

WEEKLY REPORT



MMGY
Weekly Report for UK & Ireland
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ECONOMIC, POLITICAL & SOCIAL UPDATE

ONS Revises UK Borrowing Down by £2bn After VAT Error

The Office for National Statistics has lowered UK government borrowing for April–August to £81.8bn, down from £83.8bn, after HMRC identified missing VAT payments. The current budget deficit is now £60bn, still above the £46.6bn forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility. The revision comes just weeks before Chancellor Rachel Reeves is set to deliver the November Budget, widely expected to raise taxes to close a £20–30bn fiscal gap. The ONS has faced multiple data errors this year, including inflation and retail sales figures, raising concerns about the reliability of official economic statistics.

Source: [Financial Times](#)

UK Ministers Plan Up to 25% Increase in NHS Drug Prices

Ministers are preparing to raise the NHS payment for medicines by up to 25% after weeks of negotiations with the US administration and pharmaceutical companies. Labour has proposed changing the cost-effectiveness thresholds used by NICE to assess new medications, a key element in resolving disputes that have led firms like MSD and AstraZeneca to pause or cancel UK investments while expanding in the US. The plan aims to increase NHS spending on new medicines, currently 9% of overall NHS expenditure, which is lower than in the US and many European countries.

Source: [The Guardian](#)

Water Bills Set to Rise for Millions of Households in England

Millions of households in England will face higher water bills after the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) approved additional increases for five water companies (Anglian, Northumbrian, Southern, Wessex, and South East) beyond the amounts previously set by regulator Ofwat. The CMA allowed an average extra rise of 3% (around £12 per year) due in part to higher borrowing costs, although the companies had requested much larger increases to fund infrastructure improvements. The decision caps the extra revenue at £556m, just 21% of the £2.7bn requested.

Source: [BBC](#)

Liberal Democrats Membership Halves Despite Electoral Success

The Liberal Democrats have seen their membership almost halve over the past five years, falling from just under 118,000 in 2020 to around 60,000. The decline follows a post-Brexit surge and is partly masked by the inclusion of “registered supporters,” who do not have voting rights in leadership contests. Experts suggest the drop is surprising given the party’s electoral performance, though public profile and limited prospects of entering government may affect long-term membership growth. In contrast, the Green Party has seen rapid growth to 90,000 members, while Labour, Reform UK, and the Conservatives report mixed trends. The Lib Dems, however, remain highly active, with 19% of members canvassing voters in the 2024 election, the highest proportion among UK parties.

Source: [BBC](#)

TRADE UPDATE

Foreign Office warns US government shutdown could disrupt travel

The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) has updated its advice for the US, warning the federal government shutdown could disrupt travel. The updated advice says: “There could be travel disruptions, including flight delays and longer queue times at some airports, due to the current US federal government shutdown. “Check for messaging from your travel provider or airline and follow their guidance. “There may also be restrictions on access to some federally-managed tourist attractions. Please check the relevant websites in advance.” The shutdown began on 1 October after the Republicans and Democrats failed to agree on Government funding of public services beyond this month.

Source: [Travel Gossip](#)

Change in youth travel demand could lead to more single-centre tours

Changing demands from younger travellers could lead to a shift from multi-centres to more single-country youth tours, according to the boss of TTC Tour Brands. Speaking on a panel debate on differentiated and experiential product at Abta’s Travel Convention, EMEA managing director Kelly Jackson described younger travellers as wanting a slower pace of travel, more purpose-driven and concerned about sustainability and inclusion. TTC Tour Brands’ portfolio includes youth touring brand Contiki, known for its multi-destination tours for 18 to 35 year olds, as well brands Trafalgar, Insight Vacations and Luxury Gold. “We still have multi-destination trips [but] I think we will see less of them and more single country trips coming up in the future,” said Jackson on the group’s youth tours, adding: “We are looking at that.”

Source: [Travel Weekly](#)

UK industry ‘very resilient’ despite financial uncertainty, says Tui UK boss

The UK industry remains “very resilient” despite financial concerns ahead of November’s Budget and increased capacity across the market, according to Tui’s UK boss. “The great news is that our industry is very resilient. It’s a great place to be – holidays – because people want to book travel,” said Neil Swanson, Tui UK & Ireland managing director. However, he noted: “People are waiting a bit later [to book]. It is a bit more uncertain, so they are waiting later.” He told a Travel Weekly webcast the market is “very competitive” with “big capacity increases” alongside financial uncertainty ahead of the Budget at the end of November. “The prices might come down in that period. There is a lot about how you hold your nerve on prices,” he said during the webcast at Abta’s Travel Convention in Majorca.

Source: [Travel Weekly](#)

AIRLINE UPDATE

Air Transat - Air Transat will operate direct flights between London Gatwick and Ottawa, Canada for the first time next year. The service will start on 15 May 2026, operating three times a week, on Fridays, Sundays and Tuesdays. This will coincide with a new Ottawa–Montreal route between 5 May to 23 October 2026, operated by Air Transat’s partner Porter Airlines.

Source: [Travel Gossip](#)

British Airways (BA) - A third daily British Airways flight between Heathrow and Delhi is to be introduced next year, the airline has confirmed. The carrier will also look for further growth opportunities in the country as trade between the UK and India increases. The airline’s First cabin will return on flights to Mumbai this month, with the latest business class Club Suite on select flights across all five Indian routes by the end of 2026. The extra frequency will give passengers travelling to India more choice and flexibility, BA confirmed as it carried 130 top UK chief executives and ministers led by Prime Minister Keir Starmer on a government trade mission to the country.

Source: [Travel Weekly](#)

Norwegian - Norwegian Group airlines handled almost 2.7 million passengers on increased capacity in September. Norwegian Air accounted for the bulk of carryings at 2.3 million while regional offshoot Wideroe flew almost 400,000. The load factor at Norwegian Air was up 1.4 percentage points year on year to 86.6% as the airline operated an average of 89 aircraft last month, a rise of two per cent. The group exercised an option to expand an order for new generation Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft and 10 new routes from Billund in Denmark during the month.

Source: [Travel Weekly](#)

United - United Airlines will return to Glasgow airport in 2026 to reinstate direct flights to its New York hub, Newark Liberty International Airport. It is the first time the carrier will have operated at Glasgow since 2019. United also said it will be the only US airline offering a non-stop service between the US and Glasgow, Scotland. The daily service takes off on May 8 and runs until September 23, 2026, with 166-seat Boeing 737 Max-8 aircraft. Matt Hazelwood, chief commercial officer at airport owner AGS Airports, said: “We are absolutely thrilled to welcome United Airlines back to Glasgow airport.

Source: [Travel Weekly](#)

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

Audley Travel - Audley Travel is reintroducing trips to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2026. The tour operator last offered itineraries to the Silk Road destinations in 2020. Agents can book several trips including the 'Uzbekistan discovered', an 11-day itinerary which visits the capital city Tashkent, the walled city of Khiva, the Holy City of Bukhara and ends in Samarkand. There is also a 16-day 'Highlights of Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan's mountains & Uzbekistan's architecture' that features the main destinations in Uzbekistan with the addition of Kyrgyzstan's Bishkek, Lake Issyk-Kul and Song-Kul Lake.

Source: [Travel Gossip](#)

Exodus - Exodus Adventure Travel is launching 15 new itineraries for 2026. The small group tour operator's new trips are available for agents to book now and span Central and South America, Asia, Africa and Europe. Highlights of the tours in Asia include a 12-day hiking trip in Sri Lanka, a 13-day trek through northern Vietnam and a 13-day cycling holiday around the Japanese islands of Kyushu and Shikoku. In Europe, there are a number of new itineraries including a week-long activity itinerary in Sardinia, which combines kayaking, cycling, and hiking, a seven-day journey through Turkey and an eight-day trip through the Baltics.

Source: [Travel Gossip](#)

Great Little Escapes - The UK Civil Aviation Authority has confirmed Great Little Escapes has ceased trading as an Atol holder. The tour operator, which was based in Sandhurst, Berkshire, traded under the names Great Little Escapes, Tunisia First and Your Holidays until its failure on June 13. It also traded through the websites themaldives.co.uk, yourholidays.co.uk, thecaribbean.com and greatlittleescapes.co.uk, with its license allowing it to carry 500 passengers. The CAA said it understood there were not any customers overseas, while the initial number of estimated forward bookings stood at 141 travellers.

Source: [Travel Weekly](#)

TUI - A new Tui survey has found nearly a third of people (32%) have avoided travelling due to "accessibility concerns". The most common barriers were a lack of sensory-friendly spaces, poorly designed facilities and limited wheelchair access. The study also revealed two-thirds of the 2,034 respondents (66%) think it is "expected" that people with disabilities will face difficulties when travelling, while more than a quarter (27%) think the UK "doesn't do enough" to support disabled and neurodivergent people in having equal access to travel. Inaccessible booking systems, long airport waiting times, inadequate support from airline and hotel staff and unsuitable lifts were cited as problems making access to travel unequal.

Source - [Travel Weekly](#)

MEDIA & SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram's Edits add new features

Instagram's video editing app Edits has introduced several new features, including a variety of new fonts, such as 'ZEN SERIF' a signature font by the K-Pop star JENNIE. Additionally, the app now offers over 250 new sound effects, including seasonal options for Halloween, and the ability to save custom colours using hexcodes. To help creators with collaborations, a new tool allows them to generate a PDF report of their performance metrics.

Source: [Social Media Today](#)

Key Media Movers and Shakers:

Gemma Bowes promoted to Assistant Travel Editor: Formerly Acting Associate Editor, Gemma Bowes is now the Assistant Travel Editor at The Times & The Sunday Times.

Daily Mail appoints first Influencer Correspondent: Molly Clayton appointed as the Daily Mail's first Influencer Correspondent.

MICE UPDATE

Excel London claims status as America's No.1 event destination in Europe following \$340m investment

London has become the destination of choice in Europe for the US convention and congress sector, according to new data released by Excel London. During the opening day of IMEX America in Las Vegas, the Excel team announced that events booked by US companies now account for more than half (60%) of all its conventions and congresses, a trend they expect to continue over the coming years. Global US brands including Amazon, Microsoft, Google, Salesforce and Gartner are just some of the firms favouring London for their landmark European conferences, drawn by the city's culture, connectivity and universal appeal. That's in addition to major association congresses, with US-based organisers such as the Linux Foundation (KubeCon) and the Alzheimer's Association International Conference® also opting for London. The expansion now sees Excel total 125,000sqm, making it the largest fully integrated convention and exhibition venue in Europe. Its size would also put it among the top 10 largest venues in America.

Source: [CMW \(Conference and Meetings World\)](#)

LIGHTER NOTE

A creative AI project lets people have real-time conversations with trees by converting their bioelectrical signals into speech, sharing insights about their lifespans and environments. See more [here](#).