



Headline News

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November 3, 2021 - Stephen Morton

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November 3, 2021 [Business News](#), [Headline News](#)



It's a real jungle out there for travellers, says Adelaide based travel agent Max Najar as new, confusing layers added to the travel equation every day thanks to **COVID-19**. The days of travellers relying on a phone call or the internet to make bookings have changed, he believes. "This is a new era of more complex rules plus new layers of health and security checks that will last for at least 12 months.

Here are his thoughts on **domestic** and international travel plus travel insurance.

DOMESTIC TRAVEL will be easier to plan and book as borders open and quarantine regulations are relaxed – but be aware this ruling can change at any moment. The wearing of masks and being double vaccinated is still the best protection. Non vaccinated travellers will find it hard to travel anywhere domestically by any form of commercial transportation. You can also expect spot checks when using your own car. I expect hotels, tourist attractions and tour operators to apply the same No Jab-No entry rules.

Lock-downs may not happen again, but if you read State Emergency Acts, it is still a possible prescribed action by any State Government if the need arises.

Travellers must now constantly **check** new travel rules and conditions besides reading the new airline, supplier, and agency booking conditions and fees. The danger is a domino effect when one disrupted component (say a cancelled flight or sudden lockdown) affects all other bookings in your itinerary. The best idea is – let a professional travel agent handle your holiday.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL will in the medium term be a lot more complex to navigate, full of more layers of political, medical and **government** requirements that can change hourly, even perhaps while you are on a plane or on a cruise ship. Even though Australians with a double jab are now allowed to exit and enter **Australia**, the requirements of any arrival country or even transit point- can vary daily. Major overseas destinations like the UK continue to update arrival protocols, such as daily, weekly health checks required. Imagine having to do regular COVID checks if you are physically away from a prescribed clinic, especially if you are on a safari or in the outback or about to start a tour. You may be forced to hibernate as soon as you get off of a plane or cruise ship because someone on the same vessel was infected.

I think there will be up to seven health check hurdles international travellers will have to jump at airports or cruise terminals. A quick note here to people who do not have a mobile phone to prove COVID vaccination details. Not all airports or suppliers or Government agencies can read what we issue here and not all can verify the authenticity, so expect delays and maybe non-acceptance of entry upon

arrival. IATA has developed with success an International COVID QR CODE but some airports do not have readable scanners or you could fly on a non-IATA airline.

I am already aware of travellers attempting to use another person's QR Code, another bribing airline A at an airport check-in counter to connect with airline B, only to be deported after transit Airline b discovered the scam. Then there was a recent case of an airline unwilling to accept a PCR test result resulting in the passenger being denied boarding. Issues will occur and a backup plan needs to be in place or better still, get a travel advisor agent expert to do it all for you. He/she is legally liable to ensure you are aware of conditions of entry required until the day of departure.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: As of November 1, COVERMORE has the clearest and most comprehensive COVID-19 policy, but that is only while nib Travel **Insurance** and others are re-assessing their policies and underwriters.

We, as an agency, are not pushing any travel insurance at the moment, as there is not enough out there to compare. Overall, as the new **Australian** travel rules have changed, I suggest if it is not urgent to have a policy issued, wait for the new policies to filter through by mid to late November. In the meantime, place travel onto a quality credit or charge card, pay the merchant fees applicable and then have an agent compare, advise, and then issue the most appropriate travel insurance policy later.

Emirates has a fairly good free policy when an agent issues their air tickets (not code-shared though) and Australian domestic carriers have simple **cancellation**, amendment and credit fares available whilst we wait for new comprehensive travel insurance policies to come out.

Singapore Airlines, United, Cathay, QANTAS International, Etihad and Qatar all have simple coverage if they require a flight to be amended or cancelled because of COVID, but that applies to air tickets on their planes only. Most major cruise lines have their own conditions which are flexible if a cruise needs to be postponed or cancelled because of COVID.

The larger tour companies also offer the ability to cancel and amend dates if a COVID problem emerges. Also, I like the solo tour companies that offer, at a small premium, insurance protection package from \$89 pp that allows pax to cancel out or amend at no or minimal cost. This at least protects the land content of that tour if a pax needs to cancel.

Some hotels that we book have their own individual policies to amend, cancel or refund, but conditions vary per hotel or resort. Buyer beware is the advice – or get your travel agent to book and assist.

If you are at all concerned about the financial collapse of an airline, look for a **SAFI (Scheduled Airline Failure Insurance)** policy issued by some travel agents via Gow Gates.

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