

WEEKLY BRIEFING

11 June 2021



HB HIGHLIGHTS

This week, the Wightlink team secured a feature in [Forbes online](#) as a result of a press visit by journalist Jo Shurvell. The article shares Jo's top tips for an Isle of Wight break, with an overview of Wightlink's offering and the ferry service's green credentials.

COVID-19 UPDATE

The UK has seen a rise in the number of COVID-19 cases, with the Delta variant now making up 91% of all new infections. However, patients being admitted to hospital with COVID-19, and deaths within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test, have not seen a dramatic rise - up 7% and 1.9% respectively from the previous week.

The UK has continued to roll out its vaccination programme with over 77.6% of the adult population having now received their first jab. Indeed, 54.8% of the adult population has now been fully vaccinated. Due to the rise in cases, the government opened up the vaccination roll out to anyone over the age of 25 years old and a total of 1,082,596 first and second dose slots were snapped up during the 24-hour period following the opening. Financial Times analysis suggests two doses of a vaccine are about 95% effective at preventing hospital admission with the Delta variant, and one dose upwards of 70%.

Despite this, public health officials have called for a delay to lifting the last COVID-19 restrictions in England on 21 June to "stop us going backwards". The Association of Directors of Public Health said unlocking then would risk an increase in hospital admissions. The government is expected to announce on 14 June whether it will remove the last of the restrictions a week later. Minister, Nadhim Zahawi, said it had to be careful not to squander the progress made in tackling the virus. The final stage of lifting restrictions would see all legal limits on social contact removed.

Nightclubs would reopen, and restrictions on performances, weddings and other life events would also be lifted.

In Scotland, first minister Nicola Sturgeon has paused lockdown easing for millions. 13 local authority areas will not move to Level 1 at the end of this week and the Delta COVID-19 variant is being blamed for the delay. More than half of Scottish residents, including nearly all in the Central Belt, are to remain in Level 2 instead of taking the next step out of COVID-19 lockdown next week.

Wales saw further restrictions eased on 7 June meaning up to 30 people can now meet outside and outdoor events including concerts, festivals and football matches can now take place with 4,000 standing and 10,000 sitting.

In Ireland, all hospitality reopened on 7 June. A distance of one metre is required between tables outdoors, with a maximum of six people aged over 13 at a table, or 15 if the group includes children. The Health and Safety Executive confirmed that 50% of the adult population has now had their first dose with one million doses being given in May.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

World Leaders gather in Cornwall, United Kingdom for the summit of the G7 nations

World leaders are gathering in the Cornish resort of Carbis Bay for face-to-face meetings at the summit of G7 (Group of Seven) nations to discuss the biggest issues of the day. The G7 is an organisation of the world's seven largest so-called advanced economies, including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the United States. Among the leaders attending is President Biden who is making his first foreign visit since taking office. At the end of the summit the UK, as the host nation, will publish a communique outlining what has been agreed by the leaders. Boris Johnson held talks with President Biden on Thursday afternoon, covering topics including the president's concerns over the peace in Northern Ireland. Johnson described the president as a "breath of fresh air and Biden reaffirmed his commitment to the UK-U.S. "special relationship".

UK economy grows in April as shops reopen

The UK economy grew 2.3% in April, its fastest monthly growth since July last year. Shoppers spent more on the High Street as non-essential shops reopened, and people bought more cars and caravans. There was also more spending in pubs, cafes and restaurants as restrictions eased, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE**Former prime minister, Theresa May, criticises “chaotic” traffic light system**

Former prime minister Theresa May has blasted the government’s traffic lights system as “chaotic” and questioned why travel is more restricted this summer, despite the UK’s high vaccination rates against COVID-19. During a debate on the travel industry in the House of Commons, May said the UK had “gone backwards” in the past year and travel restrictions were now tighter than they had been in summer 2020 when there was no vaccine available. “We have a devastated industry, jobs lost and global Britain shut for business,” she said. “Rather than being further forward, we have gone backwards. We have over 50% of the population vaccinated and yet we’re more restricted on travel than we were last year.” May also warned that the government’s policy was threatening aviation’s ability to remain a “key sector” after the pandemic.

The industry welcomes U.S.-UK taskforce but urges quick action

Plans for a new taskforce to restore transatlantic travel between the UK and U.S. have been welcomed by ABTA, which has also called for the existing traffic lights system to be “used as intended”. Transport secretary Grant Shapps will oversee the new travel taskforce designed to facilitate the resumption of UK-U.S. travel as soon as possible. An ABTA spokesperson said: “The U.S.-UK link is incredibly important for business and leisure travel, as well as UK trade, so steps to get travel restarted are very welcome. However, there is little in this announcement in terms of detail or timings. As we move toward the next review of the traffic light system on 28 June, the government needs to make sure the existing traffic light system is used as intended, and that travel to some of the most popular foreign holiday destinations is opened up in time for the industry to make the most of the critical summer holiday period.”

Women in Travel launches study of BAME travellers

The research project is a partnership between Women in Travel CIC’s BAME programme and the University of Surrey’s School of Hospitality and Tourism Management. The initiative, which is being supported by Black Travel Creators, will use surveys, focus groups and interviews to examine the travel patterns, influences and circumstances that shape the travel decisions of BAME people in the UK. Women in Travel’s executive director Jamie-Lee Abtar said: “The UK travel market has traditionally been treated as a homogenous group, with little allowance for cultural, ethnic and other differences. Additionally, stereotypical beliefs about black and other BAME communities travelling to familiar destinations, or rarely exploring new places, has – to date – resulted in little interest in these groups from the travel and tourism sector. By collating reliable data on UK Black and other BAME travellers, I hope that in turn we can inform the wider travel industry and change

and correct perceptions, whilst empowering BAME travellers at the same time.”

Aviation minister says ‘vaccines are the way out’ for travel

The aviation minister says vaccines are “the way out” of the COVID-19 crisis for international travel, and insisted the Department for Transport is upping efforts to see how the UK’s border restrictions can be eased. Robert Courts, under-secretary of state for transport, was quizzed by MPs in the House of Commons as part of a debate about support for the aviation, travel and tourism sectors this week. Former PM Theresa May and other MPs criticised the government’s travel policies, saying they were too restrictive at a time when so many people had been fully inoculated. Huw Merriman, chair of the transport select committee, said 99% of those at risk of mortality will be fully vaccinated by June 21 and called on the government for a “concrete milestone” for the unlocking of international travel. Courts commented: “We are working towards seeing what more we can do to open up travel with aid of vaccines”, adding, “[v]accines: they are the way out and hope for the future.”

Celebrity launches innovative app ahead of UK sailing

Celebrity Cruises has launched an “innovative” app which will “transform” guests’ experiences onboard Celebrity Silhouette ahead of its first sailing from Southampton on 3 July. From their personal devices, travellers can check-in, scan their passport information and upload a self-taken security photo to generate a mobile boarding pass and qualify for expedited boarding. People will also be able to download a digital cabin key via the app. Furthermore, the onboard safety drill can be completed via mobile devices, including information on where to go in case of an emergency and life jacket instructions. All travellers, who must be fully vaccinated, also need to provide proof of a negative PCR test taken 24-72 hours before the time of sailing. Those aged 3-17 will need to take an antigen test at the terminal prior to embarkation.

Majority of UK agents would visit Spain this year a poll reveals

The majority of agents polled by the Andalucia Tourism Board (96%) said they would feel comfortable travelling to Spain once routes reopen. The findings came as part of a wider study by the tourism board to gauge perception of Andalucia and Spain in the UK market while the COVID-19 crisis continues. In total, 102 UK industry experts were interviewed – including 75 travel agents and 22 tour operators, with a further five media focus groups held. Agents said the biggest barriers to selling a trip in the current climate were travel restrictions, and clients’ concerns about PCR testing, vaccination passports, quarantine and ever-changing travel advice. When asked which Spanish destinations they would recommend to their clients, nearly half opted for destinations within Andalucia; 13% chose destinations in the Balearics, 11% in the Canaries, 10% in Catalonia and 10% in the Valencia region. More than four in five (81%) said they were confident about selling a trip to Andalucia, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

AIRLINE UPDATE

United Airlines - United Airlines has launched United Airlines Ventures – a corporate venture fund which will allow the airline to invest in “high potential” companies which focus on sustainability, aerospace and other “innovative” technologies. United reports that, during the last six-months, it has agreed to invest in, collaborate with, and purchase aircraft from, Archer Aviation as part of the venture. Current vice president of corporate development and investor relations, Michael Leskinen, will assume the role of president of United Airlines Ventures. He said: “United has always been a pioneer within the industry and United Airlines Ventures will help us grow companies that are pushing the envelope to make air travel better for our customers, our employees and our planet.”

Wizz Air - Wizz Air will start flying to Jersey next month, with routes from Doncaster Sheffield and Cardiff. The budget carrier will operate the routes twice-a-week on Mondays and Fridays, with fares starting from £17.99pp one-way. Services will take off on Friday 9 July. They are Wizz Air’s first UK domestic services. Owain Jones, Wizz Air UK managing director, said: “The team is working hard to ensure that summer 2021 is not cancelled by continuing to provide low-fare flights to the destinations that our UK customers love to travel to. “Jersey has it all”, said Jones, “uncrowded beaches, natural beauty and rich history. We are looking forward to offering our customers in Doncaster Sheffield and Cardiff, where we will soon open our new base, the opportunity to explore Jersey and the surrounding Channel Islands.”

Virgin Atlantic - A fleet of electric aircraft with vertical take off and landing capability to feed passengers into major UK airports is being envisaged by Virgin Atlantic. The airline has agreed an option to buy between 50 and 150 of the four-passenger eVTOL (electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing) aircraft to be built by Bristol-based Vertical Aerospace. It is not yet a committed order and aircraft development is still under way, so the final order value is yet to be confirmed. The fully-electric VA-X4 is described as a “zero emissions, near silent aircraft” with a range of more than 100 miles powered by four tilting advanced rotors at the front and stowable rotors at the rear. Capable of speeds more than 200 mph, Vertical Aerospace and Virgin Atlantic will seek to establish short haul connectivity between UK cities and airport hubs starting with Heathrow, Manchester and Gatwick. The aircraft would cut the 56-mile journey from Cambridge to Heathrow to just 22 minutes, in comparison to a one hour 30 minute drive by road.

TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

Kuoni - Kuoni plans to relaunch its U.S. and Canada programme. The programme will launch under a new brand, which is yet to be revealed, but will still be tied to Kuoni. So far, Kuoni has made great headway with the new brand and is set to launch in September. The new brand, specialising in U.S. and Canada product, will primarily be an online proposition and less anchored to retail distribution. In the first phase, there will be continuity with the customer type – the older demographic and honeymooners. This is to capture immediate business, but they would like to also target a younger demographic down the line. There will be an emphasis on single and multi centre trips in the first phase and they will be launching a road trip portfolio, but this will be limited at first and focused only on iconic volume roadtrips with good connectivity e.g. California. Niche road trips will likely come down the line once the brand is more established

Saga - Saga's Dave Johncock says its cruise customers are feeling more confident after being among the first in the UK to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. In a recent statement, he said: "In recent months, we've seen demand rapidly grow. Our customers were among the first to be vaccinated and, as confidence in travel grows, so do the call volumes coming into our contact centre. For example, in April we saw a 127% increase in the volume of calls to our holidays team in the week following the government's announcement on the resumption of international travel. At much the same time, we saw our cruise call volumes increase by 110%. I'm sure you can imagine that this has put pressure on our call centres, so I'd like to thank you for your patience as I know there have been some delays in getting through. I'm very pleased to say that should no longer be an issue, as we're now recruiting for both our holidays and cruise contact centres and already have 17 new starters taking to the phones as I write this."

HalalBooking - In May 2021, HalalBooking, the world's leading accommodation booking platform for halal-friendly travel, recorded sales of 4.4 million USD; up from 3.5 million USD in the same month in 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic struck. It represents an astonishing recovery for the company, especially in the 2nd half of the month. HalalBooking is now on track to be back to its pre-COVID-19 2.0x growth rate, forecasting sales of 60 million USD in 2021 compared to 32 million in 2019. In addition to the increase in sales across the month, 31st May 2021 was the single most successful day for sales in the company's entire history with more than 500,000 USD of sales in a single day. The company forecasts, however, that this record will be beaten many times during the coming weeks.

Great Little Breaks - Great Little Breaks (GLB) is hopeful of launching its rail packaging platform to the trade this month. Chris Cundall, GLB director of trade relations, said agent trials were ongoing and agreements were in place with all main consortia and major independents, including Hays Travel. The platform, which GLB had planned to launch prior to the pandemic, will allow agents to package rail, accommodation and tickets.

Sandals - Sandals has launched a number of World Ocean Day initiatives. Guests of Sandals resorts throughout the Caribbean can help hatch turtles, rebuild dying reefs and curtail invasive marine species to mark World Ocean Day. Visitors can work with local turtle conservation authorities to help monitor thousands of baby turtles as they journey into the sea from May to December. Guests of any Sandals resort in Saint Lucia can join a course in coral planting and the science of nurseries during their stay. Once familiarised with the necessary skills, PADI certified individuals can take part in a dive to help save the Caribbean reefs. Divers staying at Sandals Resorts or Beaches Resorts can join a special lionfish hunting dive - a species which is allegedly highly destructive to the biodiversity of Caribbean waters. Adam Stewart, Sandals Resorts International's executive chairman said: "Over the next 10 years we have promised to develop and implement conservation efforts, engaging more than 100,000 people in educational efforts, planting 30,000 coral fragments and seeing thousands of turtle hatchlings to the sea. The Caribbean is our home and the sea, the centre of our lives. Working to preserve and improve the quality, beauty and bounty of our ocean is an imperative that has direct implications for the livelihood of Caribbean people and of course, the visitors who grace our shore."

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

Instagram announces affiliate programme

Tying into its Creator Week showcase event, Instagram has announced some new monetisation options for creators, including a new affiliate marketing programme, which will make it easier for creators to earn money from product promotions. Over the coming months, Instagram will begin testing a new 'native affiliate tool', which will enable creators to discover new products available for purchase in the app, then share them with their followers and earn commissions for any subsequent purchases that they drive. Instagram is also adding a new option that will enable users to attach their existing shop to their personal profile, along with their business or creator account. This, in turn, will provide more avenues for direct promotion and expanding audience reach.

Facebook set to launch a smartwatch

According to reports, Facebook is developing a new smartwatch which will launch next year. This new device would add to the social network's growing hardware line, which now includes its Portal video calling device, Oculus VR range and soon to be released AR glasses. The new Facebook watch will include two cameras, with users able to detach the watch face, in order to take photos and videos on the go, that could then easily be shared across Facebook and Instagram.

MICE UPDATE

Study suggests July is the magic month for live events

A new report has revealed event planners are confident about returning to live events in July 2021. The report conducted by Leeds-based AYRE Event Solutions polled a mix of event attendees and event organisers to explore the sentiment towards the return of live events.

The most popular date anticipated for the resumption of live events (chosen by 35% of respondents) was July 2021 and an optimistic 17% said they expected events to return in June 2021. A further 27% said they believed events would make a comeback in October 2021 and just 2.6% anticipate a longer wait until 2022. The study also delved into what type of events business leaders and event professionals were likely to attend first when they are able to do so. Business conferences ranked top with 43% of event organisers likely to attend this type of event first. Business awards and networking events closely followed, with tradeshows ranking in seventh place.

LIGHTER NOTE

Stunning shots: Solar eclipse as seen from the UK. See it [here](#).