

Guest column: Restart on the rise

This is a special feature from *PAX International's* [June 2021 Asia-Pacific digital edition](#).

In this guest column, Keerthi “HappyK” Hapugasdeniya, Founder of HappyK Solutions, gives an update on two key airlines in Vietnam, plus a snapshot of the country’s plans to reopen come September.



Keerthi “HappyK” Hapugasdeniya, Founder, HappyK Solutions

It has been a hectic few months after going through deep COVID restrictions in Vietnam, with the travel and tourism sectors facing many challenges. With predictions of a fourth wave, some cities are locked down with the public encouraged to stay home. This is not good news for domestic travel.

I recently spoke to Director of Tourism Mr. Binh Nguyen who says the city of Da Nang is not waiting for international tourists, but rather is changing tourist criteria to welcome local travelers who have do not have the option to travel overseas. He tells me the city has hosted a number of successful activities in the past few months to reconnect locals after a year of silence. The city plans to keep the events going for the rest of the year. If the virus disturbs the plans, the city will respond appropriately to keep people safe.



Vietravel plans to equitize subsidiary Vietravel Airlines in its second year to boost its success as the first travel airline in Vietnam

Like in many other countries, airlines in Vietnam are re-evaluating business plans to adapt to the unpredictable environment. According to [Vietnamplus](#), [Vietravel](#) plans to equitize subsidiary [Vietravel Airlines](#) in its second year to boost its success as the first travel airline in Vietnam. Vietravel will hold the founding share and remain the majority shareholder. Vietravel Airlines, headquartered at [Phu Bai International Airport](#) in the central city of Hue, [debuted in December 2020](#) and aims to carry one million passengers by the end of its first year.

Airline consulting company [Yates+Partners](#) entered an agreement with [Bamboo Airways](#) in May with the goal of helping the carrier become the first airline in the country to achieve a five-star rating. As part of the partnership, Yates will advise the airline on products and services at all customer touch points; develop training classes for all employees; and, design a long-term consulting roadmap to achieve the goal by 2023.



Bamboo Airways plans to become a five-star airline in Vietnam by 2023 with the help of airline consulting company Yates+Partners

Bamboo is finalizing plans operate regular flights to San Francisco and Los Angeles starting in September having received a permit last year from the US Department of Transportation to carry passenger and cargo to the country.

The Vietnam Ministry of Transport is confirming procedures to designate Bamboo Airways to operate charter flights to the US following a proposal from the Civil Aviation Authority of Vietnam (CAAV) at the end of April. It will allow privately owned airlines to carry passengers and goods on charter flights upon approval by the Prime Minister and relevant agencies. Passengers could be experts, foreign investors and Vietnamese citizens in the US returning home. Bamboo Airways Chairman Trinh Van Quyet says the airline expects to operate charter flights to the US starting in July, operating 787-9s. This would make Bamboo Airways the only non-stop airline between Vietnam and the US.

Meanwhile, the carrier also plans to launch new international direct routes to the Korea, China, the UK, Germany, Tokyo, Melbourne, Sydney, Singapore and Thailand.



Vietjet Air plans to resume flights shortly

Still waiting for government approval, [Vietjet Air](#) has plans to reopen international commercial flights from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to Thailand, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. The routes will prioritize Vietnamese citizens you are studying or working abroad, as well as those wanting to return home. On return flights, the carrier would carry only Vietnamese citizen being repatriated or foreign experts with permission to enter the country as per government regulations.

Catering to locals

Vietnam closed its national borders and cancelled all international flights last March. Since then, only repatriates, foreign experts and highly skilled workers have been able to move in and out of the country.

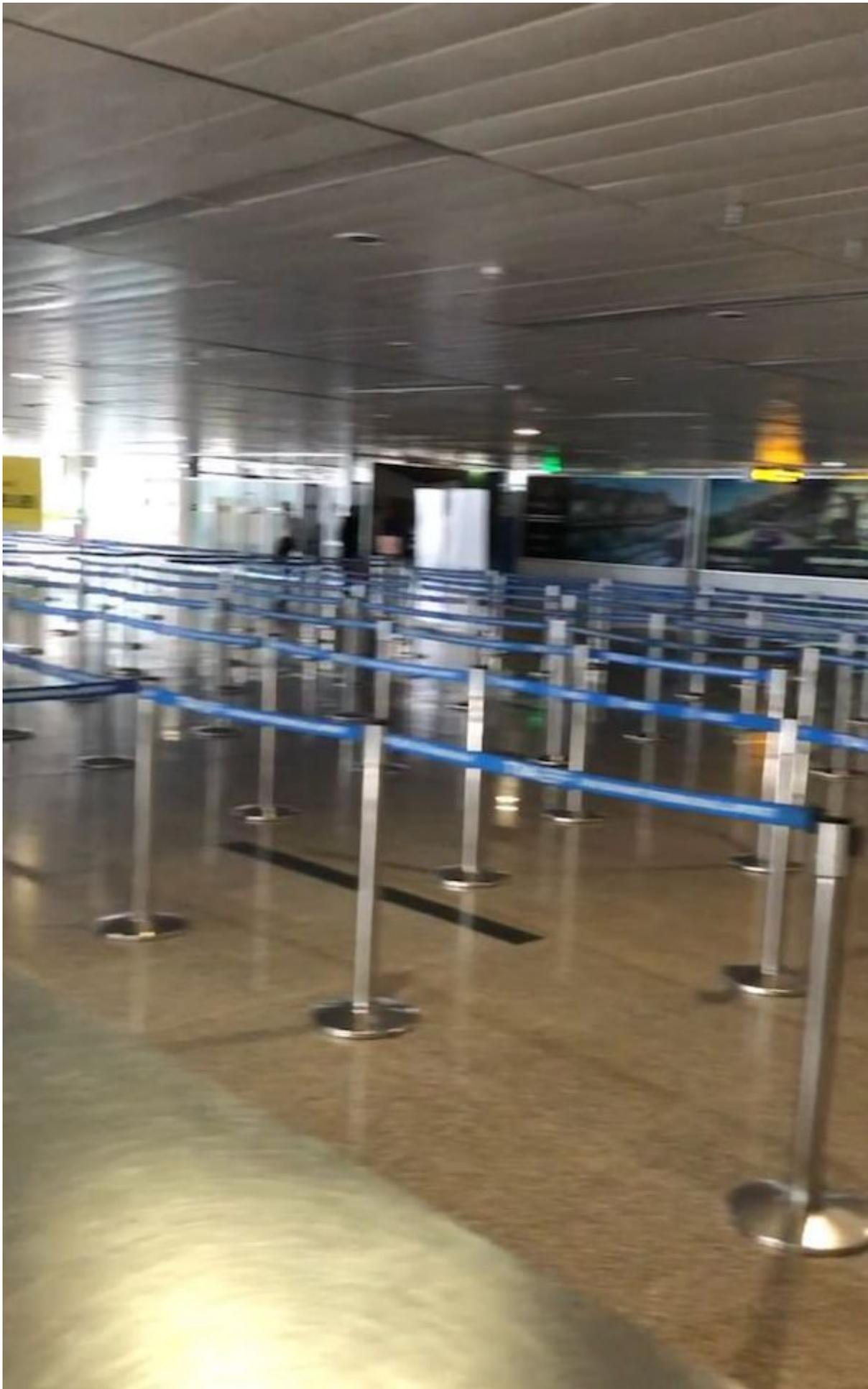
Third-party suppliers and airlines have gone through a rollercoaster of COVID restrictions, with all catering reduced and adapted to meet demands of local travelers instead. Airport retail units are catering to local travelers with a reduced selection of offerings. Tourist destinations have reprogrammed their services to cater to local travelers.



Airports in Vietnam are catering mostly to local travelers due to COVID



Sometimes travel in Vietnam is busy with locals



International travel is much less busy at airports due to the pandemic and government restrictions on travel

Vacation in Vietnam

But, Vietnam is working to resume regular international passenger flights in September 2021. In the first phase of reopening, bundled flights and hotel packages will be an option for domestic travelers serving 14-day quarantines. In the second phase, which the government aims to implement from July, there will be focus on re-establishing routes with other countries. Four weekly return flights will run for each airline, in each destination country including Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Flights will be subject to quarantine capacity at all airports.

The third and final stage begins in September, targeting daily return flights to each destination. Vietnam will accept travelers with a negative COVID-19 test result or vaccine certificate to serve a shortened seven- to 14-day quarantine at home. This phase depends on the progress of Vietnam's vaccination program. The country plans to connect with those that have similar vaccination standards and COVID-19 travel protocols.

CAAV says that local authorities will recognize international vaccine certifications issued by government-approved immunization establishments or approved by the [World Health Organization](#).

While it has been tough for the country, the government is doing everything it can to keep people safe. The community obeys the regulations and I think is a good example to show the world that strict discipline can fight difficult times.