

## Australia welcoming int'l tourists from Feb 21

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 20 February, 2022



Dhaka: Australia will be welcoming international tourists February 21 following nearly a two-years long border shutdown. "The wait is over," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on February 20 at a briefing at the Melbourne International Airport.

Fully vaccinated tourists will not need to quarantine, but those not double-dosed will require a travel exemption to enter the country and will be subject to state and territory quarantine requirements.

The country's government hopes to boost a pre-pandemic growth sector - real tourism gross domestic product expanded 3.4 per cent in 2018-2019, compared with overall GDP growth of 1.9 per cent.

Australia has been gradually reopening since November, first allowing Australians to travel in and out, then admitting international students and some workers. From February 21, leisure travellers and more business travellers may enter.

Australia's opening to tourists indicates the government's shift from a strict zero-covid approach to living with the virus and vaccinating the public to minimise deaths and severe illness.

Most of the country's 2.7 million coronavirus infections have occurred since the Omicron variant emerged in late November. With one of the world's highest vaccination rates - more than 94 per cent of people aged 16 and over are double-dosed - there have been just under 5,000 deaths, a fraction of the rates seen in many other developed countries.

On February 20, the country recorded over 16,600 coronavirus cases, before all areas had reported, and at least 33 deaths, mainly in the three most populous states of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

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