

WEEKLY BRIEFING

11 November 2022

COVID-19 UPDATE

COVID-19 infections have fallen in England and Wales, according to the Office for National Statistics. However, the ONS figures do show that levels have increased in Northern Ireland and the trend is uncertain in Scotland. Overall roughly 1.9 million people have the virus, down from two million the week before. Experts warn levels are still high in the over-70s and say vaccines are key.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

UK economy starts to shrink as recession looms

The UK appears to be heading into recession after the latest official figures showed the economy shrank between July and September. The economy contracted by 0.2% during the three months as soaring prices hit businesses and households. The Bank of England has forecast a "very challenging" two-year recession. A recession has been widely expected in the UK due to the prices of goods such as food, fuel and energy soaring, which is down to several factors, including the war in Ukraine. Higher prices for goods has led to many households facing hardship and cutting back on spending, which has started to drag on the economy.

Rishi Sunak and Nicola Sturgeon meet for the first time since he became prime minister

Scotland's first minister Nicola Sturgeon met Rishi Sunak for a "cordial and constructive" meeting despite the pair having "profound political disagreements". Nicola said they discussed the cost of living crisis, the NHS and her desire for a second Scottish independence referendum. Mr Sunak called on political leaders to unite to tackle shared challenges. The talks were held in Blackpool ahead of a meeting of the British-Irish Council and the prime minister confirmed he "emphasised" their duty to work closely together.

Christmas adverts acknowledge the cost of living crisis

As the cost of living soars, some retailers have opted for a more muted approach to their campaigns this year. John Lewis said its advert, featuring a foster family, was less about buying things and more about kindness but some retail experts warned scenes of bountiful buffets in other ads were still out of touch as families struggle with rising prices. John Lewis is the latest big name brand to beam its festive message into homes around the UK. It told the BBC that the cost-of-living crisis was "front of mind" when deciding what tone the advert should take.

Kwarteng says he 'warned Truss' over radical reforms

Kwasi Kwarteng has claimed that he warned Liz Truss she was going too fast with her economic plans. Speaking to TalkTV in his first interview since he was sacked by the then prime minister, the former chancellor said he had warned her to "slow down" after September's mini-budget. Kwarteng was fired by Truss two weeks after their economic statement caused panic on financial markets. Kwarteng said he told her she was "mad" to fire him.

TRADE UPDATE

Spain approaching 2023 with 'extreme caution' amid cost-of-living crisis

Spain expects to achieve more than 80% of its pre-pandemic capacity this year but is approaching 2023 with "extreme caution" as the cost-of-living crisis looms. In an interview with Travel Weekly, the country's Secretary of State for Tourism, Fernando Valdés, explained that 2022 was positive – strengthened by an "excellent summer" – as British travellers flocked back after two years of disruption. Spain anticipates that more than 15 million British tourists will visit by the end of 2022.

US travel blames Biden inaction on visitor visas for stalled international travel recovery

One year after the reopening of US borders to inbound air travellers on 8 November 2021, outrageous wait times of more than 400 days for visitor visa applicants is delaying the recovery of the critically important international travel sector, according to the US Travel Association. US visa wait times now average a staggering 400+ days for first-time visitor visa applicants in the largest countries for inbound travel. Visa interview wait times for potential travellers from Brazil, India and Mexico are now 317, 757 and 601 days, respectively. These excessive delays are the equivalent of a travel ban, driving potential US visitors to choose other destinations.

Ireland targets recovery of British market by 2024

Tourism Ireland is targeting a full recovery of the British market in 2024 after forecasting that visitor numbers for 2022 will reach between 70% and 75% of pre-pandemic levels. Speaking at World Travel Market, the tourism body's chief executive Niall Gibbons said he was "realistically optimistic" despite economic headwinds and indicated the British market could rebound ahead of a forecast overall "real-terms recovery" by 2025. Gibbons said trade partners were "upbeat and buoyant" for 2023, with demand strong and that Ireland is perceived as a good value destination, particularly in shoulder seasons.

Cost of living worries hit next year's holiday plans

The cost-of-living crisis is by far the biggest issue to impact Brits' 2023 holiday plans, according to the latest Industry Report by World Travel Market London. The report, published on the first day of WTM London 2022 reveals two-thirds of all adults (66%) said rising prices were likely to have a serious impact on next year's holiday plans, with one in four (27%) saying the price of petrol was a major concern. In the key family market age groups of 35-44s and 45-54s, cost-of-living concerns on travel plans soared to 73% and 72% respectively. The youngest and the eldest age groups are less concerned than anyone else, with 51% of 18-24s and 54% of over 65s saying the cost-of-living crisis will impact holiday choice.

UK & Ireland regain position as leading international market to Florida

The UK & Ireland has regained its position as the number one overseas market to Florida. Speaking at its annual WTM dinner, Visit Florida president and chief executive Dana Young said more than 820,000 Brits had visited the state between January and September this year, which she described as "amazing progress". She added: "We have a little way to go to meet pre-pandemic futures but things are certainly heading in the right direction."

AIRLINE UPDATE

UK-US flights 'recover to 92% of pre-pandemic levels'

Transatlantic flights from the UK to the US have recovered to 92% of 2019 pre-pandemic levels, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium. Flights to the US have risen 79% in the last 12 months, with 3,298 departures in November 2022 compared to 1,842 in November 2021, the data shows. British Airways remains the largest carrier on key North Atlantic routes, operating 35% of all flights, followed by Virgin Atlantic (17%), United Airlines (17%), American Airlines (15%) and Delta Air Lines (8%). The most popular destination for UK travellers is New York JFK, with 718 flights this month, followed by Newark (285), Boston (237), Los Angeles (201) and Chicago (169).

Qantas ‘firmly back’ to pre-Covid performance in October

Qantas was “firmly back” to pre-Covid levels of service in October following improvements in the previous two months. The disclosure came at the Australian airline’s annual meeting but was tempered by a warning from chief executive Alan Joyce that the industry as a whole is far from ‘post-Covid’. He warned: “There are side effects that still impact us daily. One element is the supply chain. A spare part that would usually take 12 hours to arrive can now take a week.”

Virgin Group looking to increase connectivity across network

Virgin is looking to increase connectivity across its network to make it easier for people to combine different products the company offers on a single trip. Speaking at a press conference marking the launch of Virgin Atlantic’s [new Heathrow-Tampa route](#) at the airport of the Florida city, Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson said this was something the company “should have done years ago”.

BA to allow male pilots and crew to wear make-up and accessories

British Airways has updated its policy on make-up and accessories for cabin crew and pilots, with changes coming into effect on Monday. The airline says male employees can wear mascara, earrings, nail varnish and tie their hair up in a ‘man bun’ if they choose. In an internal memo, the airline said ‘subtle shades’ of makeup for a ‘natural look’ will now be acceptable across the board. The airline said it hopes the new guidance would be ‘embraced by everyone regardless of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, background, culture, sexual identity or otherwise,’ Mail Online said.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Nearly 300 Hays Travel shops ‘outstripping sales targets’ in 2022

Hays Travel’s retail chief Paula Barrett says 293 Hays Travel branches are “overachieving” and performing better than their predicted sales targets so far this year. She said 177 staff had achieved their individual targets six months early and that sales were 131% of the company’s target so far. Looking ahead, she added: “We expect big things in January. Any overtime that we can do in January we will appreciate it. Any additional support would be fantastic.”

Tui UK & Ireland reveals eco hotel labelling

Hotels certified as sustainable by an independent organisation will be highlighted by Tui UK & Ireland with a ‘Green & Fair’ label. Hotels must meet a strict standard of sustainability credentials, known as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria. The move, ahead of the operator’s summer 2024 programme going on sale, is designed to make it easier for customers to identify hotels with more “planet-friendly” practices.

New Irish travel company to specialise in luxury trips

The Travel Suite, a new Irish travel company specialising in luxury holidays, cruises, group travel and premium class flights has launched. The company has been set up by Mary McKenna, chief executive and owner of Tour America and Cruise Holidays, and Lorraine Quinn, who has 25 years' experience in the industry. Its new offices, which will be located in Milltown, south Dublin, will open over the coming weeks.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Twitter previews new 'official' Grey Checkmark as it prepares to launch its \$8 verification plan

Twitter is preparing to launch its Blue Package, which offers the blue verification tick to all Twitter users at a fee of \$8 per month. In addition, the platform has also decided that there is a need for some users to have an official marker to prevent fraud. As such, Twitter's solution is to add a new identifier, a grey tick, which will appear on a user's profile and signify that it is an official account. Those that will be eligible for the grey tick are governments, publishers, companies, some public figures, business partners and key media organisations. However, unlike the blue tick in its current form, the grey tick will not be shown on tweets and therefore users will have to click through to the profile to verify the person's identity.

TikTok re-organises staffing structure amid ongoing scrutiny over political affiliations

TikTok is facing challenges related to regulation and monetisation. While the app continues to advance its lead as the top app for teen users, it has had to restructure and cut jobs to mitigate the reduction in ad spend due to global economic decline. TikTok has also been accused of influencing political activity, with a recent report suggesting that it suppressed election-related posts in the buildup to the US midterm elections.

MICE UPDATE

Group business showing steady growth according to new Amadeus forecast

Global travel solutions specialist, Amadeus, has released a new forecast in collaboration with Meeting Professionals International and Salesforce, indicating that group travel is set for a strong conference season in Q4 2022 and promising growth in 2023. According to the data, global group occupancy has consistently mirrored pre-pandemic levels throughout the conference sector rebound in 2022, according to Amadeus. The company is also set for a strong start in 2023, with 48 million bookings already made for H1 2023, 16% more than were made in the same period of 2022.

LIGHTER NOTE

Missing cat reunited with owner it's after five years

Missing cat with distinctive moustache marking is found in Norfolk after five years. For more information, see [here](#)