

Coronavirus travel restrictions to Australia prompt foreigners and locals to fly in en masse

[abc.net.au/news/2020-03-20/travellers-return-to-australia-ahead-of-coronavirus-travel-ban/12075340](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-20/travellers-return-to-australia-ahead-of-coronavirus-travel-ban/12075340)

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By [Bellinda Kontominas](#) and [Benjamin Gubana](#)

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Georgie Ridge, right, cut short her gap year in the UK(ABC News)

Travellers have flocked home to Australia, arriving at airports across the country just hours before strict foreign travel bans come into effect.

Key points:

- Now that the ban is in effect, non-citizens and non-residents will be refused entry to Australia
- Australian Border Force officers will be placed at foreign airports to ensure compliance
- Foreign airline crews are exempt from the travel ban but must self-isolate while in the country

The ban was enforced at 9:00pm AEDT on Friday. Now only Australian citizens, residents and immediate family members can enter the country.

It replaces earlier travel bans on foreigners coming from China, Iran, Italy and South Korea.

Leon Lycett arrived from Ireland, having cut short his holiday in Thailand and Vietnam to start his 12-month Australian stint before the ban came into effect.

"We're just on a working holiday visa," he said.

"We've had to book a hotel for two weeks and are not allowed to leave or stay with our friends."

Reza Omar arrived from Singapore to spend two months on holiday in Australia.

He said he would follow the rules to self-isolate.

"We'll make sure we are all on top of things when it comes to health and then travel within Australia, once we're all clear."

Australian citizens took the opportunity to cut short their overseas travel, fearing more restrictions could have left them stranded if they remained abroad.

One Perth woman said she spent three days at an airport in the Philippines "trying to get out".



Simon Glover and his family returned to Australia from Singapore(ABC News)

She said she couldn't change her original flights and then had to book further flights to get to a different airport.

"When I finally got through one of the ticket offices to get one of the flights ... I broke down crying."

Georgie Ridge arrived at Sydney Airport from London after spending only three months in the UK for what was meant to be her gap year.

"[I have] mixed emotions yeah, happy to be home but sad that I had to leave," she said.

Her mother Ingrid Ridge said their decision to bring Georgie home was justified, when just days later the UK decided to close all schools.

"Yeah, really relieved, I didn't realise how emotional it is. I haven't seen her for three months.

"We decided before the school shut to bring her home, and literally days later the big decision, they shut all the schools in the United Kingdom."

Simon Glover, his wife Lucinda and their two children returned to Australia from Singapore after visiting countries including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Malaysia during a five-week holiday visiting friends.

"We barely scraped in to Kuala Lumpur a day and a half before they closed the border to non-residents," he said.

"It was good to be able to get home, weren't sure if our flights were going to be cancelled, you know touch and go the whole way back, but glad to be home, that's for sure."

Of the 37 flights scheduled to arrive at Sydney Airport between midday and 10:00pm on Friday, 13 were cancelled.

From tonight Australians will still be able to return from overseas, but they will be required to self-isolate for 14 days.

New Zealand closed its borders to foreign nationals at midnight on Thursday.

The bans do not apply to New Zealanders living in Australia or Australians living in New Zealand.

A spokesperson from the Department of Home Affairs said Australian Border Force liaison officers stationed at overseas airports would work with airlines to identify travellers restricted from flying to Australia.

Airlines would then stop those travellers getting on board the flights.

The spokesperson said foreign airline crews were exempt from the travel restrictions and were advised to take appropriate precautions during layovers, including 14 days' self-isolation while in the country.

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