

ACI Asia-Pacific urges governments to change entry requirements

With a drastic reduction in passenger numbers and a real risk to the airport sector's survival, Airports Council International (ACI) Asia-Pacific is requesting a change in the way governments deal with travelers during this pandemic.

A 14-day quarantine is untenable for most travelers, and this requirement has greatly impacted the number of individuals willing and able to travel. ACI is therefore urging governments to replace quarantine requirements with testing and contact tracing protocols for airports in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East. Current forecasts show airports in Asia-Pacific will lose 55% of passenger volume in 2020 over 2019, and for Middle East airports that number is even greater, at 60%.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic brought global travel to a virtual standstill, Asia-Pacific was expected to accept 3.5 billion passengers onboard in 2020. The current regional PAX estimate for this year totals just above 1.5 billion passengers, a reduction of around 1.9 billion passengers.

While the Middle East had been set to welcome 420 million PAX in 2020, the current estimate sits at 170 million, a reduction of 250 million. Airport revenues are now forecast to decline by approximately US\$27 billion in the Asia-Pacific region and US\$8 billion in the Middle East by the end of 2020.

"The latest ACI forecast depicts an ongoing uncertain picture for the airport sector. To put the revenue loss in perspective, it equates to wiping out the revenues of 27 of the regions' busiest hubs. We are now facing at least a three-year recovery period," said Stefano Baronci, Director General, ACI Asia-Pacific.

The airport sector was one of the first to implement a host of precautionary health and hygiene measures, but despite this, current government travel restrictions and quarantine requirements are severely hampering the restart of the sector, thereby contributing to the ever-declining economic situation.

Baronci and ACI therefore urge governments to adopt testing and contract tracing protocols instead of quarantine, at the very least between low-risk countries.

"Governments should relax current travel restrictions and consider alternative safeguarding measures to ensure the survival of the aviation sector based on a periodically updated risk assessment. The recent announcement from the Government of Singapore replacing the 14-day quarantine with COVID-19 testing for all inbound passengers from some low risk countries is a first step in the right direction to support the economic recovery of the aviation ecosystem," added Baronci.