

Italy leads Europe reopening borders as virus strikes Latam

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Italy reopened its borders to European travellers on Wednesday as the continent slowly emerged from quarantines to restart battered economies even as the coronavirus pandemic carved its deadly path through Latin

America.

European nations among the hardest hit by the outbreak have mostly flattened out infection curves and turned to the task of balancing economic recovery against the risk of a second wave of cases.

The United States, with the highest death toll, and Latin America have emerged as new centres for infections of COVID-19 that has killed more than 380,000 people worldwide since it first emerged in China late last year.

Across the globe, nations are cautiously reopening schools, businesses and returning to life after months of quarantine.

Italy—the first country badly hammered in Europe—is leading the way to restart, hoping tourism will revive its recession-hit economy three months after the nation shut down.

"We are cautiously optimistic. Let's hope the Italians begin travelling and take advantage of seeing an uncrowded Rome," said hotel receptionist Alessandra Conti.

Tourism accounts for 13 percent of Italy's GDP and officials are keen to reassure visitors they will be safe.

But with health experts warning over reopening too quickly, some fear foreign visitors may be reluctant to travel.

"I don't think we'll see any foreign tourists really until the end of August or even September. Who's going to come? No one from South America, China or the US," said Mimmo Burgio, a cafe owner near Rome's Colosseum.

Rethinking Sweden lockdown

International flights were only expected to resume in three main cities: Milan, Rome and Naples, and some of Italy's neighbours are not yet ready to lift [travel restrictions](#) there.

Austria said on Wednesday it would scrap virus controls on all land borders, except for Italy, still viewed by some of neighbours as a virus hotspot.

Germany will also lift its blanket travel warning for European nations from June 15, replacing it with warnings for [individual countries](#).

"This decision raises great hope and expectations but I want to say again: travel warnings are not travel bans, and travel advice is not an invitation to travel," Foreign Minister Heiko Maas cautioned Wednesday.

London City Airport announced it would reopen at the end of June, with domestic services first and international flights expected to follow in early July.

Britain—with the second highest death rate in the world after the US at nearly 40,000 fatalities—is still advising against non-essential [travel](#).

In Sweden, which mostly remained open while Europe went into lockdown, a top epidemiologist acknowledged its softer approach to curbing the virus needed improvement.

"If we were to encounter the same disease with everything we know about it today, I think we would end up doing something in between what Sweden and the rest of the world has done," Anders Tegnell said.

Sweden has reported more than 38,000 cases and nearly 4,500 deaths,

far greater than neighbouring countries.

'Gas to fire'

Countries around the world are eager to get economies going again after punishing lockdowns halted growth.

Australia has become the latest country to warn of the, saying it would head for its first recession in nearly three decades after the economy shrank in the January-March quarter.

And the World Bank warned this week the world faces "staggeringly large" losses because of the pandemic, with recovery efforts expected to be hampered by a shortage of resources.

While Europe emerges from the darkest days of its outbreak, the virus tightened its grip on Latin America, especially in Brazil, where populist President Jair Bolsonaro opposes lockdown measures.

Brazil has now surpassed 30,000 deaths—the fourth deadliest outbreak in the world after the US, Britain and Italy.

The figures came even as some Brazilian states began to emerge from weeks of quarantine measures despite warnings from the WHO and epidemiologists it is too soon.

"In the current situation, relaxing the measures is adding gasoline to the fire," Rafael Galliez, an infectious diseases expert, told AFP.

Still, surfers and swimmers streamed back to the beach in Rio de Janeiro as the city eased lockdown measures.

"I think that here, in the water, there is no risk," said Cesar Calmon as he

delighted in the waves off Ipanema beach.

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