

ANTI-VIRAL ARRIVALS

Whether it is through quarantines, air bridges, airport testing or thermal scanning, the pressure will be on authorities to make sure outsiders don't bring in new cases of Covid-19

By Marisa Cannon





Airlines and governments around the world are clamouring for solutions to make travel safe again, and while immunity passports might sound like the plot twist of a dystopian novel, there's been talk around whether they might serve as a way of reigniting tourism. Chile was the first country to push ahead with "release

certificates", while Turkey and Thailand have said they will ask visitors to show medical certificates declaring they have tested negative for coronavirus. In parts of China, WeChat and Alipay have issued citizens with a coloured health code that dictates where they can travel.

However, the World Health Organization has said that governments

should not issue immunity passports, as there is "no evidence" that people who have recovered from coronavirus are protected against a second infection. The US, Spain and Hong Kong are among some of the countries that have instated temporary 14-day quarantines for arrivals, while airports worldwide including Heathrow are testing thermal screening,

Greece's public health body plans to create "quarantine hotels" for visitors who test positive while in the country, and will issue health certificates to passengers within 72 hours of their arrival.

These measures are unlikely to entice travellers, with an IATA survey finding that 86 per cent were "somewhat or very concerned about being quarantined while travelling", while 69 per cent "would not consider travelling if it involved a 14-day quarantine period".

Another deterrent might be heightened racial intolerance, with reports of coronavirus-related attacks and Africans in China being turned away from hotels and restaurants, blamed for carrying the so-called "second wave" of coronavirus.

This year, 1.1 billion fewer trips are expected to be made globally (the global travel and tourism industry

was predicted to rake in US\$700 billion but is now only on track for US\$447 billion). Tourism revenue in Europe will likely drop from US\$200 billion in 2019 to US\$124 billion in 2020.

The European Commission has issued guidelines on how countries might reopen its borders, suggesting "a phased and co-ordinated approach that starts by lifting restrictions between areas or member states with sufficiently similar epidemiological situations". These so-called "air bridges" could be an alternative to quarantining.

Members of the EU are also allowing Covid-19 tracing apps to operate across borders so citizens can be alert to possible infection while travelling. In a statement, the Commission said: "Such tracing apps must be voluntary, transparent, temporary, cybersecure, using anonymised data,

should rely on Bluetooth technology and be interoperable across borders as well as across operating systems."

Nations that responded quickly to the outbreak will be the first to open their borders, with some neighbouring states making plans to allow people to move freely. From mid-May, citizens in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia could travel between the Baltic states, although anyone from beyond is required to quarantine for two weeks.

Australia and New Zealand have agreed to a trans-Tasman travel zone. In the Mediterranean, Israel, Greece and Cyprus are in talks over a "tourism-safe zone", with the aim to partially open borders. It's clear that any reopening will be gradual, and governments are prepared to shut down travel permissions as soon as the virus resurfaces.