

# How Australia Is Outraged As Nicole Kidman, Hollywood Celebrities Dodge Hotel Quarantine

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Australians' sense of fairness is being rocked as a string of "mega-rich" celebrities are spared from mandatory hotel quarantine on arrival. Most notably the current "fury" over Hollywood star Nicole Kidman getting to spend it at her country estate instead.

Since Australia closed its borders to the world on March 20, all travelers returning home are placed in compulsory hotel quarantine for a fortnight.

Unless that is, you are an Oscar-winning actress like Kidman; her husband-singer Keith Urban; or singer Dannii Minogue—Kylie's sister. They are among several prominent figures who have contentiously been allowed to home quarantine, rather than spend 14 days in hotel detention.

Each Australian state and territory handles its own hotel quarantine system. While there have been previous exemptions, mostly on medical or compassionate grounds, this kind of star treatment is causing outrage.

Kidman and Urban flew into Sydney from the United States last week, ahead of the filming of her new mini-series, *Nine Perfect Strangers*, in August.

Arriving by private jet from Tennessee, they and their two daughters, Sunday and Faith, were allowed to isolate at their holiday home in regional New South Wales rather than face hotel quarantine like everyone else.

A week earlier, Dannii Minogue and her 10-year-old son were granted permission to stay in the comfort of a private home on the Gold Coast, Queensland.

Photos last Monday of the Kidman-Urban couple wandering around the vast grounds of their home in Sutton Forest, smiling and free, hardly help. When thousands of people are battling it out behind closed hotel doors, not allowed to open a window for fresh air.

The issue is particularly thorny given the recent introduction of a charging system for government-managed quarantine. Previously it was the state who footed the bill.

Now Australians returning to the country must pay around \$3,000 each. And if you don't have a private jet, the number of those who can do so has been slashed.

The star-immunity also comes amid a resurgence of the virus in Australia. Why do celebrities get to skip "strict rules" and appear to be given special treatment? many are asking.

Veteran journalist and one-time Victorian Senator, Derryn Hinch, lashed out last week at the double standards. Viewed from a state in lockdown due to a spiralling Covid crisis, the contradiction is even more glaring.

## **No Special Treatment Leaders Say**

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Despite these incidents, state leaders maintain there has been no special treatment.

The New South Wales health department says exemptions are “only considered where there are strong medical, health or compassionate grounds”.

There is no mention of VIP privileges, and health officials have not explained the anomaly.

NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian said there was still a strict quarantine in place for the rest of the Kidman film crew too: “... it’s just a question of where you have the quarantine.”

Meanwhile, Queensland's Chief Health officer, Jeannette Young, has defended Dannii Minogue’s quarantine exemption. The star bypassed the costly hotel isolation (\$2,800 per person in Queensland) because she had “a Covid-safe plan that is managed by an independent third party,” Young said.

Deputy Premier and state Health Minister, Steven Miles meanwhile argued: “The quarantine arrangements in place in this instance, mirror – if not greater – the arrangements in hotel quarantine.”

Something Queensland Opposition party members pounced on, accusing the government of granting “one rule for celebrities and one rule for everyone else”.

For while the security measures may match (some would argue they could even be better than that provided at Melbourne hotels now at the heart of a quarantine scandal), the living conditions most certainly don’t.

As the singer was let off the hook—of 14-days staring at the walls of a hotel room— across the state thousands of others were incarcerated. Some 1660 hotel rooms in Queensland were reportedly being used in mid-July for traveler quarantine.

Young said 38 exemptions in total had been granted so far, for film and TV industry figures, consular officials, Australian Defence Force personnel, and oil and gas industry workers.

The issue is raising the hackles of Australians, who live by the principle of “a fair go”. Perhaps this is another reminder that equality for all is just a national myth.

Many others have had to undergo quarantine, even when mental health and other experts called for more exemptions on humane grounds.

The fact that Kidman's TV series will reportedly pump \$100 million into the local Southern Highland's economy during 5 months of filming, is not enough to quell the storm. A poll by *The Daily Mail* found less than one in five Australians approve of her skipping usual procedures. While Kidman's Sydney publicist described claims they were flouting the rules as "absolute garbage".

Not all superstars have escaped tough quarantine procedures for the lap of luxury. British-American actress Jane Seymour, did her time this month—in hotel quarantine. (Maybe she simply forgot to ask for an exception).

"The coronavirus pandemic has had an unexpected side effect, exposing the celebrity pecking order in all its ignominious glory this week as a cavalcade of stars went into quarantine," writes *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Andrew Hornery.

This is not the first time the would-be hard and fast rules have been stretched. In April, Western Australia billionaire, Kerry Stokes, was allowed to self-isolate in his Perth home on returning from America. Something that is still raising eyebrows. "Friends in high places", both among state and federal leaders, helped him avoid hotel lockdown Nine News reports.