VIRUS OUTBREAK: NEWS ANALYSIS

Singapore’s travel easing is a risk game

Public health risks must be balanced against a strong economic need for easing controls, analysts say

Singapore

Singapore’s gradual border reopening is not risk free – but the public health risks must be balanced against a strong economic need for easing controls, analysts have said.

Some also suggested that Taiwan and Thailand could be on the list of places where Singapore allows unrestricted, quarantine-free travel.

This comes as the Republic is expected to reap benefits even from one-way travel arrangements into the country.

We should quickly move towards re-establishing links with all our important trading and business partners, which is happening right now,” said DSB aviation and transport analyst Paul Yong, citing the controlled Covid-19 situation here.

Since closing to short-term visitors in end-March, Singapore has worked to relax its strict border controls.

Singapore introduced all-purpose Air Travel Passes with Australia, Brunei, mainland China, New Zealand and Vietnam, and reciprocal green lanes for business and official travel with Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and parts of China.

From Nov 22, it will also have its first air travel bubble with Hong Kong.

Already, the scheduled seat capacity for flights into Singapore is expected to increase significantly in the next two months, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium.

The potential growth looks particularly strong in nearby countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, which are usually highly connected with Singapore,” Cirium’s Norman Teo, told The Business Times.

Industry observers like Mr Yong expect trading partners with similar or better virus management – such as Thailand and Taiwan – to be added to Singapore’s green lane list.

To be sure, the gradual reopening is not expected to lead to a surge in Singapore’s visitor arrivals, which have been tepid in the year to date.

Some 5,000 visitors touched down in September, better than the April trough of 750 but a long way off from 1.46 million in the year-ago period.

But there will be more airlines resuming international flight services in January 2021,” said Mr Teo, adding that travel growth is also expected to be driven by top-tier Chinese airports in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

And even if border controls in other countries make some of Singapore’s arrangements unilateral, analysts still expect a positive impact.

By Annabeth Leow
leowan@sphe.com.sg
@AnnabethLeowBT

Singapore will require pre-departure testing for travellers from higher-risk regions from Nov 18, on top of mandated stay-home period.

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