

# WEEKLY BRIEFING

9 February 2024



## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### **King Charles has been diagnosed with cancer**

Buckingham Palace released a statement this week announcing that during the King's treatment for another matter, diagnostic tests identified a form of cancer. He has begun a round of treatments and has postponed all public facing duties for the foreseeable future. The King is reported to be in good spirits and looks forward to returning to full public duty as soon as possible. A statement from Buckingham Palace explained that he chose to share the diagnosis to prevent speculation and help raise awareness for all those around the world affected by cancer.

### **Labour to ditch £28bn green prosperity plan**

Labour announced on Thursday that it is scaling back its flagship green prosperity plan. The policy will not be dropped altogether, but the party is abandoning the financial target to spend £28bn a year on environmental schemes. Labour attributes this decision to uncertain public finances and the outcome of finalising ideas for their manifesto for the next general election, which is expected later this year around November.

## TRADE UPDATE

### **Travellers are booking multiple trips all at once, says luxury operator**

Colletts Travel notes a notable shift in travel preferences for 2024, with growing interest in destinations like Mexico, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore due to favourable rates. There is also increased interest in 'once-in-a-lifetime' holidays to places like Japan and South Africa. Travellers are booking multiple trips with a longer window extending into 2025 to take advantage of early booking offers.

The trend resembles traditional leisure patterns, indicating stability in booking trends. Trips are longer, with rising demand for luxury all-inclusive packages and private air travel.

### **Consumers Expected to Increase Holiday Spending Despite Financial Challenges**

Despite facing financial challenges, a significant portion of consumers, nearly one-fifth, are projected to increase their spending on holidays in 2024, according to a new report by NatWest. The survey, which interviewed 2,000 consumers in December, also indicated a general satisfaction with dynamic pricing strategies in the travel industry. NatWest's 2024 Retail and Leisure Outlook report suggests that increased holiday expenditure will come at the expense of other sectors such as takeaways, electronics, and furniture, which experienced growth during the pandemic. Specifically, 17% of consumers plan to allocate more funds towards holidays, with 13% intending to spend more on accommodation. However, the report highlights that economic pressures may lead Gen Z and millennial demographics to cut back on travel expenses, although they are more likely to seek out cheaper holiday alternatives.

### **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**Ryanair** - Ryanair has announced a distribution partnership with Kiwi.com, marking its second agreement with an online travel agent. Kiwi.com customers will no longer undergo Ryanair's customer verification process. Instead, they will gain direct access to their myRyanair account, receiving flight information directly via email. Additionally, the agreement enables customers to utilise Kiwi's virtual interline service, facilitating the booking of connecting flights. In the event of a missed connection, Kiwi will re-accommodate passengers on the next available flight at no extra cost.

**Turkish Airlines** - Turkish Airlines has introduced its latest innovation, the SmartMic language translation devices, now available at airports throughout Turkey. These devices enable non-English-speaking passengers to seamlessly communicate with Turkish Airline staff. With SmartMic, passengers can speak into the device in their native language, which supports 52 languages and 72 accents. The device then translates the conversation into the staff member's language in real-time.

## TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

**Travel Counsellors** - Travel Counsellors celebrates a remarkable achievement in January, achieving £125 million in group sales. This reflects a 12% increase compared to the previous year and a staggering 68% surge from pre-pandemic levels, marking the best January and the highest sales month in the company's 30-year history. Travel Counsellors Ireland, comprising 80 Travel Counsellors supported by the Cork Office, also saw record-breaking results, contributing over €7.5 million in January. Additionally, January 31st marked the second-best day in the company's 18-year history in Ireland. The top five leisure destinations booked by Ireland's Travel Counsellors and customers in January were Spain, USA, Cruise, Thailand, Italy, and Greece.

**Classic Package Holidays** - The operator has introduced more than 1,000 new hotels across 11 new destinations including: Maldives, Thailand, Cape Verde, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro, Amsterdam, Madrid, Paris and Prague. This expansion coincides with the appointment of Adam Courtney as the new Regional Sales Manager for the Midlands and the North, representing both Classic Collection and Classic Package Holidays.

**Caribtours** - Specialist tour operator Just Slovenia, part of Caribtours, has announced its launch to the trade, aiming to double the size of its business in the first 12 months. The brand was bought in April 2022 as part of Caribtours' acquisition of tour operator, Just Grenada Collection, and its seven sister brands, including Just Slovenia, Just Barbados and Just Saint Lucia. The other seven companies are expected to become available for independent agents in the next 12 months.

**EasyJet holidays** - EasyJet holidays is prolonging its £5 agent incentive as an extension of its peaks booking campaign. Tens of thousands of agents have already taken advantage of this incentive, prompting the extension throughout February. Additionally, agents can now enjoy further customer savings, with discounts of up to £250 per booking on all beach destinations using the code HOLIDAY and up to £150 off city breaks with the code CITYSALE, for departures until October 31st.

**TUI** - Travel industry leader Tui has committed to the Safer Tourism Pledge. This initiative aims to acknowledge and distinguish businesses that not only boast robust safety measures and protocols but also prioritise cooperation over competition in ensuring customer safety. Safer Tourism assesses the safety management systems of interested companies. The pledge involves six key commitments, including supporting the foundation's mission to safeguard travellers, maintaining high safety standards, and providing practical guidance to travellers.

## SOCIAL UPDATE

### **Facebook and Instagram to label fake AI images**

Meta has announced plans to introduce technology capable of detecting and labelling images generated by other companies' artificial intelligence (AI) tools. The deployment will occur on Facebook, Instagram and Threads. AI expert and director of the Reliable AI Lab, Professor Soheil Feizi, has suggested that such a system might be easy to evade. In an interview with Reuters news agency, Senior executive at Meta Sir Nick Clegg, conceded that the technology is "not yet fully mature," but the company aims to "create a sense of momentum and incentive for the rest of the industry to follow". Meta has acknowledged that its tool will not work for audio and video, despite these being the media types generating much of the concern surrounding AI fakes.

### **New report shows TikTok usage is rising among teens**

Engagement trends are rapidly evolving, especially among younger generations who spend significant time online, on platforms such as Roblox and TikTok. A report by digital wellbeing provider, Qustodio states that TikTok is the most popular social media platform among children aged 4-18. The report also notes the increasing use of generative AI tools, with nearly 20% of young users accessing platforms like OpenAI.

### **Meta shares insights into how the Threads feed algorithm works**

As Threads continues to gain momentum, with the platform now boasting [130 million active users](#), more brands are also testing the waters to see what sort of engagement they can drive. Meta recently shared insights into the Threads algorithm, which prioritises factors such as likes, replies, and follows.

Additional considerations include post frequency, user activity, and profile visits. Users can influence their experience by interacting with posts and hiding content they're uninterested in. As the algorithm evolves, emphasis will likely be on enhancing user experience and refining engagement drivers.

## MICE UPDATE

### **UFI Global Barometer Indicates Record Growth for the Exhibition Sector in 2024**

UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, has released the latest 32nd edition of its flagship Global Exhibition Barometer research, which takes the pulse of the industry. The results highlight that in most markets around the world the exhibition industry fully recovered from the pandemic slump in 2023, with revenues reaching a comparable level to 2019, on average. The outlook for 2024 is very positive, with revenues expected to grow by an average of 15%, setting the industry up to record the highest ever revenue levels in 2024. Globally, 52% of companies declare that they plan to increase their workforce in the coming 6 months, and 45% declare that they will keep current staff numbers stable. "State of the economy in the home market" is the most pressing issue (22% of answers globally), followed by "Global economic developments" (17% of answers). There is an overwhelming consensus globally, that AI will affect the industry, with 91% of companies stating this, up from 87% in the previous edition.

## LIGHTER NOTE

**Lighter note:** An amateur photographer from the UK has won a prestigious Wildlife Photographer Of The Year award with this emotive shot of a polar bear sleeping in a makeshift bed carved into a small iceberg. See more [here](#).