

## IATA confident of Asia's travel rebound in 2022

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Dhaka: Asia will reopen further to travel while the recent tightening of borders is only a “temporary speed bump” on the road to recovery, said a top airline industry representative, according to reports.

Philip Goh, Regional Head of International Air Transport Association, expressed he was optimistic about the resumption of travel in Asia in 2022 despite the region's doubling down on travel restrictions in response to the Omicron variant.

“People miss travel and they want to travel. You cannot substitute a hug, a handshake with a virtual zoom call,” Goh said. “Nor can videos capture and invigorate the senses stimulated by the sights, sounds and scents of the places we travel to.”

Goh, Vice President for Asia-Pacific, IATA also said governments in the region that had banked on isolation to control Covid-19 more than any other part of the world would ultimately reopen because “their citizens want to travel and are asking for it”.

“They also understand the need for economies dependent on global commerce and trade to re-establish trade lanes and to allow connectivity to again flourish,” Goh added.

“This is a temporary set-back,” claimed Goh, who attributed Asia's strict border policies to

the “risk adverse nature of the region and memories of the SARS pandemic in 2003”.

“We are optimistic that plans to restart international travel will resume when more is learnt about Omicron.”

Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand have reintroduced tough travel curbs in response to Omicron, while mainland China, Hong Kong and New Zealand have doubled down on existing ultra-strict border controls.

The region’s deepening isolation comes as countries such as the United States, Australia and Canada ease testing and isolation rules amid growing acknowledgement that efforts to tightly control the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron strain have become too disruptive to everyday life.

Even before Omicron’s arrival, Asia Pacific had yet to see any meaningful rebound in travel. Air traffic in the region was down 92.8 per cent in October compared with October 2019, according to IATA data. By comparison, travel in North America and Europe was down just 57 per cent and 50.6 per cent, respectively, in the same period.