

# Industry associations respond to US opening international air travel

After nearly 19 months of closed borders and advocacy by industry associations, the Biden Administration announced in mid-September that the country will allow fully vaccinated travelers to enter starting in November.

The White House decision to open the borders allows fully vaccinated travelers from 33 previously barred countries to enter, including China, India, Brazil and most of Europe. These travelers must have a negative COVID-19 test result before travel.

CEO  
Dr. Joe Leader

COO  
Russ Lemieux

Executive Director  
Lauren Costello

U.S. Policy Director  
Michael Taylor

President Joe Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

**Thank you for your administration's leadership in public discussion on reopening America for vaccinated individuals from Europe.** Many of these European nations have warmly opened their arms to vaccinated Americans. The United States must now reciprocate before Europe's doors are closed to vaccinated Americans, as hinted at last week by the European Commission President.

**On behalf of the millions of vaccinated airline passengers across Europe, we ask for you, Mr. President, to reopen the doors to the United States now.** The previous administration closed travel to our European allies at a time well before the vaccines. With our country having reached over 70% of adults vaccinated, we know that welcoming fully vaccinated individuals from Europe that are additionally tested prior to entry only strengthens your administration's message: vaccination provides all of us more freedom.

**APEX proposes a staged reopening of the United States for vaccinated international travelers beginning with Europe, effective immediately.** As the largest international airline association advocating for passenger experience, APEX points proudly to the scientific facts touted by your administration. Every European country currently blocked by the United States has significantly lower COVID-19 infection rates than our nation. Citing U.S. Centers for Disease Control guidance: "People who are fully vaccinated with an FDA-authorized vaccine or a vaccine authorized for emergency use by the World Health Organization can travel safely within the United States."

**Finally, we strongly believe that the U.S. must show that vaccination stands as a beacon of hope for overcoming the human toll experienced by millions of Europeans divided from their families, friends, and colleagues.** U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg recently answered on live television to a U.K. journalist that he had to watch his own father's funeral over an iPhone, stating, "I am among those impatient to see loved ones who live across the Atlantic." Secretary Buttigieg may now do so as an American, but the U.S. now should reciprocate for our European allies. There are millions of weddings, funerals, relationships, births, birthdays, and other human experiences already missed – including touching ones that have been shared with us at APEX. A hopeful mother from France flew to the U.S. in February 2020 for IVF, but her healthy embryo has awaited implementation since March 2020. An elderly retired couple from the U.K. eagerly awaits to fly and see their only son in America. A European grandmother cannot meet her only grandchild born during the pandemic. Mr. President, America's continued blockade of Europeans has separated families, friends, colleagues, and our world for far too long.

**We implore you to use your power as President to immediately enable Europe as a test of your administration's proposed vaccinated international travel program for foreign nationals.** Our airlines are ready, our European travelers are ready, and our world needs your inspirational vaccinated leadership forward.

Sincerest thanks,



Dr. Joe Leader  
APEX/IFSA CEO  
[leader@apex.aero](mailto:leader@apex.aero)

The Airline Passenger Experience Association ([APEX](https://www.apex.aero)) called on U.S. President Joe Biden to end the traveler blockade in a mid-[August letter](#). APEX cited that refusing entry to fully vaccinated travelers goes directly against [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) guidance, which says fully vaccinated people can travel safely within the United States. APEX continued working closely with CDC Director Rochelle Walensky and White House COVID-19 Coordinator Jeffrey Zients to move the needle on the issue.

APEX CEO Dr. Joe Leader tells *PAX International* the decision benefits travel worldwide.

"We have a bar being set across multiple nations that vaccination is required for travel," he says.

Now airlines face the challenge of ramping up to support the demand.

“Millions retired during COVID-19 without an interest to return to work. Some lost jobs and moved to other sectors. Unfortunately, rising labor costs may trigger catering costs to increase. That’s the last element expected as an impact of COVID-19, the need to broadly increase pay and bonuses,” Leader says, referencing a recent Delta SkyClubs US \$2,000 signing bonus advertisement.

“When our industry needs more workers, we take the economic steps to find them. Eventually, these higher costs may appear in lounge fees and tickets, but that will be in time. Right now, we simply need to focus on getting airport and airline service levels to what our passengers expect.”

The International Air Transport Association ([IATA](#)) released a statement on the decision, calling it a major step forward.

“This is excellent news for families and loved ones who have suffered through the heartache and loneliness of separation. It’s good for the millions of livelihoods in the US that depend on global tourism. And it will boost the economic recovery by enabling some key business travel markets,” said Willie Walsh, Director General at IATA.

Walsh says those who do not have access to vaccines must also be considered, adding that testing is a solution backed by data.

“We must get back to a situation where the freedom to travel is available to all,” said Walsh.



Airlines have expressed a welcome response to the easing of entry provisions. [SWISS International Air Lines](#) released a statement September 21 saying it is already seeing an increase in demand for leisure and business travel.

"North America is the most important air travel market of all for Swiss International Air Lines," said the release.

While still operating at lower capacities, SWISS has restored its route network to cover more than 90 percent of the destinations it was serving from Zurich and Geneva in 2019.

"We warmly welcome the easing of the US entry provisions that have recently been communicated," said SWISS CCO Tamur Goudarzi Pour.

The airline has expanded its lounge offer at [Zurich Airport](#) and offers flexible rebooking provisions and status extensions. There are testing facilities at Zurich and Geneva airports, as has been the case to date.