

TRAVEL



2021 travel trends, Minnesota-style

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Travel trends generally reflect the cultural moment. In the 1920s, after Prohibition shut down juiced parties in the United States, Canada, Mexico and Cuba became destination darlings. When the Interstate Highway System began to spider across the country in the 1950s, people hitched their vacation dreams to campers and RVs. The popular TV series “The Love Boat” fed an interest in sea cruises in the late 1970s. In the new year, masks and plexiglass barriers that have arrived courtesy of COVID-19 could be joined by health screenings and vaccine passports, proof you’ve gotten the shots. Here’s how the pandemic — and the hope it will soon be over — will inspire vacations in 2021 and how to embrace the new trends in Minnesota.

1. Rethinking the bucket list

Tethered to the house, sitting in our living rooms, we’ve been dreaming of our next vacation, honing our bucket lists and realizing that experiences are as important, or more important, as big-name destinations. As an antidote to too much sitting around, some people will want to test themselves physically. Up North, opportunities abound. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area, the million-acre wilderness of lakes and islands, requires paddling and portages. A thru-hike of the 300-mile Superior Hiking Trail promises elevation changes and views of the Big Lake. Either could be a beautiful way to work off pandemic fatigue and make peace with the challenges that nature can bring.

Experience it here: Minneapolis-based nonprofit Wilderness Inquiry offers group trips and specialized itineraries in the BWCA and on the Superior Hiking Trail (wildernessinquiry.org; 612-676-9400).

For information on the BWCA, including applications for the required wilderness permits and trip planning resources, go to the U.S. Forest Service’s website at tinyurl.com/ycuon5o2.

The Superior Hiking Trail Association offers maps, updates on trail conditions, information on shuttle services and other important details (superiorhiking.org; 1-218-834-2700).

2. Reconnecting with family

Travel often leads to human connection as a matter of circumstance; now making connection could be a trip’s driving force. Weary of Zoom meetups and socially distanced driveway visits, extended families will make up for lost time this summer. Picture grandparents wading in the shallows of a lake with their toddler grandchildren, while teenage cousins splash off the dock. Summer vacations could be all about quality time with loved ones once vaccines become widespread. Many Minnesota resorts

have cabins designed for large gatherings. Here are a few of the many options.

Experience it here: Sweetwater Resort, a seasonal spot near Cushing in central Minnesota, has a six-bedroom reunion house (sweetwaterresort.com; 1-800-601-3474).

On the main property of Grand View Lodge, open year-round in Nisswa, some cabins have as many as eight bedrooms (grandviewlodge.com; 1-866-801-2951).

At seasonal Pine Cone Lodge, near Park Rapids, two cabins sleep up to 17 people, and the lodge, which seats 80, is a nice gathering spot (pineconelodge.info; 1-320-491-6952).

3. Motoring (and floating) between stops

In the summer of 2020, everyone wanted a recreational vehicle. Fears of contaminated hotels, restaurants and restrooms faded away with the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen directly behind the driver’s seat. Now that people have tasted the sweetness of motoring from one great outdoor stop to another, the trend is likely to continue. In Minnesota, a similar experience improves on the concept. Houseboats, basically floating RVs, carry visitors through the state’s only national park, Voyageurs, where tie-ups at remote islands and sandy beaches welcome usually only one houseboat at a time.

Experience it here: For information on visiting Voyageurs National Park, go to nps.gov/voya. Look for local guides and rental services under the “Plan your trip” link.

4. Marveling at the night sky

Both the BWCA and Voyageurs National Park received Dark Sky certification last year (BWCA is designated a Dark Sky Sanctuary and Voyageurs is a Dark Sky Park). The new recognition makes them prime targets for the rising number of travelers seeking views of the gauzy Milky Way and, when the time is right, colorful aurora borealis. This pandemic has people looking for perspective, and the sense of infinity in a dark starry sky serves the pur-

pose well. Lots of places in Minnesota will do, as long as there is open sky and no city lights obscuring the show.

Experience it here: Ludlow’s Island Resort, near Cook on Lake Vermilion, has a cabin so well situated for dark sky and aurora borealis views that it’s called “Northern Lights.” The resort opens in May (ludlowsresort.com; 1-877-583-5697).

Gunflint Lodge, open year-round, sits far from city lights near the end of the Gunflint Trail on the south shore of Gunflint Lake, which makes its north-facing views well suited for spying northern lights (gunflint.com; 1-800-328-3325).

North of Grand Rapids, the year-round Buckhorn on Caribou Lake has 1,000 feet of shoreline. Some cabins have saunas so visitors can heat up before stepping into the brisk night air to gaze skyward (buckhornoncaribou.com; 1-218-256-0089).

5. Cruising on a river

After the numerous mid-ocean coronavirus cases of 2020, river cruises are the hottest commodity of the cruising world. Seems there is comfort in knowing a port is always in sight. One of the world’s great waterways gets its start in Minnesota. With stops in historic river towns like Memphis and Hannibal, Mo., Mississippi River cruises have been gaining steam. Viking Cruises is planning to launch in 2022. Two companies have already scheduled a variety of itineraries for this summer.

Experience it here: Both the American Queen Steamboat Co. and American Cruise Lines offer trips on the Mississippi, including some that follow the river all the way to New Orleans. For more information, go to americanqueensteamboatcompany.com (1-833-598-0119) or americancruiselines.com (1-800-460-4518).

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1. The Superior Hiking Trail cuts through the old growth forest of Magney-Snively Natural Area near Spirit Mountain in Duluth. 2. Grand View Lodge in Nisswa offers lodging and activities for extended families. 3. A houseboat plies the waters of Namogee Lake in Voyageurs National Park. 4. Saturn shines brightly in the backdrop of the Milky Way above Fire Lake in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. 5. The American Queen rolls down the Mississippi River while its calliope pipes let off steam.