

## Easing Into Travel

I'm from the Bay Area, California, and COVID restrictions were as strict here as anywhere in the U.S. from what I could tell. When restaurants and hotels started opening up for in-person/outdoor dining, we wanted to travel but didn't want to risk air travel yet. We took several road trips within California in 2021, and all with COVID precautions in mind. The first trip we took was just across the bay to San Francisco, in March of that year.

My wife, two daughters, and I decided to make our first post-lockdown travel experience less than an hour from home. It afforded us the flexibility to abort the mission at any point, and we were familiar with the territory enough to be confident in what we were getting ourselves into. First, we booked an air BNB so that we could control our lodging as far as COVID risks. I remember that we didn't know quite what to expect from hotels, and we wanted to make sure that we were not exposed to more people than was necessary. Our activities that we planned were all outdoors to minimize close contact. We walked in Golden Gate Park and saw the Bison, and hiked Land's End with its amazing views of the bridge and the ocean. We explored the Japanese Tea Garden, as it was outside and beautiful. And we even went to ChinaTown, which was uncharacteristically empty because of COVID. We could walk in the street without being shoulder to shoulder with passers by. We specifically chose restaurants with patio seating, because at the time, indoor dining was just starting to make a comeback and we didn't want to be exposed to all that.

It was a good trip. It was great to get out of the house following a year of being stuck at home. Following that trip, we took road trips up the North Coast, to Yosemite, and down to Santa Barbara. With each successive trip, we took slightly more risks. By Spring of 2023, we ventured out of the Country for the first time, to Europe, which is how we eventually got COVID for the first time. By that time however, it just seemed like an eventuality that caught up to us, rather than a potential crisis.