Australia Closes Borders in Response to Coronavirus Crisis

Travelers wait in line at a Virgin Australia Airlines counter at Kingsford Smith International Airport, amid the coronavirus outbreak, in Sydney, Australia, March 18, 2020.

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SYDNEY – Australia is becoming a fortress. It is banning foreign travelers beginning Friday as it tries to stop the spread of the new coronavirus. International tourists are scrambling to leave Australia as concerns mount over flight cancellations and border closures. Australia now has more than 700 confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Similar measures already are in place in New Zealand.

Australia had previously barred entry to passengers flying from China, Iran, South Korea and Italy.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison says a broader blanket ban is needed to protect the country from the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

"The overwhelming proportion of cases in Australia have been imported and the measures we have put in place have obviously had an impact on that, and this is a further measure now that will ensure that that can be further enhanced," Morrison said.

Many Australians are stranded overseas. Their fear and anxieties about returning

are shared by foreign tourists in Australia.

Many are scrambling to leave Australia as concerns mount over flight cancellations and border closures because of the coronavirus outbreak.

In Sydney, Emily Roberston, a traveler from England, wants to fly home as soon as she can.

"Huge worry, like, other side of the world with my family and stuff and we have had quite a few cases near where we live (in England), so, yeah, it is quite difficult to like process it and keep calm. Obviously, like, flights are quite difficult to get at the moment and quite expensive so for, like, backpackers. It is not a particularly ideal situation," Roberston said.

The Reserve Bank in Australia this week cut interest rates to a record low 0.25% in a dramatic bid to stave off recession in an ailing economy. Panicked investors have wiped billions of dollars of value off the Australian stock market.