

Designated flights under HK-Singapore Air Travel Bubble to begin on May 26

The Governments of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Singapore today (April 26) announced that designated flights under the bilateral Air Travel Bubble (ATB) arrangement will begin on May 26, resuming cross-border air travel in a gradual and orderly manner amidst stabilised epidemic situations of the two places.

"With gradual stabilisation of the fourth wave of the epidemic in Hong Kong, we have been engaging in active discussions with Singapore on the re-launch of the ATB. The two governments have reached consensus on the latest arrangement and will put in place more stringent public health protocols in response to the latest epidemic development. Our goal remains striking a right balance between public health and travel convenience so that the public will rest assured while maintaining certainty," the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, said.

"The re-launch of the ATB not only meets the aspirations of the people and business communities on cross-border travel, but also signifies that gradual resumption of cross-border travel is achievable through mutual collaborations among different places. We will continue to maintain communication with the Singapore Government and closely monitor the epidemic development of both places to ensure the smooth launch of the ATB," Mr Yau said.

"I am happy that Hong Kong got the COVID-19 situation under control. It has been a long few months, but the conditions are now ripe again to re-launch the ATB. Both sides will need to stay very vigilant in the next one month, so that we can launch the first flights smoothly. It is a significant ATB between two aviation and financial services hubs in Asia," said the Minister for Transport of the Republic of Singapore, Mr Ong Ye Kung.

Riding on the original ATB arrangement, the two governments will impose more stringent measures as follows –

(1) Travel history prior to departure: Under the original requirement, ATB travellers should have no travel history to any place other than Singapore or Hong Kong in the 14 days prior to departure. In view of the spread of a mutant strain of COVID-19 in different places at varying degrees and the possibility of a very small portion of infected persons with an incubation period of more than 14 days, there is a new requirement that the respective compulsory quarantine periods in Hong Kong or Singapore arising from the travellers' last visit outside Hong Kong or Singapore would not count towards that 14-day period;

(2) Mechanism to suspend or resume: Under the original mechanism, the ATB would be suspended for two weeks if the seven-day moving average of the daily number of unlinked local COVID-19 cases (the 7DMA figure) is more than five

for either Singapore or Hong Kong, and can resume if the 7DMA figure reported on the last day of the two-week suspension period for both places do not exceed five. To address potential fluctuations of the epidemic situation, a new requirement is introduced so that the ATB can resume only after fulfilling the original threshold and subsequently having three consecutive days with the daily number of unlinked local cases for both places not exceeding three, and the 7DMA figure on the third day for both places do not exceed five. This can help ensure that the epidemic is under a stabilised and downward trend; and

(3) Enhanced contact tracing: According to the original arrangement, ATB travellers departing from Hong Kong to Singapore are required to download, register and use Singapore's TraceTogether mobile application. With the increasing use of Hong Kong's LeaveHomeSafe (LHS) mobile application and its wide application in different premises, there is a new requirement that ATB travellers departing from Singapore to Hong Kong are required to download and use the LHS application, and the relevant records have to be retained for 31 days after departure from Hong Kong.

Moreover, in order to encourage Hong Kong citizens to get vaccinated as soon as possible for better self-protection against COVID-19 when travelling, Hong Kong residents travelling under the ATB can only take designated flights to fly to Singapore at least 14 days after they have had two doses of COVID-19 vaccine.

Apart from the above additional requirements, the original ATB arrangement remains largely unchanged, including the requirements that ATB travellers must have tested negative for COVID-19 both before departure and upon arrival, travel on designated flights, etc. Upon compliance with all the requirements, ATB travellers would then be free from any restrictions to their travel itineraries and compulsory quarantine. Relevant details are set out at the Annex.

The airlines concerned will announce reservation details of air tickets for designated flights under the ATB later today. For other detailed arrangements and the latest information on the ATB, travellers may visit the dedicated website later today at www.tourism.gov.hk/travelbubble.

The ATB arrangement between Hong Kong and Singapore was agreed in November last year, and designated flights were originally scheduled to begin in the same month. However, the ATB launch was deferred in view of the epidemic situation in Hong Kong. With the gradual stabilisation of Hong Kong's epidemic situation since mid-February and satisfactory epidemic control in Singapore all along, the two governments consider that now is a suitable time to re-launch the ATB. The two sides will continue to closely monitor the epidemic development of both places prior to the inaugural flights on May 26.