

Global Economic Research

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On The Road Again: Personal Reflections

COVID-19 is no longer a hurdle for mobility.

By Carl Tannenbaum



It was overcast and damp on the *Calle Major* in Madrid. But I felt as if I had just stepped into bright sunshine.

The pandemic grounded most of us. During its initial months, we rarely left our homes; an occasional trip to the supermarket served as a primary source of entertainment and human

contact. Colleagues, friends and family members were reduced to two dimensions.

We all tried to soldier on, adapting to the new circumstances as best we could. Some were more successful than others. Over time, pride in resilience and the novelty of new modes of communication faded. Pandemic fatigue increased, as did pushback against public health strictures designed to contain the virus.

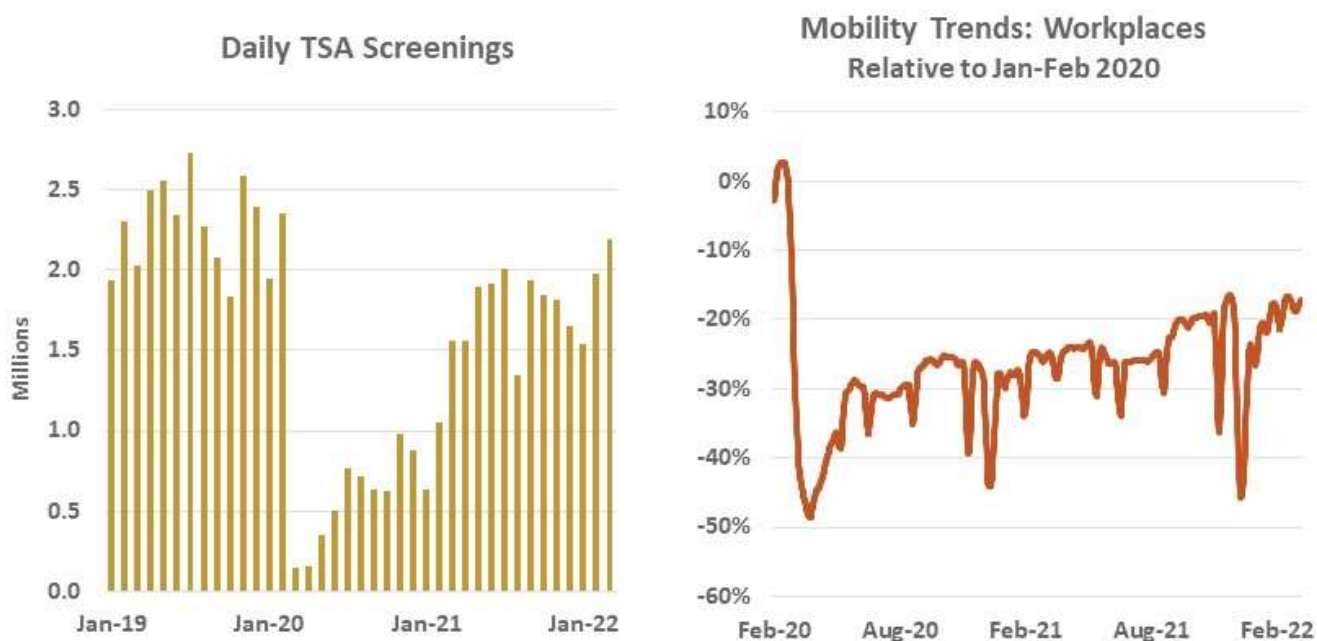
Travel programs provided a glimpse of what we had once known, and hoped to know again. I savored Stanley Tucci's [Searching for Italy](#), watching each episode several times, and hoping that I would get to eat *cacio e pepe* in Rome someday.

The cloud of COVID-19 receded from time to time, but never really went away. Many snuck out a bit more to see friends and family, or to take a short trip. But pandemic concerns hovered over those occasions.

Blessedly, COVID concern has diminished. Cases are still present, but severe cases have become truly rare in many countries. Public health restrictions have fallen, as have our reservations about getting out and about. And so I found myself in Spain, beginning my first international business trip in two years. It was liberating.

Apparently, I am not alone in expanding my range of motion. [Travel bookings](#) have soared, and people are getting back to their places of business. Those trends are positive for the economy, but also in a less tangible way.

Improving mobility will be good for the economy and good for our souls.



Sources: TSA, Bloomberg, Google, Our World in Data

During the trip, I witnessed tearful reunions and joyous celebrations. Many of us steeled ourselves to cope with the pandemic, but may not have realized the emotional deficit created by reduced contact with people and places. The opportunity to re-connect provides an opportunity to close those gaps. As we do, the feelings released are powerful.

I had a Victor Hugo moment at the *Mercat de San Miguel*. My first bite of *patatas bravas* transported me to trips of the past, and made me hungry for new memories. I hope we'll all get to enjoy a cornucopia of bright experiences in the months ahead.

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