

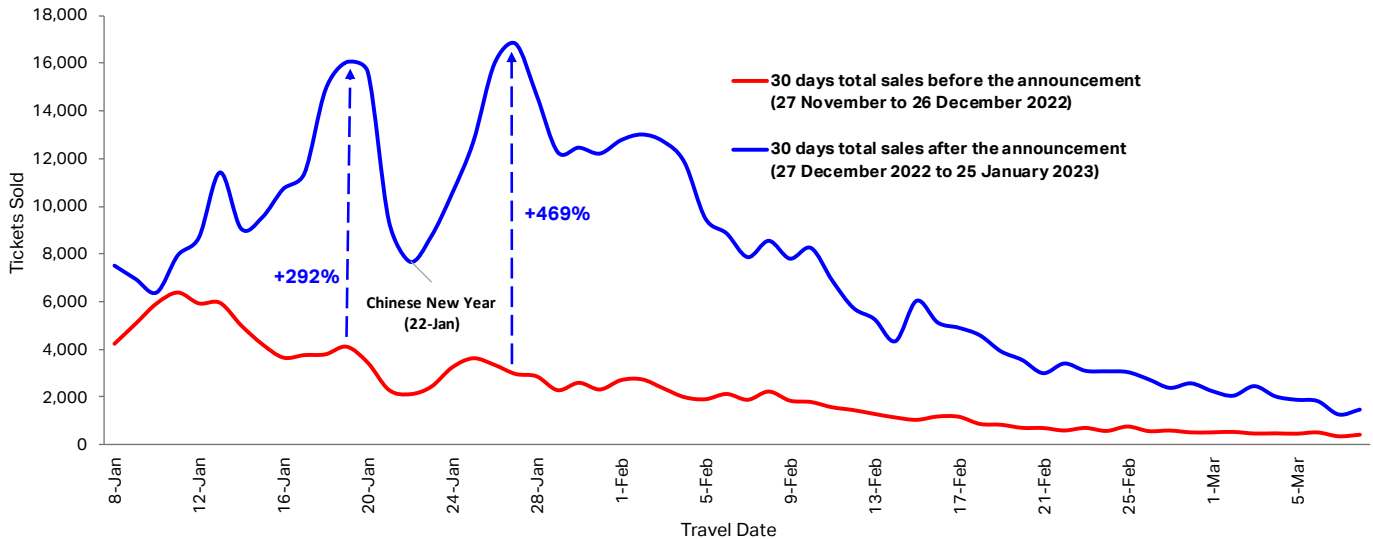


IATA's Chart of the Week

17 March 2023

International air travel to China picks up but remains restricted

China's inbound international flight ticket sales before and after the 26 Dec 2022 policy announcement, by travel date



Source: IATA Sustainability & Economics using data from DDS

- On 26 December 2022, the Chinese government announced that it would remove several travel restrictions from the country's zero-Covid measures and reopen its border to international air travel from 8 January 2023. Following our [chart of the week from 6 January](#), where we noted an uptick in international air ticket sales shortly after China's reopening, we revisit our assessment of the travel impacts from this policy change.
- Here, we compare inbound international ticket sales from all regions to China 30 days before (purchased between 27 November and 26 December 2022) and 30 days after (purchased between 27 December 2022 and 25 January 2023) the reopening policy change was announced (see chart).
- As anticipated, the relaxation of the zero-Covid measures enabled a surge in the number of people traveling to China before the Chinese New Year holiday, possibly for the first time since the onset of the pandemic. The two peaks in inbound air travel after China's reopening were before (19 January) and after (27 January) the New Year's Day on 22 January, when ticket sales increased by 292% and 469%, respectively, compared with the ticket sales before the reopening was announced.¹
- According to the Chinese National Immigration Administration, during this year's Spring Festival national holiday period (21 to 27 January), the total number of international travelers to-and-from China across all modes of transportation increased by 123.2% and 117.8%, respectively, compared to 2022 travelers. Inbound air passengers increased by 241.8% over this period, reaching 0.33 million. However, this traffic level still accounted for less than 30% of the inbound air travelers during the Spring Festival holiday period of 2019.
- Although international traffic picked up in January, the full recovery timeline for China's international air passengers remains uncertain due to various constraints. Most importantly, the remaining flight restrictions in many countries in Europe and in the Americas have impeded airlines from serving the pent-up demand for travel to China. Travel document backlogs and entry requirements for Chinese travelers have also limited the pace of traffic recovery.

¹We note too that ticket sales tend to rise closer to the departure date, separately from the change in policy.

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