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The Daily Telegraph

TRAVEL

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French food, wine, scenery and architecture may be much missed on this side of the Channel – but we have Waddesden Manor, Michel Roux jr, English wine, patisserie and the Cotswolds lavender fields to console us



France? It's closer than you think

Crossing the Channel is tricky right now, but with a little bit of planning you can enjoy glorious chateaux, a grand crème and even a game of boules right here in Britain. Nick Trend is your guide

So near geographically, yet – culturally – so far, France has always offered travellers a fabulous transformation – a taste of the exotic only a few short miles away across the Channel. For many of us, it was our first experience of abroad: of the excitement of a different language, different food and, well, a different attitude to life.

For me, at least, and I know for

many others, the magic persists, made more familiar by regular visits but still refreshing, still beautiful, still full of new delight.

But now we are effectively barred even from jumping into our own car and driving to an isolated gîte in some remote, bosky *parcage*. Deemed too risky, France is off limits to British holidaymakers for the foreseeable future.

So what can we do to find a taste of France without leaving our shores?

I'm not just talking about the cuisine. Obviously we can all name our favourite French restaurant (though there are plenty more excellent examples, to try, as we point out below). But how about a vineyard tour, or a game

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JUST SAYING

With its smiling, maskless tourists, Santorini proves to be a quiet utopia for lockdown sceptics like me, writes Annabel Fenwick-Elliott



I'm done with being cautious. Not about spreading Covid-19 – I'll jump through the hoops and wear the muzzle if it makes others feel safer. But no longer will I tiptoe around the matter. It is my view that the world, with the notable exception of Sweden, has lost the plot over this virus – an illness that has trashed the global economy, and which the vast majority of the human population has survived.

So I was elated to find, on my visit to Santorini last week, a quiet utopia for lockdown sceptics like me. Where hoops were being

conversation between strangers.

A couple I met from Finland expressed their enormous relief to find respite from Project Fear back home, but said they'd been roundly shamed for travelling. A British family I spoke to said the same thing. Good on them for going, though.

During my brief stay, I scuba-dived (you wear a mask anyway), rode a horse across the black sand beach (socially distanced by nature) and befriended Philip the German helicopter pilot, who told me: "Most people here aren't afraid of the virus."

Philip briefly let me take



jumped through, but hysteria was nowhere to be found.

Oia, the Instagram-famous labyrinth of white domes clutched at the forehead of the island's steep cliffs, was empty of the pouty influencers that usually fill its narrow cobbled streets. The few tourists there were not gagged and tense, but smiling and maskless.

So too were all the guests at Oia's Andronis Luxury Suites. The staff wore discreet Perspex mouth shields that enabled us to actually compute their expressions. Indeed, the only noticeably odd aspect at dinner that night was the sheer normality of the situation. There was live music and laughter;

'It was the most fun I'd had in ages; I genuinely forgot about the pandemic'

the controls, and the nose of the helicopter dipped towards the ocean. It was the most fun I'd had in ages, and perhaps non-coincidentally, the first time I genuinely forgot about the pandemic. Refreshing is the right word: people on Santorini aren't concerned, and there's only a minuscule chance they should be.