

CORONAVIRUS

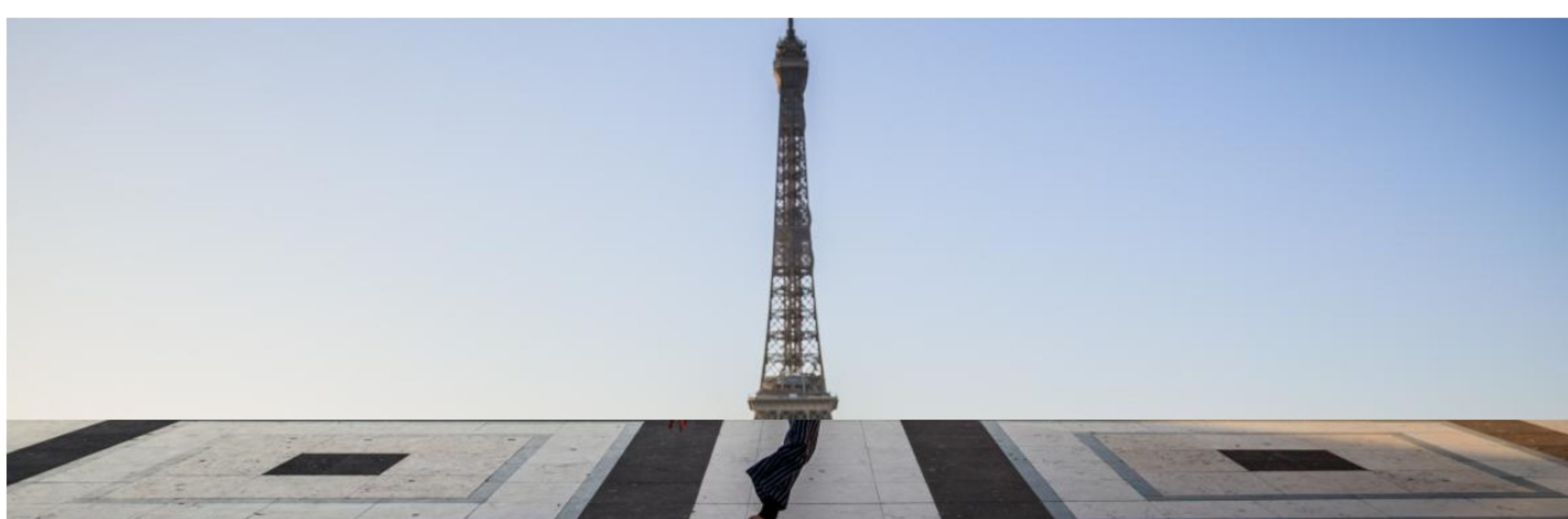
Macron's quarantine deal prompts search for French holidays

Travel agents report surge in inquiries

Ben Clatworthy, Assistant Travel Editor | Charlotte Wace


Monday May 11 2020, 5:00pm, The Times

Boris Johnson



Britain's plan to quarantine arrivals for two weeks does not apply to France "at this stage"
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Britons pining for a foreign holiday this year were given a glimmer of hope when it was announced that travel quarantine would not apply to movements between England and France.

Holiday companies reported a surge in inquiries and searches for trips to France this year despite uncertainty about when travel restrictions will be eased.

Boris Johnson announced last night that it would "soon be the time" to [quarantine arrivals to Britain](#) for 14 days. However, Mr Johnson and Emmanuel Macron, the French president, have agreed that the measures will not apply between France and the UK "at this stage", according to a joint statement.



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Peak Retreats, a tour operator specialising in French mountain holidays, said web traffic increased by 43 per cent today. Another operator, Abercrombie and Kent, said inquiries for holidays to the country were up by almost a quarter. Searches for its French villas jumped by 50 per cent, indicating that holidaymakers are looking for trips that will allow social distancing to be maintained.

"We're still seeing inquiries come through for this summer," Kerry Golds, managing director of Abercrombie and Kent, said. "We Brits love our holidays, and there is still a small sense of optimism that it might be possible. The likes of Nice and St Tropez are looking like firm favourites, especially for villas, given the privacy and isolation they provide compared to hotels."

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France [emerged from two months of lockdown](#) today. Shops and businesses were allowed to reopen and citizens can travel up to 60 miles from home. The French border, however, will remain closed until at least June 15, with anyone entering the country required to complete a permit. The French embassy in London has stressed that Britons should only travel to the country if "strictly necessary".

Some holiday resorts are reopening in France this week, although Édouard Philippe, the prime minister, has insisted that "now is not the time for weekend trips". B&B and gite owners in the country, especially within 60 miles of big cities, have reported a surge in domestic bookings for the coming weeks.

Richard Green, founder of Summer France, a tour operator specialising in villas, hotels and apartments, said: "We've noticed an uptick in web search, but customers are understandably cautious, on both sides of the channel.

"Some of our resorts in France are opening to locals this week, with very strict distancing and hygiene rules, and we'll take the next steps as the situation evolves. We'll open to UK travellers next, with a no-quibbles cancellation policy in place."


GetLink, the operator of the Channel Tunnel which connects Folkestone with Coquelles, said that it was witnessing a "steady stream" of bookings from July onwards. John Keefe, its director of public affairs, said: "The Tunnel has always been popular with independent travellers and second home owners, but we imagine it will be a very attractive mode of transport for a wider number of holidaymakers.

"Once you get off at the other side it's not a long drive to reach beautiful countryside and areas that have lots of gites and farmhouses that are available for holiday lets."

Other holiday companies have reported a spike in inquiries for French breaks but warn that many are still nervous about committing.

Dominic Rogers, a spokesman for Action Outdoors, an adventure holiday company, said: "There is a great deal of interest in summer trips, but customers do not have the confidence [to book]. Many are holding off until they know they can travel, so we are expecting to see a lot of pent up demand released should there be any clarity on travel."

The Foreign Office has advised against all but essential travel to anywhere in the world for an indefinite period. Speaking this morning, Dominic Raab, the foreign secretary, said foreign trips remained off the cards and that he was "sorry" to Britons whose holiday plans have been ruined.



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Mr Johnson's announcement blindsided the authorities in some British regions. Leading figures in the Lake District, which has been urging people to stay away, said they were shocked by the prime minister sanctioning travel to beauty spots.

South Lakes Police asked the public to "take a long hard look at your own conscience" before travelling to the region. A statement continued: "We urge you to use common sense and to continue to exercise close to your own home. We need to break the cycle of infection."

Assistant Chief Constable Andy Slattery, who is chairing Cumbria's local response forum, said they "weren't expecting" the prime minister's announcement. "We are awaiting the guidance documentation but it gives all the authorities cause for concern that it will result in large numbers of people coming to the Lake District on days out," he said. "That could be a matter of major concern."

He added that bars, cafés, car parks and public lavatories remained closed. There was "no infrastructure" to support tourists, he said.

Paul Williams, chairman of the Cumbria Police Federation, said the announcement had caused "complete confusion".

Cumbria Tourism tweeted last night: "We are shocked by the timing and short notice of tonight's announcement." Gill Haigh, the tourist agency's managing director, today urged the public to continue to stay at home.

She added: "With Cumbria continuing to have one of the highest incidences of coronavirus per head of population and a high number of older residents, the safety of local residents must take absolute top priority, along with a collective responsibility to help protect Cumbria's NHS workers."

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Ben Clatworthy, Assistant Travel Editor



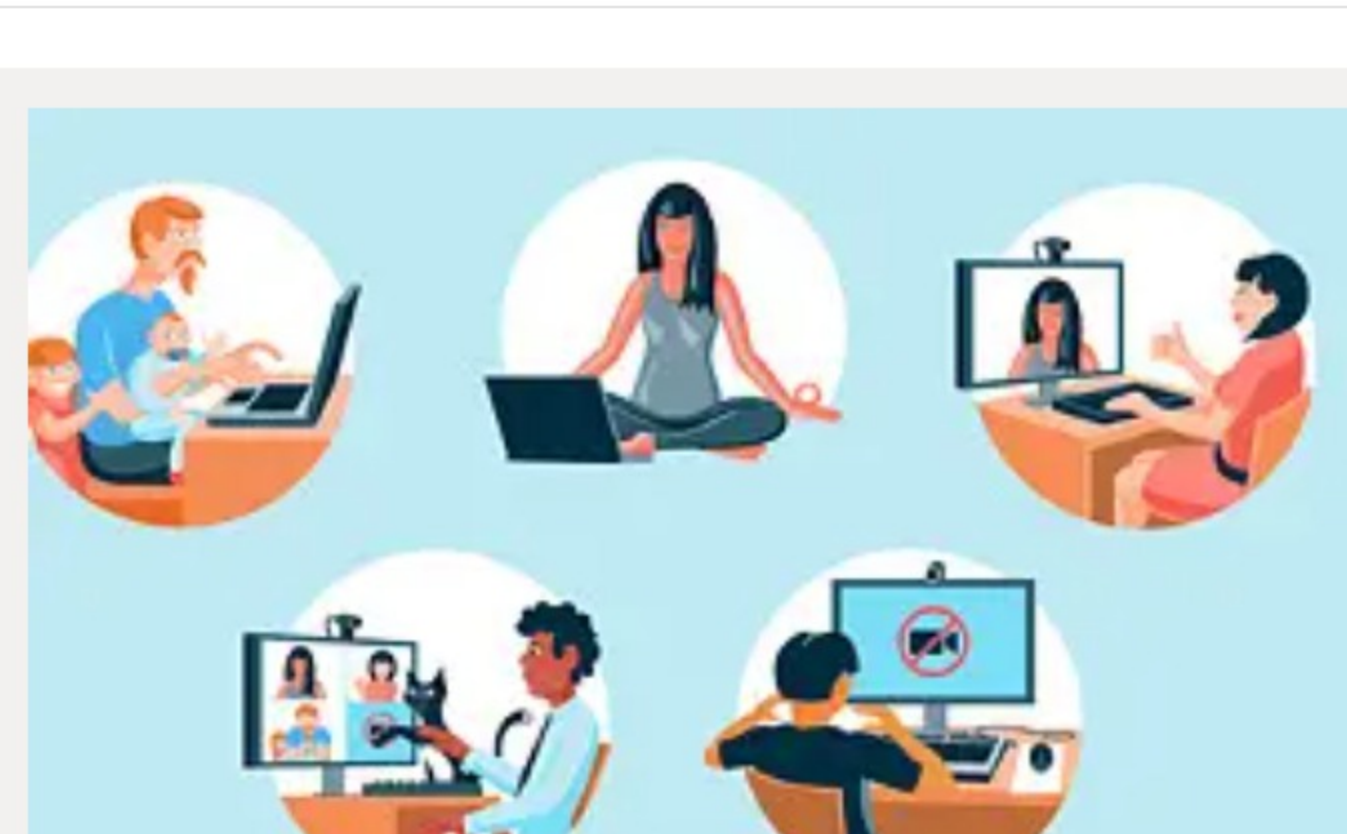
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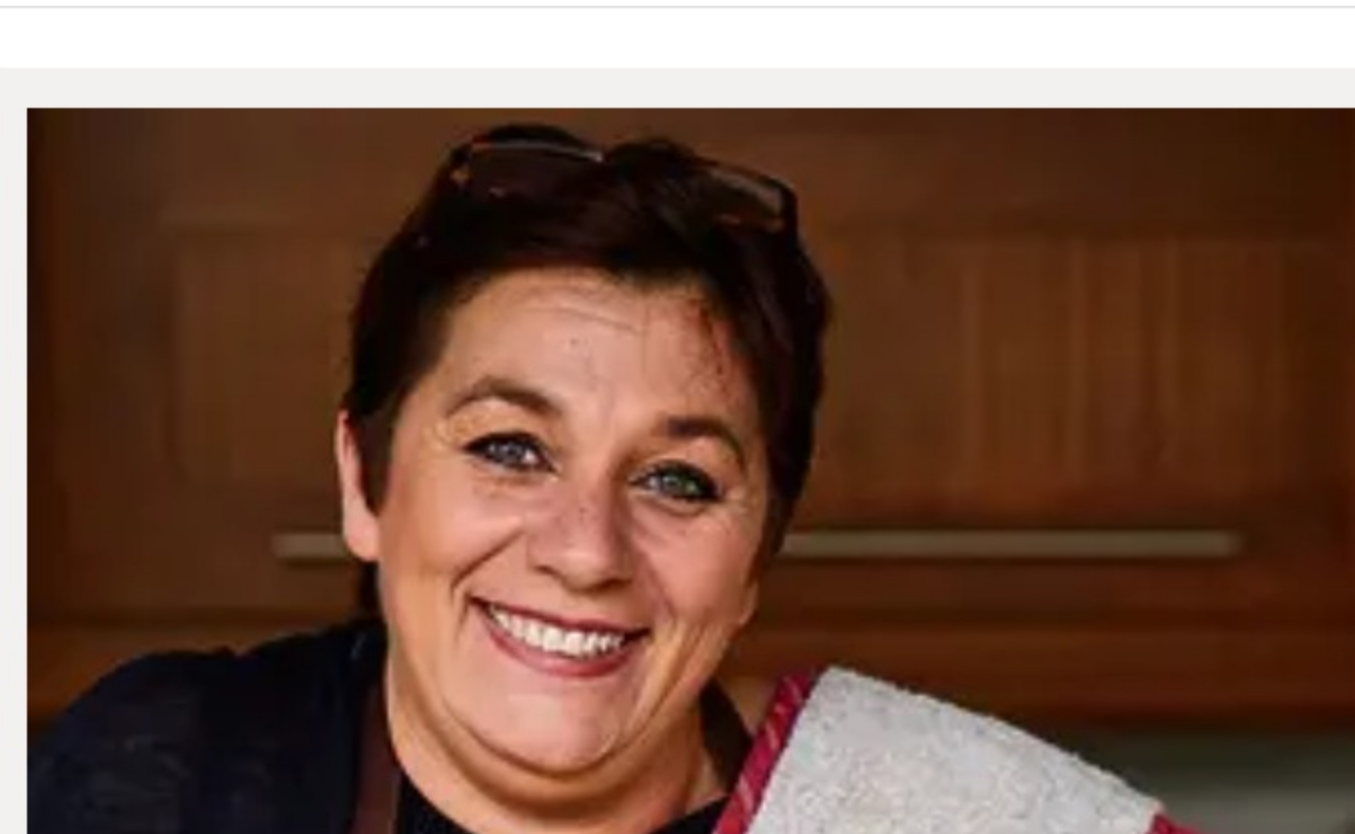
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