



My 10 best travel experiences of 2020

December 21, 2020

Monday [newsletters](#) always feature [top 10 travel lists](#) to inspire.

Today (December 21, 2020): My 10 best travel experiences of 2020.

As the year 2020 is coming to an end, it's a good time to reflect on the headlines and stories that shaped the past year. 2020 is a year unlike any other; a year most of us want to forget but we will never forget; a year defined by the worst pandemic the world has seen in more than a century, social justice movements, one of the most contentious elections in USA history, and an increasingly volatile climate change. But amid the struggle, as most of us need to redefine ourselves, there have been signs of hope for a better future with a new sense of purpose and solidarity.

2020 is also the year that international travel collapsed. This time last year, concepts such as “lockdowns,” “quarantines” and “mask mandates” were unknown to most of us. Today they are part of our everyday language as the coronavirus pandemic continues to impact all aspects of our lives, including our travel plans and wanderlust. Since this is a travel blog that tries to give you a daily moment of travel inspiration with a focus on my personal stories, I hereby share with you my travel highlights of 2020 (and there were several highlights, despite the pandemic). Early 2021, I'll share what to expect from me in the next year.

There is more information (with trip reports & YouTube clips) below the slideshow. You can share your own thoughts on 2020 or your own 2020 travel highlights in the **comments section** below.



10. FLYING BUSINESS CLASS ONBOARD A SWISS BOEING 777

Early 2020, when the world was still a normal place, I flew Business Class in a Boeing 777-300ER aircraft of Switzerland's flagship carrier, Swiss International Air Lines, more commonly known under its short name Swiss (often stylized as SWISS). Swiss was formed after the 2001 bankruptcy of Swissair, Switzerland's former flag carrier. The airline is a member of Star Alliance and a subsidiary of the Lufthansa Group since 2005. Swiss recently acquired 11 Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, which replaced most of Swiss' aging A340 planes although five A340s remain in service and are currently getting a refurbishment. The experience on this B777 trip was great and clearly a step up compared to flying on Swiss' A340s (which I reviewed [here](#)). Although I liked the elegant cabin interior, I was not a fan of Swiss' uncomfortable flat-bed seat and cramped cabin layout. That said, the service by the crew, the delicious food, and the excellent inflight entertainment more than made up for it.

- Review: [Swiss Boeing 777 Business Class from Zürich to Singapore](#)
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9. ENJOYING SUMMER VIBES ON GREECE'S LARGEST ISLAND, CRETE

Last summer, at a time when the pandemic was easing a little bit in Europe, I enjoyed a lovely holiday on Crete, Greece's largest island. Due to its geographical position between Africa, Europe, and Asia, Crete has been a center of culture as early as Neolithic times. The island is also the birthplace of the first advanced society on European soil, the Minoans, who ruled some 4000 years ago, and you'll find evocative vestiges all over, including the famous Palace of Knossos. Crete is a remarkable place to visit, packed with pristine beaches and spectacular sights, from desert island atolls to far-flung traditional villages, many of them way off the beaten path. Although Crete is also not as expensive compared to its more famous siblings Santorini and Mykonos, it still has plenty of resorts where one can indulge in luxurious settings. During my holiday, I stayed in 3 resorts, which rank among the very best on the island: Daios Cove, Elounda Beach Hotel & Villas, and Abaton Island Resort.

- Review: [Elounda Beach Hotel & Villas](#)
 - Review: [Abaton Island Resort & Spa](#)
 - Review: [Daios Cove Luxury Hotel & Villas](#)
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8. TRYING OUT VIRGIN ATLANTIC'S NEW A350 BUSINESS CLASS PRODUCT

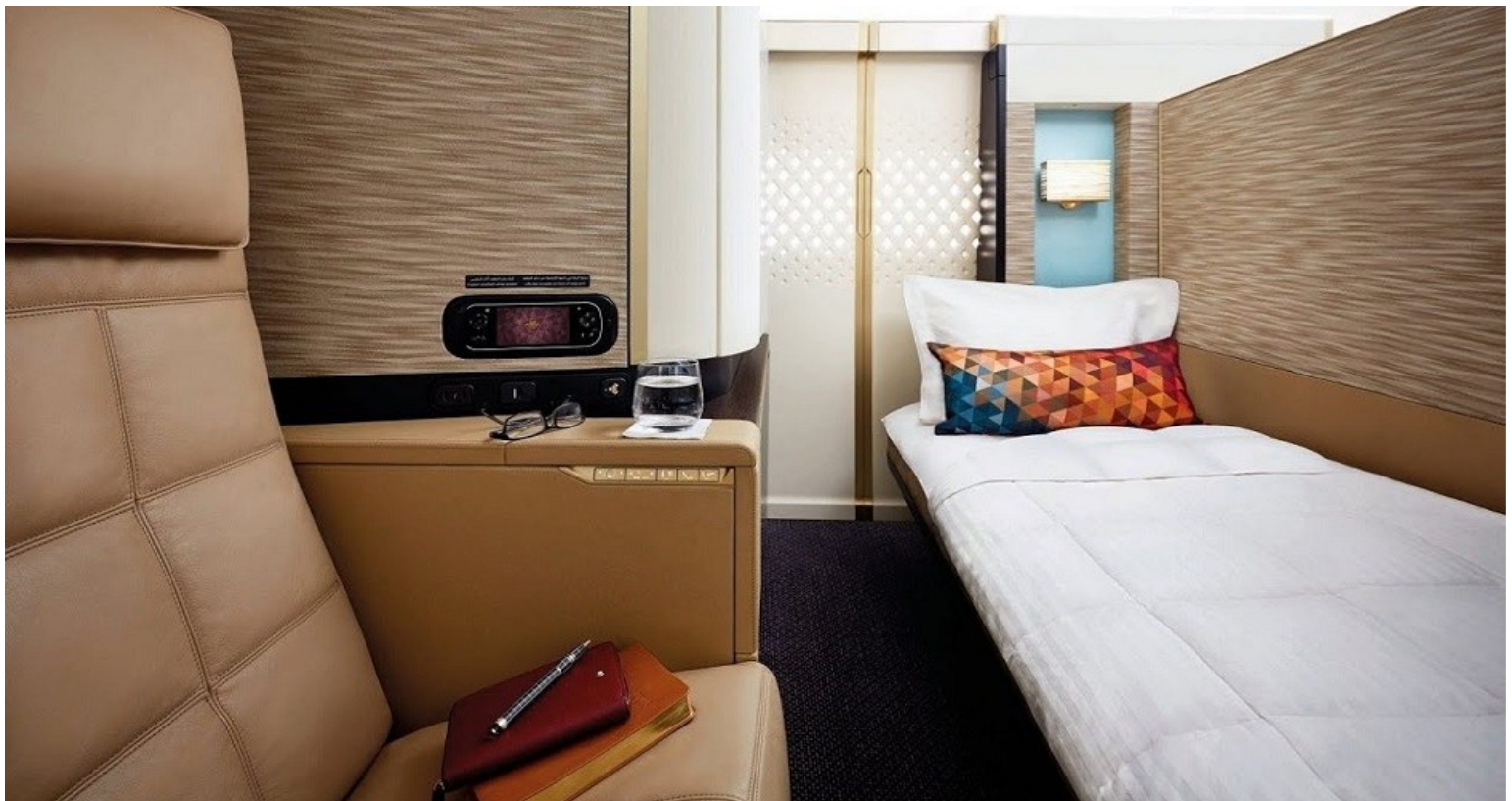
Last winter, I flew from London to New York onboard a brand-new Virgin Atlantic Airbus A350-1000 aircraft, which features an entirely new Upper Class cabin concept, including a new Business Class seat. Laid out in a 1-2-1 configuration, every suite faces towards the window and offers deployable privacy screens. All suites transition seamlessly from an upright seat, straight to a bed. The suite also boasts Virgin Atlantic's largest ever in-flight entertainment screen, at 18.5" and features intuitive new system, controllable by passengers' own personal device. The Virgin Atlantic A350 also features a new bar area known as The Loft. As the largest social space in the airline's fleet, it's designed for customers to gather, chat, enjoy a drink or dine with friends. Virgin Atlantic has ordered a total of 12 Airbus A350-1000 aircraft, all scheduled to join the carrier's fleet by the end of 2021. I will publish my video of this journey this Saturday on my YouTube channel, and my blog review next week, so stay tuned!



7. EXPLORING THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

The Kingdom of Cambodia is finally rebounding from its complex and war-torn past and is on its way to become the next big travel destination in Asia. The country's landscapes are surprisingly diverse, with tropical beaches, remote jungles, rice paddies, and sugar palm plantations. Like most visitors, my prime reason to visit Cambodia was to explore the iconic ancient temple ruins of Angkor Wat. Vast, beautiful and beguiling, these temple complexes contain a magic that makes them stand out from the crowd. Cambodia also has a growing ultra-luxury hotel scene, which is luring discerning travelers to this fascinating Southeast Asian nation. During my visit, I stayed at three fabulous boutique properties located in three different parts of the country: Phum Baitang by Zannier Hotels (near Angkor Wat), Alili Koh Russey (a private island beach resort in the Gulf of Thailand; currently closed), and Shinta Mani Wild (a fabulous rainforest camp designed by world-renowned architect Bill Bensley).

- Review: [Zannier Hotels Phum Baitang, Cambodia](#)
 - Review: [A visit to Angkor Wat, Cambodia](#)
 - Review: [Alila Villas Koh Russey, Cambodia](#)
 - Review: [Shinta Mani Wild by Bensley Collection, Cambodia](#)
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6. FLYING IN ETIHAD AIRWAYS' FIRST CLASS APARTMENT

Early 2020, I flew First Class with [Etihad Airways](#) from Paris Charles De Gaulle Airport (France) to Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport (Thailand) via a stopover in Etihad's hub in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates). The flight from Paris to Abu Dhabi was operated by Etihad Airways' flagship plane, the double-decker Airbus A380. The carrier has ten A380s in its fleet, deploying them on routes from Abu Dhabi to New York, London, Melbourne, Seoul and Sydney (prior to the pandemic). Etihad Airways pushed luxury to a sky-high new level and revolutionized First Class with the introduction of the 'Apartment' concept on its A380 superjumbos in 2014. More than just a seat, the Apartment has a large leather armchair and separate bed. There is even space to walk around after closing the privacy doors. As you can imagine, the experience was mind-blowing, and you can read my trip report or watch my YouTube video to get an idea of what it feels like to travel onboard Etihad's A380 in First Class.

- Review: [Etihad Airways Airbus A380 First Class Apartment from Paris to Abu Dhabi](#)
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5. ENJOYING LA DOLCE VITA IN ITALY

Due to the pandemic, I had to cancel many longhaul trips (such as Costa Rica, Namibia, and French Polynesia). Instead, I planned several last-minute holidays to some of Italy's most beautiful areas, which wasn't a bad alternative at all, because what's not to love about this boot-shaped Mediterranean country? Italy offers a rich culture, world-class cuisine, passionate people, trendy fashion, ancient monuments, and picturesque villages. Besides its historic and cultural treasures, Italy also features magnificent landscapes, which include spectacular coastlines, Alpine lakes and breathtaking mountains. The country is also home to some of the world's most exclusive and astronomically expensive hotels. My Italy trips brought me from the spectacular Dolomites, Lake Como and Lake Garda in the North to the breathtaking island of Sicily in the South, with some side trips to the Italian Riviera & Cinque Terre in the West and Venice's Grand Canal in the East.

- Review: [Il Sereno, Lake Como](#)
 - Review: [Grand Hotel Tremezzo, Lake Como](#)
 - Review: [Grand Hotel Portovenere, Cinque Terre](#)
 - Review: [Belmond Hotel Splendido, Portofino](#)
 - Review: [St Regis Hotel Venice](#)
 - Review: [Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo, Sicily](#)
 - Review: [Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea, Sicily](#)
 - Review: [Lefay Resort & Spa, Lake Garda](#)
 - Review: [Bellevue Hotel & Spa, Aosta Valley \(Alps\)](#)
 - Review: [Forestis, Dolomites \(Alps\)](#)
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4. FLYING BUSINESS CLASS WITH EVA AIR

Last winter, I flew onboard an Eva Air Boeing 777-300ER from Bangkok (Thailand) to London (UK) in Business Class (or Royal Laurel Class, as Eva Air calls its premium product). The experience was brilliant and that shouldn't come as surprise since Taiwan-based Eva Air offers one of the [world's best \(and most underrated\) Business Class products](#). The seats in Royal Laurel Class onboard EVA's B777s are configured in a reverse herringbone 1-2-1 layout that maximizes space, which is similar to what you find on other airlines such as [Air France](#), [Air Canada](#) or [Cathay Pacific](#). However, the carrier's service, amenities and catering really stand out as extraordinary, and are on-par with most international First Class products (albeit at a Business Class price). To top it all, EVA Air is one of the few airlines to offer pajamas in Business Class; loose and comfortable, these garments are perfect for slumbering on long-haul flights. I'm already looking forward to fly with EVA Air again!

- Review: [Eva Air Boeing 777 Business Class from Bangkok to London](#)
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3. AMAN JOURNEY IN MONTENEGRO

Montenegro is one of the world's fastest-growing tourist destinations, with several high-end brands opening some ultraluxe resorts over the coming years (e.g. Ritz Carlton, One&Only, etc ...). In 2020, I visited the country for the first time and stayed at Montenegro's most famous property, [Aman Sveti Stefan](#), managed by Aman, one [the word's most exclusive hotel brands](#). Standing against pink-sand beaches, crystal-clear waters and rugged, pine-cloaked mountains, the hotel stretches across a causeway from a rustic island village in the Mediterranean Sea to a former royal residence on the mainland. The 80-acre estate features secret coves, a serene spa and a cliff-top pool, scattered along Queen's Beach, a scallop-shaped bay which is considered Montenegro's finest and which is at the exclusive disposal of Aman guests. There are 58 unique luxury lodgings, all coming with a myriad of views ranging from sea and rooftops to quaint courtyards and piazzas.

- Review: [Aman Sveti Stefan \(Montenegro\)](#)
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2. FLYING FIRST CLASS WITH CATHAY PACIFIC

Early March, I flew First Class with [Cathay Pacific](#) onboard one of the carrier's Boeing 777-300ERs from Hong Kong to Frankfurt. Unfortunately, the airline is struggling in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and the Hong Kong protests, although the company got a massive \$5 billion USD state-backed bailout to survive the troubles. The flag carrier of Hong Kong still offers one of [my favorite longhaul First Class products in the world](#). Not only is Cathay Pacific's First Class product incredibly consistent, but it's also one of the few airlines that scores nearly perfect in all premium inflight categories (think plush bedding and pillows, fine dining options, and sublime new amenity kits). It took me three First Class flights with Cathay Pacific to get this trip report & YouTube clip: my camera broke down during my first flight two years ago, and I was not allowed to film during my second flight with Cathay last year because of the presence of a high profile passenger in the cabin, but three times is the charm!

- Review: [Cathay Pacific First Class Boeing 777 from Hong Kong to Frankfurt](#)
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1. RE-VISITING MY FAVORITE HOTEL IN THE WORLD, SONEVA KIRI (THAILAND)

It's no secret. Besides being an Aman junkie, I am a HUGE [Soneva](#) fan. The Soneva story started in 1995, when Sonu Shivdasani, an Indian-British hotelier, launched the now world-famous [Soneva Fushi](#) resort in the Maldives. He also built his house there, together with his wife Eva Malmstrom, a Swedish fashion model, who developed the design of the unique resort. They had no idea that their intensely personal vision of a locally crafted villa and environmentally responsible lifestyle would form the basis of a successful collection of world-class hotels, resorts and spas. But that's exactly what happened. In 2017, Soneva Fushi got a sister resort in the Maldives, phenomenal [Soneva Jani](#), one of the most amazing resorts ever built.

Besides its Maldives properties, the Soneva group also operates another, and in my opinion even more spectacular hotel: [Soneva Kiri](#). Remote yet accessible by a one hour flight from Bangkok on the resort's private plane, Soneva Kiri sits on Thailand's 4th largest but least populated island, Koh Kood. Soneva Kiri's resort villas (including 11 private residences) are amongst the largest in the world. Located on the idyllic beach or sunny slopes in the rainforest, all have stunning infinity pools, impossibly chic furnishings, personal electric buggies, and impeccable service courtesy of private butlers. Highlights include the open air cinema Paradiso, Benz' mangrove restaurant, the chocolate & ice cream parlor, the children's den and the spectacular Treetop dining pod.