



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

# Australia - New Zealand Safe Travel Zone

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Australia and New Zealand unilaterally opened two-way quarantine-free travel from each other creating a safe travel zone.

- Quarantine-free travel from Australia to New Zealand commenced on 19 April 2021
- travel zone covers air travel and commercial maritime vessels (freight/cargo) only

## Safe Travel Zone – ground rules and common principles

- Protecting the health and safety of both Australia's and New Zealand's communities from risks posed by COVID-19 remains the highest priority for both governments, in a collaborative approach to the operations of the travel zone.
- Both governments had clearly identified early the conditions that needed to be met in order to allow quarantine-free travel into their country (and for citizens and residents to leave).
- Eligible people to travel in the safe travel zone are those who have been in either Australia or New Zealand for 14 consecutive days immediately prior to travel, subject to meeting health and immigration requirements of Australia or New Zealand.
- The management and operation of the travel zone is grounded on health principles, acknowledging each country makes its own assessments and decisions on arrangements for quarantine-free travel into its jurisdiction, including assessment of public health risks.
- Both countries accept that either government could impose travel restrictions at short notice in response to a COVID-19 outbreak, including pausing or suspending quarantine-free travel.
- Both countries have undertaken to engage with each other if they intend to open quarantine-free travel to other countries.

## Safe Travel Zone – Information sharing, coordination and communications

- Timely sharing and exchange of information between relevant Australian and New Zealand agencies and other key stakeholders (e.g. state jurisdictions in the case of Australia) is critical.
- Australia and New Zealand were fortunate that there were established institutional relationships between our agencies helping with information and data exchange across issues such as health, border controls, quarantine, and other operational, policy and regulatory areas.
- Progress to get and maintain a safe travel zone requires coordinated engagement.
- Australia and New Zealand appointed lead agencies to coordinate discussions on establishing a Trans-Tasman Safe Travel Zone (Foreign Affairs and Trade).
- However specific agencies responsible for health and border protection also regularly met to settle their specific approaches to issues such risk (assessments), passenger entry requirements e.g. travel documentation and whether COVID-19 departure/arrival testing was necessary.
- Communications of requirements to the airlines, segregating “green zones” at airports and informing the travelling public of their obligations have been fundamental in the planning and operation of the safe travel zone.

## A&NZ Safe Travel Zone – Health assessments and border arrangements

- Both Australia and New Zealand review health risks and assessments on an ongoing basis, taking into account the evolving nature of the threat posed by COVID-19, the domestic situation in each country, and the need for quick and flexible responses to emerging threats.
- In the evolving pandemic environment, the risks of quarantine-free travel remain under constant review, and Australia and New Zealand consult each other if there are any material changes to domestic COVID-19 measures, restrictions and processes.
- Australia and New Zealand are also applying enhanced border and travel protocols for the travel zone in addition to existing robust border processes, agreed between our border authorities.
- Understanding each others government operations (again, who has authority in relation to health and border measures decision-making) has been essential to avoid confusion and delays.
- For example Australian states and territories may at any time implement their own border and quarantine measures, and health requirements, within their jurisdictions, which can impact on quarantine-free travel.

## A&NZ Safe Travel Zone – Suspension of quarantine-free travel

- National sovereignty over decision-making remains in place.
- Australia or New Zealand may unilaterally decide to pause or suspend quarantine-free travel into their jurisdiction at any time based on their assessment of the health risks to their respective communities.
- If this occurs, they will inform the other government promptly through established (diplomatic) channels, and endeavour to provide as much notice as possible to passengers, government agencies, airlines and airport operators affected by the measures to minimise disruption.
- Reciprocal agency notification arrangements facilitate timely communications between Australian and New Zealand agencies.
- In the event of a prolonged pause or suspension of quarantine-free travel in one or both directions, the two governments have undertaken work on contingency plans to facilitate the return of travellers to their country of residence to the extent practicable and when safe to do so. However, the overarching public message is travel has changed and travellers need to be prepared for disruption (“Flyer beware”).

## Lessons Learnt

- The key to the development of safe travel zones or travel bubbles is that the countries involved establish a shared understanding of what outcomes they are seeking to achieve from the bubble.
- In Australia and New Zealand's case the outcome sought was quarantine free travel across the Trans-Tasman based on a health assessment by both countries that each had low or no COVID-19 community transmission.
- With an agreed outcome determined, then countries need to agree on criteria that qualify people for access to safe or "green" zone travel – for Australia and New Zealand the key criteria that gives passenger access is that you can demonstrate that you have been in either country for at least 14 days (and not in a COVID-19 area).
- Countries who wish to be involved in these arrangements must also be prepared to share reliable information – if you do not then it is difficult to see how you can make a reasonable health assessment of the other country.
- You also need to be patient – inevitably countries and their respective officials may have some initial differences about what they are willing to allow, these can usually eventually be resolved through discussions.
- Issues around transit passengers are challenging – they do not lend themselves to so called "green" travel corridors as they involve passengers wanting to come in from countries outside the bubble.
- You need to reach a position on how both countries handle subsequent COVID-19 outbreaks – in Australia and New Zealand's case this is the ability of either country to decide they will pause or suspend the arrangements. Working closely with airlines on what might happen in a response is critical so they can be prepared.
- Clear public messaging about the safe travel zone including passenger eligibility and what might happen if an outbreak occurs is critical – travellers must be aware and be prepared.
- Working with airlines and airports is critical in the planning stage of a safe travel zone to understand what is operationally feasible, with clear guidance about the health measures they need to apply.



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