

# WEEKLY BRIEFING

24 May 2024



## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### **Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announces UK general election for Thursday 4 July**

Rishi Sunak vowed to "fight for every vote" as he called an early UK general election for Thursday 4 July. The Prime Minister made the announcement in a speech outside 10 Downing Street, as he bids to secure a fifth consecutive term for the Conservative Party. The decision upended expectations of an autumn poll, which some analysts believed could have given the Tories a better opportunity to narrow Labour's lead in opinion polls. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer welcomed the news, declaring it was "time for change" from "Tory chaos" as his party aims to capitalise on its large advantage in recent surveys. Parliament will be suspended on Friday 24 May, before it is formally dissolved on Thursday 30 May, ahead of an official five-week election campaign.

### **Inflation rate falls to lowest in almost three years**

The UK inflation rate has fallen to its lowest in almost three years at 2.3% in the year to April, down from 3.2% the previous month, driven by falling gas and electricity prices. While inflation remains slightly above the Bank of England's 2% target, the central bank has hinted interest rates could be cut this summer, from the current 16-year high of 5.25%. Rishi Sunak said the figures marked a "major moment for the economy, with inflation back to normal". The government and the Bank of England will closely monitor economic data to determine if further action is needed to support the economy and keep inflation in check.

## **UK government issues formal apology for infected blood scandal**

The UK government issued a formal apology for the infected blood scandal of the 1970s and 1980s when thousands of NHS patients were infected with HIV and hepatitis C through tainted blood products. In an official statement, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak apologised on behalf of the government for the "monumental human tragedy" that saw an estimated 2,400 patients die after being given contaminated blood imports. Many were struggling with haemophilia and other blood disorders at the time. Sunak acknowledged the "multigenerational suffering" caused by the scandal and the negligence of the health sector, as concluded by the Infected Blood Inquiry. While some felt the long-awaited apology lacked full admissions of unlawful conduct, it marked an important milestone in one of Britain's worst modern healthcare scandals.

## **TRADE UPDATE**

### **Heathrow faces the threat of further strike action affecting passport control, during the half-term holiday week**

More than 500 Border Force members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union are to take a further three days' action in a dispute over a new roster already imposed. The PCS said walkouts "will disrupt passport checks for travellers coming into the UK at Heathrow".

Strikes are scheduled for 31 May and 1 and 2 June. This will be followed by three weeks of action "short of a strike" that will include a work-to-rule and overtime ban running from 4 to 25 June. The PCS said action on 29, 30 April, 1 and 2 May was "well supported", with members "clearly in favour of further action should there be no movement from the Home Office".

### **New research finds that cost and weather to be bigger priorities for holidaymakers than risk, safety and security**

New research by the Safer Tourism Foundation has found that risk, security and safety are near the bottom of the list of holidaymakers' priorities when choosing a destination. The charity's first Travel Behaviours Risk Index found the level of threat and hazard in a destination ranked only eighth in a list of 10 priorities behind ease of access, food, accommodation, weather and type of destination. The cost was the chief concern among holidaymakers. The poll of 2,000 people also found that 76% were open to trying activities on holiday they would not attempt at home.

### **British Airways and JetBlue seek permission for surprise codeshare**

British Airways and JetBlue have applied to codeshare on US and European routes in a surprise move.

The carriers have applied to US authorities to put each other's codes on services from Heathrow, JFK and Boston. BA has asked to put its BA code on 39 US domestic routes from JFK and 36 from Boston operated by JetBlue. JetBlue will put its B6 code on 17 European city routes operated by BA from its hub. The application comes despite BA having a joint transatlantic venture with American Airlines.

In its filing to the US Department of Transportation, the carriers have asked for the normal 45-day processing time to be expedited and for the agreement to be for an "indefinite duration".

### **Travel Counsellors reports record second quarter as sales hit £270 million**

Travel Counsellors has reported its best-ever second quarter, with group sales reaching £270 million in February, March and April. The figure is an increase of 13% compared to the same period last year and comes as the homeworking brand marks its 30th year in business. Travel Counsellors has now achieved 13 consecutive quarters of double-digit growth, with total sales over the rolling 12 months reaching £977 million. Travel Counsellors also reported a record rise in new business owners, with 76 recruited in the last quarter, a 10% increase on the same period last year. The sales update comes as Travel Counsellors continues its latest series of mini-conference events, TC Together, held at eight locations across the UK until June.

### **New US and Canada Brand JourneyScape to Launch to the Trade This Summer**

Journey Latin America has confirmed its new US and Canada sister brand, Journeyscape, will launch to the trade in July. Journeyscape, which will be based at JLA's west London office, will go on sale through agents on 15 July after a direct launch. Journeyscape will offer more than 60 "inspiring and authentic" journeys in North America, spanning self-drives, escorted tours and cruises. Focuses include North American culture, heritage and popular culture, as well as the region's landscapes and wildlife.

## **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**Aer Lingus** - Aer Lingus will start flying to Las Vegas from Dublin for the first time later this year. The Irish flag carrier's three-times-weekly Vegas service will take off on 25 October. Flights will operate through 29 April 2025, taking in the Easter holidays.

**British Airways** - British Airways is to launch flights to the Norwegian city of Tromsø next winter, a viewpoint for the Northern Lights. Tromsø will become BA's most northerly destination from 1 December, when it will operate from Heathrow. Flights will operate until 27 March 2025.

**British Airways** - British Airways will return to Jeddah this November after a five-year hiatus. BA's four-times-weekly service will take off on 4 November, flying year-round. BA said reintroducing Jeddah would complement its existing daily service to the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

## • TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

**EasyJet** - EasyJet has put its spring 2025 schedule on sale for both seat-only and package sales. It covers 3 March to 15 June next year and features 120 destinations. Seat-only and easyJet Holidays packages are offered from 21 airports with lead-in single fares from £26.99.

**Major Travel** - Major Travel is aiming to become the UK's leading trade-exclusive tour operator after US homeworking brand InteleTravel acquired a majority stake in the tailor-made specialist. The homeworking business argued its acquisition would help every UK and Irish travel agent to compete more effectively against direct-sell operators. InteleTravel confirmed a recruitment drive was underway to double the size of Major Travel's team by the end of the year, alongside plans to get Major's premium and long-haul holidays onto its booking platform.

**Jet2 Holidays** - Jet2.com and Jet2holidays' 2025/26 winter sun programme is now on sale, which includes a major expansion of its Morocco offering and two brand-new routes, as well as the first winter sun flights from its newest base. The airline and operator is offering some 4.2 million seats across 14 winter sun destinations – an increase of more than 5% compared with its 2024/25 winter programme, making it its biggest winter sun launch ever. Jet2 claims to be the first major operator to put winter 2025/26 on sale, stressing that the early launch came in response to demand from holidaymakers keen to lock in a winter sun break at the earliest opportunity.

## SOCIAL UPDATE

### **TikTok tests new collaboration feature**

TikTok is testing a new feature that allows users to tag collaborators in posts with links to their profiles. The coding for this feature suggests that creators can invite up to five others to make a collaboration post, and they will be able to decline or accept. Collaborator posts will appear on the creator and collaborator profiles, though only the creator will be able to edit the post. This feature will be ideal for brands collaborating with influencers and running campaigns. It will also enable companies and content creators to engage with specific audiences and increase reach in the app.

## MICE UPDATE

### **ICCA Unveils New Educational Initiatives and Expanded Certification Programmes**

The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) announced new educational initiatives at their Imex press conference, including ICCA Masterclasses, the ICCAUni partnership with colleges and universities, and expanded ICCASkills certification programmes. The new ICCA Masterclasses cover Association Impacts, AI-Empowered Event Professionals, and Regenerative Event Management. ICCAUni provides scholarships for students to attend the ICCA Congress, offering registration, travel, accommodation, and access to ICCA's resources and post-Congress mentorship. ICCA has also enhanced ICCASkills certification programmes, making online classes self-paced for global accessibility and expanding in-person classes with new hubs in Beijing and Luxembourg.

## LIGHTER NOTE

This week, dogs took to the red carpet for the 'Pet Gala', mimicking the memorable Met Gala looks from stars like Zendaya, Cardi B, Bad Bunny, Sarah Jessica Parker and more. For more information, please see [here](#)