

US sets pandemic-era high for air travel, over 1.6 million

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In this Oct. 14, 2020 file photo, a TSA staff wears mask as he walks past flight information screens show flight status information at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago. Federal officials keep seeing cases of airline passengers getting into confrontations with flight attendants or other passengers. The Federal Aviation Administration said Tuesday, April 27, 2021, that it is seeking fines ranging from \$14,500 to \$31,750 against three recent passengers. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh)

The United States set another record for the number of air travelers since the pandemic set in, although passenger numbers remain far below 2019 levels.

More than 1.6 million people were screened at U.S. airport checkpoints on Sunday, according to the Transportation Security Administration. That was the highest number screened since March 12 of last year when air travel began to plummet.

However, it was still 35% below the number of airport travelers reported on the comparable Sunday in 2019, according to TSA figures.

Airlines started to see an increase in bookings around mid-February, and the TSA has screened

at least 1 million people every day since March 11. Vacation destinations have been most popular—business travel, which is more profitable for airlines, remains drastically reduced.

Government restrictions are also sharply limiting international travel, another lucrative piece of the airline business.

Nearly 50 U.S. and U.K. travel-industry groups urged President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to lift restrictions on travel between the two countries. The groups said in a letter Monday that it would be ideal if the two leaders would announce "the full reopening of the U.S.-UK air travel market for both U.S. and UK citizens" before the G7 meeting in early June.



In this Monday, April 26, 2021 file photo, a jet is silhouetted by the rising moon as it approaches Louisville International Airport in Louisville, Ky. Air travel continues to recover from the pandemic, although it's still not close to normal. The Transportation Security Administration said that nearly 1.67 million people were screened at U.S. airport checkpoints on Sunday, May 2, 2021. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel)

Airline executives are cautiously optimistic about summer travel as more Americans get vaccinated against COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it is [safe for vaccinated people to travel](#) within the United States, although it continues to warn [against travel to most foreign countries](#).

Last week, the TSA extended its requirement that airline passengers wear face masks. That rule was set to expire May 11, but TSA extended it through mid-September.

Travelers should expect planes to be more full. Over the weekend, Delta Air Lines stopped blocking off middle seats. It was the last U.S. airline to limit seating as a safety precaution.

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