



ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

The Israel-Hamas truce and the pro-Palestinian marches in London

On Friday 24th November 2023, it was announced that the Israeli authorities had reached an agreement with Hamas for a four-day truce over which 50 Israeli hostages would be released in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners. Since this announcement, the truce has been extended and is currently on its seventh day of ceasefire with a total of 102 Israeli hostages freed and 210 Palestinian prisoners released thus far.

Over the weekend, thousands of pro-Palestinian demonstrators (an estimated 300,000) marched through central London urging for a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza strip - the first march of its kind since armistice day. The protest coincided with the second day of the truce, with pro-Palestinian activists carrying Palestinian flags with frequently occurring slogans aimed at highlighting "the right of all Palestinians to freedom, equality and justice". While 1,500 officers were indeed deployed, it was noted that the "overwhelming majority" protested lawfully.

Governor of Bank of England warns that interest rates will not be cut in the foreseeable future

Bank of England Governor, Andrew Bailey, expressed concerns about the UK's economic growth, emphasising that interest rates are unlikely to be cut in the foreseeable future. The concerns came following the Government's forecaster which cut growth outlooks for the UK, due in part to high inflation and interest rates. Despite a drop in inflation to 4.6%, which is still above the Bank of England's 2% target, Bailey has pushed against assumptions to cut interest rates and stresses the need to achieve the 2% inflation target.

In Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Autumn statement last week, he announced some tax cuts for workers and businesses as an attempt to boost growth - however, according to the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), while the UK economy is forecast to grow this year, the outlook for the next couple of years is not as good as previously thought.

Rail workers and senior doctors in deals to end strikes

Rail workers from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) have accepted a pay deal, ending their strikes after agreeing to a 5% backdated pay rise and job security guarantees from 14 train companies. This decision means RMT members won't strike until at least spring next year. However, Aslef, a union representing train drivers, will strike with plans for a "rolling programme" of strikes over the 2nd to 9th December.

Similarly, senior doctors in England have tentatively resolved their pay dispute with the government, aiming to end disruptive NHS strikes. Pending approval from grassroots members of the British Medical Associations (BMA) and the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association (HCSA), the deal includes a significant U-turn by the government, offering a 4.95% average increase for the last three months of the financial year. If accepted, both unions will call off industrial action which has led to the cancellation of thousands of operations and appointments.

TRADE UPDATE

EU to strengthen rights of passengers who book through agents

The EU has laid out how it proposes to strengthen passenger rights, with a shake-up to its package travel rules set to provide travellers who book through an agent greater protection. Under the revised Passenger Rights Regulation and the 2015 Package Travel Directive, travellers who buy their tickets through travel agents will have more clarity on who will reimburse them, while passengers accompanying people with disabilities will travel free of charge. Reaffirming the right to a refund within 14 days, limiting the down payment for travel packages to 25% of the total price and refunding unused vouchers are also part of the proposals.

Abta predicts 18-24 year-olds to be 'most prolific' travellers in 2024

Abta research reveals that almost three-quarters of 18-24-year-olds (72%) plan to travel overseas in the next 12 months – more than any other age group. Despite the squeeze on finances, only 4% say they will not go away at all due to the rising cost of living, compared with 10% of the wider population. City breaks are their top choice for next year, but this age group is almost three times as likely than the average traveller to take an adventure holiday and twice as likely to go camping, head to a major sports event, take a train holiday and go on a food and drink-based break.

Travel firms must substantiate green claims to win consumer trust

Travel companies have been told to be ready to substantiate any green claims they make in advertising and marketing as consumers ask more questions about sustainability. Mike Coates, assistant director of consumer protection at the Competition and Markets Authority, told the Travel Weekly Sustainability Summit it was vital firms followed the Green Claims Code as clients would soon be asking them to prove what they were saying. Coates urged travel companies to avoid using vague terms in their green claims and be as specific as possible.

Travellers will take 2024 holidays 'no matter what', experts predict

Booking patterns may change in 2024 due to ongoing geopolitical and financial challenges, but travellers will continue to take holidays "no matter what", according to a panel of experts at an Abta travel trends conference held in London this week. Neil Sealy, Exoticca managing director for the UK & Ireland, predicted the rising cost of living will not have an impact on the number of people wanting to travel in 2024, and although the industry may face "bumps" throughout the year, demand will continue at its current rate.

AIRLINE UPDATE

EasyJet - EasyJet is set to open its three-aircraft base in Birmingham in March 2024, earlier than initially expected. The low-cost carrier said the new base will be operational from 18 March 2024, expanding its destination portfolio with 16 new routes to the UK, Europe and North Africa.

Turkish Airlines - Turkish Airlines has launched a wholly-owned subsidiary called AJet, which will start operating to the UK from the end of March 2024. AJet stems from the former AndalouJet, set up in 2008 to operate from Turkey's Anatolia region. The rebranded low-cost carrier will offer a summer schedule with flights to destinations in Turkey.

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic flew from London Heathrow to New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport on Tuesday using only sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), marking a world's first in commercial transatlantic travel. Virgin Atlantic says its Flight100 will "prove that the challenge of scaling up production is one of policy and investment, and industry and government must move quickly to create a thriving UK SAF industry".

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Hays Travel - Hays Travel has acquired Travel House and its 16 shops across south Wales. Travel House has been a member of the Hays Travel Independence Group since 2021 after switching from Advantage Travel Partnership.

Riviera Travel - Riviera Travel has re-opened its European river cruise and selected tours product to the Irish market. The tours and cruise specialist exited the market in 2020 because of the pandemic and effects of Brexit.

Travel Counsellors - Travel Counsellors has recorded record sales of £933 million in the year to 31 October 2023, after taking a record 300,000 bookings during the year. UK leisure bookings grew by 22% year-on-year to hit £552m, while UK corporate bookings increased 24% to £209m.

Tui - Tui has reported a "double-digit increase" in third-party agent sales in the six-week period from late August to October 2023, during which the operator grew its trade sales team to 17, offered agents improved commercial terms and boosted call centre support.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Meta highlights what's driving Threads engagement

With Threads usage rising, many are now considering what works on the platform, and how to maximise their presence for optimal engagement. Meta marketing director Jacki Pimente highlighted at the [CreatorIQ Connect conference](#) that content which performs well tends to be conversation starters. Conversation prompts, which invite users to share their own thoughts and perspectives on a topic, have been a common engagement tactic on every social app. Meta has also made a point of actively working to facilitate more positive engagement on Threads, which puts a slightly different spin on this aspect.

Snapchat tests new ad-free subscription tier

Snapchat is the latest social media platform looking to provide a higher-priced, ad-free subscription offering as a means to align with evolving data privacy regulations in the EU. The removal of most ads from the in-app experience when users opt for Snapchat+ will also test the waters on just how many people might be willing to pay for an ad-free experience. Snapchat [notes](#) that subscribers may still see sponsored places, as well as paid promotions within 'My AI' responses, where it's currently testing the best ways to monetise its AI chat platform.

MICE UPDATE

Exhibition World Bahrain and IAPCO Establish a New Partnership

Exhibition World Bahrain (EWB), the Middle East's newest and largest exhibition and convention centre, has signed a partnership agreement with the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers (IAPCO), making EWB a new Convention Centre Partner of the world's leading association for professional congress organisers. Under this new partnership, EWB will utilise IAPCO's global network of professional congress organisers (PCOs), knowledge exchange and training programmes, and the development of new business opportunities. In addition, EWB will be able to instil its position as a leading international exhibition and convention venue, while IAPCO's members will have access to EWB's state-of-the-art facilities and professional expertise. IAPCO's network will provide EWB with a robust approach to a wide range of potential clients, including international organisations, associations and corporations, tapping into new businesses from around the world.

LIGHTER NOTE

School lunch supervisor, Manjit Nahal, from Bridgetown School in Stratford-upon-Avon, surprised with unsung hero award on the BBC's The One Show.

Find out more [here](#).