

WEEKLY BRIEFING

30 April 2021

HB HIGHLIGHTS

As rumours continue to circulate that the U.S. will be on the green list, Brand USA led the recovery conversation and brought the travel trade together at the 'Focus On UK & Ireland' virtual event, hosted on Brand USA's Global Marketplace in late April. Post-event, the PR team secured 12 pieces of coverage in leading UK & Irish trade titles, including *TTG*, *Travel Weekly* and *ABTA*, with the coverage highlighting a renewed sense of optimism and demand for U.S. consumer travel.

The Puerto Rico PR team has also ensured that the Island remains front of mind by securing coverage in [Culture Trip](#) in a round-up on the Island's best beaches, whilst luxury title [House of Coco](#) revealed why Puerto Rico is the best kept secret in the Caribbean.

The *Daily Express* ran a UK staycation special today with Butlin's leading the way in a round-up on UK resorts. The piece was also shared on *The Mirror* online and can be read [here](#).

COVID-19 UPDATE

The estimated R rate in the United Kingdom remains below 1.0, with the number of people testing positive continuing to fall. The number of deaths, within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test, as well as patients being admitted to hospital also fell 8.6% and 15.6% respectively from the previous week. The figures suggest the UK's pandemic is moving into a new phase, with many areas seeing low levels of COVID-19. The latest lockdown and the vaccination programme have successfully reduced cases, and as a result, deaths.

The UK has given a first vaccine dose to more than 34.1 million people, which accounts for 63% of the adult population. A further 14 million people have received a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, as the focus shifts to people in earlier priority groups receiving their booster injections. The COVID-19 vaccine is now being offered to people aged 40 and over in England.

England is currently in step two of the road out of lockdown, with step three beginning no earlier than 17 May. Scotland moved from Level 4 to Level 3 of lockdown restrictions, allowing non-essential shops, gyms, swimming pools, libraries and museums to also reopen. However, hospitality will close from 20:00 BST indoors and alcohol will only be served outdoors. Additionally, people across the UK can now travel between England, Scotland and Wales as border restrictions are eased.

In Wales, pubs, cafes and restaurants have reopened outdoors, with indoor reopening from 17 May, providing COVID-19 rates stay low. From 3 May, families will once again be able to meet indoors, with extended households able to form again between two households, meaning some families will be able to meet up for the first time since December.

The Irish government has also announced a phased relaxation of its strict COVID-19 lockdown over the next six weeks. The country has been at Level Five, its highest level of restrictions, since Christmas. On 10 May, close-contact services such as hairdressers can reopen and click-and-collect retail can resume. From the same date, people can travel outside of Ireland for the first time in more than four months, and team sports training can resume. Up to 50 people will be allowed to attend weddings, funerals and other religious services.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL UPDATE

Shopping trips set to fuel an economic rebound

Britain is set for a "sharp snap back" in spending by shoppers as restrictions ease, according to experts at Deloitte. The firm found "going to a shop" topped the list of leisure activities people are most likely to do after lockdown. Separate research suggested that the UK's economy will grow at its fastest rate on record this year, helped by the rebound in consumer spending. Deloitte said the economy had "proven to be more resilient than seemed possible". The forecasting body has upgraded its 2021 growth forecast from 5% to 6.8%, which would mark the fastest rate seen since the Office for National Statistics (ONS) records began.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE

NHS app to be used as COVID-19 pass for overseas travel

The NHS app will be used as a digital pass for overseas travel this summer, transport secretary Grant Shapps has said. Speaking to Sky News on Wednesday (28 April), Shapps laid out further details of the UK government's plans to restart international travel. He also commented that the long-awaited "green list" of destinations for which there will be no return quarantine requirement for travellers

would be published “in the next couple of weeks”. A limited resumption of international travel is expected to resume from 17 May, as per the government’s COVID-19 roadmap and the findings of the Global Travel Taskforce. Shapps said the data was “looking good from a UK perspective” for the roadmap to continue as planned. The transport secretary said he could confirm the government was working to extend the functionality of an existing NHS app, although not the NHS COVID-19 app, to accommodate vaccine certification. Shapps said: “We are working on an NHS application, in fact, it will be the NHS app people use when they book appointments and so on, to show that you’ve had a vaccine or that you’ve had testing, and I’m working internationally with partners across the world to make sure that that system can be internationally recognised.”

Poll shows strong interest in long-haul travel

Interest in long-haul travel is greater than that for nearer to home, a new poll has established. A survey of 1,132 UK consumers by GlobalData found 36% were considering travelling to a different continent in the next 12 months, more than the 28% planning international travel closer to home. Ralph Hollister, GlobalData travel and tourism analyst, said factors such as frequent adjustments to travel restrictions had not deterred consumers. “This shows how general fatigue created by the pandemic has left travellers adamant that they need a radical change of scenery and may be willing to put considerable concerns aside to achieve this,” Hollister said. He added that airlines were reinstating their long-haul networks, saying: “This increase in long-haul flights to popular destinations shows that airlines have also predicted pent-up demand for long-haul travel this year. Betting on long-haul travel from a traveller and business point of view still carries risk, as the pandemic is not over and the situation can still quickly change. However, global demand for long-haul travel is evidently growing, which shows signs that meaningful recovery could start this year.”

Skyscanner sees a better outlook for UK bookings

New research by Skyscanner has shed a positive light on the UK market, with increased spend and longer booking lead-in times. The online agency said the average booking horizon for UK travellers was now 113 days, “much closer to pre-pandemic norms than 2020, suggesting increasing confidence to commit to future travel”. UK travellers are spending “around double” the cheapest airfare available, Skyscanner said. However, UK consumers were spending 13% less on flights than in 2019, suggesting a big fall in ticket prices as a whole. Skyscanner predicted summer demand would stretch into September, October and November, with search data indicating this. Spain was the top destination booked by UK travellers on Skyscanner following the government’s roadmap announcement in February, with the most popular outbound month being August. Searches to Greece from the UK for summer 2021 have increased 44% week-on-week, with the top increases being London to Mykonos (+278% week on week) and London to Zante (+363%).

ATOL protection on RCNs extended to September 2022

Refund credit notes (RCNs) will continue to benefit from ATOL protection until the end of September next year, the government and the Air Travel Trust (ATT) have confirmed, making this a 12-month extension to the scheme. The validity period for firms to issue new RCNs has also been extended and will apply indefinitely until further notice. The CAA said on Tuesday (27 April) the ATT would provide at least one month's advance notice of the scheme coming to an end. It means consumers whose package bookings are cancelled owing to the pandemic can accept an RCN where suitable, in the knowledge they can exchange it for a cash refund at a later date. Previously, newly issued RCNs would only carry ATOL protection up to 30 September 2021.

MEPs back 12-month EU COVID-19 certification scheme

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have voted in favour of a new COVID-19 certificate that will permit intra-EU travel without quarantine, self-isolation or additional testing requirements. The EU COVID-19 certificate will be available in digital or paper format and will verify the holder's negative COVID-19 status through evidence of vaccination, a recent negative test for COVID-19 or recent recovery from the infection. There will be provisions too for citizens of third countries, such as the UK, looking to travel within the EU, so long as they have travelled legally to the bloc and met any entry requirements. They also agreed the scheme should be time-limited to the pandemic, likely for 12 months from implementation. "The aim is to reach an agreement ahead of the summer tourist season," said the parliament on Thursday (29 April).

AIRLINE UPDATE

British Airways - British Airways (BA) has announced four new short-haul routes from Heathrow. The flights to Wroclaw and Gdansk in Poland, Riga in Latvia and Cluj-Napoca in Romania will operate from the beginning of July, running throughout summer. Wroclaw will operate twice a week, and Gdansk, Riga and Cluj-Napoca three times a week. BA's flexible booking policy offers customers no change fees or a voucher exchange for bookings made for travel before the end of April 2022.

easyJet - easyJet and easyJet holidays have relaxed rebooking conditions in a bid to quell consumer concerns about changes to the list of "green" countries. All clients can now switch flights without a change fee up to two hours before departure. Customers can transfer to any flights currently on sale to the end of September 2022 to any destination. "This means that if there are some travel restrictions impacting their destination country, such as self-isolation in destination or on return to the UK, customers can easily change their trip to another country on easyJet's network," the airline said. Refunds are already offered to those impacted by local lockdowns and travel bans across Europe, with this now extended to

include mandatory hotel quarantine restrictions

Jet2 - Jet2.com and Jet2holidays have extended their summer 2022 season of flights and holidays to Menorca. The sister brands have brought forward the start of next summer's season to the Balearic island by adding flights and holidays in April 2022, covering the Easter holiday break. Steve Heapy, chief executive of Jet2.com and Jet2holidays said: "We are seeing great demand from customers wanting to enjoy Menorca both in the peak summer season and outside of that period too. These additional flights give our customers the opportunity to enjoy Menorca in April and over the Easter holidays. Working with our partners in Menorca, we look forward to filling our hotels with happy holidaymakers as soon as we can get flying again."

TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

dnata - dnata brands are all tracking increased flight searches for 2022 and 2023, which is much earlier than normal. Data from Travel Republic reflects the share of searches for summer 2022 to be 500% higher than the year prior. May and June are seeing the highest search volumes, followed by July and August. Meanwhile, winter 2021/2022 contributes to 20% of all searches, with December seeing the largest volume, followed by November and January.

Joe Walsh Tours - Ireland's Joe Walsh Tours has shut its doors after some 60 years in business. The Irish Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) confirmed the agency ceased trading on Tuesday (27 April). Pat Dawson, chief executive of the Irish Travel Agents' Association (ITAA), said it was a "sad day" for the industry, and one that reflected the challenges the travel sector continues to face amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Oceania Cruises - Oceania Cruises will restart operations in August, the line has confirmed. *Marina* will be Oceania's first ship to resume sailing as part of a phased resumption this summer. The 1,250-guest ship will sail Scandinavia and western Europe from 29 August, under new health protocols. Oceania Cruises said phased restart dates for the rest of the Oceania fleet would follow shortly; itineraries will be subject to port availability and could be "adjusted as needed" closer to sailing dates. The line's new SailSAFE health protocols include a vaccination requirement for all guests and crew, regular testing and additional pre-embarkation health screening.

Sandals - Unique Caribbean Holidays, the in-house tour operator for Sandals, is offering new packages to its Barbados resorts using Aer Lingus' new flights from Manchester. The operator is selling holidays to Sandals Barbados and the neighbouring Sandals Royal Barbados for departures from 20 October 2021, when the flights begin. Aer Lingus will initially operate twice-weekly flights from

Manchester on Wednesday and Saturday, with a third flight on Friday due to be added from 3 November. The flights will operate through to March 2022.

Travel Counsellors - Travel Counsellors has announced that bookings are now at 80% of what they were pre-COVID-19. A spike in domestic holiday demand has pushed the UK up to third in Travel Counsellors' list of top-selling destinations and has helped drive a recovery in new bookings. New bookings made with Travel Counsellors during March and April are currently at three times the level they were this time last year, with the UK trailing only Spain and Greece by volume. The U.S. is fourth with the UAE fifth. Travel Counsellors said consumers "remained confident" domestic and overseas holidays were on the cards this year, despite the UK government not yet having announced how destinations will be categorised under a new traffic light system.

TUI - TUI says demand for what it calls "greener and fairer" holidays is on the up, after recording an 84% increase in customers staying in sustainably certified hotels over the past six years. In 2015, TUI set itself the goal of delivering 10 million sustainable holidays – packages featuring stays at hotels with independently certified sustainability credentials – a year by 2020. TUI has said that uptake has risen year-on-year from 5.3 million in 2015 to more than 10 million in 2019, with the total number taken between 2015 and 2020 running to 43 million. TUI Group analysis of 300 hotels highlights how sustainably certified accommodation delivers better environmental performance, including 10% lower carbon emissions, 24% lower waste output, 19% less water usage per guests, 23% higher usage of green energy and a 9% higher rate of local employment.

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

Instagram announces new revenue tools

Facebook has announced plans to add more tools to help Instagram creators earn money from their efforts. These tools include creator shops, new branded content promotional deal frameworks and an improved influencer marketplace to connect users and brands. Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg noted that the company is looking to establish a new, integrated ad offering, which would enable creators to get paid directly for promoting products within the app. Instagram is also working on an improved branded content marketplace, which would seek to match relevant brands and creators for promotions.

Facebook announces new integration with Spotify

Facebook has announced an expansion of its partnership with Spotify which will enable users to share and listen to full-length music tracks and podcast episodes directly on Facebook, without having to open a third-party app. The new process will provide an additional posting option for Spotify tracks, which will mean that any

user with the Spotify app also installed on their device will be able to listen to that music or podcast then and there, directly from their Facebook feed. The playback will also continue whilst browsing Facebook, and when the phone display is turned off, if a user chooses. Facebook is rolling out this update across 27 markets, starting with the U.S. this week.

MICE UPDATE

UK hosts first business event without COVID-19 measures since March

The Change Business for Good event at ACC Liverpool brought together approximately 400 delegates to participate in a government-backed, research-led event, where social distancing was not compulsory and wearing masks was optional. All delegates, including organisers and staff, had to show a negative COVID-19 test to enter the venue, but proof of vaccination was not required. Four sets of scientists from UK universities collected data at the event. Several factors were measured throughout the event, including airflow in the venue, stagnant pockets of air, bottleneck areas in venues, whether testing thousands of people works efficiently, whether people still enjoy meeting and whether organisers can safely organise events.

FURTHER READING

1. *Forbes.com* looks at the destinations pulling out all the stops to kickstart tourism this summer including the Greek Islands, Malta and Alaska. Read the article [here](#)
2. In *The Telegraph*, Nick Trend and Annabel Fenwick Elliot go head-to-head to offer their say on what the traffic light system will mean for travellers from 17 May. Find out more [here](#)
3. *Travel Weekly* reveals that interest in foreign holidays has shifted away from autumn and into the summer peak over the course of the last week. Read the full article [here](#)

LIGHTER NOTE

Feathered fan! Orphaned bird learns to whistle football team anthem from its owner, who is grieving the loss of his pet dog - see it [here](#).