

FINDING PEACE IN BC ✨ WHALE WATCHING IN QUEBEC ✨ ECO-FRIENDLY TRAVEL GEAR ✨ OVERCOMING TRAVEL ANXIETY

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Travel *in the time of Covid*

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CANADIAN *Traveller* WINTER 2020



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ON THE COVER:
Ramsey Lake, Sudbury, Ontario
istock photo



RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

As an adolescent, I dreamed of becoming a travel magazine editor. I imagined engaging in heated discussions in a glass-windowed boardroom and catching last-minute flights to tropical destinations with talented journalists. I'd happily spend my evenings in boutique hotel rooms feverishly penning every detail of the architecture, festivals, food and culture in a worn, leather-bound notebook.

Even in my wildest fantasies, I never imagined debuting my career as a print editor amid a global pandemic. Instead of taste-testing foreign delicacies and roaming through historic city centres, I'm trapped in my home office, re-recording interviews on my phone and joining editorial meetings on Zoom.

I'm not complaining—I feel extremely lucky to be healthy, safe and employed, commencing my new role as the managing editor for *Canadian Traveller*—but I will acknowledge this isn't a year, or an issue, like most.

The magazine you're holding has been a long time in the making. I can trace it back to my first overseas journey as a wide-eyed 11-year-old. Wearing bell-bottom jeans

and wire-rimmed glasses, I explored Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Brussels with my upbeat, optimistic mom. Since then, I've explored over 35 different countries—many of them with my mom by my side. She's my true beginning.

Travelling internationally sparked a sense of unencumbered joy I barely understood—except to know I wanted more of it. From Australia to India to South Africa, I charted my own course, packing my bags and moving freely for the best, hardest and most formative parts of the past 10 years.

I, too, can't wait to walk down the aisle and hear those beautiful words, "this is your captain speaking," but right here, right now, I implore Canadian travellers to focus on hyper-local, eco-friendly explorations that will improve ourselves, our backyard and possibly the entire world. (Can you tell I inherited my mom's optimism, too?)

Beginning with imaginative tips for sustainable travel, this issue includes stories that detail the realities, difficulties and unexpected joys of domestic travel in the time of

Covid-19. I'm delighted to publish an in-depth feature on race, gender and passport privilege by Bianca Bujan. You'll also read Kevin Wagar's haunting story about fear, anxiety and loss of control—a relatable experience on the road.

Several of these articles ask—and attempt to answer—one of the biggest questions in the travel industry right now: *how do we travel in the time of Covid?*

I don't have all the answers, but I hope these well-crafted articles will spark your intuition, wanderlust, curiosity and kindness. The truth is, we're all just trying to figure it out—step by step, moment by moment.

How we travel in the physical world has changed, but our commitment to bringing you the best travel writing hasn't. You're about to be transported to stormy seas in the Philippines, an uncomfortable security search in Ecuador and a milestone whale watching tour in Quebec—all between these few pages. Take a long walk to your comfiest, coziest nook and buckle in: this is your editor speaking. It's time for takeoff.

Wistfully,

Alison Karlene Hodgins
Managing Editor



Right:
Alison with
her mom, Margaret,
in Europe, 2003.

CANADIAN *Traveller*

CANADIANTRAVELLER.COM

MANAGING EDITOR

Alison Karlene Hodgins
alisonh@mypassionmedia.com

ART DIRECTOR

Gordon Alexander

CONTRIBUTORS

Kellie Paxian, Amy Fish,
Deidre Olsen, Kevin Wagar,
Bianca Bujan, Waheeda Harris

NATIONAL ACCOUNT MANAGER

James Mohr

ACCOUNT MANAGER

— FLORIDA REGION
Bonny Mager

GENERAL ADVERTISING INQUIRIES

1-888-924-7524

adsales@mypassionmedia.com

CEO Brad Liski

CHIEF TECHNICAL OFFICER

Kevin Hinton

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

Ryan McKenzie

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

David Webb

CUSTOMER SERVICE Sheila Ross

CONTROLLER Cheryl Haapalo

DIRECTOR - CONSUMER MARKETING

Craig Sweetman

SUBSCRIPTION HOTLINE

1-888-924-7524

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subscription@mypassionmedia.com

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Tips for Sustainable & Eco-friendly Trips

BY KELLIE PAXIAN

"It's just one straw," said eight billion people.

The pandemic has reinforced the reality that travel is a privilege, not a right, and it is more critical than ever to do so sustainably. Every choice we make as travellers must be made consciously to minimize our impact on the environment. Here are five tips for sustainable and eco-friendly travel—whether you're exploring locally or planning future international adventures.

1. OPT FOR GREEN TRANSPORTATION

During the pandemic, Canadians have discovered that we don't have to go far to find stunning natural landscapes.

When it's safe to do so, we can head south of the border by an eco-friendly vehicle or train.

Choose transportation with minimal environmental impact such as walking, biking or taking public transport.

The average passenger vehicle emits up to nine tonnes of CO₂ each year. To offset that carbon, you'll need to plant about 50 trees every year.

While we tend to associate travelling with getting on an airplane, flying isn't the greenest option. Aviation produces two

to three per cent of global carbon emissions, prompting many climate activists to advocate for going flight-free.

If you want to give up flying for good, don't fret—get creative! There are other ways to cross the pond; take it from 17-year-old Greta Thunberg, who crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a zero-carbon-emissions sailboat and hasn't flown in 12 years!



2. BOOK WITH SUSTAINABLE COMPANIES

Look for accommodation or tour companies with sustainable practices including using local guides, donating to the environment and community or implementing eco-friendly features such as motion-sensor lighting and automatic/timed taps and showers.

If sustainability is important to a company, this value will likely be clear in the brand messaging. For example, JetBlue Airways is working toward carbon-neutral flying by purchasing offsets, using sustainable aviation fuel and investing in NextGen technologies. Hostelling International Canada employs sustainable features at some locations: Banff's Rampart Creek has off-grid fridges, Athabasca Falls in Jasper has solar-panel electricity and Bonavista in Newfoundland and Labrador has wind turbines.





3. PACK RESPONSIBLY

Avoid packing products that produce unnecessary waste, such as single-use or plastic packaging, and items that could harm the environment, such as microbeads and aerosols.

In addition to reusable and recycled items, consider bringing shampoo bars from companies like Lush, reef-friendly sunscreen such as Think-sport, sustainable laundry detergent like Tru Earth and lightweight containers such as bento boxes so you can take leftovers or take-out without wasting a disposable box or bag.

If you're flying, pack as light as possible. Travelling lighter will remove excess weight from the airplane, which will require less fuel, emitting less CO₂ into the atmosphere. Having lighter luggage will also make you more inclined to take public transport instead of renting a private vehicle.

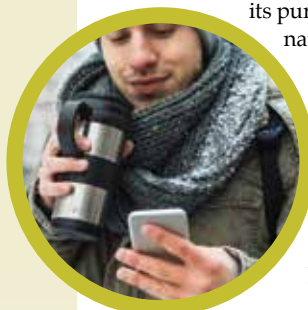


4. SUPPORT LOCAL

Skip the tacky tourist shops and mass-produced souvenirs—support street vendors and local artisans instead. Invest in experiences rather than things, booking with local companies that prioritize sustainability.

Why not embrace the digital age and consider photographs your souvenirs? Otherwise, go for items that hold sentimental value and will last beyond your trip or serve a purpose, such as a towel or a hat. Make sure the product is high quality, locally made and fair trade.

While shopping, avoid animal products such as horns, tusks, teeth and skins that may have been sourced unethically, as well as natural artefacts that have been plucked from their environment. Removing any part of nature may have a detrimental effect on the environment where it belongs. For example, taking a sand dollar as a souvenir will prevent it from its purpose as an ocean filter or food source. Every part of nature has a role to play!



5. MINIMIZE YOUR WASTE

Request not to be given straws, plastic cups and single-use packaging while travelling. Learn phrases like “no straw, please” or “no bag, please” in the local language.

Decline disposable toiletries and room cleaning; use the same towel and linen for the duration of your stay. Go paperless with electronic tickets for tours, flights, trains and buses. Take photos of brochures or other materials on your phone rather than taking a paper copy.

Keeping these tips in mind will decrease our carbon footprints and increase our chances of being able to explore our beautiful planet for generations to come. 🌍



IS OFFSETTING YOUR FLIGHT ENOUGH?

Offsetting your flight means paying for the carbon produced by your occupancy in the skies. For example, a typical roundtrip flight for one individual in economy from Vancouver, Canada, to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, produces about 1.3 tonnes of CO₂ and costs less than \$35 to offset. While this is an easy, affordable way to make your trip carbon neutral, sustainable travel is not as easy as paying off your emissions. According to the Nature Conservancy, each person should produce less than two tonnes total per year to have the best chance of avoiding a 2 C rise in global temperatures. In an article for the *New York Times*, Andy Newman wrote: “Going someplace far away, we now know, is the biggest single action a private citizen can take to worsen climate change.” How can we reconcile international travel with environmental responsibility?

WHALE WATCHING

during the pandemic

AMY FISH and her husband have been waiting decades to see whales in the wild. It took a Covid-induced backyard trip to finally see these incredible marine mammals.



Humpback whale watching on the north shore of the Saint Lawrence River.

//

"IS THAT A WHALE?" I ask, pointing toward a blur in the deep blue of the Saint Lawrence River.

"No, mom. I think that's a bird," says my middle son, Benji.

Having never seen a whale up close, I'm not exactly sure what to look for.

Every smudge out the window holds the potential to amaze and delight me.

"I think when we see an actual whale, we'll know it," offers my oldest son, Ezra, iPhone poised to capture any passing marine life. ▶

Les
Escoumins
→



istock photo

“Fingers crossed,” my husband says.

“Listen. The tour boat company said that they have a 99 per cent success rate. They said they can’t give a money-back guarantee, but—”

The boat stops. The window walls come down.

This is good news because it means we are heading into whale-spotting territory. It’s also good news because it means we can remove our face masks and breathe in fresh air. This being a pandemic, we are used to wearing our masks all the time—and we are also used to removing them as soon as we safely can.

Somehow, with my mask down, I feel like I can see better, and looking to the right of the boat I spot them: two majestic creatures jumping clear out of the water. Goosebumps rise on my arms. I want to pinch myself to make sure it’s really happening.

I am astounded by how graceful the whales are. Their moves look choreographed—like synchronized swimmers. Are they performing for us? Are they playing together? I have no idea. But I can tell you this—they are not smudges. Those are two honest-to-goodness, full-size, in-the-flesh humpback whales.

My family squishes together, watching and pointing as the whales frolic 40 or 50 metres away from us. We spot their tails. We see their heads. We watch them surface. Blow air. They breach—pull their entire bodies out of the water—and even my 15-year-old daughter gasps in delight.



Humpback
whale tails are a
mesmerizing sight.
→

Marc Loiselle/Tourisme Côte-Nord

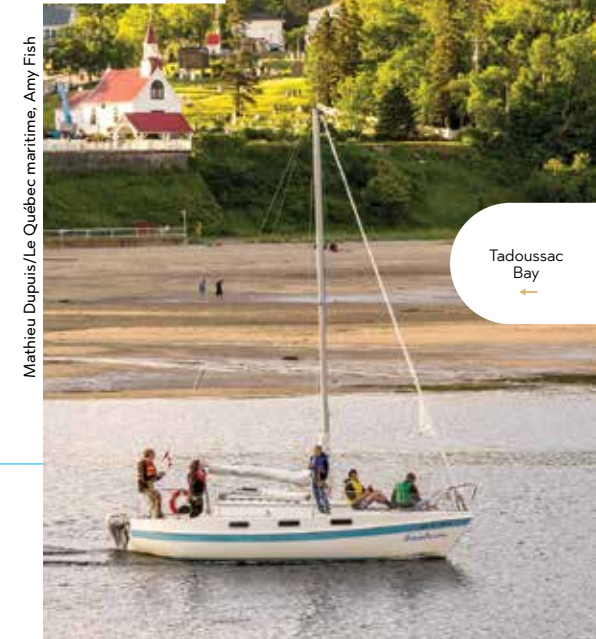
MY HUSBAND REACHES his arm around me and squeezes. We have been waiting 27 years for this moment. Not because we are such whale fans, but because our inability to *spot* a whale has become a running joke. We have been on three or four whale watching tours over the years, from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, to the great fjords of Norway. Each time, the guide has returned the boat to harbour saying something like, “Huh. I don’t know what happened. Just this morning, we saw 11 belugas, six dolphins and a Pacific walrus sunning itself on that rock.” Dave and I saw nothing but blue waves.



Matching shirts from a different, but memorable, family vacation. ←



Tadoussac Bay ←



Mathieu Dupuis/Le Québec maritime, Amy Fish

On this landmark tour, our guide tells us that whales have been evolving for 50 million years. With that in mind, 27 years of searching doesn't seem like much. And eight months of a pandemic is like a grain of sand.

This is a big change from our usual summer vacation. At some point in July, I realized that the US border was not going to reopen and our annual beach holiday had to be cancelled. I sadly gave up our ferry reservation to Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts and resigned myself to being stuck at home with no family bonding vacation to look forward to.

After a day or two of wallowing, it dawned on me that just because we couldn't have our usual road trip didn't mean we couldn't take any road trip at all. We just needed to figure out how to travel safely during the pandemic.

I put together a list of requirements: I was looking for a wholesome family activity that was driving distance from our house in Montreal. I wanted something that would entertain our three children (plus a girlfriend) ranging in age from 15 to 21 years old. I was not looking for adventurous activities, like sleeping under the stars or kayaking over a waterfall—not for this group.

I thought a cottage rental would be the safest bet because we would be able to bring extra cleaning supplies and prepare our own food. Plus, there would be no elevators or lobbies to worry about. The government restrictions allowed for some travel between regions at that time, so we were within the Ministry of Health guidelines.

I started clicking around and found a little A-frame house perched on the rocks in Les Escoumins, Quebec. Every single one of the 30-plus reviewers said they sat on the back deck and watched whales swim in the water below. I was sure that the whale population would disappear when they heard we were coming, so I hedged our bets with a whale watching boat tour which turned out to be front-row seats to a whale ballet.

COVID-19 HAS BEEN devastating for so many. At the same time, I know this life-changing experience never would have happened if the global pandemic hadn't derailed our normal travel plans.

Destinations that used to be easily accessible are now closed to us, forcing us to stay closer to home. We have masks covering our mouths and noses. We have hand sanitizer and wipes in our bags, and extra sweaters tied around our waists in case an icy wind blows off the Saint Lawrence. We also have matching t-shirts, memories of a great family vacation and finally, finally—I can spot the difference between a 30,000-kilogram mammal and a smudge on the window. **U**



FAMILY

*Finding Peace
on a Mother-Daughter*

ROAD TRIP

Cape Scott
Provincial Park

Nature offers a much-needed respite
from the intensity of the pandemic for
DEIDRE OLSEN and her mother.

THE RHYTHM OF THE OCEAN'S SWAY beckoned us forward. Salt filled the air. A bright green carpet of skunk cabbage and moss blanketed the forest floor. The canopy of old-growth Sitka spruce, hemlock and western redcedar lined the trail's edge, sheltering us from the drizzling rain above.

At San Josef Bay, I felt a million miles away from the grey, gloomy, suffocating city streets back home. For the first time in a long time, the outside world brought me an immeasurable sense of peace.

MY MOTHER AND I were on a three-day road trip on the west coast of British Columbia. She lives in Delta, a mainland municipality where the river meets the ocean. We packed her Ford Explorer with the essential supplies: food, clothes and a mattress to sleep on in the back of the truck, plus blankets and pillows. My tiny, elderly dog Padugi cozied up in the makeshift bed.

We reserved a spot on the 7 a.m. ferry and arrived nearly an hour early. Once on the boat, we put on our face masks, departed the vehicle and headed upstairs. The ferry used to be bustling, full of folks heading home or to the Island for a weekend getaway. This time, the atmosphere was somber. People either stayed inside their vehicles or kept apart from one another on board.

I felt melancholy and gratitude in equal measure as our ferry landed at Duke Point in Nanaimo. From here, it would be a six-hour drive to our destination

that moment, it had been so hard to be present—I felt like I was constantly on the edge of my seat waiting to see what would happen next. Finally cut off from the noise of social media and barrage of Covid-19 news, I sank into my seat and took a deep breath, eyes fixated on the coastline.

IF YOU WANT to fuel up and grab snacks or use your cellphone, Port Hardy is your last hope. From this town on the northeast coast of Vancouver Island, the highway becomes a gravel road filled with potholes. There is little-to-nothing but logging traffic and a short tour through the quaint town of Holberg for a 75-kilometre stretch.

As we drove deeper into the rainforest, I could feel my senses heightening. Rolling down the window, the air was crisper, the smell of the trees more potent and the sound of rain hitting the Earth louder. We came across several black bears and stopped to let them cross the road or to snap a quick picture. I was amazed by how quickly they disappeared into the foliage, camouflaged from view. I felt free to do the same: to retreat into nature.

We arrived in the early afternoon to find quite a few people coming and going at the parking lot. It was wet so we put on our raincoats and waterproof hiking boots. As Cape Scott Provincial Park is hike-in only and we were short on time, we opted for the 2.5-kilometre trek to San Josef Bay.

At my feet, Padugi ran beside me, tongue hanging out of her mouth in a joyful pant. I smiled at the sight of nursing logs breathing life into new trees. Beetles, lichen and fungi were hard at work helping old plant and animal life decompose to make way for the next generation.

AS WE LEFT the trail, sand dunes greeted us. We climbed over one and both gasped in awe at the sight of the majestic beach. The stretch of golden sand was empty, save for a family with two children happily running and playing. I could picture what Tofino might have looked like long ago, before the swarms of tourists arrived and constructed oceanfront real estate.

In a place so pristine and untouched, I felt like I was both at the beginning and the end of time. We walked until we found ourselves at the feet of rock formations surrounded by tidal pools. These tall structures, weathered by the ocean, stood skinny at their bases. I could see how high the water would rise as the tide came in. I felt at the mercy of nature and ever so small.

My mother and I looked at each other and exhaled deep sighs in unison. We could feel the magic of nature and its powerful impact on us. It was incredible to be outside without the threat of Covid-19 lurking around every corner, to breathe in the fresh air without a mask on and not be worried about being in close proximity to others. Here, at Cape Scott Provincial Park, we found peace. **U**

on the northwest tip of Vancouver Island—Cape Scott Provincial Park. My mother and I wanted to go somewhere there'd be few people around so we could breathe in the open air.

The trip up-island was calming in every sense of the word. I felt relieved when my phone lost its signal. Before



San Josef Bay



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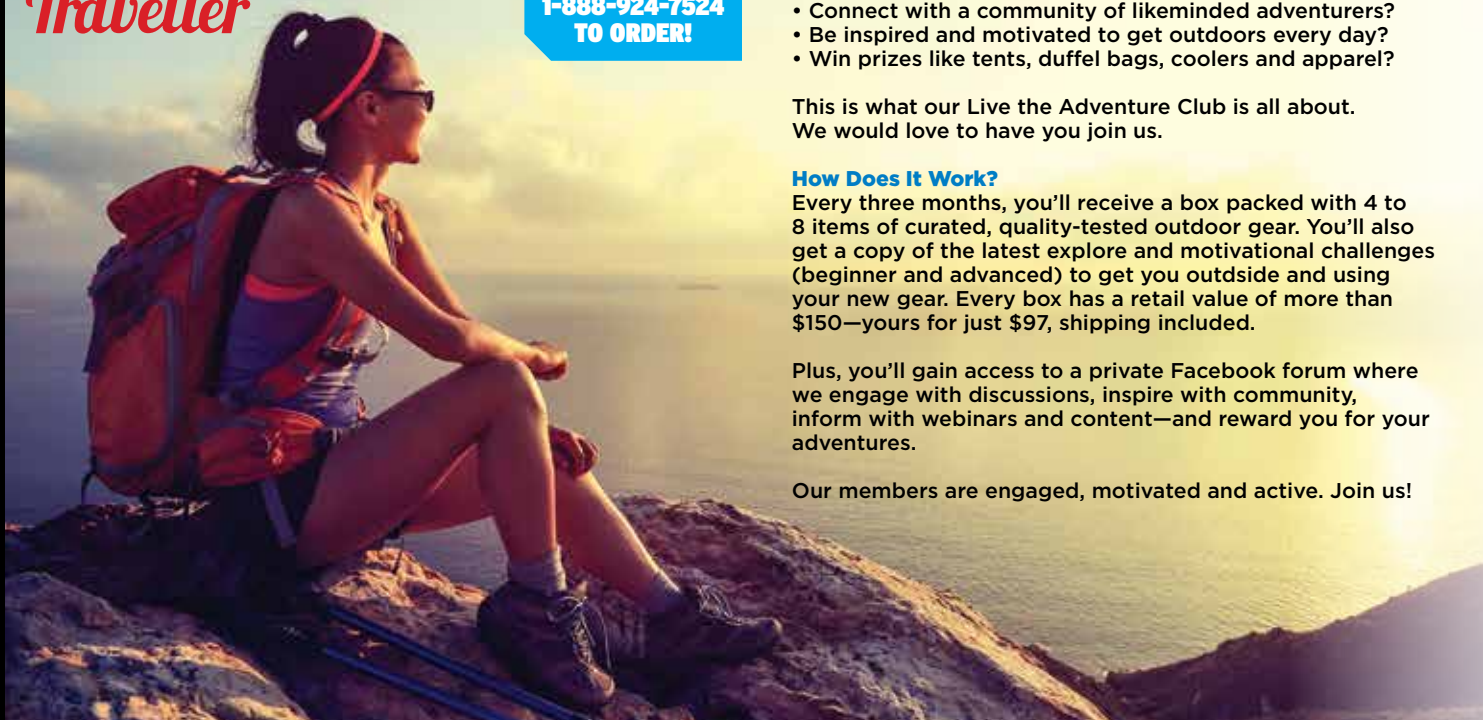
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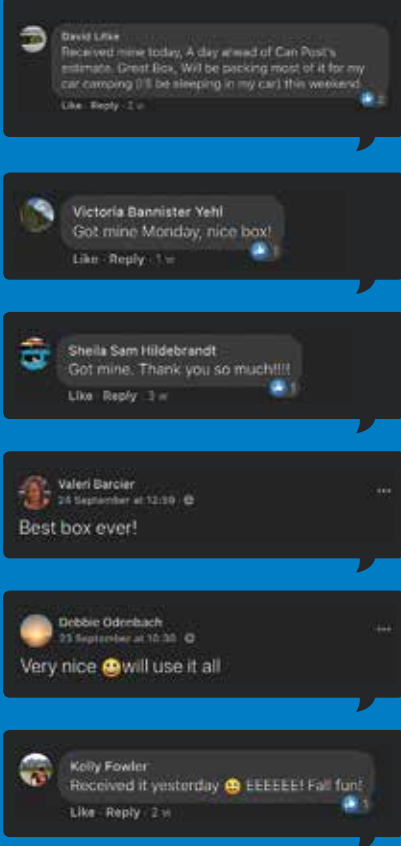
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ADVENTURE

FEAR OF WATER

After his anxiety nearly forced him to stop travelling, **KEVIN WAGAR** confronts similar fears reflected in his youngest son.



Dylan faces his fears.



Kevin Weagar

IN 2018, MY FAMILY BOARDED A FLIGHT FROM Shanghai, China, to Manila, Philippines. We were excited for an experience that would help my kids connect to their Filipino roots, meet my wife's extended family and open our eyes to some of the most beautiful islands and beaches in existence. We weren't expecting this trip to spark a fear that would shape our travels for the next two years.

My wife, Christina, and I are avid travellers. Our two boys, Cohen, age nine, and Dylan, age seven (yes, they're named after Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan), have been travelling around the world with us since they were babies. As toddlers, they rode horses beneath the towering cliffs of Petra in Jordan. Not long afterwards, they played tag with Uru children on the floating islands of Lake Titicaca in Peru. Our passion for travel led me to a career as a family travel writer.

We've run into our fair share of obstacles along the way: awkward border crossings, food poisoning and kids who occasionally strayed. But challenges are meant to be overcome. As a family, we've always worked together. We've supported each other and worked through our fears as a unit.

One short yet frightening experience on the windy beaches of Puerto Princesa in Palawan threatened to throw our life of travel into complete disarray.

WATER HAS BEEN a staple on many of our trips. Between scuba diving, snorkelling, boating and even ice-swimming in Arctic Finland, we've always been drawn to the water.

For Christina and me, water has offered a peaceful escape. The muted noises beneath the waves have been a source of calm and relaxation. For the boys, it's been a place of play and excitement. They know if we're spending a day on the water, it means sun and fun.

That was the case when we arrived in Palawan during the balmy days of early January. We'd been chased out of Boracay by an incoming typhoon. After a restful night of counting stars on the sand and playing tag around the Daluyon Beach and Mountain Resort, we walked to the Sabang Marina for our boat ride to the Puerto Princesa Underground River.

Brilliant blue hues broke between the fluffy clouds and belied the heavy winds that had swept in from the typhoon in Boracay. Choppy seas deterred the boats from coming directly onto the shore to pick us up. We needed

to wade out into the water and board the traditional Filipino paraws (long, double outrigger boats) via a ladder.

Although the sun shone brightly on the beach, we could see angry clouds bubbling over the horizon like a boiling pot. The wind began to whip the ocean mist into our faces. I pulled Dylan into my arms and carried him through waist-deep water toward the paraw.

Cohen bravely skipped through the water and climbed up the ladder like a monkey. Dylan, however, clung to me tightly as he spat salty water from his mouth.

As we approached the boat, he cried out in terror. For

me, timing my leap into the boat between increasingly large waves was simple mental math. For a small five-year-old, it was like standing beneath the feet of a wooden monster, leaping and slashing at him.

The waves were growing increasingly rough, tossing the boat into the air like it was weightless. Dylan buried his head into my shoulder as I grabbed the ladder and hauled the two of us up onto the deck. When I tried to safely place him onto one of the boat's padded seats, I could tell something about him was different. His typically brave and stoic face

was ashen, and his eyes were clamped tightly shut. In that short moment, he had become terrified of boats and open water.

Christina and I thought this might be a temporary fear. However, our boat ride to the remote beaches of San Vicente the next day proved us wrong. Dylan spent most of the journey curled up in my lap, refusing to look over the edge. My wife and I looked at each other and wondered whether our passion for the water would need to be shelved. But we were mostly worried about how to help our sweet, brave boy conquer what would become one of his biggest emotional obstacles.

Knowing that he had this fear hanging over him was heartbreaking for me. I've dealt with anxiety myself. When I was a young traveller, a panic attack nearly derailed my life and ended my travels. Instead, I decided to use it as a catalyst to propel my passion. But it wasn't an overnight feat—anxiety took years for me to overcome. My love of travel and Christina's support helped me find my way through.

I didn't want my little boy to be saddled by the same burdens that had weighed me down. After battling with mental health for most of my life, the idea that my child might have to struggle with something similar overwhelmed me.

When I was a young traveller, a panic attack nearly derailed my life and ended my travels. Instead, I decided to use it as a catalyst to propel my passion.



Kevin comforts Dylan on the boat in the Philippines.

On our next two big family trips, we kept trying to get our little man into the water to help him overcome his fear. We could get him onto small lakes and rivers, but anything resembling an ocean had him trembling like leaves on a windy day.

EVERY YEAR, WE let the boys decide on a destination. They usually base their decisions on what animals they want to see. We've visited penguins in Argentina, polar bears in Churchill and whales on the Saint Lawrence River. This time, it was Cohen's turn to choose. His biggest desire was to swim among tropical fish and colourful reefs. We knew Dylan had a fondness for sea turtles, so we thought, *maybe this is the trip where Dylan will fall back in love with the water.*

We packed up and made our way to Maui, Hawaii, for a trip with a big focus on snorkelling. Every time we dipped into the water, whether it was on Lanai's secluded beaches or the black sand beaches along the road to Hana, our youngest son just couldn't relax.

Finally, on our last outing of the trip, we took a boat out to the Molokini Crater, a spectacular crescent moon-shaped island about three miles offshore. Big D was, as always, dressed in his snorkel gear and ready to go. But we assumed that once he hit the water, his fear would overtake him, and we would spend the day on the boat together playing games of rock, paper, scissors or I spy.

This boat was a little different from what we were used to; it was a family-focused snorkelling excursion ran by the eco-focused Pacific Whale Foundation. Ideal for kids, it featured a waterslide for splashing into the waves.

I went in the water first and waited patiently for Dylan at the bottom. I spent a few minutes taking in my surroundings. Underneath the sparkling blue waves, the vast colours of the ocean were on full display. Tropical fish of every hue flitted and zipped around coral reefs that glowed with reds, blues and pinks.



Chasing sea turtles at the Molokini Crater in Hawaii.

And then I spotted it—something Dylan had been begging to see his entire life.

As I looked up, Dylan was summoning his courage. With a deep breath, he zipped down the slide, hitting the water with a splash. The second he landed, he looked up at me with those massive, terrified brown eyes. I reached out to grab him and held on tight.

"Dylan," I said. "I want you to take three deep breaths and look down below you. There's something extraordinary in the water right under your feet."

Dylan slowed down his breathing just enough that he was able to dip his head beneath the surface of the ocean.

"Dad! Dad! There's a sea turtle down there! It's huge!"

He took off like a shot to follow the turtle through the reef. I never actually caught up to him again. And he was the last one out of the water.

WHEN WE ALL returned to the boat for the ride back to Maui, it was hard to tell who was feeling the most pride: Dylan or me. We spent the next 10 minutes grinning at each other and sharing extravagant high-fives.

It had been heartbreaking to see how his anxiety mirrored my own—we were both handcuffed by our own mental health. But in the end, we both found something we loved enough to overcome the fear that was holding us back. **CT**



istock photo

ISSUES

TICKET TO RIDE:

Acknowledging our travel privilege

Travel writer **BIANCA BUJAN** contemplates passport privilege, how gender and race impact our travel experiences and what we can do to use our privilege to promote responsible tourism.



PASSPORT IN HAND, I head to the airport, hop on a plane and eagerly await my arrival in Ecuador. I've been wanting to visit the Galapagos Islands since I first learned about the archipelago of volcanic islands in a high school geography class. Thanks to a last-minute invite to report on a new land-based, eco-friendly lodge, I'm on my way. As a Canadian travel writer, entry to the country is easy, but as a woman of colour, I have concerns about my safety and status upon arrival.

As someone who travels often, I'm not blind to the benefits that come with carrying a coveted Canadian blue book. My passport provides me with easy access to most of the world, and I'm aware that this benefit—based solely on my birthplace—is a privilege. Beyond accessibility, I also recognize the impacts of my gender and race on my travel experiences. Upon arrival, I wonder: *Will I be safe as a woman travelling solo? Will I be pulled aside and questioned due to the colour of my skin?*

Travel privilege is rarely discussed, yet it has a great influence on both those who can enjoy global mobility with ease and those who cannot. When recognizing our privilege as it relates to our passports, gender and race, we should also consider how our presence in a new place can make a positive impact.

IT'S MID-DECEMBER in 2019 when I depart on this journey to the Galapagos Islands—it will become my last international trip before Covid-19 halts global travel.

With the onset of the pandemic, I watched my neighbours to the south swiftly shift from packing one of the most powerful passports in the world to realizing the woes of having little-to-no access to overseas destinations.

According to the Henley Passport Index—a ranking of the world's most powerful passports—Canada ranks ninth. Our passports grant us visa-free access to 183 destinations around the world. In contrast, my ancestors in Nigeria have visa-free access to only 46 countries—24 per cent of the world—and that's if they even have

According to the Henley Passport Index—a ranking of the world's most powerful passports—Canada ranks ninth. Our passports grant us visa-free access to 183 destinations around the world.

the means to travel. Afghanistan comes in last on the list with visa-free access to only 26 countries.

I asked my friend and fellow travel writer Heather Greenwood Davis to share her thoughts on Canadian passport privilege. "It really hit me on my family's trip around the world in 2011," she recalled. "We visited 29 countries on six continents over a year. We first realized our privilege when we were in Vietnam. We struck up a conversation with a waitress, and when she heard what we were up to, she shared how impossible it would be for her and described the red-tape process necessary for her to leave the country. It was an eye-opener I've never forgotten."

I arrive in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in the middle of the night—it's a stopover before my final destination. The empty airport hallways are sprinkled with sleepy strangers. I look around cautiously as I make my way through the terminal alone. As a woman, I've learned to pay careful attention to my surroundings. In the past, men have awkwardly eyed me up and down, followed me through the airport and attempted to lure me into a car. I avoid falling asleep during long layovers and don't drink alcohol, afraid of what might happen to me if I'm not completely alert and aware of my surroundings. I always take these safety precautions when travelling—primarily because of my gender.



A sea lion pup approaches on Mosquera Islet, Galapagos Islands.

But while I'm vigilant as a female traveller, I've come to realize that there can also be perks to travelling alone. My friend and fellow travel writer Diane Selkirk has taken many solo trips, and she agrees that there are pros and cons when travelling alone as a woman. "Women aren't given much agency in some places in the world and are seen as something to both protect and exploit," she said. "For me, my gender has been a positive and negative. But the number of people who have wanted to assist or be kind . . . has been even greater." I agree.

When I arrive in the Galapagos Islands, I meet up with a small group of travel media—mostly women—and we spend the week exploring the region by land and sea. I take comfort in travelling in a group, knowing that we are guided by a local who takes extra care to ensure our safety throughout the journey.

"ARE YOU A LOCAL?" a curious vendor asks me as I fish out a bill from my wallet at an airport kiosk while waiting to depart the Galapagos Islands. I've wandered away from my group of Caucasian travel companions to purchase a keepsake for my kids, and, as is often the case, my darker complexion creates cultural curiosity. I take her question as a compliment and receive a surprised look when I explain that I'm a Canadian travel writer visiting on assignment.



Left to right: Travel writer Bianca Bujan, Giant Tortoise, Galapagos Blue Footed Boobies.

While waiting to board the plane, my name is called on the loudspeaker, followed by a series of words that I don't understand. My heart races. I look at my travel companions, shrug my shoulders and follow a man in uniform who leads me through a door and down a dark staircase into the basement of the airport, along with five dark-skinned men who have received the same message. My teeth chatter. I ask what's going on, but no one around me can respond in English.

I stand wide-eyed and watch as another man in uniform dumps the contents of my carry-on onto a metal table before me. He fingers his way through my personal items, ignoring my questions as he works. I assume this is a "random" security check, and I am not blind to the fact that everyone in the room has a darker complexion like myself. Dissatisfied, the man tosses my things aside and motions for me to pack up. Shaken, I stuff my things back into my suitcase. I hear the final boarding call for my flight and ask if I can go. I'm dismissed with a flick of his hand and left to navigate my way back to the lobby—just in time to board my plane.

For Greenwood Davis, the travel privilege that comes with race is also apparent. She shares, "It's out there. But while the recipient recognizes it immediately because they have experienced it, the privilege holder often

tries to explain it away as you being overly sensitive. I was ignored at a restaurant while a white family who came in later was attended to immediately. Is there an overt clarity that this happened because I'm Black? No. But after a few similar experiences, you begin to look for the common denominator in the situation, and often it's race."

I RETURN HOME filled with fond memories of my time spent in the Galapagos Islands. From the adrenaline rush of up-close encounters with wildlife to sampling the local cuisine, I savoured every moment of my visit. But what stuck with me most was seeing firsthand how the locals coexist in harmony with the creatures of the islands.

While there, I made it a priority to connect with the people who call the islands home. I found out how I could contribute to the community as a visitor, and I only purchased items from local vendors. Before departing, I planted a Scalesia tree through a local reforestation program designed to ensure the birds and tortoises thrive, contributing to the overall wellbeing of the islands.

Through my experiences in the Galapagos Islands, I realized the importance of using travel privilege to promote responsible tourism. With this in mind, I asked Greenwood Davis to

share her thoughts on how Canadians can positively impact tourism while travelling. "With great access comes great responsibility," she said. "We have to approach every inch of this planet with dignity and respect for it and the people who inhabit it. If being a Canadian grants me greater access to the world, it also requires I represent my country in a way that suggests I recognize the privilege it brings."

Selkirk agreed, adding, "We need to travel with an awareness that thanks to an accident of birth, the world is open to us. We need to treat that lucky bit of chance as the precious gift it is, by going further afield and challenging ourselves to learn more and see more. By exploring off the beaten path, our tourism dollars reach places that need them most."

For me, this awareness becomes more apparent with each trip. While I remain conscious of how my travel experiences are impacted by my gender and race, I also aim to focus more on how my visits can benefit each destination. By choosing to stay at locally-run resorts, making it a priority to engage with local communities and highlighting the ways in which other visitors can travel responsibly, I hope that my own travel privilege will positively impact the tourism industry and encourage others to travel with the same goals in mind. **BT**

TRAVEL DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Travel is rather ‘up in the air’ these days. **WAHEEDA HARRIS** investigates how flying changed in 2020.



A selfie in the airport. →

THE SOUNDS ARE WHAT STRIKE ME AS I walk into Toronto Pearson International Airport—snippets of conversation, announcements about airport safety and the distinctive hum of suitcase wheels. As I complete touchless check-in—where it takes less than five minutes to scan my digital boarding pass and drop off my suitcase—I’m pleasantly surprised to see activity in Canada’s largest airport.

Passengers around me seem familiar with pre-flight procedures in the time of Covid-19. We step into sectioned areas for temperature readings, now done by free-standing machines instead of hand-held gauges. As I pass through security, an airport staff member disinfects each bin before it’s used again.

As I head to the gate, a small bird flies above me, dodging signs and airport architecture, looking for a way to escape. Unlike the bird, my fellow passengers seem relaxed and distracted by handheld screens as they wait for a boarding announcement. The only obvious difference from a year ago is that everyone wears a mask and spreads out as much as possible.

PRE-PANDEMIC TIMES, I would be at YYZ two to three times a month. In March 2020, I was in steamy, historic Siem Reap, Cambodia, at the end of a two-week assignment travelling through Southeast Asia. I flew home uncertain exactly what was happening, but as I passed through airports on my return to Canada, it was the silence that I remember: first, in the stark emptiness of Hong Kong International Airport, where endless rows of planes sat parked on the tarmac and empty terminal hallways echoed my footsteps. Then, in the hushed surroundings of Pearson, masked and gloved Canadian Border Services Agency officials reminded passengers of their impending 14-day quarantine and everyone hurried out of the terminal, the airport’s soundtrack of piped-in tunes and chatty travellers reduced to minimal buzz.

I moved east to Ontario two decades ago, so flying cross-country to Vancouver is one of my well-travelled routes. During the time of coronavirus, I understand why many have opted to stay home and avoid being in a large metal object with 300 strangers 11,000 metres above the Earth.

I planned to return to Vancouver as talk of an imminent ‘second wave’ served as a depressing reminder that the disease had become a permanent part of our lexicon. As temperatures slid from double- to single-digits in Toronto, my schedule of socially distanced park visits and coffee walks shrank. I was grateful I had steady work and digital connection, but it couldn’t replace the welcoming environment of my family.



I understand why many have opted to stay home and avoid being in a large metal object with 300 strangers 11,000 metres above the Earth.



After my quarantine last March and months of time by myself, this only child knew she had to see her parents. They worried about me as much as I worried about them. I kept my friend bubble small, tested negative and flew west, my pandemic stress slowly alleviating with every kilometre I moved closer to British Columbia and my parents' home.

WHEN I FLEW last June, many passengers were garbed in layers of personal protective equipment (PPE). On this flight, face masks are on display, but PPE jumpsuits and face shields are few. The plane's environment involves quiet conversations and minimal movements. Although middle seats are no longer blocked, flight attendants try to space passengers apart when possible after boarding has completed. Passengers raise their hands like a game show audience to move to a coveted empty row.

On Air Canada flights, the Customer Care Kits offered to every passenger now include a face mask, hand sanitizer, antibacterial wipe, bottle of water, earbuds and a package of pretzels. Food is still not sold on board Air Canada's domestic flights, but passengers can order in advance when checking-in or bring food on board.

At YYZ, open restaurants include Thai Twist, A&W, Mill Street Brewery Pub and an essential for many: Tim Hortons.

Six months ago, the additional procedures of flying were new, and I was nervous about what I touched and how close I was to strangers. Now, I've gotten used to wearing a mask and subconsciously cleaning my hands with sanitizer.

Arriving at Vancouver International Airport, my ears are welcomed with conversations and occasional laughter as we disembark and walk through the terminal to the baggage carousel, where everyone stands far apart, but still close enough to pounce on a suitcase as the carousel revolves. No one waits for me (or any of my fellow passengers) at the exit, as airport rules restrict access to passengers and employees.

I board the Canada Line SkyTrain headed downtown. It delivers me to my parents' door. They're waiting for me to join them for a hearty lunch, eager to hear the details of my travel day and excited to see me in person. There are more rules, but for me, restricting my circle and getting tested helps keep me and my family safe—and allows me a much-needed dose of the West Coast. **11**



6 SUSTAINABLE ITEMS

to pack for an eco-friendly travel adventure

BY CANADIAN TRAVELLER STAFF

2



1



3



4



5



6



1. EDDIE BAUER CENTENNIAL COLLECTION MICROTHERM® 1000 DOWN JACKET

What makes this puffy interesting isn't just the incredible warmth-to-weight ratio of its 1,000-fill down, or the discontinuous channel construction that eliminates cold spots. It's that Eddie Bauer crafted this centennial-anniversary jacket with RDS-certified down, which prioritizes animal welfare and forgoes live-plucking and force-feeding, and recycled nylon—ensuring a low-footprint for a highly technical piece. Find it at eddiebauer.ca for \$500.

2. PATAGONIA BLACK HOLE WHEELED DUFFEL BAG

Ready for a local getaway? Pack this durable, 40-litre rolling duffel made with 100 per cent recycled body fabric, lining and webbing. As a member of 1% for the Planet, Patagonia is actively working to be socially and environmentally responsible. Initiatives include forest stewardship, material traceability and using organic, natural fabric. Find it at patagonia.ca for \$375.

3. RUMPL ORIGINAL PUFFY BLANKET

This innovative sleeping-bag-puffy-blanket hybrid was imagined in the back of a van on a surf-and-ski trip through California. Rumpl is committed to sourcing environmentally sustainable materials and offsetting carbon emissions from production. Recycled plastic bottles are used to make their bestselling products, like the warm and cozy, weatherproof Original. Find it at rumpl.ca for \$130.

4. UNITED BY BLUE SALVAGED HEMP BLEND FACE MASK

Disposable face masks, gloves and other coronavirus waste are littering our forests and waterways. Forgo wasteful single-use face masks and purchase a pack of reusable masks with built-in filter slots. This Certified B Corp removes one pound of trash from oceans and waterways for every product purchased. One mask will be donated to individuals experiencing homelessness for every 10-pack purchased. Find it at unitedbyblue.com for \$66.

5. TENTREE CONSTELLATION JUNIPER HOODIE

Made from organic cotton and recycled polyester, this is the softest sweater for brisk winter travel days. Glow-in-the-dark constellations create a beautiful starry background with Oeko-Tex certified ink. As environmentalists and advocates, tentree is committed to ethical manufacturing and transparency. For every item purchased, tentree plants 10 trees. Post-purchase, you can register your trees online and see the planting sites. Find it at tentree.ca for \$79.

6. ICEBUG STRIDE

Thanks to 16 carbide-tip lugs, the Icebug Stride offers unparalleled grip in the worst winter conditions—plus the fleece liner and waterproof-breathable membrane keep tootsies toasty. You can sport them proudly, knowing Icebug is the first climate-positive outdoor footwear brand, using recycled materials whenever possible and offsetting 200 per cent of their carbon emission from 2020 onward. Find them at icebugcanada.com for \$250.



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