

Austria bans apres-ski parties, issues new travel warnings

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Winter sports-mad Austria on Thursday announced a ban on apres-ski parties, which were blamed for creating coronavirus hotspots earlier this year, and issued travel warnings for Paris, Prague and other destinations.

Even as infections are rapidly rising again in the Alpine country, authorities are adamant that Austria's world-famous [ski resorts](#)—which generate a huge amount of tourist revenue—will still open in the coming winter season.

Thousands of tourists from all over the world became infected at tightly-packed ski-slope bars around early March.

This time, strict social distancing and hygiene measures will be enforced, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said.

"It won't be possible to have apres-ski the way we are used to from the past, because the risk of infection is too high... Ski fun yes, but no apres-ski," he told reporters.

Tourists must keep at least one metre (three feet) apart at all times, wear masks in [cable cars](#) and gondolas, and bars and restaurants will serve drink and food to seated customers only.

"Standing shoulder-to-shoulder, dancing, singing in small bars or outdoor bars are potential centres of infection," Tourism Minister Elisabeth Koestinger said.

Another top tourist attraction, the country's Christmas markets, will also be allowed to open this year, on condition they comply with safety guidelines like masks and social distancing.

Austria is heavily reliant on tourism, and recent travel warnings for parts of Austria, including from neighbouring Germany, have hit the industry hard.

Austria, for its part, has also introduced rules requiring travellers from regions with high [infection](#) rates to show negative [coronavirus](#) tests or

undergo self-isolation.

On Thursday, Austria issued new travel warnings for Paris, Prague, Israel and a number of other destinations, but removed Sweden, Australia, Japan and others from the list.

Austria with population of nearly nine million has recorded more than 41,000 cases and 783 deaths from coronavirus in total to date.

"In the upcoming weeks, we have to do everything we possibly can to keep the number of infections low... because that is the basis on which guests can come to Austria at all," Kurz said.

On Wednesday, a consumer watchdog said it was suing the government for coronavirus outbreaks in the country's ski resorts.

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