

COULD TRAVEL BUBBLES BOOST TOURISM?



is expected to boost tourism.

Since 15 May, residents of the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) have been able to travel within the three countries as they wish. Without a fortnight's quarantine or screening test at the borders, literally in a bubble. A "travel bubble". A new concept designating a free movement agreement among several states which could, in the coming months, be extended to other countries

Concerned by the revival of tourism in her country, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on 20 May that she was considering the introduction of a 4-day week to encourage her fellow citizens to go on extended weekends in the country.

But an alternative route has been dug to revive this sector, which is essential to the economic health of New Zealand. For several weeks, the government held discussions with its Australian counterparts before reaching an agreement on May 5. The purpose of the agreement? **A "travel bubble" between the two countries, a "COVID-free travel zone" that would allow citizens of both countries to fly or cross the Tasman Sea for holidays.** Except that both countries preferred to delay and reach a more favourable health situation before officially opening their bubble.

"Similar Epidemiological Situation"

A reserve that the Baltic countries did not have. On 15 May this year, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia opened their common borders to each other, creating a "Baltic travel bubble" within the European Union. Residents are therefore allowed to travel back and forth between the three countries, without going through the 15-day quarantine that is compulsory for all foreign visitors. "The Baltic States are partners. We have a similar epidemiological situation. And we have developed an integrated economy. The free movement of people and goods is very important for the region," Arnoldas Pranckevicius, the European Commission's representative in Lithuania.

The principle of the 'travel bubble' without quarantine inspires beyond the Baltic States. The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Croatia on one side, and Greece, Cyprus and Israel on the other, could take the plunge. Greece announced on 20 May that travellers from the Baltic States, the Balkans and Germany would also be allowed to come without having to observe a quarantine period.

China would also consider establishing such a bubble/corridor with Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. Although South Korea has already established a "travel corridor" with its Chinese neighbour, allowing the movement of goods and people between a few selected cities (Seoul, Shanghai and eight other cities). **But this authorization comes with a price: travellers have to undergo regular tests for two weeks, be screened just before boarding a plane, observe a 48-hour quarantine upon arrival in China and undergo a new screening test.** Dissuasive conditions? Not really given that Korean Airlines easily sold all the seats (more than 300) on a weekly flight between Seoul and Shenyang in China.

With this new approach to tourism in times of deconfinement, in the form of the gradual reopening of the world, the expression "staying in your bubble" could, therefore, take on a whole new

connotation.

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