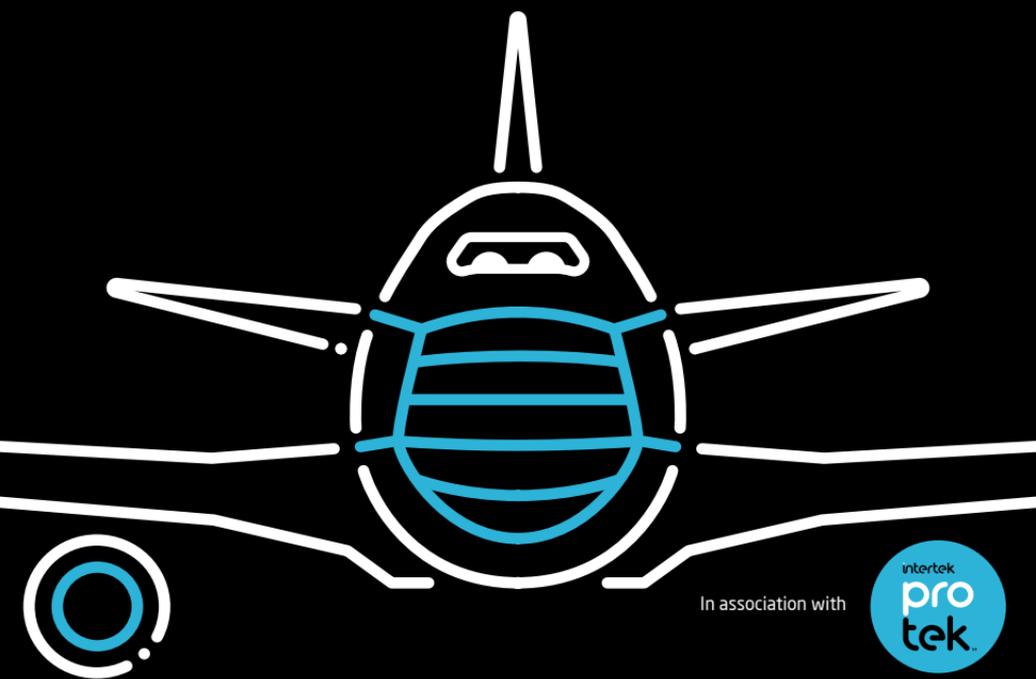


TRAVEL TRUTH AND LIES UNMASKED



In association with

intertek
pro
tek

MARTIN LINDSTROM

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

**TRAVEL
TRUTH
AND LIES
UNMASKED**

MARTIN LINDSTROM

lindstrom
COMPANY

First published by Lindstrom Company 2020

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First edition

Revised 31 July 2020

Ebook design by milestonecreative.co.uk

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FOREWORD

Until 9th March, 2020, travelling was my life.

It wasn't unusual for me to start my day with breakfast in Switzerland, then a couple hours later give a keynote speech in Frankfurt, run a lunchtime board meeting in Copenhagen, close a conference in Madrid late that afternoon, and have a pasta bolognese in Milan with a client that same evening.

Only half-jokingly, I told colleagues that I fly so much my stomach had become a one-man in-flight catering company. There are plenty of business travellers who share this frantic, footloose lifestyle. Take my friend André Lacroix, the CEO of Intertek. On more than one occasion, we've found ourselves seated next to each other on an airline heading for the same destination.

It really hit home for me one day, just as the George Clooney movie 'Up in the Air' began to play. The captain strolled down the aisle, paused at my seat, and welcomed me back 'because you're such an important Singapore Airlines customer.' I have to admit, being recognized did indeed make me feel special.

And then it all stopped, for me and for all of us.

No more planes, no more airport security, no passport control, no duty free, no catered food, no breakfast three times the same morning on three different flights, no jetlag, no screaming kids a couple rows behind me, no hotels, no time-zone calculations and missed wakeup calls. Instead,

a never-ending stream of Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and GoToMeetings took over. Endless travel was replaced with silence. My window became my screen to the world. A mouse became my joystick.

Despite (or because of) all the more-or-less useless gold cards in my wallet, I strangely became a go-to-person for a Who's Who of like-minded recovering frequent fliers. They began asking me for insights on this new world of travel. I'm not sure if this was due to my extensive work with airlines, airports, hotels, and car rental companies – or because they somehow sensed that I, just like them, felt lost behind my screen, exhibiting symptoms of severe 'boarding announcement withdrawal' while featuring permanent static in my background.

I began to wonder: What's the reality of travelling these days? Quickly, I discovered that it's nearly impossible to ferret out the genuine truth.

Just try typing in 'Covid safety while flying'. You'll get as many different answers as there are passengers on a plane (or were, until a few months ago). And of course, questions about safety when checking into your hotel, transiting airports, driving your rental car, and eating out are equally important. If you've ever tried to find the truth about travelling in a coronavirus world ... well, I'm sure you're still searching.

In May '20, I was invited to take part in a global business webinar titled '*Positioning Your Organization for Success in a Post-COVID-19 World*' and I invited André to join me. I asked him how Intertek had responded to the crisis and he said that



**WHAT'S THE REALITY OF
TRAVELLING THESE DAYS?
...IT'S NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE
TO FERRET OUT THE TRUTH.**

they had two main priorities: firstly to make sure all the right processes were in place to protect their people's health and safety; and secondly to ensure they could give their clients all the help they needed to get their operations back up and running – and in fact they had launched a new solution called Intertek Protek, services focused completely on health, safety and wellbeing.

This is when it occurred to me: Why not, in the midst of all this craziness, write an ebook for like-minded travellers and combine my extensive scientific research into human behaviour with insights from my fellow traveller André's global quality assurance team.

With health and safety now the number one concern for the employees and customers of their clients, every minute,

every day, all year round the Intertek team is busy auditing, benchmarking and certifying thousands of hotel rooms, restaurants, and airlines – worldwide – clearing the travel industry of Covid-19 risks with Protek solutions.

It's been a fun journey, so to speak. After researching and writing this book, I know I'll never touch a remote control, munch a handful of peanuts in the airport bar, or use the airplane lavatory the same way again. Thanks to Intertek Protek, I've come to realize that there are ways we all can get back on the road again – safely – in the new reality.

Enjoy the flight.

Martin Lindstrom

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED. AND SO WILL YOU!

You and I touch our nose, ears, and eyes 16 to 23 times an hour. That's equivalent to over 250 times on an average day!

If you happen to be sequestered in a sanitized, perfectly sterile room with filtered air and water, religiously controlled food, and immaculately screened visitors, then touching your nose, ears, and eyes is not a big deal – but who wants to live in there?

Bacteria and viruses have always surrounded us. In fact, the human '[microbiome](#)' contains an estimated 39 trillion microbial cells including bacteria, more than the 30 trillion human cells that make up the human body.

The other day I saw a flashy TV commercial for the latest, greatest, super-duper vacuum cleaner, capable of sucking up every single pathogen (as well as LEGO bricks) and instantly transforming my carpet into a perfectly clean landing strip, '99.99% free from deadly bacteria'. Of course, the left-over 0.01% equals one billion bacteria. And even that may not be the essential point.

What if eliminating microbes from our environment isn't important? What if it's even harmful?

Without bacteria we wouldn't be able to survive. Despite what Hollywood, social media, and even those '99.99% bacteria-free' ads may tell us, [microbes](#) are responsible for building our immune systems, preventing disease, digesting food, and even affecting our behaviour. They're a huge part of the reason that we, as the human species, even exist today.

However, they've also been an undeniable danger, from ancient plagues to the famous 1918 influenza to today's Covid-19. If you live in New York City and want to play it safe by never boarding a plane again, your risk of dying from Covid-19 at the height of the pandemic would have been about double that of the mortal risk to a US soldier stationed in Afghanistan in 2010. If you lived in Michigan during the pandemic, your risk of dying from Covid-19 would approximate that of driving a motorcycle 70 kilometres every day. Living in Maryland during these Covid-19 times would be roughly as risky as doing one skydiving jump a day for the duration.

Or, stated, another way: For someone infected with Covid-19, the [risk of death](#) is comparable to the chances of dying on a climb to over 26,000 feet in the Himalayas.

These numbers are based on the entire US population, assuming an average age of 38. For older folk, the fatality rate could be as much as 10 times higher – slightly less than flying four Royal Air Force bombing missions over Germany during World War II.



**YOUR RISK OF DYING
FROM COVID-19 WOULD
APPROXIMATE THAT OF
RIDING A MOTORCYCLE
70KM EVERY DAY.**

The Japanese are probably the most hygiene-obsessed population in the world. They seem to live and breathe the essence of cleanliness in every step and every breath they take. Once, when I was visiting a Japanese hot spring (onsen, in Japanese), the kimono-dressed hostess carefully instructed me to use a specially dedicated pair of indoor shoes. But she didn't stop there. That pair of shoes was only to be used until I had arrived at the front door to my room. Then another pair would take over. A third pair of shoes was waiting at the entrance to my bathroom, and a fourth pair was neatly placed just in front of the toilet.

If you're raised with the routine of casually changing shoes for every room you enter, I'm sure this would be like navigating a simple walk in a park. But for a non-Japanese like me, who'd had a bit too much sake, missing a couple of

shoe-changing routines on the way to the toilet turned the entire onsen on its head. I remember the look of horror on my hostess's face when she caught me wearing the wrong pair of shoes.

For the Japanese, raised with fundamentals of health and safety, this lifestyle is as normal as you and me brushing our teeth every night before going to bed. These routines are so engrained in Japanese society that wearing a protective mask when you have a cold is just as commonplace as coughing into a hand in the West. Do I need to point out which of those two options is more efficient at stopping the spread of the virus? As of 19 May 2020, the UK had suffered 35,341 Covid-19 deaths, compared to Japan's 768 (though Japan's population is twice that of the United Kingdom).

Ensuring that a population of [126 million people](#) thinks and breathes hygiene with every breath they take didn't happen overnight. It has direct links back to the Emperor of Japan and the invention of sushi. Observing the dilemma of feeding his inland population with ocean-caught fish, despite the long, warm-weather journey from the sea leading to a risk of food poisoning, the Japanese introduced [Narezushi](#) in the 8th century. Narezushi, the most primitive, earliest form of sushi, is a world away from your California rolls and sliced sashimi. Primarily a means of food preservation, it came with a bonus: a population with the highest average life expectancy, the oldest population in the world, and a Covid-19 death toll nearly [44 times lower](#) than that of the United Kingdom.

Unless you're Japanese – having learned to bow rather than shake hands, willing to try the shoe trick, comfortable wearing a mask in public – then you have a slightly different, somewhat clumsy relationship with hygiene. Attention to sanitation doesn't play much of a role in our daily lives. According to a [2020 study](#), 40 percent of Americans don't always wash their hands after going to the bathroom, and [33 percent](#) don't use soap at all. I consider these disturbing statistics, given that [80 percent](#) of communicable diseases can be transferred by touch.

Unlike the Japanese, we shake hands. We touch the pump at the gas station, even though [71 percent](#) of gas pump handles are crawling with pathogens. We walk with a firm grip on the handle of a shopping trolley, ignoring the fact that thousands of other shoppers have touched the same handle. As a lady I once interviewed pointed out, 'I noticed how another family with a sick two-year-old kid "embraced" the shopping trolley. That trolley was next in line for me to pick up.'

The introduction of touch-screen technology hasn't been beneficial, either. We use a touch screen to get cash from the ATM, check in when flying, check out through immigration, order food at McDonald's and Burger King, purchase tickets for the train, and obtain information at the information desk in the mall. We tap and touch those displays, on which thousands of previous customers have left behind their invisible fingerprints and lively germs.

Without touch, our society simply couldn't work. Until now, that is.

By now, we've all become painfully familiar with Covid-19. You're tired of reading about it, aren't you? You're tired of hearing about it, tired of having your life turned upside-down by it. I know I am. This is true, even though we know it's the most important thing going on in the world.

If you're a businessperson, I'd be willing to bet that every conference call you've attended over the last few months has opened with that very topic. It's replaced the obligatory small talk about the weather and Donald Trump.

Now we've reached the point where we're no longer talking about the numbers of fatalities. Instead, we're talking about the agony of this seemingly endless lockdown and the newly essential questions: What does the future hold for us? What will the future look like?

Here's my point. Though Covid-19 may not entirely disappear, eventually it will surely become a shadow of itself. But please don't be fooled. Unless our behaviours change dramatically, our society will remain vulnerable to this or another virus, paralyzing everything we do and impacting the lives of everyone we love. Quite frankly, we've been sitting on a ticking time-bomb for decades. The epidemiologists told us a pandemic was not only a possibility, but a sure thing. Even so, we've placed the topic of a pandemic at the bottom of our to-do-list, while attending to more urgent, more attention-grabbing, quite frankly more profitable issues higher up the list.

Not that we didn't have plenty of warning. Most recently, the [2009 H1N1 virus](#) (also called the swine flu) infected some

two billion people on Planet Earth – *that's billion with a B* – causing the deaths of an estimated 203,000 people the first year.

The fact is that we've created a world where vulnerability is 'baked into the cake'. Everything in this world is intertwined and interconnected. In the US alone, every year more than [1.1 trillion dollars](#) are spent on travel; every year, Americans take 2.3 billion flights.

The reality is that, until now, our society hasn't been built to deal with a killer virus.

Consider this: In 1918 the biggest pandemic in history, the [Spanish flu](#) (which ironically originated not in Spain, but most likely in New York or Kansas), infected half-a-billion people, nearly one-third of the world's population, and killed somewhere between 50 million and 100 million people. This occurred, even though the flu broke out during a time when we were [travelling](#) a tiny percent of what we do today. Remember, these were the days of Titanic. On land, walking, the horse, and the steam engine were still the only real means of travel. This only really changed later in the decade, thanks to Henry Ford and his revolutionary mass production techniques.

It's no surprise that the world has changed drastically since then, providing us with incredible labor-saving devices, communication technologies, and computing tools – but also creating unforeseen consequences. Today in the United States, for instance, American-grown food [travels](#) between 1,500 and 2,500 miles from farm to table, as much as

25 percent farther than only two decades ago. On top of that, another 20 percent of the US food supply is [imported](#). With [17 million](#) hotel rooms hosting 43.5 billion stays per year across the globe and [15 million](#) restaurants visited billions of times annually, we've built the perfect foundation for a pandemic. It's waiting for us right in front of our fingers, mouths, and noses.

Sure, we can lock ourselves inside, hoping a [vaccine](#) will appear and allow us to re-engage with a newly safe world. But science, despite heroic efforts by thousands of researchers all around the globe, is still in the early stages of understanding the coronavirus. With only one vaccine, of limited use, so far emerging from more than 125 preclinical Covid-19 trials, the reality is that a Covid-19 vaccine may be a long time coming. The reason why is simple. As Dr. Seema Yasmin, director of the Stanford Health Communication Initiative, notes: 'The fastest vaccine we previously developed was for mumps, and that took four years to develop. Typically, it takes 10 to 15 years to [develop a vaccine](#). So, 12 to 18 months would be record-breaking'.

A second reality is that we've most likely only witnessed a trial run for another virus to appear.

Does this mean that, for the rest of our lives, travel is out of the question? That you can forget about visiting your nearby restaurant, travelling to the far side of the world, going to business meetings in another city or country? Not to mention enjoying a lovely overnight stay with your loved one?

Not at all. If you're a frequent business traveller or just a leisure traveller, if you like to visit restaurants from time to time or if you enjoy staying at hotels, then you'll simply need to adopt new behaviours and make them part of your daily routines.

I'm not going to claim this will be easy (remember my shoes at the Japanese onsen?)

You'll need to fine-tune your behaviour, just as you know to look left-then-right when crossing the street, just as you watch out for seemingly insignificant signs as you visit hotels, board planes, or dine in restaurants. We'll need to learn to attend to new hints, which will be essential to our personal safety. We'll need to accustom ourselves to new guides to navigating a world in which one must expect a virus to always be present, in one shape or another.

Over the next pages, I intend to help you do exactly that. I'll provide you with a guide to help you navigate an unfamiliar, somewhat scary, but not impossible new world.

THE DAY I REALIZED I KNEW NOTHING ABOUT CLEANLINESS AND NEITHER DID THE AIRLINES

‘Excuse me, Sir.’ The flight attendant spoke firmly to the passenger seated in the row opposite mine. ‘You need to wear your mask...’ But she stopped halfway through her sentence. ‘Oh, excuse me, I didn’t notice you’re drinking your Champagne. Well, then, please make sure you put your mask back on as soon as you’ve finished your beverage.’

As an operations expert at United Airlines told me when I interviewed him, ‘This is much like the Dr. Dao incident. We don’t really know where the line is until it gets crossed.’

To me, after several months of an involuntary ‘retraining course’ – in other words, several months of Covid-19

lockdown – the passenger in 3F removing his mask to drink his Champagne seemed like a life-or-death matter for everyone on the flight. I'm not even sure anymore if this was an over-reaction on my part.

It was a Friday afternoon, and businesspeople were on their way home with no option but the old stand-by: a jet flight. Half the occupants of the cabin seemed desperate to celebrate something ... just about anything. Yet there really was nothing to celebrate except the joy of flying in the immediate aftermath of Covid-19. A plane in the sky was just as rare as good news in the media.

I'd found myself on a flight to Munich, sharing a cabin with 232 other passengers, each shivering with their fear of breathing in the coronavirus, but each also armed with a valid excuse to fly.

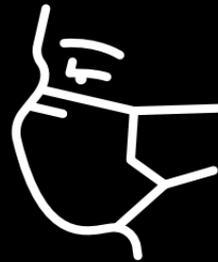
The airline and the airport had done their homework, lining up a stunning beauty pageant of 'Covid-19 tricks' aimed at making every passenger feel safe. It began with the entrance into the airport through doors newly decorated with Covid-19 informational placards, but beyond those doors, a scene from *Ghost Town 2* met our eyes. We're all used to that classic greatest hit coming over the loudspeakers: '*3-1-1 liquids in a plastic bag*' – followed immediately by its ever-popular sequel: '*If you see something suspicious, please inform the authorities*'. But now a new best-seller had become the primary message: '*All passengers must wear face masks at all times*' – they seemed to be particularly reminding me and the two other mask-less passengers I spotted in check-in –

‘and keep two metres’ distance between you and other people.’

For a split second, I was surprised to realize that a welcoming smile was hiding behind the security officer’s mask. It occurred to me, as if had surely occurred to her, that nothing is certain in this world, not even a security officer’s job. And I wondered, also, how on earth each of the [221,000](#) passengers who pass through Heathrow Airport on an average day could possibly keep two metres apart. In the days when Corona was something you drank and viruses were something featured in blockbuster Hollywood movies, we went through Security shoulder-to-shoulder. So where was all this extra space going to come from?

As I dumped three mini-bottles of disinfectant, a handful of almost certainly contaminated coins, and a long-since forgotten, wadded-up face mask onto the tray, I wondered, ‘Wait, where did all those trays come from? Straight out of a form factory or a tray-disinfection machine? And will they all

**IF YOU FELT AIR TRAVEL
IN THE AGE OF
TERRORISM
COULDN'T GET
ANY WORSE,
THINK AGAIN.**



go immediately to Covid-19 heaven?’ I did the obligatory cat-walk through the metal detector, walked past the beverage-and-perfume duty free (now offering no beverage or perfumes, only a lot of hand sanitizer), and arrived at my gate.

Have you ever travelled to a country where few would dare go, one of those ‘*The embassy highly recommends you avoid*’ places? That was my feeling when I joined a couple hundred fellow passengers at the gate. In the past, we would spend the waiting time eyeing each other’s boarding cards for their class categorization. That was something from the past, replaced by an ‘*oh-he-has-a-more-advanced-mask-than-mine*’ type of stare, while we all stood there like backgammon counters, each parked on our two-meters-apart floor sticker, arranged in one long line pointing toward the gate to airline heaven.

If you felt air travel in the age of terrorism couldn’t get any worse, think again.

All passengers had indeed been informed numerous times to wear their face masks throughout the entire flight (except, of course, when imbibing their Champagne) and to keep our curious little fingers to ourselves. Despite these warnings, one couldn’t help wondering where the landmines were buried. Forget about terrorists; that was then, another point in time. Now, every passenger looked around suspiciously for microscopic enemies. Was the lavatory the ticking time-bomb? The headrest? Was the catered food and that shiny metal cutlery the coronavirus’s stealthy hiding place? What about that table tray lock or the touch screen on the

entertainment system? Would one touch be enough to? ... well, you know.

Thank God I was, like everyone else in the cabin, well-armed with my fold-out kit of coronavirus-protection tools. To my knowledge, I didn't let down a single time, successfully navigating a maze of sneaky virus-traps. Time flew (so to speak), and I survived to touchdown in Germany.

As we disembarked, the airline was still on its game, requesting passengers not to stand up and congregate in the aisles. We should walk out letter by letter. First everyone seated in the A seats, then the B seats, then C...

All good so far – but then the perfectly staged safety-theatre collapsed.

Walking out in our best North Korean military style, we passengers right away encountered a problem. The aerobridge had been replaced by a staircase, leading straight into coronavirus hell. With a digital sign reading 'Welcome to Munich', a bus was waiting at the end of the staircase. Remember *Jaws*, with that enormous, scary, teeth-filled mouth? The door onto the bus was just like that. They packed us in like sardines in a can. That bus captured every alien and their viruses one-by-one.

The airline industry is one of the world's fastest expanding businesses, each year (pre-pandemic, that is) transporting [4.3 billion](#) passengers. With scale of that magnitude, welcome to a true margin business, where one extra lettuce leaf in your salad, multiplied across several billion meals, yields an enormous yearly cost.

**CLEANING, PRIOR
TO THE ARRIVAL OF
THE CORONAVIRUS,
HAD BECOME A
FAST-VANISHING MIRAGE.**



Where does health fit into the airlines' calculations? It's a questionable cocktail at best.

In fact, it may not be a surprise that most of the airlines operating in the United States define a turn-around cleaning procedure as: Collect empty pretzel bags, water bottles, newspapers, magazines, and forgotten iPhones and ear buds during an average 30-minute turn-around-time from passengers disembarking to another round of passengers walking on to the tune of *'Please take your seat. This flight is fully booked'*. That's [12 seconds](#) per seat, if you're travelling on a 156-seat A-319.

Hold on just a second. Did someone say 'cleaning'?

In an industry where the addition or subtraction of a simple lettuce leaf rises to a level of genuine significance, how much would it cost to have an airliner sit on the tarmac, with all those seats unoccupied and unsold, while a crew spends several hours doing a genuine deep-cleaning procedure?

The fact is that cleaning, prior to the arrival of the coronavirus, had become a fast-vanishing mirage. Forget about disinfecting the armrests, cleaning the trays, sterilizing the lavatories, washing the seat pockets, wiping the call-staff buttons, or vacuuming the seats and the aisles. It may happen ... just not on your flight, or the one before, or any flight the day after. In fact, what industry experts call '[deep cleaning](#)' only happens every sixth week. Or, said another way: After forty thousand passengers have had the chance to breathe, cough, touch, and sneeze their way through your plane.

But even more concerning was what I learned when I interviewed industry experts, cabin crew, airline executives, and sanitation experts at the quality assurance company Intertek seeking to understand what to do (and not do) on planes. It turns out I was completely wrong in my assumptions of what was safe on the way to the airport, in the airport, on board a flight, driving to my hotel, checking in, staying in the hotel, and visiting the restaurants. In fact, it turns out that I'd built personal routines around totally false assumptions. My grandmother would have described my assumptions as 'Less than intelligent'.

SEAT 14E

On March 15, 2003, a Boeing 737-300 carrying 112 passengers, six flight attendants, and two pilots took off on a three-hour flight from Hong Kong to Beijing.

What no-one knew was that the presence of the 72-year-old passenger in Seat 14E would severely impact the lives of 18 fellow passengers, sadly claiming the lives of five passengers and changing the lives of their families ... forever.

As the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) reported, 13 professors and scientists spent nearly a year analyzing that flight from Hong Kong to Beijing, as well as two other flights from Hong Kong to Taipei a week prior and a week after the Beijing departure.

By interviewing 45 percent of the passengers on those three flights – a total of 304 people – the scientists unveiled stunning insights into rarely discussed, invisible aspects of what passengers and crew experience during a flight. They revealed [how](#) a deadly virus might spread, minute by minute, while we're sipping wine from our mini-glasses, innocently fiddling with the entertainment system's controls, and blissfully watching *The Lion King*, *Toy Story 4*, or *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*.

What made the Beijing flight so unusual was that only one

of the passengers, a 72-year-old man, had shown any symptoms of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (also known as [SARS](#)-associated coronavirus, SARS-CoV, or simply SARS) before boarding.

Though they're both caused by a coronavirus, SARS and Covid-19 have differences. For one thing, [SARS's mortality rate](#) was an estimated 9.6 percent, much higher than [Covid-19's mortality](#) of 1.38 percent to 3.4 percent. However, the two viruses bear strong similarities to each other: They are genetically related, share the same origin, spread through the same mechanisms, and have similar incubation periods.

The 13 scientists' analysis of how SARS spread on that Hong Kong-to-Beijing flight provides a frightening insight into how a virus like Covid-19 has the potential to spread worldwide while [half-a-million passengers](#), on average, find themselves sitting in close proximity with dozens or hundreds of strangers at a cruising altitude of 34,000 feet at any given moment, every day, all year around.

Let's start with the good news. By analyzing every minute on the Hong Kong-to-Beijing flight from take-off to landing, as well as on the two other flights, the scientists were able to conclude that those passengers who boarded the plane during their SARS incubation period were unlikely to infect their fellow passengers. The scientists also concluded that where a passenger sits on a plane impacts his or her risk of contracting the virus (though the difference, in this study, was not statistically significant). Most surprising of all, however, as straightforward as this conclusion may seem at first glance, the 'safe zone' isn't where I would have guessed.

The scientists observed that of the 35 passengers seated in rows 9 through 13 – that is, in the rows immediately in front of the infected passenger – 11 contracted the SARS virus during the flight. That contrasted with only seven of the 81 passengers seated elsewhere on the plane. Most surprising, neither of the passengers sitting directly next to the infected passenger caught the virus. The conclusion was clear: If you happen to sit behind, a distance in front of, or even directly next to an infected fellow passenger, then your risk of contracting the coronavirus (SARS, certainly, but probably Covid-19, too) is substantially lower than if you happen to be sitting immediately in front of the infected passenger.

Of course, those passengers in rows 9-to-13 had no way of knowing about the ticking time-bomb sitting just behind them. Without that knowledge, they were helpless to take action.

Does this mean we're all doomed the moment we walk down that aerobridge, watching ahead for the light at the end of the tunnel?

We've all been bombarded by endless streams of fake (though genuine-seeming) posts on Facebook and other social channels sharing advice on the 'true risk' of Covid-19 when taking taxis, staying in hotels, or sailing on cruise ships. Not to mention, the obligatory three-rules-for-what-not-to-do when flying, which is often featured next to five-tricks-you-didn't-know-your-cat-could-do.

How do we survive the maze of fear that has bombarded us – from left, right, and center – ever since a bat ate a snake at

the wet market in Wuhan way back in 2019? Or was it a snake that ate a bat? I can't really remember anymore.

Just as confused as you, I set out on a mission to discover the true risk of flying. My aim was to help create a roadmap for actions you should consider taking (and actions you should avoid) to minimize your chances of contracting a virus when you're on holiday. Or, if you're travelling on business, how to carefully juggle your way through packed airports and planes, hundreds of people waiting in line for taxis and Ubers, hotel check-ins and check-outs, crowded restaurants, the keycards providing access to your room – not to forget a bed that's been used by only 300 people before you, this year alone.

I had help in my research from Intertek, brand owner of health, safety, and well-being assurance program Protek. Thomas Alva Edison, the great inventor, founded the Lamp Testing Bureau in 1896 as a way to quality-check manufacturers of his latest, brightest invention, the light bulb. Eventually, Edison's company merged with several other quality testing companies, forming Intertek, and Intertek, in turn, has created the Protek program. Given Intertek's diverse role as the quality controllers of everything from the black box on Airforce One and the catering food entering the White House to thousands of hotels, restaurants, and airlines, they were able to lend me a solid knowledge base to tap into.

I also gained incredible insights from interviews with the likes of Captain Smith, a 59-year-old veteran pilot, and his entire team operating planes in and out of China in the

HOW WELL-EQUIPPED ARE THESE INDUSTRIES AS BILLIONS LEAVE LOCKDOWN?



lead-up to the outbreak of Covid-19; the engineers at Lufthansa Technik and United Airlines, responsible for checking the aircraft filters; three professors in biology, experts in the spread of the virus; the chief housekeepers at Ritz Carlton and other hotel chains; folks in airline catering operations; and doctors working in some of the most impacted hospitals in Italy, UK, and the US. All these experts helped me establish a nuanced picture of the reality of the spread of Covid-19.

I'll be absolutely frank. My many interviews raised some profound questions about what's really going on in those industries, which impact millions, if not billions, of people around the world.

My investigation raised uncomfortable questions about how well-equipped these industries are, as billions of people leave lockdown and return to the world. These questions may largely determine our destiny.

Spoiler alert: As you'll read in the next chapter, I was not only shocked to discover the true risk of flying in a 'somewhat post-Covid-19 world'. I was also surprised when, more or less by coincidence, I bumped into three contamination sources that have barely been mentioned in the media. These contamination sources might (and I emphasize that word: '*might*') have a substantial impact on your health as a traveller. Frankly, during my 30 years on the road and in the air, these three sources had never crossed my mind – but the moment I discovered them, they made absolute sense.

DISCOVERING A TINY, INVISIBLE AND CONTAMINATED SOUVENIR

We all know that flying a helicopter or a private jet is dangerous. In fact, the risk is 60 times higher than flying on a regular commercial plane.

Even taking Amtrak, America's national intercity railroad, is [20 times riskier](#) than flying with a commercial operator like American or British Airways.

However, topping the chart of all forms of transportation is driving your own car (no offense intended!). Driving on a daily basis for a year comes in at a whopping 453 times higher than taking one flight on a commercial airline. So, for infrequent fliers, the risk of that one flight per year logs in at a bit less than the long-term risk of driving (though the more often you fly, of course, the greater the risk).

In comparison: Even your mother's ultimate dread – skydiving – is [24 times safer](#) than driving. Yes, here it is in black and white. Driving is a genuinely perilous undertaking.

So, now that we've determined how much safer it is to board a commercial airline than to drive, fly a helicopter, or even jump out of an airplane: What impact has the Covid-19-situation had on the risk of commercial flying?

I decided to ask Fergus Simpson, Ph.D., Cambridge University astrophysicist and senior machine learning researcher at artificial intelligence pioneer PROWLER.io. I fed him my insights from the Hong Kong-to-Beijing flight and asked him to calculate the authentic risk of flying during the pandemic.

Needless to say, given the endless list of unknown factors, this isn't a straightforward calculation. For instance, where your flight originates has a [big impact](#) on the end result. If you're one of the lucky ones starting your journey in Auckland, New Zealand, your risk of contracting Covid-19 on the plane would be pretty close to zero (at the time I wrote this chapter, there were currently zero Kiwis with Covid-19); contrast this with passengers flying out of Madrid, Spain, where nearly one person out of every 200 is infected.

Other factors that we need to recognize as having an impact are the length of the flight, since passengers move around more on a longer flight, which has been proven to correlate with the risk of contracting Covid-19; the number of fellow passengers; and the onboard service level, since frequent interaction with staff is another factor. In other words, asking the flight attendant your silly questions about the danger of contracting the coronavirus is, itself, an activity that makes you prone to contracting the virus.

Since the first time we heard the phrase ‘coronavirus’, the experts have been telling us to watch out for two different methods of transmission. First, they’ve told us that we spread it when we sneeze, cough, shout, sing, talk, and even simply breathe; coronavirus-infected droplets float from our mouths, travel in the air, and enter the mouths, nostrils, and even eyes of other people. And, second, the virus lurks on various surfaces, waiting for us to touch them, pick up the virus on our fingertips, and transfer the virus to our faces.

In the case of the Hong Kong-to-Beijing flight, it’s pretty apparent that transmission from the passenger in seat 14E was as a result of ‘aerosol transmission’, not by surface-to-hand-to-mouth.

So, as we think about the safety level of flying, it’s important to consider the nature of the air inside the airliner.

Some people claim that the quality of airflow in an airliner differs substantially, depending on where in the plane you happen to be situated. They make the somewhat natural assumption that economy class passengers are left with the worst possible air quality imaginable. The air starts utterly fresh in the cockpit, then flows to the cabin crew in the galley. Along with their Champagne bubbles, first-class passengers inhale air so nearly perfect that they can easily imagine themselves high up on a pristine mountaintop. Then, it’s circulated to business-class passengers – and, finally, it ends with you, in seat 57F, right next to the lavatory. Do you have sufficient imagination to picture that snow-draped Alp? Probably not. According to this scenario,

you're stuck with stale, pre-used air that makes you worry (how can you help yourself from wondering?) if it's infused with coronavirus. All this while exercise videos on the screen instruct you to take an extra-deep breath in-and-out (while counting the days you have left to live).

Well, the experts at Protek and airline engineers tell me that when it comes to airflow in an airliner, we'd be wise to think again.

First of all, they tell me, airflow on all modern planes is equally distributed throughout the entire cabin, including lavatories and economy class (and no, I'm not suggesting a connection here). In fact, several insiders claimed to me that it is safer to be seated in economy class than in first class. Go figure.

Airflow through the entire cabin is so intense that all the air is completely recirculated every three to five minutes. In addition, planes built [after 1992](#) (90 percent of the operating fleet) are equipped with High-Efficiency Particulate Air filters, also called [HEPA filters](#), the same filters you'll find in certain super-premium vacuum cleaners that are intended for purchase by people suffering from severe allergies. They are the same as those used in hospital operating theatres. Don't be fooled by certain less-than-trustworthy economy airline operators, who claim their filters are safer than those of other airlines. The experts tell me that this is simply untrue. Almost all airliners' air filters are equally safe.

What I learned is that the breathing of an ill person like Passenger 14E is not more likely to spread the virus on an airliner than in any other fairly confined space. In fact, an

ex-Royal Airforce operations manager I interviewed argued that ‘airline air is actually safer, compared to the air in your office or even at home, as the HEPA filters take out 99.95 percent of microbe particles.’

So, what about surface-to-hand-to-mouth transmission? From the beginning of the pandemic, we’ve all taught ourselves the proper, 20-seconds-long method of washing our hands, and we’ve learned to turn doorknobs with our elbows. However, as more data has poured in, the Centers for Disease Control has waffled on the danger of surface transmission. Now the [CDC](#) says, “*It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes...*” (my italics for emphasis).

Since it *may be possible* to acquire the virus by surface contact, let me give you a brief quiz. How risky do you rank the Covid-19 ‘danger zones’ on a commercial airliner?

Let’s start with the epicentre of all in-flight horrors, the lavatory. Consider the handle on the inside and outside lavatory door, the tap, and the already mysteriously pre-heated toilet seat.

Or what about the touch screen (*touch* – you get it!) and the monitor. For some reason, you’re always forced to wrestle with the monitor, reaching with both hands into that hole while trying to pull out the screen.

And let’s not neglect that perennial hot-spot, the fold-down table lock. It’s situated just in front of your eyes and mouth (as it’s also been situated in front of the eyes and mouths of

the previous 116 passengers who've been assigned the same seat over the past month). One passenger after another has coughed and sneezed while pushing and twisting the little lock ... while desperately trying to fold out that dirty tray table ... while a less-than-patient cabin crew member waits in the aisle with your bag of pretzels and cup of lukewarm chlorine-flavoured water.

If you feel like these items I've just described are the true danger zones aboard an airliner – think again. In fact, the experts at Protek tell me that none of the above should worry us very much. Counter-intuitive as it may sound, the spots we perceive as most contaminated are typically the most hygienic, for the simple reason that we're overly cautious in those areas. Nearly every person who interacts with those spots treads carefully, touches invisibly threatening surfaces with napkins, showers themselves in hand sanitizer, and struggles against the airflow to place one sheet of toilet paper after another elegantly on the toilet seat to create a clean surface on which to perch one's bare bum.

Typically, we should instead be watching for danger in spots where we're distracted by our subconscious sense of security – or perhaps, from a neuroscientific point-of-view, spots we associate with a perception of safety – even though they may be a far cry from it.

Announcements over the loudspeaker serve to camouflage one of those items behind a layer of perceived safety. I'm talking about the seatbelt buckle. Did you ever consider that this shiny piece of truly lifesaving piece of metal could be a potential Covid-19 danger? Actually cleaning them never

appears on any airline's sanitation protocol. They frequently remind their passengers, '*Safety is our first priority*' – in terms of a crash, maybe, but not at all in terms of cleanliness. They fold the belts neat and tidy across the seats, creating the illusion that the buckles have been cleaned. But the last passenger's fingerprints, bacteria, and viruses remain as invisible souvenirs for the next passenger to share and enjoy.

Imagine how many hands have dipped into the seat pocket and handled the magazines and safety placards. Reaching down into the 'lucky dip', have you ever discovered a less-than-pleasant surprise hidden down there? I know I have.

Another 'please-do-not-touch' spot is the top of each seat. How many hundreds of passengers have used them as navigation crutches, acting semi-blindfolded, stalked by bad luck unless they systematically place a hand on each and every seat-top the whole way back to Seat 57F? Or even worse, the passenger who reaches for the seat-top to pull himself up and inevitably grabs a handful of your hair. A leisure traveller I interviewed told me, 'We should know not to do that, but people just don't know how to act when travelling.'

And – you didn't think about this, did you? – what about your socks? Twenty percent of passengers visit the lavatories without shoes. As they shuffle down the aisle and do their business in the lav, like a sponge their socks absorb ... well, let's just say, everything that's been sprinkled, dripped, and dropped on the floor. And then, back in their seats, how many of those shoe-less passengers massage their sore feet, contaminate their fingers, and, sometime in the next few



**THE ACTUAL DANGER-ZONE
FOR AIRLINE TRAVELLERS
IS TO BE ENCOUNTERED
ELSEWHERE.**

minutes, absent-mindedly touch their faces, their armrests, the fold-down tray, and the window shade?

If you pay close attention to these various problem areas, then you should be in pretty good shape. You see, the reality is that the very moment we walk down the aerobridge, mental alarm bells flash, leading us to what psychologists call 'consciously aware behaviour'. Remember the first time you drove a car, so anxious to avoid a crash that you saw, heard, and noticed everything with a total, intense focus. As time passed, your consciously aware behaviour became unconscious, embedded into your routines (and into your bad habits). Gradually, you began to feel tempted by all the less clever things to do, like texting and driving.

Which brings me back to Professor Simpson's calculation of the risk of flying in these Covid-19 times. According

to Professor Simpson, the risk of contracting and dying of Covid-19 while flying – from all sources of transmission, aerosol and surface – is, in fact, a miniscule 0.01 percent if you're in a vulnerable category, and as low as 0.0001 percent if you're under 40 years of age. The risk of catching Covid-19 on a flight is currently around one in a thousand, or 0.1 percent.

Stated another way: You're at [no greater risk](#) of contracting Covid-19 on a commercial airliner, and dying from it, than you are of suffering a fatal accident while driving your own car.

Curiously, the actual danger-zone for airline travellers isn't in the air. It's to be encountered somewhere else. It's a place that may have you shivering uneasily – though for completely different reasons than what you might think.

THE SERIOUS POLICE OFFICER'S DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

Are you like me, when passing through Customs?

No matter how much I pretend, I can't help being assailed by a wave of undeserved guilt. Those uniformed customs officers, armed with those amazing laser eyes, are so intimidating. They have the ability to make even the most innocent people feel remorseful. Should I give those two officers a courteous, super-relaxed smile as I continue straight for the exit? Or should I simply ignore those two statuettes in the shadows, pretend I don't know they're watching me, try my best to give off a vibe that says I'm too busy to care, and just pass them by, heading for the outside world?

What's ironic is that I haven't done anything illegal, with the possible exception of 'borrowing' that mini-shampoo bottle from my last hotel room. Actually, even thinking about that shampoo bottle makes me feel guilty.

This reaction has a name: It's widely known as the Milgram experiment. In his famous study, Yale University

psychologist Stanley Milgram demonstrated that authorities not only intimidate us. They also have the ability to blindly seduce us to act, often against our own will, common sense, or morals.

If there's a place where the Milgram experiment can be observed at full sway in our day-to-day lives, it would have to be the airport. Among the touch points you encounter while travelling, airports present one of the highest levels of risk for contracting Covid-19. The Milgram experiment explains why we are barely aware of this risk.

On any given day, more than 235,000 passengers pass through each of the [ten](#) largest international airports. That's more than 18 football stadiums packed with people.

You'd have a difficult time finding such a melting pot, packed with people from all walks of life, anywhere else. Some are deeply nervous about missing their flight; others are anxious about their upcoming plane ride; kids are super-excited to fly for the first time; that 80-year-old-lady is superstitious that this will be her last airplane ride; the newlywed couple is anticipating their honeymoon; the businessperson dreads one more flight to Milwaukee and back the same day; all while the staff at the gate prepares today's excuse for another delay: bad weather, mechanical issues, or any of the other tick-the-boxes. With passengers of every imaginable religion, race, culture, and demographic you can possibly think of, and you've got a mini-United Nations with all the languages, the perspectives, the desires, the fears, the hopes, and the dreams – just without the long-winded speeches. All this, of course, occurs beneath a

filter of public-address system announcements and, in the background, a less-than-successful instrumental cover of *'Love Me Tender'*.

Without our awareness, airports play subtle games with our minds, giving us the unmistakable sense that we're in a life-and-death situation.

Think of the frantic family rushing to their gates, just to end up with an hour-long wait before the official boarding announcement. Or the passenger throwing a tantrum because he can't be seated next to his friend on a 45-minute flight to Hickory. We wouldn't behave like this on a bus or a train, though in airports we do.

But under the surface there's something fascinating going on, something you can't necessarily spot with your bare eyes.

You've just made it through the security screening without suffering any actual harm. When it was your turn to remove your shoes and put them in the tray, you may have thought to yourself, 'I don't want to.' But then the security officer said, 'Please place your shoes in the tray,' and you instantly decided, 'Well, okay, if that uniformed person says to do it, then it must be all right.'

You may have had a brief struggle with that tray, ending with three pairs of shoes belonging to fellow passengers flying into the air while your previously white socks picked up a nasty grey tint (and who knows what else) from the carpet over which hundreds of shoe-less people have shuffled since last time it was steam-cleaned.

Hundreds of pairs of shoes – after walking on sidewalks, across airport carpets, and through airport bathrooms – have been in that tray before your shoes came to take their brief ride through the X-ray machine. Now, you reach into the tray, retrieve your shoes, pull them on, and retie them.

If you really stopped to think about it, you might feel a bit uneasy about the whole process; but the uniformed security screener said to do it, so it must be all right – and after all, you're equipped with Purell to sanitize your hands. 'All good!' you're thinking as you head for the gate.

Realizing that you've arrived way too early, you decide to camp at a nearby sushi joint in the very center of it all. A friendly, well-dressed, nicely coiffed hostess smiles and hands you a menu card, and you start by ordering a club soda with ice and a lime wedge. You're well prepared in this time of the coronavirus, with your little bottle of hand sanitizer in your pocket in case something unexpected, something threatening, happens.

As you flick through the plastic pages of the menu card (unaware of how densely packed it is with microbes), you fall in love with the photograph of the California roll. It's easy, light, and ... and what the heck? ... this place looks pretty safe. So why not? The counter seems freshly wiped, and so do the tables. And from what you can see, the nicely dressed businesswoman next to you, with her handbag on the counter, seems safe. Within minutes, the waiter brings your sushi and your filled-to-the-rim glass of club soda. Just as you'd instructed, your glass is packed with ice cubes

**A RESTAURANT MENU
CAN CONTAIN
185,000 GERMS
PER SQ CM.**



and garnished with a fresh lime. ‘Isn’t life beautiful?’ you’re thinking. You take a deep breath of unfiltered air while keeping a sharp eye on the arrival-and-departure screens in the distance.

‘This Covid-19 thing isn’t too bad,’ you decide. At least, not here in this pleasant sushi bar.

But what hasn’t occurred to you was that air quality on planes is far superior to that in airports. Your airliner uses industry-standard HEPA filters, but on the ground, the story is very different. Every privately held airport operator, independent of regulation by the government, is free to decide if filtering is necessary at all. No real regulations exist, and since airports don’t sell a lot of air (except, perhaps, for the fragrance version in duty free), until recently, airports haven’t had a lot of incentive to control the air quality of their millions of cubic feet of space.

And as if what we breathe isn’t enough, remember that menu you just flicked through? According to a recent study,

a restaurant menu can contain [185,000](#) germs per square centimetre. For reference, a public toilet has about 500–1,000 germs per square centimetre. And don't forget the ice cubes, which have been shown to contain up to [31 species](#) of eight different bacteria. Oh, and the lime wedge, too. Studies have shown that that wedge of citrus is highly contaminated, as well (according to the [Journal of Environmental Health](#)). Among the 25 different microorganisms it may carry is *E. coli*, a bacterium commonly found in the lower intestine of warm-blooded creatures.

'But, hey, hang on,' you're thinking. 'This is a respected, respectable place.'

You've forgotten that you're engaged in a real-life version of the Milgram experiment. The constant presence of security personnel, the police officers walking up-and-down the halls, the signs announcing the names of highly regarded restaurant chains: all of this camouflages risk, danger, and threat behind a scrim of authority-driven safety. Just as Milgram's authority figure easily convinced the experiment's subjects to violate their usual ethics and cause pain to a stranger, likewise we blindly accept the airport authority figures' assurance of safety.

Whereas catered food on most airlines passes through one of the most rigorous food safety and control processes in the world, the reality is that food and beverage outlets in airports typically don't bother. Running their own show with an eye on the profit margin, these operations define their own control measures and set their own cleanliness standards.

You aren't likely to return to that airport sushi bar for quite some time, if ever, so that default web of safety precautions you experience at your local neighbourhood restaurant, depending on its reputation among regular patrons, is simply missing in the airport. Airport food outlets' attention to food-and-beverage safety is ... at very best ... questionable.

So, now you've finished your meal and carefully cleaned your fingers from your smaller-than-10-ounce bottle of sanitizer. Before heading to the gate, it's time to pay a quick visit to the bathroom. You don't know if you can trust the cleanliness of those airplane lavatories, so better to be safe than sorry.

As you enter the sushi bar bathroom, you notice two businessmen at the urinals, each of them engaged in a heated phone call. So, you decide to pick a stall. As you start into the usual paper-on-toilet-seat routine, you realize that the toilet paper holder is of the latest, greatest, most environmental design, only allowing you one sheet at a time.

You know these public toilets can be less than clean, and a recent study suggests potentially infectious particles continue to be airborne for about a minute after each [flush](#). So, to be cautious, you always devote extra time to washing your hands. However, the tap automatically switches off the water every five seconds. That's great for reducing water consumption, but it requires you to touch the same, no-doubt contaminated push button and start your hand-washing ritual all over again – more than once.

There haven't been any bars of soap since the end of the last century, though you once read a study that reported soap bars are 100% self-rinsing and probably the safest way to wash your hands. Instead, the airport provides more economically efficient soap dispensers, with approximately one in four of those dispensers [contaminated](#).

After you wash your hands, you use the [air blower](#) to spray high-pressure air across your damp hands. If you happened to be wearing a pair of ultraviolet glasses, you'd notice this mini-tornado blasting fecal matter and bacteria up into your face, while millions of microbes, including pathogens and spores, travel throughout the bathroom and into the restaurant. The passengers waiting for their turn at the air blower seem anxious and in a hurry, so even though [damp hands](#) are substantially more likely to spread viruses, you abandon the air blower with your hands only half dry.

Then, being extra-careful, you wrap the door knob with the tail of your shirt, open the door, and head for your gate (smart move, as the *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences* [reports](#) that 93.8 percent of all door knobs are contaminated).

Research shows that airports operate some of the most contagious bathrooms in the world. They are so contagious that [30 percent](#) of travelling toilet-users don't bother to wash their hands.

Even worse, the microbes don't stay in the bathroom. Remember how the two businessmen were using their smart phones while doing their business at the urinals? Well,

[88 percent](#) of bathroom users have used their mobiles while in the bathroom. This explains why only 20 percent of people travelling through the 10 largest airports in the world have clean hands.

Studies show that cell phones are some of the most contagious devices you will ever own, with more than [17,000](#) bacterial gene copies. According to Dr Tajouri, a biomedical scientist at Bond University, [cell phones](#) are a 'Trojan horse contributing to the transmission of Covid-19'. We tap, swipe, and click on our phones [2,617](#) times per day. Is it worth mentioning that despite all this horror-inducing data, more than [40 percent](#) of all Americans occasionally hold their phones with their mouth when their hands are full, while one in four Americans never clean their phones.

Samsung has some good news on the cell-phone-cleanliness front. Their [UV Sterilizer](#), soon to be introduced around the world, is a box large enough to hold a phone (or a pair of sunglasses, earbuds, or other possibly contaminated items). While wirelessly recharging your phone, it bathes the phone – top, sides, and bottom – in powerful ultra-violet light that kills up to 99 percent of bacteria. But until the UV Sterilizer is available, regular cleansing of our phones would be an awfully good idea.

Meanwhile, let's not forget the briefcase, handbag, and purse that sat on the bathroom floor and then, within minutes, were placed on the sushi bar counter. According to a [study](#) conducted for the ABC, 20 percent of the handbags in the experiment carried more bacteria than a toilet. Half of the bags in that study contained coliform bacteria,

indicating the possible presence of human or animal waste. And if you think that at least the contents inside the bag must be safe, think again. A team from the University of Mauritius, sampling [purses](#) from 80 women and 65 men, discovered that 95.2 percent had bacterial contamination. An astounding 50.7 percent contained bodily organisms.

Those viruses and bacteria typically affix themselves to the leather or synthetic of the purse, which has been shown to represent an optimal breeding-ground for bacteria, while we reach for our phones, keys, and credit cards. Perhaps even worse, the same study found that the bacteria from your purse routinely decide to join you for a free ride, accompanying you home. At least 17.5 percent camp out on your dining table, and 11.3 percent make your kitchen counter surfaces their permanent home.

The same study pointed out that only 2.1 percent of people clean their purses as often as once a month.

May I remind you? The kitchen is also home to the meat, fish, and vegetables you're cooking.

All this is going on while we wander around the airport, pick up a Mars bar at the snack kiosk, rummage through the apples and bananas in the café for the freshest specimen, and flick through the latest glossy magazines (many featuring the latest, greatest tips on how to stay safe in the pandemic). Being a cautious citizen, however, you pick the second magazine from the top. You never know who might have handled the uppermost magazine ... though 70 percent of people thumbing through magazines decide

not to purchase, and 45 percent, returning the magazine to the pile, place it second from the top.

I don't really mean to scare you. Keep in mind that our immune system is built to resist a lot. In fact, the more bacteria and viruses we're exposed to as a child, the more resistant we'll be as an adult. A Swedish [study](#) from 2013 show that children whose parents just sucked their pacifiers clean have a lower risk of developing eczema. A 2016 [study](#) published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* compared the immune profiles of Amish children, grown up on small single-family farms, and Hutterite children, who are genetically similar but grow up on large industrialized farms. The Amish (growing up in an environment described as 'rich in microbes' and farmyard dust) had strikingly lower rates of asthma.

What you've just read isn't new. It's been going on, in one form or another, for decades, centuries, and millennia. However, back then we weren't 7.5 billion people on Planet Earth, didn't travel as much as we do today, and didn't have Covid-19.

These new pandemics have introduced a new set of rules, which may indeed be enough to protect us. But protection requires us to change our behaviour and, like the Japanese, adopt new, more hygienic routines in our daily lives.

What's especially thought-provoking is that it doesn't take a lot of effort. According to MIT researchers, focusing on handwashing messaging in those 10 airports alone could potentially slow the spread of disease by as much as [37 percent](#).

But as we've learned, it is when we let our guard down, when we least expect it, that we're most vulnerable.

Which brings me back to the beginning of this chapter. The riskiest location for a traveller isn't the plane where you'll sit for hours in close proximity to dozens of strangers. Rather, it's the airport where you depart and arrive.

You've just landed in JFK. What a relief! You've survived your nine-hour flight. Wearing your face mask made you feel like your head was stuck in a sauna for all those hours. Now you're finally on the ground, waiting in an hour-long line with another 983 passengers. Security staff are yelling, guiding all of you down a one-way-street leading onto a never-ending hamster wheel. Thin ribbons have created a maze, with one (slowly) moving line passing another (slowly) moving line, over and over again, so you find yourself mingling with strangers and passing the same coughing and sneezing people time after time.

There's no point in wondering why you chose this particular line, rather than the other (faster moving) line. A loving couple with three kids camps out at the head of your line, sharing their life stories with the officer. You wonder why they find it necessary to relate the story about their old Auntie Christie and how much she hated flying.

Finally, it's your turn. You slide over your passport, preparing for the officer's predictable question: 'What is your purpose in the United States?' And then, out of the blue, the Milgram experiment kicks in.

You may have been through this routine a thousand times,

but this authority figure can tell you to do just about anything ... and you would.

Remember how I felt when passing by custom control? Well, that feeling has come rushing back. Whatever the officer says, he's right. 'Yes, sir.' Just keep repeating it. 'Yes, sir. Yes, sir....' He fiddles around with his papers, types some random-seeming words on his screen, looks you in the eye, stamps your passport, and says, 'Welcome to the United States of America.'

You're free to go. He didn't take advantage of his authority by ordering you to commit any shameful or immoral acts ... for which you feel like thanking him. You survived it all – including Covid-19.

But wait, you missed something.

It's a bit like the guy I saw driving his motorbike the other day. One hand was on his handlebar, and he was holding his helmet under his other arm. That helmet, I realized, carries with it an amazing halo effect of safety. Somehow, its mere presence was going to magically protect him from danger.

Well, that same safety halo is what you've just experienced while standing there sweating in front of the customs officer.

In the last chapter we talked about the reality that what we perceive as most contagious probably isn't ... and what we perceive as the safest is probably the riskiest of all.

While I stood there preparing my answers to all the familiar questions ... while I desperately pressed my fingertips on that scanner ... while I waited for the officer to flick through

my passport with his plastic gloves, stamp it, and return it – well, that may be the [most contagious spot](#) in the entire airport. According to the experts at Protek, Border Control hosts more germs than just about any other location.

I wish this was the end of your journey, but unfortunately, it isn't.

Waiting for you is the train, the monorail, the taxi, the Uber, or the rental car. Under normal circumstances, these spots probably would have been safe. For sure, they're safe if you take smart precautions when you're out and about. But there's a difference between today and those pre-Covid-19 days.

If you imagine you're finally safe, far from Border Control and those public toilets, think again. The [steering wheel](#) on your rental car is populated with four times the germs of a public toilet seat. In fact, in terms of exposure to coronavirus, your rental ranks right up there with all the time you spent mingling with your fellow passengers in the queue to Border Control.

And now you're about to step into a danger zone you probably haven't worried about: your hotel.

HANDS OFF THE TV REMOTE

If you've ever worked in the hospitality industry, you know that a hotel consists of two completely different worlds. In the lingo of industry professionals, there's the Front-of-house and the Back-of-house.

On the back of the door leading from the back-of-house into the hotel's reception area, there's often a placard, featuring a large smiley face, that reads, 'Smile – you're about to enter the stage.' And the hotel customers, for sure, will get a theatrical experience. In fact, as the number of stars and diamonds featured at the hotel entrance increases, the more the theatricality gets dialled up. 'Yes, sir. Most certainly, madam. Have a lovely day....' Have you ever, anywhere else, met a bunch of more polite, better-trained, well-groomed, well-dressed, handsome people?

Behind the scenes, things are often quite different. No more mahogany-clad walls, cut-glass mirrors, glittering chandeliers, elegant sofa settings, and shining silver coffee pots. In the back-of-house, it's anything but that. Here, the order of the day is blunt talk, casual dress, and far less attention to appearances. You might have suddenly been dumped into an all-male construction site.

The perception of hospitality, the essence of elegance, can be rather seductive – and cleanliness in the hospitality industry can be just as much of an illusion. Peel off the beautiful veneer, and something very different appears. The rat I once spotted skulking across the floor in the restaurant of one of London’s most respected restaurants was just a hint of the behind-the-scenes reality. If you manage to invite yourself into the back-of-house, you may walk through smelly hallways displaying left-over food, dirty dishes, and soiled cutlery. In five-star hotel bars, researchers recently discovered that ice cubes placed in drinks are often teeming with microbes, and the cups holding endlessly recycled peanuts can contain *Enterobacteria*, a bacterium indicating that the [peanuts](#) may have been exposed to faecal matter. *Enjoy!*

The ultra-clean glasses at the sink in your bathroom may never have left the bathroom for cleaning; instead, they’ve likely undergone a brief in-the-sink-and-out-again water dip and a wipe with the previous guest’s used towel. In fact, one housekeeper reported that it was common for staff, pressed for time, to clean toilet bowls with hand towels.

Frankly, all this has worked pretty well for hundreds of years. Few guests contracted life-threatening illnesses. If one did, it was likely a once-in-a-lifetime event for that hotel.

Of course, that was until Covid-19 entered our daily vocabulary.

Other than the travel industry, no sector is about to undergo as profound a change as the hospitality industry. They’re about to marry up the front- and back-of-house. Or, said another way: Perception will be matched with reality. If they

**THE PERCEPTION
OF HOSPITALITY
CAN BE
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don't, reputations will suffer, hotel images will be tarnished, and livelihoods will vanish forever.

On a mission to peel off the veneer, I interviewed dozens of housekeepers. I quickly learned how surprisingly professional and proud these wonderful people are at their work. This turns out to be true not just when they are on duty, but, even more thought-provoking, when they're travelling in a private capacity. One chief housekeeper for a major five-star hotel in New York (whose name and hotel I'll keep to myself) told me that she would never, ever, check into any hotel without bringing her own arsenal of cleaning products and tools. Before settling into her room, she scrubs, washes, polishes, and deep cleans for a couple hours. Did I mention that she does this not while travelling for work, but when she's on holiday?

'Isn't that a bit much?' I asked her. "A little bit of over-kill?"

'I know I'm more obsessed than other people,' she told me, 'but I've discovered that many hotels are bacteria time-bombs. You'd better be careful.'

I couldn't stop thinking about my many trips to countries around the world. My fresh pair of coronavirus-tinted lenses added a completely different light on this new reality.

I'm picturing the hundreds of times I've queued up with several dozen snuffling, wheezing, coughing, ear-pod-wired businesspeople at my hotel's all-you-can-eat lucky dip: the 'breakfast buffet'. To no-one's surprise, the hotel's lovely, immaculately retouched posters announcing their lovely luxury buffet always seem a far cry from the reality of the ten lukewarm silver containers. As the hours pass, excitement vanishes along with the taste of the food. You'll find all the old iconic regulars: the exhausted, limp scrambled eggs, the lifeless fried-boiled-baked potatoes, and the bacon that's been waiting all morning, getting chewier and chewier, for your arrival.

In hindsight, though the people in the buffet queue may think they're on a search for something tasty, or at least edible, what they're really engaged in is a desperate hunt for a virus-infected jackpot. Everyone touches the same handles, opens and closes one container after another, and inevitably ends up at the same dead-end: the mini-sausages, floating in their pool of fat, oil, and grease. As they queued up, even if they wore their face masks, they stood far closer than six feet apart. And then, of course, the next stop. The pre-set table features table mat, coffee cup, and cutlery, all patiently waiting just for you. Or was it all waiting for the person

before you, who took his seat, touched it all, breathed, took a cell phone call, and then rushed away for an urgent meeting?

‘Is it really that bad?’ I asked the hotel staffs – including my favourite chief housekeeper – hoping for a reassuring answer.

‘Let me tell you a story,’ she said ... and so she did, item-by-item, destroying my illusion of what a hotel stay really is all about.

Remember what I said about airlines’ turnaround time? How time allocated to cleaning amounts to minutes, rather than hours? Well, hotels are no different.

An unusual chain or two, of course, give their housecleaning staff 30 minutes or more per room. But these are five-star hotels, charging a premium price of more than \$1,000 per night. For hotels that charge a fraction of that, the story is very different. And I mean that quite literally.

An expert from Intertek had warned me, ‘Always look out for the remote control, you never know what’s on it.’ The housekeeper told me, ‘He’s right.’ In fact, when she’s travelling, she brings along her own plastic zip-lock bag, places the remote inside it, and operates the remote through this protective plastic shield. An especially wise move, as tests conducted by researchers from the University of Arizona found traces of things you’d rather not find on [30 percent](#) of all remote controls. I cringed at the thought of the hundreds of times I’ve fiddled around with the remote, often pressing extra hard on the buttons as if that would make nearly-dead batteries spring miraculously back to life.

My queasiness must have shown in my face.

The housekeeper paused and asked me, 'Are you okay?'

'Sure,' I replied politely.

'And don't overlook the phone in the room,' she continued.

'It's crawling with viruses.'

The Protek guy had called out the mini-bar. Guests return tipsy to their hotel room at the end of a night on the town. In that condition, cleanliness is not their number-one priority. So, I asked my housekeeper friend, and she told me, 'Those mini-bars are extra tricky to clean. The second door, behind the wooden veneer, has a lock that we housekeepers don't have access to. Management tells us it's a safety thing, but in fact, I don't think they trust us. Anyway, that makes it impossible for us to clean the mini-bars.'

As we talked, I realized there were spots in the room to which I'd never given a thought. No-one ever cleans the hangers in the cupboard, despite the risk of them carrying coronavirus. 'We simply don't have the time,' my housekeeper friend told me.

The in-room jacuzzi is a ticking time-bomb, she told me. As the pool manager at a large London hotel explained to me, people tend to behave themselves in public, but behind closed doors ... well, I decided not to ask any further questions, but just leave it there.

The experts I interviewed unanimously said that '90 percent of hotel guests are not aware of hygiene at all.' They're unaware that the pens and pads, the keycard, the jacuzzi, the

remote control, the bathroom countertop, and the master light switch should always be cleaned before making the room your home for the next 24 hours.

‘Is anything safe?’ I asked.

Ironically, toilet seats are as clean as housekeepers can possibly make them. So are the side tables.

Some hotels, like the Beverly Hills Hotel, the Hotel Bel-Air, and the Ritz Carlton in Chicago, take cleanliness seriously. Not only do they spend up to three hours deep-cleaning every room before a new guest checks in, but the Ritz Carlton even takes every room out of operation for 24 hours, after every single check-out, to refresh the air in the room.

But those hotels are few and far between, and surprisingly, it doesn’t all come down to cost. EmLab performed laboratory [tests](#) in three-star hotels, four-star hotels, and five-star hotels. They were surprised to discover: the lower the number of stars, the better. In fact, in five-star hotels, remote controls and bathroom countertops contained more than a million viable bacteria per square inch.

So, does all this mean the end of hotel stays as we know them?

Not at all. You just need to adopt some new behaviours and make them part of your routines.

As I learned later on, there are certain simple precautions you can take to stay healthy, even if you’re not staying in one of those few elite hotels. One trick I learned surprised me – and the rest I’ll surely never forget.

CHANGING IS EASY UNTIL YOU TRY IT

Join me in an experiment. Tonight, use your ‘wrong hand’ to brush your teeth. You’ll immediately realize it’s nearly impossible (and you’ll probably invent all sorts of excuses why this experiment is a complete waste of time).

Having read the previous six chapters, I’m sure by now you feel exhausted by the thought of all the daily routines you have to change. Washing your hands for the time it takes to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ has become incredibly tedious. Wearing your mask in the airports and on the plane. Skipping those airport restaurants. Covering the TV remote control with plastic wrap. Wiping down the steering wheel ... it’s all so painfully daunting.

And the real risk, just as Londoners (and citizens of cities and states throughout the US) have learned, is that you and all your neighbours simply say, ‘To heck with it all’ – and then we all slip back into the good old, very comfortable, and very, very dangerous routine.

Changing an engrained routine, like brushing your teeth with your opposite hand, turns out to be incredibly difficult. But, as psychologists put it, if you stick with it,

you'll eventually migrate this 'conscious competence' into an 'unconscious competence'.

You know you should get into the habit of cleaning out your handbag and disinfecting your smart phone every day. After all, it's for the good of humanity. But even though you may try to convince yourself, I'm pretty sure the reward won't be great enough to make you actually do it for more than a day or two.

Researchers from University College London studied how long it takes for a simple, desirable action to become an [engrained habit](#) – in their jargon, to 'achieve 95% automaticity'. The new behaviours were simple, such as drinking a bottle of water with lunch, but even so, the subjects found that at first it was difficult to keep to them. On average, subjects required 66 days of deliberately repeating the behaviour, with a range from 18 to 254 days, before the change in routine became a habit. You see, here's the problem. Adopting a change into your daily routine isn't hard because you're lazy. It is simply because change, by its very nature, is difficult.

In a [1998 study](#), Roy Baumeister demonstrated that 'laziness' correlates with exhaustion. He invited two sets of students into a lab and, on a table, offered two bowls. One bowl was full of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, while the other contained a bunch of radishes. He asked members of one group to eat the cookies but leave the radishes alone; he asked the other group to eat the radishes while skipping the cookies. The researchers left the lab, hoping the test subjects would be tempted to cheat. Would the radish-eaters sneak a cookie?

Or, perhaps less likely, would the cookie-eaters be tempted to eat a radish? None of the subjects failed the test, and that's the end of the experiment – except for one small detail.

The researchers next asked the subjects to solve a logic puzzle. Unknown to the subjects, the task was designed to be impossible to solve. The researchers simply wanted to see how long the test subjects would persist before they gave up.

This is where the surprising result appeared.

The cookie-eaters tried to solve the puzzle, and tried and tried, for an average of 19 minutes. The radish-eaters, on the other hand, persisted for just eight minutes. Why this huge discrepancy? The answer may surprise you. Baumeister concluded that the radish-eaters, in resisting those delicious cookies, had [used up their reserves](#) of self-control.

It turns out that monitoring our own self-behaviour is exhausting.

This explains why, when we come home from an exhausting day at work, we're more likely to snap at our partners. It also shows how difficult it is to handle multiple challenges at the same time. Just imagine if you were dieting, exercising, learning a new language, and changing the hand you use to brush your teeth – all at the same time. Sounds exhausting, right?

Now try to wash your hands every time you touch something. All of us know we should, more now in these days of Covid-19 than ever before, but even if you had a mobile bathroom following you around (and I'm pretty sure you don't), all that hand-washing is just plain exhausting.

It's like knowing that you should pause from your work at the computer every 15 minutes, stand up and stretch for five minutes. We all agree it's a great idea, guaranteed to keep mind alert and body healthy – but I know I rarely do it. I've tried, but I've never stuck with it long enough to turn the behaviour into an unconscious competence.

You're about to hit the road again, but as you do so you'll encounter an exhausting flurry of new rules, guidelines, routines, and measures that have been put in place by governments, authorities, hotels, and airlines. They are, no doubt, all good ideas, intended to keep us healthy. But the reality is that we won't quite trust all of those new rules, and unless you're absolutely addicted to change, they'll be nearly impossible to obey.

It'll be like being expected to brush your teeth with your wrong hand. It may sound simple, but it's a lot more difficult than it sounds.

And it's not just a single change you'll be expected to make. To continue our grooming-and-dressing metaphor, consider introducing a second new routine: instead of pulling on your trousers right leg first, then left leg – try sticking your left leg in first.

Oh, and then let's introduce a third change. Pick up your morning coffee cup with your right hand, not your left.

And then, how about one more change?...

You're feeling exhausted just reading about making all those changes, aren't you?

This explains why so many people, struggling to be productive during the Covid-19 crisis, have become convinced they are just lazy.

In fact, experiments show that we're all more-or-less exhausted from adopting all these new routines – and we'll probably continue to be exhausted for years to come, as the world slowly changes, adjusts, and adapts.

The new reality is that making all those necessary changes will be difficult, but the risk of failure is huge. That includes lots of danger for me, for you, for all of us – unless we're all serious about changing.



**WE'RE ALL TRIBAL MEMBERS.
IF THE PEOPLE AROUND US
ADOPT NEW BEHAVIOURS,
WE'LL BEND BEFORE
PEER PRESSURE AND
ADOPT THE CHANGE.**

The hospitality industry's adaptation to the new normal is an early indicator of how difficult all this is going to be. The doorman at a five-star Sydney hotel, taking every guest's temperature as they entered the property, was indeed wearing a face mask. The loops went around his ears, but he'd strapped the fabric mask under his chin, leaving his mouth and nose open to the air. It was as if simply 'wearing it' was good enough.

All lobbies and corridors in the same hotel announced 'keep two metres distance', but that guideline seemed not to apply to the elevators, where ten or more guests would cram their way aboard. They tried, without much success, to hold their breath as the elevator made 20 stops between the lobby and the 65th floor.

The travel and leisure industries aren't the only ones struggling with these new realities. Recently I jumped on a flight from Australia to Europe. According to protocol, all those neatly dressed businesspeople were indeed wearing the latest, greatest 3M masks, but – just as your effort to learn to brush your teeth with the wrong hand didn't last long – as soon as the meal arrived, the travellers, one by one, lowered their masks. And do you know what? Having lowered their masks to eat, they never bothered to raise them again, for the entire remainder of the flight. It was as if the virus, having miraculously acknowledged each passenger's good intentions, had decided to move on to some other victim.

Here's the reality. We're all tribal members. If the people around us adopt new behaviours, we'll bend before peer pressure and adopt the change.

Not long ago, having my routine health check-up at the office of my doctor in Switzerland, I realized I was the only one in the clinic not wearing a mask. In sheer panic, I asked the person behind the counter if they had a mask I could use. 'Wearing a mask isn't mandatory,' she said, 'though we'll be glad to give you a mask if you'd feel more comfortable.' The glances from all the other patients waiting in the lobby were more than enough to drive me onto the right track. On went the mask, and just that quick, I'd re-joined my tribe. It wasn't about being a germ-obsessed weirdo; it was just about wanting to feel included in my group.

Likewise, if everyone in the airport is wearing a protective mask, you'll join the crowd and put on your mask.

But what if no-one does. Would you then?

Or what if no-one keeps a safe distance, mingling mask-free in the bar before departure? Will you act like a kangaroo, constantly jumping around in order to keep your safe distance, while everyone shouts at you, 'Come on. Relax. Enjoy. We know each other. You're not suggesting I'm unsafe, are you?'

Because the reality is that even though Covid-19 is a global phenomenon, what's considered right in one culture, among one age bracket, in one particular state, city, or country ... won't be the same in a different place and among a different crowd.

And as you jump on that flight, you will surely fly straight into another tribe with an entirely different mindset.

No way, you may be thinking. You're remembering my nasty menu card and those cringe-inducing smart phone stats, but you're thinking, 'No way will I give in. My life and the lives of my children are simply too dear to me.'

However, the reality is that you will give in. At least, you'll give in to the extent that you won't adopt every behaviour necessary to keep yourself 100% safe from every danger-point I've described throughout the last several chapters.

Instead of fooling yourself, let's adopt a reverse psychological approach.

Your doctor might tell you, 'You're overweight, your optimal weight is (a certain number of kilos), and you have just got to start dieting.' Well, that approach isn't likely to work. But if your doctor starts by asking, 'What weight would make you happier with yourself?' and then gives you some helpful tips for shedding a few kilos – well, aren't you more likely to heed that second doctor's friendly advice, rather than the first doctor's rigid commands?

You see, here's the reality: No matter what precautions you take before travelling, you'll never be 100 percent safe. If you want to be that, then stay home. Isolate yourself in the room I talked about in the opening of Chapter 1, and stay there for the rest of your life. Enjoy.

For most of us, I encourage assessing the degree of safety you're personally comfortable with. Then, consider all the actions that will be required for you to achieve that degree

of safety. Review all those necessary actions, list them on a card, decide if you're up for the 'left-hand-brushing-exercise', and then go for it.

Sounds daunting, but it isn't. The next chapter will do the work for you. The only thing you'll have to do is determine how safe you need to be, then follow the actions linked with your preferred degree of risk.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU AND OTHER TRICKS TO USE IF YOU WANT TO STAY SAFE WHEN TRAVELLING

In the world of health and safety, psychologists work with a method called the ‘Hierarchy of Controls’. Basically, this method eliminates risk by acquiring a tighter and tighter degree of control.

Needless to say, few people (if any at all) are able to achieve perfect safety; they can’t sustain a complete adoption of all safety routines over an extended period of time, because our surroundings don’t remain the same.

Because perfection isn’t possible, your realistic goal is relatively simple: determine how safe you’d like to be, assess

what that will require, make a list of the changes you'll need to make, and always follow them.

The list below, while far from exhaustive, is realistic. It takes into account interviews with hundreds of sources, helping to determine what to do – and what not to do. Whenever the item of advice is labelled with the word 'Recommended', this action would be 'nice to do', but it is not essential.

Planning your trip:

Buy...

- 2 bottles of hand sanitizer, each smaller than 10 oz.
- 2 surgical respirator masks per day while on the road. N95 masks are the best, approved by NIOSH for their respiratory protection efficiency, resistance, and other NIOSH requirements, and they are separately cleared by the FDA as medical devices. ASTM level 2 and level 3 masks are also excellent.
- Phone sanitizing wipes, so you can cleanse your phone daily.
- Wipes to sanitize your luggage.
- A couple of zip-lock plastic bags for the remote control in your bedroom.

Visit...

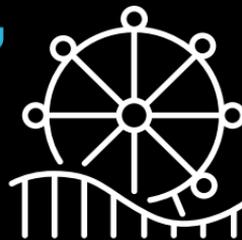
- If you want to know if it's safe to travel to another country: [CDC's travellers' map](#) or Johns Hopkins' [Covid-19 dashboard](#).
- Download the daily coronavirus report from [WHO](#).
- See if the hotel you're about to book has already been assigned a [safety rating](#).
- To see if there are government requirements for quarantine and to determine what type of citizenship, work permits, or health status is required in order to enter the country, see IATA's International Travel Document overview [dashboard](#) or Trip's travel restriction [overview](#), updated daily.
- Check the airport and airline for minimum check-in times given the Covid-19 situation. Some airports like Sydney, Mumbai, and Heathrow require additional, very time-consuming document checks (and sometimes health checks, too).
- If at all possible, check airport security average waiting time, as some airports have nearly tripled their waiting time compared with pre-Covid-19. For the United States, [visit here](#). you'll be able to download an app that shares just-in-time waiting times to get through TSA screening.

Then...

- Double-check that you show no sign of fever. If you do, get cleared for Covid-19 and bring your certificate to the airport, as most airports are likely to temperature-check you upon arrival.

- If you've had any (very) recent Covid-19 health check, bring the documentation with you.
- Some countries such as India (Aaragya Setu tracking system) and China require you to carry a smart phone showing your health status.
- Pack all your baggage in a carry-on suitcase (maximum size 21.5 x 135 x 8.4 in), avoiding the risk of acquiring microbes on checked-in luggage.
- Check in prior to leaving home. If possible, check in your luggage (if you have any) by securing a tag, printing it, and bringing it with you.
- Book a window seat (recommended).
- Try to book a single seat (recommended).
- Use a limousine company for your transfer trips. Double-check the limousine company's sanitary rules and policies before booking.
- To play it super safe, secure a window seat in the last row.

**DON'T VIEW THE AIRPORT
AS A THEME PARK,
AS IN THE PAST.
TIMES HAVE
CHANGED.**



Getting to the airport or hotel...

- In theory, the safest vehicle should be your own car (unless you're a poor driver, of course). Your least safe form of transportation would be the train or monorail.
- Wear your mask during the entire trip (recommended).
- Wash or wipe your hands prior to entering the vehicle, and do the same immediately after leaving the vehicle.
- Avoid standing close to any fellow passengers (meaning less than two metres).

Spending time in the airport...

- Keep your distance at all times. Do not be afraid to inform people, with a smile, to keep their distance.
- Try to assess the security waiting time, then calculate backwards to minimize waiting time in the airport.
- Avoid checking-in at the airport (recommended).
- If you are to be patted down in screening, ask the TSA officer to put on new gloves before doing so (recommended).
- Stay away from the toilets, but if you absolutely have to go, wear a mask, close the toilet lid (if there is one) before flushing, and wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds, the time it takes to sing, 'Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you' twice (though it's recommended not to sing too loud!).
- Use paper towels, not the air dryer (recommended).

- Consider your phone as an extension of your hand, so remember to [sanitize](#) the phone after your toilet visit.
- Don't view the airport as a theme park or shopping center, as you may have done in the past. Times have changed. Most shops are likely closed anyway, and will be for the rest of 2020. Avoid browsing around in duty free. Walk straight to the gate (recommended).
- If there are too many people at your gate, go to a nearby empty gate and wait there until boarding is announced (recommended).

Up in the air...

- Wear your mask while boarding and try to keep it on while in the air (recommended).
- As painful as it may be, try to board last, not first (recommended).
- Don't touch the top of the passenger seats (recommended).
- Do a sanitary makeover on the most essential touch points at your seat:
 - Seatbelt buckle
 - Armrest, top and underneath
 - Tray table lock
 - Actual tray table
- If there is a touch screen, clean the screen.
- Window shades.
- Avoid touching or reaching into the seat pocket.

- Don't read the reading materials in the seat pocket.
- Don't place anything in your seat pocket (including your phone or wallet).
- Try to keep your movements to a minimum (recommended).
- Ask the crew not to refill your glass, but use a new glass every time (recommended).
- Always wear shoes when going to the lavatory.
- Wash your hands just before and after using the toilet.
- Sanitize your hands after you've left the lavatory.
- Run intensive air flow on your head during the entire flight (recommended).

Getting out of the airport...

- Don't stand up after the seatbelt sign switches off. Wait until the passengers outside your seat begin to move.
- Don't touch the top of the seats while disembarking.
- Sanitize your hands once out of the aircraft.
- Keep appropriate distance in the custom/border control line.
- Sanitize your passport cover and the pages touched by the inspector immediately after leaving border control.
- Sanitize your hands immediately after leaving border control.
- Choose a limousine company for your airport-to-hotel transfer (recommended).

- Once in the car, sanitize your hands.
- Sanitize your seat belt.
- If you consume any water and snacks in the car, sanitize your hands after opening the bottle or pack (recommended).
- Sit in the back seat, preferably directly behind the driver (recommended).

Spending time in your hotel...

- After using your credit card – if not touch-free – wipe it down before replacing it in your purse or pocket.
- Wipe down your smart phone.
- Wash your hands as soon as you enter your room.
- Wipe off the master light switch in your room. Think about it: People might wash their hands once they get inside the room, but the first thing they touch (after being on germy planes and trains) before reaching the bathroom is the light switch. A study by a University of Houston researcher found that the main light switch is the dirtiest surface in hotel rooms, often containing high levels of faecal bacteria.
- If there are any touch buttons next to the bed, wipe them down before using them.
- Wipe down the side tables (recommended).
- Place the remote control in a zip-lock bag.
- Wipe down the bathroom counter (recommended).

- Wipe down the toilet flush button and the toilet seat (recommended).
- Don't use the jacuzzi.
- Wipe down the house phone.
- Wipe down the chair at the desk.
- Carefully wash the toothbrush glasses in the bathroom.
- If you use the iron or hairdryer, wipe them down.

Dining and wining...

- Don't use the buffet at all.
- Skip the physical menu if possible, and use the app provided by most restaurants. If you decide to use the physical menu, cleanse your hands before eating.
- Remove your place mat and sanitize your hands after touching it (recommended).
- Ask for bottled water (recommended).
- Sanitize the menu after you've used it.
- Wash your hands before eating.
- Go to your private room rather than the public toilets in the hotel (recommended).
- If there's more than one fellow guest in the elevator, skip the ride and take another elevator car (recommended).

I'm sure that reading through this list has left you somewhat weary. Rest assured, writing it exhausted me. As you read in Chapter 7, adopting many changes all at once is a recipe for disaster.

I suggest you decide upon your own minimum level of cleanliness safety, prioritize the suggested points, print out the list, and promise yourself that you'll refer to the list on a regular basis. Use your list as an ongoing checklist, referring to it after each phase of your journey so you don't let yourself (and the world) down.

Is this our never-ending future? Rest assured, there's good news just beyond the horizon.

A NEW CHAPTER

In June 2020, just as the world had familiarized itself with the fact that Corona is more than a beer with a lime, a new study revealed that yet another virus had been detected.

This one was a strain of the swine flu with (as yet) a less-than-sexy name: [G4 EA H1N1](#). The virus, common on China's pig farms, has now demonstrated its unnerving ability to spread to humans. 'G4 viruses have all the essential hallmarks of a candidate pandemic virus,' says the [study](#), published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

I'm sure you are with me in wishing the prompt death of Covid-19 – literally speaking. We aren't sure when we'll be able to say we've seen the last of Covid-19, and yet another lovely virus family member may already be waiting for its turn in the global limelight. Its potential for disrupting our lifestyle, the way we eat, entertain, and travel, is frighteningly high.

But as scary as this sounds, the health risks we face while travelling are a far cry from the Age of Sail, when seafarers like Magellan and Cook conquered the world's oceans, discovered the Americas and Australia, and brought immense

wealth and knowledge to Europe. These travels came at a high price. It was taken for granted that half of all sailors who embarked on long voyages would die of [scurvy](#). Long-distance travel was considered one of the most dangerous missions one could possibly pursue.

In the 1750s, a Royal Navy surgeon [proved](#) that the ‘vaccine’ for this terrible ailment, which ravaged both body and mind, was a simple dose of Vitamin C. The British navy eventually began putting lime juice in its sailors’ daily ration of grog. Scurvy vanished, and the British sailor gained a nickname – [Limey](#) – that he still goes by today.

I remember the ‘good old days’, when my travel experiences were dominated by discussions with TSA officers about the threat to world order posed by my dangerously oversized deodorant. Ironically, now I miss those conversations.

While interviewing one expert after another, I’ve been naively hoping that I’d stumble onto one person ... just one ... who could reveal a magical way of returning travel to those ‘good old days’. They all have the same answer: We’ll get there, but it’s likely going to take years.

We’re waiting for Boeing to introduce its ‘Clean Lavatory concept’, an onboard UV light system technology capable of sanitizing lavatories or even entire planes in a flash and allowing passengers to touch even the naughtiest places on a plane without the slightest risk. Or how about the widespread adoption of self-cleaning materials on all scanning equipment, carpets, trays, tables and even walls in Security, allowing you (if such was your inclination) to

picnic on top of the conveyer belt without a free pass to a nearby hospital.

I was consistently told: Yes, those technologies exist – but don't count on seeing them in operation in the real world for quite a few years.

There are, of course, certain odd pioneers out there. For instance, immediately after the avian flu ravaged the region, [Hong Kong airport](#) introduced automated temperature control for all incoming and transit passengers and, as a sort of sequel, recently introduced 40-second [self-disinfection](#) facilities. Looking and functioning like a one-man sauna on wheels, they'll sterilize your entire body as soon as you've passed through your security screening. They've also introduced '[Intelligent Sterilization Robots](#)', which use UV-ray light and liquid agents to deep-clean public bathrooms in less than 10 minutes.

These technologies, along with touch-free check-in kiosks and instant virus assessments, are all likely to play an instrumental role in how air travel takes shape in the future. But for now – and most likely for the next year to come – the air-travel adaptations you notice are not going to remind you of a sci-fi movie like *Minority Report*.

Let me get to my point: Travel will never be the same again.

We'll never again travel like we did way back in 'the good old days' – by which I mean, way back in 2019.

The pleasant, exciting travel experiences I remember belong to the fairy-tale books. Picture yourself reading to your grandchildren: 'Once upon a time, I flew...'

In fact, I've gradually begun to realize that I should be grateful to have been one of the lucky ones who got to experience those wonderful pre-Covid-19 years. Likewise, I consider myself fortunate to have been among the pre-9/11 generation, who remember actually wearing shoes through Security.

As an American airline expert told me, 'There is no going back to things pre-pandemic. Passengers can see how things are being cleaned and sanitized differently, which has resulted in higher expectations. These procedures will have to be the rule post-pandemic.'

Several airline executives I talked to spoke of long-term industry-wide disruption. Numerous operators, including Lufthansa, don't expect to be back to full operation before the year 2030. In official statements, [Emirates](#) is somewhat more optimistic, but even they aren't planning for their entire fleet to be in the air for four more years. These moves all make sense, given that nearly all of the 50 businesspeople I spoke with for this book expected to halve their travel activities in 2021 compared with pre-Covid – simply because businesses have learned how to survive using virtual calls rather than flying people across the globe.

The airlines aren't the only businesses being squeezed. Prior to Covid-19, Airbus had already ceased production of the A-380, the world's largest passenger plane. What no-one could predict, as the [last A-380](#) was trucked through the small French villages, was that that plane would remain un-decorated and parked, perhaps never to host a single passenger. Meantime, Lufthansa's entire fleet of A-380s sits in the Spanish desert, minimizing wear-and-tear. Several

industry experts predict that the world will never see the A-380 operational again.

Despite all this doom and gloom, there's good news on the horizon.

First (in my opinion), the onslaught of Covid-19 has given entire industries a well-deserved, very serious wakeup call. Hotels, restaurants, and public toilets are realizing what 'grandmother's cleaning' really meant.

Airline passengers have experienced commercial flight without being squeezed into the middle seat. I wonder if they'll return meekly to the pre-Covid-19 status quo.

And we've also experienced standing in queues without that sardines-in-a-tin-can sensation.

Years ago, certain governments took steps to regulate standards. Denmark, Sweden, and France require restaurants and bars to display their sanitary status via a graphic system featuring happy faces and sad faces. France goes one step further, introducing apps that announce establishments' cleanliness status. Soon, we'll probably see similar notifications in hotels and airports.

We've learned to check that the seal on a bottle of water or pharma product isn't broken. Metaphorically speaking, we're likely to learn to do the same before checking into a hotel room or boarding a plane. Third-party quality assurance programs like [Intertek Protek](#) will inspect and verify the safety of hotel rooms, restaurants, aircraft, and airports, and they will seal these with a digital QR-code

quality stamp for passengers to scan before taking their airline seat or lifting the duvet on the hotel bed.

‘Over the past several months,’ Intertek’s CEO André Lacroix told me, ‘we’ve rolled out a universal safety system across thousands of hotels, allowing guests to instantly determine the sanitary status of the hotel room or the restaurant they’re about to enter. All information is obtained by independent health inspectors, conducting random checks.’

I learned that we are likely to soon see a similar format applied across all major airports, with focus on highly contagious locations like ticketing, check-in, security, and border control. Aircraft will be included too, André told me. “We’ll soon be ‘quality stamping’ aircraft with a QR-code for passengers to scan while boarding the plane. The data will update the passenger about the health status of the aircraft, lavatories, and even the seat you’re about to settle into for the next nine hours.”

However, airlines have the flexibility to introduce these measures even more quickly and efficiently than governments. Since the beginning of World War II, the airline industry has been well known for setting industry standards long before government authorities impose them. This is largely thanks to [Airlines For America](#) (often called simply A4A), a highly powerful, yet largely unknown, lobby group of top airline executives. Just as they did after 9/11, A4A is now busy setting new standards for tomorrow’s travel.

You’ll see near unanimity amongst airlines taking such steps. Amongst those measures, you’re likely to see more

transparency, allowing guests and passengers to evaluate health and safety before boarding a plane or checking into a hotel room.

However, until these measures become global industry standard practice, you'll see a flurry of initiatives – hotel-by-hotel, airport-by-airport, airline-by-airline – attempting to create a safer environment whilst helping to slow the spread of Covid-19.

In airports and hotels, you'll walk between protective plastic screens. In lounges and restaurants, you'll see a plastic-wrap *fata morgana*: from menu cards to sauces, salads, biscuits, sandwiches, and everything else encased and sealed. Hand sanitizer will be waiting for you everywhere you turn.

Consider [Delta](#), which recently banned assignment of any middle seat. Many airlines are likely to adopt this move on a temporary basis, despite dire warnings from the International Air Transport Association that such a move is likely to ruin the entire industry.

Even though the Transportation Security Administration ([TSA](#)) is doubtful about the effectiveness of passenger [temperature checks](#) at airports, Frontier Airlines, Air France, and Air Canada have introduced temperature checks at the gates. Most US and European airlines now also require mandatory mask-wearing onboard the airplane.

Air Canada, Qantas, and United Airlines have pioneered programs aiming to [enhance](#) passenger check-in procedures and optimize onboard aircraft cleaning practices.

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Some airlines have gone even further. In partnership with Centogene, the world's leader in genetic diagnostics for rare diseases, [Lufthansa](#) now offers Covid-19 tests. These tests are conducted by independent healthcare professionals. Negative results allow passengers travelling to Germany, Austria, and other countries border access without the obligatory 14-day quarantine. The 59-Euro fee even includes a small bonus: the four-hour waiting time allows you (at a safe distance, of course) to share the uncomfortable swabbing procedure with your fellow passengers while waiting for a 'willkommen nach Deutschland' or a disappointing 'auf wiedersehen'.

All this to say that for the time being, you'll probably have to navigate a patchwork quilt of often-contradictory regulations, guidelines, and rules.

It doesn't sound encouraging, I know, but these are the realities of a severely disrupted hospitality and travel industry desperately trying to keep on its feet in this rapidly changing world. As the issue is with any disruption, they tend to take us out of our comfort zone, requiring us to define and settle on a new reality. No industry in recent memory has witnessed a disruption of this magnitude. As travellers, you and I are likely to find ourselves dealing with the halo effect of all this, over many years to come.

As Robert Scoble once wrote: 'Change is inevitable, and the disruption it causes often brings both inconvenience and opportunity.' As frustrating as all this may seem, I hope this book has armed you with tools to successfully deal with these inconveniences. Once we get through the inconvenient part, we'll be freed to focus on the many new opportunities that are likely to follow. Sometimes our lives have to be completely shaken up, changed, and rearranged, in order to relocate us to the place we're meant to be.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin Lindstrom is an advisor to many of the world's leading brands, regularly travelling between more than 30 countries.

TIME magazine has named Lindstrom one of the 'World's 100 Most Influential People.' And for five years running, *Thinkers50*, the world's premier ranking resource of business icons, has selected Lindstrom to be among the world's top 50 business thinkers.

Lindstrom is a high profile speaker and author of seven *New York Times* best-selling books, translated into 60 languages.

TRAVEL TRUTH AND LIES UNMASKED

In this fascinating, timely book, Martin Lindstrom separates fact from hype about travelling in a 'coronavirus world'. Based on extensive interviews with top airline, hotel, and travel executives, Lindstrom reveals surprising – sometimes shocking – insights into flying, staying in a hotel, dining in a restaurant, or travelling by Uber.

With the help of an astrophysicist, an artificial intelligence pioneer, physicians, pilots, and hotel housekeepers, Lindstrom explores the true risk of contracting Covid-19 on a commercial airline, discusses our most beloved – yet most contaminated – bacteria sources, and shares with the reader a practical step-by-step guide on how to fly, dine, and check into hotels safely.

Travel Truth and Lies, Unmasked is a thought provoking, entertaining page-turner, sure to change the way you travel ... forever.

Spending more than 300 days per year on the road, behavioural psychologist Martin Lindstrom is intimately familiar with the ins-and-outs of travelling. *TIME* magazine named him one of its 100 most influential people in the world, and he has been chosen one of the world's top business thinkers. His *New York Times* best-selling books include *Buyology* and *Small Data*. His soon-to-be released book, *The Ministry of Common Sense*, explores the cost of excessive bureaucracy in our modern world.