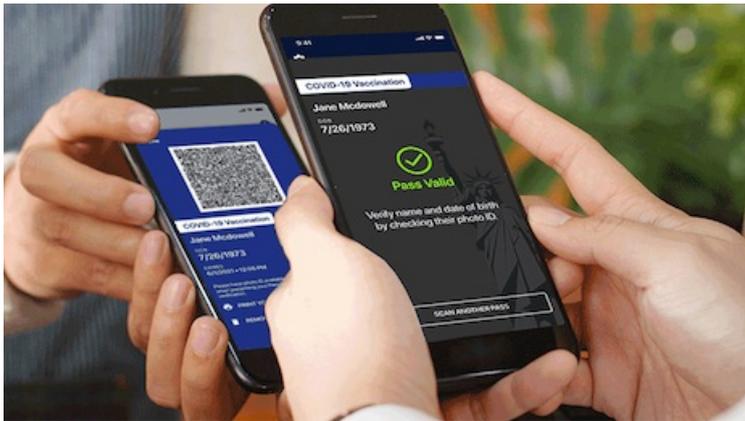


TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Brands, travelers navigate varying vaccine passport rollouts

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New York State has launched Excelsior Pass, a digital health pass. Image credit: New York State

By SARAH RAMIREZ

With the pace of COVID-19 vaccinations ramping up in many countries across the globe, many governments and businesses are considering requiring vaccine certificates to promote safety as consumers anxiously return to a new sense of normalcy.

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Some countries have already implemented what are colloquially known as "vaccine passports," which show proof of COVID-19 vaccination, while others are in the process of developing their own systems. Businesses from event venues to cruise lines are also setting vaccination requirements, adding to the list of evolving regulations that consumers must be aware of as they navigate a post-lockdown era.

"Presently, the United States as well as the world is blanketed with a patchwork of varying requirements with respect to test requirements and vaccinations, depending on the views of the local authorities," said Todd Weeber, chief operating officer at **Magellan Jets**, Boston. "It is our role to remain continuously informed of all such requirements so that our clients don't have to worry about them."

Travel rules

Although many governments and health agencies are still discouraging nonessential travel, the reality is there is pent-up demand among consumers particularly affluents and many economies rely heavily on tourism.

As a result, vaccine passports may be the next phase of safely allowing for travel, especially across international borders. Already, most countries as well as airlines and hotels have implemented safety measures such as requiring negative COVID-19 test results, mask wearing, temperature checks, social distancing and more.



Only Israelis with vaccination certificates may enter hotels and other businesses. Image credit: The Ritz-Carlton, Herzliya

The term vaccine passport has become shorthand for digital certificates or scannable paper documents that verify an individual's vaccination status. Similar to an airplane boarding pass, these credentials typically feature a QR code that can be scanned by businesses.

Israel, where more than 60 percent of the population has already received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, has already begun implementing a vaccine passport program.

Once an eligible citizen has received their second vaccine dose, they can apply for the "Green Pass" or similar documentation from the Israeli Ministry of Health. The Green Pass is currently valid for six months and must be presented to enter certain businesses including gyms, restaurants, hotels and theaters.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson confirmed on April 5 that the government will pilot a "COVID-certification" system for people interested in traveling or attending large events to prove they have been vaccinated, tested negative or recently recovered from the virus.

This follows a proposal by European Union leaders to introduce a "Digital Green Certificate" that would allow and streamline the safe movement of citizens within all member states, and potentially other European nations such as Norway and Switzerland. The E.U. is working with the World Health Organization to introduce the system by summer, providing a boost to the struggling tourism and hospitality industries.

Some European countries such as Greece and Iceland are allowing entry of non-vaccinated travelers, but these visitors may still be subject to COVID-19 testing or quarantine requirements.

Meanwhile, countries such as Mexico, Costa Rica and many Caribbean islands where COVID-19 vaccines are in limited supply have lifted quarantine restrictions or are choosing to rely on testing as a way to encourage tourism.

In the United States, the Centers of Disease Control announced that fully vaccinated people can travel domestically without needing to get tested or quarantine, nor will they have to test before leaving the country or self-quarantine after returning from international travel ([see story](#)).

However, the U.S. federal government has been hesitant about issuing national guidelines regarding vaccine passports, leaving states and private companies to develop their own plans.

"The implementation of vaccine passports' is in the early stages globally and meeting stiff resistance on the federal and state level here in the United States," Mr. Weeber said. "Regardless of the status of the various tools to help contain the pandemic, Magellan Jets has been and will always be well-equipped to ensure a stress-free customer experience for all of our Jet Card owners, members, clients and guests."



When sailing resumes, Crystal Cruises will require all guests to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination. Image credit: Crystal Cruises

Similar to mask mandates and lockdowns, vaccine passports have quickly become politicized, particularly in the U.S., amid privacy concerns and other ethical issues. New York State has already introduced a voluntary program, the Excelsior Pass, while Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed an executive order banning businesses from requiring customers show proof of vaccination.

Although there are legitimate questions about vaccine passports several of which use blockchain technology to safeguard consumer data preventing businesses from screening patrons may actually hamper the hospitality recovery.

While the CDC continues to bar cruise ships from sailing in U.S. waters, cruise lines such as Crystal and Regent Seven Seas which count several Florida cities as ports plan to require all guests be inoculated with a COVID-19 vaccine.

Return to travel

Vaccine passports will almost certainly continue to evolve and draw scrutiny, but may ultimately help usher in the travel and hospitality recovery.

Vaccination requirements are not unprecedented the yellow fever and typhoid vaccines are among those suggested for travel in certain regions but digitizing systems may improve customer and brand experiences.

For instance, the International Air Transport Association which has developed its own digital wallet solution dubbed the IATA Travel Pass reports that wait times have increased at some international airports, despite reduced traffic, because more paper documents regarding COVID-19 tests and vaccines must be inspected, on top of passports and visas.

However, standardization across certification systems is limited and will have to be addressed while maintaining privacy and remaining equitable.

Hesitation or delays around vaccine passports may discourage travelers, or force countries to continue limiting tourism to prevent more waves of COVID cases.

In an effort to halt the spread of COVID-19, foreign spectators will not be permitted to attend the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, scheduled to begin July 23. Serving as an Olympic host can spur economic growth and an influx of tourism, but the pandemic leaves Japan, as well as the brands hoping for a successful large-scale event, in a challenging position ([see story](#)).

Affluents are anxious to travel, but hospitality brands may have to wait until the latter half of 2021 to see bookings rebound significantly.

As the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved and fluctuated, travelers have shifted from staying home to opting for extended stays or spontaneous trips. With consumer confidence improving, however, travelers are becoming more comfortable booking trips months ahead of time ([see story](#)).