

Attention travelers! EU proposes reopening external borders

May 3 2021, by Samuel Petrequin



A visitor kneels in front of the Last Judgement fresco by the Italian Renaissance painter Michelangelo inside the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican Museums on the occasion of the museum's reopening, in Rome, Monday, May 3, 2021. The Vatican Museums reopened Monday to visitors after a shutdown following COVID-19 containment measures. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

In an announcement sure to be welcomed by travelers worldwide, EU officials on Monday proposed easing restrictions on visiting the 27-nation bloc as vaccination campaigns across the continent gather speed.

Travel to the European Union is currently extremely limited except for a handful of countries with low infection rates. But with the summer tourist season looming, the bloc's European Commission hopes the new recommendations will dramatically expand that list.

The Commission hopes the move will soon allow travelers reunite with their friends and relatives living in Europe and support the bloc's economy this summer.

"Time to revive EU tourism industry and for cross-border friendships to rekindle—safely," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. "We propose to welcome again vaccinated visitors and those from countries with a good health situation."

Under the Commission's proposal, entry would be granted to all those fully vaccinated with EU-authorized shots. Coronavirus vaccines authorized by the European Medicines Agency, the bloc's drug regulator, include Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. The EMA has not approved any vaccines from Russia or China as of yet but is looking at data for Russia's Sputnik V jab.



Visitors admire the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican Museums on the occasion of the museum's reopening, in Rome, Monday, May 3, 2021. The Vatican Museums reopened Monday to visitors after a shutdown following COVID-19 containment measures. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

EU nations could also individually decide to accept travelers immunized with vaccines listed by WHO for emergency use. The U.N. health agency has approved the same four vaccines as the EMA, and is expected to make a ruling soon on China's Sinopharm vaccine.

EU officials believe the bloc's COVID-19 vaccination campaigns will soon be "a game changer" in the fight against the deadly virus. Its proposal will be discussed with EU ambassadors this week and the Commission hopes it could start by June, once it is adopted by member

states. Still, the recommendation is non-binding and EU countries will be entitled to keep [travel restrictions](#) in place if they want.

Commission spokesman Adalbert Jahnz said fully-vaccinated travelers coming from outside the EU should be allowed to visit Europe but insisted that the proposal's goal is not to exempt them from testing or quarantines upon arrival.



An employee wearing a mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19 stands inside a Raphael Room of the Vatican Museums on their reopening, in Rome, Monday, May 3, 2021. The Vatican Museums reopened Monday to visitors after a shutdown following COVID-19 containment measures. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

"This still remains very much in the hands of the member states," he said.

The Commission also proposed raising the threshold of new COVID-19 cases that is used to determine the countries from which all travel should be permitted.

"Nonessential travel regardless of individual vaccination status is currently permitted from seven countries with a good epidemiological situation," it said, proposing to increase 14-day cumulative COVID-19 infection rate per 100,000 inhabitants from 25 to 100.

"This remains considerably below the current EU average, which is over 420," it said.

It was unclear which countries would actually make the cut but an EU official who was not authorized to be quoted by name because the proposal has yet to be adopted said Israel would definitely be on the list.

"The UK, question mark, the U.S., for the time being, not quite," he said. "But we see how quickly the situation in the U.S. is evolving, notably for the rate of vaccination."



Visitors wearing masks to prevent the spread of coronavirus walks inside the Vatican Museum after it reopened, in Rome, Monday, May 3, 2021. The Vatican Museums reopened Monday to visitors after a shutdown following COVID-19 containment measures. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

In case the infection situation deteriorates in a non-EU country, the Commission proposed an "emergency brake" to stop dangerous virus variants from entering the bloc through quickly enacted travel limits.

EU officials and nations are also talking about introducing COVID-19 certificates aimed at facilitating travel across the region this summer. The documents, sometimes called coronavirus passports or green certificates, would be given to EU residents who can prove they have been vaccinated, can provide a negative [coronavirus](#) test, or prove they

have recovered from COVID-19.

"Until the digital green certificate is operational, member states should be able to accept certificates from non-EU countries," the Commission said, adding that unvaccinated children should be able to travel with their vaccinated parents if they provide a negative PCR test.



A visitor admires a Raphael Room inside the Vatican Museums on their reopening, in Rome, Monday, May 3, 2021. The Vatican Museums reopened Monday to visitors after a shutdown following COVID-19 containment measures. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)



People visit the Rialto bridge in Venice, northern Italy, Saturday, May 1, 2021. Italy is gradually reopening after six months of rotating virus closures allowing outdoor dining. (Filippo Ciappi/LaPresse via AP)



A waiter works in a restaurant in Venice, northern Italy, Saturday, May 1, 2021. Italy is gradually reopening after six months of rotating virus closures allowing outdoor dining. (Filippo Ciappi/LaPresse via AP)



A waiter works in St. Mark's Square in Venice, northern Italy, Saturday, May 1, 2021. Italy is gradually reopening after six months of rotating virus closures allowing outdoor dining. (Filippo Ciappi/LaPresse via AP)



Dutch customers eager for their first drink of coffee or something stronger at a cafe terrace have flocked to outdoor seating as the Netherlands' lockdown eased in Utrecht, Wednesday, April 28, 2021. The Netherlands became the latest European country to begin cautiously relaxing its lockdown even as infection rates and intensive care occupancy remain stubbornly high. The Dutch follow Italy, Greece, France and other European nations in moving to reopen society and edge away from economically crippling lockdowns in the coming weeks.(AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



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Guests queue, bottom, to take their seats at spaced out terrace tables in Utrecht, Netherlands, Wednesday, April 28, 2021. The Netherlands became the latest European country to begin cautiously relaxing its lockdown even as infection rates and intensive care occupancy remain stubbornly high. The Dutch follow Italy, Greece, France and other European nations in moving to reopen society and edge away from economically crippling lockdowns in the coming weeks.(AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

Greece, which is heavily reliant on tourism, has already lifted quarantine restrictions for the U.S., Britain, Israel, and other non-EU countries. On Saturday, Hungary loosened several COVID-19 restrictions for residents with government-issued immunity cards, given to those who have had one vaccine dose or recovered from COVID-19.

People with the plastic cards could enter indoor dining rooms, hotels, theaters, cinemas, spas, gyms, libraries, museums and other recreational venues in Hungary.

The whole issue of COVID-19 passports is fraught in many parts of the world, with critics saying they discriminate against people in poorer nations or younger people who do not have access to vaccines in many countries. The Hungarian government moved ahead with its own certificates because it has been inoculating people with a variety of vaccines, including jabs from China and Russia that have not been approved by the EMA.

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