

WEEKLY BRIEFING

28 May 2021

HB HIGHLIGHTS

This week, we are taking you Down Under. The Oceania Cruises PR team organised a press trip for freelancer James Litston, on the cruise lines' 'Outrageous Outback' voyage in February 2020 onboard *Regatta*. Featuring in the The Telegraph and titled, 'Close encounters with the cuddly kind' James regales his experience on a shore excursion where he encountered wild koalas in Australia's You Yangs bushland as well as kangaroos at Serendip Sanctuary. The piece highlights how the tours are a rare example of ecotourism that have real benefits for the native wildlife in Australia.

COVID-19 UPDATE

The estimated R rate in the United Kingdom remains somewhere between 0.9 and 1.1, with the latest growth rate at -2%. The number of deaths, within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test, as well as patients being admitted to hospital, has remained flat and increased 10.8% respectively from the previous week.

The UK has given a first vaccine dose to more than 38.4 million people, totalling 72.9% of the adult population. A further 23.6 million people (44.8% of the adult 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.

In England and Scotland, people aged 30 and over are being invited to have their vaccine and in Wales and Northern Ireland anyone aged 18 and over are eligible. The Pfizer and AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccines are highly effective against the variant identified in India after two doses, [a study from Public Health England has found](#).

Another COVID-19 vaccine is also set to enter production within weeks and the UK has 60m doses ordered. Production of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by French firm Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) will begin within weeks, the firms have said. The two companies are currently in Phase 3 of their trials, which will see 35,000 adult volunteers receive their COVID-19 jab across the US, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Health secretary, Matt Hancock, has advised that it is too early to say if England's lockdown can lift on 21 June. Hancock said he "desperately" wants to ease the rules, but will only do so if it is safe. It comes after epidemiologist Prof Neil Ferguson said the reopening of society is now "in the balance". The prime minister said: "I don't see anything currently in the data to suggest we have to deviate from the roadmap." But, speaking to reporters on a visit to a hospital, he said "we just have to wait a little bit longer" to see the data closer to the time.

In Ireland, hospitality venues are still waiting to learn what measures they will need to adhere to for reopening. Fáilte Ireland guidelines had been expected to be published on 25 May but [RTÉ reports that will now not happen](#). Outdoor hospitality is expected to return on 7 June, but serving people indoors may not be allowed until July. The Irish cabinet will meet on 28 May to discuss the further easing of COVID-19 restrictions. 1.7 million people have now had their first COVID-19 vaccination in Ireland and a further 518,808 have had their second.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Government borrowing fell in April as UK reopened

Government borrowing fell in April compared with the same month last year, as parts of the economy reopened after lockdown measures eased. Borrowing - the difference between spending and tax income - was £31.7bn, official figures show, which was £15.6bn lower than April last year. Samuel Tombs, chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics said public borrowing "should continue to undershoot" the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast it published alongside the Budget in March amid expectations of a strong recovery in GDP.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE

Government "green list" to be reviewed in early June

Transport secretary Grant Shapps has confirmed the government will review the UK's green list next month, but has played down any prospect of a significant expansion of the list. At a parliamentary committee hearing this week, he also

confirmed there would be a green list update on or around 7 June, and that he had held discussions with the government's Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) over a new so-called "island policy". Transport committee chair, Huw Merriman, asked Shapps whether at the next review, islands would be considered separately of their respective mainlands. Shapps said if you were able to travel to an island directly without transit via the mainland, it was "fair and proper to consider it separately". However, he stressed there were other factors at play beyond the rate of new COVID-19 infections in a destination, such as rates of vaccination and a location's ability to detect variants via genomic sequencing. "On some of the islands, that is missing," said Shapps. He also pointed to the first formal review of the government's traffic light regime on 28 June, which he said would be an opportunity to explore whether there should be different rules in place for people who have been double vaccinated.

IATA forecasts 'strong rebound' in traffic when barriers removed

International Air Transport Association (IATA) has forecast that global air traffic will recover close to its former level by 2023 and resume long-term rates of growth from 2025. However, IATA chief economist Brian Pearce estimates the COVID-19 pandemic will have cost the industry two years' growth in air travel. Pearce reported: "We're 16 months from the point where we started to see the impact of COVID-19 and at the end of the first quarter air traffic was only one third of the 2019 level." He said: "We've seen a fairly V-shaped recovery in the wider global economy. There is pent-up demand for travel and an increase in accumulated savings."

NHS app sees one million new sign-ups

More than 1.3 million people have registered to use the NHS App since COVID-19 vaccine status was added to it. Vaccine details were loaded onto the app in time for travel's restart on 17 May. The app, which is different from the one used for contact tracing, now has more than 4.8 million users. It is one of the first internationally compliant systems in the world to demonstrate vaccine status and has been designed in line with World Health Organisation interim guidance. Those in England who have had two doses of any approved vaccine and who cannot use the app or are unable to access digital services, can request a letter of proof. The first 20,000 letters were delivered in England on Saturday. Health secretary Matt Hancock said: "The pace [at which] we've brought this to fruition is unparalleled and it is bringing immediate benefits to our wider health service. I encourage everyone to download the NHS app, it will help you access a host of services."

Trade reports 'mixed sales picture' as travel reopens

Travel firms have reported a mixed sales picture following the resumption of international travel but said rising consumer confidence was behind a shift in demand from 2022 to later this year. Advantage Travel Partnership said around 70%

of members' sales were for 2022 prior to the green list announcement. Last week, however, almost 60% of bookings were for holidays this year. Leisure director Kelly Cookes said: "We saw an initial boost in sales once the list was announced and Portugal and Madeira continue to sell well. We are also seeing consumer confidence grow for later in the summer and enquiries continue to increase, which is positive." The consortium is not actively promoting amber destinations but giving guidance to agents whose clients want to book. Meanwhile Miles Morgan Travel enjoyed its strongest sales in 14 months during the last two weeks. Chairman Miles Morgan predicted a gradual increase in green destinations, boosted by clients' posts on social media, which will "cause optimism and confidence to build" this summer. "I am upbeat, a slow [restart] is a winner for me," he said. Overall agents are reporting that the complexity and confusion on testing and insurance requirements has encouraged customers to book with agents.

Heathrow airport to dedicate terminal for red list arrivals

Heathrow plans to reopen Terminal 4 for arriving passengers from red list countries "as soon as operationally possible". The hub airport, which has faced criticism for passengers from red list countries having to queue alongside other travellers, said it would initially open a dedicated arrivals facility in Terminal 3 for red list passengers from 1 June before moving it to Terminal 4. "We will move this facility to Terminal 4 as soon as operationally possible," said a Heathrow spokesperson. "While opening this facility will be logistically very challenging, our hope is that it will enable Border Force to carry out its duties more efficiently as passenger volumes increase in line with the green list."

AIRLINE UPDATE

Norwegian - Norwegian has emerged from a restructuring process that will see it revert to being a short-haul airline. The carrier has emerged from six months of bankruptcy protection granted by courts in Ireland and Norway. "Today, a Norwegian airline with a long history and a large employee base that adds great value to Norway and the tourism industry has been saved. This is a proud day and marks a new beginning for Norwegian," said Jacob Schram, chief executive. Completion of the process included a refinancing deal for a slimmed-down business. The carrier said earlier this month it planned to raise £520 million.

Singapore Airlines - The Singapore Airlines (SIA) Group has pledged to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The group's airlines (Singapore Airlines, Scoot and SIA Cargo) will invest in new-generation aircraft, adopt low-carbon technology such as sustainable aviation fuels, and source "high quality" carbon offsets. The airline

group said it has maintained sustainability initiatives despite the pandemic, such as installing solar panels on all of its office buildings in Singapore. A new regional economy class meal features sustainable paper packaging and bamboo cutlery.

Wizz Air - Wizz Air has restarted flights from Doncaster Sheffield airport, and will offer 25 routes from the Yorkshire airport this summer. Destinations include Faro, opening up Portugal's Algarve coast, the Greek island of Crete, and Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands. Wizz will also fly to Larnaca, Bourgas, Alicante, Malaga, Palma, Tenerife, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria and Dalaman from Doncaster Sheffield.

TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

Classic Collection - Luxury operator Classic Collection Holidays said it is "eyeing a promising winter market" with an early launch of Canary Islands and short-haul winter-sun 2021-22 brochures. Alex Gavaldà, product and commercial director, said: "A wintersun break is ordinarily a second or third break of the year, but this is an extraordinary year... An abundance of unused annual leave coupled with lockdown savings waiting to be spent, and overdue extended family and friends get-togethers, are optimistic signals pointing towards higher value winter bookings; durations will be longer and there'll be no shortage of upgrades on flights, transfers and accommodation."

Cosmos - Cosmos and sister brand Avalon Waterways UK will operate to amber destinations despite government ministers saying Britons should not go on holidays to such countries. Giles Hawke, chief executive of Cosmos and Avalon, wrote an open letter about the brands' plans for the resumption of travel. "Our intention is to use UK government advice regarding green and amber destinations to inform our decision-making, recognising that this advice is scheduled to change every three weeks," he said. "Our intention will be to operate our tours and cruises, where operationally viable, to destinations on the green and amber lists which are accepting international visitors." Currently, the company requires guests to be fully vaccinated, or have a negative test result for COVID-19, before travelling.

Explore - Adventure specialist Explore has expanded its summer 2021 UK programme with a new Scottish walking trip and an additional departure of its sold-out Lake District tour. Explore said its new Scotland tour, coupled with its recently launched Orkney Islands walking holiday, meant it would this summer offer walking, cycling and cultural breaks spanning the length and breadth of the country "from the South Downs to Hadrian's Wall". Ben Ittensohn, Explore's head of global sales, said: "We're really proud of the UK programme we've developed over the last year."

We've been able to create the same Explore recipe of small-group adventure with fantastic tour leaders, but here on home turf."

Flight Centre - Flight Centre UK has reported its strongest day for booking enquiries so far this year. Yvonne Hobden, head of product and retail marketing, said: "Flight Centre UK reported its strongest day for holiday booking enquiries this year, despite the confusing messages from the government regarding travel to amber countries. "Looking at internal data for May, the weekly average enquiry level is up 45% versus the months of March and April and bookings are up 54% in May versus the same period, showing that momentum is certainly starting to build. "Last week was Flight Centre's busiest week with a 51% increase in total enquiries compared to March 1-7, 2021. "Australia has been our most booked destination so far this month, which isn't surprising considering our heritage in Australia. 'However, following closely behind is the US in second position. Understandably Portugal has seen a massive jump since the green list announcement, while Mexico, Thailand, Singapore and UAE have all seen a considerable increase in the past month."

Hotelplan - Hotelplan UK has appointed its first group-wide head of sustainability, which will cover Inghams, Esprit Ski and Flexiski, alongside travel brands Explore, Intravel and Santa's Lapland. Hotelplan UK chief executive Joe Ponte added: "We all have a responsibility to rebuild our industry with a more sustainable ethos. At Hotelplan UK we will be integrating sustainability into all areas of our business thinking, allowing us to effectively invest in long-term solutions."

Kuoni - TV presenter and author Simon Reeve has been appointed Kuoni's brand ambassador, with a focus on sustainability and adventure travel. Reeve will host customer events, write exclusive articles, appear at staff conferences, blog and contribute to the operator's website. He said: "Kuoni is a company I've been involved with for more than a decade and have experience of travelling with first-hand, so I have a lot of respect for the work they do." Reeve said travel could be a force for good: "It's critical that we get travel back – and understand more about how we can carry on doing that while treading as lightly as we can. The more we can do on our holidays, the further we stray from the sun lounger to experience the real destination, the more likely we are to put more money into the local economy, and often the local environment, while hugely benefitting ourselves because we have richer and more rewarding experiences."

Riviera Travel - Riviera Travel has confirmed it will cover the cost to guests of all government-mandated testing when they return from the operator's European river and yacht cruises this summer. The operator said on Wednesday that it would cover

the cost of all testing required by the UK government's traffic light system for river and yacht cruises departing in July and August. Its free testing offer applies on all new bookings made from now to 30 June. Riviera is currently only planning to operate holidays to green list destinations.

TUI - TUI has cancelled the majority of its May and June departures to a handful of amber and red list countries. All of TUI's Mexico, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Turkey, Egypt, Cape Verde, Morocco, Tunisia and Bulgaria holidays are cancelled until 28 June at the earliest. Turkey and Cape Verde are currently on the UK government's red list, while the remaining seven are on the amber list. TUI said the decision came amid the "ongoing uncertainty" over travel this summer, and reiterated it would continue to operate to countries with open borders and where the Foreign Office allows travel. Customers impacted by the latest round of cancellations will be able to request a full refund, or move their booking to a later date or different location and receive a booking incentive.

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

Instagram adds new engagement insights for Reels and Instagram Lives

Instagram has started to roll out new insights data for both Reels and Instagram Live broadcasts within the app, in a long awaited move. Instagram will now provide a range of new metrics for all types of content with the new, in-depth stats for Reels and Live adding to the already available data for feed posts and IGTVs. For Reels, Instagram will now provide data on total plays, accounts reached, likes, comments, saves and shares. For Instagram Lives, users will be able to access data on accounts reached, peak concurrent viewers, comments and shares. This is a major update for Instagram users and will help businesses determine how they can use the platform to generate ROI.

Instagram rolls out new option to hide like counts

In another major update to the social media app this week, Instagram has announced the next stage of its experiments in hiding like counts on posts, with all Facebook and Instagram users soon set to be able to choose whether or not they display like counts on each of their updates. Instagram first started testing hidden like counts back in 2019 for some users and regions, but the function will now be available to all customers. As explained by Instagram, "we tested hiding like counts to see if it might depressurise people's experience on Instagram. What we heard from people and experts was that not seeing like counts was beneficial for some, and annoying to others, particularly because people use like counts to get a sense for what's trending or popular."

MICE UPDATE

Confidence rises as planners take on new projects

Updated results from the Northstar Pulse Survey reveals that meeting planners are increasingly confident about holding in-person events in 2021. The survey, carried out among 107 UK and European event planners found that 76.3% expect to hold an in-person or hybrid event in 2021. While the majority of respondents expect live events to take place in Q3 (28%) or Q4 (34%), at least 14% expect to hold a live event before the end of Q2. Significantly, more than a quarter of respondents said they were booking new events, an increase from 11% to 26% since February. Additionally, only 18% of planners report that they are not currently focused on live events, down from 35% last time.

LIGHTER NOTE

Trash talk: Floating island resort that will be made from Indian Ocean GARBAGE is unveiled – see it [here](#)