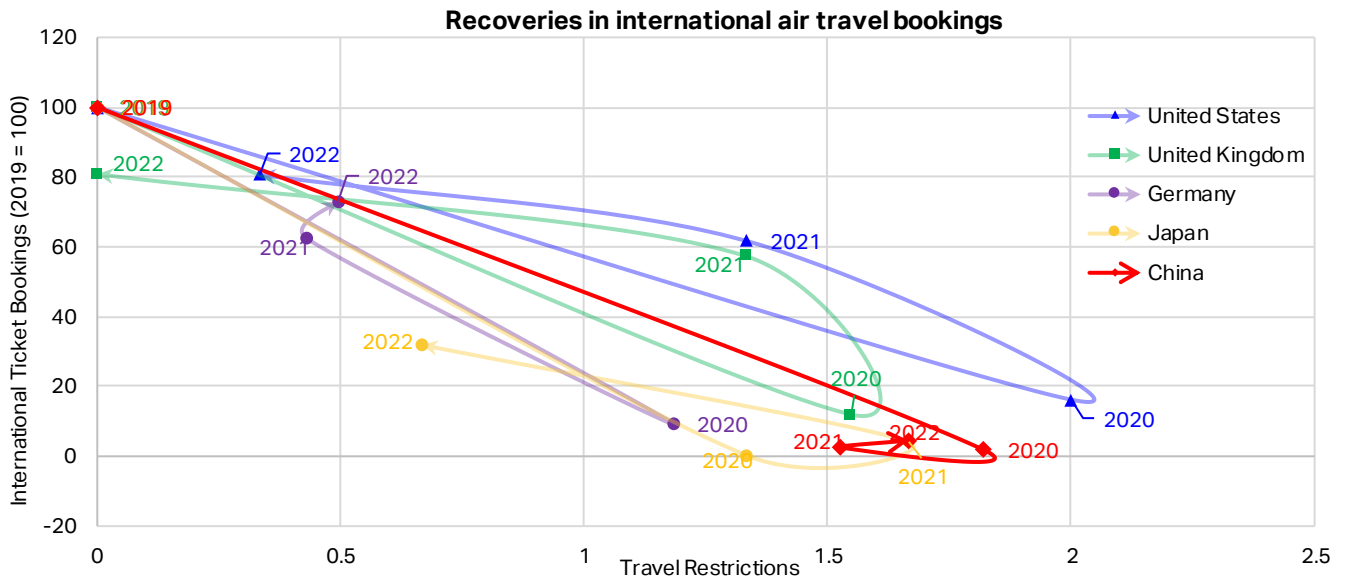




Travel rebounds as restrictions ease except in China



Sources: DDS, Our World in Data, and author's calculation.

- The Covid-19 pandemic triggered lockdowns and the imposition of travel restrictions in an uncoordinated way across countries and regions in the world, causing dramatic declines in international travels. As of October 2020, countries such as the US, the UK, and China were all in some type of lockdown, and their international travel fell below 20% of pre-pandemic levels, and to almost zero for Japan and China (see chart above) ¹.
- Thanks to the swift roll-out of COVID vaccines, 45% of the world population had received at least one dose by October 2021, and as many as 65% in the economies in the chart above. As a result, travel restrictions were eased in the US, the UK, and Germany, where international travel quickly rebounded to 60% of pre-pandemic levels. This is in contrast to international travel for Japan and China, which countries' travel restrictions were still largely in place and remained close to the 2020 near-zero level also in 2021.
- International air travel bookings have now reached around 80% of pre-pandemic levels for the three countries in North America and Europe. Japan allows tourists to visit the country without a visa since 11 October, and a cap on daily arrivals has also been lifted. Bookings jumped in response, and international traffic there has leaped to more than 30%.
- China, on the other hand, now has an even stricter COVID policy than one year ago, and international ticket bookings remain at less than 5% of the pre-pandemic level for the third year in a row.
- Nevertheless, mid-October multiple airlines in China announced increases to their scheduled international flights, clearly in anticipation of being able to fill those seats. Indeed, the Chinese government then announced on 10 November a shortening of quarantine periods as part of a package of 20 easing measures regarding travel restrictions. However, these moves have not impacted the bookings data in any meaningful way, which is in sharp contrast to the response in bookings observed elsewhere when restrictions are lifted. Most likely, prevailing strict COVID-related restrictions in specific localities curtail the rebound potential of the national measures.

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¹ The curved lines represent each country's recovery in international bookings (Y-axis) versus travel restrictions in place in Octobers in the years 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 (X-axis). Travel restrictions are a simple monthly average of 1) international travel controls, 2) internal movement restrictions, and 3) public transport closures. A higher number on the X-axis represents more stringent travel restrictions.