with life again.

This is a good opportunity to practice surrendering. You can't control others or potential lockdowns, so we need to accept 'what *is*' in whatever way that looks. Take the necessary precautions and do everything in your power to feel safe. When making travel arrangements, remain optimistic but flexible – create contingency plans to cover all possibilities and relieve the stress of the unknown.



Start small and ease gently back into travel.

Coping with travel anxiety

If you're experiencing uncertainty and heightened emotions, these strategies might help.

Know your triggers

Take some time to explore the reasons why you're feeling anxious. Is it because you haven't gone far from home since the start of Covid? Are you concerned about getting sick or losing money if a trip is cancelled? Interrogate your emotions, unpack them, and discover what's behind the fear. Talking to someone or journaling are useful tools.

Ask yourself: *what am I worried about when it comes to travelling?* Most likely, it's the fear of the unknown.

Set your boundaries

As you start to plan to travel, it's important to know your limits. Maybe you're comfortable with domestic travel and getting to places by road. Boarding a flight or being in large crowds might feel too ambitious for you right now. Once you know your level of comfort, making decisions will be easier.



Create the space you need to reintegrate in the way that's right for you.

Communicate your limits with travel buddies

Travel with people who you trust and feel safe with, at least for the first few trips. This will alleviate some of that pre-departure stress. Be honest with your travelling companions and share with them where you're at – your mental health and what you are or are not willing to do.

Release what you can't control

The greatest joys of travel are hidden within its spontaneity. If you decide to plan a trip, do your best to relinquish some control. Yes, be as safe as possible, but don't cut yourself off from the wonders of travel. Start small, ease into it, build up that confidence again, and let your love for travel open you.



Self-care 101: pack tools that support your wellbeing.

'Pack' self-care practices

You've probably developed a few rituals that've helped you get through the last couple of years. Bring these outlets with you. It might be a notebook and pen, a meditation app, a good book, a yoga practice, hiking, access to a close friend, or connecting with nature. Instead of planning your days ahead of time, you can also go with the flow on these early trips. Allow yourself to sync with the rhythm of travel, without being pulled in different directions.

You also might find comfort in creating a routine in new places. It helps with the increased uncertainty that you might feel, even if you're an experienced traveller. Think about the rituals that you do every day at home that ground you. These activities can bring a sense of structure and something familiar to your travel days.

It could be as simple as enjoying a morning coffee and book, going for a walk after lunch, cooking a nourishing meal, taking a break from social media, or connecting with a friend in real life. These mood-enhancing habits help to ground us and are more important than ever during these times.

Your next adventure could be as simple as a picnic in your local park, or as big and grand as a trip overseas.

Emerge as informed & conscious world citizens

This is an opportunity to reflect on how we want to travel going forward. How we connect with other communities and cultures and care for ourselves and the environment.

The past 18 months have highlighted the importance of travel – for us as individuals, as nations and as global citizens. With the rise in flexible work arrangements and remote home office setups, travel will undoubtedly become slower and more intentional. There'll be fewer quick, all-included package trips. Perhaps we'll see greater discernment and deeper, more fulfilling connections. Certainly, we've seen a renewed appreciation for what is local to us, and we've learned how to create adventures closer to home as much as those that see us hopping onto a flight.

Travel has become more rewarding and meaningful, and I doubt any of us will ever take it for granted again. Interestingly, it is and always has been, all around us. Reconnect with your own community, wander city streets, people watch, take a day trip, and see your world through a new lens. Travel is as much a worldview as it is an action. It awaits you, every day.

Are you ready to book a trip?