

It's possible to fly to NZ, then travel onwards

Exclusive

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The trans-Tasman travel bubble will allow Australians to escape the Morrison government's draconian ban on international travel and visit the rest of the world.

Australian and Kiwi border officials confirmed the loophole exists for Australians willing to fly into New Zealand, wait a few days, and then book a flight to a third country such as Singapore or the United States.

New figures suggest there may be some pent-up demand among people to leave Australia, with bureaucrats rejecting more than half the applications for an exemption.

However, travellers tempted to take advantage of the travel bubble are being warned they would have to run the gauntlet of Australia's hardline caps on international arrivals, which have left about 35,000 Australians stranded overseas, before enduring two weeks of hotel quarantine at their own expense.

The launch of the bubble today comes as Prime Minister Scott Morrison dampened hopes of allowing vaccinated travellers to go overseas and isolate at home upon their return, saying it would not happen until the second half of the year.

After the national cabinet last week commissioned health experts to look at how international travel could be restarted once vulnerable groups were vaccinated, Mr Morrison said he was in no hurry to open the borders.

Australians are currently banned from travelling to any country other than New Zealand unless they receive an exemption from the Australian Border Force on grounds such as essential business travel or attending the funeral of a close relative.

Latest figures show that between March 25 last year and March 31 this year, the ABF approved 134,758 of 281,630 requests for an exemption.

The launch of the travel bubble means Australians can now visit New Zealand without having to quarantine upon arrival, or when returning.

However, it also means Australians can then fly on to other countries that airlines continue to serve.

The New Zealand Customs Service said in a statement that it "has no role or power to prevent the further departure of Australian citizens to overseas destinations from New Zealand".

The ABF said travellers transiting through New Zealand must apply for an exemption. But The Australian Financial Review understands that if a person breaks their journey and purchases another airline ticket, they will be able to fly to a third country.

"Currently, New Zealand does not prevent Australian citizens leaving New Zealand and travelling onwards overseas," a Border Force spokeswoman said.

"Those who travel onwards from New Zealand to another international destination must be aware that returning to Australia or New Zealand may be difficult due to the current restrictions on passenger numbers and the availability of flights."

The hotel quarantine system has been the source of recent outbreaks, with NSW officials revealing yesterday that three people in a Sydney hotel had caught the virus from a family staying in a room next door.

There is a cap on international arrivals of 6000 a week, forcing Australians to pay thousands of dollars for business-class fares to secure a seat.

Key points

The bubble could serve as an escape route for Australians desperate to travel abroad.

The return journey could be more fraught, involving travel caps and quarantine.