

WEEKLY REPORT

13 January 2023



COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people with a confirmed positive test result for COVID-19 has decreased by 15.4% in England over the past week according to the latest Government data. Hospital admissions have also fallen by 6.1%. Of those aged 50 and above, 64.1% have been vaccinated with the autumn booster since 3 January.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Train operators set to make new pay offer to unions

Train operating companies are set to make a new offer to striking rail workers this week, after receiving a revised mandate from the government. The Rail Delivery Group (RDG), representing the firms, needs government backing for any deal. RDG chair Steve Montgomery said he had received a revised mandate, which would be "used" in talks with the TSSA and RMT unions on Thursday. Details could not be shared for confidentiality reasons, he said. Train operators and unions are at loggerheads over pay and conditions. The new offer could represent a breakthrough if the government's position has changed enough to satisfy unions' demands. However, unions may still reject any offer that comes with what they see as unacceptable changes to working practices and conditions attached.

High street Christmas sales figures far exceed expectations

Major high street outlets performed better than expected over the Christmas period and Next increased its profit outlook as a result, painting a positive picture for retail. Sales were up nearly 5% at Next in the nine weeks to 30 December on the same period in 2021, far outpacing the 2% reduction the retailer had forecast and £66m better than expected. As a leading high street retailer, Next is seen as a bellwether for the retail sector.

Rishi Sunak and Nicola Sturgeon to hold talks in Scotland

The two leaders are to have talks on a range of subjects including the NHS and the economy. Downing Street has not yet officially confirmed details of the visit, which

will be Mr Sunak's first trip to Scotland as prime minister. Mr Sunak had a telephone conversation with Ms Sturgeon shortly after becoming PM, with the two political leaders meeting at the British-Irish Council in Blackpool in November. The first minister described that meeting as "cordial and constructive" despite the pair having "profound political disagreements".

Petrol below £1.50 a litre for first time since Russia invaded Ukraine

Average petrol prices have fallen below 150p a litre for the first time since Russia invaded Ukraine, the AA motoring group says. Pump prices hit 149.74p per litre on Monday, lower than last February and down from a record 191.53p in July. The AA said falling global oil prices were behind the drop, calling it "a huge relief for drivers". But it said diesel still cost more than last year at 172.21p a litre compared with 153.05p. AA spokesman Luke Bosdet said it now cost about £23 less to fill an average-sized 55-litre car with petrol than it did in July, at roughly £82. However, he said petrol prices were "still historically way above" what they should be and that the end of a temporary fuel duty cut this March could lead to fresh rises.

TRADE UPDATE

Package holiday 'peace of mind' key consideration by consumers, poll finds

The value offered by package holidays during the cost of living crisis is leading to a surge in interest by consumers, new Jet2holidays research reveals. A poll of 2,000 adults, who have been abroad on holiday before, found 39% like having someone to arrange transfers, book accommodation, and sort the flights for them as opposed to doing it all separately. While 32% consider not having to worry about anything when they reach their destination as a positive, similarly 29% like having one point of contact should any problems arise.

Agents hail first week of peaks as sales soar on Sunshine Saturday

Travel agents have hailed the first full week of January trading as unusually strong with record sales days, prompting predictions bookings could gain further momentum in the coming weeks. Large agency groups said the first Saturday of the new year, billed 'Sunshine Saturday', beat previous January trading. Travel firms reported bookings for couples and families, with late sales continuing alongside summer enquiries, and both traditional hotspots and cruises popular.

New travel job vacancies fall to lowest level in 22 months, C&M reports

New travel job vacancies fell to their lowest level for 22 months in December, which was the slowest month of the year for recruitment in the industry. According to data from C&M Travel Recruitment, new travel job vacancies last month dropped by 39% from December 2021 to hit the lowest level since February 2021. The number was also down by 58% from the pre-pandemic month of December 2019.

Air traffic returns to three-quarters of 2019 levels

Air traffic in November returned to three-quarters of 2019 levels. Data released by IATA shows total global air traffic in the month rose by 41.3% compared to the same period in 2021, reaching 75.3% of pre-pandemic November 2019 levels. International traffic rose by 85.2% of the previous year's levels, with the Asia-Pacific market reporting the strongest year-on-year results, and all regions showing improvement compared to 2021.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Air India - Air India is to start four new routes from Gatwick this summer. The airline will be flying from the airport for the first time to Goa, Ahmedabad, Amritsar and Kochi (Cochin) from March 26. The Indian flag carrier will be running 12 flights a week between Gatwick and the four Indian destinations on Boeing 787-8 aircraft, with 256 seats across business and economy classes.

Wizz Air - Wizz Air's operations at Cardiff airport will cease permanently later this month, the budget carrier has confirmed. The airline's two routes to Milan and Bucharest will end from January 25 after a reduction in flight schedules from the Welsh airport announced last September. Affected customers will be notified via email and can opt for either a 120% refund of the original fare in airline credit, a 100% cash refund, or an alternative flight via Birmingham, Bristol, Gatwick, Leeds, Liverpool or Luton.

Ryanair - Ryanair has announced it has added five Italian routes to its summer schedule. From April, the airline will operate twice weekly flights to Rome from both Liverpool and East Midlands airports. It will also operate flights to the Italian capital from Ireland, with 12 flights a week from Dublin and two a week from Cork.

Play - Icelandic budget carrier Play is to start flying to Canada this summer. The airline is to serve Toronto's Hamilton airport – a hour's drive from the city centre – from June 22 with connections from Stansted and Liverpool via Reykjavik. Flights will depart from Stansted five times a week and from Liverpool twice a week with a 70 to 80-minute layover in the Icelandic capital.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

ITC - Luxury travel group ITC has refreshed its brands and united them under one umbrella branding, incorporating feedback from travel agents. The Chester-based company has revamped the branding for luxury operator Inspiring Travel; nature and responsible tourism specialist Rainbow; small-group and tailor made tour brand Regent; and sporting operator Spectate. ITC has also updated its dedicated

agent toolkit which features the brands' offers.

Global Travel Collection UK - Global Travel Collection UK (GTC UK) predicts a record year in 2023 as its business and leisure bookings have "soared" in the first week of January. It said hotel room nights have increased by 51% year on year, with travellers booking longer stays, despite global average rate increases. Meanwhile, business travel flight bookings for the first week are up 25% year on year.

Barrhead Travel & easyJet - Barrhead Travel and easyJet holidays both recorded their highest-ever day of sales on 'Sunshine Saturday'. The travel agency group said sales on Saturday January 7, topped the group's previous record sales day, which fell in January 2020. The bumper sales day also boosted sales for the first full week of January, which were up 52% on the same period in 2019. The reports on strong early January sales match reports from other agencies such as Hays Travel and Miles Morgan Travel.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Meta to shut down 'Creator Studio' page management app

Facebook Creator Studio has become a key tool used by social media managers for scheduling content. However, Meta will soon be closing this function down and incorporating it into its Business Suite platform, which also has analytics and messaging. Business Suite has other additional functions such as alerting users to posts on similar pages that are performing well, A/B testing capabilities and Facebook and Instagram ad tools.

Twitter set to launch advanced search in its mobile app

Twitter is looking to introduce advanced search filters on its mobile app. The new search qualifiers include: accounts mentioned; date ranges; mentions; hashtags; likes and retweet counts. These qualifiers are already available on desktop but not easily accessible on the mobile app. The new search features can also be used to undertake a tweet search on a specific individual user's profile.

MICE UPDATE

In-person return boosts business for more than half of planners

The fifth annual etc.venues survey reveals that 54% of planners saw an upturn in business following the return to in-person events. And almost 99% of planners value in-person meetings more than or the same as before the pandemic, up from 82% a year ago and a 22% increase from the start of the pandemic.

The results indicate that the impact of a dispersed workforce has changed the way

in which meetings agendas are constructed, with 65% of event planners arranging more one-day meetings than previously. Of these, 38% said it is to make better use of people's time, 32% are doing so to reduce costs and 30% say it's to help the work-life balance of delegates. The survey also showed that 27% of respondents are looking at holding more in-person meetings than before the pandemic, with 36% keeping the number the same as before.

LIGHTER NOTE

Man stops traffic for crossing Koala in Australia. See [here](#).