

Miss being somewhere that's not your house? Take your kids on vacation at home

"You don't need to take a plane to see the world," said a travel and lifestyle expert. Instead, pick a day for a virtual trip and put your child in charge of planning.

At the beginning of quarantine, parents tie-dyed like there was no tomorrow. Their production of friendship bracelets was matched only by the number of scavenger hunts they organised on the fly. In the quest to keep their children busy, they left no stone unturned. (Or untumbled in the rock tumbler, or undecorated with paint markers purchased hastily on Amazon.)



But nine months later, they are over it. Mums cannot make another pillow fort. Dads are banana-breaded out. And now they're staring down the barrel of winter break with one question: How on earth are we going to entertain these kids?

With the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urging against holiday travel, a

family vacation is off the table. Unless, that is, you mindfully set about re-creating the best parts of one at home.

"You don't need to take a plane to see the world," said Oneika Raymond, a travel and lifestyle expert and correspondent for NBC New York. Instead, pick a day for a virtual trip and put your child in charge of planning. "Let them choose a city to research, then help replicate what they find," she said. "They could say 'OK, we're going to Shanghai; we're going to eat dumplings at this particular place.' Find a recipe for dumplings together and decorate the table like in the restaurant."

If you're not in lockdown, plan a family walk through a different neighbourhood and try a new cuisine, Raymond said. Or just whiz through a few countries online with geography-based games like GeoGuessr.

It's nice for kids to learn the word "playa" by building sand castles on one, but technology can fill in the gaps until it's safe to travel again. Raymond, a former French teacher, recommends a handful of apps to immerse children in a foreign language: Gus on the Go, which uses storybook characters familiar to younger kids; Memrise, which features clips of native speakers in their hometowns; and Lirica, whose instruction-via-hit-song will appeal to tweens. Older kids may also like Language Learning with Netflix, a Chrome extension that adds subtitles and a pop-up dictionary to familiar shows.

Dust off that accumulating pile of kids' artwork and hold an exhibition, said Bar Rucci, a graphic designer who runs Art Bar and The Creativity Project.

"Cover the walls in kraft paper, tape the art on top, and label each piece with a title," she said. "Use a few rooms so you have 'wings' for different artists or styles, then

have the rest of the family stroll the gallery. Or invite masked friends at 10-minute intervals."

To mimic the hands-on investigation of a place like the Exploratorium, a science museum in San Francisco, dig into the "Science Snacks" available online in English and Spanish, said Jessica Parker, the museum's director of teaching and learning.

"Let kids choose what they're interested in," she said. "You can search and filter by what you have in the house. Combine a few experiments to make a Science Olympics, then challenge grandparents or cousins you can't see this year."

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When "Hamilton" was released for streaming, Liz Gumbinner, co-publisher and editor-in-chief of a parenting network called Cool Mom Picks, "attended" from her sofa with her family of musical theater fans.

"We got dressed up, served frozen lemonades in our Broadway souvenir cups, and ate all the Twizzlers and Junior Mints we'd normally eat during intermission," she said. "Most important? Be sure to turn off all phones."

"There's a sense of wonder at Disney World that you can't find anywhere else," said Carey Larson, who has visited 30 times and helps families plan their trips in her role as Kingdom Konsultant. But for younger kids, you can replicate at least some of the delight. —The New York Times



UK needs tighter virus rules to avert new 'catastrophe', warns epidemiologist

LONDON: Britain's government needs to bring in tighter coronavirus lockdown rules to avert a fresh wave of deaths from a new variant of the disease, a leading epidemiologist warned.

Britain reported 41,385 new COVID-19 cases on Monday, the highest number since testing became widely available in the middle of 2020, and hospitals have more COVID-19 patients than during the first wave of the pandemic in April.

"We are entering a very dangerous new phase of the pandemic, and we're going to need decisive early national action to prevent a catastrophe in January and February," Andrew Hayward, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at University College London, told the BBC.

"We're really looking at a situation where we're moving into near-lockdown," he said.

People walk along Regent Street as shops remain closed under Tier 4 restrictions, amid the coronavirus

People walk along Regent Street as shops remain closed under Tier 4 restrictions, amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in London, Britain, December 26, 2020.



More than 71,000 people in Britain have died within 28 days of a positive test for the disease. Advertisement Hitachi Asia Ltd Sponsored by Hitachi Asia Ltd Hitachi leads digital transformation in one-day virtual forum Registrations open for Hitachi Social Innovation Forum 2021

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More England COVID-19 patients in hospital than at April peak

Britain introduced a new level of tighter restrictions in parts of England on Dec 19, shutting down non-essential retail and

mostly banning people from meeting in person, because of a new variant of COVID-19 that infected people more easily.

A week later it extended the restrictions to a larger area, covering almost half of England's population. But the government has so far resisted reimposing a new nationwide lockdown.

Asked about Hayward's concerns, a spokesman for Prime Minister Boris Johnson told reporters the government was keeping measures under constant review.

A social distancing health message is seen outside of a secondary school in London

A social distancing health message is seen outside of a secondary school in London, Britain December 29, 2020.

Schools in England are due to reopen for many pupils on Jan 4. Hayward said that from a purely epidemiological point of view it would make sense to keep them closed longer, but difficulties poorer pupils faced learning online meant curbs on other areas of public life might be preferable.

Authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland set their own policies on schools and measures to combat COVID-19. —Reuters

Soothing white noise: That's what people listened to in 2020

The soundtrack to Maya Montoya's year was white noise. Specifically, a track on Spotify called Celestial White Noise – three whole hours of warm, soothing fuzz.

Montoya, who is 27 and lives in Washington, had been a nanny up until the pandemic. But when she found herself out of work in April, she began indulging in daytime naps, which ruined her sleep schedule. "I've been listening to the white noise all the time," she said.

Despite playing the track most nights for the better part of 2020, Montoya was still surprised when Celestial White Noise appeared at the top of her Spotify Wrapped chart this month. She posted a screen shot from the app on Instagram, which was met with a deluge of affirmation from her followers.

"So many people messaged me saying they got the exact same thing," she said. "It was nice to know I wasn't the only one blasting white noise into the ether so that I could sleep throughout all this."

In an average year, Spotify Wrapped is a sharing-optimised novelty hinging on nostalgia for a time that's barely passed. But in 2020, this data mirror instead presented many users with unexpected empirical evidence of their pandemic coping mechanisms: A strange hit parade of ambient music, background noise and calming sound effects that soothed them through an unusually anxious and sleepless time. (Spotify declined to comment on this trend.) While thousands of users posted in disbelief about their stress-inflected results, the situation made sense to Liz Pelly, a cultural critic who has written extensively about how Spotify and its competitors work to shape our listening habits. "It says a lot about the ways that corporate streaming services have ingrained themselves into our lives and facilitated music listening becoming more of a background experience," she said. Some listeners have used sound as a coping mechanism for years but became more reliant on it over the last nine months. Isobel Snellenberger. —The New York Times



Singapore design experts share: Interior design trends for 2021

A new year brings about the possibilities of change, and with the arrival of 2021, you may be considering redesigning or renovating your home. Whether you're thinking of a major overhaul or a simple cosmetic upgrade, take inspiration from these interior design trends as identified by local industry experts. The circuit breaker period in Singapore left many of us scrambling to create home offices for work and study. This experience is likely to stay with homeowners going into 2021, with more requesting for the segregation of space to include a work area. "The home is no longer a shelter to come back to after a long day, but it has transformed into a place to live, work and play," shared Beam Ker. —CNA



French fashion designer Pierre Cardin dies aged 98: Fam-



French fashion designer Pierre Cardin, hailed for his visionary creations but also for bringing stylish clothes to the masses, died on Tuesday (Dec 29) aged 98, his family told AFP.

Cardin, who was born to a low-income family in northern Italy but became a France-based fashion superstar, died in a hospital in Neuilly in the west of Paris, his family said.

"It is a day of great sadness for all our family. Pierre Cardin is no more," the statement said.

It said that after a lifetime spanning a century, he had left France and the world a "great unique artistic heritage" and not only in fashion.

Born into poverty in 1922 near Venice in northern Italy, his family emigrated to France when he was a small child.

"Italian by birth, Pierre Cardin never forgot his origins while bringing unconditional love to France," said his family. In this May 3, 2005, file photo, French fashion designer Pierre Cardin presents his exhibition Design and Fashion 1950-2005 at the academy for arts in

Vienna, Austria. France's Academy of Fine Arts has said that the famed fashion designer has died at 98.

He grew up in the French industrial town of Saint-Etienne and was apprenticed to a tailor in Vichy at the age of 17, already specialising in women's suits.

Moving to Paris, he designed the mesmerising sets and costumes for the film Beauty and the Beast with poet, artist and director Jean Cocteau in 1946.

After a stint with Christian Dior, he had already set up his own fashion label in 1950.

In this Sep 13, 1960, file photo, Parisian designer Pierre Cardin, with one of his models, shows the new uniform he has created for the hostesses of French television in Paris. France's Academy of Fine Arts has said that the famed fashion designer has died at 98.

He quickly established a name as an innovator, creating the now legendary bubble dress in 1954.

He also broke new ground commercially, ruffling feathers in the fashion establishment for producing a ready-to-wear collection for the Paris department store Printemps. —CNA

