

# WEEKLY BRIEFING

21 May 2021



## HB HIGHLIGHTS

As hotels and resorts reopened across England, Scotland and Wales this week, the Butlin's PR team secured national, regional and broadcast coverage to celebrate the opening of all three resorts. The openings were featured on both the 6pm and 10pm ITV News, ITV Meridian West and ITV Meridian Thames Valley on Monday evening, 6pm and 10pm BBC News on Wednesday evening, on BBC Radio 4's *PM* programme as well as on over 40 regional BBC radio stations. Online coverage on the reopening also featured in [The Sun online](#) with an exclusive interview with Butlin's managing director, Jon Hendry Pickup.

Further afield, the Namibia PR team secured a fantastic inclusion of Habitas in [Forbes.com](#) round-up of new African safari lodges to keep on the radar for when travel fully returns. The piece highlights how the luxury lodge goes beyond the typical safari experience, offering meditation, indigenous-inspired spa treatments and yoga as well as unforgettable game drives.

## COVID-19 UPDATE

The estimated R rate in the United Kingdom remains somewhere between 0.8 and 1.1, with the latest growth rate at -3%. The number of deaths, within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test, as well as patients being admitted to hospital, has fallen 26.5% and 11.1% respectively from the previous week. The latest lockdown and the vaccination programme have successfully reduced cases, and as a result, deaths. The easing of restrictions also coincided with the COVID-19 Alert Level in the UK being lowered from Level 4 to Level 3, meaning that the "epidemic is in general circulation".

The UK has given a first vaccine dose to more than 37.2 million people, totalling 70.7% of the population. A further 21.2 million people (40.3% of the population) have received a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, as the focus shifts to people in earlier priority groups receiving their booster injections. People aged 34 and over are now being invited for their first COVID-19 vaccine across the UK. Prime minister Boris Johnson has said that everybody needs to continue doing their part as

lockdown rules ease in England, Wales and most of Scotland.

England entered Step Three of the government's roadmap on 17 May, allowing for pubs and restaurants to reopen indoors, and groups of six people or two households to mix indoors. Additionally, people can hug each other once again, the ban on overseas holidays has been lifted for "green list" countries, overnight stays are allowed, face masks are no longer needed in secondary school classrooms, university students have now returned to in-person teaching, and cinemas and theatres have reopened. The rule of 30 at funerals was also dropped on 17 May, with venues assessing how many people can fit in indoor and outdoor spaces with social distancing in place.

Wales also saw indoor hospitality reopening on 17 May with pubs and restaurants reopening indoors and customers able to meet in groups of up to six from six households as Wales moved to COVID-19 alert level two. All holiday accommodations were also allowed to reopen as well as cinemas, bowling alleys, museums, galleries and theatres. Further easing of rules governing who you can meet in private homes is expected at the next review in three weeks' time.

In Scotland, a decision is expected to be announced on 21 May about whether the COVID-19 levels in Glasgow, East Renfrewshire and Moray will change. Glasgow is currently in level three, with the Scottish government expected to announce whether it can move down to level two. Earlier this week, with the exception of Glasgow and Moray, mainland Scotland moved to level two. Most of the islands moved to level one. Restrictions are more strict the higher the level an area is in.

Northern Ireland will review lockdown rules on 20 May, with the hope that some could be lifted on 24 May.

Ireland also saw restrictions being eased on 17 May with all retail able to reopen. Citizens of Ireland are now able to travel outside of the country and any number of members of three households can meet outdoors or six people from any number of households. Fully vaccinated people can meet indoors in private homes if there are no more than three households present. This can include unvaccinated people from one household if they are not at risk of severe illness. From 2 June, hotels and bed and breakfasts can reopen services for guests only. A total of 1.4 million people have received their first COVID-19 vaccine, counting for 28% of the total population.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

British retail sales surged last month, according to new data. Sales volumes in April rose 9.2% from March, with clothes sales rising 25.3%, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) says. Sales volumes were 10.6% higher than February 2020, before the first UK lockdown. The easing of travel restrictions also saw a spike in fuel sales, with petrol stations seeing a 69.4% jump compared with March.

## TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE

### **International travel from England resumes**

Long-awaited quarantine-free trips, largely to Portugal, have begun this week, with several airlines and operators offering programmes to the destination. The UK government lifted its ban on non-essential outbound travel during the early hours of Monday morning, allowing holiday travel to resume. Portugal remains the standout destination for British holidaymakers on the UK government's so-called "green list"; among the 12 destinations, only Portugal and Gibraltar could be considered to be immediately open and accessible to Britons. Both Israel and Iceland do feature on the list, but trips to Israel are not currently possible due to conflict between Israel and Palestine and Iceland still requires visitors to quarantine on arrival.

### **Johnson rules out laws to prevent amber list travel**

The prime minister has ruled out legislation to stop travel to amber list destinations but underlined the "don't holiday" message in parliament. Addressing Labour leader Keir Starmer during Prime Minister's Questions, Johnson said: "We are trying to move away from endlessly legislating for everything." Johnson said new laws were not the answer and that the government wanted to "rely on guidance and asking people to do the right thing". He went on to say: "It is very clear, you should not be going to an amber list country except for some extreme circumstances such as the serious illness of a family member. You should not be going to an amber list country on holiday."

### **Government publishes COVID-19 Passenger Charter**

The government has published its COVID-19 passenger charter, with aviation and maritime minister Robert Courts warning people to expect significant differences to the travel experience this summer. The charter was one of the Global Travel Taskforce's main recommendations to the government with regards to the resumption of international travel. It has been designed to serve as a clear and accessible source of information for passengers, outlining their rights and responsibilities. It covers what to do in the event of travel plans changing, what they are entitled to, what expectations they should have of travel providers, and what their responsibilities are as travellers. In a statement, Courts said: "If you are heading abroad this summer, you need to be aware that travel will be different, and

prepare accordingly. That's why we have developed the Passenger COVID-19 Charter to simply set out the steps passengers should consider taking as we start to holiday once again with greater confidence." The charter reinforces some of the fundamentals of travel, and clarifies a number of questions travellers may have when navigating Covid-era travel.

### **Gen Z travellers want new holiday experiences post-lockdown**

Generation Z holidaymakers are keen to have new, authentic travel experiences in destinations further away from home post-lockdown, according to a survey by Topdeck Travel. The tour operator's research showed 18-25 year olds want to get away from their screens and enjoy local cultures, the outdoors and bucket-list experiences. Visiting a destination that is further away from home came top of the list of future travel plans, with 32% choosing this if restrictions were to allow, while 29% want to tick off bucket-list destinations, 26% want to explore nature and the outdoors, and 25% hope to spend time relaxing. Most of the young travellers surveyed (93%) were already planning future travel, with 31% saying they felt they did not explore enough of a destination's nightlife and 30% saying they did not learn enough about local culture and traditions when travelling. Also high on the agenda was to meet fellow travellers, with 28% putting this on their post-lockdown list of travel plans.

### **Consumers have £5k savings "pot" for travel**

The average Briton has not been on holiday for 630 days and has nearly £5,000 to spend, research by easyJet has found. The airline said consumers had an average of £4,889 saved and had 33 days' leave to use in 2021. Nearly 70% said they had saved more in the last year "than any other time in their lives". easyJet chief executive Johan Lundgren said there was clearly pent-up demand for travel. easyJet expects to fly only 15% of 2019 capacity in the three months to the end of June but is likely to increase this figure next month. Lundgren said the airline could return to 90% capacity very quickly. The carrier was able to add 105,000 seats to Portugal within 24 hours when the country was added to the green list.

### **Agents urged to check clients' insurance for COVID-19 cover**

Travel companies should consider checking insurance policies purchased by customers to ensure they are buying the kind of cover needed during the COVID-19 crisis. Alex Padfield, director at law firm Hextalls, told the virtual ABTA Travel Law Seminar that insurance "comes down to what's in the policy" and urged the trade to tell clients to "carefully" check the wording of their policy on COVID-19 cover. "It's rare for people to ask to see the policy," said Padfield. "Tell customers to shop around and emphasise the different types of policy on the market." While policies offering no COVID-19 cover had "pretty much disappeared" in recent months, Padfield added there were many policies which only covered travellers for COVID-19 medical expenses and nothing else. He had also identified around 25 policies

offering wider COVID-19 coverage but even these showed a “huge degree of variation of exactly what they cover”.

## AIRLINE UPDATE

**Aer Lingus** - Aer Lingus Regional will launch flights from Belfast City airport to Glasgow in July this year. The route will operate daily from 1 July, with 11 flights a week, rising to 19 in August. It boosts Aer Lingus and Aer Lingus Regional's network at Belfast City to 10 routes.

**JetBlue** - JetBlue will operate daily flights to the U.S. from Heathrow and Gatwick this winter, the airline's schedules reveal. Services will start on 11 August from London Heathrow to New York JFK, with London Gatwick operating from 29 September. A service from an unspecified London airport to Boston will start next summer. “The pandemic has opened doors to London's two busiest airports, and we look forward to bringing customers low fares and great service at both Heathrow and Gatwick,” said Robin Hayes, the airline's chief executive.

**Wizz Air** - Wizz Air has confirmed operations at its new Cardiff base will get under way next month. The budget carrier will offer eight leisure routes, starting from 17 June. Destinations include Larnaca, Corfu, Heraklion, Faro, Alicante, Lanzarote, Palma and Tenerife. It will also offer flights to Sharm-el-Sheikh in Egypt, starting in October. Confirmation comes after the Welsh government lifted its ban on international leisure travel on Monday (17 May).

## TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

**Barrhead Travel** - Barrhead Travel has merged its business travel arm with corporate travel giant Altour group. The Barrhead Business Travel team, based in Scotland, will retain its branding and identity during a transition period. The move follows the February 2018 acquisition of Barrhead by U.S.-based Internova Travel Group, which owns the Altour brand. A Barrhead Travel spokesperson said the corporate travel arm was “a very, very small part of what we do. It makes sense to move it across under the Altour banner, it gives them global reach, but they will still be working from Scotland.”

**Black Opal** - Black Opal Travel Group's expansion has continued apace this month with the appointment of two new travel consultants. Established in 2019, Black Opal specialises in bespoke sports holidays, offering tailored tours to international events led by several former internationals, including ex-England cricket captain David Gower. Beyond sports travel, it also provides a concierge service for all luxury travel enquiries. It had been trading for just over a year when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

**dnata** - dnata Travel Group has expanded its offer of discounted COVID-19 tests to include testing bundles for customers travelling to green and amber list destinations. The move comes as the group is increasing the range of products and services it offers across all its brands (Gold Medal, Travel Republic, Travelbag, Netflights and Sunmaster) to reassure agents and customers. A new Green Travel Pack of two PCR tests is £120, half the recommended price of £240. Meanwhile a new Amber Travel Pack of three tests is £180, compared to the full price of £295. In the coming weeks there will be more than 100 new drop boxes in the UK to make it easier for people to return tests. The testing services have been requested in almost 800 bookings so far.

**easyJet Holidays** - easyJet Holidays has signed more than 40 new "flagship" beach hotels in the last six months, taking them from competitors' inventories. In a trading statement, the operator said it had also increased its range of properties offered in its city break portfolio. It said deals had been struck "without the need for financial commitments or inventory risk". The new "flagship" beach properties had previously been under exclusive contract with competitors, it said. New hotels in the operator's cities programme included those from Hilton, Accor, Radisson and Intercontinental Hotel Group. "Four and five-star hotels now account for around 70% of all holidays sold, generating a significant margin premium," the operator added. It said three-quarters of its holidays offered "best value in the market on like-for-like searches, whilst still providing strong marginal profit contribution".

**Lusso** - Trade-only luxury tour operator Lusso has launched a Europe programme for the first time in its 11-year history. The programme will focus on holiday destinations most regularly requested by UK travel agents, including Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Greece, Croatia and Turkey. Managing director James Weaver said Europe had been the most requested region to add to its portfolio "for many years". He added: "We established Lusso to support independent travel agents and will always strive to listen to their feedback and react to their changing needs, which is why I'm so delighted to be adding this much-wanted product to our offering."

**Sandals** - Sandals and Beaches Resorts is poised to take bookings for 2024 after reporting good sales. The all-inclusive brand said sales were "incredibly strong" for late 2021 and periods of 2022 and it already had 2023 on sale. Sandals will put 2024 on sale "soon". Karl Thompson, Unique Vacations UK managing director, an affiliate of the brand's worldwide sales and marketing representative, said there was "a strong future order book". He said: "Most new bookings and booking amends over the last few months have been made for 2022 travel dates, but in the last week there has been a significant increase in bookings for July-December 2021."



## SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

### **Twitter considers introducing a new paid service**

Twitter is considering launching a paid subscription service called Twitter Blue, which would be priced at \$2.99 a month. Planned features include the ability to save and organise tweets into collections - expanding on Twitter's bookmark feature - which currently simply stores a chronological list of saved tweets. The service would also come with an "undo tweet" button, equivalent to those on email services such as Gmail, which would allow users to prevent a tweet from being sent for a few seconds after posting.

### **Facebook launches live-stream shopping events**

Facebook is taking the next step in its evolving eCommerce push with the introduction of a new "Live Shopping Fridays" series. This series will see the platform host live-streamed shopping experiences, in conjunction with selected retailers, that will invite viewers to ask questions about products, and make purchases, all in-stream. The added real-time engagement factor provides more capacity for connection and product insight, which will trigger more spending.

## MICE UPDATE

### **UK venues report 500 per cent increase in bookings since restrictions lifted**

After prime minister Boris Johnson confirmed that indoor events of up to 1,000 people or 50 per cent venue capacity could resume in the UK, venue portfolio etc.venues reported a 500 per cent increase in confirmed bookings. Event bookings include corporate conferences, annual general meetings, association meetings and government departmental events, with London properties seeing the most bookings. Many of the bookings are taking place in the next three months and the majority are for live, in-person events.

## LIGHTER NOTE

Orangutans in a wheelbarrow! Arresting images from Nature Photographer of the Year award – see it [here](#).