

WEEKLY BRIEFING

20 August 2021

HB HIGHLIGHTS

It is proving to be a strange summer, however, the travel and lifestyle pages continue to keep its readers inspired. [The Week](#) rounded up the best hotel swimming pools from Namibia to Vienna in which to take a dip.

Meanwhile, as the UK Bank Holiday approaches, Wightlink and the Isle of Wight was featured in a round-up of last minute activities for the long weekend on the [Independent Online](#).

COVID-19 UPDATE

Cases of COVID-19 this week are slightly up from last week (7.8%), with the daily number of cases reaching just over 36,500. Hospitalisations also saw a small increase, up by 5.6% week on week.

This week, the UK vaccination programme reached a total of almost 47.5 million adults vaccinated with their first dose, and over 41 million with their second dose. This means that a vast 87.3% of the entire adult population has had one dose of the vaccine and 75.7% has had two doses. The Republic of Ireland has now also vaccinated almost 85% of adults.

On the 15th August 2021, the Government announced that all young people aged 16 to 17 in England are now to be offered a first dose of the vaccine by Monday 23 August. It is believed that this will be important to give them protection from the virus before returning to school in early September. This is expected to significantly increase the number of total vaccinations over the coming months.

New for this week, people in England and Northern Ireland who have had two COVID-19 vaccine doses will no longer have to isolate if they come into contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus. Instead of having to quarantine for 10

days, they are now advised to take a PCR test - but this is not compulsory. They are also advised to wear a face covering in enclosed spaces and to limit contact with others, especially the clinically vulnerable. The guidance applies to under-18s too. These changes to self-isolation rules have already been implemented in Scotland and Wales. This news has been broadly welcomed and is expected to significantly reduce the number of people being compelled to stay at home. At its peak in July, the number of self-isolation alerts sent from the NHS COVID-19 app in England and Wales in just one week was almost 700,000.

No new restrictions have been brought in though the Government is encouraging businesses such as nightclubs to use the NHS Covid Pass to check people are fully vaccinated before entry.

This week in Northern Ireland, class bubbles in schools came to an end, though post-primary students are still being asked to wear face coverings for the first 6 weeks of term. Further education and higher education, including universities, can now return to full in-person learning and support bubbles no longer exist.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Taliban forces advance across Afghanistan

Following the announcement of the withdrawal of foreign forces in Afghanistan, the Taliban this week rapidly advanced across the country, leading to the capture of Kabul on 15 August. Taliban forces have pledged not to allow Afghanistan to become a base for terrorists who could threaten the West but concerns are mounting over human rights in the country. In reaction to the unrest, the UK announced that it would welcome 20,000 of the most at risk Afghan citizens into the UK over the coming years.

UK job vacancies at record high

This week, UK job vacancies were at a record high, reaching just over 950,000, as wages began to rise. The BBC suggested that the UK's labour market is "rebounding robustly", with the unemployment rate falling to 4.7% and the annual growth in average pay rising to 7.4%. Vacancies are now even higher than pre-pandemic rates.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE

NHS COVID-19 Pass recognised by IATA Travel Pass

The UK's NHS COVID-19 Pass can now be uploaded into the IATA Travel Pass. The pass allows the information to be shared with airlines and border control authorities as a way of verifying a traveller's vaccination status. It is currently being trialled by a host of airlines around the world, including British Airways and Virgin Atlantic in the UK. Nick Careen, IATA's senior vice-president for operations safety and security, said: "Handling the European and UK certificates through IATA Travel Pass is an important step forward, providing convenience for travellers, authenticity for governments and efficiency for airlines."

Bank holiday boosts Eurostar bookings

The August bank holiday next week has seen Eurostar significantly expand its timetable following a recovery in bookings for travel to France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The gradual return of weekend breaks since the easing of government travel restrictions earlier this month has led to a 105% rise in August and September weekend trips between London and Paris compared to the same period last year. Bookings have also doubled in August compared to July and in response Eurostar is adding 39 trains for travel between the UK and the continent this month alone. Eurostar has hailed 'the return of the weekend break'. An updated timetable from 6 September until 1 November will see eight daily returns, with five in each direction on the London to Paris route and three in each direction between London and Brussels. Eurostar has introduced new measures to keep passengers safe, with trains deep cleaned before every journey, and cleaning teams on board to regularly disinfect high contact areas.

AIRLINE UPDATE

British Airways - BA has resumed daily flights from London to Dubai for the first time since January. From this week the national carrier has also doubled the number of flights from the UK to India from ten to 20. The moves follow the latest government traffic light review which put the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and India on the amber travel list and removed them from the red list. The changes, announced on 4 August, came into effect on 8 August.

Emirates - Emirates is expanding UK operations as UAE joins the amber list. The airline is set to operate up to 73 weekly flights from four gateways across the UK by mid-October. These include six daily services from London Heathrow, two daily flights to Manchester, ten weekly services to Birmingham and daily flights to Glasgow. The UAE has also eased entry protocols for 12 countries.

Ryanair - Ryanair is raising UK and Ireland winter capacity with 11 new winter routes. The new connections bring the airline's UK winter programme up to 400 routes and more than 2,000 weekly flights. The additions include Birmingham to Bucharest, Milan, Turin and Vilnius; Bournemouth to Budapest and Wroclaw; Bristol to Barcelona and Madrid; Luton to Grenoble and Gatwick to Malaga. The other routes from Dublin are Košice in Slovakia, Plovdiv in Bulgaria and Sibiu in Romania. Ryanair commercial director Jason McGuinness said: "UK families/visitors can now book a well-earned winter getaway safe in the knowledge that if their plans change, they can move their travel dates with a zero-change fee up until the end of December 2021."

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic has launched a direct Barbados route from Edinburgh. Operating twice weekly from 5 December 2021, Edinburgh will join London and Manchester as one of three regional gateways to the Caribbean. The new route marks Scotland's first and only direct route to the Caribbean, from Edinburgh to Bridgetown. Lisa Cummins, minister of tourism for Barbados, welcomed the announcement: "we look forward to showing Scottish travellers that Barbados is a safe destination, which is ready and waiting for them to enjoy."

TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

Caribbean Tourism Organisation - The Caribbean Tourism Organisation's (CTO) UK and Europe chapter will bring together buyers and suppliers looking to grow their business in the region at an industry showcase in London next month. The CTO's Caribbean Showcase aims to "encourage new relationships and promote its diversity." More than 20 buyers – including Virgin Holidays, Blue Bay Travel, dnata and Kuoni – have already registered to meet with suppliers such as Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica and Saint Lucia. Colin Pegler, CTO UK and Europe chair has stated they "want to ensure the Caribbean remains authentic and aspirational whilst adhering to health and safety requirements."

Club Med - Club Med has reported that UK trade bookings for ski resorts are up 40% year-on-year following two disrupted seasons due to COVID-19. The all-inclusive resort operator is preparing for winter 2020-21 with a new property in Canada and also opening La Rosière resort in the French Alps to British holidaymakers for the first time since its opening last year and since hotel refurbishments. UK and northern Europe managing director Estelle Giradeau is very optimistic following this rise in bookings: "with the last two seasons heavily disrupted, we're certain the upcoming season will be one of the best yet and we're looking forward to welcoming back British travellers."

Easyjet Holidays - EasyJet holidays is planning "multiple" fam trips as part of a range of initiatives to further build travel agency sales. The operator is marking the first anniversary of the launch of trade sales by offering trade exclusive discounts, prize holidays and places on its first fam trip, which is heading to Tenerife in November. Brad Bennetts, head of distribution, has championed the move to get more agents travelling: "It's a really important part of being in travel; we are all in travel because we love travelling."

Jet2holidays - Jet2.com and Jet2holidays has expanded its 2022/23 winter sun programme with the addition of another five destinations across Spain, Portugal and the Mediterranean and is looking ahead to the future "with enormous confidence." It means Jet2.com and Jet2holidays now have 12 destinations on sale for winter 2022/23, with up to 320 weekly flights available. The programme will run from early November 2022 through to the end of April 2023. Steve Heapy, Jet2holidays and Jet2.com chief executive has attributed this to renewed consumer confidence and an increase in bookings: "This expansion comes on the back of the great response we have seen from customers and independent travel agents looking to book their winter sunshine nice and early."

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

Facebook publishes guide on how societal shifts have impacted ads

Facebook has published a report looking at how consumer relationships with brands have changed over the past year, and what that means for marketing planning moving forward. Key takeaways are:

- **Build inclusively** - Brands that focused on inclusivity, depicting audiences in representative and insightful ways, saw improved performance
- **Create edutainment** - Brands who provided education in creative ways, such as using infographics, generated a more positive response
- **Sell with ideas** - With social interactions limited, brands that communicated ideas which aligned with the desire to find new information, replacing traditional discovery processes, saw improvements
- **Speak platform language** - Content that aligned with user-generated posts and updates to create ads that look less like ads performed best
- **Reward self-discovery** - Creatives that connected with people's desire for personalised, guided information saw improved responses

MICE UPDATE

Hire Space reports 23% increase as confidence returns

Events platform Hire Space has seen a 23% increase in quarter-on-quarter venue spend, indicating increasing confidence in the event supplier market. The increase is part of a wider positive trend which has seen a 67% year-on-year increase across digital product lines. Concurrent to the rise in venue spend, Hire Space has seen a significant increase in client business, with B2B in-person event enquiries up 77% quarter-on-quarter. Both volume and value of in-person enquiries are now approaching pre-pandemic levels, which is a positive sign for the sector.

LIGHTER NOTE

Sit back and get comfy! Wally the wandering walrus is given floating 'COUCH' to help him relax after he sunk two boats off coast of Ireland. See [here](#).