

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:12	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:19	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. There’s that thing where if you spend 10,000 hours doing something, you become a master and I’m not gonna do the math on this, but I feel pretty confident saying Rick Steves has mastered travel—particularly European travel. More specifically, ways to travel around Europe that are fun, practical, insightful, and don’t involve—you know—whatever. Making silly faces at palace guards. For over 20 years now, he’s hosted the public television show <i>Rick Steves’ Europe</i> . Before that, it was <i>Travels in Europe with Rick Steves</i> for almost a decade. He’s got a cheerful, charming and—let’s be frank—slightly dorky presence on TV. Forgive me, Rick. That’s part of the charm. Rick Steves is eager to talk without about how to beat crowds on the Champs-Élysées or what time of year is best for a visit to Milan. On your flight across the Atlantic, he’ll stress the importance of drinking lots of fluids and will remind you to get up and walk around the cabin as often as you can. It’s good for your circulation. On top of the TV show, Rick hosts a podcast and a radio show about travel. He writes travel books. He organizes tours all over the continent. And since around March of last year, he hasn’t been able to do any of that stuff. He’s been away from Europe for the longest time in his decades of covering it. So, he’s instead taken to finding ways to bring Europe home to the United States: cooking, reading up on history, looking back at fond memories of travels past. So, we decided to bring him on the show and to interview him, pair him with another public media legend: our friend Ray Suarez. It’s a clash of PBS titans. Before we get into that, let’s hear a little bit of a recent streaming event he hosted called <i>Monday Night Travel</i> . Here, Rick is talking about some of his favorite European dishes.
00:02:21	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:22	Clip	Clip	Rick Steves: Something we didn’t anticipate when we started this Monday Night Travel plan was that it would evolve into sort of a shared meal and every week, I’m surprising myself. I’m getting into the cooking! And I wanna share with you what I’m gonna be eating tonight. And I—we put the menu on our information so people can kind of eat with us, but look at this beautiful, beautiful plate. <i>[Laughs.]</i> I cooked this! My kids are saying, “Who is this man?” I cooked this myself! It’s nothing fancy, but it sure was fun to put it together. And this is a Danish meal. This is called smørrebrød. It means “butter on bread”. Smørrebrød. It’s open-faced sandwiches. And all over Scandinavia, you’ll find these open-faced sandwiches. You go into a shop, and you just choose what you like!

00:03:07	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:03:08	Ray Suarez	Host	Rick Steves, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:03:10	Rick Steves	Guest	Well, thanks, Ray! And listening to that, I just felt like an enthusiastic little kid who somehow just learned how to cook! <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:03:17	Ray	Host	Well, let's be clear—you weren't much of a cook before, were you?
00:03:20	Rick	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> No. This—you know that's—I call it a corona bonus. I'm a travel guy. I spend 100 days a year in Europe. I love my work. I'm writing guidebooks, making public television—TV shows and leading tours and suddenly I haven't been on an airplane for well over a year. And I just decided at the outbreak of this to play the cards you're dealt. You know? I always tell my tour groups, you know, if it's not to your liking, change your liking. <i>[Laughs.]</i> And I've changed my liking.
00:03:47	Ray	Host	Were there a lot of irons in the fire when the world shut down? Things that sort of stopped in the middle?
00:03:53	Rick	Guest	Oh yeah. I mean, I had—I had 100 tour guides from every country in Europe in my living room having an amazing party the week that all of the sudden, in that retirement home or senior center in Kirkland, that the first cases of COVID were being reported. It was just—it's just a 20-minute drive from my house! And we had just finished a week-long celebration—our annual summit of all the tour guides. We fly them into Seattle every January—or February—and we have a big huddle, and we were just having a big party. We were gonna go home and have the best year of touring ever, you know? 2019, we took 30,000 people on 1,500 tours and we were already almost sold out for the next year.

And they flew home. We were all euphoric. And then I look at this—I'm looking out at Puget Sound, here, from my—my window at home and it's like a tsunami came in. And it just submerged everything. I remember the next couple of months was busy in reverse. We had to send back 24,000 deposits for tours.

[Ray expresses awe.]

We had to—I had to keep my staff of 100 employed, somehow. I had 100 guides in Europe that are now not able to do their work. And it was—I mean, you know, it's—you think—every time, "Strange." During this last year—I just—every couple of days, it occurs to me, "Oh, that industry's been in crisis also." And, you know, I'm focused into tourism. We lead bus tours, and we write guidebooks and, you know, it's devastating from a travel point of view. Our guidebooks, Ray, were right up to date. These were the labor of love over 30 years of researching. I've got 50 different guidebooks on Europe, and they're all based on little moms' and pops'. You know? The entrepreneurial ventures that I think make travel so much fun—to connect with these little guest houses and B&Bs and cafés and restaurants that are the dream of a husband and wife. And it's just—it saddens me to think of how many of these works of love, you know, labors of love are in crisis now and what's gonna be a big, emotional thing for me is to go back to Europe once we get through this and see who's still standing.

I mean, the big corporations will be standing and there'll be—the Starbucks will still be where we know Starbucks is, in Paris and so on. But what about the little guys? And that's what really makes good travel. So, our initiative—right off the bat—is gonna be go back and sweep through and see what's still there and put the guidebook—make the guidebooks accurate. And then patronize the little guys as if the way we consume can help shape the future.

00:06:28 Ray Host Well, that means that an up-to-date book—given lead time and the time to run down all these leads and figure out who's still in business and all that—we're talking about, what? 2022-23 'til you can sort of figure out what's still here, in the world. Right?

00:06:49 Rick Guest Oh yeah. And from a—you know, people who value guidebooks, that's my thing—you know—is writing guidebooks. To me, a guidebook's a \$20 tool for a—for a \$3,000 experience. If it's any good, it pays for itself on the shuttle in from the airport. And a lot of people are gonna be traveling later in 2021. Europe's my beat, but anywhere. You know? And then it's gonna be almost—I'm—I really believe travel will be wide open in 2022, but from a guidebook point of view, anybody who's updating now is wasting their time. You gotta wait 'til Europe's back to some semblance of normalcy before you go back and you find out, you know, who's there and who can we recommend.

So, the workable research is only gonna be possible if all goes well, if people get their shots in Europe and in the United States and so on, in early 2022. And then it takes eight months, if it's just pedal to the metal, to get it out into the bookstores. So, anybody traveling in 2021 or 2022 will be using guidebooks that are either, I think, dishonestly claiming to be updated—'cause you can't update it—or you're gonna be using information that was accurate in 2019, when the last of our guidebooks were updated for 2020, and then you just—they're still much better than nothing at all. I'm gonna be going to Europe, I hope, later this year and I'll be equipping my—I'll be traveling with a guidebook, like I always do. And we'll just have to realize that, you know, things have changed and the only way to have information is to be flexible and use what was accurate before COVID.

But what I'm committed to is by—you know—the end of 2022, we will have what we're calling post-COVID guidebooks. You know. Researched and updated by experiences after COVID had passed and then, you know, from 2023 on we'll be back in our stride, God willing.

00:08:38 Ray Host As you mentioned, you've been a body in motion for a really long time. Did it take you some time to throttle back? To realize that there was gonna be another wave? That the rosy predictions of early in 2020 weren't coming true? That, in fact, it was gonna be a while before you went anywhere? Were there sort of almost shades of—steps of the grieving process, where you finally had to come to terms with the fact, "I'm not going anywhere."

00:09:15 Rick Guest *[Laughs.]* Yes. Well, you know, there's my woes. I'm not making any money and I can't do my research and make my TV shows. We had shows all figured out for Poland and Iceland. We had flights booked. We had the permissions. We had the scripts. We had the crew lined up. I was excited about it! But I got over that in a hurry. You know. This is much more important than privileged—my

ambitions as a businessman or my travel dreams. I employ 100 people. That's a beautiful responsibility that I take seriously, and we have a lot of people that look to us for, you know, how to put their travel dreams to Europe together. And then we have all these people that work with us indirectly, in Europe.

And I remember, Ray—again, we were euphoric. We had just—we were gearing up for the biggest year ever! I mean, it was—we're just a gang of travel nuts. And suddenly, we couldn't have our staff meeting inside. And we met, you know, behind the extra house that we had across the street, in the backyard, surrounded by a white picket fence. 100 of us. And I was standing there saying, "We don't know what's gonna happen, but we are not gonna—after today, that's our last day in the office." I was not a fan of remote work. I want people there, 'cause we have the esprit de corps and I really love being right there. But our staff knew what was coming our way and we—they had scrambled our tech people in the last week or two to get us capable at home. And we said goodbye and then it was that emotional day—I still remember it vividly. And, you know, our inner circle that did the tours, we said, "Well, we'll have to—"

We had the tours full! You know, 25 people on a—on a bus. 100 tours. That's a lot of people! 2,500 people whose travel dreams—I mean, I got over the lost income. It's their travel dreams. They saved, they planned, they dreamed, they got their friends together. And we had to, "Oh, we have to cancel through April. We have to cancel through May. We have to cancel—not through June, through the summer. We have to cancel 'til the end of the year." You know. It just was worse and worse and worse. And then, I just realized, "We gotta hunker down. We gotta trim the sails. And we just have to survive this thing." So, it's been—you know—a year and half with no revenue and 100 people on the payroll and I just met with my staff this morning. And you know, it's discouraging, 'cause we wanna do our work and we can't. And they're—I'm committed to keeping people on the payroll. I've even—but my focus has been more on our community and our roles as leaders in our community and so on. I'm paying my staff to work even if we don't have the work.

So, I just decided, "Well, let's mobilize our people to help out in the community." Because older people can't do the—they're the normal volunteer force. They're nervous about COVID. And they're people—and the needs are greater than ever. So, I thought, "Well, you guys—I'm paying you. If you can use your company time and help out with Meals on Wheels and foodbanks and, you know, cleaning up the parks and all this kind of stuff." So, in our own little way, you know—we're doing 400 hours a week with volunteer work on company time. And I'm hoping this COVID will cause us all to recognize that there are things more fundamental at stake here than our own travel dreams or our own bottom line.

00:12:24 Ray Host

Now, I'm not—I'm not trying to be like a wise-guy, but I think the brand, the way the public sees you, is as a decent guy. And you do, in your work, think about the impact of travel—about the relationship of visitors to the places they go. Does the calculus change a little bit after so many tourist-dependent economies probably had an awful 2020, that instead of being cautious about

00:13:04 Rick Guest those things—instead of having second thoughts about plunging in—“Don’t worry, just go. Spend some money. They need it.” You know, patience is not an American forte.

[Ray chuckles.]

It’s certainly not a Rick Steves forte. And for the last year, patience has been my middle name. My—you know, everybody’s chomping at the bit and it—well, from a practical point of view, I think there’s a lot of “haste makes waste” here. And if we can just relax a little bit—you know, this is sort of God’s way of telling us to slow down. For me, this is—this is therapy for a workaholic. *[Chuckles.]* It’s a very good lesson I’ve had in the last year. There’s more to life than increasing its speed. My life was so fast and so productive, and everything was exhilarating. And this last year, it’s been walking dogs, playing the piano, enjoying every sunset like it’s a devotional. And it’s been a beautiful year for me.

People—there is sort of gonna be a spring back with vengeance to travel, I think. I’ve noticed that, in 30 or 40 years of doing this, every time there’s a setback, some kind of a terrorist event or economic problem or volcano—you know—it stops things, but the demand doesn’t dissipate. But I’m just reminding people that it’s gonna come back incrementally. And if I could go to Amsterdam tomorrow and have dinner in a bubble so I don’t get somebody else’s germs, I don’t wanna go to Amsterdam. I mean, there’s nothing about social distancing and Rick Steve style travel that has anything in common. I go to Paris to have my cheeks kissed. And I go to Rome to pack into the piazzas and get a gelato and stroll in the passeggiata, down those beautiful pedestrian boulevards. And I go to the pubs in Ireland to clink glasses in a steamy, crowded mass of people. People who really believe that strangers are just friends who’ve yet to meet.

And when I—you know, when I consider what’s a good trip, what’s a good traveler, it’s connecting with people. It’s all about connecting. So, that’s gonna happen. You know. We’re still gonna be shaking hands and kissing each other on the cheeks, but it might take a few more months than what we want. So, I’m just advising people to go slow. You know?

00:15:02 Ray Host *[Rick agrees multiple times as Ray continues.]* Well, I ask because I wonder if there are places that—before the pandemic—were kind of being loved to death that might have gotten a breather. Apart from the very real economic losses—and I’m not minimizing that—but they might have benefitted from not having a million people trudging through. And I’m thinking of Las Ramblas, in Barcelona. Dubrovnik, on Croatia’s Adriatic coast, after the *Game of Thrones*. Monet Giverny, the Charles Bridge in Prague. These were places that were just—you know. It wasn’t—it was becoming not so much of a great experience anymore, because they were so packed and so overwhelmed.

00:15:42 Rick Guest You know, that is that amazing sort of odd, little thing. You don’t want the crowds, but tourism butters your bread. You know? So—and then maybe your business is not tourism, but all of your neighbors’ is tourism and you’re tired of the tourists, but your

neighbors are employed by the tourists. So, it's a very poignant little struggle going on. And yeah, I've got friends who are living in Rome, and they say for the first time, local people are going to Piazza Navona with their kids. They're—it's like fallow land is being reinhabited or whatever you'd call it by the community. I would imagine the Ramblas was that way.

I mean, you mentioned the Ramblas—that great boulevard in Barcelona. In my last edition, I said, "Ramblas RIP—rest in peace." Because it's still there. It's still full of people. But there's no local community along the Ramblas that kept the bird market going, that kept the Boqueria market vibrant. It's now—you know, it's called the bird market, but there's no birds being sold 'cause there's no grandmothers taking their granddaughters there to buy a little parakeet. You know? They've been pushed out by Airbnb to the suburbs, and everything's been inhabited by the tourists. So now, you go to the classic market, the Boqueria, and instead of older people buying their fava beans, you've got tourists buying slushies and fancy fruit on skewers. And the average tourist doesn't realize it, but if you've been going there for years, like I have, you kind of just—you're sad. It's still fun, but it's not the same.

Now, all—not all of Europe, but places like you mentioned, Ray, and Amsterdam and Salzburg and Florence, especially Barcelona—there is a little backlash against the tourist crowds, and this has been a time when they've realized, "Hey, maybe there's more to life than tourism." But I do think the hunger for the money that tourism brings, I think it's the number one employer in Europe is gonna—it's gonna trump any sort of ideals they might have of keeping their places more peaceful and less trampled by tourists. I would hope that travelers, when they come out of COVID, will recognize that we need to travel thoughtfully and sensitively to the local cultures. We need to remember that emerging economies—you know, a billion people in India and China—there's a middle class in those countries of 100 or 200 million people who've always wanted to see Big Ben and the Eiffel Tower and Michelangelo's Pieta. These are the marquee sites of European culture, just like the Taj Mahal is, in India. You know? What American going to India doesn't have Taj Mahal on their list? You know?

Well, the same thing when somebody from China finally has enough money to go to Europe. So, we need to remember that—yeah, put on your shoulder pads if you wanna visit the Sistine Chapel and Michelangelo's—you know, *Last Judgment*, 'cause it's gonna be a shuffle. And it's not ours to say, "We don't want these crowds." It's the world's. And everybody wants to see it. But we gotta remember that there is 90% of Europe that has no crowds at all, and you could lose all that great famous stuff and still have a marvelous experience.

00:18:46	Jesse	Host	We've got more to come with Rick Steves. After the break, on top of being a leading expert on European travel, Rick is also an outspoken advocate for marijuana decriminalization. Maybe you didn't know that! It's fun, right? We'll hear more about that in just a minute. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:19:06	Music	Transition	Dreamy, chiming music.

00:19:08	Jesse	Promo	<p>Support for <i>Bullseye</i> and the following message come from Culturelle.</p> <p>Culturelle wants you to know that an estimated 45 million Americans may have IBS, according to the International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders. Culturelle IBS Complete Support is a medical food for the dietary management of IBS. It's designed to relieve symptoms like abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhea, and constipation in a safe, well-tolerated, once daily dose. Save 20% with promo code "radio" on Culturelle.com.</p>
00:19:45	Promo	Clip	<p><i>[Music fades out.]</i> Music: Cheerful music.</p> <p>Speaker 1: It's time to emerge from our homes and get outside.</p> <p>Speaker 2: You have no idea what you're gonna see there. You think you might know, but every time there's a mystery there that you're gonna unearth.</p> <p>Speaker 1: All this week, <i>Life Kit</i> is headed outdoors with episodes on camping, birding, biking, and more. Listen to the <i>Life Kit</i> podcast from NPR.</p>
00:20:05	Promo	Clip	<p><i>[Music fades out.]</i> Music: Cheerful, jazzy, old-timey music plays in background.</p> <p>Freddie Wong: Hey, you like movies? How about coming up with movie ideas over the course of an hour? 'Cause that's what we do every week on <i>Story Break</i>, a writers' room podcast where three Hollywood professionals have an hour to come up with a pitch for a movie or TV show based off of totally zany prompts.</p> <p>Will Campos: Like that time we reimagined <i>Star Wars</i> based on our phones' autocomplete!</p> <p>Will: Luke Skywalker is a family man and it's <i>Star Wars</i> but it's a good idea.</p> <p><i>[Multiple people laugh.]</i></p> <p>Matt Arnold: Okay. How about a time we wrote the story of a bunch of Disney Channel Original Movies based solely on the title and the poster?</p> <p>Matt: Okay, Sarah Hyland is a 50-foot woman. Let's just go with it, guys.</p> <p>Freddie: Or the time we finally cracked the Adobe Photoshop Feature Film.</p> <p>Matt: Stamp Tool is your Woody, and then the autofill—</p> <p>Freddie: Ohhhh.</p> <p>Matt: —Is the new Buzz Lightyear!</p>

[Multiple people laugh.]

Freddie: Join us as we have a good time imagining all the movies Hollywood is *[accusatory voice]* too cowardly to make! *[Dramatic voice]* *Story Break* comes out every Thursday on Maximum Fun. *[Regular voice]* I don't know why I'm using this voice now.

[Music ends.]

00:20:50 Jesse Host

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Our guest is Rick Steves. He's the host of *Rick Steves' Europe*, the author of numerous books—especially on European travel—and... let's be frank, he's got a lot on *[laughs]*—he's got a lot on his CV. Like many of us, he hasn't been traveling for most of the last year and change. But he still kept busy with new specials and weekly streaming shows. Interviewing Rick is another beloved public media host: our friend Ray Suarez. Let's get back into it.

00:21:21 Ray Host

The last time we talked, believe it or not, was New Year's Eve 1999. And we talked about the up-and-coming places, the hot places to visit, what the next year and next years would bring in tourism, the economy was growing, great guns, and as we could get past Y2K and all of that, we were going to be alright!

[Rick laughs.]

And then a year and half later came 9/11, travel grinding to a halt, fear of terrorism, places becoming just kind of feeling odd to be in, in many cases.

[Rick affirms.]

00:22:01 Rick Guest

Is this different?

This is different. I think it's different. I skated right through 9/11. I mean, it—you know, it didn't affect—it really didn't even impact my business. I was down 10 or 20%, but my business has been strong, and I just take my punches and we keep doing it regardless of, you know, what's the economy or what's the fear level. 9/11 changed our approach to the world. Before 9/11, I think we said, "Bon voyage," and now we say, "Have a safe trip." And since—before 9/11, I was giving travel talks. Europe through the backdoor. You know? Travel tips. And after 9/11, I started giving a talk—well, I kept giving my travel talks, but I was—I had morphed into more political speaking. And I finally said, "You know, I better call a spade a spade here." And I renamed my lead talk "Travel as a Political Act".

And the idea was there's a kind of a Maslow's hierarchy of travel needs. You know, first you learn how to pack light and catch the train and to get a hotel and a restaurant. Then you learn how to appreciate the history, art, and culture. But the ultimate pinnacle of this—maybe Rick Steve's hierarchy of travel needs—would be to travel in a way that broadens our perspective, that recognizes that culture shock is a good thing. It's the growing pains of a broadening perspective. And a cool thing about travel is you get to know the other 96% of humanity and you realize we're not the norm. And you come home with that most beautiful souvenir, and that's that broader perspective.

00:23:24 Ray Host One thing we haven't talked about is marijuana. And there are people sitting at home thinking, "What?" But you are an advocate for the decriminalization of marijuana. Tell us about it.

00:23:36 Rick Guest Okay. Yeah, for actually most of my adult life, I've been perplexed by the fact that people are locked up in our country for smoking pot. And then, for some reason, 15, 20 years ago, I decided to get active in it. I joined NORML—the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. And I realized, first of all, I'm not pro-marijuana. Marijuana's a drug. It can be abused. It should be carefully regulated. I'm just anti-prohibition. I'm pro civil liberties. I'm kind of pragmatic harm reduction. Europeans are all about pragmatic harm reduction, and I think we Americans are more all about legislating morality and incarceration. And bottom line, what's better for our society? And with the status quo, until a couple years ago anyways, marijuana was a horrible thing with the prohibition, because you got privileged White guys like me who can smoke marijuana with impunity and then you've got poor people and Black people, who get caught with a joint in their pocket and it totally messes up their life. There's 70,000 people doing hard time right now for nonviolent marijuana offenses.

And so, there's that one injustice. There's also just the business end of it, which bugs me. But you've taken it from an illegal market to a legal one and you're recognizing people's civil liberties. And my hunch, bringing a European sensibility to the equation—'cause in Europe a joint's about as exciting as a can of beer—is that if you take the crime out of the equation, teen use with not go up. Road safety will stay the same. You know. The world won't change. You'll just take a black market away and turn it into a highly regulated and highly taxed legal market and we'll be able to smoke pot at home if we want, as mature adults. Not for kids, for adults. And that was our hunch. We—my state and Colorado were the first states to tax and regulate recreational marijuana. Not medical. Recreational. Just for fun. In 2012. And I get to—I'm not scary. I've got credibility. Like you said, people are surprised. "Rick Steves? Marijuana?" And I just talk about it in a common sense, a European kind of sensibility. And what I do, it's my contribution to my community. I see it that way.

Every two years, I go on the political warpath to legalized marijuana in another couple of states. In 2014, Oregon. 2016, Massachusetts and Maine. 2018, Illinois and Michigan. Last year, I was locked down, but I spent ten days here at my desk in—virtually in Montana, South Dakota, Arizona, and New Jersey. And were victorious in all of those states getting more—far more votes than the presidents or the people who won those elections that year. And we are—state by state—taking down this prohibition. I've been, now, elected to be the chair of the board at NORML and we are excited this year because it's going federal. And there's a law that—or bill that the House of Representatives has passed, it's in the Senate now, which will honor states rights to have their own choice on this complicated issue. It'll allow for expungement—letting people whose records, whose lives are burdened by a nonviolent marijuana offense to have that expunged from their records. And it will deschedule marijuana.

So, this is a big change and I just—I just feel like it's exciting to help tackle a prohibition that's wrongminded. A lot of parallels to alcohol, back in the '30s. You know, I don't think they said, "Booze is good." I think they realized the laws against booze were causing more harm to society than the drug they were designed to protect us from, and they decided, "Let's do it a different way. Tax it and regulate it." So, long story, that's my little spiel on marijuana and I just feel like I'm one guy who can talk about it because I don't need to get elected and nobody can fire me 'cause I'm my own boss and I can just brain my European friends. Once in a blue moon, somebody'll say, "Rick Steves, we know what you think about marijuana. We're not gonna read your guidebooks or take your tours anymore."

And all I can think is, "Europe's gonna be a little more fun without you."

00:27:23 Ray Host

Well, I was gonna ask whether you got any pushback, advice to stay in your lane, summit counseling about reputational risk even from PBS and other more buttoned-down quarters?

00:27:37 Rick Guest

Yep. I had to talk very carefully with my friends in public radio and public television, because that's very important to me and I don't wanna go out of my lane. And I've always stressed that I'm not a proponent of marijuana. It's a drug. It can be abused. I've never given a talk without starting that. The people who were on our dream team to be the first state to legalize and tax and regulate marijuana for recreational use for adults in Washington state, they weren't potheads. It was our—it was our republican appointed federal prosecuting attorney. It was our—Seattle's city sheriff. It was the president of the Bar Association. It was much respected legislators whose careers had been built on what's good for young people. It was the—it was the Children's Alliance. It's the NAACP.

These are all important leaders in our community and groups in our community that really wanna have pragmatic harm reduction. And we're proving it now. And I mean, I look out here from my window in Edmond's and, you know, for ten years marijuana's been legal, and the only difference is people don't need to buy marijuana from somebody on the street. You know? I mean, it's a long story. We could do a whole interview on that. But this is so important. If somebody says, "This is not good for your business," I wouldn't cow to that. I really believe in this. This is, to me, appalling what's going on in our country. It's the new Jim Crow. It's heartbreaking. And I'm principled in favor of civil liberties. You know. My—this organization, NORML, it's not a lobby organization for people who sell marijuana. You know, there's a huge industry now. It's called the green rush. And they want us to be a lobby for the legal marijuana industry. I'm board chair in part because we don't do that and we're never gonna do that.

We are defending the civil liberty in a principled way that if—you know, I'm a hardworking, churchgoing, kid raising, taxpaying American citizen. If I work all day and I come home and I just wanna smoke a joint and stare at the fireplace for three hours, that's my civil liberty. Now, do I have the civil liberty to get in my car when I'm intoxicated or high? Of course not. Throw the book at me. But there's a civil liberty issue here that is very easy for me to frame

when I'm talking on conservative talk radio shows in South Dakota or Montana. I thoroughly enjoyed talking about this issue on conservative talk radio in these states I was working in last October, because it makes sense. Regardless of where you are on the political spectrum, if I can just have 20 minutes of people's attention, they can at least respect that there is a solid grounds for questioning the wisdom of carrying on with this wrongminded prohibition against marijuana.

00:30:19 Ray Host

In all those states you named where they have rolled out—and some after considerable debate in the state legislature about the hows and the—and the wheres and the whens of marijuana sales—have any states learned some lessons from the rollout? Done it right, done it wrong? Have we been able to adjust in mid-course to make this as unthreatening a social change as you're telling us?

00:30:49 Rick Guest

You know, one thing I like very much about this whole dynamic is yes, we learn. Every two years, the laws are smarter. In Washington, we didn't—we really were careful not to overreach in 2012, along with Colorado. You know. Other states had overreached and failed. We just wanted to stop arresting pot smokers. So, no hint of public places to smoke. No hint of being able to have home grow, you know. Being very careful to honor the rights of employers to have whatever standards they want in their workplace. Really strong for road safety, really strong for keeping it away from kids, really strong for—you know—monitoring the advertising and so on. This is all commonsense stuff. And with each election, it gets smarter and smarter. Now, there's a sensibility about taking care of minority communities who have always taken the brunt of the war on drugs and making sure they're not iced out of some of the opportunities that open up when we are able to have a legal retail industry.

So, I've enjoyed watching the laws evolve and become smarter. But for me, it gets right back to civil liberties and stop locking up people of color and poor people and something that's—really should be not a criminal issue. It's a serious issue. You know. It should be a health and education challenge. And—but, you know, most of the—Ray, when people are—you know—appalled at the idea of legalizing marijuana, usually their case is assuming use will go up. And that's the fundamental misunderstanding. There's never been a society that has a correlation between how much marijuana is consumed and how strict are the laws. It's counter intuitive. I mean, the Dutch—in Europe—who have the loosest laws on marijuana, they smoke far less than the American average. And you can do hard time for it, here. But the Dutch started their progressive laws about marijuana in order to deal with a hard drug addiction, an opioid problem. The Portuguese did the same thing 20 years ago. They had a law that decriminalized the consumption of all drugs. Why? Because they had a horrible hard drug addiction problem and they wanted to deal with that with credibility and with compassion and with focus. I think you could make a very good case that if you're concerned about the opioid problem in the United States, part of it is the fact that marijuana is criminalized. And European societies have taught us that.

So, again, it's part of my travel as a political act. You can—I can get—that's the beautiful thing. When you travel, you're exposed to

different ways of thinking, different ways of organizing a society. And I love to compare notes. And what I get to do with my gig at public television is if something just is of interest to me that I think is important or I think there's a lot of my neighbors and countrymen who are smart, curious people—steep on the learning curve but who should know more about this—I get to take a look at the issue from a traveler's point of view. I go over there, and I scout it. I write it—the script—with good experts. And then I take the crew and we learn it as if we were traveling there. I think ever since I was a kid, I've learned you really can't learn something as vividly as actually going to a place. You learn so much more about your home, sometimes, by leaving it. So, we did an hour show on Iran. We did an hour show on the holy land. We did an hour show on fascism that you mentioned. I was all excited about the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. So, we did an hour on the Reformation and Martin Luther.

Just last year, our most recent show was a one-hour special called *Hunger and Hope: Lessons Learned in Ethiopian Guatemala*. And my whole agenda there was I just think Americans don't understand that development aid—taxpayer dollars here helping out poor people south of the border—is a smart investment, even if you don't buy this business of love your neighbor. Even if all you want is a safer, more stable world for you and your kids, it's a good investment. So, you know, do it one way or the other. Do it a little bit of both. But the modern development aid is so much smarter than it used to be, and it really is easy to see that as a wise investment for our own wellbeing. And so, we went into the trenches in Guatemalan Ethiopia and did—it was just such an exciting show to do. And then I got to take it home and, thanks to public broadcasting, I was able to share it with a lot of people and it's the next best thing to being there. And as a traveler, I love—I love that dimension of bringing home the lessons of the road. To me, the road is school, and the road is church. The road is exploration. I just—the road's fun.

00:35:15 Ray Host

Well, as you look out ahead, toward getting back on the road, let's—give me a plausible scenario for the next two years. Are we looking at slingshot Europe, where people get right back in there again? Are we looking at pent up demand helping revive some of these tourist-dependent economies? What looks to you like a plausible road ahead?

00:35:43 Rick Guest

I'm glad you framed it that way, Ray, because nobody knows. You know? I'm—I've been with these panels where you get all these CEOs and all these experts as if they know what's gonna happen. *[Chuckles.]* It's so hard to predict. But I do think—now that we've got the vaccine—we are—before, when it was testing and bending the curve, you know, it was whack-a-mole. And pretty discouraging. But now, with the vaccine, I think we're on a glide path to normalcy—that the big bump in the road is this notion among Americans and Europeans also that people are worried about the vaccine. I just heard very disturbing reports about what's going on in Europe and Africa and in the United States and so on and—but assuming we get vaccinated, I would—my—just, I'll tell you what my plan is for that same tour company where we had to shut it all down, you know, a year—in early 2020.

Now, we are—the table is set. We’ve got our hotels reserved, our busses standing by, our guides standing by. We’ve got people’s names on lists for departures. We’re not taking deposits yet, but we are hoping to do tours in late 2021. I’m not very confident. I wouldn’t bet on it. But we are confident to do tours in early 2022. So, maybe late 2021. I would say almost certainly in spring of 2022. How will it be different? I think it’s gonna be incremental as things open up. First, it’ll be motivated travelers that’ll put up with the uncertainties and the inconveniences and the—a little bit of—yeah. It’s not gonna be as smooth as you’d like. And then it’ll be individual travelers traveling around. And the last thing I think will be organized tourism. You know. Bus tours and so on. Because it’s just—it’s—when you’ve got 25 people on a bus—I mean, that’s how many people we have a on a bus. Most busses are 50 people on a bus. When you got 50 people on a bus, you gotta be able to predict stuff and you can’t turn on a dime. You’ve gotta be nimble. And you owe it to your people who are trusting you for a well-organized vacation to not jump the gun.

So, we’re not gonna be the first ones out of the starting gate. That’s for sure. How are we gonna change our tour program? We’re gonna have a few less people on the bus. We’re gonna have 24 instead of 28. They’ll be a few things in Europe where—you know, in the Pacific Rim countries have worn masks for a long time for hygienic reasons, and I think we’re gonna be seeing that in our—in the western world for travelers. But I think things are gonna—not snap back, but I think things will be normalized. I kind of—a good metaphor to me is the airports. Before terrorism, airports had wonderful lobbies that you could waltz across, and your loved ones took you right to the gate. It was so nice. Do you remember those days? And then, now, it’s like all that vastness—all of that elegance, all those lobbies are completely cluttered up with TSA hardware and you say goodbye to your loved ones on the curb. But the airport still works. It’s normal to us now. And it still functions.

You know, I think there’s gonna be some long-term changes, but I think the essence of travel will be the same and it’s just a matter of are we gonna take our shots or not.

00:38:53	Ray	Host	Rick Steves, a great pleasure. I hope we talk again in less than 21 years.
00:38:59	Rick	Guest	Happy travels, even if we’re just staying home for a little while longer.
00:39:02	Jesse	Host	Rick Steves, friends! He’s got a brand-new special coming out later this month: <i>Europe Awaits</i> —a two-hour tour through some of Rick’s favorite cities. It airs June 7 th on public TV stations all over the country. We’ll have a link to it on our website—the <i>Bullseye</i> page on MaximumFun.org .
00:39:20	Music	Transition	Airy music with light vocalizations.
00:39:22	Jesse	Host	That’s the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> , created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Right now, I am trying to decide whether to buy this fat, wooden bunny rabbit from my friend’s store, Bougie Bazaar in Pasadena. It’s a really good bunny rabbit. It has like—it’s sort of like secretly a box. There’s a sliding drawer underneath it. It also weirdly has reproductive organs.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Production fellows at Maximum Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find a collection of the music that he's made for the show on Bandcamp. It's pay what you will! So, uh, go give Dan some money and get some chill beats to study to or whatever. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. They've got a new record on the horizon. Already heard the singles; they're banging.

You can also keep up with the show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all of our interviews there. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:40:40 Promo Promo

Speaker: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.]