

WEEKLY BRIEFING

6 January 2023

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Planned anti-strike laws could see employers suing unions

New restrictions on striking are to be introduced to “restore the balance between those seeking to strike and protecting the public from disproportionate disruption”, says UK business secretary Grant Shapps. These would include suing unions if they do not provide minimum levels of fire, ambulance and rail services. Such restrictions have been condemned by unions who have also threatened legal action, while Labour has promised to repeal them. A wave of industrial action is currently affecting sectors from health and postal services to driving examinations, as workers seek pay rises that keep up with the fast-rising cost of living. Paul Nowak, general secretary of TUC, a federation of trade unions in England and Wales, has called the proposed bill “wrong, unworkable, and almost certainly illegal” as well as an attack on British liberties.

Ukraine war: Kyiv rejects Putin's 'trivial' Christmas truce

A 36-hour ceasefire on the Ukrainian frontline has been imposed by the Russian minister of defence as requested by president Vladimir Putin. This is to begin this Friday and will coincide with the Russian Orthodox Christmas. Kyiv was asked to reciprocate the ceasefire, calling for a truce, but Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky said it was an attempt by Russian to stop his country’s military advances and rejected the request. The ceasefire is said to have been an appeal from the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, according to a statement by the Kremlin. However, Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said Moscow repeatedly ignored President Zelensky's propositions for peace. He pointed to Russia's shelling of Kherson on Christmas Eve and strikes on New Year's Eve as evidence of Moscow's inability to cease hostilities during religious holidays.

House prices drop for fourth month in a row

With the rising cost of living and interest rates growing higher, the average house price in the UK fell for a fourth consecutive month in December 2022. According to Halifax, December prices fell by 1.5% compared to November, making the average house price currently stand at £281,272. The bank has put the slowing of the housing market down to rising interest rates and the uncertainty surrounding the cost of living and how it might impact household bills. Kim Kinnaird, mortgages director at Halifax, believes that as we enter 2023 "the housing market will continue to be impacted by the wider economic environment and, as buyers and sellers remain cautious, we expect there will be a reduction in both supply and demand overall, with house prices forecast to fall around 8% over the course of the year."

Scottish skiing experiencing lift as European resorts struggle for snow

A strong start to the ski season is being enjoyed by ski resorts across Scotland as European resorts struggle for snow. Warmer temperatures across Europe have meant that popular skiing destinations, such as France and Switzerland, have seen less snow than usual. For venues like Lecht Ski Centre in Aberdeenshire however, business is booming. Pieter du Pon, chairman of the Lecht Ski Company, said the season was off to a "very good start" as they enjoyed a busy Christmas period. "We look at a 10-day forecast. In a week's time it could disappear. We'll see how the rest of the season goes", he said. Those heading to the slopes are being warned by mountain rescue experts of the dangers in relying solely on smartphones, encouraging skiers to bring a map and compass in their bag to aid navigation.

TRADE UPDATE

Mild weather has 'zero impact' on ski bookings, trade reports

Reports of a lack of snow in popular ski resorts caused by mild weather are having "zero impact" on bookings, the trade has reported. Craig Burton, managing director of Ski Solutions, said only the lowest-level French ski resorts have been impacted by the warm weather and skiers can still access snow by travelling to higher altitudes, while most Britons in the Alps are not impacted as they are skiing at 1,800m or higher. He added that the temperature is expected to drop within the next week and snow is forecast, so he did not anticipate any reduction in bookings.

Southampton port expects almost 500 cruise ship calls this year

Southampton port expects almost 500 cruise ship calls this year. Maiden calls by seven vessels are planned in 2023 including new builds Explora 1 and Silversea Cruises' Silver Nova. This follows maiden arrivals in 2022 by Azamara Onward, Celebrity Beyond, Silver Moon, Norwegian Prima, Aida Perla, Aida Cosma, Enchanted Princess and P&O Cruises' new ship Arvia. The port switched on shore power last spring at two of its five cruise terminals – Horizon and Mayflower – and has enabled 15 ships to 'plug in' a total of 42 times for zero emissions at berth.

Parents 'prepared to take children on holiday in term time' to cut costs

More than a third of parents will cut spending amid the cost of living crisis by taking summer trips during term time and paying the associated fines for doing so. One in ten of 1,500 parents polled by Holiday Extras have already booked to take their family away before the school summer holidays, with a further 29% saying they will likely follow suit. Breaks during term time are, on average, a quarter (28%) cheaper than going away within the school summer holidays or a fifth (19%) cheaper when absence fines, which are £60 per parent, are taken into account.

Comparing the prices of two week-long package holidays to two of the UK's most popular destinations for a family of four, the analysis found that breaks to Tenerife from Manchester airport during term time were almost £900 cheaper than going away during the summer break, even with the fines included. A seven-night Crete holiday from Stansted in July was also found to be £600 cheaper than going a month later. Parents in the south-west, Wales and Scotland were most likely to cut the costs by taking their children out of school, with the least likely residing in Yorkshire and the East Midlands. Those in the south-east are most likely to have already booked their term time trip to afford a holiday – double than those in London and four times more than in the North East. Travellers without children were most likely to spend more time researching holiday destinations to cut costs and find the best deal (73%), with the second-most popular method being to swap to a less expensive destination (46%).

Festive season flights still down on pre-Covid levels

Flights from the UK on Christmas Day surpassed pre-pandemic levels by 6%, new data reveals. Overall departures from UK airports during the festive period between 21 December and 4 January were up 49% compared to the same period in 2021. Aviation analytics firm Cirium found that 28,508 flights departed the UK. This was 22% down on pre-pandemic levels, with more than 8,000 fewer departures recorded compared to the same period in 2019. There were 6% more flights leaving the UK on Christmas Day in 2022 than pre-pandemic, as travelling on December 25 grew in popularity. A total of 709 flights departed UK airports, compared to only 668 on Christmas Day in 2019.

Tourism bosses welcome Dubai's move to scrap alcohol tax

Travel industry bosses have welcomed news that Dubai has scrapped its 30% alcohol tax in an apparent bid to boost tourism. Dubai will also stop charging for personal alcohol licences, which residents who want to drink at home must obtain, reports the BBC. This latest move is believed to be an attempt to make the city more attractive to foreigners in the face of competition from neighbouring destinations, according to The Telegraph.

Antigua and Barbuda aims to promote destination in The Apprentice

The chief executive of the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority hopes that the twin-island destination being featured in the latest series of BBC's The Apprentice will entice more British travellers. The first episode, which aired at 9pm on 5 January, will feature 18 competitors facing their first challenge of the series from the Caribbean. The teams will be tasked with promoting island tours and excursions and acting as guides, showcasing a catamaran ride and a tour of UNESCO World Heritage site Nelson's Dockyard. The twin-island tourism authority said it has taken "years of planning and hard work" for the location to be included in the series, which it hopes will put Antigua and Barbuda "front of mind for millions of British travellers" during the peak booking season.

Hong Kong aims for tourism revival as restrictions are lifted

Hong Kong is to work with operators and airlines to attract tourists back with the removal of China's Covid travel curbs from 8 January. The easing of travel restrictions after almost three years will trigger efforts by tourism chiefs to reconnect with the trade, including agents.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Ryanair - Ryanair gained a festive period boost with December passenger carryings rising by 21% year-on-year. Europe's largest budget airline saw numbers rise to 11.5 million. This gave an annual total of 160.4 million passengers flown in 2022 – up 121% on the previous year. The December load factor rose by 11 percentage points to 92% over the same month in 2021 as Ryanair operated more than 65,500 flights. The carrier also reported that its load factor for the year reached 92% from 81%.

British Airways - British Airways' Gatwick-based subsidiary, BA Euroflyer, has added five new destinations to its short-haul route network. The carrier will operate a three-times weekly service to Montpellier in the summer from 27 May, as well as new routes to Mykonos and Corfu in addition to existing services from Heathrow and London City. Innsbruck sees an addition of eight new weekly flights in the winter season, which complements the current six-times weekly service from Heathrow. BA Euroflyer's new summer service to Salzburg will complement the existing winter services from Gatwick and Heathrow. The airline also put its short-haul Gatwick winter schedule on sale on Wednesday 4 January, offering 21 destinations to customers looking to book winter holidays and city breaks.

Air Transat - Air Transat has cut its lowest transatlantic fares in a seat sale starting Thursday 5 January. The lead-in return from Gatwick to Toronto has been reduced from £411 to £379 in the promotion which runs until 25 January. The rates apply to flights with the Canadian carrier until 31 October. The discounted £379 rate also applies to flights to Toronto from Glasgow and Manchester. The promotion also sees Gatwick-Montreal fares drop to £389 and Gatwick-Quebec City to £469. New connecting services from the UK to California and Florida are also included in the sale, with return fares from Gatwick starting at £535 to Orlando, £536 to Los Angeles, £561 to Miami, £580 to Fort Lauderdale and £671 to San Francisco.

Norwegian Air - Norwegian Air tripled passenger carryings to 18 million last year compared with 2021 figures. The Scandinavian budget airline rounded off the year with December numbers rising by 41% to more than 1.3 million passengers as it operated a fleet of 64 aircraft. The carrier reported a return of high demand for air travel and continued positive booking trends. Norwegian Air said it was now able to hedge jet fuel for both 2023 and 2024 thanks to its solid financial situation.

Emirates - Emirates is to hold 17 cabin crew recruitment open days across the UK this month, with dozens more planned throughout the year. The Dubai-based airline is seeking to fill thousands of positions as it responds to sustained demand for international travel. Open days are planned in January across London, Manchester, Leeds, Oxford, Gatwick, Nottingham, Newcastle, Guildford, Glasgow, Birmingham, York, Liverpool, Milton Keynes, Edinburgh and Luton. Crew will be based in Dubai with an employment package including a tax-free salary and concessional travel benefits, including for friends and family. Other benefits include free company-provided accommodation, free transport to and from work, medical cover as well as exclusive discounts on shopping and leisure activities in Dubai.

Wizz Air - Wizz Air's year-on-year carryings rose by 58% in December on the back of an expanded network. The central and eastern European budget carrier flew more than 4.1 million passengers last month with an improved load factor of 84.5%. The performance saw the airline end 2022 with carryings more than double to 45.6 million from 21.7 million in the previous year. Wizz Air started routes to Saudi Arabia from Austria and Italy last month. Expansion was also announced for Rome, Vienna, Warsaw, Tirana in Albania, Kutaisi in Georgia and Belgrade in Serbia for 2023.

Delta - Delta Air Lines has pledged to introduce free wi-fi on international aircraft from the end of 2024. The airline is making fast internet access available on some US domestic flights from 1 February in partnership with T-Mobile. It claims to be the first major US airline to offer free wi-fi as a "core element" of its customer experience. The service will be offered on more than 700 aircraft by the end of 2023. Delta also plans to bring free wi-fi on international and regional aircraft by the end of 2024. Passengers must log in using their Delta SkyMiles loyalty scheme account or join SkyMiles on the ground or in the air for free to connect.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Titan Travel - Titan Travel have released their travel trends report for 2023. In this report they analyse the current patterns dominating the travel industry and look ahead to see what changes they can expect to see over the next year. [Click here](#) to view the report.

Explore - Adventure specialist Explore has reported a 50% rise in the number of customers booking through travel agents during the past 12 weeks. The finding came as Explore revealed its top travel trends for the coming year, claiming to have analysed booking patterns across "thousands" of itineraries and passengers. Among the insights was the continued rise of "slow travel" adventures – with the number of travellers booking walking holidays with Explore up by almost a third on 2019 bookings. More solo travellers will be joining group tours, Explore also claimed, with 67% of the company's bookings coming from solos – up from 64% in 2019. Average monthly web search volumes for solo travel were also up 52% year on year. Assessing its most popular destinations for 2023, Explore said that while Europe and the UK had been "consistently up" during the pandemic, demand for long-haul destinations was growing fast. Aside from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, both new countries to Explore's programme, destinations such as Costa Rica (up 44%), Egypt (up 124%) and Morocco (up 34%) were currently enjoying "great demand". Polar expeditions are selling strongly for 2023, according to Explore, with bookings leaning in favour of Antarctica, while other "bucket list" trips such as climbing Kilimanjaro (up 9%), a Maldives Dhoni boat cruise (up 17%) and trekking the Inca Trail (up 37%) have seen similar growth.

National Holidays - National Holidays has increased its product range for 2023 with a new programme of Classic Coach Breaks tours in Britain, Ireland and Europe. A total of 48 new tours have been added in Britain and Ireland and 26 in Europe including – for the first time – 10 new holidays by air. The operator's existing programme of budget breaks will now be known as its SuperValue Selection and features more than 100 tours. In 2023, the brand will introduce a five-day Regal Scotland, Glamis Castle, Royal Yacht and Edinburgh tour; a five-day Northumberland, Hadrian's Wall, Holy Island and Alnwick Castle trip; and a five-day Great Little Trains of North Wales and Portmeirion itinerary.

Barrhead Travel - Barrhead Travel has officially launched its touring and adventure sales division to meet increasing demand for experiential and authentic trips. The new division, announced last November at the agency group's conference in Scotland, will be branded Touring & Adventure by Barrhead Travel. It is staffed by a team of four experts in the sector, based remotely across the UK, and will service online, telephone and social media enquiries as well as operating as a support function for Barrhead's shop network. The division's adventure arm will target younger customers, including students, school leavers and those travelling on a gap year, who are looking for immersive experiences that offer value-for-money when travelling. The other product area, touring, will focus on tailor-made and escorted tours with higher price points and detailed itineraries to explore a destination's culture.

Kuoni - Kuoni has launched a multimillion-pound multi-media campaign which includes a new sponsorship deal with Times Radio. The campaign will run throughout the peak January and February sales period on digital platforms, radio, out-of-home advertising, direct mail and national press. It includes offers such as free room nights, savings, upgrades and added value experiences. The operator's 'Travel On' messaging features a new Travel On poem, positioning Kuoni as a trusted brand. Radio stations such as Heart, Classic FM, Smooth and Times Radio will run advertisements with the new poem. Kuoni has also become the main sponsor of the Times Radio afternoon show with Fi and Jane and its supporting Off Air podcast.

Limitless Travel - Disabled-friendly travel specialist Limitless Travel has seen the average booking value of holidays rise by 55% last year over 2021. Customers are opting to spend more on one premium long-haul trip rather than multiple cheaper breaks across the year.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram chief outlines key areas of focus for 2023

Instagram chief Adam Mosseri has released a summary of the platform's three key priorities for 2023. The first is to 'inspire people to be creative' and in line with this, it's expected that Instagram will add new visual customisation and editing functionalities, in particular tools related to AR. The second is to 'help people discover things they love'. Instagram currently shows users content they know and like from profiles they follow. 2023 will see a shift away from this to a more TikTok style experience where users will see content from people and pages they don't follow. The third priority is to 'spark connections between people'. Due to fear of divisive discourse, more people are choosing to share content to their stories and via direct messages rather than on their main feed. Instagram is attempting to tap into this trend and explore new ways to encourage engagement, with its new 'Notes' feature being an example of this.

Twitter rolls out priority tweet ranking and longer video uploads to 'Blue Subscribers'

Twitter has launched two new features for its Blue subscription package. The first is that subscribers' tweets will get 'priority ranking in conversations', however it is not yet known what 'priority' means in this context. The platform is also adding public tweet view counts to all content this week, suggesting that users will be able to see that Twitter Blue subscribers are getting greater exposure and entice others to subscribe. Additionally, subscribers will also be able to upload videos that are up to 60 minutes long, which is part of the platform's broader goal of increasing video content.

MICE UPDATE

Rise in "gratitude getaways" to combat skills shortage

According to Centre Parks Conference & Events, businesses are increasingly combining traditional networking conferences and events with 'gratitude getaways' – a way of thanking their staff for all of their hard work and promoting wellness through relaxation and overnight stays. During the enquiry process, event planners are increasingly describing the type of event they want to run as "immersive", "a thank you", and "relaxing".

This reflects that employers are recognising that there is a benefit to promoting employee wellbeing. Pre-pandemic, Centre Parks was hosting more traditional client-facing or networking conferences and events. These have become increasingly inward-facing with more and more businesses opting to host a corporate event purely for the benefit of their own staff.

LIGHTER NOTE

Nature conquering all: Two-legged fox spotted balancing on its front legs to explore Derbyshire couple's garden. See [here](#).