

REPORT: COVID-19: OMICRON AND TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

What you need to know

December 2021

From late [November 2021](#), countries around the world started to reimpose travel restrictions in response to rapidly emerging concerns about the Omicron variant of COVID-19, which the World Health Organization (WHO) has classified as a variant of concern. New restrictions have involved reversing some of the freedoms recently extended to [fully-vaccinated](#) travelers.

The tightening of travel restrictions may prove to be temporary, should Omicron prove not to be as serious as initially feared. In this case, the reaction has effectively demonstrated how quickly governments can reverse the easing of travel restrictions. If the concerns about Omicron are realized, the return of some restrictions could become more enduring and widespread.

While many countries have targeted their response specifically against travel to/from southern Africa, others, like France, the U.K. and the U.S., have applied some changes to a much broader group of travelers, and in some cases, to all travelers.

This report provides a snapshot of some of the recent changes in a small selection of markets.

Europe

European Union (EU)

Countries across the EU have tightened travel restrictions in an attempt to contain the spread of the Omicron variant. The restrictions vary from country to country:¹

- Denmark - advises against travel to Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Arrivals from the eight countries must quarantine for [10 days](#), although this may be shortened by negative test results on days [four](#) and [six](#).
- Estonia - from December 1, all arrivals from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, as well as Egypt and Turkey, must self-isolate for ten days.² [Fully-vaccinated](#) or recovered travelers are exempt from quarantine if tested for COVID-19 on arrival. Unvaccinated travelers can reduce quarantine by testing on arrival and on day six of isolation.
- Finland - only Finnish nationals may return from southern Africa. All other travelers, including the [fully-vaccinated](#), are banned.
- France - only French citizens may return from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Even [fully-vaccinated](#) non-citizens and people recovered from COVID-19 have been banned from entering France.³ All third-country nationals (included those fully-vaccinated) arriving from other countries must now test within [48 hours](#) of departure for France.⁴

¹ [Schengen Visa Info](#), Nov. 30, 2021

² [Schengen Visa Info](#), Dec. 7, 2021

³ [Schengen Visa Info](#), Nov. 26, 2021

⁴ [Schengen Visa Info](#), Dec. 6, 2021

On December 16, with less than two days' notice, France extended the travel ban to limit arrivals from the U.K. to essential travel only for non-French citizens. And anyone (including French travelers) arriving from the U.K. must now present a negative result from a test taken in the 24 hours before travel and then enter quarantine. The period of self-isolation may be shortened with another negative test result.⁵

- Germany - except for German nationals, all travelers, regardless of [vaccination](#) status, are banned from entering Germany from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.⁶ Even though it is regarded to be in community circulation in many countries, Germany blamed high levels of Omicron infection for a decision to ban non-German citizens and residents from arriving from the U.K. from December 19.⁷ Anyone entering the country must present a negative test result and quarantine for 14 days, regardless of vaccination status. At the same time, Germany added Andorra, Denmark, France, Lebanon and Norway to its high-risk list of countries, although the resulting tightening of restrictions do not apply to vaccinated travelers.⁸
- Hungary - arrivals are banned from the affected countries, and anyone allowed to enter Hungary must quarantine for [14](#) days.
- Lithuania - travel to/from the affected countries banned from [November 29](#), with returning travelers required to double test and quarantine
- Slovenia - advises against travel to Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Arrivals must quarantine for [10](#) days and then take a PCR test.
- Spain - strict entry rules now apply to anyone arriving from areas affected by the Omicron variant.⁹ The list includes seven African countries: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. All arriving travelers must submit a negative result from a PCR test taken within 72 hours before arrival and submit a Spain Travel Health form. The requirement applies to everyone, including those who are [fully-vaccinated](#) or have recovered from COVID-19.

U.K.

Changes to pre-departure testing

From [December 7](#), anyone aged 12 years and over must take a PCR or an LFD (lateral flow device) COVID-19 test before traveling to England from abroad. Travelers must take the test no earlier than [48 hours](#) before flight departure (first leg in a multi-leg journey). Testing now applies to [fully-vaccinated](#) travelers as well as to the unvaccinated.

Testing after arrival

After arrival in England, [fully-vaccinated](#) travelers must take a pre-booked COVID-19 PCR test. Arriving on day [0](#), this test must be taken anytime after arrival, but before the end of day [2](#). Travelers must self-isolate while waiting for their test result. [Unvaccinated](#) travelers must take PCR tests on or before day [2](#) and on or after day [8](#) and must quarantine for 10 days.¹⁰

Red list returns, temporarily

On [November 26, 2021](#), the red list was reactivated, placing restrictions on arrivals from Botswana,

⁵ [Schengen Visa Info](#), Dec. 16, 2021

⁶ [Schengen Visa Info](#), Dec. 3, 2021

⁷ [Schengen Visa Info](#), Dec. 19, 2021

⁸ [Schengen Visa Info](#), Dec. 18, 2021

⁹ [Schengen Visa Info](#), Dec. 6, 2021

¹⁰ [Gov.UK](#), Travel to England

Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Two days later, the list was expanded to include Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, with Nigeria bringing the number of countries to 11 from December 6. Only British or Irish nationals or someone with residence rights in the U.K. could enter England if having spent time in a red list country in the previous ten days.¹¹

Anyone arriving directly from a red list country, or who had been in a red list country in the 10 days before arrival in England, was subject to a number of restrictions even if they are [fully-vaccinated](#).

Visitors arriving from a red list country had to take a COVID-19 test in the three days before departure, quarantine for 10 full days in a managed quarantine hotel, take a COVID-19 test on or before day 2 and on or after day 8 of quarantining, and complete a passenger locator form

The restrictions proved to be short-lived, however, and were removed on December 15, after community transmission of Omicron was confirmed in the U.K.

North America

U.S.

Ban on travel from southern Africa

On [November 26, 2021](#), the U.S. announced a new travel ban on U.S. non-citizens arriving from eight south African nations: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.¹²

New pre-departure testing rules

From [December 6](#), all inbound air travelers have been required to show a negative COVID-19 test result taken no more than one day before departure to the U.S.¹³ This new rule applies to everyone from the age of two years, regardless of [nationality](#) or [vaccination status](#). Evidence of recovery from COVID-19 in the past 90 days is also accepted. Foreign travelers arriving in the U.S. must be [fully vaccinated](#); unvaccinated Americans and legal permanent residents may still travel.

The U.S. has yet to make any changes to post arrival testing or quarantine

Mask mandate extended

A federal mask mandate requiring travelers to wear masks in airports, on planes and on other modes of public transportation, has been extended until [March 18, 2022](#).

Note

The information presented in this report represents the latest view as at December 20, 2021. We have carefully researched and checked the information contained. However, we do not guarantee or warrant the correctness, completeness or topicality of this article and do not accept any liability for any damage or loss as a result of the use of the information contained within this article.

Do you have questions or comments regarding this report?
Please email mike.eggleton@bcdtravel.co.uk to share your thoughts.

¹¹ [Gov.UK](#), Guidance

¹² [CNN Travel](#), Dec. 5, 2021

¹³ [Gov.UK](#), FCO, USA travel advice