

May 2020

Covid-19 Travel Report

Navigating travel in a post-pandemic world



COVID-19 TRAVEL REPORT

11 May 2020

Fellow Travellers,

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has disrupted every aspect of our daily lives, and perhaps none more quickly or so thoroughly as how we travel. It was only several short months ago that the travel industry finished another record-breaking year. We were all moving around the globe carefree, oblivious to the changes to come.

Yet even as the outbreak continues – and accelerates in some regions – travel has begun to resume. We've already seen signs of increased demand in the domestic market in China, and we think we'll see a similar return to domestic travel in other countries before some kind of resumption in international travel. But it's unlikely travel will return in the same form as we knew it before COVID-19.

As more countries begin to relax strict lockdowns in favour of resuming some form of everyday life, the travel and mobility industries have begun to adapt to the 'new normal'. Maintaining social distance and navigating a slew of new regulations and health guidance are just some of the challenges companies face. All of these changes will have a profound impact on how we experience travel.

With this report we want to highlight some of these changes that have already been implemented and those that are planned, without venturing too far into the realm of science fiction. We hope you find it useful as you and your colleagues consider venturing out on the road again.

Safe travels

Kennet Nordlien
CEO, Riskline





Airports

Airports are attempting to implement social distancing measures to limit the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. A growing number of airports, such as London Heathrow Airport (LHR/EGLL), have deployed workers to manage queues and used signage and physical barriers to separate passengers. In Chile, LATAM Airlines has urged travellers to check-in online, while American Airlines and other US airlines have turned off some electronic kiosks at ticket counters to create more space. However, enforcing social distancing remains a challenge at these facilities. John Holland-Kaye, the CEO of London Heathrow Airport, considers social distancing at airports “physically impossible”, as they lack adequate space to provide a safe distance for all passengers. As the number of travellers slowly rebounds from its current historic low, distancing will be even more difficult.

It remains uncertain how and whether social distancing can be integrated into security procedures. As of 7 May, over 530 Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employees in the United States (US) had tested positive for COVID-19. Among the cases were six deaths as well as new infections that were reported in early May, underscoring the hazard that airport security personnel continue to face despite increased efforts to mitigate the risk of transmission. While yet to be confirmed, new precautionary measures are expected at security screening, to include a face mask requirement for both workers and passengers, plexiglass barriers and an enhanced cleaning regime.

Enhanced screening measures have led to concerns of increased wait times at airports. In addition to causing frustration for travellers, long queues also pose a risk of overcrowding that could potentially expose travellers to infected individuals. For this reason, Spanish officials have advised against going to the airport more than 90 minutes in advance. In March, crowds of travellers waited up to seven hours to clear customs at Chicago O’Hare Airport (ORD/KORD), which was short-staffed to deal with a high volume of returning passengers. The long wait occurred after the US government’s decision to funnel travellers from Europe to select airports including O’Hare and order enhanced screening, showing that the very measures intended to curb the spread of the virus can put the public at risk. While upgraded screening equipment and thermal imaging cameras could expedite the screening process, wait times are likely to ultimately differ from airport to airport, depending on how effectively officials account for the impact of the screening process on passenger queues and wait times.

Acknowledging that social distancing is not always possible in crowded places, many countries have ordered face masks to be worn on public transport. This measure also extends to airports, including major hubs in Europe like Frankfurt (FRA/EDDF), Munich (MUC/EDDM), Madrid (MAD/LEMD), Barcelona (BCN/LEBL) and Vienna (VIE/LOWW) airports. In Chile, wearing face masks has also been made mandatory at all airports. The provision of masks, unfortunately, remains inconsistent: some airport operators and carriers have indicated they will provide them to travellers, while others have told travellers to bring their own or be refused entry.

A growing number of airports have also implemented various health checks. Incheon International Airport (ICN/RKSI), the main point of entry to South Korea, was among the first to respond to the outbreak. Since March, the airport has implemented a three-step process to check travellers’ body temperatures at terminals, departure areas and boarding gates using thermal imaging cameras and handheld, non-contact infrared thermometers.

Airports

Passengers with body temperatures found to exceed 37.5°C (99.5°F) during any of the three stages may be taken to a quarantine station for an examination, denied boarding or have their ticket cancelled. Several other global hubs have introduced similar health screening measures. Since April, departing passengers on domestic flights from Tokyo Haneda Airport (HND/RJTT) have been required to undergo temperature checks before boarding. At Hong Kong International Airport (HKG/VHHH), arriving passengers must pass a temperature scan and saliva test before being granted entry into the territory.

Questionnaires have also become a part of these health screening processes. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has advised that authorities should collect details and contact information for travellers electronically prior to their trip for potential contact tracing purposes. In Mexico, for example, all airline passengers are already required by the Federal Civil Aviation Agency (AFAC) to answer a [risk assessment questionnaire](#) online prior to travelling. The questionnaire assesses the recent travel history of the passenger, possible symptoms and potential contacts with any confirmed COVID-19 cases. The results can be grounds for medical evaluation or being denied boarding or entry.

Advice

- Check-in online and use an electronic ticket. Otherwise, use self-service kiosks at the airport to minimise contact with staff.
- Check with the departure airport about how far in advance to arrive before your flight.
- If you aren't feeling well in advance of your flight, consult with a doctor. Individuals showing symptoms may be denied entry or boarding.
- Wear a face mask at all times, and bring a spare in case yours gets wet or soiled.
- Maintain a safe distance from other passengers and airport staff.
- Pack hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes in your carry on.

Airlines

As the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated travel restrictions have caused demand for flights to plummet to historically low levels, airlines have stepped up sanitary and distancing measures in an attempt to reassure weary passengers. In addition to pre-boarding health checks and mandatory face masks, airlines have begun implementing enhanced cleaning and disinfecting for aircraft and personal protective equipment (PPE)-integrated uniforms for flight attendants. Aeroméxico, Air Canada, Delta, American, JetBlue, United, Southwest, Air Namibia, Emirates, Air France, KLM, Lufthansa, Austrian and Swiss International Air Lines are just some of the international carriers to require face masks.

Airlines

Multiple airlines have also implemented health screening for passengers. On 4 May, Air Canada announced that passengers will be subject to an infrared temperature check at all airports, as a part of its CleanCare+ program. The announcement was made after Emirates became the first airline to conduct blood tests on travellers. On 15 April, the Emirati airline announced that the company began blood testing passengers booked on select flights from Dubai International Airport (DXB/OMDB) before departure, with an intention to expand the on-site testing scheme.

Airlines are also implementing various measures for social distancing. LATAM Airlines in Chile has blocked passengers from using toilets in the front of the aircraft to minimise contact with the crew. Delta, United, Spirit, EasyJet and Alaska airlines are among a number of carriers that have stopped booking passengers on middle seats. Several airlines have also phased out or reduced food and beverage services to limit physical contact with crew members. Similarly, Kenya Airways has advised passengers to carry their own headsets, as they have stopped issuing headsets across all flights.

Advice

- Wear a face mask at all times, and bring a spare in case yours gets wet or soiled.
- Pack hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes in your carry on. Clean your tray table, window shade, arm rests and non-porous seat during boarding.
- Remain in your seat whenever possible and minimise movement around the cabin.
- Considering bringing your own food and beverages.



Hotels and accomodations

Hotels and other short-term accommodation providers, such as Airbnb, have been severely affected by the pandemic. Many smaller hotels have been forced to close completely, which will mean fewer accomodation options for travellers. Some well-established hotel chains have introduced enhanced health screening measures for guests and employees, such as mandatory temperature checks at entrances and enforced social distancing measures in all common areas, including in lounges and bars. In addition, facilities such as swimming pools and gyms will likely also remain closed to guests due the difficulty of implementing strict sanitary measures in those locations. Depending on local regulations, wearing face masks may be mandatory whenever a traveller is in a hotel common area.

Going forward, the hospitality industry in many countries may implement certification programmes as a mark of confidence for travellers that their premises are clean, disinfected regularly and adhere to social distancing measures. In Malaysia, for example, the national hotel association indicated they would implement a “clean and safe” certification system as part of a move to boost confidence and peace of mind for travellers. The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) released a similar set of cleaning standards as part of their “Stay Safe” initiative. In the event this practice becomes more widespread, travellers should seek out accommodation providers that have such a certification.

Advice

- Book your stay in well-established hotel chains and serviced apartment providers that, at minimum, comply with local regulations on cleanliness and social distancing.
- Avoid under-regulated options, such as homestays, where stringent health and safety measures cannot be guaranteed.
- Bring an adequate supply of face masks, hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes for the duration of your stay. While some accommodations may provide them, this may not be the case everywhere.



Car rental, taxis and rideshares

Car rentals, taxis and rideshare services were among the first to be hit when COVID-19 lockdowns took effect across the world. Car rental operators like Avis, Hertz and Europcar were forced to shut down many of their outlets in and around airports as flights halted, laying off a significant portion of their staff.

In order to survive, rental car companies have started providing cheaper rental options for longer periods of time. Sixt has halved its daily rental costs for luxury cars, such as BMW 3 series and Mercedes-Benz models, in the United States. Some operators like Hertz and Avis have started providing weekly and monthly rentals of lower-end models for a third of what the cost had been before the COVID-19 outbreak.

Car rental companies have implemented some health safety measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which include adding hand sanitisers within vehicles and disinfecting them before and after each trip. Some operators like Carla Rental allow customers to rent a vehicle online and pick it up from select locations without having to enter the office. Going forward, more car rental companies are likely to implement contactless pick up options for travellers from locations closer to their home. As travel resumes, customers are also likely to demand clean rental vehicles which conform to health safety standards as well as flexibility on returns and cancellations, in the event that any travel restrictions are suddenly reimposed.

Many taxi operators and Uber, Lyft and Ola rideshare drivers have been forced to quit their jobs or resort to home deliveries of food and essential goods. Health authorities have issued special guidelines for taxis and rideshare operators to continue functioning during lockdowns. Uber has requested that customers sit in the back of the vehicle to ensure sufficient distance between the driver and the traveller. On 7 May, Lyft announced that both passengers and drivers will be required to wear masks and complete a health certification programme, which includes confirming before each ride that they are not displaying COVID-19 symptoms. In most countries with strict lockdowns, including Australia, taxis and rideshare services are not allowed to transport more than one customer in their vehicles.

Advice

- Wear a face mask and ride in the rear seats of the vehicle.
- Keep a window open for the duration of the journey.
- Handle your own luggage and wipe down your personal belongings after reaching your destination.
- Use cashless payment options, when available.
- When using rideshares or taxis to order food and groceries, opt for the delivery to be left outside your doorstep.



Rail

Many rail operators around the world are also adapting as travel begins to resume. In Europe, Eurostar issued an order requiring all passengers to wear face masks as of 4 May, while in the United States, Amtrak informed travellers that cash payments for tickets will no longer be accepted as of 27 March as part of efforts to reduce non-essential contact between customers and staff. In Italy, Trenitalia suspended onboard catering for similar reasons.

Lockdowns, curfews and entry bans are not the only cause of rail service disruptions across the globe. In recent weeks, rail operators have reduced schedules to allow for deep cleaning and disinfection of trains and stations, measures which are widely expected to continue until a vaccine is found. Many operators are also enforcing pre-boarding health screenings, including thermal testing, on passengers at stations, which often result in queues and longer waiting times.

Countries with strict lockdowns or restrictions on domestic rail travel, such as Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Djibouti are expected to experience continued total or near-total service suspensions in the near-term. International rail services are likely to take even longer to recover due to entry bans and self-quarantine orders. Services, particularly across Europe, are expected to remain disrupted until at least mid- to late May, while services between Russia, China and Mongolia will not resume before June.

Advice

- Check-in online and use an electronic ticket. Otherwise, use self-service kiosks at the station to minimise contact with staff.
- Check with the departure station about how far in advance to arrive before your train.
- Wear a face mask at all times, and bring a spare in case yours gets wet or soiled.
- Maintain a safe distance from other passengers and staff.

- Pack hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes in an easily accessible bag. Clean your tray table, arm rests and non-porous seat during boarding.
- Remain in your seat whenever possible and minimise movement around the train.
- Considering bringing your own food and beverages.



Public transport

Lockdowns and other travel restrictions combined with the accurate perception that public transport means being close to other people has resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of passengers using public transport. Operators in turn have suspended routes, altered timetables and reduced services and are likely to continue doing so as they adjust to low passenger numbers. As the industry adjusts to the new situation, more measures will likely be implemented in an attempt to restore confidence in public transport and ensure the safety of passengers. Some standard operating procedures have been implemented by many public transport operators, including social distancing measures, requirement for passengers to wear face masks, changes to payment methods and the daily sanitisation of buses, trains, ships and other vehicles. On 6 May, the New York City Subway announced a planned overnight shutdown – for the first time in its history as a 24/7 service – for deep cleaning.

Social distancing has become the new norm but its application on board public transport has varied. Many operators are operating at a reduced capacity and have applied various methods for enforcing social distancing, including a ban on passengers standing, new seating arrangements or simply asking people to stay a certain distance from one another. Under lockdown the measures are relatively easy to apply, however, social distancing will be much more difficult when commuters return to work, especially during peak hours, and this could lead to overcrowding at stations and longer journey times. While some service providers already offer a cashless service, many operators have switched to the method in an effort to limit the exchange of cash. Malta Public Transport implemented a “No Change” policy requiring passengers to pay using the exact amount of change. In Moscow, authorities implemented a digital permit system for public transport users, however, the measure initially led to large crowds at metro stations thus defeating the object of social distancing. Some countries such as Malaysia, Oman and Singapore have also implemented temperature checks at stations and individuals with a high temperature will not be allowed on board.

Advice

- Confirm your intended route immediately before departure.
- Follow directives on social distancing during your journey.
- Wear a face mask at all times, and bring a spare in case yours gets wet or soiled.
- Use cashless payments wherever possible.
- Wear gloves and avoid touching handrails, poles, etc.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced individual travellers and entire industries – aviation, accommodation, mobility – to rethink how we travel.

The pandemic has created a challenge of how to resume travelling while minimising the risk of exposure to the virus, complying with a growing list of new directives and grappling with many uncertainties. Consumer confidence is very unlikely to immediately return to pre-pandemic levels, even with extensive mitigation efforts, leading to persistently low demand. Any further highly-publicized outbreaks on board a cruise ship or at a business conference would cause immediate disruptions.

Until more effective therapeutic treatments – or a proven vaccine – are widely available, localised outbreaks will prompt the implementation of new lockdowns, potentially stranding travellers again in quarantine zones. Travel and security managers will have to carefully weigh a multitude of risks against the necessity of a trip before authorising travel.