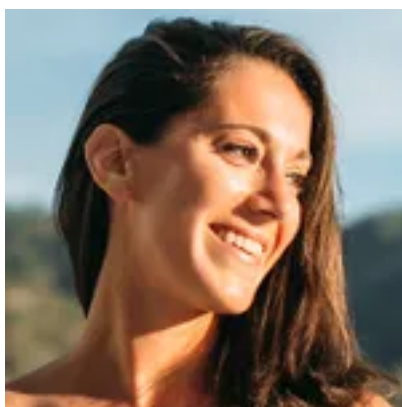


# To travel pros, Mexico's resort destinations feel safer than the U.S.

[Meagan Drillinger](#)



Donna Parent Alkarmi, owner of [Lonestar Travel](#), has been to Mexico twice in the three weeks since Mexico reopened its doors to tourism. Ronda Mathis Helton of [The Travel Connection](#), has been traveling back and forth to Mexico since July 5.

[Jennine Cohen](#), a luxury and adventure travel expert specializing in Latin America, chose to remain in Mexico for

the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic. Sharon Walters, owner of [Sharon Walters Travel](#), recently spent 12 days in Los Cabos, where she has just built a home. And Kim Kessler, head of public relations for [Costa Careyes](#) luxury estate in Jalisco, chose to relocate to Careyes permanently in the wake of the public health crisis.

Their unanimous verdict: They feel safer in Mexico than they do in the U.S., based on the way the country has responded to the outbreak of Covid-19.

"I feel better here [Riviera Maya] than I do at home," Helton said from her room at [Fairmont Mayakoba](#). "We extended our trip a few more days."

Helton is from St. Louis, which has seen a dramatic uptick in Covid-19 cases since the beginning of July. "If we didn't have our pets or things to take care of, I think I'd just stay put [in Mexico]," she added.

Alkarmi, similarly, was blown away by the new protocols, particularly in the Cancun area. "I thought the airport was phenomenal," she said. "It's clean, everyone adhered to social distancing rules, and all the transfer companies I saw at the airport were spraying down luggage," she said.

She said her check-in experience at [Live Aqua Beach Resort Cancun](#) was also "phenomenal."

"They have installed hand sanitizers by every single elevator," Alkarmi said. "They are constantly cleaning. I felt super safe at Live Aqua."

Similarly, Helton was equally impressed with the arrival experience at the Los Cabos International Airport. "From the moment we arrived at the airport in Cabo, we knew they were taking this very seriously," said Helton. "The transfer service was impeccable and truly exceeded our expectations. We had our temperature taken. Shoes, luggage, car seats were all disinfected before we could ever enter the SUV to take us to our resort."

Los Cabos "is doing far more than we are here to prevent the spread of Covid," Walters said. "When you go into a restaurant, into a coffee shop, hotel, local grocery store -- you have to get your temperature checked. You get your hands sanitized immediately. You have to put antibacterial stuff on your shoes. They are monitoring you from the minute you get in to the minute you leave."

## **The resort experience**

"While Mexico has had a containment plan at the national level, the president handed over control and enforcement to the governors, so the situation varies greatly from state to state depending on local leadership," said Cohen.

Resorts in popular tourist destinations are proving to be among the best equipped to navigate the "new normal," and, for the most part, resorts are enforcing the health and safety protocols that they touted prior to reopening.

Cohen was living in the Yucatan throughout the pandemic, which has been one of the states that reported the lowest numbers of Covid-19 cases in Mexico. "I think the governor did a world-class job with regards to aggressive health and safety protocols at the state level, as well as getting urgent supplies and medical care to vulnerable Mayan communities," she said. "Locals have definitely complied with local laws."

Cohen said she would advise against sending clients to cities, like Mexico City, for example, whose safety protocols and enforcement have been more lax.

As far as hotels, resorts and private villas, however, experts on the ground are reporting that health and safety are of the utmost priority, as promised. Kessler reports from Careyes that the luxury enclave has no Covid-19 cases and has lifted the previously instituted 14-day quarantine, so travelers can come and explore the compound as soon as they arrive. Social distancing and mask-wearing, however, is still strongly encouraged.

Professionals are impressed with the implementation of new

protocols at companies like Palladium Hotel Group, La Coleccion, Velas Resorts and Mayakoba, though there are certainly many other companies that are also impressing agents across the board.

"All of the resorts that we have visited since July 5 have definitely put safety measures into place," said Helton. She has stayed at [Grand Velas Los Cabos](#), the [Fives Oceanfront](#) (whose grand opening was July 24), [Grand Velas Riviera Maya](#), Fairmont Mayakoba and [Chable Maroma](#). "Right now, I really do see some resorts setting the bar higher than others. That's truly one of the reasons that it was so important for me to see these safety measures in place for myself and my family."

## **Room for improvement**

It goes without saying that this is still very much a learning experience for the majority of the world. There are bound to be areas in need of improvement, and Mexico is no exception.

"You can tell that everyone is adjusting as they can," said Helton. "You have to go in with an open mind, because you don't know what the consistency is going to be."

For example, Mexico now asks visitors to fill out a Health Declaration card upon arrival, which can be downloaded to

their phones prior to arrival. Passengers have been told that they would be required to submit this form upon arrival to customs agents, though the actual experience has been inconsistent, depending on airport and day. Alkarmi reports that she never had anyone check her health form upon arrival, while several of her clients had the experience that their forms were checked and collected efficiently.

This experience "didn't take away from how the airport handles cleanliness, though," said Alkarmi. "Immigration felt safe, with plenty of space, and I felt very confident."

For Walters, it wasn't the Mexican response that concerned her, but the attitude by many of the Americans who were traveling in Los Cabos. "The Mexicans were masks," she said. "And while many of the Americans were, many were not, either."

## **The takeaway**

Mexico's top tourism destinations continue to be areas that travel professionals trust in the wake of our "new reality." In fact, Alkarmi is rerouting travel from other destinations to Mexico.

"I've pulled most of my summer travel to other destinations in the Caribbean and all have been transferred to Mexico because I feel comfortable traveling there," she said. "

[Mexico] is doing a phenomenal job when you compare it to the U.S. I still feel safer there than I do in my own airport in the U.S. That's why I feel comfortable traveling there. That's the reason why I'm selling Mexico to clients."

"Before I start working with clients, I am now sharing this up front: If you wish to travel during this time of Covid-19, you must be flexible, be patient, be understanding, be respectful, be kind," said Helton. "We are all adjusting to the new norm, and just trying to all figure it out since factors are constantly changing."

She adds that if clients cannot abide by these simple guidelines, they should not consider traveling at this time.

It's also important to keep conveying to travelers the guidelines set out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC reminds travelers to consider the fact that they can still contract or transmit Covid-19 while traveling, especially if precautions like masks and sanitation are not put in place. Even if travelers don't have symptoms, they can still spread Covid-19 to others.

If your clients are traveling, remind them to frequently wash their hands, maintain social distancing and wear a cloth face covering in public.

Walters recommends aiming for nonstop flights, because it

reduces the amount of contact points. The most difficult part in containing the spread is the act of commuting, with so many moving parts. "I do feel secure about all of the actions that [Los Cabos] has taken to maintain standards of cleanliness," she said. In fact, she recently diverted two of her clients who had planned a big trip to Kenya and Tanzania, recommending that they instead do something closer to home in Los Cabos.

To travel right now is a personal choice, even as countries are opening up to tourism. There is a way to do it safely, ethically, and in a way that protects those traveling around you and the destination you are visiting.