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JUNE 25, 2020







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# Take a Virtual Vacation

SOPHIE PANZER | JE STAFF



**Micaela Pavoncello leads a tour in Rome before the pandemic.**  
Courtesy of Micaela Pavoncello

HAKINMHAN / iStock / Getty Images Plus

**T**he coronavirus pandemic has given rise to a new form of international travel that allows tourists to skip the lines and the jet lag.

Armed with computers rather than fanny packs, intrepid souls hire local guides and journey to faraway places from the comfort of their living rooms.

This is virtual tourism — and it may be here to stay.

Participants pay experts to educate them through videos and slideshows of destinations that are temporarily out of reach. They are not intended to replace travel, but to provide entertainment and social connection while people are stuck in their home countries.

For those who miss visiting Israel, Jewish National Fund-USA launched JNF Virtual Travel & Tours, which are virtual missions complete with Zoom buses and cocktail hours.

“A few weeks ago, my wife Lauren mentioned to me the JNF partners love to get together for missions to Israel, and with COVID-19 we miss that,” Jewish National Fund-USA President Sol Lizerbram said. “She said, ‘What if we have a virtual mission to Israel? We’ll all get on a virtual bus, we’ll hire a professional tour guide and for a week we’ll go on a tour of Israel.’”

The missions are led by a guide in Israel and at least one JNF-USA staff member who is local to the “departing” region. Each Zoom bus can hold 22 households sharing a computer screen.

Tours begin at 4 p.m. in participants’ local time zone and run for an hour, during which they visit three sites. The guide presents images, videos, stories and cultural insight while answering questions from the audience. At 5 p.m., people take a break to get ready for dinner or cocktails with their fellow travelers. At 6 p.m., everyone reconvenes to schmooze on Zoom.

A \$50 registration fee covers five days of tours, beginning on

Monday and culminating in a Shabbat gathering on Friday.

“It’s not the same as being there, obviously, but it is fun to go on the tour and to have dinner or appetizers together,” Lizerbram said.

JNF-USA is also assisting Israeli artisans and small businesses hurting from the lack of tourism. Participants looking for a souvenir from their virtual travels can buy wine, cheese, jewelry and art from JNF-USA’s online Mitzvah Marketplace and have it shipped to their homes.

According to Lizerbram, the trips are a hit and attracted a variety of audiences. Some have been to Israel as many as 30 times. Others have never visited. Many had trips scheduled this year that were canceled or now seem uncertain.

“Now synagogues are requesting buses, Jewish day schools are requesting buses, Jewish camps are requesting buses; it’s sort of become quite a phenomenon,” he said.

Samantha van Adelsberg, JNF-USA’s Eastern Pennsylvania director, said the organization has already hosted 14 virtual trips to Israel and signed up more than 800 participants across the country.

“The good problem on our end is we have so many tours and so many regions interested in sending Zoom buses to Israel we almost don’t have enough responses,” she said.

JNF-USA does not take any of the money raised by the virtual missions.

“Funds go directly to the guides who have been out for work for almost three months,” van Adelsberg said.

For tour guide Yocheved Kolchin, the program has been a way to earn steady part-time income. She got her tour guide license at the end of January, just weeks before Israel’s tourism industry shut down.

“A lot of people are out of work right now, and we don’t get



compensated,” she said. “For example, I had Birthright trips I was supposed to guide this summer, and I don’t get compensation from the government for those. If you’re an independent freelancer you can get a grant from the government based on your income from 2018, but I wasn’t an independent freelancer in 2018. This just sounded like a great opportunity.”

Her virtual tours start on an El Al plane, sans crying babies and airsickness. She takes her visitors to classic sites like the Old City in Jerusalem, even a boat ride on the Dead Sea. She has also introduced viewers to lesser-known places.

“One of the benefits of doing virtual tours is we get to visit places people wouldn’t put on an itinerary,” she said. She has shown audiences Timnah, an ancient site four hours from Jerusalem that is usually too hot for visitors during the summer, and Rosh HaNikra, a seafront with white cliffs and hidden grottoes on Israel’s border with Lebanon.

She said the tours have been a success.

“The world is changing so much lately, and it’s really inspiring to see how people are meeting the challenges. People are still committed to visiting Israel,” she said.

Israel is not the only destination available for virtual tourism. Guides, travel companies and cultural sites are offering similar experiences in European and Asian countries.

Philadelphia-based tour agency The Tour Guy started planning virtual tours after Italy, one of its main destinations, sent international travelers home due to the coronavirus in early March.

“We saw this as an opportunity to innovate,” Director of Finance and Administration Josh Raab said.

The tours are held on the online webinar platform BigMarker and are accessible through the company’s website. Tourists can learn about gladiators in ancient Rome, Carnival in Venice and Napoleon’s reign in Paris from local guides, with prices ranging from \$14 to \$22. Cooking classes with local chefs are also available. Participants can interact with guides and instructors

by typing questions in a chat box.

“The difference between us and a 15-minute video is (our tours) are interactive. Our presenters can stop what they’re doing to answer questions from the audience,” Raab said.

Tours of the Colosseum, the Vatican, the Paris Catacombs and the Louvre museum are usually the most popular, but the low overhead cost of virtual tours has allowed the company to branch out.

“We are able to give tours where we normally would not have a presence,” Raab said. “We give a tour in Egypt and a cooking course with a chef in Bhutan. We’re expanding from our core of Italy, France and Spain, and now we’re in Ireland, India, Egypt, and we’re planning to start in Israel soon.”

Jewish Heritage Europe, a website featuring news and information concerning Jewish monuments and cultural sites in Europe, has curated virtual tours and exhibits from various sources.

The site, a project of the Rothschild Foundation, is run by Ruth Ellen Gruber, author of “Jewish Heritage Travel: A Guide to Eastern Europe.” Originally from Philadelphia, she now lives in Europe and has spent the coronavirus lockdown in Italy.

“Museums and other operations have been creating virtual tours and digital recreations and online exhibits for a long time. Since no one can travel, there’s been an explosion of digital experiences of all sorts,” Gruber said. “JHE is an online operation, so I just wanted to bring more useful and expansive content to people who were stuck at home. People want to be entertained, to see beautiful things.”

She started in early March with a series of virtual tours of 11 European towns that included digital recreations of buildings where people could learn local history. After getting a positive response from visitors, she continued to post more virtual experiences in Italy, Hungary, Spain, Germany, the Czech

See Virtual, **Page 8**



▲ American tourists take a virtual tour of Rome led by guide Micaela Pavoncello.

Courtesy of Micaela Pavoncello



# Virtual

Continued from Page 7



▲ Tour guide Yocheved Kolchin shows the ancient city of Tzipori in Israel.

Courtesy of Jewish National Fund-USA

► Yocheved Kolchin takes her audience on a virtual cable car ride in Rosh HaNikra, Israel.

Republic and other countries.

In addition to cemeteries and art exhibitions, site visitors can explore “Atlas of Memory Maps.” Mounted by Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre in Lublin, Poland, the online exhibit features maps of pre-war cities, towns and shtetls drawn from former inhabitants’ memories after World War II.

The JHE website also hosts an exhibit of papercut art by the Polish artist Monika Krajewska commemorating Jewish sites that were destroyed during the Holocaust.

“They’re really fabulous, we got a good response,” Gruber said of the artwork.

She said the challenge for tour guides and organizations is monetizing those experiences to help sustain workers in the tourism industry during coronavirus shutdowns.

Micaela Pavoncello, a tour guide based in Rome, used her network of contacts from in-person tours to adapt.

“I have a lot of fans, and I knew something like this can work. When the pandemic started, I started contacting my good contacts at AIPAC, JCCs, synagogues, people who could help me (by) spreading the voice. I started giving these lectures on Zoom and people love it. I did it for a couple of synagogues, they started booking me for Mother’s Day. It’s such a connection for me, and I like it,” she said.

Her in-person tours focused on forming personal connections with her clients and capturing their attention with storytelling. This has helped in making the transition to virtual experiences.

“It’s not just a question of carbonara and fettuccine. People want to learn and put their feet in our shoes and that’s what I provide,” she said.

Many tours of European Jewish heritage sites focus on the tragedy of the Holocaust, but Pavoncello’s tours span the 2,000-year history of Jews in Rome.

“Our history is very different from those who immigrated from Eastern Europe 200 years ago. The Shoah is a horrible part of our history, but it’s not the only part,” she said.

Pavoncello plans to offer a live tour inside the Jewish Museum of Rome once it reopens to the public. She is also offering online kosher cooking classes with chefs from local restaurants.

These classes focus on simpler foods than the classes she is used to hosting. Attempting to fry artichokes in the Roman Jewish style at home without an expert’s in-person help could be a recipe for disaster.



“We are going to make gnocchi, easy things anybody can do — bruschetta, orange and fennel salad, all very easy things,” she said.

The virtual tours have allowed her to continue to do a job she loves during Italy’s coronavirus lockdown. She didn’t realize how much she would miss it until she was stuck at home.

“I really believe in my job almost as a mission. I’m not even such an observant Jew, but the pride, the sense of the belonging, the sense of traditions, they are fundamental,” she said.

Virtual tourism may continue in some form even when people feel safe traveling again.

Raab said the response to The Tour Guy’s programs has been positive, with demand surging during Mother’s Day as family members who couldn’t be together in person sought to share new memories and experiences. The company will likely continue to offer them even if travel can begin again in late 2020 or early 2021.

“We’re getting nothing but great feedback,” he said. “We can turn this into an educational tool. If physical touring kicks back off, virtual touring will be here to stay as a product we’re offering.”

Van Adelsberg sees virtual missions to Israel as another way to keep people connected to the country, particularly those who are older and unable to weather long flights.

“The response that we’ve gotten has been so fantastic, we’re probably going to continue doing these tours. It’s a really unique opportunity to get to experience the country without the jet lag,” she said.

Pavoncello wants to continue her virtual tours to connect with people are unable to travel due to physical or financial limitations, including students and the elderly.

“This is what excites me the most: Every time I meet somebody I get to learn a lot. It’s an exchange, and it’s good for everybody. It’s a new era, an era where we’re far but we’ve got to get closer,” she said. ●

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# Jewish-Themed TV: 10 Shows to Watch This Summer

ANDY GOTLIEB | JE STAFF

**W**e're supposedly in a golden age of television, with more outlets than ever, not to mention more quality offerings than at any point in history.

And Jews are well-represented on TV, with Israeli shows, Jewish-themed documentaries and plenty of programs that feature Jewish actors or obviously Jewish characters, even if the content often is relatively secular.

While social distancing restrictions are starting to loosen, it's likely many summer activities will be curtailed, leading us to have more time in front of what former FCC head Newton Minow once dubbed a "vast wasteland."

In no particular order, here are some shows to check out.

## **"Grace and Frankie"/"The Kominsky Method" (Netflix)**

Both shows feature plenty of *alter kocker*-themed humor that makes for perfect summertime viewing. It's also a pleasure to watch old pros like Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin (Jewish!), Martin Sheen and Sam Waterston (not a Jew, but plays one in the show!) in the former and Michael Douglas and Alan Arkin (both Jewish!) in the latter clearly enjoying themselves still performing. And Jewish fingerprints are all over both shows.

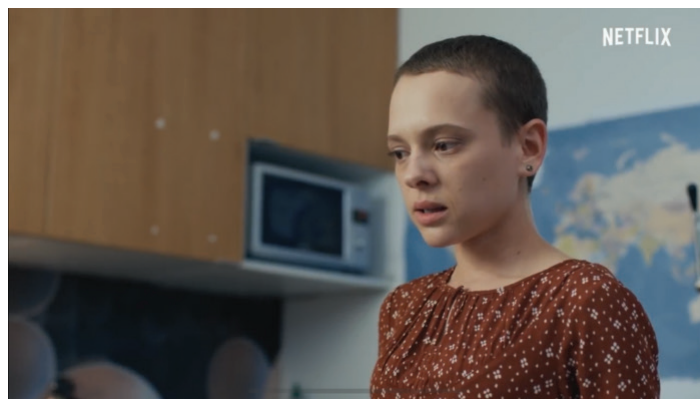
"Grace and Frankie" is essentially an updated "Odd Couple," while "The Kominsky Method" is more akin to "Grumpy Old Men." Despite the inherent silliness in both programs, some of the universal issues plaguing seniors — death, having to urinate frequently, memory loss, being unable to get off the toilet — are dealt with both humorously and poignantly.

It's also fun when older guest stars pop in. Wait, is that Ann-Margret? Hey, that's Sam Elliott!

## **"The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" (Amazon Prime)**

This much-lauded show draws kudos for a hefty dose of nostalgia as well as its portrayal of late 1950s/early 1960s Jewish housewife Miriam "Midge" Maisel who turns to comedy after her husband leaves her for his secretary.

There are Jewish themes galore and Rachel Brosnahan, a non-Jew, knocks it out of the park, mixing doses of sass and humility. The supporting cast is stellar, too.



▲ "Unorthodox"

Netflix

## **"Unorthodox" (Netflix)**

This four-part miniseries debuted earlier this year to much acclaim, providing a searing look into the life of a young Satmar woman who abandons an unhappy arranged marriage and lowly status in her Brooklyn community.

The thing is, protagonist Esther Shapiro (superbly portrayed by Shira Haas) doesn't know what she's looking for. She heads to Berlin, makes friends, sort of reconciles with her outcast mother and begins to figure out what she really wants — but her husband and a cousin are hot on her trail to bring her back to the United States.

The attention to detail helps elevate "Unorthodox" into elite territory.

## **"Shtisel" (Netflix)**

Like "Unorthodox," "Shtisel" focuses on the *haredi* Orthodox community, although the setting is the Geula neighborhood of Jerusalem instead of Brooklyn.

The Israeli-created program explores the life Rabbi Shulem Shtisel, as well as his family, which lives in a strict religious community. When norms are violated, it creates conflict within the family.

Some have described the show as an anthropological portrayal of a mostly inaccessible society.

## **"Curb Your Enthusiasm" (HBO)**

Not much needs to be said about "Curb," but Larry David fans or George Costanza fans (really just Larry David fans in disguise) will likely enjoy the most-recent season of Larry's foibles coloring his life. Leon Black (J.B. Smoove) is outrageous as ever. And Jeff Greene (Jeff Garlin) being mistaken for Harvey Weinstein was a highlight, too.

## **"The Devil Next Door" (Netflix)**

This five-part documentary about John "Ivan the Terrible" Demjanjuk, the suspected concentration camp guard, details his highly publicized trial a decade ago.

While the documentary is thorough, it's a bit repetitive at times. Still, the testimony of survivors who identify him remains moving, even if there are some potential doubts about his guilt. (Even so, the since-deceased Demjanjuk is hardly a sympathetic figure.)

Perhaps the most salient point the documentary makes is that the passage of time blurs a lot of lines, making finding the truth a much more difficult task.

## **"Fauda" (Netflix)**

Unlike the other shows on this list, this is more of an action-thriller program. Additionally, anecdotal evidence shows that "Fauda" is a polarizing program — either you really like it or you can't stand it.

"Fauda" focuses on Doron (Lior Raz), commander of the Israel Defense Forces' Mista'arvim unit. Doron and his soldiers are trying to track down "The Panther," a Hamas arch-terrorist played by Hisham Sulliman.



Mista'arvim believes it had killed The Panther more than a year prior to the show starting but, as with all good thrillers, not everything is as it seems, and all sorts of twists and turns follow.

Fans of fictional characters such as Brad Thor's Scott Harvath or Daniel Silva's Gabriel Allon might enjoy "Fauda."

### "Schitt's Creek" (Netflix, Hulu)

A classic fish-out-of-water tale, "Schitt's Creek" details the life of the Rose family, a once-wealthy family forced to relocate to a hick town called Schitt's Creek they once bought as a joke.

Humor abounds as the Roses adapt to living in a cheap motel with town residents as quirky as they are. Having always-entertaining SCTVs alums Eugene Levy and Catherine O'Hara as stars certainly helps and the rest of the cast, including Chris Elliott, shines.

Although the Roses are Jewish, that isn't a focal point of the six seasons; however, show creators Levy and his son Dan, who also stars in the show, are Jewish and viewers will pick up on subtle Jewish elements.

Note: The first five seasons of the show are on Netflix, but the recently completed final season won't be on the platform until the fall.



▲ "The Plot Against America"

HBO

### "The Plot Against America" (HBO)

Phillip Roth's acclaimed novel of the same name seemed like a perfect candidate for movie or miniseries treatment, and this six-part HBO offering delivered, providing appointment television during the pandemic's early days.

"The Plot Against America" prevents an alternative universe in 1940, with aviation hero (and rabid xenophobe) Charles Lindbergh defeating Franklin Delano Roosevelt for the presidency, hurtling the nation onto a much more fascist path.

As you might expect, the nation's Jews feel the resulting impact, with the action presented via a working-class Jewish family in Newark.

Excellent character actors, including Winona Ryder, David Krumholtz and John Turturro, to name a few, raise the overall quality of "The Plot Against America."

**Honorable mention:** "The Goldbergs" (ABC), "Hunters" (Amazon Prime), "The Spy" (Netflix) and "Broad City" (Amazon Prime). •

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# A Grandparents Guide to Smartphone Gaming

ERIC SCHUCHT | JE STAFF

**I**t's day whatever in these uncertain times and you're bored. You planned on spending the weekend with the grandkids at the shore house, but that's not so possible in this COVID-19 world.

So, what to do?

Maybe give video games a try? But dropping hundreds of dollars to set up a Nintendo Switch or a Playstation 4 is a lot to spend all at once. And set-up can be a hassle. Luckily, there are thousands of games accessible at the tips of people's fingers on a device many already own.

So here's a list of games to pass the time while sheltering in place. Each is available for either a smartphone or tablet computer on Google Play or the Apple App Store. The majority of the titles on this list are free, but include ads and in-app purchases in order to play additional levels. I've tried to stick to games that are simple, accessible and fun for those who didn't grow up with video games. Enjoy!

## Tetris

The Cold War may have ended, but Mother Russia's legacy survives: Tetris — the solitaire of video games. From graphic calculators to towering skyscraper displays, if it runs on electricity, chances are it can play Tetris. This classic is literally everywhere, so it's no surprise to find it on your phone and tablet as well.

This puzzle game has you stack falling blocks to eliminate them by completely filling a row and racking up points. But watch out, because enough wrong moves could lead the stack to reach the top — and then it's game over. Tetris is a fairly simple design that's remained popular even after all these decades. Forewarning: The Tetris theme is super-catchy, so be prepared to find yourself humming along.

## Candy Crush Saga / Bejeweled Classic

A bus ride hasn't gone by where I haven't seen somebody playing Candy Crush. Or maybe it was Bejeweled. I'm gonna be



fizkes / iStock / Getty Images Plus

honest: If you were to ask me the difference between Bejeweled and Candy, I couldn't tell you. What I can say is Bejeweled is the forefather of all match-three puzzle games.

Get a table full of mismatched icons, put three of them together to earn points and bam, you've just made one of the most-played games on the market. Candy Crush improved upon the formula by making those icons candy, so quite the innovation. Either of these games is worth a try, at the very least to pass some time while traveling.

## Angry Birds 2

For some reason, my dad's a huge fan of this one. Angry Birds may be the only game on this list to get its own movie (at the time of publication). It's on T-shirts, toys and even a cartoon from Finland streaming on Netflix and Hulu.

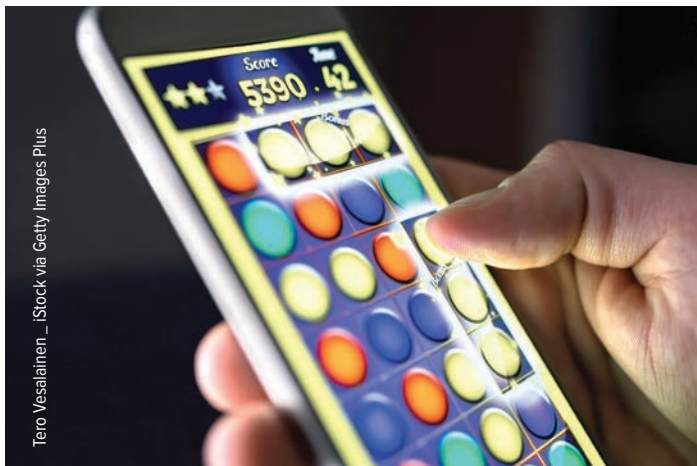
But what about the game? In summary, you play as a group of various birds — who are mad at a hoard of green pigs — for stealing their eggs. Now, with your trusty slingshot, the player must fire these birds-turned-projectiles at jungle gym towers constructed by the pigs.

After reading what I wrote, I can say this definitely has the most out-there premise on this list, but it works. It's fun. There are tons of levels and it's worth a try. Hey, at the very least, my dad approves.

## Plants vs. Zombies

Batman vs. the Joker. It's a pretty weird match up, right? Bats and clowns have no historical pretense to be at odds with one another, but it's a thing now. That's Plants vs Zombies. In this game, the player uses a variety of plants — like the sunflowers, mushrooms and cherries — to eliminate wave after wave of zombie enemies.

Why must plans and zombies fight? Who knows, but it sure is fun. It's a cute, simple tower defense game that's one of the more complicated games on this list, but quite rewarding to master.



Tero Vesalainen - iStock via Getty Images Plus



### Pokemon Go

I have to admit I was a little bit iffy on whether or not to recommend this one. This game does require you to go outside and head to places normally filled with people. But it should be safe if social distancing is kept in mind.

The summer that Pokemon GO came out was magical. The streets of my college town were littered with people running around with phones in hand trying to capture invisible monsters. I remember how dozens of people would camp out on the lawn in front of the veterans dance hall in their foldable chairs and congregate at one of the game's hot spots.

Those days are gone, but the game is still popular and has been updated frequently. Players walk around town to collect items, capture monsters and fight other people's monsters. It's difficult to play in rural areas, but a jam in the city.

Just make sure to stay six feet apart.

### 2048

An Italian teen designed this game over a weekend as a test and it has since gone on to become a viral hit. 2048 has players slide numbered blocks together to merge and combine their numbers. Only blocks of the same number can combine, otherwise, they just bounce into each other.

The goal is to rack up the highest number possible before running out of free space. It's simple to learn, difficult to master and a great way to kill small amounts of time. I would say 2048 is the simplest game on this list and definitely worth a try.

### Mister Smith & His Adventures

If you were a fan of early computer games from the '70s and '80s, then you're probably familiar with the text adventure genre. It's like a mixture between a book and game, where the player chooses the actions of the protagonist on a grand adventure. Back then, players had to type out commands at random, but Mister Smith is much more straightforward.

Players select from several prompts of decisions Mister Smith can make, from clever to dumb. Players will also answer trivia questions to progress the story. Whatever happens to Mister Smith is in your hands. •

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# Summer Movies, Had Me a Blast ...

ANDY GOTLIEB | JE STAFF



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**P**eople equate all sorts of thing with summer: the shore, water ice, first romances, cheesy novels, fireworks, swimming pools and baseball, to name a few.

But don't forget about movies.

During a recent Jewish Exponent staff meeting, the conversation morphed into a discussion about movies — specifically ones that reminded us of summer. We all came up with some pretty good selections (or so we thought) and present them for your consideration. No doubt there's plenty of room for debate.

**Liz Spikol, editor-in-chief**

## **"Dirty Dancing" (1987)**

No other summer movie so evocatively conjures a particular moment in Ashkenazi American life — when the Catskills and the Borscht Belt were king; when summer vacations were taken as a family, before the heyday of sending kids to overnight camp; when dating a non-Jewish blond-haired, blue-eyed boy felt like a fabulously illicit adventure.

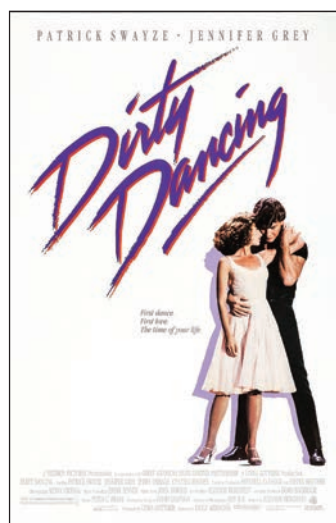
Based on summers at the famed Jewish resort Kellerman's, "Dirty Dancing" tells the story of a Jewish girl called Baby (Jennifer Grey) who finds love with a hunky non-Jewish dance instructor (Patrick Swayze), but not before they're both drawn into a web of drama regarding secret abortions and class conflict. These days the film is mostly remembered for the culminating dance scene in which Swayze lifts a gossamer Grey into the air, and for being as cheesy as '80s films could get. But it's also a window into a vanished summer world.

**Andy Gotlieb, managing editor**

## **"Grease" (1978)**

"Grease" remains the word more than 40 years after its initial release — I first saw it at sleepaway camp during its original release the summer of 1978.

The film screams summer, complete with its sing-along songs, hefty doses of nostalgia and eye candy in the form of Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta. The plot is frothy enough that not a whole lot of brainpower is required to comprehend it, making it perfect for June, July and August.



Vestron Pictures



Paramount Pictures

For those who've been in a cave for decades, here's the plot: Boy and girl (from Australia) meet over the summer. When school rolls around in the fall, they unexpectedly meet again (she was supposed to go back to Australia). Trouble ensues because she's a "good girl" and he's a "bad boy." Various attempts to reconcile occur. A happy ending wraps things up.

All that said, there are a few peculiar things about "Grease."

How about that cast of supposed high school students, many of whom have crow's feet? Rizzo (Stockard Channing) was 34!

Or, for such a light-hearted movie, how some of the lyrics in "Greased Lightning" wouldn't be out of place in a Lil Wayne song?

And how about the anti-girl power message that women should change themselves to win a man?

Yeah, I realize I'm overthinking it. Just enjoy the movie.

**Jesse Bernstein, books editor and staff writer**

## **"Midsommar" (2019)**

If horror movies aren't really your thing, the end of this





A24



Disney

sentence may be where you exit this ride. If you're still with us, I implore you to watch "Midsommar," last summer's terrifying trip to the most horrifying locale imaginable: the picturesque Swedish countryside.

Still reeling from a traumatic event that I won't reveal here, Dani (Florence Pugh) decides to join her boyfriend, Christian (Jack Reynor), as he and his friends follow a Swedish acquaintance to his village's once-every-90-years midsummer celebration. Things do not go as planned as the American travelers behave poorly, turn on one another and learn more about the festival.

At the same time, Dani comes to notice increasingly concerning things about Christian (he doesn't remember her birthday, for one). Get ready for something called an *ättestupa*, as well as close-up shots of severed and mutilated things that, generally speaking, you don't want in such condition. Great score, too.

**Sophie Panzer, staff writer**

### "High School Musical 2" (2007)

As someone who spent a good part of 1997 living in a uterus, this movie's release in 2007 meant my childhood was profoundly shaped by the "High School Musical" franchise.

Nostalgia aside, "High School Musical 2" is the perfect movie to revive the part of your soul that died during week eight of quarantine and make it vaguely excited for summer again.

Choreographed and directed by Kenny Ortega of "Dirty Dancing" fame, the film's premise is simple: After proving that kids from different cliques can be friends, the East High Wildcats are all set to enjoy summer when the reality of earning money for college sets in.

Everyone somehow gets jobs at the same country club, which is owned by the wealthy parents of Ryan (Lucas Grabeel) and Sharpay (Ashley Tisdale). Tensions flare along class lines as the teens prepare for rival performances at the club talent show, but as per Disney requirements, everyone is friends again by the final number.

Every song in the soundtrack is a bop. Opening number "What Time is It?" and rich-girl anthem "Fabulous," will be stuck in your head for three weeks. While leading couple Troy (Zac Efron) and Gabriella (Vanessa Hudgens) have the chemistry of damp socks, the unacknowledged but undeniable sexual tension between Chad (Corbin Bleu) and Ryan in "I Don't Dance" makes up for it.

The film is also an opportunity to congratulate yourself for surviving the fashion disaster that was the early 2000s. Low-rise jeans! Striped polos! The color aqua! ●

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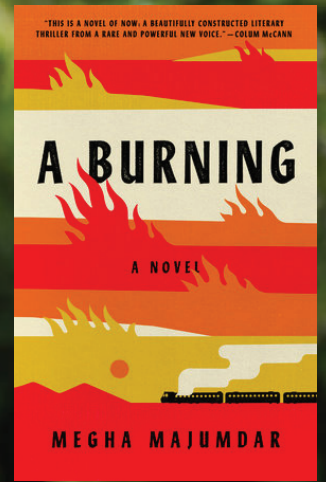


# Summer Books Preview

JESSE BERNSTEIN | JE STAFF



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Courtesy of Knopf



Courtesy of Penguin Press

It's summer 2020, and you know what that means: sitting quietly by yourself inside, leaving your phone in another room and reading.

It's certainly not the summer that we anticipated, but that doesn't mean a good book can't take you somewhere else for a few hours. Here's a preview of some of the summer's hottest new reads.

## "A Burning"

Megha Majumdar (June 2)

Majumdar's debut novel tells the story of three Indians — Jivan, PT Sir and Lovely — caught up in the complex web of politics, class and corruption. Jivan must try to clear her name after being accused of committing a terrorist act, and Lovely, the only one who could exonerate her, can't do it. Meanwhile, PT Sir's ambitions depend on Jivan's failure.

## "Death in Her Hands"

Ottessa Moshfegh (June 23)

Moshfegh, 39, might be the best young novelist in America. "Death in Her Hands," her latest novel, delayed for a few months but now here at last, is the story of an elderly woman who thinks that she may have discovered a murder. Her last novel, "My Year of Rest and Relaxation," grabbed the publicity, but check out her novella, "McGlue," first.

## "Cool for America: Stories"

Andrew Martin (July 7)

Andrew Martin writes stories about young

people that are sad and trying hard not to be. "Cool for America," his first collection, borrows some of the characters from his well-regarded debut novel, "Early Work," for stories about people who doing their best not to just give up.

## "Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir"

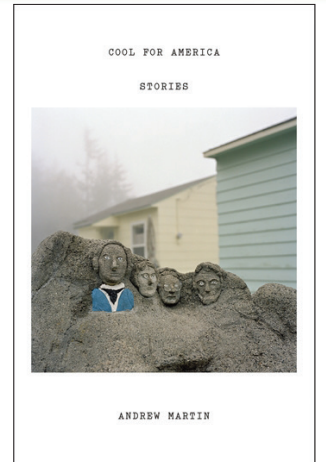
Natasha Trethewey (July 28)

Today, Trethewey is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, and has served as the United States poet laureate. But when she was 19, she was grieving her mother, murdered by her stepfather. Trethewey retraces her mother's steps through the segregated South to that awful day on Memorial Drive, giving a history of her own childhood along the way.

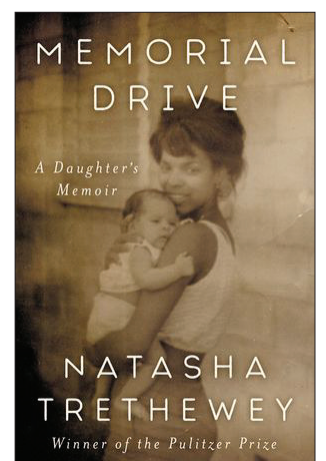
## "The Wild Laughter"

Caoilinn Hughes (July 30)

If you follow publishing trends closely, it seems that new literary histories of the devastation of the 2007-2008 financial crises are published every week. Hughes, however, sets her story in her native Ireland, for a change of pace. Her novel asks a deceptively simple question: What do people do when they feel they have nothing to lose?

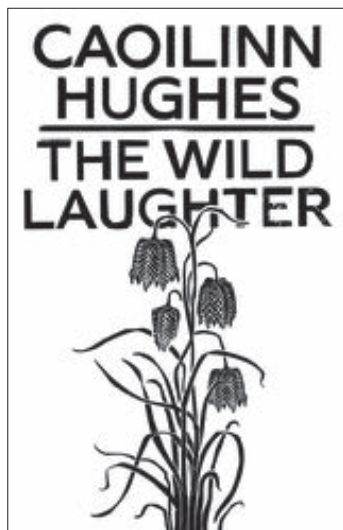


Courtesy of Farrar, Straus and

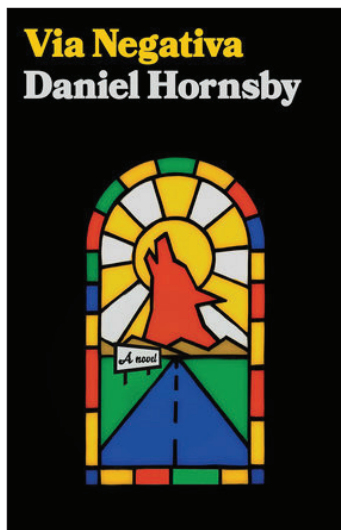


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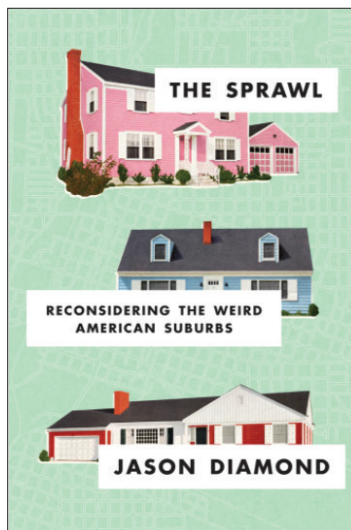




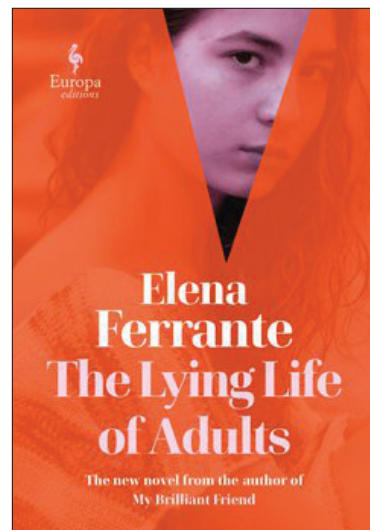
Courtesy of Oneworld



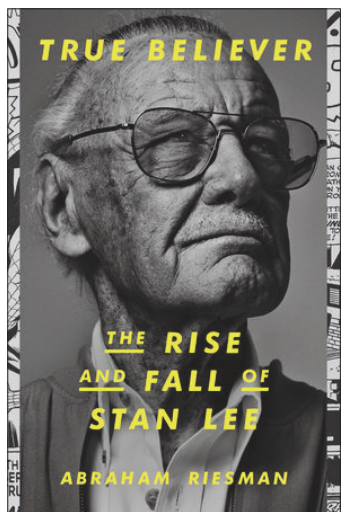
Courtesy of Knopf



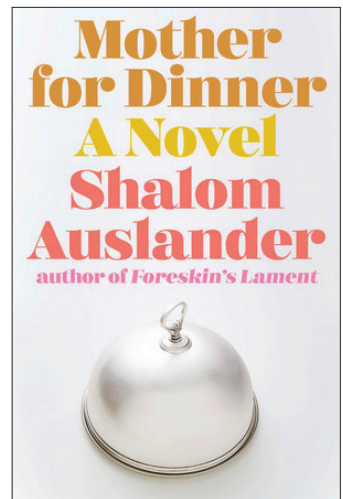
Courtesy of Coffee House Press



Courtesy of Europa Editions



Courtesy of Crown



Courtesy of Riverhead Books

### "Via Negativa"

Daniel Hornsby (Aug. 11)

The newly homeless Father Dan, kicked out of his conservative diocese, is now a monk on the move, living out of his Camry as he travels the country searching for peace. He's on his way to finding it, he believes, before he witnesses the vehicular injuring of a fox, who becomes his companion on his increasingly weird journey across America.

### "The Sprawl"

Jason Diamond (Aug. 25)

The suburbs are not typically considered to be incubators of uniquely American art and culture; in fact, many stories about artists with suburban origins typically posit that their success came in spite of their surroundings. In "The Sprawl," Diamond seeks to challenge the narrative that the suburbs are the place "where art happens despite: despite the conformity, the emptiness, the sameness."

### "The Lying Life of Adults"

Elena Ferrante (Sept. 1)

Ferrante's Neapolitan novels, translated from Italian,

have brought her fame the world over (you can watch an adaptation of the best-known one, "My Brilliant Friend," on HBO, and this newest novel will be adapted for Netflix). The pseudonymous writer is frequently listed in discussions regarding future Nobel Prize winners; we advise trying to get on the bandwagon as early as you can. Ferrante's newest novel takes place in Naples yet again, but with a new cast of characters.

### "Mother for Dinner"

Shalom Auslander (Sept. 22)

Upon the death of his mother, Seventh Seltzer, a "Cannibal-American," is forced to confront the community tradition he'd always dreaded: He has to eat her. Seventh has to contend with the fact that the Seltzer family is flung all over country; what's he going to do, eat her by himself? Cannibal-Americans, a once thriving ethnic group, have more or less assimilated, and only their Uncle Ishmael still knows how to undertake the eating ritual. If this insane premise works for you, give Auslander a try.

### "True Believer"

Abraham Riesman, (Sept. 29)

Whatever you love or hate Marvel Comics and the movies they've spawned, there is no denying the massive effect they've had on the American cultural landscape. Riesman, who frequently writes on Jewish subjects, delivers a biography of Stan Lee, the man behind it all. It's a serious look from someone who holds an abiding love for Lee's work, without letting it blind a critical, journalistic eye. •

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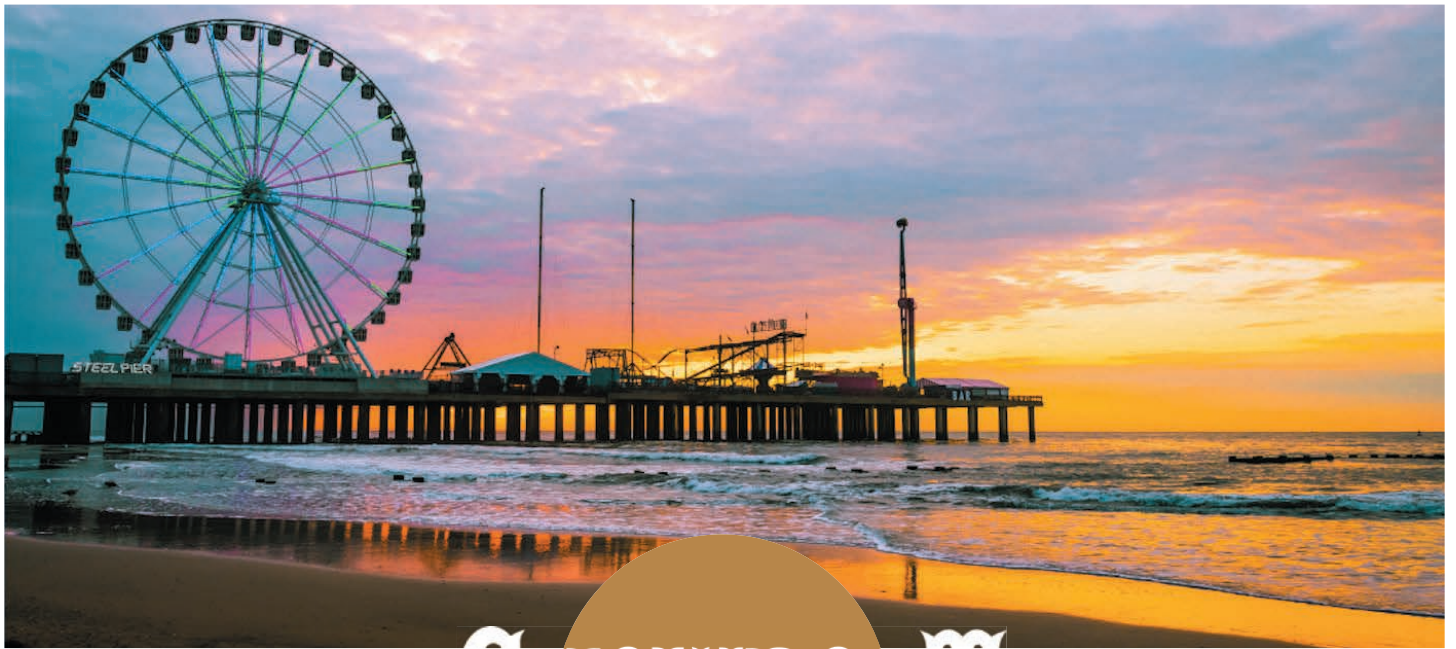
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