

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

NO FLIGHT NECESSARY



Re  **set**
lessons from
lockdown

NO FLIGHT NECESSARY



How the pandemic triggered a new 'micro-adventure' movement in local spaces and places



As flying becomes a no-go area for growing numbers of carbon conscious travellers, the default holiday is changing as a result of our experience during the pandemic. People have realised they can explore much closer to home and save time, money and reduce their impact on the environment. It also enables people to see their **home location**¹ from a new – and sometimes more positive – perspective. From **Instagram trips around Hong Kong**² to walking tours of the Cincinnati's **slave history**,³ imaginative ways of having fun in your own area have sprung up all over. Exotic places on the other side of the world are no longer a must, **staycations**⁴ and regional tourism have become desirable again, and simply discovering your local area is back on the table.

The UK's Ordnance Survey Maps app saw a year-on-year sales **increase of 41%**⁵ in April 2020, as people took to the streets, lanes and footpaths in search of space. Even sales of custom made paper maps in May 2020 were up by 175% as people made up their own local walks and trips. **The Echoes interactive "sound walks" app**⁶ uses audio made by artists, musicians, authors and historians around the world, with content triggered by GPS or Apple iBeacons along the route to add a new dimension to your journey. This change spells hope for a more sustainable future and could revive many under-appreciated towns and regions, as people find places of historical, cultural and ecological interest closer to home. Travelling locally or regionally means that flying is unlikely and that more sustainable forms of transport predominate: trains, cycling, walking and electric vehicles.



During the lockdowns in particular, as people were restricted to places they could **reach by bike**⁷ or on foot, many were astonished to discover local woods, walking paths, town trails, parks and ancient monuments they would otherwise never have found. The shared exploration with friends and family – or alone – of a local, loved location is an experience well known in earlier times and being rediscovered today. This can also help build community, bring people together regularly and **increase wellbeing**,⁸ and reduce the impact on more famous sites. It also **reduces overconsumption**⁹ – a walk through a local bluebell wood or across a nearby park provides healthy activity, rest from stress and requires no gift shop, or shopping at all. One Florida resident was amazed to discover his county has 24 parks and **11,000 acres of nature**¹⁰ to explore.



Nature and health and all its interactions are of huge interest and importance to me. This stems from an early career in public health and a lifelong love for wildlife and nature. I have always enjoyed engaging with my local patch and am incredibly lucky to have a wildlife garden to immerse myself in. I was really, really heartened by the joy that so many people found from connecting with nature on their doorsteps during the lockdowns in particular. I truly hope that we can continue this as part of a more sustainable future, both for our own health and wellbeing and for the reduced carbon footprint that will contribute to tackling climate change.

Sandra King, Beaver Trust

Not everyone has access to the countryside and some organisations stepped up to support those living in cities or towns with little access to green space. The UK's Council for British Archaeology and the Young Archaeologists Club, ran a **Local Explorers Challenge**¹¹ based on the game of Bingo, in which the aim is to find a series of features – the winner is the one who finds them all first. People used to exploring more widely and who found themselves restricted in geography came up with **creative ways to explore**¹² close to home, such as drawing a circle on a map and then following it, finding the highest point in your area and zig-zagging your way back home, follow a feature of the landscape – a river or canal, pipeline or power line, travelling every path or street in your area in one journey, walking a familiar route but at night. A British author came up with a whole book on **"Microadventures"**¹³ that can be done close to home without overconsumption or unsustainable travel.

The pandemic drew much needed attention to the inequality of health impacts and access to outside spaces for poorer populations and – thanks largely to the awareness of persistent racism after the death of the American George Floyd – in particular to racism in rural areas. According to the **Office for National Statistics**,¹⁴ in every region of England and Wales, white groups were least likely to live in an urban location and people from Asian and Black ethnic groups were most likely to do so.

A range of groups actively encouraging people from a range of ethnic backgrounds to hike, walk and otherwise explore the countryside across Britain rose to prominence during the pandemic, from **Black2Nature**,¹⁵ **Black Girls Hike**¹⁶ and **Black Men Walking**.¹⁷ Black Girls Hike member Davina, who lives in the UK city of Salford, found a **local canal path**¹⁸ she had never visited before thanks to the restrictions on going to more obviously exciting destinations. This movement is growing, acknowledging that people of colour are often **not welcomed in the countryside**.¹⁹ British heritage charity The National Trust ran a study programme together with the University of Leicester to build on the UK's growing understanding of how its huge slave trade funded many of its **country houses**²⁰ and other historical infrastructure.



Many places dependent on international tourism had to respond flexibly to the sudden stop of visitors and several did this successfully by pivoting to local interest, history, art and nature. Hong Kong travel companies offered **ghost tours**²¹ for residents around famous sites and cemeteries, and the chance to solve a local mystery with a map and clues. The city's hotels also **marketed strongly**²² at local people to use their facilities for a staycation. As many people live in small apartments, this proved popular and kept much of the tourism sector afloat. In the US, organisations such as the Cincinnati Reds baseball club compensated for the empty stadiums by running **walking tours**²³ in the area.

Some people for whom travel was a large part of their life – such as wealthier retired people used to roaming in campervans or to second homes – had to significantly adjust their behaviour and found much to appreciate. Australia is a country whose citizens are used to travelling long distances, and the pandemic has given many of them a new way to exercise their famously adventurous spirit. **Research on domestic tourism**²⁴ in 2021 pointed out the tendency among young Australians to travel overseas in their younger years and wait until they have a family or even until retirement before taking the time to really explore Australia. The pandemic may reverse this trend, as Australia's huge spaces and unique wildlife offer great value for money with a much lower carbon footprint. Road trips, camping and homestays are all popular and the number of recreational vehicles (campers, caravans and motorhomes) registered rose by **16.5 per cent**²⁵ in the June quarter of 2020.

The pandemic not only stopped us travelling; it also resulted in many of us focusing on closer to home, becoming more engaged with our local communities, cycling and walking to destinations in our own neighbourhoods and noticing the natural world in our immediate vicinity. As the world opens up again and foreign destinations look more enticing, let's hope that our newfound appreciation of our own areas remains strong, helping us to build resilience together.

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