

British businesses raise concerns for the future of travel while uncertainty continues in re-entry approval

June 25, 2020: In the latest poll from the British Chamber of Commerce Singapore members, taken between 15th and 24th June at the end of Phase 1, 95% of respondents who are work pass holders admitted to being concerned about leaving Singapore to travel, for fear they may not be permitted re-entry. Since March 20th, all work pass holders planning to enter/return to Singapore from any country have been required to obtain approval from the Ministry of Manpower before they commence their journey. When this rule was announced, several members and/or their dependent family members were out of the country, awaiting approval to re-enter. The approval step is a precautionary measure to limit the number of imported cases of COVID-19 into Singapore, a sensible and practical move to protect the resident population.

Three months later, Chamber members continue to voice concerns for those effectively stuck outside of their country of residence, where they work, live and participate in society. The Chamber will continue to report these issues to the appropriate Government agencies, and to work alongside the British High Commissioner and her team in support of the British business community.

In their next outbound travel, when this is recommended, just under half of all respondents will visit family and friends to be reunited and check on their wellbeing after the world was caught in the grip of the coronavirus. **The top five concerns for outbound travel** are: quarantine measures at the host country and/or stay at home notices on return to Singapore (making short trips unfeasible); the risk of being stuck if cases increase in either country while travelling; the re-entry restrictions mentioned above for work pass holders; confidence in the host country's quality of care, safety measures, reporting and contact tracing; and the scope of aircraft safe distancing measures.

British Chamber members are coping well through this period, with **38% reporting a good current mental state**, while just over half felt some level of anxiety and concern. We will continue to benchmark this critical question. At the time of the survey launch, the Circuit Breaker was still in effect - 76% of members were only leaving their home for important errands and/or exercise, while 19% left for work and/or to visit family (within safe distancing restrictions), and 4% did not leave their home.

Turning to the impacts on business, we asked both individual members and business leaders for their key concerns in returning to the workplace. **At a personal level, members highlighted several measures that they want to see in place before feeling comfortable to fully re-integrate into public life and travel.** These include mandatory wearing of face masks, comprehensive contact tracing, publicly available testing, temperature checks, the option of full-time flexible working arrangements (where possible), a universal contact tracing system across borders, and ultimately, a vaccine. Singapore's multi-Ministry taskforce has instigated many of these steps, leading our members to reassert their confidence in the country, this month with an **approval rating of 93%**.

British Chamber of Commerce Member Samuel Sharpe, Advocate and Solicitor at Sharpe & Jagger LLC states:

"As unfortunate and difficult as these last few months have been, my colleagues and I all feel lucky that we are in Singapore, which has handled the economic impact of the virus very well."

For employers, almost all volunteered that they plan to continue offering flexible working or working from home arrangements. **Employers recognise the anxiety and practicality of employees returning to the workplace, using public transport and the potential difficulties of complying with Government safe distancing requirements.** With limited office space, only a portion of employees will be able to work on-site at any time to be appropriately spaced.

Due consideration has been given to these practicalities and concerns, with over three-quarters of companies reporting a plan for the return to work is now in place, up by around 25% on last month.

British Chamber of Commerce Member Mel Yap, Senior Consultant at JDX Consulting comments:

“JDX have built a sharing culture where employees can share with each other how they have been coping working from home. We believe that the former routines are behind us and we must prepare ourselves to adapt to the new age of doing business. Despite having Business Continuity Plans, the implicit effects of working from home were not realised until they were put in place. We need to be adaptable to the sudden change in environment and continue to adapt to any future obstacles.”

June’s results see a **5% increase in the proportion of members anticipating cuts to the workforce (28%), with a corresponding rise in potential repatriations, up to 14%**. Of those making or planning cuts, the majority continue to anticipate this to reflect a small proportion of their total workforce. **Over half of all respondents are forecasting to be down more than 20% in expected revenue this year; a further increase on May and a jump of 35% since the initial survey in March.** With the Jobs Support Scheme and other financial support measures in place (for those eligible), **over half of all respondents continued to report no plans to reduce salaries.**

Executive Director of the Chamber, David Kelly, commented on this month’s latest results:

“The Chamber remains committed to supporting the business community, working with the relevant Singapore government agencies to help to sustain the vibrant business eco-system in Singapore. Whilst there are significant challenges that COVID-19 is demonstrating via these results, we maintain steadfast in our approach to support our members with access to the most up-to-date information, virtual networking to support a connection between business members, and curation of content to support companies with access to information on how to support their staff and business operations.”

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About the British Chamber of Commerce


The British Chamber is an independent membership organisation with almost 4,000 members committed to strengthening the ties between the UK and Singapore. We have done so since 1954. Our goal is to deliver member value through the services we offer, that all work towards supporting our members in achieving their business objectives and aligning with our mission of Building Networks, Connecting Businesses and Creating Opportunities. Whether a company is just starting research into ASEAN by scoping the market opportunities in Singapore, have established their business and seeking growth, building connections to the UK Government, or looking for brand exposure and employee development activities, the Chamber is available to support their needs at every stage of the journey. With a full calendar of activities throughout the year including events, publications and opportunities to collaborate with our members, the Chamber team is available to help as a point of resource, introductions, networking, learning and profile-raising. Ultimately, our entire network benefits from our leading position as a strong and credible voice for our members and British businesses in Singapore and beyond. For further information visit <http://www.britcham.org.sg>.

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