

Australian state to end quarantine for vaccinated travelers

October 15 2021, by Rod McGuirk



A traveler points to his luggage as he arrives at a quarantine hotel in Sydney, Australia, on May 20, 2021. New South Wales state, which includes Sydney, has announced it will end hotel quarantine requirements for fully-vaccinated international travelers from Nov. 1, 2021 in a major relaxation in pandemic restrictions. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Baker

Sydney will end hotel quarantine for vaccinated passengers when scheduled international flights restart in Australia within two weeks, officials said on Friday, while maintaining some restrictions on foreigners entering the country.

Vaccinated travelers who test negative for COVID-19 before flying to Australia's largest city would be spared 14 days in hotel quarantine from Nov. 1, New South Wales state Premier Dominic Perrottet said.

The major relaxation of the state's pandemic restrictions, which makes entering Australia easier for some travelers, was announced four days after Sydney came out of a 106-day lockdown.

"We can't live here in a hermit kingdom. We've got to open up and this decision today is a big one, but it is the right one to get New South Wales connected globally," Perrottet said.

"It's going to be great for our tourism industry, it's going to be great for tourist operators," he added.

Sydney's is the first Australian international airport to reopen because New South Wales has the highest vaccination rate of any state.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison approved the Nov. 1 travel resumption, but has yet to say when foreign tourists will be welcomed back in Australia. He has ruled out this year.

Australian permanent residents and citizens will be free to travel next month for the first time since the nation's border was closed in March last year by some of the toughest travel restrictions in the democratic world. Skilled migrants and students would be given priority in coming to Australia over international tourists.



International travelers are met by Australian military personnel as they arrive at a quarantine hotel in Sydney, Australia on May 20, 2021. New South Wales state, which includes Sydney, has announced it will end hotel quarantine requirements for fully-vaccinated international travelers from Nov. 1, 2021 in a major relaxation in pandemic restrictions. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Baker

Morrison said on Friday that parents of Australians would be reclassified as immediate family, enabling foreign nationals to visit grandchildren born in Australia during the pandemic.

Grandparents previously had to wait until tourists were allowed back to reunite with families. But restrictions on foreigners entering Australia would otherwise not change, Morrison said.

Qantas Airways responded to the news by bringing forward scheduled international flights by two weeks to Nov. 1. The first flights will operate between Sydney and Los Angeles and Sydney and London.

Limits on hotel rooms available for quarantine have been a major barrier for Australians who want to come home.

It is unclear whether returning Australians will be able to avoid hotel quarantine in other states by landing in Sydney then catching domestic flights across state lines.

The government of Victoria state, which has overtaken neighboring New South Wales as Australia's COVID-19 hotspot, is keen to see details of the quarantine changes.



An Australian military person carries luggage for international travelers on their arrival at a quarantine hotel in Sydney, Australia on May 20, 2021. New South Wales state, which includes Sydney, has announced it will end hotel quarantine requirements for fully-vaccinated international travelers from Nov. 1, 2021 in a major relaxation in pandemic restrictions. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Baker

Peppered by journalists' questions about the two states' conflicting quarantine policies, Victoria Health Minister Martin Foley replied: "Everyone just needs to take a chill pill."

"We are not aware of the full details of a media release hot off the printer from the New South Wales government," Foley said.

Queensland state, which has remained virtually free of COVID-19 throughout the pandemic through tight state border controls, has hinted it would open to vaccinated interstate travelers by Christmas.

"There's just been an enormous change this morning that I haven't been able to get my head around so I need to work out what that change means," Queensland Chief Health Officer Jeannette Young said.

Health professionals have accused Perrottet of putting economic priorities ahead of health since he replaced his predecessor Gladys Berejiklian last week.

But Australian Tourism Export Council, which represents the nation's tourism export sector, welcomed the end of hotel quarantine.



New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet speaks to the media during a press conference in Sydney, Friday, Oct. 15, 2021. Perrottet says the most populous state would end hotel quarantine for vaccinated international travelers as the government accelerates the wind back of pandemic restrictions. Credit: AAP Image/Bianca De Marchi

"Australia's tourism industry has borne the brunt of international border closures with many businesses suffering with no income since March 2020," the council's managing director Peter Shelley said.

"This announcement not only gives tourism businesses their income back, but also lets the world know they are welcome back in Australia," he added.

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