

The current Covid-19 Situation in Germany

Chancellor Merkel held yet another (marathon) Pandemic Summit with the 16 state governors on Monday night / early Tuesday morning to assess the current situation and decide on rules / shutdowns both over the upcoming Easter holidays (next week) and into the month of April. The government in February had laid out “re-opening” plans for non-essential retail, sports facilities and restaurants based on a scaled incident rate of 35 / 50 /100 per 100,000. Roughly explained, if a county and/or municipal district had an incident rate under 35 for a set time, then basically everything would be re-opened; if the incident rate was over 100 over a set time period, then everything would be automatically closed. A rate of 50 allowed limited openings. Masks, hygiene concepts and social distancing would all still be enforced.

In February the incident rate was 70 when these new standards were set. The incident rate now is 108. Oops. What went wrong? As epidemiologists warned that the incident rate was going to drastically increase in the face of more aggressive virus mutations, several governors and of course business lobby groups appealed to have the “lockdown light” repealed. Schools had reopened here at the beginning of March. So did beauty salons and barber shops. More people have been out and about, despite ostensible restrictions in the number of people you may see / visit privately.

Basically people are starting to run out of patience; they are bored, tired and frustrated. They are meeting each other more frequently in private. Particularly for hotels and attractions within Germany, there is still no perspective for domestic travel. Non-essential / leisure travel is still more or less illegal within Germany. BUT the government last week said that Mallorca was safe...and BOOM !! Airlines like TUI Fly and Eurowings put hundreds of flights ex Germany to Mallorca onto their reservation systems, and Germans booked like crazy the past week to fly to Mallorca over the Easter Holiday. Now there are discussions that they must be tested and/or go into quarantine upon their return, and the situation will surely change again by next week.

But they cannot drive within the country and visit their friends and relatives. What was also announced was a pretty much a complete national lockdown during the 5 day Easter Holiday weekend within the country in an effort to slow down the infection rate during a traditional vacation and holiday period.

This dichotomy – this disconnect – has yet to be clearly communicated to the general public. It will now be extended through April 17, 2021 (we have been in suspended animation here since November 2021). The “lockdown light” that we have been subjected to for the past several months – restaurants closed, retail closed, more home-office – but fully functioning factories, reopened schools for live instruction - has not worked to keep down the infection rate. The main reasons here are 1) extremely slow vaccination roll-out with only 9% of the population of Germany (82 million) having received at least the first covid-19 vaccine; and 2) extremely poor distribution of covid-19 testing kits, either free testing at clinics/doctors/drugstores AND a slow roll-out of self-testing kits.

Market Notes Germany, Switzerland, Austria: March 24, 2021

Travel sentiment remains high, people are itching to travel. The “window” that travel to Mallorca is possible provided the travel industry with its first truly optimistic booking period in over a year. The government had said back in February that travel over the Easter Holiday was unlikely, but that travel over Pentecost Holiday in mid-May would be much more likely. Wage subsidy programs and direct subsidy programs remain in place to support retail, restaurants, hotels and the travel industry which have been affected the most adversely. But a lack of perspective remains a depressant for the travel industry – for the entire country, for that matter.

Things are improving, but things have DEFINITELY not worked out smoothly as Germans are used to having things work out, being such good planners. Germany is confronting its penchant for bureaucracy, complicated forms and application procedures, and general inflexibility. There have been mistakes made on all levels down starting from the European Commission in Brussels. Things are definitely improving, the weather is warming up, the trees are starting to blossom, an optimism will surely take hold if/when tests and vaccines are finally distributed and available as promised. Summer travel within Europe (short haul and drive market) is the political, economic and personal goal of all European governments and citizens.

Albert Jennings assessment of the situation, March 23, 2021

The current Covid-19 Situation in Switzerland

Fabio De Canio, Product Director for North America at Hotelplan

“On Monday, about two weeks ago, the stores could reopen. However, restaurants, bars, clubs will remain closed until probably the end of April. Since we are in soft lockdown, the border with the US is still closed and additionally the US is on the quarantine list, we have little to no demand for travel to the US. The only hope we see right now is the vaccination strategy in the U.S. and in our country. However, I still expect that we will not have much demand for travel to the U.S. this year. A lot of things are still very unclear and uncertain. The business will probably not recover slowly and sustainably until 2022.

Otherwise, we are still on reduced working hours / wage subsidy and will probably need this tool throughout 2021. We are currently waiting to see how the global Corona pandemic develops. We are also watching the development of vaccination strategies in Switzerland and the US. As long as the border remains closed, we have completely stopped marketing activities for the US. Only when there is a positive sign regarding the opening, we will probably resume marketing activities for the USA.

That's really all I can say about the situation at the moment. We have to continue to wait and hope.”

Email from Fabio DeCanio, Monday March 22, 2021

The Current Situation in Austria

Despite high infection rates Austria does not tighten Corona rules

"We take risks," says Vienna Mayor Michael Ludwig. This is the motto for the entire country. The high incidence levels are not prompting top politicians to tighten up.

Despite a nationwide seven-day incidence of 240, Austria is refraining from taking further steps in the corona crisis for now. The current path of almost unprecedented intensive testing will still be expanded, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) said Monday in Vienna. Health Minister Rudolf Anschober (Greens) called the millions of tests an "innovative counter-program" to fight the spread other than with a national lockdown. To assess the situation, especially in the coming months, not only the incidence value will be used, but also, above all, the occupancy rate in intensive care units and the vaccination rate of those over 50 years of age.

In view of the particularly critical situation in intensive care units in the capital Vienna, the provinces of Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland want to discuss their own measures together with the Ministry of Health this week. As soon as a district reaches a seven-day incidence of 400, there should be regionally tailored measures, he said.

The originally envisaged opening of outdoor restaurants is off the table for the time being, but further opening steps have not been ruled out. These should be possible after Easter, if the development in the intensive care units remains stable, he said. "The most important thing is the perspective," Kurz said in view of the immense pressure, especially from the catering and hotel industry. He said he continues to expect that the worst will be over by summer. "We will return to normality in the summer," the Austrian head of government said.

The Austrian testing campaign is currently gaining momentum. For example, a third test has recently been held in elementary schools on Fridays within the space of a week. This brings the number of Corona tests to almost four million per week, the government announced. A total of just under nine million people live in Austria. Some 1,500 companies with about 730,000 employees also took part in the tests.

The broad range of tests is also intended to be a basis for the so-called Green Passport, which will give tested people in Austria more freedom for a certain period of time starting in April.

dpa / German Press Agency article from March 23, 2021

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International Flight Situation / Transatlantic Routes / Digital Vaccination Passes

Iata expects transatlantic air service to open in June

The International Air Transport Association currently counts only half the usual number of passengers on major global routes. Soon, however, many things should be better, help should be digital vaccination and test certificates.

Iata expects transatlantic air travel to open up in June. "We are quite optimistic," said Iata chief Alexandre de Juniac. He said he expects the two sides to agree on common rules for safe air travel before the summer travel season. The EU and U.S. have imposed wide-ranging entry restrictions because of the Corona pandemic, which remain in place.

De Juniac welcomed EU plans for a single European digital vaccination pass. The "digital green certificate" will document Corona vaccinations, as well as results of approved PCR and rapid tests, and survived Corona infections, and will be ready on June 1. The only problem is when there are too many different digital solutions, de Juniac said. That made travel too complicated for passengers.

The organization itself has developed the "Iata Travel Pass." It is an app for cell phones in which travelers should be able to store vaccination and test certificates in a forgery-proof way and show them to airlines and immigration authorities when needed. The app is expected to be available in April. De Juniac hopes the EU proof will integrate with the Iata Travel Passport.

De Juniac, formerly chief executive of Air France-KLM, is stepping down as Iata director general at the end of March. He will be succeeded by William Walsh, former chief executive of British Airways and of its parent company International Airlines Group (IAG).

[*Airliners.de from March 17, 2021*](#)

Summa Summarum

We remain "cautiously optimistic" that fall travel to the USA will be possible, That IPW 2021 in Las Vegas will have international buyers and press representatives, that travelers from Europe will return to Florida for fall and winter 2021/22. Tour operators across the board with whom we have communicated during Go West Summit, ITB, Brand USA Marketplace the past three week as well during our regular travel trade outreach are all focusing on Summer 2022 for North American and Caribbean travel – for all non-European / short haul (drive market) travel.

Our GIA efforts for travel inspiration (PR) and training (trade) continue. We work with our destination clients to prepare for the marketing and booking-motivational period which we anticipate will again occur as of fall 2021 through spring 2022 for Caribbean and North American bookings in Summer 2022.