

NEXT BIG TRIP

Revenge travel: How vacation vengeance became a thing

Lilit Marcus, CNN • Published 15th May 2022



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Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé, France: An 18th-century chateau in the Loire Valley with plush suites and plenty of tranquil outdoor space sounds like a good way to usher in some international travel.

Adam Lynk/Courtesy Hotel Château du Grand Lucé



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Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé: Sun-filled suites feature plush fabrics and antique furnishings.

Michael Spengler/Courtesy Hotel Château du Grand Lucé

(CNN) — As more and more countries reopen their borders to eager tourists, a trendy new phrase has emerged on social media: revenge travel.

The term has been used to describe trips as varied as family reunions, big splurge vacations and re-visits to favorite places, which leads to one question: so, what *is* it?

"Revenge" generally has a negative connotation, which contradicts the joyful, excited feeling so many people have about making their first vacation in two-plus years.

But the idea of "revenge travel" seems to be more about loving to travel rather than expecting a specific destination to make amends. Unless, say, Romania stole your girlfriend or Peru got you fired from your job, it sounds strange to take revenge on a place.

Perhaps "revenge travel" can be interpreted as getting revenge against the pandemic, or against Covid itself.

No. Really. What is it?

"Revenge travel is a media buzzword that originated in 2021 when the world began to reopen, and people decided to make up for lost time," says Erika Richter, vice president of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA).

Part of the problem is that there isn't one good way to describe the current mood of travel around the globe. "Post-pandemic travel" isn't quite accurate, since the pandemic isn't over in many places. Different countries and regions are operating on different timelines, with some eliminating all barriers to entry while others remain strictly controlled or even closed to foreign visitors.

Richter agrees with the overall sentiment behind the concept, even if she doesn't use the term "revenge travel."

"It's another way of saying, 'Hey, life is short. I want to book that trip. I want to spend more time with family. I want to connect with humanity and with nature. I want to explore the world and seek experiences that make me feel alive.'"



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Where to travel in 2022: It's safe to say most people didn't take their dream vacation in 2021. Here are some places to dream about for when the world becomes accessible again. First up: the twin islands of Antigua (pictured) and Barbuda.

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She isn't the only one in the tourism industry struggling to figure out how to talk about "revenge travel" as a trend.

"I don't think the prefix 'revenge' is appropriate to what travel should be about," Rory Boland, editor of Which? magazine, tells CNN Travel. He calls "revenge travel" an "ugly term."

However, he acknowledges that the phrase has clearly connected with people.

"What it is trying to capture, I think, is the desire many people have to travel again, to see new places and meet new people, after a period that has felt static and dreary."

The people who are doing it

Whether they use the term "revenge travel" or not, many travelers report that they're taking their first big trip since the beginning of the pandemic.

Deborah Campagnaro, who lives in British Columbia, Canada, is one of them.

She retired from her investment services job of 30-plus years during the pandemic and looked forward to going on a big celebratory vacation with her husband. The couple went on a group trip to Nepal in 2016 to hike the Annapurna Circuit, a challenging trek through some of the country's highest peaks.

They loved the trip so much they had planned to go back to Nepal, this time on a custom itinerary. Pandemic related closures and weather difficulties meant they had to postpone multiple times. Finally, they have confirmed tickets and bookings for September 2022.

Campagnaro and her husband are indulging in additional time and experiences instead of fancy resort stays. They will be staying in Nepal for an entire month and have added on a few days in the lakeside town of Pokhara as a treat.

"That wouldn't have happened before," she says about the side trip. "We're just doing it now because we can. it's very, very nice to have some downtime there after a trek."

Rhode Island resident Brittney Darcy is also looking forward to a trip that was scuttled by the pandemic.

The 26-year-old has dreamed of going to Paris since she was a little girl watching her favorite movie, "Sabrina." But the planned summer 2020 trip with her boyfriend was called off when Covid broke out.

Now, she has finally rescheduled her dream vacation -- but with more stops and some upgrades. Instead of five days in Paris, she will be spending two weeks abroad in France and Italy.

"I went on a cross-country trip during Covid, but it wasn't enough and I've always wanted to go to Paris and Italy and I've never been. We're young and why not?" she told CNN.

The money she saved from not traveling for two years is being put toward some vacation upgrades. Instead of having a layover in Iceland or Ireland, Darcy and her boyfriend paid more for a direct flight from Boston.

Darcy admits that she had never heard the term "revenge travel," but once she did it was a perfect term to apply to her Europe trip.

"Covid has made me less frugal. We only live once, so I might as well spend my money on experiences."

Making up for lost time

One thing is clear: as vaccines roll out and doors reopen, people around the world are eager to get back out on the road again.

Travel booking company Expedia tracks online search data related to travel and tourism. In 2021, the single highest increase in average travel search traffic -- 10% -- was in May, the week after the European Union voted to extend their contract with Pfizer and approve the vaccine for use on adolescents.

Expedia's survey found that 60% of consumers had plans to travel domestically and 27% to travel internationally in 2022.

And many of these travelers are willing to spend more money on a vacation than they would have in the past.

Two-ish years of staying home means that some people have saved up money and can now splurge on a fancier hotel, a first-class airplane ticket or a spendy once-in-a-lifetime experience.

On top of that, more and more companies have permanently changed their remote work policies post-pandemic.

A Pew survey published in February showed that 60% of workers with jobs that can be done from home said they'd like to work from home all or most of the time when the pandemic is over if given the choice.

For some people, working from home doesn't necessarily mean from home -- it could mean trying out an Airbnb in another country and spending several weeks there combining work and travel.

Some destinations are openly courting remote workers. Caribbean islands like Barbados and Anguilla have offered visas specifically for remote workers or "digital nomads" as a way to boost tourism.

So call it "revenge travel" or don't. Either way, it's apparent that people have changed their travel mindsets since the pandemic began, and that feeling of "oh, finally!" has a lot of power to sell airline tickets and hotel packages.

One of the people taking part in the trend is Christie Hudson, Expedia's head of public relations, who worked on the company's travel survey.

"Honestly, I wasn't very surprised [by the survey results] simply because the findings resonated so strongly with the way I feel personally," she says. "During my last weekend getaway, I booked multiple spa appointments and upgraded our flights to first class. I felt like I deserved it."