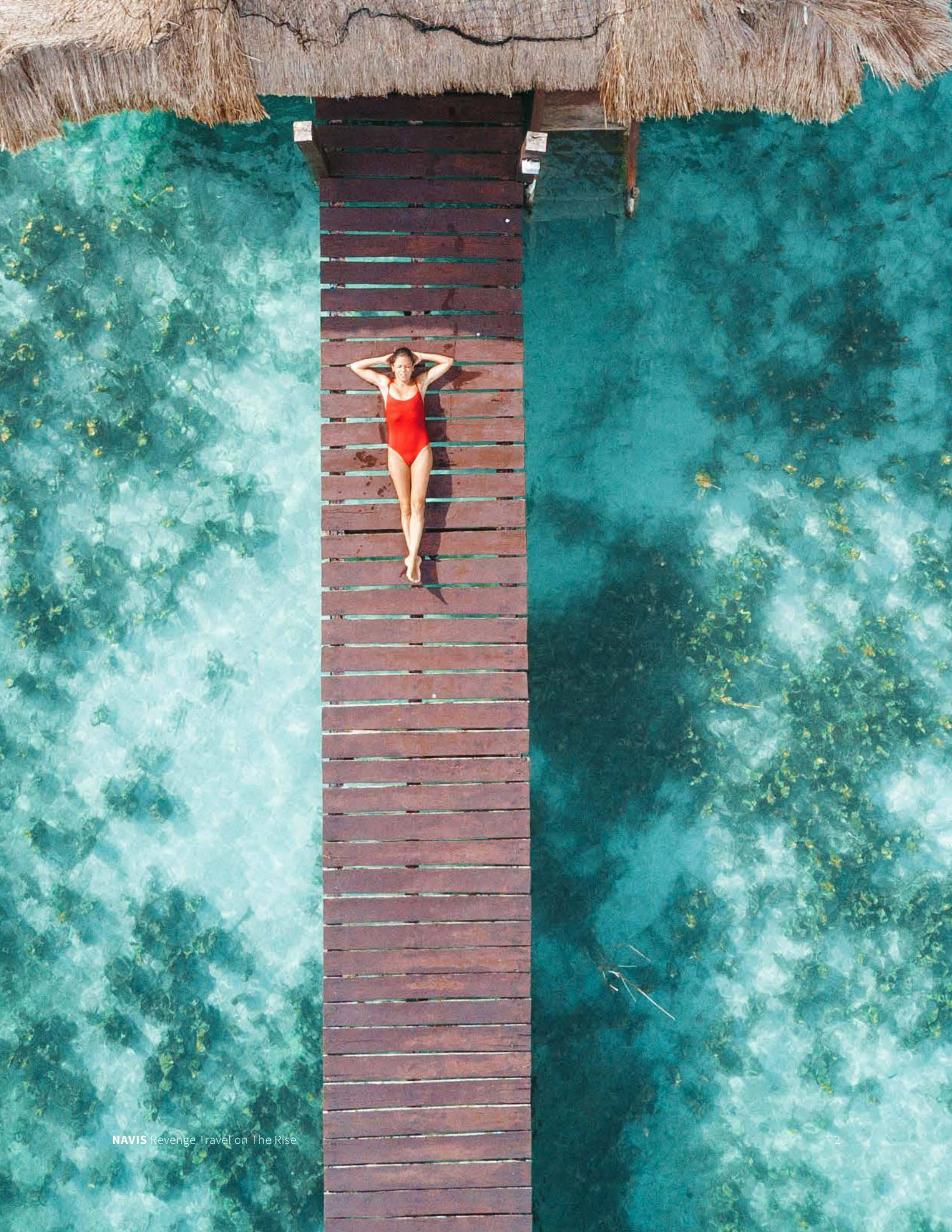


Revenge Travel on The Rise

Understanding pent-up demand
for post-Covid-19 travel





BY JANINE YU

What is Revenge Travel?

“It’s amplified, pent-up demand following quarantine and lockdown,” explained Sunshine Woodyard of digital marketing team The Sunshine Gals.

When Covid-19 became our collective reality, the world of travel seemed to shut down overnight. Virtually everything that required staying anywhere but your own home had to be canceled, rescheduled, or reconsidered completely.

Months of hunkering within the same walls has a way of ramping up a desire to break out — sometimes in a big way. “People are planning more elaborate trips and staying longer,” said Woodyard. “Since many had to cancel international trips, they are spending more on local trips, whether it’s on fine-dining, upgrades to suites, or treating themselves to the spa.”

Whoever said the same word for crisis is the same for opportunity probably didn’t think this applied to a global pandemic that would spawn massive demand for travel. Here’s what you need to know about people traveling with a vengeance, and how to strike while the iron is hot.





An Urgency to Travel

Revenge travel isn't just limited to people looking to travel when "Covid is over," whenever that may be. The reality is that many people chose to travel in 2020, albeit in ways that may have been different than their usual travel preferences and patterns.

Jonny Massena and Jaimie Austin both work in industries completely shut down by the pandemic, on Broadway, and in group fitness classes. After months of quarantining in their New York City apartment, they decided to hit the road. "We would probably never again be able to leave the city for a substantial amount of time, with zero work responsibilities over our heads," Austin shared. Together with another couple, they rented an RV and set off on a Great American Road Trip.

"We lovingly referred to it as our Covid-19 Tour 2020," Austin said of their 30-day, 9,000-mile road trip. Since then, they have gone on shorter road trips and are inspired to travel more, while neither of them is back to work in a full-time capacity. "We feel the urgency to take advantage of the downtime and explore the beauty of this country," she said.

Austin and her group weren't alone in this trend of hitting the road in 2020. RV sales and rentals are through the roof, and some U.S. National Parks reported being overwhelmed with visitors this past year.

While most travelers choose the relative safety of traveling on the road, more intrepid travelers — usually younger, more mobile— are fine to get on long-haul flights. Suzy Guttler, a finance executive, escaped lockdown by flying to Taiwan, her birth country, where she spent two months rediscovering her roots and heritage. She continued to work New York hours in an opposite time zone, a trade-off she was willing to make for the chance to go on sabbatical without leaving her job, especially in a country with very few Covid cases and where life seemed normal. "Pre-pandemic, most of my trips were very short, two or three days of PTO tacked on to weekends or holidays, even for trips to the other side of the world," Guttler explained. "I often think to myself - when in my life would I be able to work remotely from anywhere in the world again?"

How to Capture the Dreamers

- » **"Book Now, Stay Later" promotions entice travelers** who feel confident they will one day travel to a destination and want to take advantage of deals now. It's also an excellent way to bring in revenue when few people are traveling.
- » **Flexible cancellation policies are essential.** "There are just so many reasons to cancel that are out of people's control," said digital marketer Sunshine Woodyard.
- » **Avoid price wars.** Instead of offering deeply discounted rates, offer incentives and market to specific segments.
- » **Segment, segment, segment.** Keep your lists targeted with solutions like NAVIS' Marketing Suite and send direct marketing emails to people who live within driving distance. Keep in mind that the drive market is now significantly larger, with Florida hotels seeing guests driving from the Midwest.



5 Do's to Court Revenge Travelers

- » **DO keep the dream alive.** Images and content on travel are more powerful than ever
- » **DO offer incentives to book** now for a future stay
- » **DO offer flexible cancellation policies**
- » **DO proactively address Covid** safety concerns
- » **DO upsell** — revenge travelers are looking to splurge

Anticipating a Post-Vaccine World

The biggest factor driving travel bookings today is the vaccine roll-out. According to a report by the American Hotel & Lodging Association, more than 56% of Americans see the vaccine as a key to travel. Coupled with a protracted quarantine and the symbolism of a new year, bookings are on the rise.

“Two weeks into January, we saw a number of inquiries and new bookings that rivaled pre-Covid numbers,” said Lexi Polster, a luxury travel agent. “I suspect the new year held even more symbolism than in years past, and there was an increased hope that just entering 2021 would mean an increase in normalcy. So even if the stage hasn’t been set yet

for a full return to traveling, the will and the hope of travelers is there.”

This desire to travel resonates especially with elderly travelers. Octogenarians Roger Hollands and his friend Marianne Benson got their first vaccine shots in early January and have since planned a summer trip to Alaska and a winter trip to Maui. Their trips in the past year have been mostly limited to state parks and family visits. “I felt restrained considerably by the Covid pandemic. It was scary to go out not knowing where or in whom the virus lurked,” Hollands shared. “We are excited about both trips after the long months of Covid concerns.”



Don’t Lose Those Leads!

With so much reticence around travel, the [NAVIS Shopping Cart Abandonment Solution](#) can help target guests on the fence about taking that trip. It helps capture guest contact data from abandoned bookings and enables hotels to re-market to them and create lifetime opportunities through personalized and automated emails.

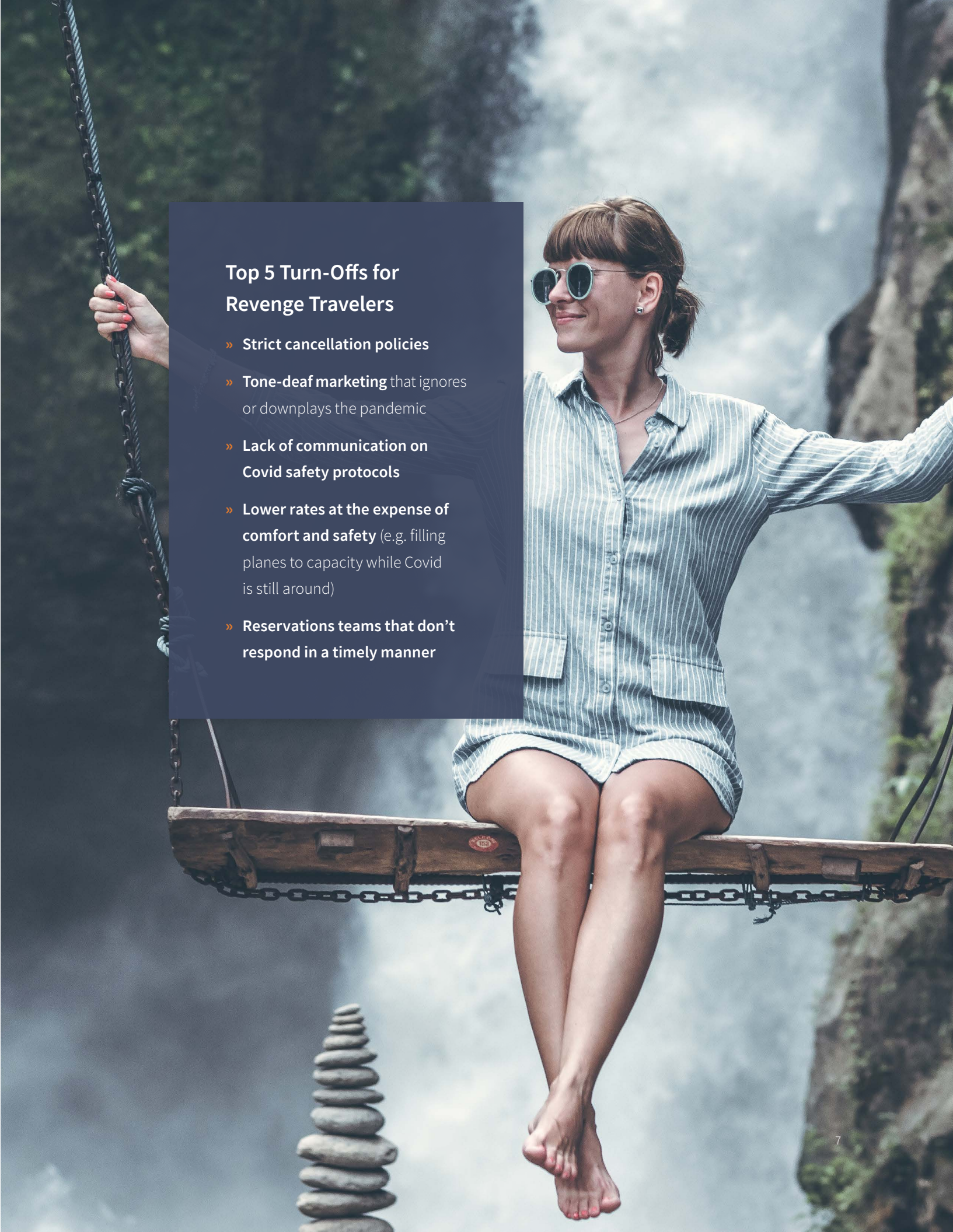
After the initial Covid slowdown, [Spectrum Resorts’](#) call centers and social media channels were flooded with inquiries. The management team didn’t want to lose interested visitors, but they couldn’t wait for agents to work through expanding call-back lists.

“We used Shopping Cart Abandonment to reach guests who were on the fence about booking,” said Ashlee Lowry, Director of Marketing. “When a prospect enters their information and then exits the booking engine, an email is triggered that addresses common booking fears.”

In three months, Spectrum Resorts generated over \$600,000 with one email to abandoned leads. Lowry’s team sees nearly 70% open rates on emails and converts these direct bookings without additional staffing.

Top 5 Turn-Offs for Revenge Travelers

- » Strict cancellation policies
- » Tone-deaf marketing that ignores or downplays the pandemic
- » Lack of communication on Covid safety protocols
- » Lower rates at the expense of comfort and safety (e.g. filling planes to capacity while Covid is still around)
- » Reservations teams that don’t respond in a timely manner



Fewer, Longer & More Purposeful Trips

One positive effect of pandemic-related travel is that people have become more purposeful with travel.

Polster has seen her clients move away from consumptive travel to considered travel, where people are more discerning about where they want to go and how they want to connect more deeply with other cultures. Ried Stelly, an avid traveler, said, “I am very much looking forward to embracing slow, thoughtful travel.” He is setting his sights on a cross-Atlantic journey on the Queen Mary and also revisiting China, where he lived for three years and met his husband. “Going back to China is a priority for two reasons: to spend time with my husband’s family, and to explore many parts of the country before rapid urbanization takes place.”

While waiting for the world to open up again, they are saving almost a million airline and credit card points and miles to splurge on a trip to Australia and New Zealand.

Similarly, Joyce Tan sees the importance of getting to parts of the world that are quickly disappearing. An environmental lawyer, she moved halfway across the world to a flat in London just days before lockdown started. Her new job promised international travel opportunities, and she was looking forward to weekend jaunts around Europe. Instead, she has been quarantining alone for the better part of the year, barely able to explore her new city, much less beyond. When travel becomes possible again, her priority is now to visit islands in the Pacific that might become uninhabitable soon.

Tell Them What They Want to Hear

- » **Safety is top of mind for today’s traveler.** “Guests need us to give them ammunition to tell their family members why it’s safe to stay with us,” said Woodyard.
- » **Use NAVIS’s Engage emails to send helpful communications that aren’t sales-driven.** The Sunshine Gals found that hotels got the same open rates for emails with recipes, employee profiles, and guides to local events as they did for promotional discounts. These engaging communications keep guests interested in the dreaming phase when they are not yet ready to book.
- » **Have a direct call-to-action.** When Alden Suites in St. Pete Beach, FL was ready to welcome back guests, they launched a “We Want You Back” campaign that featured the hotel president and staff delivering warm invitations and reassurances of safety protocols. Within two days, the hotel sold out every weekend of Summer 2020.

Top 5 Revenge Travel Destination Styles

- » **Road tripping** — see more of the country while staying safe
- » **Flexcationing** — go on a working vacation or sabbatical
- » **Slow traveling** — enjoy the journey, not just the destination
- » **Prioritizing** — get to destinations that might disappear soon
- » **Bucket listing** — time to finally take your dream trip

While some naysayers say travel will never return to pre-pandemic levels, there’s reason to be hopeful it will. According to a report by Bloomberg, hotel bookings spiked to its highest point during the pandemic after the first vaccine was approved in the U.S. last December. While waiting for travelers to return, hotels and vacation rental companies can and should continue to market to guests in smart and thoughtful ways, by keeping guests engaged while they are still dreaming and giving them reasons to book as soon as they are ready.

The desire to travel is there — you just have to harness it and appease the anxieties of revenge travelers.

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