

MONTHLY REPORT JANUARY 2022

VISIT ST. PETE/CLEARWATER



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1. Overview of Monthly Highlights

In January 2022, we continued calling and contacting each U.S. travel industry partner in Central Europe individually and moving directly into the market as Visit St. Pete / Clearwater's new representative for Central Europe.

Through the pandemic there were several shifts within the industry and new contacts have replaced those that have left. At the time of this report, the Florida Huddle had taken place and several of the key contacts found themselves in the U.S. attending the event. This is of course good news indicating an upswing in the destination. We were able to discuss the booking situation with the the tour operators as North America will become more popular with travel heading west. Currently several other long-haul destinations are only announcing opening dates but are not yet officially open, driving business in the direction of North America with Florida and St Pete / Clearwater being a major force.

Feedback from the 50+ travel industry partners that we personally talked to concluded in the majority of them stating that business is in fact still a bit slow, but much better compared to last year. Some even expect record numbers for 2022. The USA operators that will suffer include those that specialize in round-trips with either rental car and camper programs. The rental car companies have become extremely expensive causing a 14-day trip price to up by 700 Euro per person more than it was before the pandemic. Unfortunately, many of those possible bookings are holding off for hopes of better prices. However, this could lead to a shift in travel, where people find a more stationary destination until rental car /camper prices stabilize. The industry has also indicted that the FL hotel rates have increased due to the success of the domestic market and the willingness of the U.S. traveler to pay a higher premium for hotel rates.

On the upswing we are finding competitive pricing with the airlines to Florida to help stimulate travel. The combination of the cold weather and competitive airline rates (avg. 550 Euro RT including taxes and surcharges) make for good marketing. President Biden's announcement of "no more lockdowns" will also encourage bookings without the fear of having to wait months for a refund and the hassle of having to rebook future vacations.

Besides the networking with important travel trade partners, we also contacted all Visit USA Committees, the Visit Florida and the Brand USA offices in Central Europe to request their co-op marketing and sales programs for 2022. Due to the lack of promotional activities caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in the past two years as well as the ongoing uncertainty of hosting physical events, some of these offices did not have their program available yet.

Based on the co-op opportunities that were offered to us, we developed a proposed marketing, sales and public relations plan and submitted it to VSPC for approval. In addition, we started registering for upcoming promotional activities and road shows in order to promote our destination in the lucrative Central European markets. Please find an overview of these activities in the subsequent sections of this report.

2. Overview of Regional Activities

Germany

- KMS contacted all USA tour operators in Germany and introduced our office as the new representative for Visit St. Pete / Clearwater in Central Europe. We had a chance to talk to a large number of these operators and we sent e-mail introductions to those operators that we were not able to reach this month. We will continue reaching out to all of them in the next few weeks.
- KMS contacted the Visit USA Committee in Germany and requested their co-op programs for 2022. Based on these programs and after approval from VSPC, we registered several marketing, sales and public relations activities in the next few months. Please find details in section 3 of this report.
- KMS contacted the Visit Florida office in Germany and requested their co-op programs for 2022. Unfortunately, Visit Florida Central Europe had not finalized its co-op program but they will send it to us as soon as it will become available.
- KMS contacted the Brand USA office in Germany and requested their co-op programs for 2022. Unfortunately, the Brand USA office in Central Europe had not finalized its co-op program but they will send it to us as soon as it will become available. They only sent an announcement and "save the date" for their *Brand USA Travel Week Europe*, which is schedule to take place in Frankfurt, Germany from September 26 – 29, 2022.
- After approval of VSPC, we registered for the *Eurowings Road Show* in Germany from March 14-18, 2022. The road show will stop in Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Baden-Baden, Nuremberg and Munich. Please find details in section 3 of this report.
- After approval of VSPC, we registered for the FVW Virtual Counter Days in Germany from February 22-23, 2022. FVW is the leading travel trade magazine in Germany and the Virtual Counter Days provide two full days of destination trainings for the travel trade in the German speaking countries. Please find details in section 3 of this report.
- On invitation of the Visit USA Committee Germany, we promoted our destination at a designated virtual media event on January 25, 2022. We spoke to many interested journalists that showed strong interest in our destination. Please find details in our VSPC PR Report for January 2022.
- We also registered for TravMedia's International Media Marketplace Germany 2022 (IMM). The day-long media event will take place in Berlin on March 08, 2022. Please find details in section 3 of this report.

- We maintained a strong communication with Eurowings Discover in order to support the airline with their flights from Frankfurt to Tampa. We discussed joint promotional opportunities such as travel trade and press fam trips among other activities.
- We also maintained our communication with Visit Tampa's representative in Germany in order to discuss opportunities for joint and non-competing promotional activities.
- Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Visit USA Committee Germany unfortunately cancelled their promotional events in Munich on January 11, 2022 and in Hamburg, Germany on January 18, 2022. We will register for the events again when they will become available later this year.
- We attended several coordination calls with VSPC in January 2022.
- We received several proposals for joint marketing activities and forwarded them for evaluation and discussion to VSPC.
- We coordinated the warehouse that we have subcontracted on behalf of VSPC, proofread their inventory report for January 2022 and forwarded it to VSPC.
- We developed the proposed marketing, sales and public relations plan for the current fiscal year with detailed budgets and submitted it to VSPC for evaluation and approval.
- After our pro-active contact with the luxury tour operator *Art of Travel* in Munich we learned that the operator plans to expand its program and wants to add our destination. The product manager will be in our area for site inspections in April 2022. We sent all details to VSPC and kindly asked for assistance during her stay in our area.

Switzerland

- KMS contacted most USA tour operators in Switzerland and introduced our office as the new representative for Visit St. Pete / Clearwater in Central Europe. We had a chance to talk to a large number of these operators and we sent e-mail introductions to those operators that we were not able to reach this month. We will continue reaching out to all of them in the next few weeks.
- KMS contacted the Visit USA Committee in Switzerland and requested their co-op programs for 2022. Based on these programs and after approval from VSPC, we registered for their planned road show in April 2022. Please find details in section 3 of this report.

Austria

- KMS contacted most USA tour operators in Austria and introduced our office as the new representative for Visit St. Pete / Clearwater in Central Europe. We had a chance to talk to a large number of these operators and we sent e-mail introductions to those operators that we were not able to reach this month. We will continue reaching out to all of them in the next few weeks.
- KMS contacted the Visit USA Committee in Austria and requested their co-op programs for 2022. Since their program for 2022 was not finalized yet, we will evaluate all promotional opportunities for our destination as soon as we receive it.

The Netherlands

- KMS started contacting all USA tour operators in the Netherlands and introduced our office as the new representative for Visit St. Pete / Clearwater in Central Europe. Whenever we did not have a chance to talk to these operators, we sent e-mail introductions. We will continue reaching out to all of them in the next few weeks.
- KMS contacted the Visit USA Committee in the Netherlands and requested their co-op programs for 2022. Since their program for 2022 was not finalized yet, we will evaluate all promotional opportunities for our destination as soon as we receive it. The Visit USA Committee Netherlands plans to send it to us at the beginning of February 2022.

Belgium

- KMS started contacting all USA tour operators in Belgium and introduced our office as the new representative for Visit St. Pete / Clearwater in Central Europe. Whenever we did not have a chance to talk to these operators, we sent e-mail introductions. We will continue reaching out to all of them in the next few weeks.
- KMS contacted the Visit USA Committee in the Belgium and requested their co-op programs for 2022. Since their program for 2022 was not finalized yet, we will evaluate all promotional opportunities for our destination as soon as we receive it. Since we are not members of the Visit USA Committee Belgium they sent us their application forms.

Czech Republic

- KMS started contacting selected USA tour operators in Belgium and introduced our office as the new representative for Visit St. Pete / Clearwater in Central Europe. Whenever we did not have a chance to talk to these operators, we sent e-mail introductions. We will continue reaching out to all of them in the next few weeks.
- KMS contacted the U.S. Department of Commerce in the Czech Republic and requested their co-op programs for 2022. They offered us to attend a "Destination Showcase Bruch" in Prague on April 27, 2022 where they expect 150-250 media and travel trade professionals as well as corporate clients. We forwarded the information to VSPC recommending a participation in the event.

3. Status of Sales Activities and Promotions

USA Media Event (January 25, 2022)

- On invitation of the Visit USA Committee Germany, we promoted our destination at a designated virtual media event on January 25, 2022. The event was attended by approximately 50 media professionals. During the two-hours long event we had a chance to introduce our destination and pitch story ideas to 12 journalists. Since some of these media professionals will be attending IPW 2022 in Orlando, FL in June 2022, we invited them to our destination for pre or post fairs. We will continue following up with all media contacts.

FVW Counter Days (February 22-23, 2022)

- After approval of VSPC, we registered for the FVW Virtual Counter Days in Germany. FVW is the leading travel trade magazine in Germany and the Virtual Counter Days provide two full days of concentrated destination trainings for the travel trade in the German speaking countries. We started setting-up our virtual show booth with detailed information about our destination.

TravMedia's International Media Marketplace Germany (March 08, 2022)

- We registered for TravMedia's International Media Marketplace Germany 2022 (IMM). The day-long event is Germany's leading media event and it will take place at the prestigious Ritz-Carlton in Berlin on March 08, 2022. VSPC will have an own table and will be represented through its PR manager in Central Europe. During up to 24 pre-scheduled media appointments we will discuss projects with top-tier media for our destination.

Visit USA Virtual Road Show (March 07-11, 2022)

- We registered for the Visit USA Committee Germany's virtual roadshow in March 2022. This roadshow exclusively available to Visit USA members Date: March 7-11, 2022. During the road show, we will have a presentation time of 20 minutes plus 5 minutes for questions and answers. The road show will consist of one webinar per day starting at 10:00 a.m. over a period of five days. Each webinar block will have three to four U.S. partners.

Eurowings Discover Road Show (March 14-18, 2022)

- After approval of VSPC, we registered for the *Eurowings Road Show* in Germany from March 14-18, 2022. The road show will stop in Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Baden-Baden, Nuremberg and Munich. Approximately 50 travel agents are expected to attend each event.

IPW Orlando, FL (June 04-08, 2022)

- Support of VSPC during IPW 2022 with pre-scheduling and coordinating meetings with travel trade professionals and media interviews as well as onsite representation.

Brand USA Travel Week Europe (September 26-29, 2022)

- The Brand USA Travel Week Europe 2022 is designed to showcase the diverse range of travel experiences available throughout the U.S.. Registration is open to all tourism industry entities operating export-ready tourism services in the U.S. We currently received the "save the date" for the event only with no detailed information.

Further sales activities and promotions will be added after approval.

4. Public Relations Activities

Please see our separate PR Activity Plan for an overview of all our public relations and media relations activities in January 2022.

5. Market Updates

Inflation in Germany likely to remain "exceptionally high"

In their first report of the year, the Bundesbank's economists offer little hope for a rapid decline in inflation. The central bank also wants to focus more on the effects of climate change.

The Bundesbank expects price pressures to remain extremely high at the start of the year. The inflation rate is likely to "remain extraordinarily high," warns the German central bank in its monthly report presented on Monday. This is apparent, although several special effects that contributed to the upward pressure on prices last year have disappeared.

These include the introduction of the climate package and the reversal of the temporary reduction in VAT rates. In addition, according to the report, services and industrial goods excluding energy became excessively expensive at times in 2021, primarily due to supply bottlenecks and price increases to compensate for previously suffered profit losses: these factors will now also "have an impact in the new year," according to the Bundesbank economists: "In addition, the corresponding retail tariffs will be raised sharply due to the significant increase in market prices for natural gas."

(Source: www.spiegel.de)

BDL warns of shift in passenger flows

While the overall market on routes from Germany to Asia and Africa grew by 73% between 2010 and 2019, Germany hardly plays a role as a transfer country anymore (+15%), the airline association announced in its annual report. This growth is predominantly via Istanbul and hubs outside Europe (+115%), according to the BDL.

On Thursday, the association also presented an analysis of the long-term development of global passenger flows for the first time in its annual report. The data for this had been prepared by the German Aerospace Center (DLR). The analysis of passenger flows shows how many passengers travel from starting point "A" to destination "B" in a given period, regardless of the route chosen. As a result, the analysis provides information on how traffic between different regions of the world is changing and how the ratios between nonstop connections and transfer connections are shifting.

While European traffic is largely on point-to-point connections, transfer passengers make up the majority of intercontinental travelers at 60 percent, BDL said. The analysis of traffic flows shows that transfer traffic is taking place less and less in Germany: the share of transfer passengers in Germany in transfer traffic with Germany has fallen from 28 percent in 2010 to 21 percent in 2021, it said. While Germany has essentially been able to maintain its role as a transfer country in traffic from North America to the East, its share as a transfer country in the traffic flow from Europe to Asia and to Eastern and Southern Africa has halved from six to three percent.

Shift to Turkey and the Emirates

It is "unmistakable that a completely new traffic structure has emerged in traffic from and via Germany to Asia and to eastern and southern Africa with the policy of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Turkey for targeted promotion of the hubs Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha and Istanbul, which has greatly changed the market," says BDL President Peter Gerber. The passenger flows of the past ten years show "what tangible consequences this industrial policy can have, especially in the long-haul business.

Significant competitive disadvantages have arisen for European airlines, which meet much higher social, environmental and consumer standards than carriers from the Middle East or the Bosphorus. As a result, "there is a real pull effect for traffic from Europe in the direction of Asia and Africa," explains Gerber.

No new burdens

The background to the analysis was likely to be, above all, the aviation lobbyists' aim of preventing further burdens for the German and European airline industry as far as possible. It is important "that further social and ecological progress in air traffic is made with regulations that affect all companies equally in international traffic," demands BDL head Gerber.

Particularly in view of the current reform proposals for more climate protection in the EU Commission's "Fit for 55" package, there is a need for action. If no changes are made, the Commission's key regulatory proposals for air traffic would lead to a significant shift of passenger flows to airlines and air traffic hubs outside Europe. The development of traffic flows over the last decade shows how urgent it is to revise the regulatory proposals so that carbon leakage and distortions of competition can be avoided and connectivity and climate progress can be achieved.

(Source: www.reisevor9.de)

Aviation News

Ryanair gives up base in Frankfurt

After five years, Europe's largest low-cost airline Ryanair is giving up its base at Frankfurt Airport. The five aircraft still stationed there are to be redistributed to less expensive airports at the time of the flight schedule change on March 31 this year, the Irish company announced on Friday. Nuremberg, where two aircraft are to be stationed again, was cited as an example.

All flights from March 31 were canceled, Ryanair further announced. Passengers with tickets already booked would be notified in the coming days and receive refunds. On Friday, flights had initially still been displayed on the Ryanair booking app after the date mentioned. For the Frankfurt crews, Ryanair says it is offering alternative jobs in its fast-growing European network.

Ryanair accuses German government of distorting competition

The company cited increased takeoff and landing fees at Germany's largest airport at the turn of the year as the reason for the withdrawal. "Instead of giving Ryanair an incentive to stay and grow, Frankfurt has chosen to drive away traffic and jobs by increasing airport charges," the statement said. Ryanair manager Jason McGuinness accused the German government of distorting competition by providing billions in aid to Lufthansa.

Ryanair had come to Germany's largest airport for the first time for the 2017 summer flight schedule, which as an international hub wanted to expand its range of low-cost European flights. Ryanair benefited from an incentive program offered by operator Fraport with reduced flight fees for new entrants to the site. These incentives expired for Ryanair in 2020, according to a Fraport spokesman.

Fraport with below-average fees in European comparison

The airport operator dismissed the Irish criticism as unjustified. With an approved price increase of 4.3 percent, Fraport is very low in a European comparison of hubs, a spokesman said. According to data from industry service OAG, Ryanair had an average market share of about 3 percent in Frankfurt.

Fraport, the MDax group sponsored by the state of Hesse and the city of Frankfurt, now has to think more about the utilization of the nearly completed Pier G, which is explicitly tailored to the needs of direct flight providers like Ryanair. Due to the Corona crisis, however, the opening of the terminal was not scheduled until 2026, together with the entire Terminal 3. After completion, Fraport plans to initially put Pier G into "dormant operation" in the first half of 2022.

250 to 450 million euros loss at Ryanair

Airline CEO Eddie Wilson told the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" that a return to Frankfurt is only conceivable if Fraport consistently supports low-cost carriers. Whether to ramp up the commitment at Hahn Airport in the Hunsrück region again would depend on the development of the insolvent airport. Ryanair established its first German base there in 1999 and marketed it as "Frankfurt-Hahn".

Ryanair, which is actually highly profitable, has lowered its forecast for the current fiscal year because of the ongoing Corona crisis. The company is now calculating a net loss for the fiscal year, which runs until the end of March 2022, of 250 million to 450 million euros, after the airline had most recently assumed a minus of 100 to 200 million euros. In terms of passenger traffic, the Group now expects under 100 million passengers instead of more than 100 million.

(Source: www.airliners.de)

Debate on slot utilization rules comes to a head

Because airlines have to use 64 percent of their takeoff and landing slots in the summer flight schedule in order to keep them, there is a threat of many empty flights if demand continues to be lacking. Voices calling for a relaxation of slot allocation are growing. But there is also headwind.

Actually, airlines must use at least 80 percent of the slots allocated to them so that they are not redistributed in the following season. Because of the pandemic consequences for the airline industry, the EU temporarily reduced the requirement to 25 percent. The limit is currently 50 percent and is set to rise further in the summer.

According to the EU Commission's plans, airlines will have to use 64 percent of their slots in the summer season in order to keep them. This is justified because air traffic this year will reach 89 percent of the 2019 level, according to Eurocontrol forecasts, the Tagesschau quoted a Commission spokesman as saying. It is expected that flight operations will continue to normalize due to increasing demand. In addition, there would be the possibility of individual exceptions in justified cases of hardship, "for example, due to new sudden restrictions because of the Covid 19 pandemic."

Competition or waste of resources?

Lufthansa CEO Carsten Spohr recently warned that his company would probably have to operate around 18,000 empty or almost empty flights this winter. Due to weak demand, the company had actually wanted to further reduce the number of flights in January, but Brussels did not allow that.

Now, SPD parliamentary group vice chairman Detlef Müller has spoken out in favor of relief for the aviation industry in light of the ongoing corona crisis. He told the news agency DPA that the recovery of air traffic is taking longer than was initially foreseeable. In view of continuing problems, he expects the EU Commission to leave the allocation of take-off and landing rights in air traffic at a maximum of 50 percent until there is an actual normalization of travel. An increase to 64 percent would be "completely counterproductive for climate policy and economic reasons".

Nevertheless, there are also other voices on the subject. For example, the airports association ACI Europe said airlines are very well protected from the current vagaries with a significantly reduced threshold for slot use and a special provision for changing circumstances, which is what the omicron variant represents. The association does not understand why the issue with ghost flights is being discussed now.

(Source: www.reisevor9.de)

Ryanair calls for state subsidies for airports

Andreas Gruber, Ryanair's spokesman for the DACH region and CEO of Laudamotion, calls for more government subsidies for airports in an interview with Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland. This should boost growth, he says.

Low-cost carrier Ryanair is calling for government subsidies for airports to win back passengers lost to the pandemic. In an interview with Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland (RND), Andreas Gruber, CEO of Laudamotion and DACH spokesman for Ryanair, said it was important to promote growth for the entire industry. "The best tool for this is government support for airports," Gruber added. The resulting cost advantages could then be passed on by the airports to the airlines, he added.

No support for the national champion

Gruber also explicitly spoke out against selective government support for individual airline groups: "What I'd like to see from the new federal government is an open heart for aviation, and that they don't throw money down the throat of the 'national champion' again, i.e. Lufthansa."

He said support programs are needed that apply equally to all airlines. This could include discounted fee schedules. He said it was important that, especially in the case of fee schedules, every airline had to pay the same price for the same service. Gruber defends the decision to abandon Frankfurt Airport. One of the most important prerequisites for a location is an efficient organization of processes. But a competitive fee schedule is also important, he says. "Unfortunately, both were no longer given in Frankfurt. That's why this decision had to be made."

(Source: www.airliners.de)

Lufthansa wants alliance with ITA

The shipping company MSC wants to take over the airline ITA with Lufthansa as a partner. The Germans' interest in the Italian airline is apparently aimed at the European flight network. Shipping company MSC wants to join forces with partner Lufthansa to acquire airline ITA, which emerged from the insolvent Italian airline Alitalia.

The three companies involved confirmed the plans. ITA said last night it had received "an expression of interest from MSC Group and Lufthansa to acquire a majority stake in ITA Airways," according to the Italian company. According to the statement, Lufthansa and MSC want "the Italian government to retain a minority stake in the company." MSC and Lufthansa are asking for 90 working days for exclusive talks on a possible deal, according to ITA. ITA's board of directors will review details of the expression of interest at an upcoming meeting, it said.

Long search for investor

ITA is wholly owned by the Italian government following the insolvency of its predecessor Alitalia. Rome had entered Alitalia in 2017, but failed to find an investor for the airline for a long time. The Corona pandemic exacerbated the company's economic situation. Shipping company MSC, which has Italian roots, also confirmed the information from ITA Airways. The company had "expressed to the Italian government its interest in acquiring a majority stake" in the airline, it said. And Lufthansa has also declared its support for the offer: "We are MSC's potential commercial partner," a Lufthansa spokesman confirmed.

Interest in feeder flights

By partnering with MSC, Lufthansa could become a partner of ITA without its own investment or financial risk, according to Reuters news agency. Lufthansa had been interested in joining ITA for some time, but a first attempt in early 2020 failed. Lufthansa CEO Carsten Spohr had ruled out a share acquisition as recently as November. The Italian market is considered difficult in the industry. Domestic flights and European connections are highly competitive, according to aviation experts, as there are many fast train connections on the mainland and low-cost carriers Ryanair and Wizz occupy many European routes.

For Lufthansa, the goal of joining ITA is likely to be primarily to get feeder flights to its own hubs in Frankfurt, Munich or Zurich. A "commercial partnership" such as the one now planned would be sufficient for this. It could "bring in revenue without additional costs," says Kepler Cheuvreux analyst Ruxandra Haradau-Doser.

(Source: www.tagesschau.de)

Airlines call for easing of Corona travel restrictions

The airline association IATA takes stock of the second Corona year and complains: Testing and quarantine obligations have cost a lot - but helped little. Now it is time to return to normality.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is calling for Corona travel restrictions to be eased. The pandemic is becoming endemic, it said. Travel restrictions such as testing and quarantine requirements have not proven effective in warding off the infection, but are causing enormous damage to the economy, said IATA chief Willie Walsh.

Governments should focus on increasing population immunity and stop using travel barriers to impede the return to normalcy, he said.

Walsh also cited examples: France and the United Kingdom have already relaxed requirements, he said. "We hope others will follow," he said.

Passenger aviation worldwide slowly recovered from the shock of the first corona year of 2020 last year, according to IATA data, with demanded volume in 2021 at just under 42 percent of 2019's pre-crisis level, measured in terms of passenger kilometers. In 2020, that figure had been 34 percent.

Omicron less bad than feared

Passenger volumes in 2021 were 75.5 percent below 2019 levels, with the emergence of the viral variant Omikron slowing the upward trend from December, but not as much as feared, Walsh said. Governments have already partially rolled back the restrictions that were tightened as a result, he said.

Meanwhile, air freight experienced a boom. Air freight had a brilliant year, Walsh said. Capacity demand had even exceeded the pre-crisis level of 2019 by 6.9 percent. But offered capacity remained 11 percent below 2019 volumes due to a lack of passenger aircraft loading capability, he said, which drove up freight rates and mitigated airlines' losses in passenger airline business.

In December, freight rates were 150 percent higher than the same month two years ago, according to IATA. The economic situation continues to boost the cargo business. This is because global trade and industrial production have recently been on the rise. With many suppliers under time pressure, air freight could continue to hold its own against competing ocean freight.

(Source: www.spiegel.de)

Travel News

No test before departure: Great Britain relaxes entry requirements

Great Britain has repeatedly tightened its entry regulations in the past year. Since then, travelers must pass a Corona test before departure. This will now be dropped again tomorrow!

Since Tuesday, December 7, 2021, stricter regulations apply to entry into the UK. Thus, all international travelers must already pass a Corona test before departure to the UK, which must not be older than two days. However, as The Points Guy in the UK now confirms, the British government is relaxing these measures again. Thus, the test before departure is to be dropped again. The test requirement after arrival will also be adjusted.

Test before departure is omitted - quarantine also?

Great Britain has not been considered a virus variant area for a few days. This classification on the part of the Robert Koch Institute was recently lifted again. The reason: the new virus variant Omikron is significantly involved in the current infection worldwide. And the effects of the significantly more infectious variant are also being felt in Great Britain. The current seven-day incidence is 1,877.0 with a vaccination rate of just under 70 percent fully vaccinated. Booster vaccinations are gaining momentum, but further protective measures are not. For this reason, the government of the kingdom is already again relaxing the recently massively tightened entry regulations. The pre-departure test will no longer be required from Friday, January 7, 2022.

Already in recent days, there has been speculation and debate about any relaxation of the entry requirements. The additional test before departure should prevent or at least contain the spread of the virus variant Omikron. In the meantime, however, the mutant is the dominant virus variant on the island and in large parts of the world, which is why this additional protective measure is being lifted again. The test before departure is thus no longer mandatory for fully vaccinated persons and persons under 18 years of age.

No PCR test after arrival

In addition, travelers must take another coronary test no later than two days after arrival. While travelers could choose between a PCR or rapid antigen test before departure, a PCR test after arrival is now mandatory. In addition, travelers must go into quarantine after arrival. Here, too, there is now clarity! Because the test after arrival does not have to be a PCR test anymore. A simple antigen rapid test up to two days after arrival is again sufficient. At the same time, the quarantine for arriving travelers will also be lifted. Accordingly, they no longer have to wait in self-isolation until the test result is available. However, if this turns out positive, a retest with PCR test must be carried out.

In recent days, especially during the New Year's celebrations, there has been additional debate about a renewed tightening of the Corona measures in the UK. Prime Minister Boris Johnson commented on this only on the sidelines of a visit to the vaccination center at Buckingham Palace in London.

According to him, all measures would be constantly monitored and analyzed in detail. However, he praised the current mix of measures. The current entry regulations have already been in force since December 7, 2021. The British travel industry criticized the tightening of entry regulations as a "devastating blow" and a "major deterrent" to travelers. The U.K. Transport Secretary also announced with the relaxation of entry requirements that a further review of the rules will take place at the end of January.

Conclusion on the entry relaxations.

Within a very short period of time, registered cases of the Omikron variant in the UK have increased significantly. In the meantime, however, the evidence again points to relaxations. Therefore, the British government will relax the entry regulations again as a first step. Accordingly, fully vaccinated travelers and persons under the age of 18 will no longer have to present a Corona test before departure. The testing regulations after arrival will also be adjusted. Persons with full vaccination protection will only be required to complete a rapid antigen test no later than two days after arrival. Quarantine is no longer mandatory. But beware: The new rules only apply to England for the time being!

(Source: www.reisetopia.de)

Federal Council of Switzerland relaxes entry for vaccinated and convalescent persons

As announced, the Federal Council has commented on the afternoon of January 19 on the existing Corona measures and made changes or extensions.

For the travel industry, there is important and welcome news in this regard: The test regime for entry will be adjusted as of next Saturday, January 22. As of this date, the 3G rule will apply for entry into Switzerland. Vaccinated and recovered persons do not have to show a negative test anymore, only unvaccinated persons have to. The second test four to seven days after entry will also be abolished.

As announced, the validity of all vaccination certificates will be reduced from 365 to 270 days by the end of the month. This will ensure that the certificate continues to be recognized within the EU.

Corona measures to be extended

The existing Corona measures will be extended. However, not quite as long as expected: Both the quarantine and the home office obligation will end at the end of February.

The measures 2G, 2G+ and restrictions on private meetings will be extended until the end of March. The Federal Council emphasizes that this is to apply "provisionally". It will be reviewed on an ongoing basis whether the measures are still necessary. The government will talk about concrete relaxation again on February 2.

The federal government recommends a new order of prioritization for PCR tests. First and foremost, at-risk persons with symptoms should be given a turn; those who need a test for traveling must wait in line.

(Source: www.abouttravel.ch)

Travel is made easier for those vaccinated, tested, recovered

The EU countries agreed that from February 1, it will no longer be decisive from where a trip starts - but whether a valid vaccination, test or convalescent certificate is available. This was announced by the EU countries. In doing so, the states are largely following a proposal presented by the EU Commission two months ago.

According to the agreement, in addition to vaccines approved in the EU, agents accepted by the WHO or national authorities should also suffice. A PCR test should be done at the earliest 72, a rapid test 24 hours before travel. A convalescent certificate is to be valid for 180 days. Those without a certificate should test upon arrival. There are exceptions for children. There should be no additional restrictions. A spokesman for the EU Commission stressed, "The least we can all expect is that the member states also implement this recommendation."

Since the Omikron variant has now spread throughout Europe, it is also to be examined whether the travel restrictions introduced in view of the variant in some member states should be lifted.

Germany distinguishes between virus variant and high-risk areas for entry. Vaccinated and recovered persons do not have to be quarantined after entry from a high-risk area. Unvaccinated persons can be cleared five days after entry at the earliest. Currently, all EU countries are classified as high-risk areas; no country is currently classified as a virus variant area. Other countries, such as Italy and Austria, also currently require more than just a certificate in some cases. For example, anyone who only has basic immunization must also present a negative test for a vacation in Austria.

(Source: www.zeit.de)

Tour Operator News

Omicron a major setback for cruising worldwide

What's next for cruises? Worldwide, despite mandatory vaccinations and strict rules, corona cases are piling up on board, trips are being canceled and future cruises canceled. The restart has come to an abrupt halt. The U.S. health authority warns against cruises in general. First countries ban calls again.

In Brazil, nothing is going on in terms of cruises at the moment. After hundreds of cases of corona on board cruise ships, the health authorities ordered the cancellation of two cruises by Costa and MSC and initiated investigations. The shipping companies then canceled all cruises until Jan. 21. Voluntarily, as the Brazilian branch of the industry association Clia emphasizes. The cruise lobby now wants to try to resolve differences with the authorities, reports Der Spiegel.

Shipping companies worldwide cancel cruises

TUI Cruises has taken Mein Schiff 6 out of service until Jan. 17. The New Year's Eve cruise in the Gulf had been interrupted Jan. 2 because of several corona falls in Dubai. Previously, the liner was not allowed to call at Doha in Qatar and was rerouted to Dubai. Actually, the break was supposed to last only a few days, but as a precautionary measure, the subsequent voyage had now also been canceled.

After the New Year's Eve voyage with the Aida Nova had been canceled in Lisbon due to Corona Falls on board, Aida Cruises has also canceled the three following trips with the ship. The premature journey home of the guests from the Portuguese capital went anything but smoothly. RTL reports that vacationers were dropped off at the airport on January 3 without care, food or drink. Instead of taking off for home in the afternoon, many were still stuck at the airport at 2 a.m., including children and elderly people in wheelchairs.

In the Caribbean, the next three voyages on the Aida ship Luna will not take place. The Luna's next voyage is now scheduled to depart on Jan. 29. Customers could rebook on the Diva or Perla, which are also sailing in the Caribbean, it said.

MSC lets infected off board and continues to sail

Corona is also back on board MSC Cruises in Europe. On the Grandiosa, 150 people tested positive. The ship with 5,000 passengers and crew members came from Marseille and initially headed for Genoa. There, infected guests from northern Italy and foreigners disembarked. Some were in hospitals, reports the Berliner Zeitung. Meanwhile, the Grandiosa continues to sail. In Rome, the remaining infected Italians left the cruiser, after which the ship continued its journey.

After eight corona cases and crew members of the Amera, Phoenix Reisen had prematurely aborted a Canary Islands voyage and returned to Bremerhaven. Now the subsequent 60-day voyage to the Mediterranean was also canceled, reports the news agency DPA. The two luxury ships Europa and Europa 2 also had to cancel their New Year's Eve voyages in the Indian Ocean because of Corona Falls.

US health authority warns against all cruises

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has issued a general warning against cruises since December 30. The highest Corona warning level 4 now applies to travel on ships, and the new Omikron variant could spread quickly and easily on board, even among vaccinated guests. Regardless of their vaccination status, people should therefore avoid traveling on cruise ships. This applies worldwide, including to riverboats, the CDC's official website says.

Among the more than 100 cruise ships under watch at the U.S. health agency, only a handful still have no Corona outbreak on board. As of Jan. 6, 99 ships were listed there with infections on board. In the last two weeks of December alone, the CDC counted more than 5,000 corona cases on board, according to USA Today. All major shipping companies are affected, from Carnival to MSC to Royal Caribbean. The current, complete list of individual ships and their status can be found at the CDC.

NCL, Aida and RCI cancel cruises

Norwegian Cruise Line is temporarily withdrawing as many as eight cruise ships from service. Due to ongoing travel restrictions, some will have to cancel cruises until the end of April, according to a statement from NCL. The Getaway, whose sailing was canceled on Jan. 5, made the start. The Pearl is dropping cruises through Jan. 14, inclusive, the Sky through Feb. 25 and Pride of America through the 26th. The Jade is canceling sailings through March 3, inclusive, and the Star through March 19. Cruises with the Sun are canceled up to and including April 19, and those with the Spirit even up to April 23.

Royal Caribbean International is also canceling upcoming voyages for four ships, according to USA Today. Symphony of the Seas, for example, will be out of service by Jan. 29, Jewel of the Seas by Feb. 20, Vision by March 7 and Serenade by April 26.

It is unclear if and when other shipping companies will follow the lead of NCL, Aida and RCI. Other companies are still keeping a low profile and hardly communicating of their own accord. Things are certainly not likely to get any easier for the cruise industry in view of the Omikron wave. The virus variant could stop the restart.

(Source: www.reisevor9.de)

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