

## Singapore reopens to more countries, relaxes test rules for visitors

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Dhaka: Singapore will be relaxing Covid travel testing rules while launching new vaccinated travel lanes with the Philippines and Israel as it aims to attract more tourists in an effort to reclaim its status of one of Asia's major travel hubs.

Singapore will also be restarting the previously announced VTLs from February 25 with Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore said in a statement on February 16 while the lanes with the Philippines and Israel will start on March 4.

On the other hand, rules for travellers from Hong Kong were tightened slightly. Singapore downgraded Hong Kong's status because of its own outbreak, but will open a travel lane so vaccinated travellers from Hong Kong can still enter without quarantine.

Singapore has been aiming to revive its aviation hub status after starting travel lanes with over 20 countries including the US, UK and France in 2021, and refrained from closing them completely even when the omicron variant sent case numbers were surging.

Flagship carrier Singapore Airlines had said in a statement on February 16 that it will expand its vaccinated travel-lane network to 47 cities in the coming weeks, adding hubs

like Dubai and Hong Kong. It also will increase the frequency of flights on several existing routes.

According to reports, Singapore's Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said the country was prepared to reopen even further after the omicron wave has passed, potentially allowing any vaccinated traveller to come to Singapore without quarantine.

On the other hand, as announced on February 16, people coming to Singapore via the travel lanes and from low-risk countries like mainland China will no longer require to pay for polymerase chain reaction tests on arrival. Rather, they will take a supervised, rapid test, Singapore's Ministry of Health said in a separate statement.

Also, to be scrapped is a requirement for travellers to self-administer tests for seven days after arrival if they want to go outside. The risk-classification system for countries will also be simplified, with travellers from countries with higher infection numbers having to serve seven days of quarantine from February 22.

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