

WEEKLY BRIEFING

23 August 2024



ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

UK economy growing twice as fast as EU

The UK economy has grown for a second successive quarter, outperforming all EU nations within the G7. The figures, released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that the UK economy has grown in the last two quarters, extending its recovery from the recession it fell into at the end of 2023. In comparison, the EU economy grew by just 0.3 percent in both quarters, with political uncertainty in several influential EU countries hampering attempts to increase by as much as 1 percent. The continued growth shows signs of investor confidence in the UK economy, helped by a peaceful transfer of power following the general election and the underestimated impact of measures introduced by Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt following the turmoil of 2022. The lack of EU growth does have implications for the UK economy, given that the EU is a final destination for a large proportion of UK exports and poor growth could lead to a reduced level of demand.

Storm Lilian leads to Heathrow cancellations ahead of 'busiest day of the year'

British Airways has cancelled a number of flights to and from Heathrow airport on Friday (23 August) due to high winds brought on by Storm Lilian. It is likely to be the busiest day of the year for the UK's airports due to the UK bank holiday weekend. Flight cancellations include services to and from Paris, Rome and Barcelona, with flights to Palma, Corfu, Naples and more facing delays. The weather comes on what is expected to be the busiest day for UK air departures, with 3,243 scheduled. Across the bank holiday weekend, 12,302 services are scheduled to depart British airports, with Heathrow set to wave off the largest number.

Typical household energy bill up £149 a year this October in the UK

A typical household's annual energy bill will rise by £149 in October under the new price cap. People using an average amount of gas and electricity will pay £1,717 a year, a 10% rise compared with now. Although prices are still

lower than last winter, the rise comes as some support for bills has been withdrawn, and the new government has announced it will halt winter fuel payments for 10 million pensioners in England and Wales. To calculate the effect on what households will pay this autumn, bill payers can add 10% to their current annual bill. The rise in the price cap is the result of higher prices on the international energy market, Ofgem said, owing to increasing geopolitical tensions and extreme weather driving competition and demand for gas, which determines the price of wholesale electricity.

UK rail travellers warned of bank holiday weekend disruption

Rail passengers are being warned of disruption over the bank holiday weekend in the UK. National Rail said buses would replace some trains due to engineering work taking place over the three days. Train operator London North Eastern Railway (LNER) said the work involved signalling updates along the southern part of the East Coast Mainline, between St Neots, Cambridgeshire, and King's Cross station, London. No LNER, Hull Trains, Lumo or Grand Central services will run to or from King's Cross for passengers from Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire or Norfolk.

TRADE UPDATE

British travellers to continental Europe to 'face €7 visa waiver' by next summer

British travellers to continental Europe next summer will have to apply for a €7 visa waiver, officials in Brussels have reportedly confirmed. Passengers visiting the bloc will be required to apply for a waiver – similar to the US ESTA – before travel. It will be valid for three years or until the expiry of an existing passport, whichever is first. EU home affairs commissioner Ylva Johansson has indicated that the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (Etias) is on course to be introduced next spring. Johansson was speaking before the delayed launch of the EU's Entry/Exit System (EES), which she confirmed was now targeted to come into force on 10 November.

CAA reiterates passenger rights as record departures predicted

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has urged travellers "to brush up on their passenger rights" ahead of the August bank holiday weekend, with social media messaging telling those taking flights to 'know before you go'. The August bank holiday last year saw the shutdown of the UK's automated air traffic control system operated by Nats, leading to delays and cancellations affecting 700,000 passengers. It also noted passenger numbers are approaching pre-COVID levels with almost 79 million passengers passing through UK airports in the second quarter of this year, up 7% on the same period in 2023.

Government approves London City airport's passenger increase

The UK government has approved London City airport's plans to increase its annual passenger cap from 6.5 million to nine million. This includes three extra flights in the first half hour of operations during the week but no increase in the permitted number of annual flights or infrastructure. The planning application also included a commitment that "only cleaner, quieter, next generation aircraft" would be allowed to fly in any extended operating periods. In the same submission, London City airport proposed extending its Saturday afternoon operating hours, but this was rejected.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Air Canada - Air Canada faces a strike threat by pilots from next month. Canada's Air Line Pilots Association, which represents more than 5,200 flight crew, said a strike mandate vote passed with 98% support on Thursday. The union has been negotiating with the airline for more than a year, with ongoing talks overseen by a federal conciliator.

Jet2 - Jet2.com has introduced their programme of winter city breaks for 2025/26, with the collection being their biggest yet. Customers booking a city break can choose a flight-only option with Jet2.com or an Atol-protected protected package holiday with Jet2CityBreaks. Flights to Athens, Barcelona, Budapest, Krakow, Paris, Prague, Rome, Vienna and Venice have been introduced across eight UK bases.

Qatar Airways - Qatar Airways has acquired a quarter share of South African regional carrier Airlink. The deal comes as the Doha-based airline seeks to expand operations across Africa. The investment in Johannesburg-based Airlink, which serves more than 45 destinations in 15 African countries with a fleet of 65 aircraft, will enhance a code-sharing partnership between the two airlines.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Exodus Adventure Travels - Exodus Adventure Travels has rejoined the Association of Touring and Adventure Suppliers to strengthen existing partnerships and explore new collaborations. "UK travel agents are vital to Exodus", said managing director, Sam Seward. "We have many long standing relationships with large consortia and small independents and have always believed in the quality of our connection with frontline agents being at the core of sustaining success."

First Class Holidays - Long-haul specialist First Class Holidays has added Japan to its portfolio, releasing a 100-page online brochure. Meanwhile, First Class has struck a partnership with Sports Tours International aimed at competitors in overseas marathons who wish to extend their stay. Packages include the Tokyo 2025 Marathon.

Travelopia - Travelopia Tailormade has reported a marked rise in repeat bookings for this summer and for winter sun holidays, presenting a 'captive market' for the trade to capitalise on. The group's three leading tour operator brands, Citalia, Sovereign Luxury Travel and American Holidays, have all highlighted the trend, with repeat bookings for all three brands for this summer up by as much as 40%.

Virgin Voyages - Virgin Voyages has added new eclipse voyages to its programme for 2026 as well as a range of longer cruises. The adults-only cruise line's new "marvellous voyages" will coincide with an expected total eclipse on 12 August 2026. In addition to the solar eclipse cruises, the line will operate six other sailings between March and August 2026, spanning Iceland to Istanbul, the British Isles to The Baltics.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Scheduling, drafts and analytics now available on Threads

Meta has launched several new features on Threads. The first is Threads analytics, which allows desktop users to view their account's performance metrics, including view counts, interaction insights, audience demographics and more. Another newly introduced feature is post scheduling, enabling users to plan content in advance on the app. The drafts feature has also been enhanced, with users now able to save up to 100 drafts.

Instagram launches Channel tagging

Instagram introduced Channels in February 2023 as a one-way broadcasting feature for creators to send updates to followers via DMs. The app has now added the ability to tag another creator when broadcasting, giving them access to your audience and potentially bringing some of theirs. You'll also be able to invite fans (members of your community) to chat with you in real time.

MICE UPDATE

WTM London 2024 conference programme announced

Organisers of World Travel Market London (WTM) have confirmed over 60 conference sessions for this year's conference, bringing together leading experts and ministers. The sessions are split into six conference tracks, curated by a panel of conference advisors. Topics include diversity, equity, accessibility & inclusion (DEAI), geo-economics, marketing, sustainability, travel trends and technology. Following a 29% increase in attendance across the conference sessions in 2023, this year the stages have increased in size. In addition, different days will be dedicated to specific topics, with sessions gathered into summits.

LIGHTER NOTE

This week a rare Super Blue Moon lit up skies around the UK and the rest of the world. [Here](#) are the best photos.