

# WEEKLY BRIEFING

2 July 2021

## HB HIGHLIGHTS

The Brand USA PR team worked closely with freelance journalist, Tamara Hinson, on a round-up of iconic all-American experiences for the [independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk), to celebrate Independence Day. Tamara highlights a number of themes including the 30th anniversary of the film *Thelma & Louise*, Major League Baseball and Amtrak's 50th anniversary. The round-up can be read [here](#).

## COVID-19 UPDATE

The UK has seen a rise in COVID-19 infections over the last seven days owing to the more infectious Delta variant. Despite this, hospital admissions and deaths within 30 days of a COVID-19 test have risen at a much slower rate compared to the rate of infection at 10.7% and 11.4% respectively in the last seven days. This is due to the impact of the COVID-19 vaccine roll out.

The UK vaccination scheme has been ramped up in order to curb the rising cases. 85.2% of the UK adult population has received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and a further 62.7% have now been fully vaccinated. This accounts for a total of 77.9 million vaccines given in the UK. Everybody over 18 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are now eligible for the vaccine whilst everybody over 30 in Scotland are eligible. Second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine are also being accelerated for all over 40s. Individuals can now receive their second dose eight weeks after the first (down from twelve weeks earlier in the roll out). Public Health England claims that the vaccine has saved more than 13,000 UK lives and is also crucial in stopping the spread of the virus.

Prime minister, Boris Johnson, remains upbeat about easing lockdown in England on 19 July, hoping that England will return to as close to the pre-pandemic status quo as possible on that date. Boris Johnson said he would set out in the next few days what step four of the roadmap out of lockdown will look like. He added some

"extra precautions" may still be needed and urged patience over the possibility of scrapping isolation for whole bubbles in schools. Johnson also said double jabs would be "a liberator" for foreign travel. In addition, the UK saw a new health secretary appointed, Sajid Javid, due to the resignation of the previous health secretary, Matt Hancock. Sajid Javid supports the plan to return England to economic normality on 19 July and believes the UK needs to "learn to live with COVID-19".

Scotland first minister Nicola Sturgeon has confirmed that lockdown easing would be paused for three weeks to allow more time for people to be vaccinated in Scotland. This means mainland areas will not move to the lowest level zero restrictions until 19 July but the hope is that the remaining rules will be lifted on 9 August. Ms Sturgeon said this would allow life in Scotland to return to "almost complete normality". The government will not advise an immediate return to full office working on that date and people will still be required to wear face masks in some settings.

In Wales, Conservatives have called for a dated plan to end lockdown rules and restrictions. First minister Mark Drakeford (part of the Labour Party) has held off lifting restrictions amid concerns over the Delta variant. Mr Drakeford's government said its approach to reopening was led by the data and not "by artificial dates". Welsh Conservative leader Andrew Davies said a plan was needed, given that the data shows the number of people in hospital with COVID-19 has fallen to a record low.

Ireland has delayed the reopening of indoor hospitality, which was due to happen on 5 July. The Taoiseach (Micheál Martin) has said that this is the right decision. When indoor hospitality does reopen, only those who are fully vaccinated or have recovered from COVID-19 will be able to eat or drink indoors. Ireland's chief medical officer said, without this measure, indoor hospitality could have remained shut beyond September. Martin said he had spoken to Scottish first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, who told him the Delta variant would affect the unvaccinated population. "All their eggs are in the vaccination basket - they are 60% vaccinated," he said. He went on to say that there are hopes the link between cases and the number of people in hospital is being broken, but so far this remains uncertain. "We don't want to divide society, we want to protect people," he told RTÉ.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### **Sunak outlines UK roadmap for financial services**

Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, pledged yesterday (1 July) to make the UK the most "advanced and exciting" financial services hub in the world. Speaking at Mansion House, he outlined a roadmap for the sector that aims to "sharpen" its competitive advantage. Mr Sunak also set out a plan to force companies to report their environmental impact and say how climate change is likely to affect them. The new Integrated Sustainability Disclosures Requirements will apply to firms "across the economy", the Treasury said. "As the baton passes to a new generation of leaders in finance, I feel optimistic about the future. Ambitious at home. Confident internationally," the chancellor said.

## TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE

### **Plans for fully-vaccinated travellers to avoid quarantine**

Prime minister Boris Johnson has said the government would be "setting out the details over the course of the next few days" for its plans to allow fully-vaccinated Britons to avoid quarantine when returning from an amber list country. He went on to say that he is "very confident" the UK's vaccination programme will enable Britons to travel abroad this summer, describing having both vaccine jabs as "a liberator". "There's no doubt that once you have got two jabs you are in a much better position," Johnson told *Sky News*. "Everybody who is frustrated about travel over the summer, double jabs will be a liberator." He further stressed that international travel this year will "not be like every other [year]" due to COVID-19 and people shouldn't expect overseas tourism to be "hassle-free".

Meanwhile transport secretary Grant Shapps declined to put a timetable on plans to introduce quarantine-free travel from amber countries for people who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Last week, the government revealed plans to change the policy later this summer to allow travellers who have received both doses of a vaccine to be exempted from the current 10-day quarantine on return from amber countries. Mr Shapps would not give a timetable for the implementation of this change though, when pressed by MPs in the House of Commons on Tuesday (29 June), citing "complexities" such as whether children will be vaccinated or not. An update on the policy is expected in July. "This is a complicated policy that requires time to work through," said Shapps. "First, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has yet to opine on whether children should be part of a vaccination programme. They are not at present, and we must resolve how

children would therefore be treated under a programme that enabled people to travel without vaccinations." Shapps added there were questions about how the system would treat younger people yet to receive two doses of a vaccine, as well as those who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons.

### **Green list announcement sees small uptick in bookings**

News of an expanded green list last week led to reports of a sales spike for the trade but agents claimed it was not significant enough to save the summer season. Operators reported an immediate sales surge after last week's green list additions, with Jet2holidays saying Balearics bookings for July were up more than 3,000%, and Malta and Madeira up 1,500% after being put on the green list. Chief executive Steve Heapy said people were "flocking to book" but cautioned it was a "small step in the right direction". Saga Holidays, Kuoni, Caribtours and Sandals' UK operator Unique Caribbean Holidays cited "huge demand" as Caribbean destinations joined the list. Advantage Travel Partnership members reported a shift in demand to July. Leisure director Kelly Cookes called the news a "morale boost", but warned the additions were "not enough to sustain the industry" this summer. She said an increase in "confusing" restrictions in key destinations since Thursday had "increased customer concern" and "[made] it difficult for agents to sell in volume" by adding "another layer of complexity for the family market".

### **Travel Day of Action media coverage 'reaches 12m people'**

Last week's national Travel Day of Action lobby reached more than 12 million people via Twitter with 13,000 mentions. The travel trade gatherings at Westminster, Holyrood in Edinburgh, Stormont in Belfast and a virtual lobby in Wales last week generated more than 1,300 media mentions, according to the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). "There was great engagement from the 50 MPs attending to hear what we need – financial support for a safe return of international travel," AITO tweeted.

## **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**British Airways** - British Airways, along with Lufthansa, has implemented a scheme which allows travellers to make a flight reservation by paying a deposit and then settling the balance a few weeks before departure. According to a study, 39% of respondents said the "pay when you fly" (PWYF) option is the most appealing payment method. The report, carried out by Opinium on behalf of travel technology company Amadeus, claims 46% of 5,000 travellers said "refund uncertainty" was their top concern with overseas travel. Around 4,000 respondents said the increased risk of cancellations due to the pandemic is a barrier to booking travel this year. According to Amadeus, the PWYF scheme "could boost industry revenues

with travellers willing to spend 36% more per trip on average". Bart Tompkins, managing director of payments for Amadeus, said the travel industry "needs to build confidence at every opportunity".

**easyJet** - easyJet has agreed a deal with high street pharmacy Boots to offer a range of COVID-19 tests to meet requirements for international travel. The partnership will allow the airline's customers to connect directly from the easyJet website to Boots' COVID-19 testing hub. Boots has more than 200 branches around the UK offering in-store COVID-19 tests to meet both pre- and post-travel requirements. In-store PCR tests cost £85 with results provided the next day, while an at home "self-swab" PCR test is priced at £65 from 500 stores or online through the Boots website with results produced within 24-48 hours of the test arriving at the lab. The pharmacist is an accredited provider for the government's Test to Release scheme, offering next day results for those wishing to reduce their home quarantine by taking a voluntary test on the fifth day.

**Jet2** - Jet2.com and Jet2holidays have restarted flight and holiday programmes from all UK bases to European green list destinations. Flights departed from Belfast International, Birmingham, East Midlands, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds Bradford, Stansted, Manchester, and Newcastle on Thursday (1 July) to the Balearic Islands and Madeira. Today (2 July), the carrier will launch operations from Bristol to Majorca and Menorca. The company reported July bookings to the Balearic Islands had increased by 3,000%, with Madeira bookings jumping by around 1,500%. Steve Heapy, chief executive of Jet2.com and Jet2holidays, said the operator was aware of the "pent-up" demand from customers and agents to travel abroad.

## TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

**Click&Go** - Click&Go, Ireland's leading online travel agent, has released its latest Travel Sentiment Survey, providing valuable information on when and where Irish consumers will travel as we begin to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and resume international travel. The survey sample was 2,496 respondents between the ages of 18 and 65, with the majority of respondents aged 35 or higher. Those surveyed were keen to travel again, with 26% of the respondents stating that they would be planning a holiday outside Ireland in September of this year and 22% stating that they would travel in October.

**dnata** - One of dnata brands, Gold Medal, is seeing 80% of its bookings being made for 2022. Destinations which are popular include the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Florida and New York. There has also been an uptick for immediate travel in

response to green list announcements from the UK government. Meanwhile, cruise bookings are popular for 2023 and 2024.

**Explore** - Adventure operator Explore has added an extra departure for its Walking Scotland's Orkney Islands tour in response to "huge demand". The operator said that demand for domestic adventure holidays has "soared" because of continuing uncertainty about overseas destinations and the government's green list. The new Orkney Islands trips were launched in spring and 2021 dates sold out quickly, so the new departure on 20 September 2021 is also expected to sell out swiftly. Another recent addition to the Explore domestic portfolio is a new three-centre week-long walking holiday in Scotland's northwest Highlands and Skye. Other UK departures are also selling fast, especially trips to the Lake District, the South Downs and north Wales.

**Newmarket Holidays** - Newmarket Holidays has unveiled its 2021-2022 river cruise brochure, featuring 16 itineraries with its A-Rosa style boats. The operator's 84-page brochure – created in partnership with the German river line – includes a new Classic Rhine and Moselle Cruise, a themed Rhine in Flames option and a Christmas on the Southern Rhine sailing. Up to two excursions are now included with the cruises in the brochure, which also features departures on A-Rosa's new part-electric E-Motion ship, which is due to launch next spring.

**Saga** - The expansion of the government's green list of destinations triggered a spike in the number of searches and bookings on the Saga Holidays website. No specific booking data was revealed but the over-50s operator described Madeira, Spain and Sicily as top sellers while requests for brochures rose by 67% over the past week. The company claimed a rise in searches to destinations such as Madeira and the Balearic islands which have been on the green 'watchlist' since Wednesday. Saga Holidays chief executive Chris Simmonds said: "Our customers are so looking forward to going on holiday again. They were early in the queue for both vaccines and are looking for some warmth, a change of scenery and new experiences. Our customer research has found that our travellers want to go away for longer to make up for more than 15 months at home and that their financial security has improved, so they want to spend their money on enjoying themselves with a great holiday."

**TUI** - Tui has cancelled all holidays to more than a dozen destinations as it makes plans in line with latest Foreign Office (FCDO) travel advice. The UK's largest tour operator is no longer operating until at least 21 July to the following destinations: Aruba; Bulgaria; Cape Verde; Costa Rica; Croatia; Cyprus; Dominican Republic; Egypt; the Greek destinations of Halkidiki, Kefalonia, Preveza, Samos, Santorini, Skiathos, Thassos and Crete (Chania, not Heraklion); Italy; Jamaica; mainland Spain

and La Palma; Mexico; Morocco; Tunisia and Turkey. All holidays to TUI Lakes & Mountains destinations have also been suspended until at least 21 July. Additionally, TUI has cancelled all holidays which include non-TUI flights to Canada, India, Indonesia, Kenya, the Maldives, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, Tobago, the United Arab Emirates and the U.S. – up to and including 21 July. The changes follow Thursday's additions to the UK government's green list, which included Spain's Balearic Islands, Malta, Portuguese archipelago Madeira and some Caribbean islands.

**Virgin Voyages** - New adult-only cruise line Virgin Voyages has become the latest supplier to announce it will join trade marketing body Tipto. It follows recent news that Carnival Cruise Line is to rejoin Tipto after a two year gap. Both companies will form part of Tipto from September, the start of the organisation's 23rd year. Tipto currently has nine members but hopes to have at least 12 by September, with several additions still in the pipeline. Virgin Voyages plans to promote its brand and itineraries through Tipto to agents and homeworkers nationwide through events and online to complement its own plans for agency visits, webinars and its Seacademy e-learning programme.

## SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

### **Facebook tests new reels and rooms**

In a bid to compete with the continuing rise of TikTok, Facebook may be close to giving Instagram Reels more exposure by integrating a Reels clips display directly into the Facebook app. A new display option at the top of the Stories panel would give users the option to see an alternative feed display of either Stories, Instagram Reels, or in-progress video and audio rooms. This would also boost discovery of Facebook's new audio rooms which is in live testing with selected creators and groups. In addition to this, the company is developing a new option to create Reels on Facebook.

### **Instagram launches test of image/video uploads for the desktop**

Instagram is launching a live test of the capability to publish feed posts from the desktop version of the app. This would enable users to access the full suite of upload and posting options including image formatting tools and filters. It will not facilitate Stories or Reels uploads at this stage, but IGTV uploads are also in the works, suggesting that full posting functionality is coming in the future.

## MICE UPDATE

### **Second pilot business event confirmed**

The Home and Gift Buyers' Festival and the Manchester Furniture Show at Harrogate Convention Centre has been chosen as part of the Government's Events Research Programme (ERP) pilot, which is being managed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The event will run 18-21 July, overlapping the 19 July in which the Government targets the lifting of restrictions. Harrogate Convention Centre will host both shows, which run from 18-21 July, following a major conversion back to its regular use, after being a stand-by 500-bed NHS Nightingale Hospital.

## LIGHTER NOTE

MY toy! Hilarious moment Oliver the cat takes over baby bouncer and leaves child to play on the floor. See it [here](#).