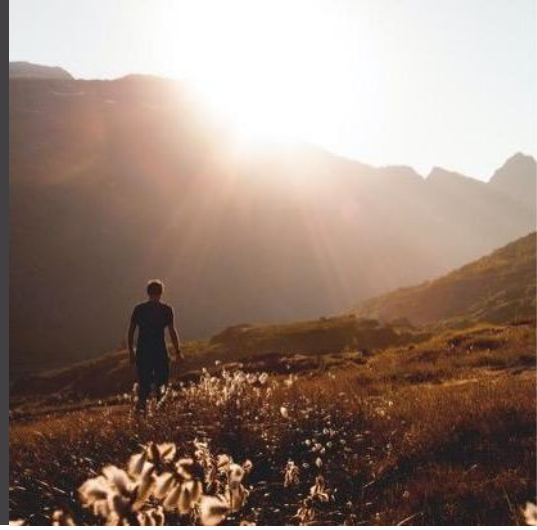


WEEKLY BRIEFING

15 November 2024



ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

The UK economy barely grew between July and September

The economy slowed over the three-month period, growing by just 0.1%, and shrank during September itself. Labour made boosting economic growth its top priority when it came into power but Chancellor Rachel Reeves said she was "not satisfied" with these latest figures which cover the first three months of the new government. However, many businesses have criticised tax rises in the Budget which they say will lead to higher prices and fewer new jobs. The latest growth figure was weaker than expected and was a sharp slowdown from the 0.5% growth seen in the April to June period. A number of economists said concerns about what October's Budget would contain had affected how firms and households had behaved.

UN climate talks 'no longer fit for purpose' say key experts

The United Nations' COP climate talks are "no longer fit for purpose" and need an urgent overhaul, key experts including a former UN secretary general and former UN climate chief have said. In a letter to the UN, external senior figures say countries should not host the talks if they don't support the phase-out of fossil energy. The UN's climate talks have made significant progress in recent years, although unanimous agreement is needed among almost 200 countries to take action. The Paris climate agreement, signed in 2015, outlines a long-term plan to rein in rising temperatures, as countries strive to keep that rise under 1.5C this century. They have also agreed to transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems and to treble renewable power by 2030. While the authors of this letter recognise these achievements, they feel that the slow-moving COP process is "no longer fit for purpose" in dealing with a fast-moving climate crisis.

Passengers promised better protection after UK air traffic control meltdown

The UK government has promised to introduce tougher enforcement action against airlines that fail to protect customers from losses caused by flight disruption after an inquiry into last August's air traffic meltdown, which led to more than 700,000 people facing delays and cancellations. The transport secretary, Louise Haigh, said she wanted "all passengers to feel confident when they fly" and would introduce changes to "provide air travellers with the highest level of protection possible". Her comments came after an investigation into the severe disruption caused across UK airports on 28 August last year after National Air Traffic Services (Nats) experienced a technical glitch while processing a flight plan. Hundreds of flights were grounded on one of the busiest travel days of the year, which resulted in more than 300,000 passengers having flights cancelled, and nearly 400,000 facing delays of at least three hours.

TRADE UPDATE

Oceania Cruises Expands 2026 Collection with 60 New Itineraries

Oceania Cruises has revealed a new set of 2026 voyages, featuring 60 itineraries across the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean, and Northern Europe. The collection includes 17 Grand Voyages aboard the line's smaller ships—Nautica, Regatta, and Sirena, which carry just 670 guests each. Key highlights include a 20-day East African Majesty sailing from Mumbai to Cape Town and a 15-day Eastern Atlantic Crossing from Miami to Lisbon. These offer unique, boutique cruising experiences to ports less accessible to larger vessels.

A&K Travel Group Plans Extensive African Property Rebuilds

A&K Travel Group is set to overhaul two flagship African properties: Gorilla Forest Camp in Uganda, relaunching Gorilla Forest Lodge, and Baines' Lodge in Botswana. Reopening mid-2025, Gorilla Forest Lodge will offer 10 expanded suites with luxury features and eco-friendly enhancements, while Baines' Lodge will include six redesigned suites with private decks. As part of a broader portfolio upgrade, A&K also recently announced its new riverboat, Pure Amazon, debuting in Peru next year.

Japan Sees Surge in UK Arrivals, Focus on Lesser Known Regions and Year Round Travel

Japan is experiencing a 38% rise in UK arrivals, with efforts to promote lesser-visited regions like Kyushu and Shimanami. The Japan National Tourism Organisation is encouraging travel throughout the year, beyond the cherry blossom season, and highlighting upcoming events such as the 80th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. The favourable exchange rate and off-season affordability are also boosting interest from UK tourists.

Eurostar Reports Sales Growth via Trade Channels as It Marks 30th Anniversary

Eurostar's growth through trade partners has exceeded direct sales, with an 8% increase through indirect channels in 2024. The operator also confirmed the Amsterdam-London direct service will restart in February 2025 after redevelopment work at Amsterdam Centraal station. Eurostar is expanding its network capacity and securing up to 50 new trains, aiming for over 30 million passengers by 2030. They also discussed readiness for the EU's Entry-Exit System (EES) in 2025, with increased kiosks and border agents at St Pancras station to accommodate new procedures.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Air India - The merger of Air India and Vistara has resulted in Singapore Airlines holding a 25.1% stake in the new Air India group. This consolidation includes Air India Express and AIX Connect, forming a unified group operating over 8,300 weekly flights with 300 aircraft. The transformation, part of a five-year strategy, aims to enhance global connectivity, now offering 120,000 passengers daily service across 312 routes. Air India's CEO highlighted the seamless transition of staff and operations as a key milestone in the airline's post-privatization journey.

Etihad Airways – Etihad Airways reported a 66% increase in net profits to £301 million for the first nine months of 2024, driven by a 21% rise in revenue to £4 billion. The airline saw a 35% increase in passenger numbers, reaching 13.6 million, and expanded its fleet and network. CEO Antonoaldo Neves highlighted the company's growth strategy, noting improvements in customer satisfaction, fleet expansion, and the successful relaunch of their cadet program, alongside a broader network of 83 destinations by September.

Jet2 – Jet2.com and Jet2holidays will start operations from Luton Airport in the summer of 2025, offering 17 destinations, including exclusive routes to Girona, Madeira, and Verona. The airline will operate up to 36 weekly flights, expanding its footprint with 430,000 seats on sale. The expansion includes new Airbus A321neo aircraft, creating over 125 jobs. CEO Steve Heapy emphasised the demand for the new base and the positive impact on the local economy, highlighting the company's commitment to offering exceptional service to holidaymakers across southern England.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

Audley Travel – Audley Travel reports an increase in demand for hybrid holidays, which combine experiences like cruises with land tours, safaris with beach getaways, and more. Agents also observe early bookings, particularly for high-demand events like Japan's cherry blossom season and the upcoming 2026 eclipse. Additionally, there's a rise in cultural tours, particularly for families, with destinations like Japan and Greece gaining popularity. Sustainable travel and bucket-list vacations are also key motivations, with top destinations for 2025 including India, Canada, Japan, the US, and Thailand, and trip durations growing to 16 nights.

EasyJet Holidays – EasyJet Holidays has launched its biggest-ever summer program for 2026, offering thousands of hotels in popular beach destinations like Turkey and Spain, plus city breaks in locations such as Barcelona and Krakow. The program also includes promotions with savings of up to £200, alongside more free kids' places at over 350 family-friendly hotels. With more than 70 destinations available across Europe and North Africa, the operator aims to meet the increasing demand for holidays. Popular packages include beach breaks, city escapes, and family stays, with exclusive trade offers available until November 24.

Hays Travel – Hays Travel aims to boost its fly-cruise bookings, emphasising the importance of suggesting cruises to customers at every opportunity. The company has seen strong performance in cruise bookings, with passenger numbers, revenue, and profitability all showing significant growth. With 35% of the UK population interested in cruising over the next five years, Hays encourages agents to become cruise experts, focus on luxury, expedition, and river cruises, and support cruise line launches. The agency is committed to growing passenger numbers as a key driver for profit and success.

Travel Counsellors – The Travel Counsellors global annual conference, marking the company's 30th anniversary, will take place from November 22-24 at the Manchester Central Convention Centre, with over 2,100 delegates attending. The event, themed '30 Beyond,' will feature a private celebration for long-standing members and seminars on wellbeing, resilience, and stress management, with external speakers addressing these topics.

CEO Steve Byrne highlighted the conference as a chance to celebrate the company's international success and reflect on a record-breaking year while focusing on future growth and customer care.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram expands boosting to include more post types

Instagram's boost option has now been updated to include a wider range of content. Posts which contain GIFs and stickers are now included, and when boosting posts with copyrighted music, Instagram will give the user the option to change the track to a boost-eligible song.

Facebook makes views its primary metric

In August, Instagram made 'views' its primary metric for both video and photographic content, shifting away from 'impressions' and 'reach'. Now, Facebook is doing the same, with 'views' replacing 'impressions' for Stories. Text and image posts will now measure how many times a post has appeared on screen. The views metric includes repeat views, so if one person sees a post three times, this is counted as three views.

MICE UPDATE

Convention bureaux 'as important as healthcare and education', summit claims

Convention and visitor bureaux (CVBs) – responsible for winning conference business for countries and cities – should be seen as "an essential public good." Rather than being categorised as sales and marketing organisations, CVBs should be recognised as "catalysts for community vitality", delegates to Destination International's 2024 Advocacy Summit, held in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, October 22-24, were told. The conference – theme "The Advocate as Catalyst" – gathered 750 destination leaders and explored a range of topics, including the record number of elections taking place worldwide in 2024 and 2025 and their potential impact on the travel industry. More broadly, the summit continued DI's work to build awareness that the days when destination organisations were measured primarily on the number of visitors or 'heads in beds' are over and destination promotion today must be regarded as essential to a community's vitality, 'on par with education, healthcare, emergency response, utilities and other public services'.

LIGHTER NOTE

First emperor penguin found in Australia after 2,000-mile journey from Antarctica. Read more [here](#).