



What future has European tourism in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The EU Tourism and Transport Package

On 13 May 2020 the European Commission published a package of guidelines and recommendations designed to help member states gradually relax current travel restrictions and allow tourism businesses to reopen after the current lockdown while at the same time respecting necessary health precautions.

The UK is, of course, no longer an EU member and this package is advisory only, but it is likely to have a major impact on UK travel businesses wishing to send clients to EU holiday destinations and on British citizens wanting to go on holiday to Europe this year.

The UK's current position

The EU's determination to plan for the future of European tourism beyond the current pandemic is in striking contrast to recent public statements by the UK Government. On 12 May 2020 the health secretary, Matt Hancock, said that summer holidays abroad were unlikely this year because of the new 'reality of life' dictated by social distancing. This comment was followed up by the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, who said on 13 May 2020 that the UK Government was advising against all non-essential foreign travel and that anyone booking a trip in July or August this year would be 'taking a chance' because of the lockdown across Europe. He added that there was little sign of an immediate change, speaking on the same day as the EU Commission published its Tourism Package!

Certainly, the UK travel market is currently at a standstill. TUI has cancelled all breaks until 14 June but plans to restart most holidays in July. Jet 2 plans to resume flights and holidays from 17 June and Ryanair has announced its intention to operate 1000 flights per day from 1st July. Speaking on BBC Radio 4 on 14 May 2020, a TUI representative said that the company had sold about 1/3 of their summer holidays, which must be far below normal sales for this time in the season. Meanwhile, BA announced that it had given cash refunds on 921,000 bookings and vouchers for another 346,000 bookings. Clearly, any resumption of foreign holidays will depend on a relaxation of current restrictions by both the EU and the UK Government.

The EU Package in more detail

The background to the EU's intervention is that what it terms the European tourism ecosystem, which includes transport, accommodation, food, recreation and culture, accounts for almost 10% of the EU's GDP and is a vital source of employment and income, especially in many of the less developed regions of Europe. In the June to August summer season, EU residents make 385 million tourism trips and spend €190 billion, but it is now estimated that these figures could be 60-80% down this summer.

The recommendation in the EU package, which is to make travel vouchers an attractive alternative to cash reimbursement to strengthen the balance sheets of tourism companies, is discussed in a companion article to this one posted by Daniel Black.

The EU package contains three guidelines, which are:

1. a common approach to lifting current restrictions on free movement at EU borders in a gradual and coordinated way;
2. a common framework to support the gradual resumption of transport services while ensuring the safety of passengers and staff; and
3. common criteria for gradually and safely resuming tourist activities, including health protocols for hotels, restaurants and other tourist facilities.

Lifting restrictions on free movement

Under this heading, the Commission invites member states to engage in a process of reopening unrestricted cross-border movement based on three criteria:

- (i) epidemiological, focussing on areas and member states where the infection situation is improving based on information supplied by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control;
- (ii) the ability to apply containment measures, for example physical distancing and hygiene precautions, during the whole journey and
- (iii) economic and social considerations, initially giving priority to key areas of health, social and economic activity.

A common framework for resuming transport services

Under this heading, the Commission recommends limiting contact between passengers and transport workers and reducing the number of passengers using all forms of transport, as well as providing guidelines on the use of facemasks. The document also records that member states have agreed on guidelines to ensure the cross-border inter-operability of tracing apps to warn of coronavirus infection, but it admits that the technical problems of achieving this have not yet been overcome.

Common criteria for safely resuming tourist activities

The Commission has issued guidance for the safe and gradual restoration of tourism activities, including health protocols for hotels, restaurants and cafés. As expected, there is reference here to physical distancing, washing and disinfection, use of facemasks and what is oddly termed 'respiratory etiquette'. The guidance also recommends that hotels and restaurants should fix notices on their premises telling customers what infection control measures are being applied by the owners and what should be followed by customers.

Alongside the package, the EU has published various supporting documents, including detailed Questions and Answers. The first question: *Will I be able to travel abroad this summer?* is, not surprisingly, given a qualified answer, namely that this will depend on the evolution of the public health situation in member states and that restrictions are more likely to be lifted between member states with similar epidemiological situations than for there to be a generalised lifting of restrictions throughout the EU. Another question is: *What health and safety protocols will apply during travel?* This is answered by stating that passengers will be encouraged to buy tickets and check-in online to minimise contact at departure, physical distancing will be ensured at security checks and luggage drop-offs and fewer passengers may be allowed on board buses and trains. The answer notably does not confront the issue of reduced seating on aircraft, which has already generated public debate with some airlines expressing a willingness to leave middle seats on

planes empty, but Michael O'Leary of Ryanair describing this as 'idiotic'. The document returns to the subject obliquely in an answer dealing specifically with mitigating risk on aircraft by recommending facemasks and strengthened filtering systems and adding that a health and safety protocol is being developed jointly by the EU Aviation Safety Agency and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control which '*will specify additional risk mitigation measures to address physical distancing on board.*'

The EU package states that it applies to all EU member states, whether or not they are members of the Schengen area and also to all Schengen associated countries. Therefore, it does not directly apply to the UK. It is also notable that the word 'quarantine' does not seem to be mentioned anywhere in the package or the supporting documentation.

It is clear from the very different public statements emerging from London and Brussels on the issue of possible relaxation of travel restrictions that the UK Government has not, so far at least, worked out a fully developed policy for the tourism industry over the next 6 months. However, it is going to come under increasing pressure both from the public and the industry, as well as from EU member states which depend on UK visitors, to alter its current negative stance and to allow some resumption of international tourism at some point in the summer, although it will probably not come into effect before July 2020 at the earliest. It is likely to find it difficult to maintain its present position of introducing quarantine measures for all passengers on incoming flights to the UK from the end of May 2020, as this would probably be enough to deter most UK holidaymakers from taking a foreign holiday at all, coming on top of the currently lengthy lockdown. The fact that a UK Government adviser is reported in the press on 15 May 2020 as saying that the quarantine policy doesn't make sense at this stage of the pandemic may give the Government an excuse to climb down from this unwise policy.

Written by [Andrew Young](#) of [3 Hare Court Chambers](#)