The Road to Recovery: Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia restore free movement

While “a crisis like no other” (in the words of the International Monetary Fund) rages, it is important to identify and highlight the sectors of the stricken travel retail business that are beginning to recover.

In this column we bring you regular (we hope) updates about how airports, airlines, travel retailers and brands are planning for and investing in the recovery; how governments are opening borders and how various stakeholders are preparing to shape up for the new normal.

For more recent updates, click here

16 May

Welcome back: New Zealand website Stuff reports how about 100 passengers on Air New Zealand flight NZ1209 from Auckland were welcomed with applause and live music at Queenstown Airport in the South Island when the plane touched down on Saturday. It was
15 May

Germany/International

The Lufthansa Group — including Lufthansa, Swiss, Brussels Airlines and Eurowings — is significantly expanding flight operations in June.

By the end of June, the group aims to operate 1,800 weekly roundtrip services to more than 130 destinations globally.

Some of Lufthansa’s services to resume include flights from Frankfurt to Hanover, Majorca, Prague, Billund, Nice, Manchester, Budapest, Dublin, Riga, Krakow, Bucharest and Kiev. It has also added flight services from Munich to Münster/Osnabrück, Sylt, Rostock, Vienna, Zurich, Brussels and Mallorca.

In addition, 19 long-haul destinations will be added to Lufthansa’s flight schedule in the first half of June, with further resumptions planned for the second half of the month.
Lufthansa Group aims to operate 1,800 weekly roundtrip services to more than 130 destinations by the end of June.

Austrian Airlines is extending the suspension of regular flight operations for an additional week with a resumption in June being considered. Swiss Airlines is planning to resume operations to several European destinations, in addition to selected long-haul services to the US, Singapore, Bangkok, Tokyo, Mumbai, Hong Kong and Johannesburg.

Eurowings is gradually adding 15 European destinations to its flight schedule in May; while Brussels Airlines plans to resume flights on a reduced operating network beginning 15 June.

“With the June flight schedule, we are making an important contribution to the revitalisation of the aviation infrastructure,” said German Lufthansa AG Member of the Executive Board Harry Hohmeister. “It is an essential part of the German and European economic power.

“People want to and can travel again, whether on holiday or for business reasons. That’s why we will continue to expand our offer step by step in the coming months and connect Europe with each other and Europe with the world.”

**Estonia/Latvia/Lithuania**

The Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia restored free movement between each other for residents at
midnight, creating Europe’s first ‘travel bubble’. Border controls between each, which were imposed during the COVID-19 crisis, have been removed. Travellers from outside the three states will still have to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival.

As of Wednesday, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia had each reported only a handful of new daily cases (seven each that day in Estonia and Lithuania, 11 in Latvia).

The three states said they trusted each other’s health systems, allowing free movement once more

On 12 May the respective governments approved a memorandum of mutual understanding on cooperation and agreed to lift the restrictions of movement of road, rail, air and maritime travel.
That followed several video meetings between Estonian Prime Minister Jüri Ratas together with his Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts Krišjānis Kariņš and Saulius Skvernelis.

On 9 May Skvernelis said: “This is an opportunity for businesses to reopen, and a glimmer of hope for the people that life is getting back to normal.”

14 May

**Abu Dhabi/UAE**

Etihad Airways resumes its weekly service between London and Melbourne, with a transit via Abu Dhabi.

Flights from Melbourne to London will commence on 15 May; while flights from London to Melbourne will begin on 21 May.

Throughout the month of May, Etihad Airways will increase the frequency of special flights from Abu Dhabi to Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brussels, Frankfurt, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, London, Manila, Melbourne, Seoul Incheon, Singapore, Tokyo, Zurich, Dublin, and New York.

According to the airline, this is in preparation “for an eventual return to scheduled flights, subject to the lifting of current travel restrictions.”

In a statement the company said: “Etihad continues to follow all UAE and international government and regulatory authority directives, and has implemented an extensive sanitation and customer wellbeing programme, to boost its already stringent procedures, and to ensure the highest standards of hygiene at every touchpoint of the guest journey, including social distancing in-flight.”

Starting 15 May, passengers in Australia who need to travel to the United Kingdom will be able to book flights from Melbourne to London, with transit via Abu Dhabi. (1/3)

[Etihad Airways (@etihad)](https://twitter.com/etihad) May 11, 2020

**Dubai/UAE**

Emirates to resume passenger flights to nine destinations, including routes between the UK and Australia.

The airline announced plans to resume operations on flight services to London, Frankfurt, Paris, Milan, Madrid, Chicago, Toronto, Sydney and Melbourne from 21 May.

Emirates announced that passengers will only be allowed onboard if they comply with the entry criteria requirements of each destination country.

Emirates Chief Operating Officer Adel el Redha commented, “We are pleased to resume scheduled passenger services to these destinations, providing more options for customers to travel from the UAE to these cities, and between the UK and Australia.

We are working closely with the authorities to plan the resumption of operations to additional destinations. We
have implemented additional measures at the airport in coordination with the relevant authorities in respect to social distancing and sanitation. The safety and wellbeing of our employees, customers and communities, remain our top priority.”

Emirates will offer connections in Dubai for passengers travelling on its UK/Australia routes

**Qatar/Australia**

Qatar Airways has announced the resumption of passenger flights to Brisbane, Australia. Three-weekly flights have been scheduled with a start date of 20 May.

The airline had previously received short-term approval to operate to Brisbane from late March to early April. During this period, Qatar Airways helped repatriate over 5,000 stranded travellers to the Australian city.
The flights will be on an Airbus A350-1000 offering 46 seats in Business and 281 seats in Economy classes

12 May

Europe

Ryanair today announced plans to return to 40% of normal flight schedules from 1 July, subject to government restrictions on intra-EU flights being lifted, and effective public health measures being put in place at airports.

Ryanair said it plans to operate a daily schedule of almost 1,000 flights, restoring 90% of its pre-crisis route network. Since restrictions took effect in mid-March, Ryanair has been operating a skeleton daily schedule of 30 flights between Ireland, the UK and Europe.
Ryanair signals a return to flying from 1 July, although at 40% of its previous schedule

Health measures aimed at halting the spread of the coronavirus include fewer checked bags, check-in online, downloading boarding passes to smart phones, plus temperature checks at airports. Ryanair will encourage travellers to wear face masks/coverings at all times in the terminal and onboard aircraft.

Onboard aircraft, Ryanair cabin crew will wear face masks/coverings and a limited inflight service will be offered of pre-packaged snacks and drinks, but no cash sales. All onboard transactions will be cashless.

As a temporary further public health measure, Ryanair will require all passengers flying in July and August to fill in details (at the point of check-in) of how long their planned visit will be, and also their address while visiting another EU country. This contact information will be provided to EU governments to help them to monitor any isolation regulations they require of visitors on intra-EU flights.

10 May

International

From Shashank Nigam, the Founder & CEO of aviation marketing consultancy SimpliFlying, comes an insightful note via LinkedIn on the ‘travel bubbles’ that are likely to form the platform of our industry’s recovery.

On my BBC interview this week, we discussed how ‘travel bubbles’ could help kickstart travel, like between New Zealand and Australia. Here’s a thought on how they may work elsewhere too. Countries like New Zealand and Vietnam seem to have finally won the battle against COVID-19. Others like Australia and Taiwan are not far away either. So it would make sense to allow travel between ‘green zone countries’ like Australia and New Zealand, or Taiwan and Vietnam, wouldn’t it?
There would be no need for a 14-day quarantine, while only a few of the procedures we highlight in our Rise of Sanitised Travel report may be required. As I pored over charts on which countries are ‘winning’, multiple potential travel bubbles emerged. Like between the Baltic states and Norway/Iceland. Or between some countries in Southeast Asia and China.

Once these travel bubbles are operational, we can see how the results are, before replicating these around the world to boost travel confidence. Do you think these can help travel recovery? Where could other bubbles emerge? Tip of the hat to Musa Faisal for posing the question that got me to think through this, and to Khaled Elayyan for sharing these charts to begin with.
Click [here](#) for our earlier story on how SimpliFlying has mapped out over 70 areas that would affect (or be demanded by) travellers in the post-COVID-19 landscape.

### 7 May

#### South Korea

South Korean news agency Yonhap is reporting that Korean Air will resume flights on 19 international routes from 1 June, as the flag carrier strives to offset a sharp decline in passenger demand due to COVID-19.

A Korean Air statement said the reopening routes include Washington, D.C., Seattle, Vancouver, Toronto, Frankfurt, Singapore, Beijing and Kuala Lumpur.

The airline currently offers 55 flights a week on 13 international routes; before the COVID-19 crisis, the numbers were 900 flights on 110 long-haul routes. Starting in June, 146 flights on 32 international routes will be available, according to the report.
1 May

Belgium

Brussels South Charleroi Airport, which has been closed to passengers and airlines since 24 March, has said it estimates that its commercial activities will partially resume from the beginning of June.

The airport added that the date would depend on “how the system is developing internationally” and information received from airlines.

30 April

Malaysia

AirAsia resumed its scheduled domestic flights in Malaysia yesterday, bringing a major boost to the Asia Pacific aviation market.

Giving an update on dates for service returns in other Asia Pacific markets, the airline confirmed that domestic flights will resume in Thailand on 1 May 2020 and Indonesia on 7 May 2020. A return to service in the
Philippines, however, has been moved back to 16 May 2020. These resumptions are all subject to approval from the authorities.

The airline said strict health controls and social distancing protocol are in place, in compliance with regulations.

AirAsia Group Executive Chairman Datuk Kamarudin Meranun said: “Flexibility remains the key to our business model. Our strong foundation coupled with robust relationships with suppliers and partners have enabled us to return to service stronger amid these unprecedented challenging times.”

18 April

Malaysia

In an encouraging move for the regional aviation market, AirAsia is to resume scheduled domestic flights in coming weeks. These will begin in its home market of Malaysia on 29 April, followed by Thailand (1 May), the Philippines (1 May), India (4 May) and Indonesia (7 May), subject to approval from the authorities.

The resumption of services will increase gradually to include international destinations around the network, once the situation improves and governments lift borders and travel restrictions, said AirAsia.
AirAsia Group President Bo Lingam said: “We are very pleased to be able to fly again and to serve our guests starting with domestic routes, and hope to resume full operations as soon as possible. We have undertaken a thorough review of our guest handling procedures both on ground and onboard in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. We have been working closely with the airport authorities to ensure that all the relevant precautionary measures are in place to ensure a safe, pleasant and comfortable journey for everyone.”

Guests are advised to practise the universally recommended protective precautionary measures including wearing a mask, social distancing and observing high personal hygiene.

The aircraft, which are fitted with hospital-standard High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters, will also be sent for disinfection after each flight.

16 April

China

China, first into the COVID-19 crisis and, barring a second wave, first out of it, is also leading the way in travel retail terms. Buoyed by highly proactive national and provincial government policies, the offshore duty free sector on Hainan island is bouncing back fast with all signs pointing to record sales in the critical May holiday period. China Duty Free Group, principally at its acclaimed CDF Mall in Haitang Bay, is driving the resurgence and the retailer is increasingly confident of prospects for the balance of 2020 as many Chinese citizens opt to travel domestically and enjoy their special duty free shopping privilege.

Another retailer on an upwards curve is CNSC, which plans to open a near 1,800sq m, post-arrivals duty free store in Beijing FUN (???) – an extraordinary two-phased commercial and cultural development just 100 metres away from Tiananmen Square and adjacent to the National Palace Museum, National Grand Theatre, National Museum and other renowned cultural institutions.
Today’s images (below) come courtesy of Gary Leong, Global Travel Retail Director at Swedish beauty-tech brand Foreo, who has just visited CNSC’s flagship in Shanghai and notes, “where retail confidence is back”.

That view was confirmed today by CNSC Deputy General Manager Evita Qu (pictured below) who told The Moodie Davitt Report, “During the special period of outbreak, our downtown stores have gained more attention from loyal customers of the travel retail channel. Although we suffered a heavy hit in the early stage, our downtown stores have basically returned to normal since March and achieved satisfactory sales performance.

“And during this special period, we also provided our assistance to the brands in sourcing medical supplies, taking advantage of [our parent company] Sinopharm’s medical background,” said Ms Qu.

“For Beijing FUN, all the preparatory work is in progress. We will open during this year but still no exact time yet.”
Evita Qu (second from right) with Martin Moodie during a tour of the Beijing FUN complex last year

The Moodie Davitt Report will be bringing exclusive on-location coverage of the Beijing FUN opening later this year – one of the most impressive downtown retail innovations in Asia.
Gary Leong from Foreo pays a visit to the CNSC flagship in Shanghai (All photos below courtesy of Gary Leong)