**JANUARY 20TH CHAPTER TRAVEL FORUM**

**By Dan Sockle and Terry Babin**

The Columbia River Chapter, MOAA’s, sixth *Travel Forum* was held the evening of January 20, 2022.

The guest subject matter expert was Patty Kole, owner of Patty’s Travel. Patty covered river, ocean, and land tours. Here is a summary of her presentation and answers to questions from the Forum participants:

1. Cruises:
* There is a lot of pent-up demand—particularly among the elderly and young couples in part because working remotely makes travel easier for many of those not retired (i.e., Expect to begin your cruise planning earlier than in the past)
* Cruise lines are using modern technologies to keep the ship environment safer for passengers.
* Expect to be required to have all COVID vaccinations including the booster shots at least two weeks before embarkation.
* COVID testing (usually the rapid test) being required within 2-3 days before embarkation by many cruise lines.
* Many ocean and river cruise companies now offering longer cruises as a strategy to reduce exposure/risk to staff and passengers.
1. Land tours: Companies going to smaller groups.
2. Other information:
* Morocco has closed to tourism.
* All major cruise and tour companies are usually very good about giving travelers timely, current information on pre-travel COVID requirements and arranging COVID testing before return to the U.S. for their clients.
* One the best sources for COVID rules and protocols by country is to use your browser to go to: **apply.joinsherpa.com/travel-restrictions**.
* Most of the travel industry is:
	+ Becoming more flexible about deposits.
	+ Offering “cruise or tour with confidence,” or similar programs with no penalty if cancelled before 30 days of departure with payment credited for future cruise/tours.
* Travel insurance is recommended, and Allianz now covers COVID.
* For those who are foregoing international travel, there are many opportunities for domestic river and small-ship cruises, and many good tour packages to major cities and National Parks.
1. Patty Kole’s contact information:

Patty’s Travel

1-866-392-9117 or (360) 835-2820

**http:/www.pattystravel.com**

1. Information/advice from Forum participants:
* Information was provided about family-friendly resorts in the Caribbean including the Villa Group. Highly recommended was the St. James Club in Antigua. You can check this all-inclusive resort on **stjamesclubantigua.com**.
* Hawaii now has elevated entry requirements regarding COVID—comply or face 10 days quarantine.
* As a follow-up to questions about travel in Costa Rica during the November Travel Forum.
	+ Answers were provided to the traveling member prior to this month’s Forum.
	+ Costa Rica remains the exception to most countries in Central America—safe and modern.
* A summary of a recent trip to Finland/Sweden over the Christmas period was given:
	+ Wonderful trip, but expensive—total costs came to about $20K per person.
	+ Several days’ stopover in United Kingdom and also Norway were cancelled because of COVID and COVID-testing complications.
	+ Trip was not taken as part of a tour; so, travelers had to arrange their own COVID testing for return to the U.S.—cost was $500.00 each.
	+ Temperatures down to the minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit.
* Another Forum participant echoed the difficulties for both timing and getting testing in the UK which resulted in cancellation of an October 2021 trip.
* For travel without leaving the continent, an alternative that is available here in the area is Oregon West—a bus touring company.
	+ One of the Forum participants and spouse will be taking a 6-day western Canada tour (with return flight included) during mid-June.
	+ Information is available on the Oregon west website at **orwest.com** or call 1-800-333-0774.
* A summary of a recent Celebrity cruise over the holidays was given:
	+ The ship (*Equinox*) required all passengers to be fully vaccinated, COVID tested within two days of embarkation, and limited bookings to 70% of capacity.
	+ Still, the ship was not fully prepared for the COVID surge that erupted halfway into the trip—problem was internal communications and processes for accommodating passengers placed in isolation pending determination of whether they needed to be quarantined.
	+ Four of the original ports of call were closed to the ship by the port authorities due to Omicron concerns—excursion pre-pays were reimbursed quickly, but the cruise line has offered no other compensation/credits for the itinerary disruption.
* There was a request for more information about Overseas Adventure Travels which has been used by two of the Forum participants. Website is **www.oattravel.com**.
1. Several Forum members are still considering (or have booked) travel to the countries listed below during 2022. If you have any suggestions/recommendations, please e-mail them to tbear06@comcast.net or join the next Travel Forum during March 2022.

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| Czech Republic | Austria | Hungary |
| Finland | Germany | Turkey |
| Portugal | Russia | England/Scotland |

**Next Forum Zoom meeting is scheduled for 7:00 PM on Tuesday, March 15th.**