

# Australia to ease 18-month-old border closure 'within weeks'

October 1 2021

---



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Australia will begin to reopen its borders next month, the country's prime minister said Friday, 18 months after citizens were banned from travelling overseas without permission.

Scott Morrison said vaccinated Australians would be able to return home and travel overseas "within weeks" as 80 percent vaccination targets are met.

On March 20 last year Australia introduced some of the world's toughest border restrictions in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

For the last 560 days countless international flights have been grounded, and overseas travel has slowed to a trickle.

Families have been split across continents, an estimated 30,000 nationals were stranded overseas and foreign residents were stuck in the country unable to see friends or relatives.

More than 100,000 requests to enter or leave the country were denied in the first five months of this year alone, according to Department of Home Affairs data.

"The time has come to give Australians their life back. We're getting ready for that, and Australia will be ready for takeoff, very soon," Morrison said.

He also announced that vaccinated residents would be able to home quarantine for seven days on their return, dodging the current mandatory and costly 14-day hotel quarantine.

The exact timing of the border reopenings will depend on when Australian states reach their 80 percent vaccination targets, and crucially on local political approval.

The most populous state of New South Wales currently has 64 percent of those aged over 16 fully vaccinated and has indicated it will hit 70 and 80 percent targets this month.

But most Australian states—most notably West Australia and Queensland—still have no widespread community transmission, are pursuing a strategy of "COVID-zero" and remain shut to other parts of the country.

Friday's announcements could mean that within a month it is easier for those in Sydney or Melbourne to travel to London or New York than to go to Perth or Brisbane.

Australian flag carrier Qantas welcomed the decision, announcing it would restart flights to London and Los Angeles on November 14.

## **'Fortress Oz'**

Expats and foreign residents gave the news a cautious welcome on social media forums. But experts say many Australians will remain cautious about booking travel for fear of snap lockdowns or other disruptions.

And the impact of the unprecedented period in the country's history could be felt for years to come.

"Australia has been a fortress nation with the drawbridge pulled up to the rest of the world," Tim Soutphommasane, an academic and former Australian race discrimination commissioner told AFP.

"What we're seeing now with this announcement of borders being reopened is akin to Australia re-entering the world, and it's long overdue," he said.

A Lowy Institute poll in May showed that a plurality of Australians backed the tough border measures, with 41 percent of those in support.

Only 18 percent said fellow nationals should be free to leave.

"Australia in recent decades has been an emphatically open and multicultural and cosmopolitan country.

"It has been a trading nation. But COVID has seen the nation turn the clock back," said Soutphommasane.

He added: "There has been a sense of parochialism and insularity that has shaped the nation's response to COVID-19. The rest of the world may well be looking at this thinking that Australia has changed fundamentally as a country."

© 2021 AFP

Citation: Australia to ease 18-month-old border closure 'within weeks' (2021, October 1)  
retrieved 26 April 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-australia-ease-month-old-border-closure.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.