

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Leisure travelers face mixed travel restrictions amid delta surge

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Global governments are tightening restrictions on travel, while hospitality groups aim to welcome tourists with looser safety protocols. Image credit: International Luxury Travel Market

By NORA HOWE

As the delta variant of the COVID-19 virus sweeps North America and many parts of Europe, world leaders have conflicting responses to travel mandates and tourists.

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In response to rising COVID-19 cases reported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) earlier this week, the European Union removed the United States from its safe-travel list ([see story](#)). However, in an attempt to avert economic disaster, upscale vacation destinations such as Anguilla are lifting quarantine mandates.

"Keep in mind that these are recommendations by the EU and that each individual country can make a decision as to their border entry requirements and restrictions," said Tiffany Dowd, founder and president of [Luxe Social Media](#), Boston. "Time will tell, but this is why it is important to use a travel advisor who can help travelers navigate these very confusing times of travel and make it less stressful."

Mixed signals

The EU's new safety protocol comes only two months after the governing body lifted travel restrictions on non-essential travel from the U.S., among other countries, and for weeks there have been mixed responses around the world.

"What we're hearing at the moment is that any new travel restrictions will likely pertain to unvaccinated travelers, potentially affecting travel plans for some, and may have the greatest impact on families traveling with unvaccinated children, but it won't mean travel grinds to a halt," said Misty Belles, vice president of public relations at [Virtuoso](#), New York. "Fall travel to Europe tends to skew slightly older, so this group will continue to travel."

Only a few weeks after restrictions were lifted, French President Emmanuel Macron ordered all health workers to get vaccinated by Sept. 15, and announced requirements for COVID-19 vaccine passports for restaurants, shopping malls and hospitals.

At the time, the delta variant accounted for more than half of new infections in France, according to French health

minister Olivier Vran. After the president's address, more than 1 million French citizens made vaccine appointments in one day, according to the Associated Press ([see story](#)).



No longer a part of the EU due to Brexit, the U.K. has devised its own COVID-19 travel safety protocols. Image credit: Knight Frank

Towards the end of July, the United Kingdom updated its COVID-19 travel policy, going so far as to waive mandatory quarantine for fully vaccinated arrivals from the United States and Europe.

As of Aug. 4, passengers who are fully vaccinated in the U.S. and European Union are able to travel to England without having to quarantine or take a test eight days after arrival.

The U.K. government also confirmed its plans to allow international cruise sailings to restart from England in accordance with Public Health England guidance ([see story](#)).

Although the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) fully approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine last week ([see story](#)), New York Governor Kathy Hochul has directed the New York State Department of Health to institute a universal mask requirement in all schools, mirroring the CDC's earlier recommendation to wear masks indoors, despite vaccination status ([see story](#)).

On the contrary, Anguilla's executive council has lifted all quarantine requirements for international vacation travelers staying at hotels or villas, regardless of their length of stay.

In a statement, the Caribbean island announced that non-business visitors staying at a hotel, resort or a licensed villa for any length of stay will receive mandatory testing upon arrival and must stay in place at their hotel or villa while awaiting their arrival test results.

Once they receive a negative test result, they are free to leave the property. While Anguilla is no longer requiring the previously mandated 4-day quarantine, all visitors will be tested again on day 4 of their stay.

To enter Anguilla, adult travelers must be fully vaccinated, meaning they must have received the last dose of a vaccine at least 21 days prior to arrival.



An oceanfront villa at the Four Seasons Anguilla. Image credit: The Four Seasons

"Of course, [another shutdown] is always on the minds of travel industry professionals, but the industry as a whole is better prepared to handle the challenges of a global pandemic, including increased vaccination of their industry workers and good health and safety protocols at their hotels and resorts to keep their workers and visitors safe," Ms. Dowd said. "We are seeing an increase in countries requiring visitors to be fully vaccinated before entering the

country and I suspect more countries will follow should COVID-19 cases continue to rise."

Hospitality fights to survive

Considering how drastically the hospitality industry was hit during the height of the pandemic last year with lockdowns and severe travel restrictions, groups are doing everything they can to stimulate economic growth while also taking safety precautions.

"The industry is carefully watching what happens in Europe," Virtuoso's Ms. Belles said. "The best way to prepare is for travelers to work with a travel advisor who can monitor changes in restrictions, protocols and any documentation needed to visit destinations outside of the US.

"The only constant right now is change, so it's imperative to work with a professional who has strong relationships and can act as an advocate to help clients navigate any changes that do occur."

In August, Equinox Hotels, the hospitality arm of luxury fitness club Equinox, announced it would begin requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination for all guests starting in September ([see story](#)).

As the delta variant contributes to rising COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, more hospitality brands, retailers and other businesses are requiring proof of vaccination or reinstating mask policies in order to keep guests safe without having to shut down operations.

After more than a year of restrictions and lockdowns, cruise organizations are setting out for the sea, resuming their operations. Several luxury cruise lines relaunching services include Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Crystal, Ponant and more.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises has scheduled its first sailing for Sept. 11, 2021. The ships include Seven Seas Splendor, Seven Seas Explorer and Seven Seas Mariner exploring the regions of Northern Europe, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean and Panama Canal.

Regent's full five-ship fleet is scheduled to return to service by February 2022 ([see story](#)).

"While travel numbers may be lower after a peak in August, there may be other factors contributing to the decline including people getting ready to go back to work in the office and students heading back to school," Ms. Dowd said. "People are still very optimistic about traveling to places like Italy, Greece, Mexico and the Caribbean which continue to be popular destinations for travelers through the end of the summer.

"As far as future bookings through the end of the year, resorts are reporting that space is limited for the festive season which is a positive trend for future bookings," she said. "However, in the short term, people are considering delaying trips until more is known about international border restrictions, vaccine boosters and other entry requirements like vaccination status, quarantines and other COVID-19 testing."