

WEEKLY REPORT

28 January 2022



COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 has decreased in the last seven days by 0.9%. Meanwhile, the number of patients admitted to hospital has also dropped, by 15.2%. In regard to the vaccination rollout, 90.9% of the population aged 12 and above has received their first dose, 83.9% their second and a further 64.4% of the population their booster dose. Health secretary Sajid Javid, lauded the vaccination effort but urged caution, stating: “The tireless efforts of NHS and care staff, and the army of volunteers, as well as the phenomenal response of the British public means over 37 million people have been boosted. As we learn to live with COVID-19 we need to be clear eyed that this virus is not going away so if you haven't already - please come forward for your first, second or booster jab.”

As of Thursday 27 January, England has removed all of its “Plan B” restrictions, which included compulsory face masks in public indoor places unless exempt and the mandatory COVID-19 certification will end, but venues may choose to use the NHS COVID Pass voluntarily. Mask-wearing remains mandated on Transport for London (TFL) services.

Transport secretary Grant Shapps announced this week that from 11 February there will be no requirement for vaccinated passengers arriving in England to do post-arrival lateral flow tests, but they will still need to complete a passenger locator form. Those who are not fully vaccinated - two jabs, or a single Janssen jab - will need to test before they depart for England, and take a post-arrival PCR test, and complete a passenger locator form however, they will no longer need to isolate, or complete a day eight test.

Elsewhere in the UK, Scotland announced the reopening of nightclubs and the scrapping of social distancing this week. Work from home is still being advised and face coverings remain on public transport and in indoor public places. Crowds are

set to return to Welsh sporting events in the next fortnight with nightclubs also reopening. In Northern Ireland this week nightclubs reopened, although a domestic COVID-19 certificate is still required for entry.

The Irish government has also eased restrictions over the past seven days, including: pubs and restaurants can return to normal opening times (no longer must close at 20:00 GMT); nightclubs can reopen; you no longer need a vaccination or recovery certificate to access hospitality or indoor activities; social distancing is no longer required in hospitality or other settings; restrictions on numbers attending indoor and outdoor events or activities no longer apply; and limits on household visits no longer apply.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Omicron pushes UK business growth to 11 month low

The UK economy grew at its slowest pace in almost a year in January as hospitality, leisure and travel businesses felt the impact of the Omicron variant, the IHS Markit and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply reported. Service sector growth eased for a third month, according to the survey, amid reports from businesses of a loss of momentum caused by pandemic disruptions and very subdued demand. Chris Williamson, IHS Markit's chief business economist, said: "A resilient rate of economic growth in the UK during January masks wide variations across different sectors. Consumer-facing businesses have been hit hard by Omicron, and manufacturers have reported a further worrying weakening of order book growth, but other business sectors have remained encouragingly robust."

IMF suggests UK economy will be the fastest growing in G7

The growth of the UK economy will slow down in 2022 as a result of Omicron - but will still be the fastest growing economy of all the G7 countries, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the latest amendment to its economic forecasts, the IMF said it now expects British gross domestic product (GDP) to expand by 4.7 percent in 2022 - cutting down its previous prediction of 5.0 percent made in October 2021. But the cut to Britain's expected growth rate in 2022 was the smallest among the Group of Seven (G7) large, advanced economies besides Japan, and Britain's GDP is still expected to grow faster than any other G7 nation in 2022. British GDP is also expected to outstrip global economic growth by 0.3 percent in 2022, thanks to a rebound from sharp economic decline the UK suffered amid the lockdowns in 2020.

Downing Street parties report likely to be delayed

The report, being undertaken by Sue Gray, was set to be published this week but complications surrounding a concurrent police investigation have led most to believe that it will be released next week. The report, looking into illegal parties held at Downing Street in April, May and June 2020, is set to shed light on these instances with new information and could have considerable influence over Boris Johnson's future as prime minister. However, during a time of possible overseas conflict on the Ukrainian border and a cost-of-living crisis, it remains to be seen whether the Conservative party would pursue a change of leadership.

TRADE UPDATE

Growing demand for travel agents

Travel agents have reported a surge in demand for face-to-face contact when booking holidays. Hays Travel has suggested 53 percent of customers visiting their 450 stores would usually book online, which is a shift up from 19 percent in 2019. According to Google Search Data, 80 percent of travel agents received enquiries from holidaymakers who have not used one in the past. Advantage Travel Partnership has said the biggest customer growth area is among younger people, who are the most digitally avid users.

All of this further supports ABTA research published in November, which showed 30 percent of people surveyed were more likely to book with a travel professional now than in 2019, primarily for their guidance with COVID-19 travel requirements (47 percent) followed by the security of a package holiday (46 percent).

Irish travel agents experience increases in bookings

Pat Dawson, CEO of the Irish Travel Agents Association, says there has been a "phenomenal" turn around in bookings with travel agents busy getting back to inquiries. Popular destinations include Spain and Portugal, which have been Irish favourites for many years now, claims director of Cassidy Travel, John Spollen.

Holiday bookings jump as UK arrival travel tests axed

The rule changes mean fully vaccinated people arriving in the UK from abroad do not need to take any COVID-19 tests. Holiday bookings have jumped with "notable increases" in trips planned for February half-term and Easter. Jet2 said bookings increased by 30 percent last week after the announcement that rules would be relaxed for people arriving in the UK.

Summer flight numbers heading for 2019 levels, data suggests

The number of flights due to operate from the UK this summer is already 86 percent of pre-COVID-19 levels, new research confirms. Figures from airline data specialist Cirium show flights scheduled to depart UK airports between April and October 2022 – both domestic and international – are currently down only 14 percent versus the same period in 2019.

AIRLINE UPDATE

easyJet - The Luton-based airline has said it is planning for capacity over the key summer months to return to “near 2019” levels. EasyJet has predicted a “strong summer” this year, with UK beach and leisure routes expected to perform “particularly well”.

Emirates - Emirates has signed a new agreement with Amadeus, extending its partnership to offer the travel trade more flexibility, choice and future capabilities.

Wizz Air - From 27 March, Wizz Air will fly five times a week to Venice and from 29 March, twice weekly to Sicily's capital Palermo. Wizz Air will also add two Black Sea destinations. From 13 June, it will launch five flights a week to Varna and from 15 June, will fly four times a week to the port city of Burgas. The carrier said it was expanding in order to fully use 15 daily slot pairs it acquired at Gatwick from Norwegian.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

Intrepid - Intrepid has acquired The Wildland Trekking Company. The acquisition adds 260 trips to its North American portfolio. Prior to the move, Intrepid had offered only 57 tours in the U.S., roughly five percent of its 1,150 offerings worldwide. Intrepid was one of the tour operators that began pivoting during the pandemic to provide Americans with more domestic tour options, later expanding in 2021 to launch a North American operations hub after the tours' popularity.

Newmarket Holidays - The escorted touring operator has reported bookings to European destinations are now returning strongly with Croatia, Italy and Portugal accounting for 50 percent of sales to Europe in recent weeks. Prior to that, the operator stated bookings had been stronger for long haul tours.

TUI - Travel giant TUI is gearing up for what it predicts will be its “biggest booking day” at the weekend since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The combination of the lifting of UK travel restrictions, plus workers receiving their first pay packet since Christmas, is set to create “soaring” demand for holidays this summer claims Katie McAlister, chief marketing officer for TUI UK and Ireland.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram increases response options in Stories polls

Instagram has quietly updated its Poll sticker for Instagram Stories, which now enables users to add up to four response options for polls, doubling users’ choices. More options could generate more responses for consumers to relate to, which in turn is likely to boost engagement and maximise both response and reach.

YouTube outlines key areas of growth in 2022

While other platforms continue to rise into the digital video market, YouTube remains the overall leader in the space. As it seeks to maintain this position, YouTube Shorts, the TikTok-like short video platform, has now hit five trillion all-time views, underlining the potential of the format. While TikTok may be the app of the moment, YouTube’s established frameworks and creator partnerships look set to keep it in the top spot for online video for some time to come.

MICE UPDATE

The Business Visits & Events Partnership (BVEP) elects new chair

The Business Visits & Events Partnership (BVEP) has elected Chris Skeith OBE as its new chair with immediate effect. Skeith is currently director of the Events Industry Alliance (EIA) which represents the Association of Event Organisers (AEO), the Association of Event Venues (AEV) and the Event Supplier and Services Association (ESSA). The announcement comes with a move to provide further resources and support for the entire business events sector in the UK as it continues to recover.

LIGHTER NOTE

Pet cat missing for 11 years reunited with owners. Read more [here](#).