

**OFF DUTY TRAVEL**

# How to Travel Luxuriously in the Summer of Covid-19, From Private Jets to Hotel Buyouts

If you've ever wanted a spa resort—or dude ranch—all to yourself, now's the time. In the name of social distancing, high-end hotels and travel companies are selling pampered privacy. And it doesn't come cheap.

*By Christian L. Wright*

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**NOW THAT** Covid-19 has made extroverts into agoraphobes and sent even the most social of butterflies back into the cocoon, the loonily extravagant world of private jets, cliff-side villas and ultraexclusive hotels has begun to seem...strangely sensible.

Last month, Jack Ezon, founder and managing partner of Embark Beyond, sent three families to the Preserve Club & Residences in Rhode Island to recreate a 10-day summer camp their young children would otherwise have missed. Each family of four had a three-bedroom house to themselves, a shared counselor to do all the wrangling, two activities a day—from shooting clay pigeons to tie-dying T-shirts—all their food provided, including a private chef for one meal a day, and full access to the 3,500-acre sporting resort. Price tag: \$45,160 per family.

**Create your own Kennebunkport compound by taking all four cottages at Maine's White Barn Inn.**

It's no wonder travelers are seeking the heightened control that so-called private travel affords, given that coronavirus cases are spiking in many parts of the U.S. and a whole passport's worth of countries has forbidden Americans entry. "Everyone's comfort level is different," said Stacy Fischer-Rosenthal, president of Fischer Travel Enterprises in New York, who notes that only about 35% of her clientele is currently traveling, when it's typically about 95% at this time of year. "But safety is the new luxury."

The high-end travel industry is seizing the moment, marketing everything from a beekeeping tutorial to a zip line through a forest as a "private" experience. Dunton River Camp—eight luxury tents on a 19th-century cattle ranch in Colorado, 4 miles from its sister resort Dunton Hot Springs—reopened in June as an exclusive-use-only property (meaning one family or group at a time) available for \$15,000 a night for up to 16 guests. "We customized to give [guests] the option of not being with anyone else," said Edoardo Rossi, executive vice president of Dunton Hot Springs, Inc. "We're here to make people forget what's happening around the world and to escape."



**FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE** Chatham Bars Inn, on Cape Cod, offers 30 cottage-style buildings—including three standalone cottages—private boat charters and beach cabanas.

PHOTO: CHATHAM BARS INN

Even if you're not an angel investor or part of a royal family, it's increasingly possible to book a hotel floor with a private elevator (at the Dupont Circle hotel in Washington D.C., for example, which reopens in September), or take over a train that gives exclusive access to the Grand Canyon, or have a five-star gym to yourself or even—as a perk at Caldera House in Wyoming, for instance—unwind at your very own working dude ranch.

It's easy to dismiss private travel as a selfish indulgence just now. But hoteliers argue that it's a kind of stimulus that lets them get some of a hard-hit workforce back on the job. No

sector of travel has been untouched by the pandemic, but hotels have been pummeled: According to the American Hotel and Lodging Association, as of mid May, 75% of hotel employees in the U.S. had been laid off or furloughed. Booking a room has a ripple effect: Some of those employees can start to trickle back.

When Carmel Valley Ranch, set on 500 acres in Carmel, Calif., reopened on June 30, the resort's menu of small-group outings—from fishing to falconry—morphed into private or semiprivate activities. The restaurants began preparing picnics for guests to pick up and eat anywhere they choose. Peter McMahon, managing director of the ranch, now part of the Hyatt Corporation, said the resort is rethinking nearly every aspect of its operations including minimizing contact between guests and staff. "I've been with Hyatt for 26 years," he said, "long enough to remember the [bursting of the] dot-com bubble, 9/11, the financial crisis." The challenges of all those combined, he added, barely compare with what Hyatt has gone through with Covid-19. "Some things we took for granted—hugging, handshakes, buffets, elevators. This is a generational change."

Travelers, too, will have to adjust. If an entire hotel is not private enough for you, try an island. For those who are willing to go farther afield—and have the means—there are a few not-too-distant private islands, such as Moskito Island in the British Virgin Islands and Over Yonder Cay in the Bahamas, up for the snatching. Some other possibilities for entrée into the private realm:



ALL MINE Kenoza Hall, a restored 22-room house set on 55 acres in New York's Catskills, opened in June and is available for a buyout, from \$4,000 a night. In addition to the hotel spa and pool, guests have private access to Kenoza Lake.

PHOTO: LAWRENCE BRAUN

## A Hotel of Your Own

Imagine you, your family and six of your best friends engaged in a hotel takeover—no rotten kids (other than your own), no tipsy bridesmaids, no unknown Speedos in the pool, no wait for the Peloton. Social distancing on tap. To attract the supreme recluse, some hideaways like ÀNI Private Resorts, with villa resorts in the Caribbean, and Magee Homestead, a luxury spa resort within the 30,000 acres of Brush Creek Ranch in Wyoming, are available only as full buyouts. Otherwise, it's possible to create your own little Kennebunkport compound by taking all four cottages at Maine's White Barn Inn, Auberge Resorts Collection (*from \$5,016 a night*). If a historic house is more your cup of tea, there's Kenoza Hall, the restored 22-room 1880s boardinghouse that opened last month on a lake in the Catskills (*from \$4,000 per night*) or Washington School House Hotel, an 1889 schoolhouse made into a chic 13-room inn in Park City, Utah (*from \$7,000 per night*).

## European-style Villas, Stateside

For those suffering from Europe withdrawal this summer, there's a full menu of stateside villas. Among them: a fully equipped three-bedroom on Lynmar Estate, a winery overlooking Quail Hill Vineyard in Sonoma, Calif.; a deluxe cottage within the confines of Santa Barbara's Belmond El Encanto hotel, where you can have private movie night on your hillside terrace (pet fees are waived); or a New England version at Chatham Bars Inn, where shingle-style cottages manage to capture the feel of grand old Cape Cod. Or try Onefinestay, a vacation rental agency that represents upmarket homes from Milan to Mykonos and, increasingly, the U.S. "It used to be London and Paris," said Amanda Dyjecinski, the agency's chief brand and marketing officer. "But now L.A. is our top destination for Americans. We have people who live in L.A. who are booking our homes there because they want the pool, the extra space and the services like private chef and nanny."

## Wildly Exclusive

Private guides can get you way off the beaten path. Isn't that every germaphobe's dream vacation? Mark Allvey and Christopher Brunning of Untold Story Travel usually concoct itineraries in far-flung destinations around the globe but have rejiggered their approach for Americans who need to stay closer to home—creating, for instance, swanky pop-up camps in the wilderness. One such trip was a three-day rafting expedition down the Colorado River in Utah, with a chef, astronomer and rafting guides who set up camps on the banks of the river. Not exclusive enough for you? Try a hidden town, about an hour's

drive from Aspen, where luxury travel company Blue Marble Private partnered with VistaJet to get guests into a 4,500-acre modern-day cowboy estate so secret that details are only revealed when the nondisclosure agreement is signed. One divulgence is the price: from \$180,000 per night for up to 70 guests, all-inclusive (except the plane), with a 3-night minimum stay.

## HOSTEL TAKEOVERS

*Four small hotels where buyouts are a relative bargain, as long as you fill every room*



**BULK RATE** The Duchamp Healdsburg offers all six rooms starting at \$8,300 for two nights.

PHOTO: KIM CARROLL

**IN THE AGE** of the novel coronavirus, small properties are running tight ships. Many administer daily temperature checks for staff (upon arrival for guests), require at least a two-night minimum to control turnover, have mask requirements and rope off common facilities that can't be 100% secured. Here are four hotels that you can take over—guest list entirely at your discretion—for a fairly modest nightly fee.

### Old-School Nantucket

The Daniel Webster House is a shingle-and-clapboard classic with 13 rooms—wallpapered, all with four-poster beds. *From \$5,000 per night, [jaredcoffinhouse.com/suites](http://jaredcoffinhouse.com/suites)*

### Hamptons Made Attainable

A Room at the Beach, in New York's Bridgehampton, is a groovy renovated motel two miles from the sea, with just 10 rooms, landscaped grounds and a swimming pool. *Pricing*

*for buyout is case by case, but room rates run from about \$575 a night,  
[Iwantaroomatthebeach.com](http://Iwantaroomatthebeach.com)*

### **Upscale Bohemian in the Catskills**

Hotel Dylan, a reinvented motel in Woodstock, N.Y., with 22 unique rooms equipped with a turntable, Turkish towels and Novogratz design that spills out into the common spaces, featuring lobby fireplace and saltwater pool. *From about \$14,500 for two nights,  
[thehoteldylan.com](http://thehoteldylan.com)*

### **Wine Country Hideout**

The six-suite Duchamp in Healdsburg, Calif., has a 50-foot pool, a European vibe and a limit of 12 guests. *From \$8,300 for a two-night buyout; [duchamphotel.com](http://duchamphotel.com)*

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