

Bloomberg

Remote Workers Flee to \$70,000-a-Month Resorts While Awaiting Vaccines

Many see no reason to leave their warm-weather bunkers—not without promise of a shot back home.

By [Jen Murphy](#)

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Chileno Bay in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Source: Auberge Resorts Collection

When Governor Gavin Newsom announced that California would be entering its strictest lockdown yet in mid-December, some of his most well-to-do residents ran the other way—as far as they could—to places like sunny Belize. Others, who'd seen the writing on the wall well ahead of time, were long gone.

Unlike the first wave of Covid-19 lockdowns, which sent people on road trips and to second homes, the second wave has globally triggered a desire for more permanent, warmer, far-flung escapes.

In the U.K. and Europe, the wealthy have flown to such warmer climates as Dubai, the Maldives, and Spain to escape winter lockdown, says Justin Huxter, founder of U.K.-based Cartology Travel. Americans have more options for tropical bunkers: Hawaii has eased its travel restrictions and borders are open in Mexico, Costa Rica, Belize, and many parts of the Caribbean. After all, what good is a second home at Lake Tahoe or Napa, Calif., when nearby ski lifts, wineries, and restaurants are periodically inaccessible, as they were for much of December and January?



Origins Lodge in Costa Rica. Source: Origins Costa Rica

“People with lockdown fatigue have realized they can continue life in places with a lot less stress and a lot more room to breathe,” says Jack Ezon, founder of Embark Beyond. He’s seeing East Coast clients flock to luxury hotels and resorts in Florida, South Carolina, and Turks and Caicos Islands while West Coast clients flee to Arizona and Puerto Vallarta and Cabo in Mexico—anywhere with equally good weather and Wi-Fi. The average cost, he says, is \$70,000 a month, with most clients booking two- to four-month stays.

Extended-stay discounts, the reopening of certain international borders, and better awareness on the precautions to take when traveling have further enabled a second-wave

exodus. While socially isolating in a five-star resort may have been a novelty at the beginning of the pandemic, it's now a need for a certain class of consumer; in Thailand, it's a business plan.

“By October, people started to realize they’d be facing another winter in San Francisco with no restaurants, no entertainment, no offices—really nowhere to go. They wanted out,” says Leigh Rowan, founder of Bay Area-based Savanti Travel, whose clients are buying one-way tickets and working remotely from beachfront villas or amenity-laden hotels.

This time, he says, they’re not coming back until there’s promise of a vaccine appointment.

Indefinite Checkout, Please

Melanie Woods, a 39-year-old graphic designer, left San Francisco well before there was word of a winter lockdown. Since Oct. 1—the day Belize reopened its borders—she’s been working out of director Francis Ford Coppola’s rustic-luxe Turtle Inn resort, where her desk is by a window with a sea breeze.

“I swim for exercise between calls. On weekends, I feel like I’m on vacation. I can snorkel, zipline, swim,” she says.



Turtle Inn, a resort in Belize. Source: The Family Coppola

Belize requires travelers to have a negative Covid-19 test upon arrival, which gave Woods peace of mind. The 27-room hotel, located on beachfront in Placencia, is also almost entirely open-air, making it easy to eat and socialize in distanced, outdoor settings. Rooms start at \$329 a night, but extended stays reap 20% discounts on both accommodations and food; Woods is renting out her apartment back home to offset the expense.

“I probably won’t return until summer, or when I can get a vaccine,” she says.



Pool Cabanas at Chileno Bay in Mexico. Source: Auberge Resorts Collection

Also requesting an indefinite checkout on their current escape are Los Angeles-based Alan and Bonnie Cartwright, both 71 and retired. The pair had hopes of vacationing in the Maldives and Capri last year; by September, they’d accepted that if they wanted to get away, Cabo was the easiest option.

They originally booked 10 nights at Auberge Resorts Collection’s Chileno Bay, where rooms average more than \$1,000 a night. But the boon to their mental health was significant, and an extended stay deal offered a savings of up to 40%, so they decided to extend—and extend, and extend, and extend.

“We’ve been married 51 years and after every vacation, we ask ourselves if we really have to go home. This time the answer was no,” says Alan Cartwright, who has no plans of leaving until the couple can have the same quality of life back in California. Bonnie Cartwright, who is immunocompromised, says the hotel staff have made her feel incredibly safe.

“They even take the temperature of the taxi drivers before you get in their car,” she explains.

Improved Creativity and Productivity

Jetting off to a sandy paradise isn't just a lifestyle play. Travel adviser Rowan says many of his clients can actually do their jobs better in a different setting.

"Many creatives, startups, and techies are realizing they can meet interesting investors in places like Oaxaca or San Miguel de Allende," he says.

Cheyenne Quinn, 39, a partner in a branding and consulting company in Los Angeles, is among that set. "When L.A. went into lockdown again, it was way more intense," she says. "I was consumed with the idea of escaping." In October, she flew to Tulum and has been renting homes around Mexico for as little as \$20 a night.

"This trip has benefitted me financially, socially, and emotionally," she says.



A hidden beach in the Marietas Islands near Puerto Vallarta in Mexico. Photographer: ferrantraite/E+

Before the pandemic, Quinn was working with such major clients as Louis Vuitton and Modelo. That business has disappeared, but she's met artisans and small company owners through her travels who have helped rebuild her company; several have hired her to consult on social media strategy and marketing, she says.

Shawn Garvey, a 55-year-old chief executive officer of an energy innovation company in the Bay Area, has also seen productivity gains from his extended vacation in Mexico. He'd been dragging himself into his empty office simply to stay productive.

"I was lethargic and tired. My inspiration was declining," he says, adding that most of his days consisted of "rolling out of my bed and working from my laptop in my underwear."

His wife Kimberley Garvey owns a court reporting firm that she now runs remotely; their three children are grown. “For the first time in decades, we didn’t have anything preventing us from leaving,” he says.

Now they’re living at the Modern Elder Academy near Todos Santos, on Mexico’s Pacific coast; it was named one of Bloomberg Pursuits’s Best Places to Travel in 2021. A monthlong stay for two, including meals, costs \$7,500, which Garvey estimates is half of the couple’s monthly living expenses back home.

“I’ve done more here in the last four weeks than I did all of last year,” says Garvey, noting that he and his wife are essentially still sheltering in place. The access to the great outdoors has reinvigorated his creativity, he says—when whales breach or jump during his Zoom calls, he tells his coworkers they’ve earned Mother Nature’s applause. It’s been such a positive experience, he’s now building a home in Todos Santos.

“From a professional perspective I’m not interested in returning until the offices are open again,” Garvey says. “Frankly, I think clients and collaborators react very positively to the idea that I am here in Mexico.”



Source: Timbers Kauai

At Your Service

Then there are the benefits of full-service at a resort that you simply can’t get at home.

Jeff Assaf, the 62-year-old chief information officer at financial firm ICG Advisors in L.A., escaped to Hawaii, where strict travel rules made it feel even safer than being at home. In July, he and his wife rented a townhouse at Timbers Kauai, where they have 450 acres as a backyard—and an entire staff to help with office needs as they arise.

“I needed a printer, and the staff installed one in my home. The gym didn’t have a rower, which is what I do for cardio, and without missing a beat, they delivered one to my house,” Assaf says.

He’s not alone. Mike Cuthbertson, area general manager for Destination Hotels, which manages the Lodge at Kukui’ula on Kauai, says that since October 2019, the number of resort guests from California has increased from 29% to 45%, and their average length of stay has more than doubled.

“People aren’t seeing this as a typical vacation,” he says. “They want to live their urban life in a different setting.”

“My office is closed. I’m not meeting money managers in person, or flying to New York, so why does it matter where I take my Zoom board meeting,” asks Mr. Assaf, who is contemplating buying a second home at Timbers.

He says the couple doesn’t plan to return to L.A. until the number of Covid cases is much lower or the couple has been able to get vaccinated in Hawaii or get an appointment to be vaccinated back home. In the meantime, he says the only challenge is early wake-ups due to time zone differences—but on the flip side, he gets to see that sweet Hawaiian sunrise.

Link: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-15/remote-workers-flee-to-luxury-beach-resorts-while-awaiting-vaccines?sref=dS0aluhK>