

**For discussion on  
17 November 2020**

**Legislative Council Panel on Economic Development**

**Hong Kong's Progress of Establishing  
Travel Bubbles with Overseas Economies**

**PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members on Hong Kong's arrangement for establishing Travel Bubbles with overseas economies and the progress of related work.

**NEED FOR ESTABLISHING TRAVEL BUBBLES UNDER NEW NORMAL**

2. In response to the coronavirus disease 2019 ("COVID-19") pandemic, governments worldwide have adopted various compulsory quarantine or immigration control measures over cross-border travellers, bringing cross-border travel to almost a complete halt globally. Currently, Hong Kong is also implementing such measures including, since 19 March this year, people who have been to any overseas countries or regions on the day of arrival at Hong Kong and during the prior 14 days are subject to a 14-day compulsory quarantine; and from 25 March onwards, non-Hong Kong residents coming from overseas countries or regions by plane are denied entry to Hong Kong. Under these measures, visitor arrivals from overseas countries or regions (i.e. countries or regions other than the Mainland, Macao, and Taiwan) plunged by 99.4% year-on-year to only about 28 400 in the period from April to September.

3. However, unless and until there are effective treatment and vaccine, we have to accept our co-existence with COVID-19 as the "new normal". Thus, the Government has been adopting the "suppress and lift" strategy, taking into account the latest development of the epidemic situation and risk assessment, to relax social distancing measures under a systematic approach in a gradual and phased manner. This approach, while ensuring

public health, strives to resume social and economic activities in an orderly way, revives vitality of the economy, and safeguards people's livelihood by gradually allowing businesses to resume operation and individuals to return to their normal life as far as practicable. As an open economy, Hong Kong needs to adopt the same approach to resume cross-border travel with various places in an orderly manner in the form of Travel Bubbles.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING TRAVEL BUBBLES**

4. In identifying which places are suitable partners for establishing Travel Bubbles, we adopt a prudent approach, taking into account their local epidemic situations, the effectiveness of their disease prevention and control measures, as well as their economic and trade relations with Hong Kong. Under the above-mentioned "new normal", our main consideration is whether the epidemic situation in our target place is under control at a relatively low level which is comparable with or better than that of Hong Kong's, so as to ensure that establishing a Travel Bubble with that place would not bring additional public health risk to Hong Kong.

5. In formulating the relevant arrangements, we have to contain the potential risk brought about by the increase in visitors while gradually relaxing the control on inbound visitor traffic progressively. The overall goal is to strike a balance between economic considerations and the need to control the epidemic. We will be guided by science with the aim of formulating simple and practical procedures while keeping the epidemic situation at bay. Also, we will follow the advice of health experts and pay close attention to the latest development of the epidemic situation in Hong Kong and in other relevant countries. With the "suppress and lift" strategy and appropriate health monitoring and protocols, our cross-border control can gradually be relaxed, thereby our economic activities can resume, and at the same time, effective control on the epidemic can be maintained.

## **MAIN FEATURES OF TRAVEL BUBBLE ARRANGEMENTS**

6. Based on the considerations above, we consider that travellers under a Travel Bubble arrangement ("Bubble Travellers") have to comply with a set of conditions before they can be exempted from the compulsory quarantine requirement.

7. First of all, Bubble Travellers, irrespective of nationality, must not have travel history to places other than our partnering country in the last 14 days prior to departure for Hong Kong. Moreover, Bubble Travellers should take a COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (“PCR”) nucleic acid test before departure and be tested again upon arrival. If necessary, we will implement additional disease prevention and control measures. We will not impose restrictions on the purpose of visit to Hong Kong as it has no direct relationship with the public health risks brought about by the Bubble Travellers to Hong Kong.

8. We will also manage the number of Bubble Travellers at a level acceptable under the prevailing epidemic situation by controlling the air traffic capacity. Bubble Travellers are required to take designated flights that will only carry passengers meeting the above-mentioned conditions but not transit passengers or other non-Bubble Travellers. By adjusting the frequency and capacity of designated flights, we can properly manage the number of Bubble Travellers arriving at Hong Kong.

9. As we will only establish Travel Bubbles with places where their epidemic situation is comparable to, or of lower risks than, Hong Kong’s, we do not consider it necessary to impose additional restrictions on the itineraries and activities of Bubble Travellers during their stay in Hong Kong on top of our existing social distancing measures (e.g. prohibition of group gatherings, mask-wearing requirement, etc.).

10. As the epidemic situation is evolving rapidly, in discussing the Travel Bubble arrangement with other places, we will, in accordance with the “suppress and lift” strategy, put in place a mechanism for suspension and resumption of the arrangement taking into account the development of the epidemic situation on both sides.

## **LATEST PROGRESS**

11. The Government has established an inter-departmental task force, led by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, to co-ordinate with relevant departments on health, immigration, transport, etc. to actively explore with target economies the resumption of cross-border travel. Since mid-June, we have put forward relevant proposals to 11 countries,

including Japan, Korea, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam, Malaysia, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Singapore.

### Hong Kong-Singapore Air Travel Bubble (“ATB”)

12. Amongst the aforesaid countries, Hong Kong and Singapore have reached an in-principle agreement on 14 October on establishing a bilateral ATB arrangement. After intensive discussion, the two governments, on 11 November, announced the relevant details. Both sides agree to implement the ATB arrangement starting from 22 November, the overview of which is set out below (key procedures for visiting Hong Kong or Singapore via the ATB arrangement are summarised at **Annex**) –

#### *Eligibility*

13. Unlike the cross-border travel arrangements implemented between other regions, one of the key features of the ATB arrangement between Hong Kong and Singapore is that there is no restriction on the purpose of travel. Any person who meets the following criteria<sup>1</sup> would be exempted from the compulsory quarantine requirement when travelling to Hong Kong or the Stay-Home Notice when travelling to Singapore –

- (a) he/she has no travel history to any place other than Hong Kong or Singapore on the day of departure and during the prior 14 days;
- (b) he/she is tested negative for COVID-19 in accordance with the requirements of the government of Hong Kong or Singapore; and
- (c) he/she arrives at Singapore or Hong Kong by a designated flight which will not carry any transit passengers nor travellers who cannot meet the criteria under the ATB arrangement. This will reduce the risk of cross-infection.

14. As compared with the local Singapore community, there are higher health risks among dormitory residents in Singapore with infection clusters occurred previously. To address concerns in this regard, dormitory

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<sup>1</sup> Travellers also have to meet normal entry and visa requirements of Hong Kong or Singapore.

residents in Singapore<sup>2</sup> are not allowed to visit Hong Kong through the ATB arrangement.

### *Testing arrangements*

15. As mentioned in paragraph 13 above, all ATB travellers, regardless of whether their destination is Hong Kong or Singapore, must obtain a valid negative result in the pre-departure COVID-19 PCR nucleic acid test<sup>3</sup>. Besides, travellers from Singapore to Hong Kong are required to take another test upon arrival. They are not allowed to leave the airport before obtaining a negative result for the PCR nucleic acid test. We will not impose any restrictions on the itineraries of ATB travellers.

### *Other health protection measures*

16. In order to reduce the additional health risks possibly posed to the two places by the ATB arrangement, apart from the relevant testing requirements as mentioned above, to further enhance protection, the following measures will also be adopted on Hong Kong's side –

- (a) all air crew serving on designated flights to Hong Kong must take a COVID-19 PCR nucleic acid test with specimen collected within 72 hours prior to the scheduled time of departure and be tested negative. Also, they are not allowed to serve on other non-designated flights after obtaining a negative test result and before serving on the designated flights; and
- (b) the Hong Kong International Airport will implement measures to segregate travellers arriving at Hong Kong by designated flights from other travellers at the Airport.

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, holders of Work Permits or S Passes issued by the Singapore Ministry of Manpower working in the construction, marine shipyard or process sectors are not allowed to visit Hong Kong through the ATB arrangement.

<sup>3</sup> Travellers may take COVID-19 PCR nucleic acid tests at local medical testing institutions recognised by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government or clinics designated by the Singapore Government. Specimens must be collected within 72 hours prior to the scheduled time of departure of the designated flight.

17. Moreover, depending on the latest development of the epidemic situation in the two places, the scale of the ATB can be adjusted any time by increasing or reducing the number of designated flights, or even suspending the flights. If the latest seven-day moving average of the daily number of unlinked local cases (excluding dormitory resident cases in Singapore) is more than five for either Singapore or Hong Kong, the ATB arrangement will be suspended after two days (including the day on which the exceedance of the threshold is announced) for a two-week period. If the latest seven-day moving average of the daily number of unlinked local cases (excluding dormitory resident cases in Singapore) reported on the last day of the suspension period does not exceed five for both Singapore and Hong Kong, the ATB arrangement can resume on the next day. To better understand the epidemic situation of the two places, the health authorities in Hong Kong and Singapore will exchange the relevant statistics/data.

*Number of designated flights and travellers*

18. During the initial implementation of the ATB arrangement, the number of designated flights per day and the maximum number of travellers visiting the two sides are as follows –

	<b>Hong Kong to Singapore</b>		<b>Singapore to Hong Kong</b>	
	<b>Number of Designated Flight(s) (per day)</b>	<b>Number of Travellers (per day)</b>	<b>Number of Designated Flight(s) (per day)</b>	<b>Number of Travellers (per day)</b>
22 November to 6 December	1	200	1	200
7 December onwards	2	400	2	200

19. The two governments will review the number and capacity of designated flights taking into account the implementation situation of the ATB arrangement.

## **WAY FORWARD**

### Hong Kong-Singapore ATB

20. To implement the ATB arrangement, we are taking a series of preparatory actions to tie in with the inaugural designated flights on 22 November, including –

- (a) specifying Singapore as a Category 2 specified foreign place and setting out the relevant conditions in accordance with the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E), such that persons arriving at Hong Kong from Singapore via the ATB arrangement are exempted from the compulsory quarantine arrangement;
- (b) adjusting the Red Outbound Travel Alert on all overseas countries/ territories issued in view of COVID-19, such that the travel alert on Singapore (except for foreign worker dormitories and foreign worker recreation centres) is lowered to Amber; and
- (c) partially adjusting the entry ban for non-Hong Kong residents coming from overseas countries and regions by plane, such that ATB travellers coming from Singapore are allowed entry to Hong Kong.

21. This is the very first ATB for Hong Kong. It matters not only for cross-border travel between the two places, but also reflects the Government's hope to progressively restore the city's economic activities amid the long-drawn battle against COVID-19. The implementation of this ATB arrangement will not only facilitate resumption of air travel between Hong Kong and Singapore, but also help furthering our discussions with places where the epidemic situation is under control on resuming cross-border travel in an orderly manner through similar arrangements.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

22. Members are invited to take note of, and provide comments on, the arrangement and latest progress of our establishment of Travel Bubbles with overseas economies.

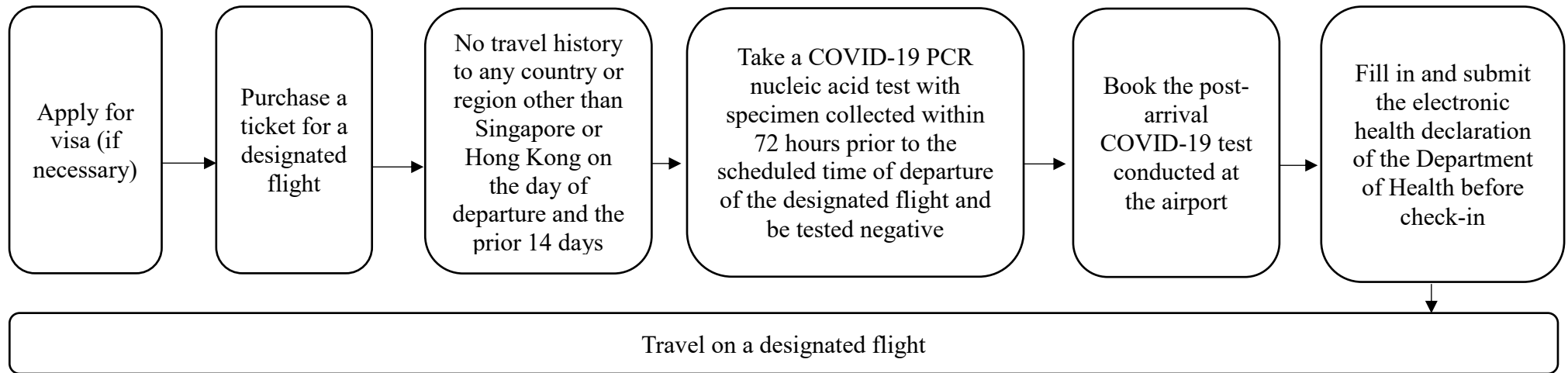
**Tourism Commission  
Commerce and Economic Development Bureau  
November 2020**



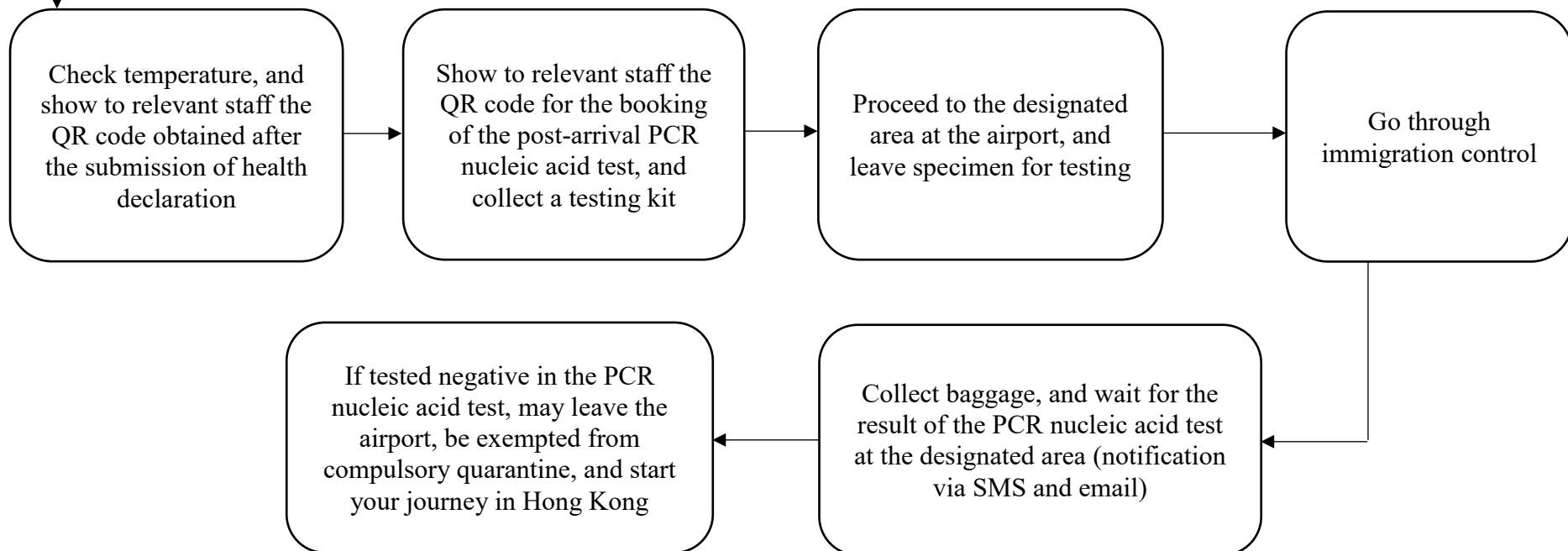
# Key procedures under the Hong Kong-Singapore Air Travel Bubble (“ATB”)

## 1. To Hong Kong

### Before departure

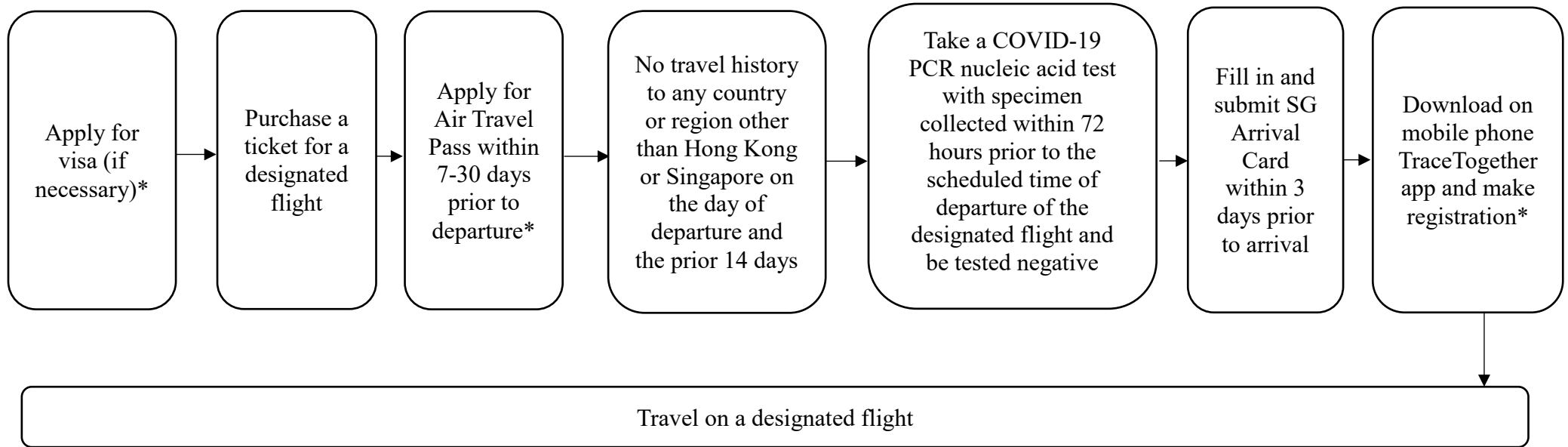


### Upon arrival at Hong Kong (ATB designated lane set up at the Hong Kong International Airport)

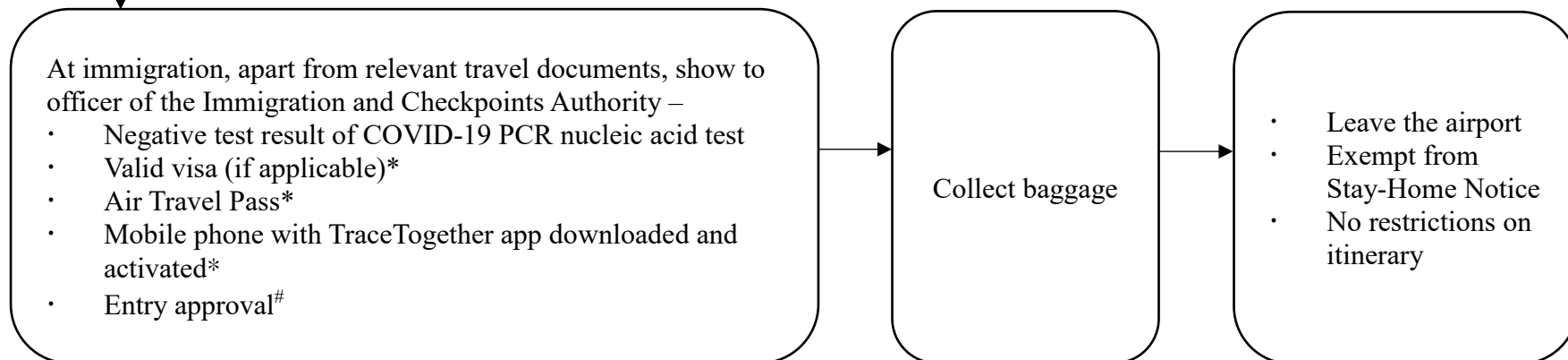


## 2. To Singapore

### Before departure



### Upon arrival at Singapore



\* Only applicable to travellers who are non-Singapore citizens, and at the same time, non-Permanent Residents or non-Long-Term Pass holders

# Only applicable to Singapore Long-Term Pass holders