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Countries eager to reopen borders for tourism

_A Monitor Report Date: 01 July, 2021

London : Countries reliant on tourism are racing to reopen borders and revive economies decimated by the pandemic.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that the sector lost nearly USD 4.5 trillion and 62 million jobs last year.

Airlines alone lost USD 126 billion last year and are on track to lose another USD 48 billion this year, according to their largest trade group.

The rollout of vaccines against Covid-19 is giving government officials in many countries new confidence to welcome visitors. But time is critical.

"Summer is a strong season for most markets, particularly Europe and the UK We really hope to see restrictions ease," said Virginia Messina, Interim Leader of the World Travel and Tourism Council.

Here's how different regions are trying to reopen to travel:

Europe

Europe has been opening slowly, testing the patience of Mediterranean countries that rely heavily on tourism, including Greece, Spain, and Turkey. That is changing now, as European Union ambassadors agreed recently to allow in visitors who are fully vaccinated or are from a now-expanded list of countries whose citizens are deemed to be safe.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said that Spain will let British and Japanese visitors enter the country if they have been vaccinated and people from other countries,

including the United States, on June 7.
Tourists are already beginning to show up in Greece after authorities there decided this month to accept vaccination and test certificates from the European Union and 21 other countries.
Croatia has also reopened - one of the few spots in Europe that's easy for Americans to visit.

Asia

The virus is surging again across parts of Asia, causing several nations to halt cautious steps they had been taking to reopen.
Hong Kong and Singapore postponed a quarantine-free "travel bubble" for a second time after a new outbreak, and Hong Kong lengthened mandatory quarantines for many unvaccinated visitors. China set up checkpoints at toll booths, airports and train stations in Liaoning province, site of new cases this month - travelers must show proof of a recent negative test for the virus.
Thailand, has opened Phuket for tourists in July with plans to open the entire country in 120 days.

Middle East, Africa

The UAE's biggest city, Dubai, has opened its doors to travelers since last July with few restrictions beyond a negative Covid-19 test.
Dubai - home to the world's busiest airport for international travel - is courting visitors fleeing lockdowns in Europe with open beaches, bars, hotel pools, restaurants, movie theaters, theme parks and spas. Social distancing and mask mandates are in place.
Meanwhile, the Gulf's largest country of Saudi Arabia is not permitting tourists into the country. Saudi citizens, who have largely been banned from travel since March 2020, are allowed to travel abroad starting this month if they have been vaccinated or recently recovered from the virus.
Egypt is trying to draw more foreign tourists even as it deals with a new wave of infections. It exempted beaches, cafes and restaurants tied to tourist hotels from new restrictions, like an earlier curfew and the closure of public beaches and parks during the Eid holiday. It even lowered the cost of tourist visas, although it still requires a negative Covid-19 test before entering the country.

Latin America, Caribbean

Visitors to the tourism-dependent Caribbean tumbled by two-thirds last year to levels not seen since the 1980s. Bermuda was among the hardest hit, suffering an 84 per cent drop.
A handful of islands, including Bonaire, Martinique and Montserrat, still ban travel from most countries. Elsewhere, tourists are trickling back under requirements that include electronic monitoring. Some islands, including St. Vincent and the Grenadines, have created "bubble resorts" to take tourists. Cruise lines are planning to shift ships from the US to Caribbean ports this summer.
The US Virgin Islands have been the region's success story this year, with arrivals down a modest 27 per cent from January through March - much of that due to Americans who are forbidden in other places and can visit the US territory without a passport if they avoid going through another country on the way.
Mexico has no flight restrictions, no requirements for visitors to pass a test or quarantine upon arrival. That has kept a reduced but steady flow of tourists, especially to beach destinations.

US, Canada

The US continues to bar most visitors from Europe, China, India, Brazil and other places. Inbound international travelers, including American citizens, must pass a

Covid-19 test before boarding flights. The State Department discourages foreign trips, labeling most of the world's countries high-risk.
The border between the US and Canada remains closed to nonessential travel through June 21.
Domestic air travel in the US is nearly back to 2019 levels, but travel-industry groups are growing impatient with what they see as an overly timid response by the Biden administration to allowing more international visitors.
"As we continue to see vaccination rates increase and infection rates decrease, it's absolutely critical from an economic standpoint to reopen international travel," said Tori Emerson Barnes, Executive Vice President, US Travel Association.