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## Three and a half year old

Photo Courtesy: Thomas Barwick/DigitalVision/Getty Images 2020 has been nothing short of chaotic. From an unprecedented pandemic to historic calls for racial justice to homicidal hornets to a seemingly major uptick in global climate catastrophes — and those are just a few of the year’s standout events — it feels like the start of the new decade has bombarded us with big, bizarre and just plain bad news stories at every turn. It’s safe to say that we’re ready for (and deserve) some respite in 2021. And it looks like hope is finally on the horizon. Things are already feeling more positive as the new year approaches, and there’s actually a lot to look forward to — aside from the mere fact that it won’t be 2020 anymore, which seems like some progress in and of itself. Simple things we once took for granted (and couldn’t do or enjoy because of the COVID-19 crisis) will become accessible again. The face of American politics will see an exciting first. And we might even get closer to world peace than we’ve ever been. Ready for 2021’s fresh start? Here’s a sampling of what’s restoring our hope in this time of new beginnings. A lot of the things we’re looking forward to in 2021 are predicated on the spread of the novel coronavirus slowing to the point that transmission becomes much less likely — and the COVID-19 vaccine is the key to doing just that. At-risk groups, healthcare professionals, first responders and essential workers across the counry are beginning to get their first doses of the two-shot vaccine, and this step alone is already cause for celebration. While it’ll take some time to create herd immunity and for us to begin enjoying a more relaxed pace of life — we’ll need to continue wearing masks, practicing effective hygiene and social distancing at least until the latter half of the year — 2021 will likely see guidelines relax. Photo Courtesy: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images According to San Francisco’s ABC7 News, “If all things go well, we could be living in a very different world by spring [of 2021].” The news outlet also reports that, in a conversation with Facebook, Dr. Anthony Fauci explained, “By the time we get to April, the normal, healthy young man or woman who’s got no underlying conditions can walk into a CVS or a Walgreens and get vaccinated.” The vaccine is in its earliest rollout stages now, which means it’s important to remain cautiously optimistic until it comes into more widespread use. But the fact that health organizations around the world have been working together to pursue this for us is an absolute triumph — one that’ll finally let us breathe a significant sigh of relief and make living our lives so much easier. For the first time in the history of the United States, January 2021’s presidential inauguration will see a woman accept the job of vice president. Kamala Harris, the former Attorney General of California and also that state’s Junior Senator, won the election alongside President-Elect Joseph R. Biden and will soon become an integral part of the incoming administration. Not only is Harris the first woman to be elected to the role, but she will also be the first person of color to serve in this position. Her husband, Doug Emhoff, will become the first “second gentleman” and the first Jewish spouse of a vice president. Photo Courtesy: Alex Wong/Getty Images It’s exciting news that we’ll soon see Harris add gender and racial diversity to the slate of top political positions in the country — and it’s particularly important following a year that saw some of the biggest calls for racial justice and representation in history. But it’s also representative of something else that’s creating hope for our political future: Biden’s entire administration is quickly becoming what has the potential to be “historically diverse.” Women, people of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community are all planning to serve on the Biden administration’s support teams and Cabinet. It remains to be seen how Biden will handle his presidency, of course, but his choices are already shaping up to lead us into the future with equality and improved representation at the forefront. And these new and diverse voices are certainly something to celebrate in 2021. No, it’s not just the stuff of beauty pageant interview answers and bumper sticker slogans — world peace is on the move to become more of a possible reality in 2021. At least, we might be getting closer. Non-violence and harmony won’t be blanketing the planet overnight, but thanks to a number of things we’re anticipating in 2021, we’re on the right track (and a faster track, too). Photo Courtesy: Pacific Press/Getty Images The Paris Agreement, for one, brings hope for the future of the planet. This legally binding international treaty meant to mitigate climate change took effect in 2016, with 196 United Nations members participating. It aims to limit greenhouse gas emissions and achieve long-term climate recovery — noble and necessary goals to ensure our ability to thrive as a global society well into the future. Although the Trump administration withdrew from this agreement, President-Elect Biden plans to re-enter it on his first day in office. Although it’s been a work in progress, this global push for change is getting results; governments, companies and organizations around the world are working together and adopting net-zero emissions targets, and the pact is seeing other signs of progress. We’re also looking forward to reconnecting with European nations that scaled back in their dealings with the United States during the Trump administration’s tenure. European leaders anticipate working well with Biden to restore broken and damaged relationships, and hopefully new negotiations offer the productive boost we need to get back on track with smoother international relations. 2020 was supposed to see the Summer Olympics take place in Tokyo, Japan, from late July to early August. And needless to say, things definitely didn’t play out that way. With the pandemic raging, Olympics officials decided to postpone the global games until it was safe again for athletes, support staff and spectators to begin travelling. Now, thanks to new developments with the COVID-19 vaccine and an anticipated drop in transmission of the virus, Summer 2021 is set to see the torch relay, the opening ceremony and plenty of international competitions take place. Photo Courtesy: SAEED KHAN/Getty Images Not only will the Olympics very likely return to the world next July, but other major sporting events we’ve all come to love are also planning to start up again. The international football (soccer to us in the United States) championship, the FIFA World Cup, will also take place in Japan in December of 2021. And the European soccer championship, UEFA Euro, which is more commonly known as the Euro Cup, will return in 2021, lasting from June 11 to July 11 across 12 host cities in UEFA countries. Fancy yourself more of a racquet fan? You’ll be happy to know that Wimbledon, the world’s most famous tennis tournament, is scheduled to take place in London between June 28 and July 11, too. Let’s not leave out our favorite domestic pro sports organizations, either. Numerous leagues and associations in the U.S. are gearing up for 2021 returns to facilities where we can watch them in person — just like the good old days. Someday soon, scrumptious snacks from concessions booths will be safe to enjoy again, and all that joyful camaraderie (and even the rivalry we’ve missed) will kick back in for everyone in the stands. One thing many of us missed the most in 2020 was the ability to travel — not just globally, but even a few cities over to see the friends and family we cherish. Once the vaccine begins reaching bigger segments of the population, we’ll get to start traveling safely again, and it can’t come soon enough. No, we can’t make up for lost holidays and birthdays, but we can definitely find some creative ways to enjoy them in 2021 — maybe with even bigger celebrations than ever before. That’s something incredibly affirming in a time when a simple high-five or hug is what we’ve been wishing for. Photo Courtesy: Tempura/Getty Images Wedding celebrations, concerts, birthday parties, baby showers, trips to the movie theater — and, yes, maybe a vacation or two — will potentially be back in 2021. Considering that we’ve missed out on so much in 2020, these activities will be that much better and that much sweeter when we finally get to come together in person. Although masks and hand sanitizer will remain big parts of our lives for a little while longer, it’s officially time to start dreaming dreams and pondering possibilities of all the future may hold. We’re about to see a new world in a new year, and that alone is a thrilling prospect. Photo Courtesy: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images All press is good press — until that press goes too well. Although the Netherlands’ beautiful, canal-filled city of Amsterdam garners about \$91.5 billion a year through tourism, the city and its residents feel more overwhelmed than grateful. In 2018, a whopping 18 million people visited Amsterdam, and experts estimate that number will climb to 42 million visitors by 2030. Longtime resident Ellen van Loon told CNN, “We [the Dutch] don’t want to turn into a Venice.” Italy’s similarly canaled destination attracts 28 million visitors annually — while 2,000 residents abandon the city each year due to those same tourists. Of course, Amsterdam and Venice aren’t the only cities that have become synonymous with overtourism. In fact, hotspots all over the world, from beaches in Thailand to ancient sites in Peru, have simply attracted too many curious tourists. This phenomenon, known as overtourism, has led to environmental and ecological damage as well as a great deal of strain for locals who must navigate living amongst tourists and their economic impact. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has stymied travel, shutting down airports, cities, borders and entire nations. According to the U.S. Travel Association, travel spending declined by an unheard of 42% in 2020; international and business travel suffered the most, with spending falling 76% and 70%, respectively. So, after a year of virtually no tourism, how are these (normally too heavily traveled) places, and the people that call them home, faring? Be it an ancient site, a crowded city or a place of natural splendor, popular destinations all feel the effects of overtourism differently. For example, Rapa Nui — often known to westerners as Easter Island — faces preservation issues, especially when it comes to the island’s famed moai sculptures. Meanwhile, the Galapagos Islands, the fragile and isolated ecosystem Charles Darwin popularized, has put a cap on how many visitors can travel to the archipelago each year. And in hotspot cities like Barcelona, Spain, locals are so furious with the unprecedented jump in tourists that they’ve coined a term to describe what overtourism is doing to the city: parquetermatizació — or the act of becoming a theme park. Photo Courtesy: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Getty Images Some of the other most heavily impacted destinations include: Santorini, Greece; Greece as a whole may be on the brink of an overtourism crisis. In 2018, the country hosted an unprecedented 32 million visitors, whereas back in 2010, that figure was closer to 15 million. The Greek National Tourism Organisation says it plans to strategically extend what is considered the summer holiday period so the influx of tourists doesn’t “[move] beyond the carrying capacity of the environment.” Of all locales, the small island of Santorini has been hit hardest, garnering a whopping 5.5 million annual visitors. Machu Picchu: Peru’s most well-known Inca citadel is one of those destinations everyone puts on their bucket list. Unfortunately, this wonder of the ancient world wasn’t built to sustain the more than 1.2 million tourists that trek to the archeological site annually. Since Peru can’t just close its most popular tourist spot, a new ticketing system was implemented in 2017 to promote preservation. Koh Tachai, Thailand: Like most Thai marine parks, Koh Tachai, an island in Similan National Park, is closed every May through October for the monsoon season. But in 2016, the park didn’t reopen. The beautiful beaches had been overrun with 14 times the number of people experts said the beaches should hold. Officials decided to close the island for rehabilitation, although many fear the damage is irreparable. In addition to problems related to general overcrowding, inexperienced divers — who were more concerned with photographs than their surroundings — damaged the island’s fragile reefs. As of 2019, Koh Tachai is closed to tourists indefinitely. Dubrovnik, Croatia: Although it joined UNESCO’s list of World Heritage Sites back in 1979, Dubrovnik only recently emerged as one of the Mediterranean’s top tourist destinations. Unfortunately, locals claim the Old City’s historic cathedrals, fortresses and buildings have swelled with Disneyland-level crowds — due to the popularity of HBO’s Game of Thrones and the sheer number of cruises it brings in. Boracay, Philippines: Boracay is known for having some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. But those beaches were closed to tourists in 2018 by the president of the Philippines. An estimated 1.7 million travelers visited the island within a 10-month period, raising major infrastructure concerns — namely in terms of sewage treatment. Cruises were one of the first aspects of the travel industry to shut down in 2020. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that between February 3 and March 13 roughly 200 COVID-19 cases in the U.S. were linked to cruise ship passengers. Soon enough, halts on air travel and widespread lockdowns followed. Photo Courtesy: Antonio Balasco/Kontrolab/LightRocket/Getty Images In Venice, a city that’s usually visited by upwards of 32,000 cruise ship passengers a day, the pandemic has completely changed the day-to-day energy of life there. “Everyday life is a lot more pleasant without the congestion created by the crowds of tourists that came in large groups,” Venice resident Jane da Mosto told CNN Travel. Of course, that calmer way of life comes at a cost financially. The reprieve from tourists has had that same dual impact the world over. Now, in light of the pandemic, only 75 people are allowed in Machu Picchu at a time, which translates to just under 700 visitors a day. That’s hundreds less than the norm — and, while it’s better for the ancient site, the financial impact will certainly be felt. While experts predict that in, only to scramble for solutions to restore environments and structures or appease upset locals. With this in mind, World Politics Review brings up an interesting question: “Should business-as-usual be salvaged at any cost, or is now the chance to create a smaller, slower and more sustainable model of global tourism?” While the COVID-19 pandemic may have only put a temporary pause on tourism, the pause itself could be a chance to recalibrate, to figure out a way to end overtourism once and for all.

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