

SAFE TRAVEL? TOURISM CANNOT WAIT UNTIL EVERYONE IS VACCINATED



resuming its activities.

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) has again stated that rapid testing for COVID-19 at airport departure is the key to unlocking international travel, in a presentation to the UK government's Global Travel Taskforce. The global tourism body says that, while the vaccination is to be applauded, the travel and tourism sector cannot wait until everyone is vaccinated before

After the difficult end to 2020, global tourism suffered further setbacks at the beginning of this year as countries tightened travel restrictions in response to new virus outbreaks. UNWTO stated that all regions of the world continued to record strong declines in tourist arrivals in the first month of the year. **The introduction of vaccinations was slower than expected, which further delayed the resumption of tourism.**

Europe and Africa both recorded an 85 percent drop in arrivals according to UNWTO. The Middle East suffered a decline of 84 percent. International tourist arrivals in the Americas fell 79 percent in January, after slightly better results in the final quarter of the year.

In the context of the complicated situation of the industry, the WTTC calls on the British government to opt for a strategy that combines vaccines, testing, digital health passports and health and safety protocols, such as mandatory mask-wearing, to open the doors to tourism and secure safe travel. According to the body, these measures would also help save millions of jobs, which depend on the sector, and speed up the necessary economic recovery.

WTTC has also strongly advocated for the government to change its risk assessment from assessing entire countries to assessing each "high-risk" traveler, allowing for faster returns to safe travel. The return to international travel would particularly boost small and medium-sized businesses, which have been hard hit, as they make up 80% of all businesses in the sector.

The body has been working alongside the UK government to create a clear roadmap for the entire travel and tourism sector to prepare for businesses to increase operations and ensure they make the most of the summer high season.

"We do not doubt that the government knows it is extremely important to present a clear roadmap, enabling the Travel and Tourism sector to find its way back to normal operation and profitability," said Gloria Guevara, WTTC CEO. "The UK government must build on the vaccination and enable the return of safe international travel through a comprehensive testing programme for unvaccinated British travelers and, most importantly, in time for the important summer season," she concluded.

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