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# S'pore, HK in pact on leisure travel

Two-way air travel bubble with few restrictions is a small but significant step towards more such partnerships, says Ong Ye Kung

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Singapore and Hong Kong have agreed to set up a bilateral air travel bubble (ATB), believed to be the first in the region between two aviation hubs.

Transport Minister Ong Ye Kung said the agreement was reached on Wednesday during a video conference between himself and Mr Edward Yau, Hong Kong's Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development.

Mr Ong called the move a small but significant step that will hopefully act as a template for Singapore to forge more of these partnerships.

He said: "Hong Kong, likewise, has a very impressive record, and I think between Singapore and Hong Kong, our risk profiles are the same."

"As I mentioned, the risk of a Hong Konger bringing the virus into Changi Airport is not very different from someone who comes from Jurong."

Under the two-way arrangement, there will be no restrictions on travel purposes.

This is unlike the reciprocal green lanes or fast lanes that are meant for essential business and



Visitors from Hong Kong will need to take a Covid-19 test but need not serve a quarantine or stay-home notice under the air travel bubble agreement.  
TNP FILE PHOTO

official travel.

But travellers under the ATB will be subjected to conditions such as testing negative on a mutually recognised Covid-19 polymerase chain reaction test.

Travellers will not need to serve any quarantine or stay-home notice requirements or a controlled itinerary.

They will also travel on dedicated flights that serve only ATB travellers. No transit passengers will be allowed on board.

The number of these flights can be adjusted, depending on latest developments such as the Covid-19 situation in both countries.

While details are still being worked out, the ATB could be launched in a matter of weeks.

Mr Ong said the ATB will be done cautiously and safely.

"We all want to control the virus and the epidemic, but should there be unforeseen circumstances, (such as a spike, I

think you have to suspend (the arrangement)," he said, adding that a quota on the number of travellers could be implemented.

Anyone who has spent 14 days in either Singapore or Hong Kong will be able to travel under the air travel bubble, with the exception of foreign workers living in dormitories here.

Health experts welcomed the move as a necessary step.

When asked about the risk of not having a 14-day stay-home

notice for such travellers, Professor Dale Fisher, a senior infectious diseases expert at National University Hospital, said countries with good contact tracing systems would have replaced contacts in quarantine, and social distancing and mask-wearing would further reduce the risk of transmission.

"So even if a case entered, he may well not transmit (the virus). I think the risk is small and the benefits make it worthwhile," he added.

Associate Professor Hsu Li Yang of the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health said: "We can be endlessly concerned, but it is important to implement such measures and monitor the situation closely to see how they work."

"At this stage, and with the experience gained over the past few months, we should be ready for more imported cases and to nip small community clusters in the bud."

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