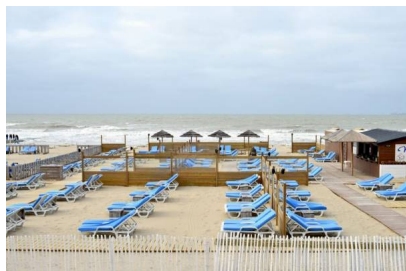


BELGIUM TO REOPEN BORDERS AND HOTEL ROOFTOPS



Belgium will reopen its border to travelers from April 19 and will allow hospitality activities on rooftops from May 8 when the curfew will be lifted, as agreed by the Consultation Committee.

The reopening of bars and restaurants, which have been closed for half a year, has been the main topic of the meeting amid pressures from the hospitality industry that demanded the lifting of restrictions. **After a meeting of seven hours, an agreement was reached so that from May 8 these activities will be allowed but only on rooftops.**

The night curfew will be lifted as of that day, but in return the number of people that can gather between midnight and 5 a.m. will be limited, allowing only groups of up to three.

Following the meeting, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo reminded everyone in a press conference to keep caution as the gradual “de-escalation” plan continues, ensuring that the virus is still “very present” among the population, although he also emphasized that vaccination campaigns have “become a solid basis for reopening.”

The government has also agreed to reopen borders and remove the restrictions for non-essential travel following the demands of the European Commission, which had expressed concerns about the implications of the Belgian laws on freedom of travel in the Schengen Area.

Last January, Belgium decided to close its borders to tourism in an attempt to contain a growing and disproportionate surge in coronavirus infections, as announced by the Community Executive.

The Belgian government also approved the reopening of hair salons, beauty centers and non-essential shops as of April 26, when groups of up to 10 will be allowed to gather for outdoor activities.

Domestic tourism increased during the Easter holiday when many Belgians decided to spend their leisure time on the coast. In terms of rentals, most agencies here have seen the number of bookings increase by 15-20%. Campsites also reported high occupancy rates. However, some hotels on the coast have remained closed while others note “decent” occupancy and still others remain below 50% occupancy.

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