

Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

And I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: We've been cooped up for a year and we're ready to travel. But we want to do it safely. We're here with travel and human connection, founder and executive producer of Ohthepeopleyoumeet, Michaela Guzy. She's here to answer our questions. Welcome, Michaela, thanks for joining us.

MG: The honor is all mine. Thank you for having me.

VC: The corona virus is still raging in places like India, South America, Japan, and people do travel in spite of restrictions. How safe is any kind of overseas or domestic travel these days?

MG: Well, unfortunately Covid is still everywhere. But a lot of countries are slowly but surely getting it underway. America has been vaccinating fast and furiously. In Mexico where I currently am they are on a level orange but you see plenty of travelers. In fact I've been guest hosting in my friend's hotel since April 30<sup>th</sup> and I'll be here till the end of June and touch wood, in the three and a half months I've spent in Mexico this year, I have personally not experienced Covid or had a guest who experienced Covid. You do see mask wearing if you go inside but the wonderful thing in most of the destinations I have chose to travel around, which I have done quite a bit of traveling during Covid to film my show, "Sleeping Around Again, Safely." It is all about documenting hotels and places that are taking safety and sustainability very seriously, and my focus has really been on, especially destinations where you can get outdoors. There are even hotels in a place like LA that are very cosmopolitan but have a lot of outdoor space very naturally and you can do a lot of activities outside. And I think that is a trend that is not going away any time soon.

KK: It's interesting that you've been in Mexico for these many months and you say it's still orange. Do you recommend people going to Mexico even under these circumstances or can you, do you know destinations, both domestic and international, that are not orange, that are safe?

MG: The hotel I'm at is called Casa de las Olas, it's one of the only LEED certified properties in all of Mexico and I highly recommend people check it out. I do still encourage people to travel to places like Mexico I have to say that it's very funny, I see many Europeans and people from across the world come stay in Mexico and stay a couple of weeks so that they can just go to America because our country is not letting them come to America directly but they can come through Mexico.

VC: When you mentioned the cruises, I know that in the US the cruise lines are doing test cruises with volunteer passengers that will be leaving and coming into different US ports, Miami being one of them where the governor of Florida has chosen not to follow, not to allow the cruise lines to ask the passengers for proof of vaccination, so what are your thoughts about that?

MG: I actually just did a 25 market media tour with Norwegian Cruise Lines and the cruises, including Norwegian, are starting to sail this summer I actually just did a 25 market media tour with Norwegian Cruise Lines and the cruises, including Norwegian, are starting to sail this summer. They are requiring all passengers and all crew to have the vaccination. It's just an extra safety net. I don't like anyone telling me that I have to do something. But, in the bigger scheme of things my opinion on the matter is, one thing that is clear is when people have the vaccine even if a new variant does break out it does seem to eliminate or at least greatly reduce deaths and the severity of the disease. And so, if you're all going to be stuck on the ship together, if something does break out, it does seem like an extra safety measure that I'm OK with.

KK: Especially when this first started, my God, the cruise ships were the epicenter of nightmare...

MG: They haven't sailed in almost a year.

KK: I know they were losing a lot of money, I know it's terrible but the cruise...

MG: Also the governor of Florida is surely going to have a lot of heated conversations because I can't tell you the exact number but there's a lot of money that comes from the cruise lines into southern Florida, so...

VC: Indeed.

KK: Absolutely. It's funny because I heard that whatever cruise line this was will go to another port to find a governor that's going to be willing to abide by these rules.

VC: There are many other ports.

MG: Not only the money that it brings in to those markets and into those ports, I think if we all just look back at since March 2020 when this really like started raging, I think that we've all learned or should have learned, that we need to be flexible and that things are evolving, and we need to constantly re-evaluate and so that's

something that I hope everyone takes into consideration in making these decisions that will have very profound impacts on thousands and thousands and thousands of people employed by the cruise lines from all over the world including all the people that live right there in Miami and other parts of southern Florida where the cruise lines come in, so...

VC: Could you recommend some destinations where it's safe, or there are good places to go now?

MG: Totally. I have so many. So to give some context and background. I worked at some of the very best publishing brands including Conde Nast, Travel & Leisure, I helped launch Town & Country Travel. I launched Ohthepepleyoumeet which is really about the people you're meeting when you travel. I have always wanted to be known as the curator of the local hosts that you should meet. So I did start a show called Michaela's Map, and that's run on American Airlines, you can find a couple of episodes on my YouTube channel but we're about to launch a whole new season from all around the world. In the fall of 2020 I was like, "all right, I've gotta get back on the road." I know Covid is still raging and people are freaking out but as a travel expert I really want to be on the road and I want to be outside. And so I booked a one-way ticket to Denver and I caught up with two girlfriends who had left New York and made Denver their new home and we rented a car and we drove through southern Utah. Denver's great, and actually coming up this fall they have a really awesome graffiti, like street art festival. That was the first video I created in my "Sleeping Around Again Safely" series and I stayed at a really cool hotel called the Ramble which is right in the Rino art district so I do urge people to check that out, and we drove in to Utah, and I only had ever been skiing in Utah so to see all these amazing national parks that I always dreamt of visiting. It was really, really special. We stayed at a place called the Sorrel River Ranch. We went horseback riding, I felt like I was in a John Wayne movie. Lots of outdoor adventures, you eat under the stars, there's great hiking. That felt like really therapeutic to do. We made our way into Southern California. I had actually never been to Palm Springs. It's so beautiful. Kelly Wearstler, the interior designer, has a couple of amazing, amazing properties right in Palm Springs and they have just re-opened a spa there. I think another trend that is definitely going to be a part of our life for the foreseeable future anyway is –it already was taking shape in a bigger way before the pandemic, that is wellness, but beyond just the hotel yoga or maybe getting a massage, but really more holistic, well being. I have all of my published "Sleeping Around Again Safely" episodes from Colorado, from Utah, from California-I drove up the entire coast of California all the way up to the Lost Coast and I stayed at The Inn at Newport Ranch. Amazing, like every climate in one little place but they also have great food and great wine, the most stunning views of the Lost Coast. But then I also have videos from all over the Yucatan Peninsula and Caribbean Mexico as well as Panama and Kenya on my channel and the new wellness suite at the Andaz in New York City. I did take a quick flight to New York City in March. That was the Andaz Fifth Avenue, its part of Hyatt and they have a beautiful wellness suite. And not only is it a

beautiful wellness suite, but if you're gonna be—another trend that I think is gonna happen in terms of the way people live and travel emerging from Covid is that people are going to stay places longer as long as there's wifi, as long as they can work, as long as their kids can do on-line learning. And when I got to the Andaz and what I liked about the hotel, the view of the library in New York, it's so iconic. They had everything from like aromatherapy on the side of the bed, they have one of those mirrors, those workout mirrors in the living room, and it was very thoughtfully curated. New York was probably like the strictest of all the places. They take your temperature when you come in. I do see that more in the cities. And actually in LA, the Pierre Hotel and the Waldorf Astoria did such a great job at taking safety seriously. Like the Waldorf Astoria has a robot named Kennedy and its UV lights and it goes in there and cleans twice and they've got shields, its pretty bananas That's at the Waldorf Astoria in Beverly Hills and LaPeer Hotel in West Hollywood, they were so -honestly I get a little choked up thinking about what Nick, their general manager has done. What Nick did, you know, this beautiful space at the La Peer Hotel in West Hollywood, all these small businesses were closing down around town and he was like, well, I have all this empty space and so he brought in everyone from like Zak the barber, he gave them a spot on the rooftops. The people could get their hair done outdoors. He gave the restaurant like a space to come in to cook because they had not been able to keep their spot open during the pandemic so all the dining was outside. He also allowed the gift shop to be taken over and curated so all these small businesses were now exhibited.

VC: So they were represented in that gift shop. That's fabulous. Like he was really involved with the community, it sounds like?

MG: Yeah, and it's still going on.

VC: Now what about accommodations like AirBnB and similar where you go and you basically rent somebody's house. What are your thoughts about that?

MG: AirBnB and the likes, there's always like good and bad. You have to weigh things out. With AirBnB you have less guarantee, right, of what you're going to get because these are all individual homeowners, etc. However, Air BnB do have some pretty strict policies in play and I don't know if I'd call it user generated content, but like your host and your guests like everybody ranks and reviews each other and AirBnB really do have a lot of protocols to take these things seriously, and safety especially. And they have a really great refund policy as well. But, for example, if you're a slightly skittish traveler, like, you might want to know exactly what you're walking into. Like a house, at least in my experience, where AirBnBs aren't putting safety seals, like this

has been cleaned, by so and so, with such and such products and like you know that Kennedy the robot has just like UV-lighted your room.

KK: I think AirBnBs are great for probably families but I'm sure everybody including myself would like to know where the really good deals are. We know the prices are going up. Do you have any suggestions that are even more affordable now than they would have been before Covid?

MG: Sure. And to finish up on AirBnB and hotels, because there's no perfect solution and it's like what is the perfect solution for you? A counterpoint to staying in a hotel versus an AirBnB is like, you guys are the only people in the AirBnB, and you're not sharing the elevator button so you have your own isolated space which I do think is a nice selling point. At the same time the hotel companies have gone like out of their way to like sanitize things, and they tell you that they're sanitizing and you're always seeing people spraying things. Again, it's like what's your level of comfortability. I still think you see a lot of good deals out there. I also did a media tour with the island of St. Kitts and Nevis and they have a great hotel promotion that is running through September 1<sup>st</sup>. You have to book it by July 31<sup>st</sup>. Both Park Hyatt and the Marriott St. Kitts are offering space available upgrades, and free breakfast for four, and something that's so fabulous about Park Hyatt St. Kitts, for example, is that not only do they allow you to vacation in place like on the property, you can move about the property freely, you can utilize the beach, you can do standup paddle boarding, but they've also instituted all these on-property activities which include things like meditation and mixology courses and painting. But the counterpoint of that is that you have to vacation in place at the hotel. You can't like leave the property until you've tested out, it ranges whether you've been vaccinated or not and I urge you to check their website. If you're going to visit St. Kitts, contact the tourism board for all the latest and greatest details because they keep changing. I've seen specials coming in from Hyatt, about loyalty reward programs, and earning extra points. So there are still deals to be had. Routes are starting to come back. Europe is starting to open up to vaccinated travelers, I think as things open up and become more readily available people are going to spread out a little more. But I do think that people are going to be searching more for the great outdoor getaways. Like beaches, and hiking and parks than they are the urban adventures might be awhile away. So if you're looking for a deal you probably can get some deals in those urban environments that are looking to fill those rooms.

KK: We're living in an urban environment, we want out!

VC: We like the outdoor thing. That sounds great.

MG: If you think about it, yes, you are in a beautiful place like New York City, which I miss, but like if someone told me I was going to London tomorrow and I could walk around St. James Park and go have a pint at like the Stafford Hotel's back garden I would be on the next plane there, like absolutely.

VC: Wait for me!

KK: You and me both!

VC: London is one of my most favorite, favorite cities ever. I love it. So speaking of air travel what about if you have airline frequent flyer miles or a lot of rewards points on your credit card that you can transfer to airline points, is this a good time to use these?

MG: I mean everything really fluctuates and it's based on the number of points you have with the company you're working with. What I always do is I'll go on American Airlines dot com and I'll look and say okay, how much does the flight cost and like I'll go back and look and see how many points it is. So in general you'll know that way if you're getting a good conversion. There are probably certain flight routes that they're looking to push more to fill and everything has been more last minute than normal so it is a bit of a researching cluster. I will say that I've always been a huge fan of working with travel advisors or travel agents and I feel like now more than ever before to work with a travel advisor is super, super important especially if you are going abroad. There are, literally the rules are changing daily. Every country has their own travel requirements and as countries move in and out of red, orange or whatever other countries change their rules, there's no unified system.

KK: Usually I would be on like figuring out where I'm going but with all that's happening, everything you said, it's constantly changing. You have to have a travel agent who's going to know what they're doing.

MG: Here's the biggest misnomer about using a travel agent. They can get you the best pricing. At minimum they'll match what you diy-ed on your own. I don't know if you've ever had this scenario, I will never buy a flight from an OTA again until someone can promise me that they own my reservation because, it was even an easy flight (VC: What's an OTA?) An online travel agent. I won't say who, but I was flying from New York to St. Louis where I grew up for Christmas and I got bumped from the flight and the airline was like, "well, we don't own your reservation." So now I'm already at the airport, it's the holidays, and I ended up just booking another ticket which was insanely expensive, to leave on another flight and I had to like fight the OTA for three months to get my money back. And I was like, never again. Even though you can use them to see all the

different flights and like who has the cheapest one I always book direct through the airline or have my travel advisor book that for you. Like my really good friend Jack Ezon, he owns a company called Embark out of New York, and they're very hands on. They're not only a travel advisor; they are true experts and specialists. You're spending all this money on this like wonderful experience, why wouldn't you have someone who has like been there, knows the people, like make sure you have the most perfect suite, make sure you're upgraded, you have the best view. They become the expert in you and your travel habits and they know all this other crazy info that's going on. And also if you miss your flight or connection, all the things, you can pick up the phone and call them and they have a direct connect and there's something really good in that direct connect personal relationship.

KK: I imagine this is the best time for travel experts now because exactly what you're saying, everything changes and you want to feel safe with where you're going.

MG: I mean why not have the extra security measures? It's not that they cost more money by the way. They get their commissions from the travel. They do all the work for you

VC: So Michaela, this is fantastic information. I'll be using this in planning my own future trips. So if people want to reach out to you, how can they do that?

MG: I'm Michaela Guzy on both Instagram and YouTube and our website is [ohthepeopleyoumeet.com](http://ohthepeopleyoumeet.com) and we are [otpym](https://www.instagram.com/ohthepeopleyoumeet) on Instagram as well. I mean we have Facebook and I'm on LinkedIn but I would say Instagram is probably our most active channel socially. We literally publish our episodes of Michaela's Map, Inspiration Station and Sleeping Around Again Safely, we have a ton of Mexico content, Panama content coming out. Let's get on with life and get on with the road. Be careful, use your common sense and be outdoors as much as possible. I always say, pack a bag and a mask and journey on with me.

VC: Thank you so much! This has been terrific and I can't wait to use your wonderful information and get out on the road.

MG: Thank you. I always say, pack a bag and a mask and journey on with me!

