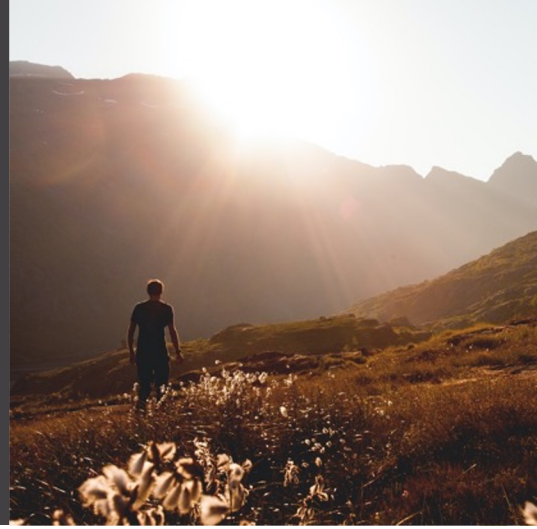


# WEEKLY REPORT

05 January 2024



## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### January walkouts on the London Underground

Passengers who frequent the London Underground face major disruption this month as workers hold days of strikes in a dispute over pay. Walkouts will commence on 5 January and are expected to end on 12 January, but the full impact will not be felt until the evening of Sunday 7 January, when Tube services wind down. The disruption comes as members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) voted to take industrial action due to a "below inflation pay offer" after Transport for London (TfL) stated the pay rise was "the most we can afford" as they try to make £230m of savings as part of a government funding deal agreed in August 2022.

### Average mortgage rate lowest in nearly 7 months

The average rate on a two-year fixed mortgage has fallen to its lowest level for nearly seven months as lenders compete for customers. Financial information service, Moneyfacts, said the average cost of a two-year deal had fallen from 5.92 per cent to 5.87 per cent – the lowest level in nearly seven years. Major lenders, such as the banks Halifax and HSBC, have started the year with rate cuts in an effort to retain customers, as their own funding costs have dropped. Though mortgage rates begin to come down, more than a million homeowners still face rising bills when deals expire this year. "The mortgage market may be heating up, but this won't fully ease the pain for the roughly 1.6 million existing borrowers with cheap fixed rate deals expiring this year," said Alice Haine, personal finance analyst from Bestinvest. "They still face a heavy jump in interest payments when they switch onto a new product." The interest rate on a fixed mortgage does not change until the deal expires, usually after two or five years, and a new one is chosen to replace it. Mortgage rates will remain higher than many people have been accustomed to because of significant changes over the past two years.

## Spice Girls to feature on commemorative set of stamps for 30th anniversary

To help mark the 30th anniversary of one of the world's most successful pop groups, Royal Mail is issuing a set of 15 stamps featuring the Spice Girls. It will be the first time Royal Mail has dedicated an entire stamp issue to a female pop group with the 10 main stamps featuring images from their performances from 1997 to 2012, including at the Brit Awards in 1997, and at the closing ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games. The Spice Girls said they never could have dreamed of that happening when they first formed, adding: "That's Girl Power!" Royal Mail director of external affairs and policy, David Gold, said "The Spice Girls have been a force to be reckoned with since they formed as a group in 1994... We are proud to celebrate the most successful female music group ever seen, not only for their music but their enduring influence over so many aspects of our lives." The stamps will go on general sale on 11 January and will be only the sixth music group to feature in a dedicated stamp issue, following on from The Beatles in 2007, Pink Floyd in 2016, Queen in 2020, The Rolling Stones in 2022 and Iron Maiden in 2023.

## TRADE UPDATE

### ABTA unveils 'Destinations to Watch' report for 2024

ABTA has released its first 'Destinations to Watch' report since the pandemic, aiming to provide inspiration for 2024. The report features 10 destinations identified as likely to strike a chord with travellers over the coming year. Among the locations highlighted by ABTA's travel experts are Albania, Crete, Mauritius and Zambia. ABTA communications director Graeme Buck said: "The reason we produce the report is to get people thinking and talking about their holidays for the coming year, as well as encouraging them to seek help from an ABTA member travel expert to plan and book their trip." The report has been published on the eve of 'Sunshine Saturday', one of the busiest days every year for travel bookings.

### Agents target 'bumper' month ahead of 'Sunshine Saturday'

Travel agents expect a 'bumper' January but say a gradual start to sales may mean bookings peak after this weekend's 'Sunshine Saturday'. Bookings last week were similar or above levels seen a year ago, according to the trade. But Tui UK & Ireland commercial director Phillip Iveson said, "appetite for travel has never been greater," adding: "For years we have seen huge demand post-Christmas to search for, and book a holiday, and we expect this January to be no different."

Miles Morgan Travel chairman, Miles Morgan, described trading last week as buoyant, but said December 30 stood out as a "nuclear" sales day. "The quality of the bookings was good but it was the sheer volume of bookings that surprised me," he said, adding: "There is a lot to be cheerful about this January." He credited the amount of travel-related advertising, particularly on TV, for boosting interest. "In previous Januarys I've talked about travel losing ground to sofas or double glazing because we don't have our 'share of voice' but the share of voice for travel this year is really high," he said.

## Tui AG confirms plan to de-list from London Stock Exchange

Tui Group has confirmed plans to de-list from the London Stock Exchange this year, with an upgrade to the 'Prime Standard' market and top-tier MDAX index on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange. The group gave notice it was considering quitting the LSE in December when issuing annual results for the 12 months to September, noting it was "recently approached by shareholders" and asked whether its current listing "is still advantageous". It has now confirmed it will put the proposal to a shareholder vote at its Annual General Meeting on February 13, with a delisting expected to take place in June. The company said the move would reflect a "notable liquidity migration from the UK to Germany", with around 77% of share transactions conducted directly through the German share register and "less than a quarter of trading in Tui shares carried out in the form of UK depository interests".

## Southend airport attracts new foreign carrier

Southend airport has attracted a new foreign carrier to help rebuild a declining network. Italian airline Aeroitalia, set up in 2022 with a fleet of Boeing 737s, is to serve Milan Bergamo this summer with the Essex airport suggesting that there are "more routes to follow". Southend airport handled almost 2.3 million passengers pre-pandemic in 2019 with services to around 40 domestic and European cities. Commercial services restarted in May 2022 but EasyJet is the only airline offering regular flights from Southend alongside seasonal services by tour operators Balkan Holidays and Santa's Lapland. The arrival of Aeroitalia this summer brings the number of destinations available from the airport in 2024 to 11.

## AIRLINE UPDATE

**Virgin and Delta** - Virgin Atlantic and Delta Air Lines have marked a decade of a transatlantic joint venture partnership. Almost 40 million passengers have been flown jointly across the Atlantic by the two airlines since 2014. The collaboration was enhanced in 2020 with Air France-KLM expanding the joint venture. Virgin Atlantic then joined the SkyTeam alliance last year. Virgin and Delta now operate a joint daily schedule of up to 86 daily non-stop flights in both directions between the UK and USA – nearly 40% more than in 2014 – including up to 34 peak-time departures from Heathrow to 15 USA gateways.

**Easyjet** - EasyJet has reopened a scheme to attract graduates after a three year hiatus due to the pandemic. The initiative is designed to fast track university graduates into key roles covering engineering, finance and management. It has been re-established amid forecasts projecting that the industry will need another 1.3 million new aviation professionals in the next ten years on top of existing recruitment opportunities. The 'Project Runway' programme is now calling for more applicants in January for this year, aiming to accelerate their career prospects in leadership roles.

**Ryanair** - Ryanair is running a recruitment drive for 150 cabin crew to join its Stansted base. Three jobs events are being held in the region this month by the 'no-frills' carrier as it seeks to fill the vacancies. The airline will be promoting its five days on/three days off roster and a one-off £1,200 new joiners allowance in addition to discounted travel across the network.

**Norwegian Air** - Norwegian Air clocked up an increased level of 20.6 million passengers in 2023 despite December schedules being affected by winter storm Pia. The Scandinavian carrier saw annual carryings rise by 16% over the previous year as capacity grew by 18%. Carryings in December of 1.3 million was described as being "close" to the level achieved in the same month in 2022, although the load factor was six percentage points higher at 83.6%.

## • TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

### **Travel Counsellors acquires itinerary management platform Planisto**

Travel Counsellors has acquired a new platform it says will allow its advisors to create and manage complex personalised itineraries for their clients. The homeworking giant confirmed on January 3 that it had completed a deal for Planisto, the second major acquisition in its 30-year history following that of Holidaysplease last March. Besides acquiring the technology that powers the tool, which will be integrated into Travel Counsellors' Phenix system, the Planisto team will also become part of the Travel Counsellors team. "They will bring their shared entrepreneurial skills and values to enhance the company's senior technology talent with a focus on driving future booking journeys and platform development," said Travel Counsellors.

### **Jet2 further bolsters Manchester programme for summer 2024**

Jet2.com and Jet2holidays have further expanded their programme from Manchester for this summer, meaning peak periods will have more than 340 weekly flights to 58 destinations. Additional flights and holidays are on sale to the brands' most popular destinations across the Canary Islands, mainland Spain, Bulgaria, Greece and Italy. It brings the total number of Jet2 seats on sale from Manchester in summer 2024 to 3.8 million – nearly 100,000 more than last summer – which represents the group's biggest-ever summer programme from the airport. Jet2 chief executive Steve Heapy said: "By adding additional services to popular summer destinations, we are giving customers exactly what they want, and we know just how much they will be jumping at the chance to get away." The extra seats and holidays have been added in response to the high numbers booking package holidays for this summer, Jet2 said.

## Oceania Cruises adds Grand Voyage to 2024-25 programme

Oceania Cruises has added a Grand Voyage to its 2024-25 programme on board Riviera. The 1,250-passenger ship will sail a 59-day Grand Voyage from Barcelona to Singapore calling at ports in the Canary Islands, Senegal, Gambia, Ghana, Namibia, Cape Town, Madagascar, Tanzania, Seychelles, Maldives, Thailand and Malaysia. Departing on November 14 and concluding on January 12, 2025, the sailing, called A Tale of Five Seas, includes overnight stays in Walvis Bay (Namibia), Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania) and Singapore. Passengers have the option of joining the whole Grand Voyage or joining for a section.

## SOCIAL UPDATE

### Facebook link history option to be made available for all users

Meta has been rolling out a new Link History archive in selected regions but has now confirmed that all Facebook users will soon have access. The feature will save a user's Facebook browsing activity for 30 days, allowing them to easily find recently viewed links. Links visited via Messenger will not be saved and users can also remove links from their browsing history. Link History will be available on iOS and Android but currently not on desktop.

### Lower-cost verification option now available on X

X has launched a lower-cost Verified Organizations Basic tier option which will cost \$200 a month or \$2,000 a year. This subscription package was created with smaller businesses in mind and will provide organisations with a gold checkmark, all the features of X Premium+, ad credits and priority support among other features.

## MICE UPDATE

### Associations and Corporates Increased Salaries in 2023 due to Rising Cost of Living

The Eastside Rooms, a leading, modern venue in the heart of England, conducted a survey of 125 event professionals from around the world in October 2023 to identify challenges and opportunities faced due to economic challenges. The survey reveals that organisers have increased salaries and freelance/consultant fees to help teams adjust to the impact of the cost of living crisis. According to the study, 37% of associations and 30% of corporate organisers have increased salaries for their professionals and teams. In addition, the report showed that 24% of organisers are providing flexible working arrangements to meet the needs of their teams. Only 2.5% of corporates have seen the need to decrease freelance/consultant budgets, whilst making no changes to their staff compensation. 2.5% of associations have also decreased freelance/consultant budgets, however 7.5% have also seen the need to reduce staff salaries or benefits. 69% of the respondents were from the UK, 19% from Europe and the remaining 12% from the rest of the world.

## LIGHTER NOTE

### **Baby 'dancing Lemur' makes its public debut.**

A critically endangered baby Coquerel's sifaka, also known as a "dancing lemur", has made its first public appearance at Chester Zoo. Watch the sweet baby dancing [here](#).