

WEEKLY BRIEFING

3 March 2023

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

February 2023 saw the biggest strike action in the UK in the last decade

Industrial action across multiple industries across February 2023 saw the biggest number of workers on strike in the last decade. On 1 February an estimated 475,000 workers went on strike in relation to pay and working conditions - roughly 200,000 teachers, 100,000 civil servants including, border force, train drivers, university lecturers and security guards all participated in strike action. In addition to these strikes, there was also the biggest strike action seen in recent years from NHS workers. This included a large number of ambulance workers and junior doctors striking, causing major delays across the country in A & E waiting times as well as scenes of ambulances queuing up outside of A & E departments unable to offload their passengers.

Rishi Sunak dismisses Boris Johnson's NI protocol for new Windsor protocol

The initial Northern Ireland protocol (NI Protocol) set up during Boris Johnson's tenure as prime minister has been reworked by Rishi Sunak. The new Windsor Framework, set up between current UK prime minister Rishi Sunak and the President of the European commission, Ursula von de Leyen, aims to solve post-Brexit issues. Some key changes include a 'green' lane for goods entering and leaving Northern Ireland with minimal paperwork for ease of moving goods and a 'red' lane for goods entering and leaving Ireland and the EU, where more thorough checks are carried out, a removal of export declaration for goods entering Great Britain from Northern Ireland and no new requirements on moving pets between UK and Northern Ireland.

Turkey rocked by series of earthquakes following initial quake on 6 February

After a devastating 7.7 earthquake struck southern and central Turkey as well as northern Syria on 6 February and another 7.8 earthquake shortly, thousands of people have been killed and millions displaced in the most devastating earthquake seen in the region in recent history. A few weeks after the twin earthquake, two more earthquakes measuring 6.4 and 5.8 struck the southern region of Hatay, further devastating the region. So far, the series of earthquakes has caused 45,000 deaths and over 1,000,000 people are now homeless.

TRADE UPDATE

Government urged to back sustainable aviation fuels

The government is being urged to support companies in investing in low-carbon sustainable aviation fuels (SAF). The call came from the Commons transport committee as it suggested that ministers change their approach towards picking specific technology solutions decarbonising UK transport or risk failing to hit targets for cutting emissions. The cross-party committee 'Fuelling the Future' report recommends the government invests in SAFs, which include both biofuels and synthetic fuels, using a 'contracts for difference' model. The model is where the government provides a company with capital for the upfront costs of developing a technology, while guaranteeing the price it will pay for the SAF when it comes on stream.

Visit Orlando to host series of UK based trade training events

In association with its partners Walt Disney World Resort and Universal Orlando Resort, Visit Orlando has announced plans to host three in person agent training events in the UK. The events will feature representatives from Orlando, who will provide the latest updates on what's new in the destination, including hotels, attractions and experiences. They will be held in London on 24 April, Manchester on 26 April, and Glasgow on 27 April. Visit Orlando president and chief executive Casandra Matej said "The UK remains our top overseas international market, with Orlando holidays currently high in demand." The events will include game sessions, opportunities to win prizes and destination updates to equip agents with tips on selling Orlando. Registration for each event begins at 5:30pm for a 6:30pm start, and the evening will end at 10pm.

UK flight departures are still down on pre-pandemic levels

According to new research, the UK's aviation sector is still yet to return to pre-pandemic departure levels. Figures published 2 March by analytics firm 'Cirium' claim UK departures scheduled for March have grown 31% compared to March 2022 to 71,617 flights / 12.5 million seats, but are still 15% down on March 2019 levels. Sally Gethin, aviation commentator, said that "It shows a year of continued growth despite challenges in the last 12 months, including recruitment shortages, debt burdens from COVID-19 lockdowns and border closures, as well as higher operating costs due to the energy crisis and inflationary pressures." Heathrow is expected to report its highest number of departures this month since January 2020 with more than 18,860 flights set to take off.

AIRLINE UPDATE

JetBlue - JetBlue to offer passengers the option to purchase sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) for their flight under a new initiative from the New York carrier. Passengers now have the option to replace a portion of their flight's conventional jet fuel with SAF via a partnership with climate tech company 'Choose'. Payments are used to cover the increased cost of SAF compared to normal kerosene. The director of sustainability and environmental social governance Sara Bogdan has said that "The call from our customers for more sustainable air travel has only got louder and louder". The airline's ambition is to convert 10% of its fuel consumption to SAF by 2030. JetBlue has been flying regularly using SAF from its California airports in San Francisco and Los Angeles, partnering with two suppliers, and has signed deals with another three.

Norse Atlantic - Norse Atlantic Airways has revealed full details of its summer schedule, with the addition of four more popular US cities from London, giving it more US destinations from Gatwick than any other airline. Already operating a daily service from Gatwick to New York, Orlando and Miami, the new routes are Washington DC, starting 1 June, Los Angeles, starting 30 June, San Francisco from 1 July and Boston from 2 September. The most frequent service will be Los Angeles with daily flights, the Washington service will operate up to six times a week, Boston will be five times a week and San Francisco will be three.

Saudia - Flights from Birmingham to Saudi Arabia are to be introduced as part of the expansion plans by state carrier Saudia. The launch date and frequency of the new flights have not yet been announced but the new route is one of four new international services confirmed by the national flag carrier. Saudia also plans to start serving Beijing, Kano in Nigeria and Johannesburg as part of a collaboration with the Saudi Air Connectivity Programme (ACP).

TUI - TUI has expanded its Egypt offering with two new weekly flights from London Gatwick to Marsa Alam. The flights will be added to the carrier's winter 2023 schedule and will begin departing twice a week from 1 November. The new additions come following a reported rise in popularity of Egypt holidays over the last few years. TUI has also put eight new resorts in the destination on sale, the hotel collection on offer features adult-only Steigenberger Coraya Beach and the Jaz Grand Marsa resort. Richard Sofer, commercial director for TUI UK, said: "Egypt is an incredible holiday destination and great value, and I'm thrilled that we're now able to give visitors the opportunity to discover a whole new region of the country."

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic has formally joined global alliance SkyTeam from 2 March. The move aims to enhance Manchester and Heathrow offerings and will see the carrier become SkyTeam's first and only UK member airline. Customers will benefit from an enhanced experience across 1,000 global destinations in more than 170 countries and will be able to book every SkyTeam member flight on a single ticket. Flying Club members, meanwhile, will have more opportunities to earn Virgin Points and Tier Points across all member airlines. Members will be able to redeem the points on partners such as Delta and Air France-KLM, Aeromexico, Air Europa, ITA Airways, Kenya Airways, Korean Air, Vietnam Airlines and XiamenAir.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

EasyJet Holidays - A special price promotion for trade partners booking travel for summer 2024 has been extended by EasyJet holidays by two weeks. The deal, providing customers using travel agents up to £200 off bookings for summer 2024 packages, will now run until 14 March. The discounts, introduced on 14 February, had been due to end on 28 February. EasyJet Holidays is offering agents £200 off with a minimum spend of £2,000 and £100 discounts for a minimum spend of £700, using an exclusive trade code. The S24TRADE code can be used on holidays booked by agents until 11pm on 14 March. It covers holidays departing between 1 April and 31 October 2024. Kelly Walker, Head of distribution, said "In recognition of the key role our travel agents play in our growing success, we've extended our trade exclusive promotion a further two weeks for trade customer bookings to show our appreciation."

Elegant Resorts - Elegant Resorts unveils new wellness collection featuring 32 leading spa resorts and retreats around the world. The properties featured in the new collection have been "carefully handpicked" by the Elegant Resorts team and offer a range of therapies and treatments including emotional healing, personal programmes created by ayurveda experts and mindfulness. The operator's managing director Lisa Fitzell explained "Wellness has always been very close to my heart. I go on one retreat a year to reset and feel the benefits from it for the rest of the year." The Wellness Collection can be found on Elegant Resorts' website with each property designed to offer "a truly immersive experience for the mind, body and soul".

Regent Seven Seas Cruises - Regent Seven Seas Cruises has launched a collection of culinary sailings. The Epicurean Spotlight Voyages each feature a chef or culinary expert to lead interactive sessions such as cooking demonstrations, wine tastings or cocktail parties. The line is offering 11 culinary sailings between June 2023 and March 2025. The Epicurean Spotlight with Chef Mark Bittman and Executive Culinary Director Wolfgang Maier Alaskan itinerary will depart Seward and call at Sitka, Skagway, Juneau, Ketchikan and Vancouver. Passengers will watch cooking demonstrations led by the headline chefs and learn how the onboard culinary team procures local ingredients for its dishes. Prices for the eight-day itinerary on board Seven Seas Explorer start at £6,849, including flights, transfers, shore excursions, food and drink.

TUI - TUI targets tour growth with a new online platform. Tui is creating a dedicated online tours brand to capture a greater share of a sector estimated to be worth \$100 billion a year. The new tuitours.com brand will start in Belgium ahead of wider international expansion during this year and in 2024. Individual and group tours in 30 countries, including destinations in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the Americas, are available. The platform replaces previously used local solutions and includes the full portfolio of existing group tours offered by Europe's largest travel group. Tui described the new platform as a "cutting-edge tool that enables the digital production of group and individual tours by travel advisors and customers" by simplifying the development of multi-day tours and trips.

SOCIAL UPDATE

TikTok is reportedly developing a paywall feature

TikTok is working on a paywalled video feature that would allow creators to charge users \$1, or another amount, to access a video. This could provide a solution to the challenge of inserting ads in short form video content allowing the app's creators to make money directly from popular videos. In addition to this, TikTok is also said to be testing a revamped creator fund that aims to give creators higher payouts than its earlier version that [launched in 2020](#). If released, both updates would allow TikTok to better reward creators whose viral videos have been vital to the app's growth and popularity.

Meta's automated ad targeting tools have driven a 32% increase in ROAS

With Meta having fewer user insights to go on, it has reverted its efforts to machine learning, and building more effective targeting systems based on systematic intelligence. Many performance advertisers are praising [the results of Advantage+ campaigns](#) with Meta announcing that they are indeed driving a better performance of +32% return on ad spend. This is great news for brands allocating budget to paid social campaigns.

MICE UPDATE

Rail strikes have caused £337m of cancellations across sector, says mia

In a survey of 126 event venues and suppliers, the Meetings Industry Association (mia) found that almost all (94 per cent) of respondents have been negatively affected by rail strikes, resulting in an estimated £337m of cancelled business and £552m of postponed business. The results were scaled up to reflect 3,500 sector organisations. The average organisations' estimated value of cancelled business due to rail strikes is just under £100k (£96,378), while the average estimated value of postponed business is £157k. The survey also revealed the effect of the well-documented rise of energy costs, as more than three quarters (76 per cent) of organisations said they had increased their prices by an average of 13 per cent to mitigate increased operating costs in the last six months.

LIGHTER NOTE

In a recent study on a stretch of coastline in Norfolk, a record breaking number of just under 3,800 baby seals have been born doubling the population numbers from three years ago, read more [here](#)