South East Asia: Open for Business

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20 April, 2022



The world is steadily emerging from the pandemic, and the Northern Hemisphere has arguably been leading the charge.

South-East Asia on the other hand has been lagging behind. The region's countries have resisted joining the world's 'new normal', instead relying on strict 'zero-covid' strategies that kept foreigners out, citizens in hotel quarantine, and crews cooped up in hotels. **Until now.**

In recent weeks and months, we have seen **several major announcements** from these countries that at last, they are willing to re-join the rest of the world – and that's good news for the industry.

Here's a rundown of the biggest changes happening right now.

Singapore

The News

From April 1, fully vaccinated foreigners (from anywhere) are once again be able enter the city-state without quarantine.

The existing 'Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL)' scheme has been scrapped. For operators this means that passenger flights flying into the Lion City will no longer need approval to operate under strict VTL protocols.

Passenger Rules

For fully vaccinated passengers, click here.

For non-vaccinated passengers, click here. **Special approval is required, and in most cases non-vaccinated foreigners will not be allowed. Seven days of self-quarantine also applies.*

Crew Rules

There are new rules for crew – one set for vaccinated crew (no restrictions on movement), and another set for unvaccinated crew (you have to stay in one of three approved hotels, and you're confined to your room!).

But watch out for one important stipulation: if any crew are unvaccinated, ALL of you have to follow the unvaccinated set of rules.

Check new CAAS Circular 18/2022 Rev 2 for full details.

Malaysia

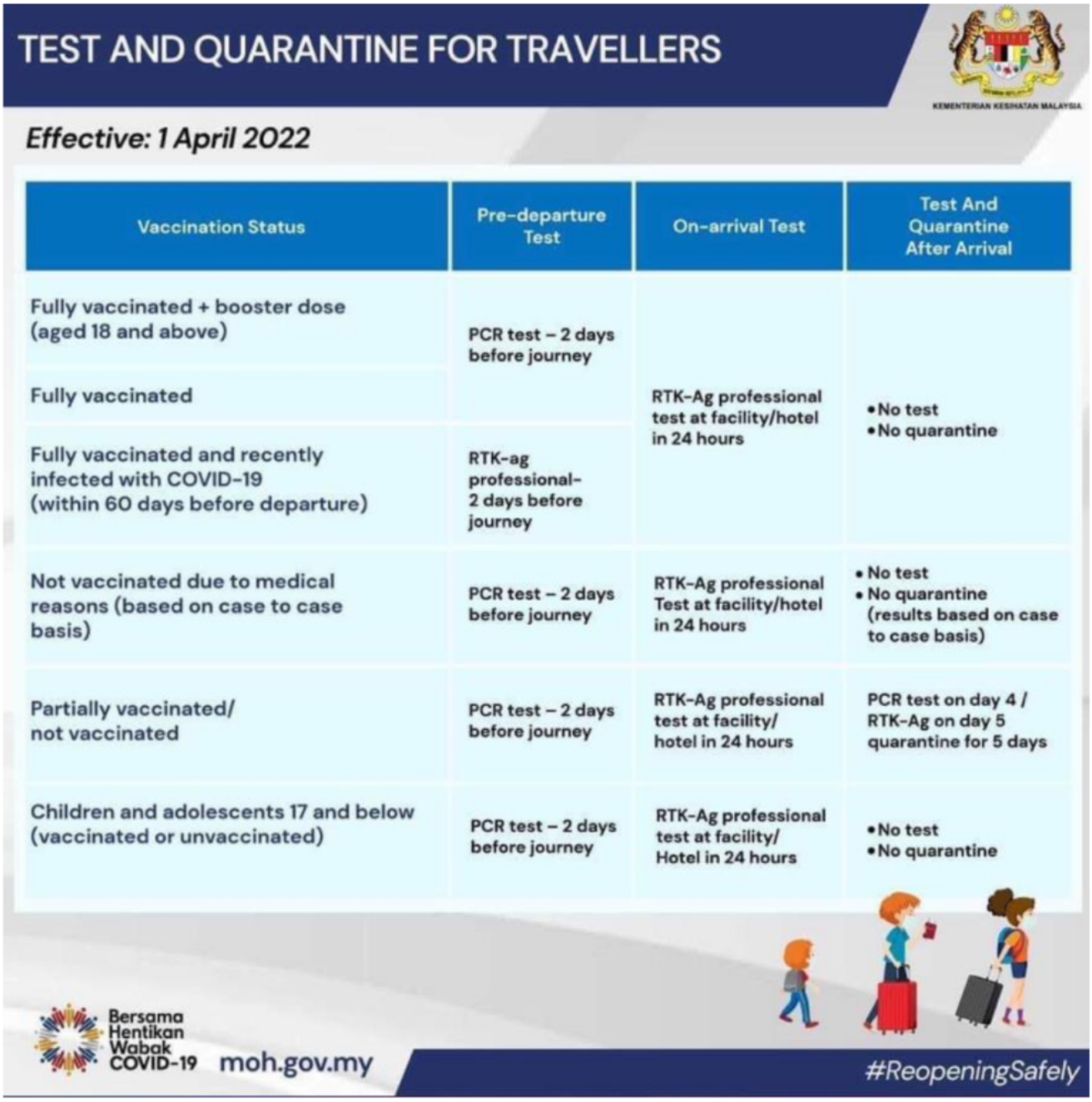
The News

It's also good. From April 1, the country completely reopened to fully vaccinated passengers with no quarantine. Foreigners also no longer need to seek approval before travelling.

Passenger Rules

They're complicated. And depend on vaccination status (they also take into account whether you have received a booster dose).

You can find that information here, but here's a picture, because pictures are always better:



Crew Rules

Crew can only enter Malaysia through WMSA/Subang, WMKK/Kuala Lumpur or WMKL/Langkawi airports.

In all cases they require a PCR test that is less than 72 hours old at time of arrival. Subang seems to be the best option, with no quarantine or maximum stay. In Kuala Lumpur crew can only stay for 24 hours and must isolate in the hotel, while in Langkawi crew can stay for 72 hours and don’t have to isolate if they follow the same rules as tourists.

Indonesia

What’s the news?

They’ve dropped quarantine for both passengers and crew throughout the entire country. This follows a successful trial on the holiday island of Bali.

Passenger Rules

They'll need a PCR test taken within 48 hours before departure for Indonesia. Keep in mind this can be a tight turn around for busy labs – the global standard seems to be 72 hours.

Crew Rules

You'll need a certificate or card proving you are fully vaccinated, along with a PCR test. The rules are a little easier for crew – you have 72 hours to get that done before you leave for Indonesia. There will also be a travel declaration to fill out, but you'll be free to leave the hotel and enjoy your layover.

Vietnam

What's the news?

Borders are now open to all foreigners, with no quarantine, as long as they hold a valid visa. Watch out for this gotcha though: the only visas available on arrival are currently for business travellers (not tourists). Everyone else will need to apply beforehand online. There's a long list of countries that this applies to (including the US, Canada and UK) which you can access here. There are also visa exemptions available for select countries, see the image below.



Countries with visa exemptions in Vietnam, all other travellers require a visa.

Passenger Rules

They'll need to get tested first, and there's two options. A PCR test that is less than 72 hours old, or a rapid antigen test that is less than 24 hours old – both at time of departure for Vietnam. There's an opt clause too, if they can't provide proof of a test they can still travel but will need to get tested within 24 hours of touching down.

Crew Rules

Local agents advise that all the same requirements apply to crew as for passengers (including a valid visa or exemption) – that is if you want to enter the country.

Japan

What's the news?

Ok, so not really South-East-Asia but we thought we'd include it anyway – given that Japan lifted its entry ban on foreigners from over a hundred countries on April 8 (including the US and UK). One big gotcha though – tourists will still have to wait. Pax will need to be entering for business, study or some other essential reason.

Passenger Rules

Depending on their vaccination status, where they are travelling from, and whether they are identified as a close contact of a positive case, they may be subject to up to 7 full days of quarantine and/or self-isolation on arrival.

For Japan's horribly complex entry rules in their official format, click here.

Crew Rules

The crew rules remain a bit of a mystery. We've had some reports from crew saying they were unable to apply for any of the visas available to passengers (business, study, etc).

We haven't seen any published rule changes here from how it worked before – crew can enter on a 'shore pass' arranged through their handler, but must self-isolate in the hotel for 7 days or until departure.

Opsgroup members have reported the following: *"The guidance we received from our company is that crew members must stay in their rooms but can leave the hotel for exercise and to obtain food to bring back to eat in the room. No dining out, no shopping for anything other than food to eat in your room. We enter on a shore pass. For quarantine, we fill out two forms that ask about where we have been in the world and if we are feeling healthy, where we are staying, and if we have transportation (another quarantine requirement is that we don't use public transportation). We also sign a pledge that we are going to follow the rules. They then give us a quarantine card to go with our shore pass. When we arrive for our return trip, we initial a paper saying that we followed the rules."*

If you're considering a trip to Japan, try contacting a local handler (iajops@interavia.co.jp and fltops@aeroworks.jp are decent options) and check if there's any update to these rules – especially those for crew (and please let us know what you find out!)

A note on Thailand.

Borders have been open to foreigners for a while now via three main entry schemes:

- Test and Go (a quarantine free option)
- Sandbox (restricted movement)
- Alternative Quarantine Scheme (quarantine reduced to five days from April 1).

The main news is that in all cases the requirement for passengers to get tested before arriving has been scrapped from April 1. Crew can make use of the same schemes and enter under the same conditions as pax.

For more info on passenger entry rules, check out the official page here, as well as the handy checklist document put together by local handling agent Asia Flight Services (eff Apr 6).

Still closed for business.

Not all of South East Asia is open to foreigners yet, watch out for these ones:

Myanmar – International passenger flights are still not allowed to land. Visas are not currently being issued for foreigners.

Brunei – Entry is still severely restricted. Any foreigner needs approval first and non-essential travel is off limits.

Laos – Special permission is still required for foreigners, and tourism is a no-go.

Unsure? Ask the team.

Entry rules change quickly and can be frustratingly confusing to get your head around. If there is a specific country you are looking for info on, try the #questions channel in Slack, or reach out to us at team@ops.group and we'll do our best to help you find the answers you're looking for.