

'Trips to Nowhere' an Easy Sell to Thousands Suffering Cabin Fever Due to Travel Restrictions

The Wired Word for the Week of October 4, 2020

In the News

Just a year ago, 350 cruise ships served a record 30 million passengers in a booming \$150 billion global business, while the global airline industry flew 4.5 billion people and generated nearly \$885 billion in revenue. But with the coronavirus outbreak, consumer skittishness and concern for public health have led to a severe decline in bookings and profitability in both industries. By some estimates, airlines' overall revenue may fall by 50 percent in 2020, since air travel in the Asia Pacific region has fallen 97.5 percent during the pandemic.

As some countries ease travel restrictions, several airline and cruise ship companies have been marketing scenic sightseeing "trips to nowhere" that begin and end at the same location to people who have been cooped up for months because of the pandemic. These circular trips have no destination, but bring passengers back to where they started.

When Australian airline company, Qantas, announced a seven-hour "special scenic joy flight" on their Boeing 787 Dreamliner "for those who just want to spread their wings -- no passport or quarantine required" that would begin and end in Sydney, it sold out in 10 minutes, to the tune of \$575 to \$2,765 per ticket.

Other airline companies in Brunei, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, India and Singapore are adding a range of amenities, such as local cuisine and low-level flybys of iconic landmarks, to the "moving staycation" model, hoping to entice people to book a flight.

"So many of our frequent fliers ... have been telling us they miss the experience of flying as much as the destinations themselves," Alan Joyce, the chief executive of Qantas Airlines, said, lending credence to the belief of some that it's not the destination, it's the journey. Some people think of travel as a means to an end, to move them from one place to another, but others say the travel has value in its own right.

Loveleen Arun, an Indian travel agent, said, "One of my clients said just a few days ago, 'all I want is to be in a window seat and see clouds go by. I miss that sight. I just want white fluffy clouds!'"

The skipper of the Mudeford Ferry, Paul Derham, who spent three decades on cruise ship bridges, wondered: "Perhaps they should do cruises to nowhere. ... Perhaps they could do cruises to Norwegian fjords and not actually land anywhere."

"Cruises to nowhere,' ... might sound intriguing," remarked Elissa Garay, *Cruise Critic* contributor, "but leave you asking 'just where exactly is nowhere?'"

"Rest assured that nowhere is somewhere, indeed," Garay asserted. "These cruises simply go out to sea for a short sailing that's devoid of ports, where the main destination is the ship."

Fans of "trips to nowhere" say they satisfy pent-up demand from the public for a way to relieve stress and provide rest and recreation, provide work for employees, and generate much-needed income for cash-starved businesses.

According to *The Economist*: "Last year ... Over 100,000 commercial flights a day filled the skies. These journeys supported 10 million jobs directly, according to the Air Transport Action Group, a trade body: 6 million at airports, including staff of shops and cafés, luggage handlers, cooks of in-flight meals and the like; 2.7 million airline workers; and 1.2 million people in planemaking."

Critics wonder whether traveling in close proximity with other passengers on a plane or cruise ship can be done safely in the middle of a pandemic, even when extra precautions such as mask-wearing, social distancing, barriers, temperature checks for Covid-19 symptoms, and heightened hygiene and cleaning protocols are in place. However, airlines have been flying -- with precautions -- for months now and have not been significant sources of new cases.

Malcolm Brabant, special correspondent for the *PBS NewsHour*, said: "When the pandemic began, cruise ships earned a reputation as incubators for the disease." Of course, that was before knowledge of the disease was widespread and no precautions were being taken.

Environmental groups have also been swift in condemning unnecessary cruises and air travel they say emit more carbon emissions than almost any other activity. They argue that "there are lots of sightseeing options that would take less of a toll on our planet, like a scenic train trip, or another Covid trend, virtual tours," Brabant reported.

Activist Mark Carter of Flight Free Australia, commented on the irony of passengers taking "a little joyride" just to view the Great Barrier Reef that their flight would be "helping to destroy" while "our home is on fire."

Of course, most planes and cruise ships are not going anywhere for now, and some think a few trips to nowhere are not going to make a dent in the climate change controversy. But for a few travelers lucky enough to snag a ticket, the trips may provide some affordable fun and relief from the extraordinary stresses we all are feeling these days. For them, going nowhere, fast, never felt so good.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Flight Goes Nowhere. And It's Sold Out. *The New York Times*](#)

[Why Would Anyone Take a Flight to Nowhere? *Afar*](#)

[Waiting to Set Sail, Idled Cruise Ships at Anchor Attract Visitors in the UK. *PBS NewsHour*](#)

[Cruises to Nowhere Tips. *Cruise Critic*](#)

['Flights to Nowhere' Are Selling Out in Minutes. *Tree Hugger*](#)

The Big Questions

1. When, if ever, have you felt like you were on a "trip to nowhere" in your life? In what ways, if any, did the experience renew your spirit? What role, if any, did your faith play in that experience?
2. Would you book or have you booked a cruise or flight "to nowhere"? If not, why not? If so, what would motivate you to do so?
3. What are some reasons people travel from one place to another? Are some reasons for travel more valid than others? Explain.

4. What are some reasons to spend time alone? What are some reasons to spend time in community with others?

5. Is the goal of going nowhere to get somewhere physically, spiritually, emotionally? Where might that "somewhere" be? Do we need distance from our current physical, emotional and spiritual place to recharge our relationship with God? Why or why not?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Psalm 55:6-8, 22

And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove!

I would fly away and be at rest;

truly, I would flee far away;

I would lodge in the wilderness;

I would hurry to find a shelter for myself

from the raging wind and tempest." ...

Cast your burden on the LORD,

and he will sustain you;

he will never permit

the righteous to be moved. (For context, read 55:6-8, 16-23.)

In this psalm, the writer asks God to hear his prayer, because he is distraught by enemies, violence, strife, oppression and fraud, that trouble, terrorize and horrify him (vv. 1-5, 9-11). Worse than that is his feeling of being betrayed by his most intimate friend with whom he had worshiped in the house of God (vv. 12-14, 20-21). While he curses his enemies (v. 15), he continues to call upon God and trust the Lord to save him (vv. 16-19) and punish the bloodthirsty and treacherous (v. 23).

Questions: What, if anything, has the power to distress you so much that you feel like flying away, as the psalmist did, to find a safe shelter where you can rest from the turmoil swirling about? When have you cast your burden on the Lord, and found that he has sustained you? Have you ever felt that the Lord has not sustained you? If so, how do you explain that?

Deuteronomy 2:1-3, 13-14 (NIV)

Then we turned back and set out toward the wilderness along the route to the Red Sea, as the LORD had directed me. For a long time we made our way around the hill country of Seir. Then the LORD said to me, "You have made your way around this hill country long enough; now turn north." ... And the LORD said, "Now get up and cross the Zered Valley." So we crossed the valley. Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them. (For context, read 1:19-40, 2:1-15.)

In this passage, Moses recounts the history of the Israelites' 40-year sojourn in the wilderness, which one might call "the mother of all 'trips to nowhere.'" Early in their journey from slavery in Egypt to Canaan, they had the opportunity to cross over into the Promised Land, but they refused to listen to the voice of God. As a result, members of that generation, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb (Deuteronomy 1:34-40), all died off; it was the next generation that would enter into the land God had sworn to give them (Joshua 5:6-7).

Sometimes individuals take "trips to nowhere" while other times, an entire community, ethnic or racial group, nation, or even the world, may seem to be going in circles together, never making any apparent progress toward a particular destination, but stuck in the same wilderness for what seems like an eternity. During this pandemic, as isolated and separated from one another as we may feel, we are still experiencing similar trauma together.

Moses said that at one point, the Lord told him: "The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything" (v. 7). Even though the Israelites experienced many hardships as they wandered through the wilderness, Moses said that God had blessed them, watched over them, stayed with them, and provided for them.

Questions: How might individual "trips to nowhere" compare and contrast with communal ones? What groups in our country may be feeling that they are on a "trip to nowhere"? How can the people of God best support and care for such groups?

Matthew 2:19-21

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. (For context, read 2:13-23.)

After the wise men visited Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus (vv. 1-12), an angel of the Lord warned Joseph to flee with his family to Egypt to escape the murderous rage of King Herod, who saw Jesus as a threat to his throne (v. 13). So Joseph took his family to Egypt, remaining there until Herod died (vv. 14-15).

Was the flight to Egypt a kind of "trip to nowhere" for the Holy Family? It must have felt like that. Even when Joseph received word that it was safe to return to Israel, he still worried about whether the next king would be any more accepting of the child, which is why he returned to Nazareth instead of Bethlehem from which they had departed for Egypt. (Luke 1:26-27).

But Nazareth didn't exactly have the greatest reputation. Years later, when Philip invited Nathanael to meet Jesus from Nazareth, Nathanael asked "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip simply responded, "Come and see." (John 1:45-46)

Apparently, Nathanael didn't expect much from certain neighborhoods. But after a brief encounter with Jesus, he changed his mind, and concluded that Jesus was actually the Son of God and the King of Israel (John 1:49).

Questions: What is the significance of the fact that Jesus lived in "nowhere" places considered by many to be of no account, rather than in palaces in the best neighborhoods?

When, if ever, have you found safety and sustenance in unexpected places, with surprising people? What did that experience teach you about yourself? About others? About how God works in the world?

Mark 1:35-36

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." (For context, read 1:35-39.)

Mark 6:31-32

[Jesus] said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. (For context, read 6:30-32.)

Jesus went "nowhere" to find quiet places to pray, to commune with God. Maybe one reason to take a trip to nowhere is not just to escape whatever, but to recharge.

Right after this incident, Jesus led his band of disciples to neighboring towns, so that he could proclaim his message in their synagogues and cast out demons (1:38-39). He knew he needed time alone with God, in order to be prepared to face whatever the new day brought.

Later Jesus invited his disciples to do the same. They had been out on a mission, preaching a message of repentance, casting out demons, and healing the sick (6:7-13). About that time, King Herod had Jesus' cousin John (the Baptist) beheaded, to please his wife's daughter (6:21-29).

Jesus knew the Twelve would be coping with weariness as well as grief, and needed rest. It wouldn't be long before the crowds would be pressing in on them again, with their great needs, their confusion, their physical and spiritual hunger (6:33-34).

Questions: What are the greatest challenges you face today? When and where do you go to spend time alone with God, to rest and be renewed, physically and spiritually? What tools and resources have you found useful to make the time you spend with God refreshing, and not just another religious ritual or chore?

For Further Discussion

1. Is a flight or cruise such as those described in the news article any different from a harbor or river cruise or a city tour that starts and finishes at the same place? Why or why not?

2. Heraclitus of Ephesus said: "You can never step into the same river; for new waters are always flowing on to you." If you take "a trip to nowhere," is it really possible to return to the same place from which you started? Why or why not?

3. St. Augustine wrote: "Men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty billows of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, and pass themselves by."

How is it possible to "pass yourself by" in the experience of travel? Is "passing yourself by" desirable? Why or why not?

4. Review this [list of reasons](#) Jesus chose solitude. When has a time of solitude helped you in similar circumstances?

Responding to the News

When you are able to do so safely, you may want to visit a place you think of as "nowhere" -- perhaps a small town or one of the smaller states -- and discover why people who live there think of it as "somewhere," a place they love. Or invite others to the "nowhere" where you live and show them hospitality and why the location is important to you.

Prayer Suggested by Psalm 139:7-10, John 4:30, Matthew 11:28-30

O God, wherever we go, whether we journey alone or with others, you are there, and your hand will lead us, and your right hand will hold us fast. Lead us ever closer to your Son, Jesus, as we make our way to him. When we are weary, O Christ, give us rest from our heavy burdens, and teach us how to partner with you in your work, so that we may find rest for our souls. Amen.