



Pets: The real reason your dog needs a leash. **E5**

◀ **Television:** Lizzo and Letterman talk Minnesota. **E8**

Star Tribune Features: Ranked 2nd in nation

Awarded by the national Society for Features Journalism (2017)

HealthPartners is your local, trusted Medicare partner. Learn more on back page.



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2020

★ StarTribune

STARTRIBUNE.COM/VARIETY • SECTION E

VARIETY

Colorado in corona

A 1,000-mile road trip to a luxe yurt provides an escape from the pandemic.

By SIMON PETER GROEBNER
simon.groebner@startribune.com

In the idyllic Colorado mountain village of Crested Butte, locals and visitors strolled past the shops and restaurants of Elk Avenue in September wearing their face masks outdoors.

Some 80 miles away, hikers and park rangers in Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park consistently masked up before passing us on the trails.

Six months into the pandemic of 2020, even I thought this was overkill. I have zero interest in catching the coronavirus — my policy is, I'm not getting it if I can help it — but I've become pretty comfortable forgoing a mask in uncrowded outdoor spaces. Yet the ski resort of Crested Butte takes Colorado's mandate a step further, requiring masks to be worn outside on the main drag, period.

Maybe they're onto something. After all, rural Colorado — and indeed, the entire state — posted some of the lowest COVID-19 numbers in the country this summer, by See **COLORADO** on E7 ▶



BRIAN PETERSON • Star Tribune

Artist helps chefs set their tables

By RICK NELSON
rick.nelson@startribune.com

The Mexican stew known as pozole will be a staple at the soon-to-open Petite León, and chef/co-owner Jorge Guzmán will not be entrusting one of his signature dishes to a random off-the-shelf soup bowl.

Instead, he's commissioned St. Paul potter Kevin Caufield to create vessels that will enhance the pozole's myriad characteristics.

"I love going to get pho, and that's where this idea came from," said Guzmán. "But I didn't want to serve pozole in a plastic bowl, that would be too kitschy. Kevin is building a specially made bowl for us that's shallow enough so that the bone from the chicken leg sticks out, but it's also deep enough to hold the hominy, cabbage, tortilla strips and avocado. It's perfect."

In all, Caufield has fashioned nearly 500 stoneware bowls, plates See **POTTERY** on E6 ▶



MIKE RICE • Star Tribune illustration, photo by Angus McBean

Murder, she wrote

A century after her first book appeared, we still love Agatha Christie.

By CHRIS HEWITT • chris.hewitt@startribune.com

I've had the good fortune to fall in love with Agatha Christie's murder mysteries twice.

I was in grade school when my grandmother introduced me to the writer whose more than 2 billion books sold makes her the bestselling novelist of all time. I'd never been to England, couldn't relate to its class struggles and was four decades younger than Christie's detectives, but I was hooked immediately.

It happened again more than 40 years later when I reread her mysteries in order and blogged about them. Even when I remembered whodunit, it was like discovering the books all over again.

This month is the 100th anniversary of Christie's first novel, "The Mysterious Affair at Styles." Somewhere in the world,

someone is probably reading it for the first time right now.

What gives? Though it's not one of her best, "Styles" introduces the Belgian ex-cop who will become one of the most popular characters in all of detective fiction, Hercule Poirot, who is persnickety, droll and fully formed right off the bat. The post-World War I setting launches what will amount to a history of 20th-century England over the course of about 80 books. And although her writing would improve, Christie immediately wins a bet with her sister that she could do better than the mysteries they were reading.

Christie died in 1976 but remains a publishing powerhouse. Airport shops almost always have a couple of titles and new — or "new" — ones keep coming. "Midwinter Murder," a repack- See **MURDER** on E4 ▶

Your more-than-a-Medicare-plan partner ▶

Find helpful Medicare information on the back page.

 **HealthPartners** | Medicare plans

TRAVEL



Airbnb

An Airbnb glamping yurt outside Gunnison, Colo., was the perfect booking for a social-distancing road trip in the Rocky Mountains state.

Colorado in corona

◀ **COLORADO** from El far. Several counties I visited on a one-week September road trip were reporting close to zero active cases — almost, but not quite, a COVID-free utopia. (Those numbers are climbing this fall as in most states, but Colorado still has the ninth fewest total cases per capita in the U.S.)

The upshot? In a state where people were arguably more conscientious than they had to be, a return to tourism-as-usual actually felt achievable this summer. I'll take that trade-off, and I suspect many road trippers would, as well.

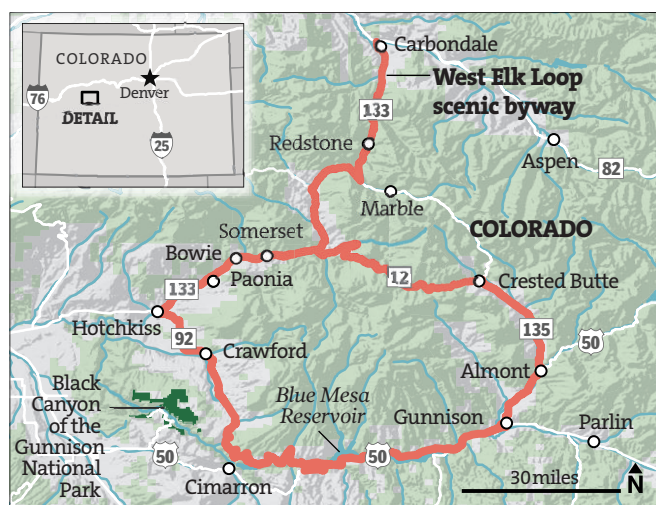
While debating late-summer destinations with my quarantine partner, I turned to the data. Specifically, I looked at online maps showing state- and county-level counts of new COVID cases in the previous seven or 14 days.

My beloved Black Hills of South Dakota were out of the question, with soaring cases of late. So were the rest of the Dakotas, Iowa and much of Wisconsin. The Upper Peninsula of Michigan looked pretty good until recently. So did the Northeast and several states in the West, especially Colorado.

An Airbnb search of the area around Gunnison, Colo., sealed the deal. I spotted a listing for a luxe “glamping” yurt with a king-size bed, electricity and a wood stove, overlooking a remote lake, at \$100 a night. It was perfect for a social-distancing trip. I eagerly booked three nights.

Snowing in September

To get there, we first had to “jump the purple wall,” our lingo for driving through areas colored purple on our map, indicating uncontrolled spread of the virus. So I plotted a 1,060-mile direct route that shunned the interstates in favor of the sprawling, scenic Sandhills of northern Nebraska — some of the least



Source: Colorado Dept. of Transportation, ESRI RAY GRUMNEY • Star Tribune

populous territory in America.

We wouldn't stop for the night until we hit the Colorado border. Under the circumstances, a Best Western Plus in rural Fort Morgan fit the bill, solely on the basis of its advertised 16-point list of extra health and safety measures — and a 9.6 reviewer score for cleanliness.

Our first full day in Colorado featured a new challenge we hadn't even considered: wild weather. In the span of 48 hours, the Denver area had careened from 100-degree record highs to 30-degree record lows and snow. In early September. The heavy flakes hit just as we started climbing into the mountains on Hwy. 285 out of Denver. A snow-covered Smokey Bear sign surreally warned of HIGH fire danger today.

In the Old West town of Fairplay (elevation: 9,953 feet), I pulled over. With hours of slick mountain passes ahead, we decided to stop here and miss our first night in the yurt. Above us, the giant letters H-O-T-E-L emerged cinematically from the gloom. We took it as serendipity and checked into the historic, allegedly haunted

Hand Hotel, where the staff wore masks and our tiny Western-style room was named for a 19th-century madam.

Soon we realized that we were snowed in at “South Park,” the indecent animated series that uses Fairplay, in Park County, as its visual reference. Naturally, one of the only open businesses in town was a legal cannabis dispensary.

Base for exploring

The next morning, the road was clear and we crossed the soaring Continental Divide at Monarch Pass (11,312 feet) on the way to our glamping yurt. Located in a semi-off-grid development in tiny Sapinero (7,620 feet), the deluxe canvas structure overlooked snowy mountains and the 20-mile-long Blue Mesa Reservoir, the largest lake in a state with few big ones.

By night, we cooked on a grill and then zipped the canvas shut to focus our energies on feeding the wood stove for heat. The fire died down as we slept, but the king-size memory foam mattress helped keep us warm until dawn. One evening, our Airbnb host welcomed us into his nearby hot

tub, where the Milky Way arched vividly overhead.

Mostly, the yurt was a perfect base for day trips to explore the diversity of Colorado's Western Slope. At Black Canyon of the Gunnison, we marveled at how the Gunnison River carved a deep, narrow trench in black rock, flecked with bright stripes of pink quartz known as pegmatite dikes. In Crested Butte, we stopped for a Himalayan lunch at Sherpa Cafe, then hiked at the base of nearby Snodgrass Mountain, where a second snowfall pelted us in a forest of pine and aspen.

We reluctantly checked out on Friday and decided to take a long, meandering way out of Colorado, starting with the West Elk Loop Scenic Byway — a personal Top 3 all-time scenic drive. The dominant imagery changed by the hour, from vertiginous views of Black Canyon, to an 800-foot igneous spire known as Needle Rock (a sort of mini-Devils Tower), to the bright hippie enclave of Paonia, where we stopped for ice cream, to the abruptly red-ochre mountains outside Glenwood Springs. Summer weather had returned, and the long drive made for my favorite day of the trip.

We wrapped up the day with a debatably risky indulgence: a sunset soak at Iron Mountain Hot Springs in Glenwood Springs. Wading in the natural hot spring pools felt almost inexcusable during a pandemic, even in an area with few COVID cases. Still, bathers wore masks while moving among the reduced-capacity outdoor pools, and physical distance was honored.

This was Colorado summer tourism in a nutshell: Be a little more careful than most places, and we'll be happy to come.

Simon Peter Groebner • Instagram: @simonpeter6

IN BRIEF

Machu Picchu, at long last

Jesse Katayama had planned to end a journey around the world at Machu Picchu, the sprawling 15th-century Inca citadel high in the Andes Mountains. Then the coronavirus happened, stranding Katayama, a 26-year-old Japanese citizen, in Peru and shutting down tourism sites. Last Sunday, after a wait of seven months, Katayama finally got to visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site. And aside from a few guides, he got it all to himself. “After the lockdown, the first man to visit Machu Picchu is meeeeeeee,” he wrote in an Instagram post. Alejandro Neyra, Peru's culture minister, said that Katayama had been granted special access in recognition of his patience. “He had come to Peru with the dream of being able to enter,” Neyra said. “The Japanese citizen has entered together with our head of the park so that he can do this before returning to his country.”

NEW YORK TIMES



PIOTR REDLINSKI • New York Times
Jesse Katayama had Machu Picchu all to himself.

Airbnb's mask mandate

Airbnb is requiring hosts to comply with enhanced cleaning procedures during the pandemic. The company also said that guests and hosts must wear masks and social distance when interacting. Hosts have until Nov. 20 to commit to the cleaning protocols, which include scrubbing floors and other surfaces with soap and water; washing linens on high heat; disinfecting high-touch items like door-knobs; and ventilating rooms. Hosts who don't comply may be suspended or removed from Airbnb.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Boomers not OK with travel

Hesitation is permeating the travel landscape for travelers 55 and older, according to the Baby Boomer Post COVID-19 Travel Survey by Coventry Direct. The survey found that 71% of baby boomers “feel either hesitant or very hesitant about getting on a plane in 2020.” Sixty-seven percent said they have not taken any international trips this year, and 40% have not taken any domestic trips. Furthermore, 50% said they believed “the younger generations are being overly reckless with their traveling behavior in 2020.” Forty percent said they were not planning any international trips in 2021, while 51% said they were planning one or two domestic trips next year.

TRAVELPULSE



ELLEN CREAGER • Tribune News Service
The Washington Monument has reopened, with restrictions.

Reopened in D.C.

Many of Washington, D.C.'s landmarks are returning to what resembles normal these days. The Lincoln and Jefferson memorials and parks in the Capitol Hill area are open. Tours of the Capitol, FBI and other buildings remain canceled. Smithsonian museums have reopened on limited days. The Washington Monument reopened Oct. 1. Four to eight people share the elevator to the top, where they have 10 minutes to enjoy the view. You need timed tickets available at 10 a.m. the day before you want to visit. The elevator is closed from 1 to 2 p.m. each day for cleaning.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

No-contact vacation

Many hotels now provide contactless check-in, allowing guests to register in advance to avoid passing credit cards back and forth and signing documents and to minimize time in the lobby. You can also go online to access boarding passes, to order carryout food and to reserve your space in line for any outing that requires a guaranteed reservation. Of course, you'll still want to capture your vacation memories on video or in still images. But it's no longer advisable to ask a stranger to take turns or bring along a selfie stick.

FAMILYTRAVEL.COM

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Nonsmokers billed \$100 for smoking in room

Q: My husband and I recently stayed at the Red Roof Inn in Gallup, N.M. We checked in late in the evening. We asked if they had any first-floor rooms because we are senior citizens, and they accommodated us.

The room had an awful odor, but we didn't want to complain because we were tired and didn't want to move. So we opened the door and tried to air it out the best we could.

After returning from our trip, I noticed a credit card charge of \$100 for a smoking fee. I called a manager. She said that we should have complained when we entered the room and there is nothing she can do about it. She said we were lucky they only charged us half the fee. I told her we requested a nonsmoking room, because we do not

smoke. Why would we then smoke in the room? She said the cleaning lady said the room smelled of smoke and so we were guilty of smoking.

We are more upset about being falsely accused of something we did not do. We are starting to think this is some sort of scam. Please help us.

A: You didn't smoke in your room. Therefore, you should not have to pay a smoking fee — or half a smoking fee. Goes without saying, right?

So what went wrong here? Easy. I think you were too polite. When you checked into a room that smelled like smoke, you should have said something. You were still being polite when you referred to it as an “odor.” The last time I wrote about smok-

ing fees in hotels, I had the audacity to say that if you smoke in your room, you should pay the cleaning fee. Some readers took offense to that, believing they should be able to smoke in their rooms without consequence. But that's the world we live in.

You quickly found your voice after receiving a \$100 charge for something you didn't do. You posted warnings on several websites and filed a BBB complaint. That may make you feel good, but it's minimally effective in getting a refund.

Red Roof did respond to you in writing. It said when its housekeeper opened the room, “there was a strong smell of cigarette smoke.” A front desk representative accompanied the housekeeper to the room and

verified a strong smell of smoke. Your room had to be closed for a few days while the hotel cleaned it. Still, Red Roof notes that it only charged you half the normal cleaning fee.

You rejected that explanation because you do not smoke. If Red Roof had more proof — like pictures of ashes and cigarette butts in its direction. But it didn't. I contacted Red Roof on your behalf. Separately, you disputed the charges on your credit card. Your credit card issuer sided with you and credited you \$100.



Christopher Elliott is the founder of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit consumer organization. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.