

WEEKLY BRIEFING

14 May 2021



HB HIGHLIGHTS

The Destination Puerto Rico team organised for freelancer, Ruaridh Nicoll, to travel to and report on what tourists can expect from the island for the Financial Times. In a comprehensive piece titled 'Resilience and exuberance in Puerto Rico' the island is celebrated as emerging as one of the strongest recovery stories in the travel industry.

Creativity in the MICE sector is also coming into the fore. The Vienna PR team secured a print interview opportunity with Christian Woronka, director of the Vienna Convention Bureau in leading MICE outlet, Conference & Meetings World. The article positions Vienna as an authoritative voice in the MICE sector and is leading by example, as showcased in the recent success story of the European Congress of Radiology event which is usually held in Vienna but was a virtual-only event this year. The full interview can be read [here](#) (pgs 40-41).

COVID-19 UPDATE

The estimated R rate in the United Kingdom remains somewhere between 0.8 and 1.0, with the latest growth rate at -3%. The number of deaths, within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test, as well as patients being admitted to hospital has fallen 16% and 7.9% 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 35.9 million people, totalling 68.2% of the population. A further 18.9 million people (35.9% of the population) have received a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, as the focus shifts to people in earlier priority groups receiving their booster injections. People aged 38 and over are now being invited for their first COVID-19 vaccine across the UK.

Vaccines have saved 11,700 lives and stopped 33,000 people becoming seriously ill, Public Health England analysis suggests. The research – covering the vaccination programme to the end of April – found people in their 70s and 80s had seen the biggest reduction in deaths and hospital admissions.

On Monday, the UK government announced that holidays abroad will be allowed from 17 May for people in England and Scotland. Both countries have adopted a "traffic light" system for foreign travel, indicating how safe a holiday destination is. Portugal and Israel are currently among the government's "green list" of countries, from where travellers won't have to quarantine upon their return. People in Wales are being advised to only travel abroad for "essential" reasons for at least another three weeks. Northern Ireland has not yet announced plans to restart foreign holidays.

England welcomes "step three" of the UK's roadmap from Monday, with pubs, bars, cafes and restaurants being allowed to serve customers indoors. Other changes include: people can meet in groups of up to 30 outdoors; six people or two households can meet indoors, with overnight stays allowed; indoor entertainment such as museums, cinemas and children's play areas can open; hotels, hostels and B&Bs can reopen.

In Wales, pubs, cafes and restaurants can open inside from Monday, and up to six people from different households will be able to meet there. However social distancing remains, with people who don't live together still having to keep two metres apart.

People in Northern Ireland will have to wait until 24 May to see more restrictions lifted, but recent changes have included the resumption of outdoor team training and increased visitation hours for care home residents.

From Monday, most of mainland Scotland is moving to level two restrictions (with the "very likely" exception of Moray, where infection rates remain high). Social distancing will be dropped between families and friends in homes and private gardens, hospitality venues can serve alcohol indoors until 22:30, entertainment venues such as cinemas, theatres and bingo halls will reopen, and up to 100 allowed to attend indoor events, 250 will be able to attend outdoor events, or 500 with seating. The Scottish islands – apart from Skye – will be moving to level one restrictions on 17 May (it is hoped the rest of Scotland will follow on 7 June).

In Ireland, from Monday, all non-essential shops can open, with further restrictions set to ease in June. 10.3% of the Irish population has now been fully vaccinated against the virus.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

The economy of the EU will bounce back more quickly than expected, owing in part to the quickening pace of its vaccination programme after a "slow start", the European Commission has forecast.

The commission expects UK GDP to rise by 5% in 2021 and by 5.3% in 2022, noting that "the rollout of vaccinations has progressed rather quickly". The latest forecasts

published by the Bank of England last week suggest economic growth in the UK will reach 7.25% in 2021 and 5.75% in 2022.

The commission expects the UK to hit pre-pandemic levels by the third quarter of 2022, whilst the Bank of England believes the UK will be back at early 2020 levels by the end of this year.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE

Consumer confidence spikes after “green list” reveal

Consumer confidence has spiked after the government last week (Friday 7 May) revealed its first quarantine-free “green list” of potential summer holiday destinations. Jet2.com and Jet2holidays said on Tuesday (11 May) its data highlighted a significant increase in consumer confidence following the announcement. More than half of those surveyed by the airline and operator (52%) said they felt confident about booking and travelling for leisure this summer and beyond, an eight percentage point week-on-week increase to the highest level recorded by Jet2 since March. Meanwhile, 55% said they were eager to travel as soon as they can. Jet2 said confidence had increased since March owing to a number of factors, chiefly the Prime Minister’s roadmap announcement and the formation of the Global Travel Taskforce, but also the sustained pace of the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out and destinations suggesting they would be open to welcoming British visitors this summer.

TravelSupermarket and Icelolly.com to join forces

Holiday comparison websites, TravelSupermarket and Icelolly.com, are set to combine into a new standalone business. TravelSupermarket’s owner, Moneysupermarket.com Group, said that the deal would enable “stronger and broader travel comparison services across both brands”. Both TravelSupermarket and Icelolly.com will be retained as separate brands following the deal. Icelolly’s chief executive, Richard Singer, will lead a “common” management team across both brands. Peter Duffy, chief executive of Moneysupermarket Group, said: “The combination of TravelSupermarket and Icelolly.com will benefit customers of both brands with a richer and more diversified offer as the travel and holiday markets recover.”

Airline chiefs urge UK and U.S. leaders to talk

UK and U.S. airline chiefs have called for a summit between their two governments in order to restart transatlantic travel. The bosses of British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, American Airlines, Delta, United and JetBlue have signed a letter to both countries’

transport departments warning the industry “needs adequate lead time” to recommence flights, Reuters said. The chiefs say the scheduling of crews and aircraft plus marketing and selling tickets mean adequate warning is needed to resume services. The calls came as the U.S. government softened its advice on travel to the UK. The UK has been moved from level four “do not travel” to level three “reconsider travel”. It was among a number of countries reclassified by the U.S. Department of State on Monday (10 May), although around three-quarters are still at level four.

AIRLINE UPDATE

British Airways - British Airways (BA) is to trial a new “ultra-rapid” COVID-19 test that can give results within 25 seconds in the hope that it can be a “game changer” for the successful resumption of international travel. The new antigen or lateral flow COVID-19 saliva test, created by medical technology specialist, Canary Global, is designed to detect both those with and without symptoms of COVID-19. BA will invite flight and cabin crew to take the Pelican COVID-19 Ultra Rapid Mobile test with the results compared with those from existing tests already taken by staff. Users put a saliva sample into a disposable sensor unit, shake and insert it into a reusable digital reader, which is connected to smartphones and other devices through Bluetooth, with the results appearing through a mobile app. Sean Doyle, BA’s chief executive, said: “As we start to see the opening up of travel we remain committed to exploring easy and affordable testing solutions to help our customers travel again, whether it’s for business, to reunite with family and friends or take a much-needed break abroad. We think this new ultra-rapid test is a game changer so we are delighted to work with the team at Canary to begin initial trials with our flight and cabin crew, before exploring what role it could play as a customer testing option.”

Meanwhile, BA has said it will offer more than 90,000 extra seats to Greece, Spain and Turkey this summer, with new services available from mid-June. The move comes in anticipation of the UK government broadening its initial “green list” to include more traditional holiday destinations. It comes as the airline launched a new tool to highlight to passengers what is required for travel to the UK from red, amber or green list destinations, which can be found [here](#).

easyJet - easyJet has added an extra 25,000 seats to “green list” destinations on sale, mainly to Portugal, pushing total seat capacity past 100,000. The airline says it is now offering 1.65 million seats from 10 UK airports to “green list” destinations this summer. It has also upped package holiday capacity in response to demand. It has added extra Faro capacity from Belfast, Bristol, Gatwick, Liverpool, Luton and

Manchester; Lisbon from Gatwick and Luton; Porto from Bristol, Gatwick, Luton and Manchester; and Funchal (Madeira) from Bristol and Gatwick. easyJet has also created a new traffic light information page to help customers assess any COVID-19 travel requirements and plan their travel accordingly. "Pent-up demand shows Brits want to travel to green destinations this summer," said the airline.

Jet2 - Jet2.com and Jet2holidays has upped Portugal capacity this summer in response to the country making the first iteration of the UK government's travel "green list". The airline and operator has put extra Faro and Madeira flights and holidays on sale from England and Scotland following the announcement last Friday.

SAS - SAS, Scandinavian Airlines has announced the launch of a new direct connection between Heathrow and Lulea airport, for winter 2021-22. It is the only direct flight connection between Swedish Lapland and the UK, and the three-hour flight will be operated by Airbus A320 aircraft.

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic is set to offer green and amber COVID-19 test packages covering some of its destinations. Round-trip bundles are initially offered for Grenada, Israel and Nigeria, starting from £152 for an Israel test kit. Bundles for amber destinations are £226. The airline has a partnership with test provider, Prenetics, which will deliver test kits before departure. A PCR and lateral flow test for the U.S. is also offered, at £171, but Prenetics does not provide a pre-departure test, as the U.S. requires these to be in-person or administered at home via a video tutorial. Virgin said it had other providers to do this.

Wizz Air - Wizz Air is to add new services to Rome from Luton and Liverpool John Lennon airports for summer 2021. Both routes to Rome Fiumicino airport are due to start on 1 July – Luton flights will operate six times per week, whilst there will be three weekly Liverpool services.

TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

Caribtours - People still want to travel to destinations on the government's "amber list" ahead of the next traffic light review despite government advice against doing so for leisure, according to Paul Cleary, chief executive of Caribtours. Cleary predicted that 50-60% of travellers who had booked departures on 23 May to the end of August will still travel. He said the government's latest announcement has made the process of booking "even more confusing" and said his interpretation of amber was that travel is allowed as long as the FCDO does not advise against travel.

Kuoni - Kuoni has announced that it will be launching new COVID-19 test holiday packages. UK boss, Derek Jones, said he believed PCR tests still remained one of the biggest challenges facing the industry and said he was concerned the infrastructure would not be able to cope if a major destination was placed on the "green list". Jones admitted Kuoni's customers were more concerned about arranging the tests in time for their holiday departure rather than their cost, especially for destinations demanding tests be carried out 72 hours beforehand.

On the Beach - On the Beach is no longer taking new bookings for holidays departing before September owing to the ongoing lack of certainty around whether newly-booked trips will be able to go ahead without disruption or cancellation. The OTA has extended its current off-sale period from 30 June to 31 August after the majority of its core destinations were categorised amber under the government's new traffic light system.

TUI - TUI Group continues to anticipate a strong 2021 holiday season, with 70% of respondents in a recent survey stating they want to travel this year. Summer 2021 bookings remain at a "high level" of 2.6 million, with strong demand growth in recent weeks and average prices up 22%. Capacity for the core months of the 2021 summer programme remained equivalent to around 75% of the 2019 summer programme, and "the pick-up in demand is clearly evident in recent weeks", with new bookings doubling since April. Bookings for summer 2022, were also showing a good trend, Tui said, with UK bookings up 109% since the end of March.

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

Instagram adds new 'pronouns' option to maximise inclusion

Instagram added a new 'pronouns' option for profiles this week, which lets users select up to four pronouns so that people know how they should be referred to within interactions. Users can edit or remove their chosen pronouns at any time, as well as choose whether their pronouns listing is shown to everyone, or just their followers. This new feature is part of Instagram's broader push to maximise inclusion, and ensure that all users are able to represent themselves as they choose on the platform.

Clubhouse launches Android version of app

Clubhouse has announced that its Android version is currently in beta testing in the U.S., with a wider launch coming soon. However, the Android app does have some significant limitations including the lack of options to follow topics, the inability to create or manage clubs, and no capacity to update a name or username in the app. Although this latest version of Clubhouse faces challenges, it is a critical step for the next stage of its development.

MICE UPDATE

Indoor events return from 17 May

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has confirmed that 17 May will mark the activation of "step three" of England's roadmap out of lockdown, including a return to indoor live events. Business events such as conferences, trade shows, exhibitions, gala dinners as well as corporate hospitality are all permitted, with no requirement for COVID-19-status certification. Event capacity is limited to 1,000 people or 50% of venue capacity. Catering can also be provided for permitted events, including business events and private dining.

FURTHER READING

With just three days to go until travel can resume, Cathy Adams at [independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk) goes live to answer questions about what to expect from 17 May. Join the conversation [here](#).

FT.com reveals that Airbnb's chief executive has predicted the "travel rebound of the century" as the home-rental company reported first-quarter revenues that pointed to a strong recovery in the U.S. holiday market. Read more [here](#).

It seems there are more changes afoot at publishing house, Condé Nast. In an open letter from Condé Nast's global editorial leads and deputies, the team talk about creating a multi-platform digitally led media company targeting a global audience. The full letter can be found [here](#).

LIGHTER NOTE

Man builds his cat its own tiny bedroom, complete with a TV, for £14 – see it [here](#).