

Is overseas travel right now really worth the risk?

So you have said to yourself – to hell with the bloody virus – i'm fit, healthy and have friends in London where I can spend a couple of weeks in quarantine if necessary.

You talk to your travel agent and hit hurdle one. If you are an Australian citizen or a permanent resident you discover you can't leave Australia due to COVID-19 restrictions unless you have an exemption. You must meet at least one of the following:

- your travel is as part of the response to the COVID-19 outbreak, including the provision of aid
- your travel is essential for the conduct of critical industries and business (including export and import industries)
- you are travelling to receive urgent medical treatment that is not available in Australia
- you are travelling on urgent and unavoidable personal business
- you are travelling on compassionate or humanitarian grounds
- your travel is in the national interest.

Let's assume you qualify for an exemption. Given all the very real uncertainties, travel insurance is an absolute essential right?

Well, yes but welcome to hurdle two. **Leading Australian corporate travel agent Max Najar** will tell you that the agency cannot issue any quality travel insurance for your trip – and that you need to carefully read the PDS of any external insurers. "As well as the fact that you are not going to be covered if the coronavirus taps you on the shoulder – how about the possibility of an accident in say the US or Europe Max wonders. Or public liability charges if you are involved in injuring another human somewhere?"

Max says his agency, Axis Travel in Adelaide, has certainly "lost" potential new clients to other travel agencies but he is happy with the fact that his regulars have listened to his advice and not travelled.

"You also need to ponder the possibility of your destination country imposing a new lockout law. "No insurer will cover these hibernation and return travel costs," Max says.

"So basically, we are telling our clients not to travel overseas unless they sign a disclaimer stating they accept full responsibility to travel solo-uninsured."

Still interested? Well how comfortable will the flight be to say London?

Welcome to hurdle three.

Let's imagine you choose Qatar Airways out of your capital city.

According to the airline: Our continuous operations have enabled us to gain unrivalled experience in providing a healthy and safe travel experience for our passengers. In addition to the hygiene measures already in place, we have further enhanced our onboard safety measures with several updates including:

- Complimentary face shields that are required to be worn onboard in addition to face masks or coverings
- New protective kits for all passengers that include a face mask, large powder-free gloves and hand sanitiser gel
- New protective gowns for cabin crew that fit over their uniforms in addition to safety glasses, gloves and masks
- Modified on board service to reduce interactions between passengers and crew inflight
- Hand sanitiser on board all our flights, as well as throughout Hamad International Airport (HIA)
- Thermal Screening checkpoints and autonomous mobile disinfection units throughout HIA ensuring regular disinfection at high traffic points.

All very impressive and safe – but fun?

Like other carriers Qatar has an extended policy which allows you to make unlimited date changes, and to change your destination as often as you need if it is within 5,000 miles of the original one. Qatar will not charge any fare differences for travel completed before 31 December 2020, after which fare rules will apply. All tickets booked for travel up to 31 December 2020 will be valid for two years from the date of issuance.

Some security there at least – but who knows how much uncertainty and discomfort looms for the rest of your trip.

So, is overseas travel right now really worth the risk? I think not.