

IATA optimistic about post-Covid travel recovery as borders reopen

A Monitor Report

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Geneva : Damage of the Covid-19 crisis will be felt for years to come, but all indications are that people have retained their need and desire to travel.

Any possibility for borders to re-open is met with an instant surge in bookings. The most recent example is the 100-percentage point spike in bookings from the UK to Portugal when the UK's "Green List" was announced in early May.

The economy is strong and can fuel growth in travel. February 2021 industrial production levels stood at 2 per cent above February 2019 levels.

Consumers have accumulated savings in the lockdowns, in some cases exceeding 10 per cent of GDP.

Vaccination rates in developed countries (with the notable exception of Japan) should exceed 50 per cent of the population by the third quarter of 2021.

"This should be a clarion call to governments to get ready. The travel and tourism sector is a major contributor to GDP. People's livelihoods are at stake. To avoid greater long-term economic and social damage, restart must not be delayed. Governments can facilitate a safe restart with policies that enable restriction-free

travel for vaccinated people, and testing alternatives for those unable to be vaccinated. Governments must also be ready with processes to digitally manage the vaccine or test certificates-ensuring that a safe restart is also efficient," said Walsh.

Sustainability

"Aviation will grow because people want and need to travel. But we must be able to fulfil that consumer demand sustainably. Those are the ground rules for any business. It is no secret that this is more challenging for aviation than sectors with broader energy alternatives. But with the support of governments we will get there through a combination of means," said Walsh.

Aviation is committed to cutting its net carbon emissions to half of 2005 levels by 2050. It already has a good track record of decoupling emissions and demand growth per passenger journey in half since 1990 through efficiency gains, but governments need to step up as well.

In addition to efficiency and technology gains, CORSIA (the first global carbon offsetting scheme for an industrial sector) is stabilising emissions from international flights at 2019 levels. A low-carbon energy transition for aviation has commenced with sustainable aviation fuels that are powering flight today, to be followed by electric and hydrogen powered aircraft. And there is much more that can be done with infrastructure-airports and air traffic management-to operate with maximum efficiency and minimum emissions.

"If we work in partnership with governments there is great potential in all these areas. But easy sustainability wins are being left on the table. In Europe, which has led on many sustainability initiatives, why are we still waiting for the Single European Sky? This could immediately reduce emissions by up to 10 per cent. There is no excuse as the technology has been here for two decades or more. The partnership with governments on sustainability must exist in deeds as well as words," said Walsh.

Warns of border chaos over vaccine passports

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has warned of potential airport chaos unless governments move quickly to adopt digital processes to manage travel health credentials.

The trade group said, pre-Covid-19, passengers, on average, spent about 1.5 hours in travel processes for every journey including check-in, security, border control, customs and baggage claim.

Current data indicates that airport processing times have ballooned to three hours during peak times, with travel volumes at only about a third of pre-Covid-19 levels.

The greatest increases are at check-in and border control (emigration and immigration) where travel health credentials are being checked mainly as paper documents.

"Without an automated solution for Covid-19 checks, we can see the potential for significant airport disruptions on the horizon," said Willie Walsh, Director General, IATA.