

New Zealand travel bubble won't come cheap



Mark Ludlow *Queensland bureau chief*

Apr 7, 2021 – 6.10pm

Save

Share

If you thought a trip to New Zealand, including the ski hub of Queenstown, was expensive before COVID-19, just wait for the trans-Tasman travel bubble prices.

With travel-mad Australians itching to dust off their passports, there has been a flurry of activity checking out flight deals from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane to popular destinations such as Auckland, Queenstown, Christchurch and Wellington.



Queenstown is back on the winter holiday list for Australians.

Flight Centre's online traffic spiked immediately – up 300 per cent – in the first hour after New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced the proposed new travel arrangements starting on April 19.

But flights across the Tasman won't come cheap.

It will cost a family of four about \$4000 to fly from Sydney to Queenstown in the first weekend of the June-July school holidays, according to a search on Qantas' website on Wednesday.

But don't stress; it would cost about the same for a family of four to fly from Sydney to Cairns.

Flights in late June from Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane to Auckland were about \$400 one-way, while it was about \$540 one-way from Sydney to Cairns, about \$990 from Melbourne to Cairns and \$392 from Brisbane to Cairns.

This is the new reality of travel in a pandemic.

Michael Schischka, from Mary Rossi Travel in Neutral Bay in Sydney, said boutique destinations such as Queenstown were always going to be more expensive, regardless of the pandemic.

But he said there were cheaper fares available for other Kiwi destinations – where there are more flights – such as Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

“We haven't been inundated with calls yet [about New Zealand travel] because people are looking for an alternative to travelling domestically,” he told *The Australian Financial Review*.

“People are being more cautious than gung-ho. Some clients want to wait for the vaccine. Other people don't want two weeks' quarantine added on to their trip [if there is a COVID-19 outbreak]. People aren't going to be going over to New Zealand for a long weekend like they used to.”

Get ready for the relatives

Friends and family are expected to be the biggest beneficiaries of the new trans-Tasman bubble, with more than 600,000 New Zealanders living in Australia excited about a visit from their Kiwi cousins.

The 75,000 Australians living in New Zealand are also likely to be looking forward to a visit from relatives after being separated for more than a year.

Tourism Australia will launch a \$3 million advertising campaign on Thursday, its first international campaign in a year, to lure Kiwis to Australia.

Before COVID-19, New Zealand was the second-biggest market for Australian tourism operators after China.

But unlike the big-spending Chinese visitors, who on average spend about \$8600 per person, thrifty New Zealanders are not big fans of opening their wallets, spending about \$1826 per person.

This is mostly due to them staying with friends and family, according to Tourism & Transport Forum chief executive Margy Osmond.

It's a long way to go, but this is a start. This has been a really huge milestone. Let's hope we can keep it open.

Ms Osmond said Queensland was likely to be the biggest beneficiary of New Zealanders coming into Australia as they "chased the sun" during the winter.

Flight Centre said trans-Tasman flight bookings had increased significantly since the announcement, admittedly off a low base.

Queenstown was the top destination, with about 22 per cent of all online inquiries, followed by Auckland.

With more than 1.5 million Australians travelling to New Zealand before the coronavirus, and 1.4 million New Zealanders coming to Australia, there is expected to be continued strong demand.



Flight Centre chief executive Graham Turner wants travel bubbles with countries such as Singapore, Japan and in the South Pacific to proceed. **Paul Harris**

Flight Centre chief executive Graham Turner said the trans-Tasman bubble would be a “huge psychological boost” for the travel and tourism sector, which has been smashed by the coronavirus over the past year.

“It’s a long way to go, but this is a start. This has been a really huge milestone. Let’s hope we can keep it open,” he said.

Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said Australia should not open its borders to any country other than New Zealand until the vaccine rollout was complete.

While Ms Palaszczuk welcomed the trans-Tasman bubble – which should benefit Queensland more than any other state because of the number of Kiwis who live in the Sunshine State – she said that should be enough for the moment.

“I don’t think we should be opening up to any other country until we have the vaccine rolled out,” she said. “We just need to get on with it.”

Mr Turner agreed the vaccination rollout needed to be sped up, but said travel bubbles with other countries, such as Singapore, Japan and South Pacific nations, should proceed.

“As long as people aren’t going to get sick and die, we should be travelling again,” he said.

“We can’t live in the shadow of this virus for the next 20 years and not travel. We just have to learn to live with the virus and vaccinate the people who are vulnerable.”