

# WEEKLY REPORT

21 January 2022



## COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 has decreased in the last seven days by 32.8%. Meanwhile, the number of patients admitted to hospital has also declined (by 7.2%). The vaccination rollout continues to move rapidly with 90.7% of the population, aged 12 and above, having received their first dose, 83.6% their second and 63.8% of the population their booster.

The UK government is no longer asking people to work from home and masks are no longer compulsory in secondary school classrooms. From January 27, COVID-19 passes will no longer be compulsory to gain entry to venues and events and face masks will no longer be compulsory in any public spaces - although they will still be "recommended" in some places. London mayor Sadiq Khan has said masks will remain mandatory on TFL services. The prime minister said he also hopes to scrap mandatory self-isolation for people who test positive for COVID-19. The current regulations expire on March 24 and he hopes to bring that date forward.

The Irish government has been given the green light to lift COVID-19 restrictions by the National Public Health Emergency Team (Nphet). Nphet has recommended restrictions around hospitality can be lifted, including the 8pm curfew and live venues and sports venues can return to full capacity. COVID-19 passes will only be required for international travel but face masks are still recommended in shops and public transport.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### Surging food prices push inflation to 30-year high

Soaring food costs and the energy bill crisis drove inflation to 5.4% in the 12 months to December, up from 5.1% the month before, in another blow to struggling families. The last time inflation was higher was in March 1992, when it was 7.1%. With gas and

electricity costs set to rise further in the spring, analysts predict it will reach that level again.

Separate official figures issued on Tuesday showed that average pay rises are failing to keep up with the rise in the cost of living. Regular pay, excluding bonuses and adjusted for inflation, fell 1% in November compared with the same month in the previous year.

### **UK retail sales fall in December amid Omicron spread**

UK retail sales sank 3.7% in December from the month before as the spread of Omicron deterred shoppers from visiting the High Street. Data from the Office for National Statistics also showed a 7.1% fall in clothing and other non-food sales.

As the UK economy emerged from lockdown last year retail sales recovered quickly from their 2020 pandemic slump. But analysts say that a combination of fast-rising inflation led by surging energy prices, the prospect of higher interest rates, and planned tax rises in April may dent the appetite of consumers to keep on spending in 2022.

### **Boris Johnson holds on as MPs await Sue Gray's report**

Senior civil servant Sue Gray is set to publish her findings on COVID-19 rule breaking in Downing Street next week. Boris Johnson urged MPs to wait for the report after he was hit by further calls for him to quit. Tory grandee and one-time ally David Davis told him: "In the name of God go". While backbench Tory MP Christian Wakeford defected to Labour, describing the PM as incapable of leading.

So far six Conservative MPs have publicly declared no confidence in the PM, but more are thought to have submitted letters to Sir Graham Brady, chairman of the backbench 1922 committee, who organises Tory leadership contests. There are claims the threshold of 54 letters needed to trigger a no-confidence vote and leadership election could soon be reached, but no official word has been given.

### **Singer Meat Loaf dies aged 74**

Meat Loaf, the singer whose Bat Out Of Hell album is one of the best-selling of all time, has died at the age of 74. The star sold 100 million albums worldwide and also appeared in movies like Fight Club, the Rocky Horror Picture Show and Wayne's World. The news was confirmed by his family.

**TRADE UPDATE****World Health Organisation calls for lifting of international travel bans**

International travel bans should be lifted or eased, the World Health Organisation has urged. Restrictions on travel “do not provide added value” and continue to contribute to “economic and social stress”. The WHO said: “The failure of travel restrictions introduced after the detection and reporting of Omicron variant to limit international spread of Omicron demonstrates the ineffectiveness of such measures over time. Travel measures – e.g. masking, testing, isolation/quarantine, and vaccination – should be based on risk assessments and avoid placing the financial burden on international travellers.”

**ABTA demands long-term plan for travel**

ABTA has insisted that the government must do more than removing the test requirement for arrivals into the UK at the upcoming strategic review of international travel policy. The association is demanding a long-term plan for the travel and tourism sector to avoid disruption if a new variant of concern is identified.

**Why we need travel agents more than ever - A new breed of customer is coming around to the benefits of face-to-face service**

Travel agents report a surge in demand for face-to-face contact when booking holidays, with many customers switching from speedy but impersonal online transactions in favour of the reassurance of dealing with an expert in person. Customers have been burned by the consistent challenges around refunds in 2020, which showed that there is no substitute for having someone on the end of the phone who is not only reachable but accountable.

**Mexico and the Maldives ‘lead long-haul recovery’**

Mexico and the Maldives lead the way as travellers from Europe drive an increase in demand for long-haul beach and sun destinations in 2022, latest data reveals. Cancun is the destination of choice for many European travellers, but those from the UK are favouring the U.S., with Orlando and New York the top spots. The new analysis reveals the destinations and international routes trending above 2019 levels based on Skyscanner’s global flight data. Routes showing the highest growth so far for 2022 over pre-pandemic levels in 2019 are topped by Heathrow-Orlando and Heathrow-Cancun. Others in the top ten include Gatwick-Cancun and Edinburgh-New York (Newark).

**Queensland poised to reopen to international travellers**

The Australian state of Queensland is relaxing COVID-19 border restrictions for

international travellers. The change takes place from January 22. There will be no restriction on fully vaccinated international visitors arriving into Queensland from then, according to the state's tourism authority.

### **Thailand to ease entry requirements from next month**

Thailand will resume quarantine-free entry for vaccinated travellers from 1 February, but with stringent test requirements. From 1 February, Thailand will require fully-vaccinated visitors to take a PCR test 72 hours before departure, on arrival and again five days later, while agreeing to tell authorities their location.

### **Holiday World Shows Rescheduled till 2023**

Business Exhibitions Ltd has announced that the annual Holiday World Shows will not proceed in 2022. The Holiday World Shows, which were set to take place in February and March in Dublin, Belfast and Shannon have been rescheduled to January 2023. Having previously deferred the Shows to spring of this year, the organisers, Business Exhibitions Ltd, have now made the difficult decision to reschedule this year's shows to January 2023. Maureen Ledwith (sales director Holiday World Show) stated, "It is with a very heavy heart that we have made the difficult decision to reschedule this year's Holiday World Shows."

## **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**Aer Lingus** - Aer Lingus has hailed the success of its debut Manchester-Barbados flights by confirming their return next winter. Services will operate this winter until 29 April and return on 2 November 2022 every Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday.

**Norse Atlantic** - Budget transatlantic newcomer Norse Atlantic Airways has won U.S. approval to start flying from Norway and the EU. The U.S. Department of Transportation approved the start-up carrier's application for the operation of flights which are now due to be launched from Oslo to "select" U.S., cities in the spring. New York and destinations in Florida are expected to be the first to be served from Norway, with flights from London and Paris to follow.

**Virgin Atlantic** - Virgin Atlantic is to restart flights to Tobago as part of a resumption of services to the Caribbean. The twice-weekly service will run from Heathrow from January 29. Virgin Atlantic and Latam airlines have also signed a codeshare agreement that allows customers to "fly seamlessly" to Brazil. Customers booking through Virgin Atlantic can travel from Heathrow to São Paulo on Latam's direct route from January 20. Connecting onwards, customers can also travel to a further 12 domestic airports in Brazil. Those travelling from São Paulo to Heathrow will have the option to connect onto Virgin Atlantic's worldwide destinations.

## TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

**Agents celebrate big bookings as confidence starts to return** - Agents are "buzzing" as they enjoy a rise in big bookings as a result of increased consumer confidence. High-value sales are being reported after in-resort pre-departure tests and PCR tests on arrival in the UK for vaccinated travellers were scrapped. Jack Mason, chief executive of Baldwins Travel's parent Inc & Co, said: "People have been saving and are looking to splash out. They want to book bigger family holidays and big experiences. They know Covid [sic] exists but they want to get on with their lives – and booking a holiday is one of the first steps back to normality."

**Contiki** – Contiki has repositioned its brand to reflect the social travel and sustainable needs of the youth market. The operator's brand refresh comes as it reaches its target to become carbon neutral and to expand worldwide in the 18-35 year old travel market during 2022. The aim is to position the brand firmly as a tour operator providing "fun, social experiences and sustainability" for the younger market in the way it communicates with its customers. Its new brand identity hopes to reflect optimism for travel catering for the needs of Gen Z and millennial travellers.

**Jet2Holidays** - The UK government's recent travel update has led to a "sudden jump" in customer confidence, according to research carried out by Jet2holidays. Consumer polling conducted by Jet2holidays showed that 47% of customers said they were more likely to book an overseas holiday as a direct result of the relaxation of the restrictions. Furthermore, 56% of respondents said they felt confident about travelling, which is the highest this figure has been since October 2021 and a 10% increase compared to the same time two weeks ago. Following the announcement, Jet2holidays reportedly saw its bookings jump by 150% for holidays to destinations such as Greece, Turkey, Spain, the Canaries, the Balearic Islands, Malta and Portugal.

**Newmarket Holidays** - The operator has "significantly" boosted its African itineraries for 2022 with four new options across its African safari range including Madagascar – Red Island Wonders, and On Safari in Kenya. Meanwhile, in North America, the operator has launched Historic Virginia, DC and the Blue Ridge Mountains, National Parks of the American West & San Francisco as well as Elvis Presley's Memphis, New Orleans & Nashville at Christmastime.

## SOCIAL UPDATE

### **TikTok looks to expand content with 'Stories' test**

Now on track to reach 1.5 billion users in 2022, TikTok is seeking to expand its content horizons with a view to increased monetisation and providing more capacity for creators to generate revenue. TikTok is looking to integrate its (still experimental) Stories creation into the main 'For You' and 'Following' feeds. Through merging Stories into the focal stream, users will be able to view Stories from both their connections and users they don't follow, increasing the opportunity to discover new content.

### **Instagram launches live test of Subscriptions**

Instagram has launched an initial test of a new Subscriptions option for Instagram creators. This will provide another monetisation avenue and incentive for content creators to keep posting to Instagram. For a variable monthly subscription – \$0.99 - \$99.99, members will have access to Subscribers-Only Lives, Subscribers-Only Stories and Subscriber Badges. Though it provides more monetising opportunities, the challenge will be in formulating a plan for sustainable, valuable add-on content that will keep subscribers paying.

## MICE UPDATE

### **Event professionals welcome the lift of England's Plan B measures**

This week the prime minister announced the end of England's Plan B restrictions as measures including COVID-19 passports and work from home guidance are abandoned. The announcement is seen as a confidence boost across the industry as UK event planners are given additional reassurance to book in-person meetings and events. Event professionals welcome the lift of Plan B restrictions and report an expected rise in the exchange of contracts as confidence increases. The news comes as the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) announced new dates for the SITE Global Conference 2022 that will take place in Dublin between April 20 - 23.

## LIGHTER NOTE

Photographers capture wealth of wildlife on UK farm. See it [here](#).