

MOST DESTINATIONS IN ASIA REMAIN CLOSED FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS



The Covid-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on the world of tourism for almost two years now and the end of the crisis seems to be out of sight. Many countries gradually open their borders. Most destinations in Asia however remain closed.

International tourism has seen an unprecedented decrease in the wake of the pandemic, as 2021 figures from UNWTO remain 72 % lower than in the pre-pandemic year 2019, despite the slight increase (+ 4 %) compared to 2020. However, could there now be a light at the end of the tunnel for international travel? **Developments in some regions suggest so, but in contrast, others are still very cautious about lifting health restrictions**, also given the rapid spread of the Omicron variant.

European Countries Cancelling Restrictions

Some European countries have taken a somewhat risky approach and have chosen to cancel all Covid-19 restrictions. Earlier in January, the United Kingdom announced that it would lift all restrictions. Denmark followed at the end of the month, despite a rapid rise in cases.

Other countries that have eased restrictions significantly include the Netherlands, while Austria has lifted its lockdown for the non-vaccinated population. The Czech Republic has announced that it plans to lift restrictions in April.

The narrative of some countries seems to suggest that it is virtually impossible to control the spread of the Covid-19 variants without devastating socio-economic consequences. While a more free-flowing approach is perhaps a novelty in Europe, Mexico, for example, has been bearing the fruit of its open borders and mild restrictions for some time now. Some Mexican beaches have never been as visited as in the past months, as they continue to welcome crowds of young travelers mainly from North America and Europe.

While the country has also seen a fall in foreign visitors from 45 million in 2019 to 31 million last year, at the same time it has moved up from 7th to 3rd in terms of worldwide popularity, which will most definitely have a positive effect on the future of its tourism.

Destinations in Asia Remain Closed

On the other side of the world, specifically in the Asia Pacific, the situation is completely different. Destinations in Asia are generally very cautious two years after the beginning of the pandemic, with the ending of the crisis seemingly very far away.

For example, China has imposed a zero-tolerance policy, with international travel virtually impossible and city lockdowns across the country being a regular occurrence. Hong Kong, for its part, has shut down schools, bars and limited the opening hours of restaurants.

Japan's borders remain closed, as do New Zealand's, while South Korea has strict conditions for entry to the country as well as many regulations in place with regards to

gatherings, restaurant opening hours and many more.

As a result of these strict policies and restrictions, destinations in Asia have suffered the most on a global scale. According to UNWTO data, arrivals in 2021 were 65 % below 2020 and 94 % below pre-pandemic figures, very well above the worldwide average.

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