

WEEKLY REPORT

14 April 2022



COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 in the UK has decreased in the last seven days, by 36.8%. Meanwhile, the number of patients admitted to hospital has also dropped, by 4.2%. With regard to the vaccination rollout, 92.1% of people aged 12 and above have received their first dose, 86.2% their second and a further 67.8% of the population have received their booster dose. Free mass testing for the majority of people in the UK was removed on 1 April.

The Scottish government has announced this week that advice for people to take routine LFTs if they have no symptoms will end from Monday 18 April. Regular asymptomatic testing in workplaces and education settings - including schools and universities - will end on this date, too. This has come into effect due to the success of the vaccination programmes and treatments.

A law requiring workplaces in Wales to take precautions for COVID-19 will be axed from Monday 18 April. It is one of two remaining COVID-19 measures the Welsh government has in place. Rules requiring facemasks in health and social care settings will remain in force for at least another three weeks. First minister Mark Drakeford said the mask rule would help control the spread of COVID-19 where "some of the most vulnerable people" are treated or live.

Since March, Ireland has had no COVID-19 restrictions and has dropped its entry requirements. Travellers do not have to complete a passenger locator form, provide proof of vaccination, recovery or a negative test. Ireland is continuing its recovery from the Omicron variant wave. According to the latest figures, all of Ireland's key COVID-19 indicators are reducing, these include the number of cases, hospitalisations, people in ICUs, deaths and the PCR positivity rate.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Prime minister Boris Johnson fined over lockdown breaches

Prime minister Boris Johnson and chancellor Rishi Sunak have been fined this week in relation to breaches of COVID-19 laws at Downing Street and Whitehall parties. This is the first time in British history that the prime minister has been found, officially, to have broken the law. The announcement sparked fresh calls for the prime minister to quit, with Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey saying: "If Boris Johnson won't resign, Conservative MPs must show him the door." Both Sunak and Johnson have rejected these calls for resignation so far. At least 30 more fixed penalty notices are being issued bringing the total to more than 50, the Metropolitan Police announced on April 12.

UK economic growth slows in February

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) released statistics this week revealing that the UK's economic growth slowed in February following a sharp fall in the production of cars and computer goods. The ONS said the economy expanded by 0.1% compared with 0.8% in January. The fall in manufacturing was off-set by growth in the services sector including areas such as tourism and travel. The ONS also said that the UK economy is 1.5% above its pre-coronavirus pandemic level in February 2020. Economists had been expecting gross domestic product (GDP) to grow by 0.3% in February following the lifting of most COVID-19 restrictions in England at the end of January.

Inflation hits 7% in March as Britain's cost of living soars

UK households have been warned to brace for the sharpest annual rise in the cost of living since the early 1980s after a bigger-than-expected jump in the official inflation rate to 7% amid record increases in petrol prices. Economists said they expected the government's preferred measure for the annual increase in living costs – the consumer price index (CPI) – was on course to breach 9% this month amid a record-breaking jump in energy bills and soaring cost of the weekly shop.

TRADE UPDATE

More than 9,000 flights to depart UK airports this Easter

Around 9,200 flights – roughly 1.63 million seats – are scheduled to depart from UK airports this Easter weekend (15-18 April), according to new data from Cirium. According to the aviation analytics firm, departing flights from UK airports are scheduled to reach 78% of Easter 2019 levels, which Cirium says illustrates "strong signs" of recovery.

The findings come as the aviation industry braces for what is tipped to be a busy weekend after airports recently faced major delays due to staff shortages and cancelled flights. The busiest day is scheduled to be Good Friday (15 April) with 2,430 departures. Flights are up 576% compared to last Easter and 836% on Easter weekend 2020.

Travel praised for going to 'extraordinary lengths' to help Ukrainian refugees

From hotel rooms to vital supplies, travel and tourism businesses around the world have come together to support refugees escaping the conflict in Ukraine, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). WTTC members such as Accor, Carnival Corporation, Hilton, Internova Travel Group, Marriott International and MSC Cruises have donated rooms, transport, clothing, food, shelter, urgent supplies and money to help those impacted by the conflict. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, hotels have stayed open to offer a base to charities, journalists, and those in need of accommodation.

Spain to retain indoor mask rules until after Easter

Spain will continue to insist face coverings are worn inside until after Easter, the country's government has confirmed. It had been hoped the rules would be eased ahead of the Easter getaway, but health minister Carolina Darias ruled out an imminent change, the Evening Standard reports. The rules will now remain in place until after the Easter holidays, and are due to be signed off by Spain's cabinet on 19 April.

Greece relaxes COVID-19 restrictions for summer

Entry rules are being removed for all travellers to Greece next month in a boost for the summer. The easing of COVID-19-related restrictions comes as the country prepares for the peak season when a record number of tourists are expected to visit. This includes travellers from EU and non-EU countries including the UK, plus vaccinated and unvaccinated travellers. Travellers will no longer be required to present either proof of a full course of vaccination, or a negative COVID-19 test in order to enter Greece from May 2. The mandatory use of facemasks will no longer be required from June 1 and people will not need to provide a COVID-19 pass as proof of vaccination when entering venues.

Visit USA confirms several changes to UK board

The UK arm of the Visit USA Association has announced several changes to its operating team and board of directors. The reshuffle, which was confirmed at the organisation's AGM in London last month, will see chief executive Tracey Spuyman and operations and development manager Pamela Newman stand down from their positions, as well as board directors Jody Hanson and Jonathan Sloan. Hanson joined Visit USA (UK) in 2000 and has served as a board director for more than 22 years.

Meanwhile, Sloan joined the Visit USA PR committee in 1998 and has held a variety of different roles and positions during his 24 year tenure, including chair from 2013 – 2017 and more recently interim chair following the loss of Sarah Lax in 2021. Ivan Beacom from Aer Lingus and James Killick from Virgin Holidays have joined the board following the association's annual election process in February. Julie Greenhill, director at Greg Evans Consultancy, has been appointed chair of the association and Andy Facer, director at 5F Marketing, will take up the role of vice chair.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Flybe - Reborn Flybe has been relaunched with its first flight from Birmingham to Belfast City airport. Additional routes are due to start over the summer following the introduction of up to four flights a day between the two cities. Glasgow will be connected to the carrier's Birmingham base from today (Thursday) with more routes added progressively from April 28 through to August 25 as the fleet is expanded to 32 turboprop aircraft.

British Airways - Heathrow has vowed to recruit heavily to ease post-pandemic pressures on staffing at the UK's busiest airport. Passenger numbers at Heathrow rose to their highest level since the start of the pandemic – 4.2 million – in March, according to the latest figures from the London airport. Following the UK government's removal of travel restrictions, a two-year high of more than 280,000 Brits travelled through the airport last month. The airport said it is increasing its resources as fast as possible ahead of the summer, which it expects to be very busy – with peak periods predicted to be close to 2019 levels. As the aviation sector rebuilds capacity, the airport is working with ground handlers and airlines to make sure it can meet the surge in demand. It is addressing staff shortages with a drive to recruit 12,000 new starters across the airport over the coming months.

Wizz Air - Wizz Air is expanding its eastern European network from Luton airport after acquiring slots from rival budget carrier Vueling. The additional two daily slot pairs means Wizz Air will increase frequencies on six existing routes – to Bacau, Craiova, Iasi, Sibiu and Timisoara in Romania, as well as to Wroclaw in Poland from May 11. The expansion will see the airline increase its capacity by 167,000 seats, cementing its position as the largest carrier at Luton airport with more than 5.6 million seats in total for the summer.

Air Canada - Air Canada is restoring seasonal summer transatlantic connections from Dublin to Vancouver and Montreal. Non-stop flights between Dublin and Vancouver will operate four times a week between June 3 and September 30 and to Montreal three times weekly from June 2 until October 1.

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic has launched a new brand and advertising campaign, which will shine a spotlight on its staff. The campaign will be its first in more than two years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using the tagline 'See the world differently', the campaign champions the "rich individuality of the airline's people and customers". The airline said the marketing builds on research showing that travellers find most airlines' crew to be impersonal in their service. The carrier has recently reinstated its full portfolio of U.S. destinations for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, flying to destinations including New York, Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco, Orlando, Boston, Washington, and Seattle. It launches new services to Austin, Texas, on May 25.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Barrhead travel - Barrhead Travel has seen demand for overseas holidays reach its highest point since March 2020. The Glasgow-based agency said booking numbers have increased steadily since major travel restrictions were eased in January. Last week, the firm's booking levels were 25% higher than the same period in 2019, with enquiry numbers reaching the highest point since before the pandemic. More than half of new bookings are for summer 2022 while a growing number of holidaymakers are simultaneously booking trips for 2023 and 2024 in a bid to secure prices.

Celebrity Cruises - Hollywood actress-turned-lifestyle guru Gwyneth Paltrow will join a nine-night Italian Riviera & France sailing on soon-to-launch Celebrity Beyond in September. Paltrow, who became the line's well-being advisor a year ago, will be interviewed live on stage alongside a wellness expert during the voyage as part of the Goop at Sea event. The founder and chief executive of lifestyle brand Goop will also coordinate tastings, product trials and massages on board.

TUI - TUI will offer 'day-before' bag drop services at Gatwick's North Terminal and Manchester airport from Monday (April 18) to help tackle the problem of long delays and queues. The service will be available for passengers on TUI flights that depart before midday, and enables them to check in luggage between 2pm and 9pm on the day before they depart. It means they can proceed straight to departures on their day of departure. The service is not available for flights to the U.S.

SOCIAL UPDATE

YouTube and TikTok add new options for automated captions

Accessibility has become a key focus for social apps with platforms adding more tools and options to help a broader range of users access their content. YouTube is advancing the use of subtitles in its YouTube Studio app. Within the 'Permissions' element, there is now a new option to add a 'Subtitles editor' role. This will enable users to easily outsource and grant access to a third party to manage subtitles on their clips. Additionally, TikTok is switching English language auto-captions on by default for all uploads. This will expand accessibility features, and improve usability for those viewing in 'sound off' environments.

MICE UPDATE

IMEX CEO expects upcoming Frankfurt show to be of similar scale to IMEX America 2021

More than 2,000 buyers from 70 countries have registered for IMEX in Frankfurt as the regeneration of the global business events sector continues. The numbers released by the IMEX Group show increasing demand from both buyers and suppliers for the forthcoming edition of IMEX in Frankfurt on May 31 – June 2. An international mix of buyers from agencies, corporates and associations, plus independent professionals have now confirmed their participation at the show.

Carina Bauer, CEO of the IMEX Group, said: "We're experiencing strong demand from both buyers and exhibitors, all of whom are motivated and excited to get back to doing business face to face at IMEX. The steady pace of registration a full two months before we open reflects the industry's quickening recovery. Right now I expect IMEX in Frankfurt to be similar in size and scope to our 10th IMEX America held in November 2021 with a comparable, global roster of buyers and exhibitors."

LIGHTER NOTE

Zoo thrilled to welcome its first sloth baby. See more [here](#).