

# WEEKLY REPORT

3 December 2021



## COVID-19 UPDATE

The prime minister has announced this week that every eligible adult in the UK should be offered a COVID-19 booster by the end of January, as ministers race to increase protection against the Omicron variant. Currently, over 19,015,975 boosters or third vaccinations have been administered in the UK. In the UK there has been an increase in the number of confirmed coronavirus cases, however, the daily death rate continues to fall.

In Ireland, 7,508,656 doses of the COVID-19 vaccination have been administered with over 86,000 of those being the third vaccination. It is expected that the Irish government will announce new restrictions on the hospitality sector.

Following the discovery of the Omicron variant, many countries have imposed new restrictions and lockdowns. Germany has announced that unvaccinated people will be banned from large parts of public life, including many shops and events and will make vaccinations mandatory from February. From Monday, the U.S. will require all international air travellers to obtain a negative COVID-19 test within one day of travel. From Sunday, all arrivals into Ireland must show proof of a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours of arrival or a lateral flow test taken within 48 hours of arrival. People can still travel to the U.K. without providing proof of a negative test, however, arrivals must now quarantine until they receive the negative test result from the day two PCR test. Masks are now mandatory in shops and on public transport.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### **Black Friday and Cyber Monday beat last year's sales**

Barclaycard, which processes about £1 in every £3 spent using cards, said by 17:00 GMT on Black Friday (26 November), there were 23% more transactions than that point in 2020. The company said there was a 2.4% rise in the volume of payments

compared with the same period on Black Friday 2019. Nationwide said its customers had made £5.95m purchases by 17:00 GMT, 26% up on last year and 24% up on 2019.

### **UK house prices continue to surge in November**

House prices in the UK have returned to double-digit growth following a slowdown in the market after the stamp duty holiday came to an end. Annual house price growth hit 10% in November, according to the Nationwide Building Society. That is an increase from the 9.9% growth seen the month before. In November, the average price of a UK house was £252,687, which is nearly 15% higher than March 2020, when the pandemic started.

### **RAC report finds retailers are making a profit on fuel**

Retailers are continuing to put up fuel prices when they should reduce them in line with savings in wholesale oil prices, the RAC motoring services organisation has claimed. In response to concerns about the Omicron variant, oil prices fell by around \$10 a barrel last week, but this reduced wholesale fuel price has not been reflected at the pumps across the UK. In November, retailers added on average 3.1p to a litre of unleaded petrol and 2.7p to diesel. The RAC said this hike in petrol prices was "completely unjustified", with larger retailers making a "shocking" profit.

## **TRADE UPDATE**

### **Johnson rejects call for further travel restrictions**

The prime minister has rejected pleas in parliament to further tighten international travel restrictions. Boris Johnson rebuffed calls for the Cobra emergency committee to be convened, following the discovery of the Omicron variant and amid reports of the U.S. tightening travel rules. "This country was actually the first to respond," said Johnson. "For the 10 countries that are most likely to seed Omicron, we have put them on the red list so they [arrivals] not only have pre-departure tests, but they are also quarantined." Regarding the change in rules requiring arrivals to take a PCR test by day two and quarantine, Johnson said "those are balanced and proportionate measures designed to protect the British people from the Omicron variant and that's the right approach to take."

### **Transport secretary's pre-departure test vow and booster jab optimism**

Transport secretary Grant Shapps has insisted the government will not require pre-departure tests for people visiting the UK. Shapps also urged families to continue booking overseas holidays, as long as they take out insurance policies. He added that vaccine passports would become the "norm" for travel.

### **Trade nervously awaits impact of new Omicron variant**

Agents headed into December nervously anticipating the full impact of the emergence of the new variant of COVID-19 on travel, despite a relatively stable and buoyant period of new sales and bookings. TTG's latest Travel Agent Tracker survey reported that the majority of agent respondents – 97% – said they took new enquiries, down two percentage points on the record level set two weeks earlier, covering trading in the two weeks to 26 November. The news of the new variant comes as a major blow to travel, which has been increasingly confident of a strong winter and successful peaks in January.

### **DMOs and government are “not doing enough on sustainability”**

National tourism boards and governments have been accused of not doing enough to encourage and drive more sustainable practises, while the private sector is doing “all the heavy lifting”. Xavier Font, professor of sustainability marketing at Surrey University, has said he is keen to present an approach to the issue and has set out a litany of failures including a lack of clear strategy, the wrong key performance indicators, and no proper climate implant measurement and reporting. ABTA industry relations director, Susan Deer, said many destinations had the opportunity of the pandemic to consider changes that needed to be made and the challenge is now how destinations can recover by driving volumes back, but not at the expense of sustainability or quality of experience.

### **Heathrow Airport opens arrival facility for red list countries in Terminal 4**

Heathrow has reopened Terminal 4 as a dedicated arrivals facility for red list countries. Chief operating officer Emma Gilthorpe said: “Heathrow maintains the highest levels of COVID-19 secure measures to ensure our passengers, colleagues and partners know that Heathrow is a safe place to travel to and from”. Terminal 4 will act as a separate facility, keeping red list arrivals away from passengers in all other operational terminals. Passengers flying into Heathrow will be able to use PCR testing facilities either on or close to the airport.

## **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**British Airways** - Travelport has signed a new distribution capability (NDC) deal with International Airlines Group (IAG) carriers British Airways, Iberia, Aer Lingus and Vueling. The agreement on new distribution capability content will see a full range of fares, ancillaries and additional content made available to Travelport connected agencies through the Travelport platform.

**easyJet** - easyJet Holidays is allowing free cancellations on Spain family trips, due to changes to the entry requirements for the country. The policy means those who cannot meet the new requirements by providing proof of vaccinations for children aged 12-17 can cancel and receive a full refund. The airline is also extending its offer for customers travelling to all destinations between 18 December and 31 December 2021 to amend their holiday fee free or to cancel for easyJet holidays credit. All other customers due to travel in 2022 and beyond will be covered under the airline's Protection Promise, only needing to pay their balance 28 days before departure and with the option to cancel 28 days before travel and keep their deposit as holiday credit.

**Emirates** - The Dubai government is considering a stock market debut for Emirates. The airline is one of 10 state-owned assets being considered for privatisation in a bid to open Dubai to more outside investors. The president of Emirates, Sir Tim Clark, said he was "waiting instructions" as to how Emirates Group would be affected. Emirates has received around £3.8 billion in state aid during the pandemic, but Clark said it was unlikely to need more unless the Omicron variant affected travel.

**United Airlines** - United Airlines is set to reconnect Scotland with the U.S., with direct daily flights from Edinburgh to New York, Chicago and Washington resuming on 5 March 2022. Seasonal services to Chicago and Washington will resume on 7 May 2022. The airline will be the first to resume services between Scotland and the U.S. The airline notched a historic milestone this week too, by operating the first commercial flight powered by 100% sustainable aviation fuel. The flight departed from Chicago's O'Hare Airport and landed in Washington D.C carrying 100 passengers, with the flight emitting 75% less CO2 than a conventional jet fuel-powered flight.

**Virgin Atlantic** - Virgin Atlantic has reported an uptake in demand for premium holidays, with customers wanting to increase their traditional travel spending levels after the lull in holiday bookings. This comes after the airline launched its Edinburgh-Barbados route, resumed services to Saint Lucia, and launched a Heathrow-Bahamas route late last month. Vice-president of communications, Laura Brander, stated that the carrier's recent Caribbean expansion was spurred on by the change in demand from consumers, with most bookings being made for Christmas 2021 and the start of 2022.

## TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

**Celebrity Cruises** - Celebrity Cruises will restart sailings to South America in December 2023. The line's *Celebrity Eclipse* will spend four months in the region, between December 2023 and April 2024, visiting 16 destinations.

**Jet2holidays** - Sales made by Jet2holidays increased during the pandemic to 31% this year, after falling from 32% to 25% in 2018, after Thomas Cook and TUI stopped selling the operator. Steve Heapy, Jet2holidays boss, reiterated the tour operator's support for the trade, pleading there is "no cap" on agent business, adding that "agents are as important as they have ever been to us".

**Riviera Travel** - Riviera Travel has unveiled its Americas 2023 collection, featuring 11 itineraries across the U.S., Canada and Latin America. Will Sarson, head of strategy and innovation said: "The Americas offer a unique array of stand-out features, and we'll guide guests through some of the region's most memorable adventures, architecture, landscapes, landmarks and natural wonders". The itineraries run from January to November 2023, with departures available from £2,749.

**Saga** - Saga has cancelled a number of scheduled 2022 itineraries across its touring and holidays programmes after an internal review. Due to the "uncertain market", it is understood that around 3,000 bookings are impacted because of the move, with all customers affected being offered the choice of switching their holiday or a full refund.

**TUI Group** - Ice Travel Group has chosen TUI Group to provide new tours and activities on its holiday comparison and deals website icelolly.com. TUI is powering a digital platform that adds a new activities section to the website and app, enabling users to search and book 55,000 excursions, activities and attraction tickets across more than 1,000 locations and 100 countries. The platform will also be utilised to set up pre-holiday communication channels in order to enhance sales and customer service.

## SOCIAL UPDATE

### TikTok tests option to tag other profiles in video clips

TikTok is testing out a new feature that would enable users to tag other profiles in video clips. At the moment, users can only mention someone in the caption, so by

adding it to the video clip users will have more space to write copy or use hashtags within the caption. For brands, it could provide another way to boost community engagement by alerting top supporters or creative partners to their latest uploads and clips.

## MICE UPDATE

### **No need to cancel events, says health secretary**

There is no need to cancel events because of the new COVID-19 variant, the health secretary Sajid Javid has reassured the public. Speaking on the morning of 1 December, Javid said people should not be thinking about cancelling events and Christmas parties. Despite new tougher measures on mask wearing in shops and on public transport introduced on 29 November to slow the spread of the Omicron variant, the health secretary insisted people should not change their plans at this stage. However, he did urge that people should consider taking lateral flow tests before going to large indoor events.

## LIGHTER NOTE

A self-taught teenage filmmaker has created a heart-warming Christmas ad to rival John Lewis - with less than 1% of the budget. The tear-jerking advert shows how the greatest gift this festive month was 'being together'. Watch it [here](#)