

WEEKLY REPORT

20 October 2023



ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

German Finance Minister Extends Invitation to UK for Post-Brexit Trade Talks

Germany's Finance Minister, Christian Lindner, has extended a surprise invitation to the UK, encouraging the country to take "new steps" toward improving post-Brexit trade relations with the European Union (EU). During an interview with the BBC, Lindner expressed a desire for the UK to intensify its trade relationship with the EU, offering to engage in discussions aimed at reducing trade barriers that have emerged since Brexit. German exports to the UK have declined by 14.1% in 2022 in comparison to 2016 post-referendum, and challenges like red tape and tariffs on electric vehicles have become immediate concerns. Lindner's invitation could be a step toward addressing these issues and promoting closer economic ties between the UK and the EU.

UK Government Borrowing in September Lower Than Expected, But Debt Remains High

Figures show Government borrowing in the UK for September stood at £14.3 billion, equivalent to £1.6 billion less than the same period the previous year. Despite the decrease, it ranks as the sixth-highest borrowing for a September since records began in 1993. The total government debt in September exceeded £2.6 trillion, over 2% higher than the last year. Chancellor Jeremy Hunt stated that the government's spending on debt interest was 'unsustainable', citing the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on inflation and interest rates. Tax cuts in the near term are unlikely, and the government remains under pressure from various fronts, including calls for reduced taxes and increased public spending.

Scotland's Largest Offshore Wind Farm at Full Power Aims to Reduce Emissions

Scotland's largest offshore wind farm, Seagreen, located off the Angus coast, has begun operating at full capacity, capable of supplying electricity to approximately two-thirds of Scottish households. The £3bn project, comprising 114 giant turbines, has been more than a decade in the making. The wind farm is set to displace more than two million tonnes of CO2 annually, contributing to the UK's efforts to reduce reliance on fossil fuels for generating electricity. SSE Renewables, one of the operators, highlights the need to expedite consenting processes to meet climate change targets, and they are considering developing 36 additional turbines to the project. The facility will also support around 700 long-term jobs, half of which are based in Scotland. This development is vital for the UK's expanding offshore wind capacity, helping achieve emissions reduction targets.

TRADE UPDATE

Brand USA Travel Week U.K. & Europe 2023

This week, Brand USA, the destination marketing organisation for the United States, hosted more than 600 travel industry delegates from over 20 countries across three tracks - Travel Week, CEO Summit and Media Forum. Now in its fifth year, the annual event ran between Monday 16 to Thursday 19 October at the capital's historic London County Hall and was the biggest event to date. The week comprised a series of pre-scheduled appointments, enrichment sessions and evening entertainment, with highlights including a private takeover at The National Gallery and a night-time cruise along the River Thames.

Autumn travel demand set to exceed pre-pandemic levels

Customers continue to defy cost-of-living pressures as the autumn market looks set to exceed pre-pandemic levels, with buoyant bookings for the October half-term and winter-sun escapes, skiing trips and early 2024 sales. A recent study by the Civil Aviation Authority's ATOL division found more than four in 10 UK consumers are likely to book an overseas trip before Christmas.

The Advantage Travel Partnership reported that 32% of all its forward bookings are due to depart in October and November, with average booking values up 10% year on year.

Heathrow baggage workers call off threat of half-term strike action

Around 170 baggage workers at Heathrow had been poised to walk out over 20-30 October following earlier action over 6-9 October. However, this week the Unite union confirmed a new pay deal had been agreed following last-ditch talks with their employer Vanderlande, which maintains Heathrow's baggage carousels. "Unite members... have resolved their dispute after winning an increased pay offer," said the union, adding: "As a consequence, strike action scheduled for later this month has been called off."

AIRLINE UPDATE

British Airways - British Airways will launch daily flights to Abu Dhabi next year, following a four-year hiatus. The service will begin operating from April 20, 2024, serving the United Arab Emirates' capital on a year-round basis from Heathrow. The new flights will be operated by a Boeing 787-9 aircraft in summer 2024 and will boost connectivity to the UAE as it joins flights to neighbouring Dubai, which operate up to three-times daily from Heathrow.

Air Transat - Air Transat has expanded its services to Canada for summer 2024, with up to 43 direct flights from the UK & Ireland each week. From May, the airline will offer twice-daily flights to Toronto and daily flights to Montreal from Gatwick, in addition to continuing its weekly direct service to Quebec City. It will also offer up to daily services from Glasgow, Manchester and Dublin to Toronto.

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic has pushed back its plans to resume flying to Tel Aviv, a little over 24 hours after announcing it would restart one of its two daily services this week. The carrier said it would contact affected passengers to discuss their options, adding its flying programme would remain under "constant review" amid the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Affected customers will be offered a refund or given the option to rebook with no additional fees until 31 December 2023.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Classic Collection - Classic Collection has created a new booking platform designed to "make travel agents' lives easier". Director of agency sales & marketing, Si Morris-Green told Travel Weekly the platform will mark the first time the operator has had a transactional website for agents and will save both the trade and Classic

Collection's sales team's time. The new platform, which will go live on 1 November, was announced at the operator's annual conference which was held at the Abaton Island Resort & Spa in Crete.

Hays Travel - Hays Travel's top cruise-selling home workers have been congratulated with an all-inclusive trip to New York and the Bahamas. From 7-16 October, 15 Personal Travel Consultants (PTCs) were hosted on flights from Heathrow to New York before embarking on Royal Caribbean's Oasis of the Seas.

Audley Travel - A 'Responsible Choice' classification system has been introduced by Audley Travel. The new criteria aims to promote the most sustainable experiences within the tailor-made operator's portfolio. Accommodation owners or excursion suppliers must put a "purposeful focus" on supporting local businesses, educating staff, exceeding local norms for environmental and social best practice, or promote conservation and biodiversity efforts to earn the status. Experiences or properties will be labelled with the Responsible Choice symbol across operator's website to identify which meet the mark.

easyJet holidays - easyJet is ready to grow its in-house tour operator, easyJet holidays, to a £250-million-a-year business over the coming years after the brand outperformed profit expectations by delivering more than a quarter of the group's total profits for the year.

The airline recently revealed it expects easyJet holidays to contribute around £120 million towards a full-year group profit before tax of between £440 million and £460 million. "EasyJet holidays continues to outperform," the airline remarked.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Broadcast channels now available on Facebook and Messenger

Meta is making broadcast channels available on Facebook and Messenger, following the success of this feature on Instagram. In line with the trend of social media conversations moving towards private messaging, broadcast channels allow creators to send updates to their fans via Direct Messenger (DM) in a one-way group chat. Creator pages on Facebook will be able to use Messenger to create a broadcast channel and send updates directly to their followers' inboxes where they will also be able to send GIFs, voice notes, text, videos and photos.

Threads introduces Voice Threads and Post Editing

Threads is now enabling an edit feature which will allow users to make changes to a post in the first five minutes after it has gone live. A countdown will appear after

publishing, indicating how much time is remaining for editing and once an edit has been made, an edited symbol will be shown next to the timestamp. The platform has also launched "Voice Threads" which are audio messages that will appear as an attachment in a Thread where users can then listen to them.

MICE UPDATE

EIA submits 'policy asks' to UK Government

The Events Industry Alliance (EIA) launched a manifesto and three key 'policy asks' for the UK Government. The manifesto details the EIA's mission to ensure that the interests of business events in the UK are effectively represented, understood and communicated to MPs across three pillars of 'Growth', 'Ensuring the UK is the World's Meeting Place' and the 'Development of Skills and People'. The three 'policy asks' detail ways in which the UK Government can help the events industry increase efficiency, bolster advocacy and incentivise growth. It also calls on the UK Government to recommit to the Business Events Strategy, launched in 2013 by the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Sajid Javid. To deliver on this, the UK Government would need to commit to cross-departmental collaboration and increased engagement with the business events sector.

LIGHTER NOTE

Expert claims recent spotting of Bigfoot in Colorado is likely just a 'guy in a suit.'
Read more [here](#).