

Need a COVID test for an upcoming trip? Here are some tips so things go smoothly

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If you need to take a COVID-19 test for your upcoming travels, you'll find plenty of options — from spitting to swabbing, at-home to drive-through testing locations.

We needed COVID tests for our recent family trip to Hawaii, which requires proof of a negative test taken within 72 hours of travel — by an approved testing partner — to avoid a mandatory 10-day quarantine upon arrival. As of May, all non-vaccinated transpacific travelers to Maui must also take a rapid coronavirus test upon landing, offered for free at Kahului Airport.

Since we needed our initial test results so quickly, we decided to try out two methods to determine (for us) which proved the most reliable and the easiest to use, and to make sure we wouldn't miss our flights because of late test results or, worse, end up quarantined — not a fun way to spend vacation.

Hawaii and Puerto Rico require a negative COVID-19 test result to enter, and many other states still recommend visitors and returning residents get tested. Hawaii requires visitors to take a Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAAT) from a certified Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment (CLIA) lab, and although the list is long, not many were accessible to us.

You can get a nasal swab PCR test at a participating CVS pharmacy (www.cvs.com) for \$139. About 10 Walgreens pharmacies in Greater Boston also offer free drive-through swab tests — make sure you choose the PCR test out of the three options (https://walgreens.com/covid19testing).

We live in Washington state and chose the free nasal swab test at our local Walgreens (available to anyone 3 and older) and a mail-in Vault Health saliva test (\$119 per person), which



Hawaii requires proof of a negative test taken within 72 hours of travel — by an approved testing partner — to avoid a mandatory 10-day quarantine upon arrival. We tried the approved Vault spit test, when we had to spit into a vial and then airmail our sample to a lab for a quick turnaround before our flight three days later.

works nationwide (https://www.vault-health.com).

We scheduled our Walgreens test for 72 hours before flight time, filling out all our information online in advance so the paperwork was ready when we arrived. The entire test for four of us took less than five minutes. We drove up to the pharmacy window, verified our information, swabbed our own noses, and packaged up the samples on the spot. We had our negative results back 20 hours later — a total relief.

The same day as our Walgreens test, we performed Vault's home test. We had

ordered the Vault mail-in test kits a month in advance and bought a jar of pickles and a bottle of vinegar for the test — not necessary, but we had heard that sniffing pickles, vinegar, lemon, and other tart liquids can help people generate saliva (it works). We just had to make sure no one had eaten, had anything to drink, or chewed gum within 30 minutes of taking the test.

To complete the test, we initiated a video call through Zoom with a Vault test supervisor who guided us through the process, verifying our identities and test serial numbers, and then instruct-

ing us to spit into a tube up to a black marker. The spitting part proved to be a long process (even sniffing pickle juice): It took us each about 10 to 15 minutes to generate enough saliva to fill the tube.

Then we slipped each sample into a biohazard bag that went into a UPS prepaid package — and missed the UPS air freight drop-off time by 20 minutes, pushing back our test results by 24 hours. We took the test on a Thursday afternoon, but we didn't receive our results until Saturday night — just 14 hours before we left for the airport. Had

we planned better and known about the drop-off times, we would have had our results back within 27 hours of taking the test (times vary, of course, but Vault says it will have results to you within 24 hours of receiving them).

The biggest benefits to the Vault test: It can be completed at home, at any time of day, and at a time that works for you. It's a great option for those living in rural areas who may not have access to drive-through test sites and for those who need results for prescheduled events, such as a wedding. But make sure you allow enough time to complete the test (you can't rush spit) and that you know the drop-off deadlines for UPS airmail so you can avoid added stress.

Finally, if you are headed to Hawaii, you'll need to take part in the mandatory online Safe Travels Hawaii program, which aims to mitigate the spread of COVID on the islands. Make sure you create a Safe Travels account (kids can be added under an adult's account) so you can upload your negative test results when you receive them and complete the mandatory health questionnaire 24 hours before flying.

Here's the catch: You must receive the negative test results and upload those to the Safe Travels website before boarding the final leg of your flight to Hawaii. Otherwise, you'll have to quarantine for 10 days or the duration of your trip, if shorter. That means you can't get out of quarantine even if your negative results come in after landing.

Once you upload your results and complete the health questionnaire, the program generates a QR code that you'll need to show at the airport and at hotels during check-in.

After landing in Maui, all nonvaccinated travelers 5 and older must also take a rapid COVID test. You are exempt from this second test if you have still not received your pre-trip test results or have opted to quarantine.

Even with testing requirements or recommendations, it's still worth it for a chance to travel again.

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Feeling the burn riding up volcano

►CYCLING
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in 52cm-61cm) and Roubaix (available as small as 44cm). The bikes at West Maui Cycles all have names — I chose the New Hampshire for good luck.

Check the weather (locals rely on www.noaa.gov or the Windy app) and then, as everyone recommended, start early. That way, you can avoid commuter and school traffic and get more of the ride done before the temps heat up — there is virtually no tree coverage on the entire route.

I took off around 7:15 a.m. — early by my vacation standards — and was the last uphill rider to depart that day. I saw dozens of downhill riders (more on them later) and seven or eight solo riders coming down the mountain throughout the day, but not one other person behind me.

The journey up the mountain takes about 5 to 6 hours for most people, but weather can be a factor. Clouds and moisture often build by mid-morning around 5,000 feet to 7,000 feet, meaning you could still be cycling for hours, wet and chilled. Ideally, the early start lets you get above the cloud zone and, with luck, remain dry.

Begin the ride near the ocean at the public parking area in downtown Paia, as I did, or park 1,700 feet higher up the mountain in the small town of Makawao. I followed the advice of someone at West Maui Cycles who said, "If you're putting in all the effort, you might as well start from sea level" (thanks, May).

The first 8 miles take you from Paia through small neighborhoods and then open land as you head southeast. You soon may question — as I did — whether you're still on the right track. Keep going right through the small town of Makawao, a plantation-turned-artsy town of 7,200 located on the northwest side of Haleakala. This hip upcountry town has a Buddhist temple, a mercantile, boutiques, and art galleries and is the best place to stock up on power bars and calories (check out the general store or take a right on Makawao Road to the family-run Pukalani Superette grocery store).

After passing through town, Baldwin Avenue turns into Olinda Road — you'll know you're on the right route when you hit Makawao's version of Heartbreak Hill, a short quad-burning climb leading out of town. Continue just over a mile until you see the red buildings and open fields of the Maui Polo Club (games and tailgating on Sundays bring more cars to the area). Here, take a very important and often-missed right-hand turn onto Hanamu Road or



PHOTOS BY KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Biking up Haleakala volcano on Maui takes riders from sea level to 10,023 feet — often a long, slow grind — but the high-speed descent only takes 60 to 90 minutes, often right through the clouds.

else you'll continue climbing in the wrong direction (a small and rustic wooden sign points to Haleakala, but it's easy to overlook — and many do).

This rolling and partially shaded route takes you a mile up to Kealahou Avenue (bear left) and then a short distance to Haleakala Highway (Route 377), a two-lane relatively well-paved winding road up the mountain.

Here, I crossed paths with the first of about eight downhill bike groups on the mountain that day. One of Maui's top attractions for decades has been biking down Haleakala. Outfitters transport riders up the mountain and drop them off with bikes, helmets, and guides. Then cyclists enjoy a virtually pedal-free ride down the volcano, enjoying sky-high views and glimpses of uphill riders moving in slow-mo.

These downhill bike tours began at

the summit of Haleakaka up until 2007, when the increasing number of bike crashes (and several deaths) led the national park to ban commercial bike tours within park boundaries. Now, one company (Bike Maui) takes riders by van to the volcano's summit for a look-see, but the actual downhill bike tour for all outfitters runs from a staging area just below the park entrance (at about 6,500 feet, 11 miles below the summit) to sea level — and, in my opinion, misses out on the most spectacular part of the ride.

Once I joined Haleakala Highway, I followed the road up through small neighborhoods with jacaranda trees and eventually stopped at Kula Lodge (on a local's recommendation) to refill my water bottles. The lodge has a restaurant and bar (tempting) and five cozy chalets that would mark the perfect

place to start the ride if I ever did it again. Just up the road past the lodge, turn left to continue on Haleakala Highway.

The journey from this point up to the park entrance took me through a pastoral landscape with fields of grass, small patches of trees, and a seemingly endless number of switchbacks so sharp that cars must slow to 15 miles per hour.

Thankfully, the clouds began to gather as they often do at this elevation, blocking the sun and cooling the air. It wasn't until I reached 6,500 feet — the staging area where I met another group of downhill riders — that I emerged above the clouds. Here, I passed through an amazing forest of eucalyptus trees, seeming so out of place in this otherwise open and rugged landscape. Hawaii's first Superintendent of Forestry, Robert Hosmer, planted eucalyptus and conifer trees here and at several other high-elevation spots in the early 1900s, for possible future development of a timber industry. Hosmer Grove Campground now has five tent campsites tucked among the trees.

Bikers must pay \$15 to enter the park at the entrance booth (credit card only as of January this year, although the ranger kindly took my cash). Just up the road at about 7,000 feet, you'll find the visitors center where you can refill water bottles and use the restrooms (the center was still closed because of COVID).

Since I had paid my entrance fee, I had to carry on, but I'll admit I did contemplate asking someone for a lift the remaining 11 miles to the summit. Hours of slow and steady grinding uphill in 95-degree humidity on a rental bike I hadn't properly fitted to myself made it a challenge to sit down. (Apparently you can do the Haleakala-simulated route on your Peloton at home — one benefit being that you can pause and come back another time if the going gets rough.)

The next few miles on wide switchbacks took me by Leleiwi and Kalahaku overlooks, by the Halemau'u Trailhead, which is the start of a challenging 9.5-mile round-trip hike to the crater floor and is not for those with height issues, and the "Summit 2 mi" sign (fantasies of hitchhiking faded once I realized I was that close). Jagged volcanic rocks and sand blanketed the landscape as far as I could see, occasionally punctuated by silver sword plants, ferns, and rugged little bushes or signs for Hawaii's native nene birds, a type of goose.

Finally, I passed by the second visitors center just a half mile below the summit. Legs cramping, I paused before the final half-mile push up a short, steep hill with views of the crater now visible off to the left. The cool breeze and views from the summit made all the climbing worth it. From the top, at 10,023 feet, I had 360-degree views of the mountain and of the nearby domes and buildings of the Haleakala Observatory. On a clear day, you can see the Big Island from here.

It had taken five hours to reach the top (not including water and photo stops) and then just under an hour and a half to reach sea level again — a virtually nonstop braking descent that barely required any pedaling and included just 45 feet of ascent on the entire ride down. Ninety high-speed minutes passing by mounds of lava rock, crossing over cattle grates, navigating 15-miles-per-hour turns, descending straight through the clouds, and wending through quiet neighborhoods with fruit stands and those purple-flowering jacaranda trees.

It had been a grueling journey, but well worth the effort. The adventure ended back at the bustling town of Paia with half a map still tucked in my pocket ready for my next unplanned Maui adventure.

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