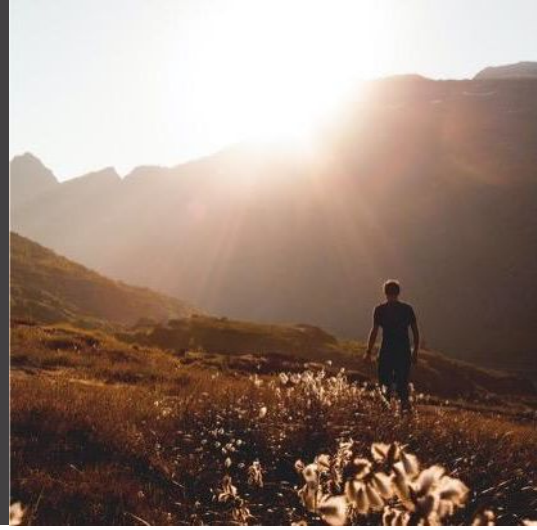


WEEKLY REPORT

29 November 2024



ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Voting starts in Irish general election

The polls have opened today (Friday) for the Irish general election. Voters are able to cast their ballot up until 22:00 pm local time to choose representatives to serve as Teachtaí Dála (TDs) in the Dáil, the lower house of the Oireachtas (Ireland's parliament). Voters will elect 173 TDs, as one seat in the Dáil goes to the Ceann Comhairle (Speaker). Eighty-eight TDs is the number required for an overall majority. The new TDs will represent 43 constituencies throughout the Republic of Ireland. More than 3.4 million people are registered to vote in the Republic of Ireland, and voters must be over 18 years of age, be an Irish or British citizen, be resident in Ireland, and be listed on the Irish Electoral Register. Election candidates include representatives from the three main parties - outgoing coalition partners Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and the leading opposition party in the outgoing Dáil, Sinn Féin. These parties are joined by many smaller parties and a significant number of independent candidates. The first sitting of the 34th Dáil is scheduled for Wednesday 18 December at 10:30. A government will be officially formed when the Dáil passes a vote to install a new taoiseach (Irish prime minister).

UK MPs hold debate on assisted dying as Parliament split ahead of historic vote

On Friday, MPs have the first opportunity to debate and vote on a proposed law to legalise assisted dying in England and Wales. The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, external was introduced by backbench Labour MP Kim Leadbeater. It is what's known as a private members' bill and would give terminally ill people the right to choose to end their life. It would be illegal to coerce someone into declaring they want to end their life, with a possible 14-year prison sentence. At present, laws throughout the UK prevent people from asking for medical help to die.

The first debate and vote on the bill is taking place in the House of Commons on Friday 29 November. If the bill passes, there are still many months of parliamentary activity before it can become law. If it's rejected, that's the end of the road. MPs have been given a free vote on the issue, which means they can make their own decision rather than follow party instructions. The government is impartial on the issue. It is not clear how many MPs will support the bill as most have not said publicly how they intend to vote.

Sycamore Gap saplings to spread 'hope' across UK

Saplings from the felled Sycamore Gap tree are being given to charities, groups and individuals as "trees of hope". A charity set up to remember schoolgirl Holly Newton in Hexham, Northumberland, and The Rob Burrow Centre for Motor Neurone Disease in Leeds are among 49 recipients across the UK. Each sapling represents a foot in height of the tree, which stood in a dip in Hadrian's Wall and was cut down in September 2023. They are being cared for by the National Trust's Plant Conservation Centre, and will be ready to plant out next winter. The charity invited organisations or individuals to bid for a sapling and had nearly 500 applications. The charity's Andrew Poad said it was "a privilege to read them". "They spoke of loss, hope and regeneration and each told heartfelt stories of people's connection to the tree and the importance of nature," he said. The saplings' new homes will all be publicly accessible.

Chancellor Reeves tells firms no more tax rises as she defends budgets

Chancellor Rachel Reeves has defended her recent tax rises on businesses, telling the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) that she would not be introducing further tax hikes or borrowing. Despite criticism, Reeves stood firm, saying the tax increases are necessary to stabilise public finances. Reeves announced a nearly £70bn rise in public spending, with over half funded by higher taxes, including a National Insurance rate increase for employers. She acknowledged businesses' concerns over the impact of higher taxes, rising minimum wages, and new workers' rights on jobs and the economy, but emphasized that her Budget provides the stability needed to move forward. Asked about further tax rises, Reeves stated, "We've put our public finances back on a firm footing" and assured that the budgets for public services are set for the remainder of the Parliament. Chancellor Rachel Reeves has made it clear that public services must now "live within their means," reaffirming that she will not resort to further borrowing or tax hikes.

TRADE UPDATE

UK government widens requirement for ETAs to enter the UK

As of Wednesday 27 November, all eligible non-European visitors will need to apply for Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) and will need one to travel to the UK from 8 January 2025. This includes six million visitors who pass through the border from the U.S, Canada and Australia each year. Eligible Europeans will need an ETA to travel to the UK from 2 April and will be able to apply from March 5. All travellers to the UK who do not need a visa for short stays and who do not already have a UK immigration status will need an ETA from April next year. This expansion follows the need for ETAs for arrivals from Gulf Cooperation Council nations earlier this year. More than 243,000 Gulf nationals were issued with ETAs in the first half of the year. The government noted that ETAs, available via a dedicated app, will “enhance security through new technology and make the UK border more efficient”.

Travellers from the UK are the least serious about sustainable travel, a new study claims

The research by Accor across seven European countries found that people in Italy and Germany take green travel most seriously, with 81% claiming these factors are important, followed by Spain (78%), Poland (77%), France (75%), the Netherlands (67%) and the UK (63%). One in five (20%) of the 8,000 travellers polled would avoid areas prone to extreme weather conditions due to climate concerns. They would also make personal behavioural choices to reduce their negative impacts including carrying re-usable bottles (36%), taking shorter showers to conserve water (35%), choosing locally-sourced and/or seasonal produce in restaurants (32%), as well as opting for independent businesses in local destinations (27%). Climate change and sustainable options are important to 73% of travellers, including a quarter who say these factors are very important. Cost represents the single biggest obstacle to consumers making more positive travel choices, with 46% saying that reducing the premium for sustainable options would make them more likely to revise their decisions.

Hundreds of flights cancelled in the UK as Storm Bert wreaks travel havoc

Hundreds of flights were grounded across the weekend as Storm Bert battered much of the UK. Heavy snow forced flights to be diverted and delayed at Newcastle airport on Saturday while London Heathrow suffered the highest number of cancellations. A total of 126 flights due to depart UK airports and 118 arrivals were cancelled on Saturday – 6% of the total, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium. Heathrow bore the brunt of cancellations across the weekend with 46 departures cancelled on Saturday and 88 by 11am on Sunday. The number of inbound flight cancellations at the London hub reached 48 on Saturday and 85 on Sunday. Sunday saw 121 departures and 117 arriving flights cancelled before midday, Cirium reported. Storm Bert's heavy winds, rain, and continued snow and icy conditions caused significant river and surface water flooding in parts of England on Sunday, especially in the South West, the West Midlands, and the Calder and Weaver Valleys in the north of England. Wind gusts reached 75mph in coastal areas and up to 65mph inland. At least 80 properties have so far been confirmed to have been flooded in England, while South Wales saw more than 100mm of rain in some places, resulting in widespread flooding.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Emirates - Emirates has unveiled its first Airbus A50-900 at an event in Dubai, two days after the airline ferried the widebody jet to the UAE. This is Emirates' first new aircraft type since 2008. The A350-900, registered as A6-EXA, arrived at Dubai International Airport on 25 November and features 3 spacious cabins classes, which can accommodate 312 travellers in 32 next-generation business class lie-flat, 21 premium economy and 259 economy class seats.

EasyJet- The low-cost airline and EasyJet Holidays has recorded a 34% increase in its annual profits. The year to September shows a pre-tax profit of £610 million compared to the previous 12 months which saw a profit of £455 million. During that period, EasyJet carried 7% more passengers, a total of 89.7 million across its network.

Etihad - Etihad Airways said its announcement of 10 new routes on Monday was a testament to its recent success in India, despite no Indian destinations being added to the list. Routes included Hong Kong, Algiers, Chiang Mai, Hanoi, Krabi, Phnom Penh, Taipei, Tunis, and Medan, coming into effect next year, as well as Atlanta, which Etihad highlights has a huge Indian market. "Atlanta is one of the five fastest growing regions in the US. The Metropolitan Atlanta and wider Georgia area is significant in terms of the Indian diaspora," said Arik De, the airline's chief commercial officer during a media roundtable on Monday.

Delta - Delta's first-of-its-kind partnership with Shake Shack will begin on flights out of Boston December 1, with plans for expansion to other US markets through 2025.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES AND OTA UPDATE

EasyJet Holidays - A strong performance by easyJet's package holidays arm helped fuel a surge in annual profits for the UK budget airline. The carrier today reported a pre-tax profit up by 34% year-on-year to £610 million. EasyJet saw total revenue for the year rise by 14% to £9.3 billion with passenger carryings of 89.7 million against 82.7 million the previous year. EasyJet holidays saw its profits soar by 56% to £190 million in the 12 months to 30 September as passenger levels rose by 36%. This took its UK market share from 5% to 7%, "executing strong progress towards the medium-term target of over £250 million profit before tax," the carrier said.

Jet2 - Jet2holidays has launched an AI-powered conversational search function for agents which it says will "differentiate us from the competition". The feature, called AI Conversational Search, was unveiled by director of digital James Malyon at the operator's annual conference in Paphos, Cyprus. Malyon said the new innovation, which is available to use from today, will "change the kinds of conversations you have with your customers and maximise your chances of getting a sale. "This is truly transformational; we're at the forefront of innovation with this technology, this hasn't been done before," Malyon told delegates. "We've all seen chatbots or OTAs delivering a searchable filter, but that's really bog-standard stuff and nobody wants more chatbots, everyone is sick of them. We wanted to give you something that will bring real tangible value to your experience."

Tui - Tui UK and Ireland has unveiled its largest ever collection of tours, with the summer 2026 range featuring 60 itineraries. The operator said tour bookings are up by 77% for summer 2025, adding “demand has never been bigger”. It has also introduced more ‘Tour & Stay’ packages, enabling customers to combine their tours with a beach stay. Phillip Iveson, commercial director, said: “We are incredibly excited to introduce our most comprehensive tour collection to date, designed to cater to a wide variety of travel interests. “With this launch, we’re focused on creating unique experiences that combine the thrill of adventure with the relaxation of a beach holiday, offering our customers the chance to truly connect with the places they visit knowing they can trust in the quality and service provided by Tui.”

SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram tests collage feature for Instagram Stories

Some Instagram users are seeing a new collage prompt to share multiple images from their camera roll to a Story. This new feature is testing a new free form way to create engaging content, allowing users to share more content in a visually creative way in just one Story.

Threads to show alternative feed options at the top of the display screen

Threads has introduced a new feature where a user's recommended ‘For you’ feed and ‘Following’ stream will now appear at the top of the display screen as well as their custom lists. Previously, users had to tap on the Threads icon to see alternative feeds, but can now easily swipe between them.

MICE UPDATE

Meetings Industry Association unveils essential Martyn’s Law guidance for business events sector

The Meeting Industry Association (MIA) has produced a practical guide to help the business meetings and events industry navigate the forthcoming Martyn’s Law. Working in partnership with leading security and risk management experts GSA Global, the trade association has compiled a step-by-step roadmap to help the sector stay ahead of the potential requirements, so it is ready when the law is enacted. The guide provides details on the existing legal frameworks that venues

must comply with to ensure the safety of their staff, visitors, and the general public, as well as information on the expected Martyn's Law. It also provides helpful information on the implications for varying sized venues alongside training checklists, risk assessment templates and communication protocols.

LIGHTER NOTE

Lighter note:

Baby pygmy hippo Moo Deng now has an official song in 4 languages, click [here](#) to see more.