

APAC COVID-19 Landscape Update Updated 23 November 2020

1. Overview

- Countries across Asia continue to report a high number of infections, namely Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka, all struggling to control the spread.
- **China** has largely controlled the spread of Covid-19 but now facing local transmission risks due to imported cases. China is now halting the issue of visas to foreign nationals while restricting non-urgent outbound movements by Chinese citizens.
- **Japan** is also experiencing a resurgence of cases in its capital as Tokyo posted the highest Covid-19 alert level with a daily tally of new cases exceeding 500 on Thursday (18 November).
- **ASEAN** - cross border travel is high on the economic recovery agenda, discussing regional travel corridors at a recent online regional summit, across a 10-nation bloc. Indonesia is pushing for the regional travel corridor to be up by Jan/ Feb 2021.
- **Hong Kong and Singapore** travel bubble was announced to launched on Nov 22, **is now postponed by 2 weeks**. This bubble was supposed to allow quarantine-free travel in each direction. Travellers would be expected to pay for their tests approx. SG\$199 per person each way. Rapid Covid-19 testing would not apply for this travel bubble yet.
- The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Council endorsed new updates to its Aviation Recovery Task Force's (CART's) 'Take-off' Guidelines for international air transport. The high-level cover document for the new guidelines emphasizes the need for coordinated measures between governments and industry are essential to the re-establishment of public confidence in air travel.

2. Political Developments

- ASEAN Southeast Asian leaders have met in regional summit meetings. The summit statement has not been released, but Indonesian President Joko Widodo said in a statement that leaders from the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#) had discussed the plan on November 12. Jokowi said that the 10-nation bloc was set to issue an “**ASEAN declaration on an ASEAN travel corridor arrangement framework.**” He added hoping that the coordination and streamlining of strict regional health protocols, would be up and running by the first quarter of 2021.
- [Hong Kong and Singapore](#) the start an air travel bubble to replace quarantine with Covid-19 testing each way is postponed until approx. Dec 7th 2020, given the increase in Covid19 cases in HK. Travellers from both cities must take designated bubble flights and fulfil certain conditions and requirements, including undergoing up to three Covid-19 tests at various stages of the journey. Singapore Minister for Transport Ong Ye Kung said that this was the first travel bubble of its type and may be used as a template for other countries, if successful.

- Singapore is currently seeking a travel bubble deal with [Taiwan](#). Taiwan's Minister of Transportation and Communications Lin Chia-lung added that Taiwan is also in talks with Vietnam and Japan about similar deals. In the meantime, the ministry plans to boost domestic tourism in December and plans to introduce a winter travel subsidy plan in January, which it hopes would benefit travel agencies, tour guides, tour managers and tourists.
- [Australia](#)'s Prime Minister Scott Morrison is reportedly holding discussions with several low-risk Asian countries in order to expand the country's travel bubble with no quarantine. The Australian Government is looking to expand its travel bubble beyond New Zealand to include other countries which have effectively controlled COVID-19 such as Japan, South Korea, China, Singapore and Taiwan. Negotiations are still exploratory at this stage.

3. Regulatory Developments

- Offshore duty free sales on [Hainan island](#) rocketed by 218.2% to US\$1.6 billion for the period between 1 July to 19 October, according to official figures by the Hainan Provincial Bureau of International Economic Development (Hainan IEDB). The significance of the period quoted is that Hainan's enhanced offshore duty free shopping policy was introduced on 1 July. Key policy changes include an increase in the annual offshore shopping quota from RMB30,000 (US\$4,215) to RMB100,000 (US\$14,050) and an increase in the number of categories from 38 to 45, including spirits & wine. The limit of RMB8,000 (US\$1,129) for a single purchase was also removed.

4. Industry Developments

- The [International Civil Aviation Organization \(ICAO\) Council](#) endorsed new updates to its Aviation Recovery Task Force's (CART's) 'Take-off' Guidelines for international air transport. The new guidelines provide recommendations for countries to consider adopting per their current local medical status, and on specific priorities including general hygiene, masks and face coverings, health screening and declarations, air passengers with reduced mobility, and the mental health and well-being of aviation workers and passengers.
- The Assembly of Presidents of the [Association of Asia Pacific Airlines \(AAPA\)](#) focused on survival and continuity in their latest virtual meeting. The meeting concluded with AAPA, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and Airports Council International Asia-Pacific (ACI Asia-Pacific), jointly declaring their solidarity and commitment to work with governments to revive air travel. It was reported that multilateral collaboration among governments to relax travel restrictions and quarantine requirements based on risk assessment and medical evidence, will be key to the restart and recovery of the aviation industry.
- A study by [Incheon International Airport Corporation \(IIAC\)](#) of 1,000 people above the age of 18 (600 Koreans and 400 foreigners) reveals strong interest among both Koreans and foreigners to travel internationally via so-called 'travel bubbles' with lower Covid-19 infection risk. The IIAC survey shows a significant increase in those who said yes to traveling within a travel bubble – 5 in 10 Koreans and 7 in 10 foreigners would travel under such conditions. Most responses (79%) however maintained that even with a travel bubble, the risk of a Covid-19 infection is still a concern.

Annex A

Appended are the list and description of the various schemes currently in place by various countries in Asia.

1. BILATERAL AGREEMENTS

a. **Travel Corridor:** Caters to essential business and official travel

Countries	
Australia	New Zealand
China	South Korea
Indonesia	China, Japan (pending implementation details), South Korea, United Arab Emirates (UAE)
India	Japan
Japan	Indonesia (pending implementation details), Korea, Singapore, Vietnam
Singapore	Brunei, China, Germany (pending implementation details), Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea
Taiwan	Australia, Bhutan, Brunei, Fiji, Hong Kong, Japan, , Malaysia, Macau, Mongolia, New Zealand, Palau, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam

b. **Others:** Schemes targeted to allow for the movement of long term residents between two countries (e.g. Periodic Commuting Arrangement between Singapore and Malaysia)

Countries	
Singapore	Malaysia - Periodic Commuting Arrangement covering long-term work permit holders from both countries, who must have at least resided in the respective country for 90 days
	Japan - Residence Track Scheme covering nationals from both countries who are holders of Work Passes and those who have been granted work passes in principle

Travellers on the above mentioned schemes are subjected to the various health control measures which generally include rules such as:

- Swab tests at pre departure and arrival points
- Controlled itinerary
- Reduced quarantine time
- To be sponsored by a business or government entity in the traveller's country of arrival

- c. **Travel Bubble:** Designed for general / leisure travel **without the need** for travellers to serve measures such as a mandatory quarantine and a controlled itinerary. For the travel bubble between Singapore and Hong Kong, only a maximum of 200 people will be permitted on each flight with travelers from both cities required to take designated bubble flights and fulfil requirements, including undergoing up to three Covid-19 tests at various stages of the journey. Details of the arrangement will be reviewed after one month.

Countries	
Singapore	Hong Kong (22 November)

2. UNILATERAL AGREEMENTS

- a. **Unilateral openings** are a standing invitation from Singapore to these countries, which have comprehensive public health surveillance systems and have successfully controlled Covid-19's spread. Currently, only Singapore has unveiled such initiative for general / leisure travellers from an approved list of countries - Australia (except Victoria state), Brunei, New Zealand, Vietnam.

Known as the **Air Travel Pass**, individuals must comply with measures such as:

- o Having remained in the approved list of countries for 14 days prior to their arrival into Singapore
- o Swab tests at departure and arrival points
- o Pre-declared controlled itinerary
- o Downloading the relevant contact tracing application
