

APAC COVID-19 Landscape Update Updated 23 December 2020

1. Overview

- Countries across Asia Pacific reported a record resurgence of infections in December.
- **South Korea** reported 1,062 new Covid-19 cases on Friday (Dec 18), the second highest since its first infection in January. Seoul densely populated metropolitan area being hit the most.
- Japan marked a record one-day with no less than 3,211 new cases on Thursday (Dec 17), led by Tokyo.
- Indonesia's capital, Jakarta increased movement restrictions in a bid to curb the spread of coronavirus as more people are set to travel to and from the city.
- **Singapore**, from 11:59pm on 23rd Dec, Singapore has joined over 40 countries to tighten restrictions on travellers from UK, following the emergence of a new coronavirus strain. Any visitors with a travel history to the UK in last 14 days will not be allowed to enter or transit through Singapore. Ban applies to prior travel approvals also.
- **United Kingdom As of 1 January 2021**, the United Kingdom will become a third country and EU Member States shall start applying the [Recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU](#) to persons travelling from the UK. Hence only **essential travel** may take place United Kingdom.

Vaccine Discussions

- Health Sciences Authority (HSA) has approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for use. This makes Singapore one of the first countries to obtain this vaccine, with sufficient vaccines planned for everyone in Singapore by Q3 2021. Pfizer also recently announced its application for approval in [Japan](#)
- New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced that the New Zealand cabinet has agreed "in principle" to open a trans-Tasman travel bubble with Australia in the first quarter of 2021 provided there are no major virus outbreaks in either country. Australia has allowed quarantine-free travel for New Zealand arrivals since October, but New Zealand has not reciprocated, maintaining its 14-day quarantine to date.

2. Political Developments

- [Singapore and Vietnam](#) The two countries have "tasked officials to finalise the green lane agreement by early next year". Both countries are also seeking to reinstate regular commercial return flights between them. According to Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Singapore will be among the first few countries with which Vietnam will resume regularised essential business and official travel.
- [Singapore](#) launmching a Connect@Singapore initiative, a new segregated travel lane aimed at business travellers on short-term stays. Open to a limited number of business, official and high economic value travellers who are staying in Singapore for up to 14 days. Applications for this segregated travel lane is planned to open mid of January 2021, (first travellers to arrive from the second half of January. For their whole stay, travellers under the segregated travel lane will be housed within dedicated facilities, undergo regular testing and observe all prevailing safe management measures. This is the first scheme open to visitors worldwide.

- [New Zealand](#) Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has announced that the country hopes to open a travel bubble with Australia by April next year and is working to finalise the necessary anti-coronavirus border measures. Ardern said New Zealand's cabinet had agreed "in principle" to open a trans-Tasman travel bubble in the first quarter of 2021 provided there are no major virus outbreaks in either country. Over the weekend, New Zealand announced a similar plan for a travel bubble with the tiny Cook Islands in the Pacific in the first quarter of next year.
- [Malaysia's](#) announcement that it was exploring travel bubble arrangements with other countries however government first needs to bring down coronavirus infections in the community. Malaysia suffered a 79% drop in tourist arrivals between January and September this year compared to same period last year.

3. Regulatory Developments

- [Singapore's Prime Minister Lee](#) announced that the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) has approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for use in Singapore. Other vaccines are expected to arrive in Singapore in the coming months, with sufficient vaccines planned for everyone in Singapore by Q3 2021. Moderna said on Tuesday (Dec 15) that it has concluded an agreement with Singapore's Ministry of Health (MOH) to supply mRNA-1273, its COVID-19 vaccine, to the country. Singapore will be entering phase three of its reopening on Dec 28. allowing social gatherings to go from 5 to 8. Capacity limits in public places such as malls, attractions and places of worship to be increased.
- Pfizer announced its application for approval in [Japan](#) for its Covid-19 vaccine. The Japanese government has a supply deal with Pfizer for 120 million vaccine doses made by Pfizer and German partner BioNTech. Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato added that Japan hoped to have all of its residents vaccinated in the first half of next year.
- The [Indonesian government](#) is planning to reallocate some of this year's remaining stimulus funds to pay for mass vaccination in 2021. By Dec. 14, the government had spent 70 percent of the nation's Rp 695.2 trillion stimulus package in an effort to strengthen the healthcare system and tend to the economy as it reeled from the coronavirus outbreak. President Joko Widodo announced that the government would provide free vaccines to all Indonesians in 2021. The government is hoping to secure 246.6 million vaccine doses. It has been in negotiations with Pfizer, AstraZeneca and global vaccine program COVAX, in addition to China's Sinovac Biotech.

4. Industry Developments

- [Airport Authority Hong Kong \(AA\)](#) announced that its relief package for the airport community will continue for another three months in view of the prolonged impact of the pandemic. The waiver or reduction of various fees for the aviation industry announced in October this year will continue from January to March 2021. Rental relief for retail and catering tenants will continue, the authority emphasised. Most of the shops and restaurants in the terminal have suspended business and their rental is waived. AA will closely monitor the operating environment and provide necessary assistance to the airport community.
- Offshore duty free sales on [Hainan island](#) , according to official figures released to The Moodie Davitt Report by Invest Hainan, the official WeChat account of Hainan Provincial Bureau of International Economic Development (Hainan IEDB). Despite the number of visitors to Hainan having fallen, the RMB30 billion sales target set by the Hainan Provincial Party Committee & Provincial Government at the beginning of the year was reached 17 days in advance of year closing. Sales rocketed since the implementation of the new offshore duty free shopping policy on 1 July, a far-sighted programme designed to stimulate Hainan's economy and maximise Chinese travel consumption at home rather than abroad.

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
New Zealand	Australia (pending implantation details of the trans-Tasman bubble)
Singapore	Brunei, China, Germany (pending implementation details), Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam
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. Perodic Commuting Arrangement between Singapore and Malaysia)

Countries	
Singapore	Malaysia - Perodic 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. The arrangement has been delayed to 2021, with an exact date to be reviewed at end-December.

Countries	
Singapore	Hong Kong (Delayed to 2021)
New Zealand	Australia (trans-Tasman bubble planned for Q1 2021, provided there are no major covid-19 outbreaks)

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
