

**ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE****Kate Middleton announces she is having treatment for cancer**

In a video announcement, Kate Middleton, the Princess of Wales, revealed that she is undergoing treatment after a cancer diagnosis. The princess says it was a "huge shock" and that it had been an "incredibly tough couple of months". Specific details about her diagnosis and treatment plan were not disclosed, but as Kate continues her treatment, the royal family has expressed their unwavering support, with Prince William by her side. King Charles, who is also being treated for cancer and was in hospital at the same time as Kate in January, has also spoken of his pride at her "courage in speaking as she did".

**Revised figures confirm UK ended 2023 in recession**

Revised GDP figures from the Office for National Statistics confirmed the UK entered a technical recession in the final six months of last year. Figures showed that the economy shrank by 0.1% in the three months between June and August, followed by a further 0.3% decline in the next financial quarter (between September and December), though the overall economy did grow by 0.1% across the whole of 2023. There are also early indications that the UK began an early recovery in January - with initial data showing some growth, and surveys indicating this may have continued in February and March.

**Holidaymakers going to EU caught out by 10-year-passport rule**

UK holidaymakers are being warned not to get caught out by the "passport 10-year rule" which could affect EU travel plans. UK travellers used to be able to carry up to nine months from an old passport over onto a new one but post-Brexit, EU countries will not accept passports issued more than 10 years ago. Up to 32 million people applied for passports before the new rules, but it is unknown how many have been affected. Since the UK left the EU, travellers heading to all countries within the bloc - and including Iceland, Norway, Lichtenstein and Switzerland, but not Ireland - must have a passport which was issued less than 10 years before their departure date.

The Home Office has said it provides up-to-date information on passport requirements on its website, which it keeps under constant review.

## TRADE UPDATE

### **Shoulder season trend identified in new search data**

Comparison site TravelSupermarket has revealed new data, based on searches, which has suggested a trend towards shoulder season travel. Potentially due to the cost of living crisis in the UK, data suggests that travellers are willing to sacrifice hot weather for cheaper prices as all five of the most booked departure dates in 2023 fell within the autumn period. The week offering the most value for families looking to get away this summer is the final week of school holidays in England, 24-30 August.

### **Good Friday forecast as the busiest day of Easter**

Good Friday is due to be the busiest day over Easter at Stansted as the airport forecast 350,000 passengers over the four day bank holiday weekend. Around 86,000 passengers are expected on Friday, 46,000 departing and 40,000 arriving. The airport is set to handle 1.4 million passengers across the two-week school Easter holiday period. Meanwhile, Gatwick expects the highest number of departures on Easter Sunday.

### **Heathrow gears up for six extra summer routes**

Six additional services will start 31 March as the London hub seeks to achieve record passenger numbers this year. New flights from Heathrow to Abu Dhabi, Kos, Izmir, Bangalore and Paris-Orly have been confirmed ahead of the summer schedule. Virgin Atlantic opens the new route from Heathrow to Bangalore 31 March while British Airways is adding Abu Dhabi flights from 20 April, and Kos and Izmir from 18 May.

## AIRLINE UPDATE

**Norse Atlantic** - Norse Atlantic Airways has confirmed a new Gatwick to Las Vegas route which will operate three times a week starting 12 September. The long-haul budget carrier is now offering launch return fares of £399 on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. Bjorn Tore Larsen, Airline Founder and Chief Executive, said "We are excited to introduce this new route from London Gatwick to Las Vegas, a unique city that offers unparalleled diversity, boasting an abundance of entertainment, dining, and recreational options to suit every taste."

**Jet2** - Jet2 to set up its 12th UK base at Bournemouth airport. Jet2.com and Jet2holidays have put flights and packages on sale from 26 March from Bournemouth airport, and are offering 16 destinations across Europe, the Canary Islands and the Mediterranean, with departures starting in summer 2025. The expansion to their footprint comes in response to “years of demand” from customers and independent travel agents across the south of England, including Bournemouth, Southampton and Portsmouth.

**Virgin Atlantic** - Virgin Atlantic will pay homage to its founder by naming its latest aircraft in his honour. Ruby Rebel, which will enter service from May, will salute Sir Richard Branson and mark 40 years since the launch of Virgin Atlantic. The icon includes nods to Branson’s career and business ventures, such as Virgin Records pin badges, a Tubular Bells charm bracelet, a Virgin Galactic rocket on the belt’s buckle and a Virgin Voyages anchor.

## TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

**Newmarket Holidays** - Newmarket Holidays is offering agents discounts on bookings made over the Easter holiday weekend. The promotion covers itineraries in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe departing this year and in 2025. The offer comes after head of trade sales, Richard Forde, predicts a lot of consumers will be in the mood to book holidays as we approach the Easter bank holiday.

**Riviera Travel** - Riviera Travel has pledged to double its passenger numbers by 2030. The operator currently caters for just under 100,000 passengers per year but is aiming to increase this to 200,000 per year by the end of the decade. Chief Executive Phil Hullash stated that he sees a “huge growth opportunity” in the touring side of the business as well as on long-haul and European rivers.

**On the Beach** - In February On the Beach became the fourth OTA to reach an agreement with Ryanair, meaning seats can be offered as part of a package holiday. Shaun Morton, Chief Executive, believes that Ryanair is likely to continue to strike more deals with online travel agencies and suggested that this would be “really positive” for the industry.

**Jet2Holidays** - Jet2holidays has become the latest major tour operator in the UK to confirm it will stop selling tickets for marine parks with captive cetaceans. The operator confirmed it will no longer sell tickets to venues “which feature cetaceans (orcas, whales and dolphins) for entertainment”. The change will take effect on 27 March but all existing bookings customers have made will be honoured.

## SOCIAL UPDATE

### **TikTok reportedly testing new photos app**

The video-based platform could be looking for a way to compete with Instagram with a new 'TikTok Photos App' which is reportedly in development. According to one blog, SpAndroid, a code within the TikTok app mentioning "TikTok Photos" was spotted. The code suggests users will soon be prompted to share their still images onto the new app. Social media news site, TechCrunch, also found the following statement in the code string. "Whether you're a world traveller, food blogger, or simply enjoy sharing what's going on in your life, TikTok Photos is our all-new photo-sharing platform dedicated to helping creators like you reach other like-minded people". Although nothing has been confirmed yet, TikTok's coding suggests an extension of the app may be coming soon.

### **Instagram updates hashtag searches and tests new comments feature**

Instagram is making a number of updates including the way that hashtags display content in the app. Users are now connected to the broader search results related to a hashtag, as opposed to the 'top posts' feed. With this new update, when searching a hashtag, users can filter through accounts, audio, places and reels - similar to the discovery section. By providing access to these new search filters, it should improve profile discovery as opposed to only showing top performing posts. Secondly, Instagram is testing a new feature where users can comment on specific images within a carousel post by tagging the number which that image is displayed in the carousel. This feature aims to encourage more engagement by giving users access to interact with specific content.

## MICE UPDATE

### **Amex GBT to acquire rival CWT in \$570m deal**

In a move that is seen as a big bet on, and boost for business travel, global travel software and services company American Express Global Business Travel (Amex GBT) has announced it has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire CWT, a global business travel and solutions provider. The transaction values CWT at approximately US\$570m and should the deal go through, it would be one of the largest mergers of travel management companies in recent history. After the acquisition closes, CWT customers would have access to Amex GBT's proprietary software and services for travel and expense, including Neo1, Neo and Egencia, in addition to Select, which enables customers to integrate with leading technology partners. Customers would have access to the broadest portfolio of professional services, including meetings and events, consulting and sustainability solutions and Amex GBT's marketplace would provide access to comprehensive content in the industry.

**LIGHTER NOTE**

**Lighter note**

Blind dog finds new home after appeal for a forever home. Read more [here](#).