

Australia reopening borders to tourists on Feb 21

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: Australia will be reopening its borders to tourists from February 21, said the country's Prime Minister Scott Morrison on February 7. The move will end some of the world's strictest and longest-running pandemic induced travel curbs.

"It's almost two years since we took the decision to close the borders to Australia," said Morrison after a meeting of the national security cabinet.

He further announced the borders will reopen to all visa holders "on February 21, 2022," adding, "if you're double vaccinated, we look forward to welcoming you back to Australia."

Australia's borders were shut in March 2020 in an effort to protect the island continent against a surging global pandemic.

For most of the time since then, Australians have been banned from leaving and only a handful of visitors have been granted exemptions to enter.

The rules have stranded nationals overseas, split families, hammered the country's multi-billion-dollar tourist industry, and prompted often bitter debates about Australia's status as a modern, open and outward-looking nation.

Every month of border closures has cost businesses an estimated USD 2.6 billion, said the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In recent months, rules have been gradually relaxed for Australians, long-term residents and students. The latest decision will see almost all remaining travel curbs lifted.

The move comes after the country's long-standing "Covid-zero" policy was abandoned, vaccination rates rose and the once stellar track-and-trace system collapsed under a wave of Omicron cases.

For Australia's travel and tourism sector -- which struggled as visitor numbers fell almost 98 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels -- the news brought great delight.

Despite the announcement, travel within Australia will still be restricted. The vast state of Western Australia remains closed to most non-residents.

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