

# WEEKLY REPORT

28 April 2023



## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### **UK says nearly 900 evacuated from Sudan amid hopes of further flights**

British troops are organising an evacuation from Sudan under cover of a ceasefire. The current ceasefire began at midnight (local time) on Monday bringing a pause to a conflict which erupted on 15 April amid a power struggle between the leaders of the army and the RSF.

Britain said it had evacuated nearly 900 people from Sudan and was hoping to continue evacuation flights overnight, although violence flared as the country's warring factions agreed to extend a ceasefire. More than 2,000 British nationals in Sudan have registered under the evacuation plans and the UK government confirmed around 4,000 British passport holders were in the country. British military chiefs say they have the capacity to evacuate at least 500 people per day.

### **Passport office announces further strikes in May**

Passport office workers have been on strike since last month and there is potential for further walkouts this year, causing issues for holidaymakers hoping to get their passports renewed ahead of the summer holidays. Almost 2,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) working in the Passport Offices in the United Kingdom walked out on 3 April in a dispute over a 10 per cent pay rise, pensions, redundancy terms and job security.

They will now be joined from Tuesday 2 May by around 1,000 workers in non-examination roles in the same offices with industrial action due to last until Saturday 6 May. The PCS members are currently being balloted on whether to renew the mandate for industrial action. The ballot is open until 9 May and if agreed, it could mean an additional six-month period where industrial action is possible.

### **MPs call for public inquiry into impact of leaving the EU**

MPs have urged the U.K. government to launch a public inquiry to assess the effects of Brexit in a parliamentary debate triggered by a petition. A three-hour debate was held after 183,000 people signed a petition calling for a public inquiry into the impact of leaving the European Union. The government says Brexit was a "democratic choice" and dismissed calls for a public inquiry. The debate on Monday in Westminster Hall gave MPs an opportunity to discuss these issues, with most speakers criticising Brexit and those who supported it.

### **UK economy not 'out of the woods'**

The British economy is still not "out of the woods", according to Barclays' chief executive, who said the bank would remain cautious in the months ahead despite making its strongest quarterly profit since 2011. The Bank of England has raised interest rates 11 months in a row to 4.25%, and is expected to do so again on 11 May. The increases have been part of efforts to curb surging prices, which rose sharply after a jump in energy costs linked to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. While higher rates boost profits for high street banks as they can charge customers more for loans and mortgages – uncertainty over the long-term impact on consumer spending and deal making is a concern for such lenders.

### **President Joe Biden launches 2024 re-election campaign**

U.S. President Joe Biden has announced he will run for re-election in 2024 and launched his video campaign on Tuesday 25th April. Biden will seek a second term in the White House, meaning the upcoming 2024 election could result in a rematch with Donald Trump.

## **TRADE UPDATE**

### **London Gatwick airport reveals brand overhaul and multimillion-pound investment**

London Gatwick airport has unveiled a new brand identity and refreshed vision to coincide with a multimillion-pound development programme. Acknowledging the airport's history, the new brand reaffirms the airport as part of the broader VINCI Airports network. The airport comments that the tagline – "To be the airport for everyone, whatever your journey" – focuses on delivering a personalised experience to meet passengers' individual needs. Accompanying the new brand and vision is a multimillion-pound development programme, which includes the expansion and refurbishment of departure lounges to create more modern spaces for passengers, while at the same time considering the airport's sustainability goals.

### **More Brits open to cruise holidays than ever before**

Holidaymakers from the UK and Ireland took around 1.7 million cruise holidays last year, nearing demand levels last seen in 2019. According to new data published by Clia, 479,000 more British travellers took a cruise break in 2022 than in 2021. The UK and Ireland markets accounted for 29% of all European source passengers and globally, more than a quarter (27%) of those who sailed for two or more nights in the last 12 months travelled in a party consisting of three or more generations. Intent to cruise, Clia said, is "stronger than ever", with 85% of cruise passengers from the UK intending to take a holiday at sea again (a 6% increase from 2019), and 60% will do so in the next two years (up from 53% in 2022). And 70% of those who have never cruised before would consider a cruise in the next few years (up from 68% in March 2022).

### **People 'happy to spend' on holidays despite economic uncertainties**

Consumers are "happy to spend" on holidays despite economic uncertainties, according to the boss of PPHE Hotel Group. President and chief executive, Boris Ivesha, delivered the message while reporting first quarter revenues up 10% on the equivalent period in pre-pandemic 2019 at £68.8 million. The UK and the Netherlands showed particularly strong performances, with trading consistently strong across leisure, corporate travel and meetings and events, according to the group. The company reported strong trading and booking trends for leisure stays, corporate business and meetings in the first three months of the year has continued into the second quarter, supported by the upcoming coronation of King Charles III.

### **Travel and tourism forecast for full COVID-19 recovery in 2024**

The global travel and tourism sector is forecast to fully rebound from the impact of COVID-19 by 2024. The industry's recovery is set to reach just 5% below 2019 pre-pandemic levels this year with a GDP contribution of \$9.5 trillion. Research conducted by the World Travel & Tourism Council in collaboration with Oxford Economics shows that 34 countries have already exceeded 2019 levels. Nearly half of 185 countries worldwide will have either fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels or be within 95% of full recovery by the end of the year, the WTTC projects.

## **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**Virgin Atlantic** - Virgin Atlantic is relaunching services to Shanghai, China from London Heathrow airport, marking the post-COVID-19 return of all of the airline's routes. The daily service will resume on 1 May 2023, with fares starting from £432pp. The move comes following a relaxation in travel restrictions between the two countries, which sees Chinese borders reopening to foreign nationals for the first time since December 2020.

**Ryanair** - Ryanair has added three new Boeing 737-8200 aircraft to its London Luton-based fleet, claiming the new models will cut noise and emissions. The low-cost carrier announced on Thursday (27 April) the new aircraft will bring a 40% reduction in noise and a 16% reduction in carbon emissions, all while carrying 4% more passengers per flight. Chief executive, Eddie Wilson, said the decision to allocate the new aircraft to Luton would support the airport's strategy to deliver sustainable growth while reaching net-zero by 2040.

**JetBlue** - Travellers in Boston and New York City, USA, have a new option for flying to Europe. JetBlue has announced new routes to Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, and flights are now on sale at a discounted rate. Booking to the Dutch capital city is now available from both John F. Kennedy International Airport and Boston Logan International Airport. Service from New York City to Amsterdam will begin on August 29 and services from Boston to Amsterdam will begin on September 20. Flights will run daily from each airport on JetBlue's Airbus A321 Long Range aircraft.

**British Airways** - British Airways has unveiled its latest inflight safety video, which it says showcases "everything that makes Britain unique and truly original". The five-minute video, which will be shown on long-haul flights from 1 May features "Britons going about their daily activities", as well as some familiar faces including journalist Robert Preston, rapper Little Simz, actor Ncuti Gatwa, and entrepreneur and star of Dragons' Den Steven Bartlett. Several celebrities associated with the airline also appear, including designer of BA's new uniforms Oswald Boateng, tennis player and British Airways Global Ambassador Emma Raducanu, and chef Tom Kerridge - responsible for the carrier's buy-on-board menus.

## TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

### **Hotels urged to go green in easyJet holidays sustainability drive**

EasyJet holidays is to encourage hotels in Spain, Greece and Turkey to go green as part of a sustainability drive. The budget airline's in-house tour operation is sponsoring a sustainable tourism course for its hotel partners across the three countries. Properties which gain recognised standards set by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) will become part of the operator's new 'eco-certified' collection. The aim is to make it easier for holidaymakers to make sustainable choices.

### **Travel Counsellors announces year-long responsible travel campaign**

The home working group's campaign includes a dedicated microsite platform for its customers to raise awareness and interest of responsible travel and has been launched to coincide with this month's Earth Day. This includes information on sustainable destinations and hotels and highlights ways to support local communities and wildlife in destinations, and ultimately, how travellers can reduce their carbon footprint.

A digital brochure is currently being produced which features related content with supporting social media assets for Travel Counsellors to showcase the campaign and sustainable activity across their own social channels.

### **JTA Travel Group parent acquires Belleair Holidays**

Malta specialist Belleair Holidays has been bought by Alfendo Limited, the parent company of JTA Travel Group. As part of the JTA family of brands, the tour operator will be run by senior JTA Travel Group executive Dave Green, who will become managing director of the Malta specialist. After hearing about the closure of the business, Green said "Belleair is a brand agents have loved for over 40 years as the 'go to' operator for the Maltese Islands and beyond, we aim to bring that back, stronger than ever before."

## **SOCIAL UPDATE**

### **Verification required to run ads on Twitter**

Twitter has informed advertisers that they will need to subscribe to its Twitter Blue or Verification for Organisations packages in order to continue advertising. This means that advertisers will now have to pay \$8 per month for Twitter Blue or \$1,000 per month for Verification for Organisations to run ads. An added benefit is that having the Blue Tick may also give brands more validity and potentially greater reach as the platform is looking into only showing tweets from verified accounts in the For You feed. However, there has been somewhat of a backlash against the Blue Tick from notable Twitter users and it may no longer carry the authority it previously had.

### **'Barcelona': the Meta alternative to Twitter**

Meta has said that they are creating a new social platform called 'Barcelona' centred on text updates which has been described as 'Instagram for your thoughts'. It will be a stand alone app where posts will be a maximum of 500 characters. Users will be able to login with their Instagram credentials and their Instagram ID will be their username. The ongoing changes at Twitter under Musk have created an appetite for an alternative among some users.

**New WhatsApp option allows log in on multiple devices**

WhatsApp has created a new feature, allowing users to access the same WhatsApp account on up to four mobile phones, enabling users to maintain chats across multiple devices. This will be beneficial to businesses, allowing multiple employees to use their phones to reply to customers via the same WhatsApp Business account. This update is being introduced globally and should be available to all users within the next few weeks.

**MICE UPDATE****Bristol to increase event capacity with major venue developments**

The Bristol area is set to significantly increase its capacity for large-scale exhibitions, conferences and events, following the announcement of major venue developments and expansions in the city. Meet Bristol and Bath, the official Convention Bureau for Bristol, Bath and the surrounding region, anticipates that it will put Bristol alongside destinations such as Glasgow and Manchester for delegate capacity.

The YTL Arena Bristol, set to open in late 2025 or early 2026, will be the largest indoor arena and exhibition centre in the South. The new Ashton Gate Sports and Convention Centre will sit alongside the current stadium with 4,000sqm floor space and a 232-room hotel, with work expected to start later this summer. Elsewhere in the city, refurbished music venue Bristol Beacon will reopen on 30 November, following a five-year transformation project.

**LIGHTER NOTE****Lighter note**

Blackpool zoo is hiring people to dress up as birds to scare away seagulls. See more [here](#).