

# WEEKLY BRIEFING

7 May 2021

## HB HIGHLIGHTS

This week, the Namibia PR team secured print coverage in *Arcadia Magazine* which focused on sustainable travel destinations across the world. The piece detailed how Namibia leads the way in Africa's conservation with its private nature reserves, wildlife initiatives and sustainable accommodations, making it easy for travellers to contribute to the country's sustainable growth.

Vienna Tourist Board and its Vienna Convention Bureau had lots to shout about this week as it unveiled a funding of €4million to support local and international meetings organisers, resulting in coverage across key MICE websites, e-newsletters and social media platforms. Ten pieces of coverage were secured for Meeting Destination Vienna including *CMW*, *M&IT*, *Association Meetings International*, *Event Industry News*, as well as in various European titles such as *Boardroom*, *HeadQuarters*, *Kongres* and *Meetings International* to name a few.

## COVID-19 UPDATE

The estimated R rate in the United Kingdom remains below 1.0, with the number of people testing positive continuing to fall. The number of deaths, within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test, as well as patients being admitted to hospital also fell 48.4% and 18.1% respectively from the previous week. The latest lockdown and the vaccination programme have successfully reduced cases, and as a result, deaths.

The UK has given a first vaccine dose to more than 34.9 million people. A further 16.3 million people have received a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, as the focus shifts to people in earlier priority groups receiving their booster injections. Scotland has vaccinated 98% of those aged 50 and over with at least one dose, while Northern Ireland has reached 93%, Wales 92% and England 95%.

In England, the first 'near-normal' concert since COVID-19 began took place in [Liverpool](#) on Sunday, with 5,000 music lovers crowding into a festival tent with no masks and no social distancing. The next official level of restrictions will ease no earlier than May 17 when indoor hospitality will reopen, large indoor performances

and sporting events with a capacity of 1,000 people will be allowed and outdoor large performances and sporting events will have a maximum capacity of 4,000 people.

In Wales, more restrictions were lifted this week with gyms, leisure centres and fitness facilities all reopening. An extended household rule also now allows two households to form an exclusive bubble and have contact indoors.

In Northern Ireland, more restrictions have been lifted this past week allowing garden gatherings to increase to 15 people, outdoor hospitality with a maximum of 6 people, takeaway and off-licence curfews removed and all retail, gyms and swimming pools reopening.

In Scotland, beer gardens, shops and cafes have now reopened, along with non-essential shops, gyms and swimming pools. Hospitality must close at 8pm indoors, with alcohol only allowed to be served outside. People are able to meet others for a meal or drink, with up to six people from two households allowed to socialise indoors in a public place.

In Ireland, from Monday close-contact services such as hairdressers can reopen and click-and-collect retail can resume. People can also travel outside their own county for the first time in more than four months, and team sports training can resume. Up to 50 people will be allowed to attend weddings, funerals and other religious services. Also, to allow grandparents meet their grandchildren and extended families, a vaccinated household can meet indoors with an unvaccinated one. Over 1.2 million people in Ireland have now received their first dose of the vaccine with almost a further 0.5 million having received their second dose.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### **UK to see strong economic uplift as vaccination success continues**

According to the Bank of England, the UK economy is set to grow at the fastest rate in more than 70 years. The economy is expected to expand by 7.25% this year, with extra government spending helping to limit job losses. The Bank expects the recovery to gather pace as the reopening of high streets paves the way for a mini-spending boom and consumer confidence having been boosted with the UK's rapid vaccination rollout.

## TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE

### **Government unveils "green list" of destinations**

Transport secretary Grant Shapps today cited vaccines and testing as the key to restarting international travel, as he unveiled which destinations would be on the government's "green list" for travel from 17 May. A total of 12 countries have been

have been added to the list, including Portugal, Gibraltar and Israel. Meanwhile Turkey, Nepal, the Maldives have been added to "red list". As outlined by the Global Travel Taskforce report, travellers to green list countries must take a pre-departure COVID-19 test before returning to England, and another test two days after returning. Shapps confirmed that the list would be reviewed every three weeks. He also reminded consumers to check the restrictions of the destination they are travelling to and to not book a holiday without a COVID-19 cancellation policy. He confirmed that vaccine records can be accessed via the NHS app, or with a paper certificate. A full list of destinations can be found via the Department for Transport.

### **Foreign Office drops advice against travel to some destinations**

The Foreign Office (FCDO) is no longer advising against non-essential travel to five Greek islands, most of Portugal, Malta, Israel and the Canary Islands. Recent updates to the government department's country-specific travel advice say the exemptions to its overarching advice against non-essential travel are "based on the current assessment of COVID-19 risks." Greek islands with exemptions to the 'do not travel' warning are Rhodes, Kos, Zakynthos, Corfu and Crete. The Canary Islands, which include Tenerife, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria and Fuerteventura, retain their exemption that has been in place since last year. When the travel corridor for the islands was removed in December, the FCDO advice exemption remained in place. The FCDO still advises against travel to the rest of Spain and Greece. For Portugal, the FCDO's advice remains in place for the autonomous archipelago of the Azores, but there are exemptions for the mainland, and the island of Madeira. The U.S. Virgin Islands has also been given an FCDO advice exemption. Travel is still currently not permitted until 17 May from England, and these exemptions are different to the destinations which will be included in the "green list", details of which are expected very soon.

### **Agents' sales rally as summer optimism grows**

Agents have reported some of their best sales days in months as optimism about travel this summer increases. Retailers said growing public confidence in the last week had led to a "definite shift" in bookings and enquiries for this year, which they expect to continue following the announcement of the government's 'green list' this week. Hays Travel noted "a significant shift towards more bookings for 2021" last week compared with previous weeks when more bookings were for 2022 onwards. The agency said enquiry levels were "particularly high" last week. Almost half (46%) of bookings by Hays' homeworkers were for 2021 compared with 33% through its shops. Similarly, The Advantage Travel Partnership reported 40% of members' sales last week were for 2021. Leisure director Kelly Cookes said: "Summer 2021 is definitely making a comeback." Miles Morgan Travel enjoyed its best Saturday in "a really long time" over the bank holiday weekend after its best week's trading in months. Meanwhile, Not Just Travel's sales over the bank holiday weekend were double the previous weekend. Last Friday (30 April) was the homeworking company's busiest

day since 26 February, and 42% of bookings last week were for summer 2021.

### **Biden and Johnson asked to open travel corridor**

The travel industry on both sides of the Atlantic has pleaded with U.S. president Joe Biden and prime minister Boris Johnson to open a UK-U.S. air corridor. In a letter to the White House and Downing Street, nearly 50 organisations and companies including the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), UKinbound, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) and Advantage argue that if travel restrictions are lifted by June, passenger numbers, buoyed by summer traffic, would approach 70% of 2019 levels by the end of this year. The letter urges Biden and Johnson to take steps ahead of the G7 summit in Cornwall, UK from 11-13 June. It argues there has been sufficient progress on vaccinations to consider opening a travel corridor. It added: "We commend the enormous success of your respective vaccine programmes. In the U.S., as of April 26, 36% of the adult population (age 16 and over) have been fully vaccinated, and 53% have received at least one dose of the vaccine. In the UK, as of April 26, 23% of the adult population (age 16 and over) have been fully vaccinated, and 62% have received at least one dose." The letter added all adults in both countries who wanted a vaccination were likely to have received at least their first dose by the end of July. "It is this success that now marks a significant opportunity for the UK and U.S. to lead the world by demonstrating how to re-open this crucial air corridor safely," it said.

### **TTG agent tracker reveals latest trends**

Agents have reported a spike in interest for U.S. and Canada trips, with new enquiries up by more than half in the last two weeks of April. Nearly half of all respondents to *TTG's* latest Travel Agent Tracker survey, (47%) received new enquiries for the region in the two weeks to Friday 30 April. This is up from just under a third (31%) in the two weeks to Friday 16 April. Bookings are up sharply too; 30% of respondents to the latest Tracker survey said they took new US and Canada bookings in the two weeks to 30 April, up from 20% earlier in the month.

## **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**Aer Lingus** - Aer Lingus is reinstating two of its key services this summer and will operate four times a week between Belfast City airport and Cardiff from 28 June, while Dublin-Cardiff will commence on 30 August, initially three times a week.

**Air Malta** - Air Malta has confirmed plans to operate to Heathrow and Manchester this summer as the island prepares to be among the first to welcome UK visitors. The airline plans to run up to 10 flights a week from the London airport and twice-weekly services from Manchester from this month. Air Malta's executive chairman David Curmi said: "We are happy to note the gradual increase of consumer confidence and propensity to travel this summer."

**Jet2** - Jet2.com and Jet2CityBreaks have responded to "strong demand" for Iceland by bringing forward a flight programme to the beginning of September. Iceland is strongly expected to be on the government's Green List, prompting Jet2.com to commence flights on 2 September from Manchester, operating twice weekly. From 30 September, two flights a week from Birmingham will run until 22 November. Next year, Manchester services will restart from 10 February 2022, operating until 10 November, as well as from 10 February until 25 April 2022 from Birmingham. In addition, Jet2.com and Jet2CityBreaks will operate 37 three and four-night dedicated trips to Iceland from Belfast International, East Midlands, Leeds Bradford, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle and Stansted.

## TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

**Advantage Travel Partnership** - Advantage Travel Partnership has created a toolkit for members ahead of the expected reopening of international travel on 17 May. The consortium has collaborated with destinations to launch a series of country campaigns that will dovetail into its wider 'Say hello again to...' campaign. Advantage has already partnered with Italy, Madeira, Morocco, Tenerife and Gran Canaria to create B2C and B2B material and is in discussions with other tourist boards. The consortium has also created customer magazines and booklets, plus email marketing opportunities including offers. There is also ready-made blog content and digital assets for agents to use across their own social media pages as well as video content for in-store televisions and agents' websites and social media channels, all underpinned by the safety messaging of Advantage Travel Partnership.

**Cox & Kings** - Upmarket operator Cox & Kings has launched its Small Group Tours 2022-23 preview brochure early to cater for consumer demand. The operator has reported longer lead times for bookings, from an average of three months to 10 months. It is also seeing demand for certain destinations such as Latin America, India, Middle East and the Far East, and types of tours such as arts, culture and solo travel. Kerry Golds, managing director of Cox & Kings, said: "With pent-up demand and limited capacity at peak travel times, we recognise the desire for travellers to secure their tour spot early. Our clients are telling us they wanted to make up for lost time and ensure they didn't miss out – that's why we've launched our preview brochure now with dates for all our top-selling tours into 2023."

**Holidaysplease** - First-time customers are driving the majority of homeworking agency Holidaysplease's new sales, according to director Richard Dixon. More than 60% of the business' April sales were from customers new to the business, said Dixon, with people booking mainly for 2022 and beyond. Dixon said a combination of higher average sale prices and improved net margin had driven up the team's overall commission earnings by more than 20% compared with April 2019. April

enquiry numbers were up 10% compared with April 2019, which Dixon said was evidence of the business's ongoing efforts to generate new opportunities in the marketplace for homeworkers. Average sale value, meanwhile, is up 71% on the same period two years ago, to £7,615, while April sales revenue is up 13% on April 2019. Net margin is up 7%.

**Travelsphere** - Travelsphere and Just You have extended their discounts, offers and reassurance guarantee to cover bookings made until 30 September. Escorted touring specialist Travelsphere has extended an early bird booking offer of up to £300 off per couple – and solos operator Just You is extending its early booking discount of £100 on selected 2022 holidays. Low deposits of £21 and a 21% saving on travel insurance, including policies with COVID-19 cover on 2022 holidays has also been extended to cover bookings made up to the end of September. These offers were first launched in January alongside a £21 trade incentive for agents making bookings in peaks.

**TUI** - TUI has announced it will offer COVID-19 testing packages this summer when international tourism resumes. The company has announced plans to offer the testing packages from £20pp for destinations classified as green under the government's traffic light system to restart travel from 17 May. Testing packages for amber countries will be priced from £50pp. TUI said it was "subsidising the cost of testing to help customers travel again this summer" through the testing package deals which are being offered through specialist provider Chronomics.

## SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

### **Instagram launches new caption sticker for Stories**

Instagram has officially launched its new caption sticker for Stories, providing increased accessibility for those who are hard of hearing or are watching with no sound. When a user adds the new caption sticker to a captured video, Instagram will auto-generate text captions based on the audio input. The auto-captions will not be 100% accurate, but users will be able to edit the text, as well as the colour, position and font. Instagram has also said that this new development will also be available for Reels soon.

### **Twitter opens Spaces to all users with 600 followers or more**

Twitter has announced that its Clubhouse-like Spaces feature is now being made available to all users with over 600 followers. As explained by Twitter, "We're bringing the ability to host a Space to all accounts with 600 or more followers. Based on what we've learned so far, these accounts are likely to have a good experience hosting live conversations because of their existing audience."



**MICE UPDATE****5,000-cap Barcelona pilot show had no impact on COVID-19 spread**

Organisers have found that there was “no sign” of increased COVID-19 infections following a pilot test event with 5,000 attendees in Barcelona. The event, organised by Festivals per la Cultura Segura, had no requirements for social distancing, but attendees were required to wear a provided FFP2 face mask. Other health and safety measures included enhanced ventilation in the venue and crowd separation methods. Researchers found that in the 14 days following the event, only six attendees tested positive and four of them were deemed to have caught the virus somewhere other than the event. The researchers confirmed that there is no sign that suggests transmission took place during the event.

**FURTHER READING**

1. *The Guardian* reveals that tour operator, TUI, is set to offer £20 COVID-19 tests for people travelling to countries on the green list this summer, saving families huge holiday costs. Read the full article [here](#)
2. Simon Calder at [independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk) answers the key questions regarding the new traffic light system following the release of the list. Find out more [here](#)
3. *FT.com* features a series of horseback journeys around the world which free the mind and allow the spirit to soar. The articles can be read [here](#)

**LIGHTER NOTE**

A confused man finds a hidden dishwasher in his home where he has been living for the last two years – see it [here](#).