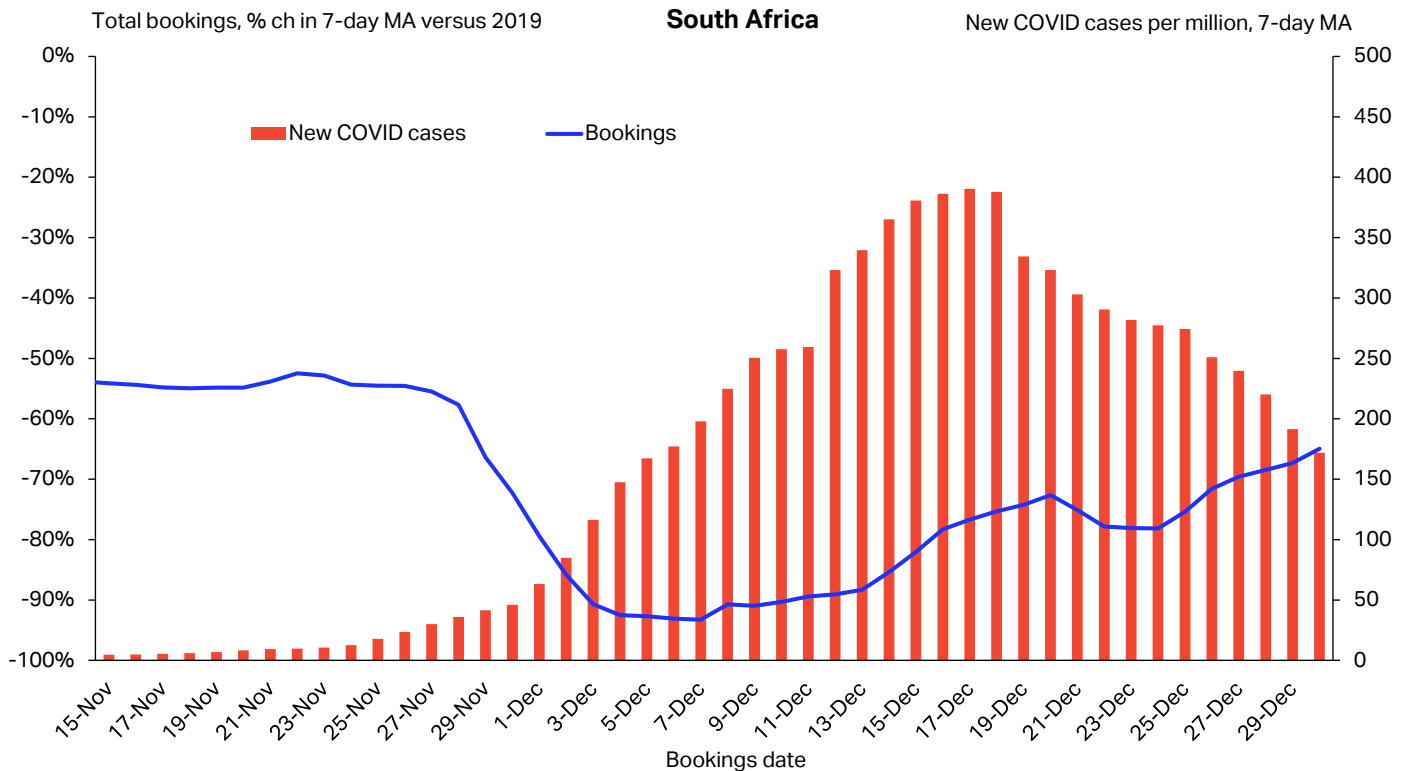




7 January 2022

IATA Economics' Chart of the Week

Swift air travel recovery in South Africa as restrictions ease



Source: IATA DDS, Our World In Data

- The emergence in South Africa of the Omicron variant has showcased that country's experience regarding the impact of the strain on human activities as the variant has spread across the world.
- The new variant of concern was discovered in Southern Africa on 24 November 2021, triggering the imposition of new and [harsher travel restrictions](#) in many parts of the world that do little to reduce overall case numbers. As of 13 December, 90 countries scattered in each region of the world had implemented travel bans to South Africa, with 5 countries having fully closed their borders. This means the number of tickets bought to travel to, from and within South Africa fell from roughly 45% of pre-crisis levels prior to the outbreak to around 7% in the first week of December. Bookings for international travel fared even worse, as refunds exceeded tickets sold for a few days in early December – a rare occurrence of negative net bookings. Domestic bookings fell to a low of 22% of 2019 levels. Other countries have been similarly impacted. The UK, for example, faced travel bans to 22 countries as of 22 December, including to key partners in Europe.
- The positive news for the UK and other countries facing travel bans is that traffic in South Africa is improving rapidly as new infection recede. Countries such as the US, Malaysia, Ireland and the Netherlands have recently lifted travel restrictions, bringing the number of countries with a ban in place down to 78 on 5 January 2022.
- More broadly, South Africa's experience with Omicron points to the pandemic possibly becoming endemic, with a reduced impact on human activities as the virus continues to mutate. This would be good news for aviation in the medium term.

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IATA Economics
economics@iata.org