

Chile and Peru close borders, Latam grounds flights over pandemic

March 17 2020



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Chile and Peru announced a total closure of their borders on Monday while Latin America's largest airline said it was reducing operations by 70 percent as the region scrambled to stem the rapidly-spreading

coronavirus pandemic.

Latin America has registered more than 800 cases and seven deaths, according to an AFP count, after the Dominican Republic became the latest nation to report a fatality.

"We've decided to close all our country's terrestrial, maritime and aerial borders for the transit of foreigners," said Chile's President Sebastian Pinera.

The announcement came as Chile revealed on Monday its number of [coronavirus](#) cases had more than doubled since Sunday to 155.

Peru followed suit soon afterwards with President Martin Vizcarra announcing a two-week border closure from midnight, while Colombia announced it would close its borders until May 30.

Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay confirmed partial border closures. Paraguay also imposed overnight curfews.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro announced late Monday that his country would enter "collective quarantine."

Latam Airlines said it was reducing operations by 70 percent, just four days after already cutting back by 30 percent.

"If these unprecedented travel restrictions increase... we're not ruling out being forced to decrease our operations even more," said the airline's vice-president Roberto Alvo.

Mexico President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador bucked the trend, saying he would not ban public gatherings or stop greeting people with "hugs" until public health officials said otherwise.

Stocks tumble

Chile rolled out a number of coronavirus control measures as the [central bank](#) slashed interest rates by 75 basis points to 1.0 percent.

The move failed to stop the Santiago stock exchange closing down 14 percent, its worst fall in three decades.

Regional stocks were battered as the Sao Paulo exchange lost almost 14 percent, Buenos Aires fell nearly 10 percent and Colombia plummeted more than 15 percent.

Brazil's currency fell below \$0.20 for the first time ever, prompting an emergency government investment of almost 150 billion reals (\$27.5 billion) into the economy.

Chile's closed borders caused a problem for a quarantined cruise ship in the country's deep south.

More than 200 passengers and crew aboard the Silver Explorer in the remote port of Caleta Tortel are in lockdown after six people tested positive for coronavirus.

Health authorities want to evacuate the other passengers back to their home countries, but may need special permission.

Cuba helping Nicaragua

Cuba said it was allowing a British cruise ship to dock despite five people on board testing positive for COVID-19 and nearly 40 others in isolation with flu-like symptoms.

"We are working around the clock to arrange evacuation flights from

Cuba to the UK as soon as possible for passengers on the Braemar cruise ship," a British foreign ministry spokesman said.

Cuba is also sending specialist doctors to Nicaragua to help the central American country treat COVID-19 patients.

Ecuador, which has seen 58 cases and two deaths, banned tourists from the Galapagos Islands on Monday while authorities in Rio de Janeiro used megaphones to order people at the beach to go home.

Rio's Flamengo football club, the reigning Copa Libertadores champions, revealed that their Portuguese coach Jorge Jesus is the latest sports star to have tested positive for the virus.

The city's famous Christ the Redeemer statue was also closed to the public.

Honduras announced a week-long lockdown to prevent people from going to work, using public transport or taking part in religious activities.

The Argentine government announced work exemptions for public and private employees of non-essential sectors, as well as parents with school-age children.

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