

UK Office January 2020 TDC Report

Prepared by: Venessa Alexander
UK Director

Tour Operators

- **Travelopia** – We had a meeting with Jessica Jackson and Charlotte Goodchild who provided an update on the operations team. Call centre staff are now split by destination, e.g. North America covering USA, Canada and the Caribbean, instead of by distribution. This is a positive step and has been well received by product & purchasing as well as the call centre staff themselves. The Hayes & Jarvis website has been updated to optimize SEO and include more content within each destination. Highlights now include suggested things to do, must-sees, festivals, cuisine, etc. Jessica and Charlotte will be reviewing the current St. Pete/Clearwater hotel choices and will request information and/or content from us when required. We provided feedback and suggestions based upon their current inclusions and how they might adapt these. We also gave details on the ‘Gulp Coast’ brewing tours and Downtown St. Petersburg wine pop-up events. They are hoping to reintroduce destination days and will be in touch with potential dates as & when they have approval.
- **Student Universe** – A meeting was held with Frederick Elliott, Commercial & Partnerships director. Student Universe is a student/youth travel/gap year operator that was started in 2000 and which was acquired by the Flight Centre Group in 2015. It was merged at the same time with GapYear.com, one of the world’s leading travel advice resources for backpackers/gap year students. 99% of their business out of the UK is FIT and it is all made online. Their biggest competitor in the UK is STA, however, STA is dominated by retail sales. Student Universe have taken a large chunk of STA’s US market share and they (STA) cannot compete with SU’s online technology. SU only market & sell to a specific demographic – clients will be aged 18-28/30 and/or enrolled in higher education. (70% of the air fares they have negotiated/have access to require the passenger to be enrolled in higher education). They focus their marketing activities online & social media. First and foremost, they are an OTA and they have permission to advertise in every college and university campus in the UK bar 168. 80% of their business is currently flight-only but there is a concerted effort to increase conversion and promote more accommodations & activities to pre-book. They are planning a co-op social campaign with Visit Florida following a meeting at WTM and would be open to including St. Pete/Clearwater content. We will be following up with Fred and Visit Florida to see what the opportunity might be. Fred inferred there was no cost to the destination(s) on this occasion because there is no history and they would like to ‘show their potential’.
- **Saga Holidays** – We held a meeting with Jacqueline Giles, Product & Purchasing Executive for the USA. Jacqui advised Simon Edwards is leaving the business to take up a head of commercial role with Holiday Taxis. Jacqui will be taking charge of their US touring product until further notice. Saga have been through a significant number of changes over the last few years both structurally and within their product. Jacqui explained the US product was scaled back quite significantly a couple of years ago, this included the cancellation of an escorted tour that stayed in Safety Harbour. There are no

tours to Florida in 2020 but Jacqui said she is looking at a new itinerary for 2021, possible suggestions include a Deep South & Florida or Florida loop. We have asked Jacqui to keep us updated with any product decisions and also to let us know as & when she may require content.

Meetings/Training/Events

- **Virgin Holidays Peak Campaign Sponsored Lunch** – VSPC sponsored lunch for the sales/reservation and operational teams as a thank you for their business. We took over the lunch area and VSPC branding was clearly on display. We engaged with selling staff and provided literature, bags and giveaways.
- **Discover America Sweden (Stockholm)** – We attended the annual workshop for retail agents. The event is made up of timed workshops interspersed with stage presentations; table-top presentations for 5-10 minutes each plus there was time given for agents to sit and chat over food and drinks. We distributed brochures, maps and giveaways. This year's event was attended by 80 agents however there was a large number of business/corporate-focused agents. Attendance in 2021 will be subject to attendance by a higher proportion of leisure agents.
- **Explore the World, Oslo** – We attended this two-day (annual) consumer show as part of the Florida's Beaches coalition. VSPC was the sole attendant on behalf of the four regions. We engaged with consumers, talked about the destinations and provided suggestions for itineraries, additionally we distributed brochures, maps and giveaways.

TRADE LIAISON

- **Florida Huddle** – We obtained the email addresses on behalf of Rosemarie for Dnata (Jonathan Couch), Funway (Malcolm Davies), Vacations to America (Andrew Pickering), North American Vacation Homes (Richard Strange), BA Holidays (Kara Widdows) and Tui (Arlene McJury). These were for the purpose of inviting them to the planned Huddle client dinner.
- **British Airways Holidays** – We assisted Kara Widdows, Destination Executive with a request to arrange a site inspection and meeting with the Sales and Revenue Manager's at The Grand Plaza Hotel in St. Pete Beach in advance of her attendance at Florida Huddle.
- **Tour America/Experience Kissimmee/Visit St. Pete/Clearwater** – Work continues on the joint campaign. Work has already commenced on the approval of creative and will be ready to launch early February and will run for a period of 4 weeks.
- **Ocean Holidays** – Discussions continued to take place with the marketing and product team at Ocean Holidays early in the month to finalise the joint co-op marketing proposal. This has now been agreed and was duly sent to Brand USA for final approval. Brand USA requested a few lines be added to the proposal and we are currently awaiting the updated document to resend back to them.

- **VSPC/Experience Kissimmee/SeaWorld Parks & Visit Tampa** – Work continues on our planning for the joint 2020 UK training mission. We are in the process of contacting key tour operators that we wish to visit during the week of the 27th April as well as finalising invitations for the London event we will be hosting at Swingers Golf in London on Wednesday 29th April.
- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners** – We have received, reviewed and agreed a joint co-op marketing campaign with USAirtours/TravelPlanners that will run from February – May. The proposal was also duly signed off by Brand USA. We will be the USAirtours Destination of the Month (DOTM) for February and in March for TravelPlanners. Other activity will include solus emails to both trade and consumer databases, social media activity, CPC ads and deals featured on Travelzoo and Ice Lolly. The approval process for the DOTM creative has already been signed off by ourselves and Brand USA.
- **Visit USA Ireland** – We have put forward our interest in hosting the next Visit USA Ireland Trade FAM after receiving a general member email from Tony Lane requesting partners who are keen to host to confirm their willingness to assist.
- **Gold Medal Travel/Visit Florida**– We have now received the results from the recent Gold Medal and Visit Florida Agent and Consumer Marketing campaign that took place from 01 September – 30 November 2019. The results are as follows:
 - The dedicated banner in agent eshot went to a total of 3750 with an open rate of 29%
 - The VSPC solus eshot went to 3750 agents and again achieved an open rate of 29%
 - The Gold Medal Facebook, Twitter and Instagram feeds reached 15,000 agents as did the Travel Gossip social media element of the campaign
 - The GMAG agent facing magazine was mailed to 1000 stores via key account managers, the mag was also available online and was emailed to 2000 email addresses
 - The bespoke 12-page consumer travel guide of which 45,000 copies were printed were sent to over 3000 stores nationwide and was also emailed to 2000 trade email addresses for distribution to their customers
 - 5 x bespoke in store posters were mailed to 1000 stores and the online version was emailed to 2000 email addresses
 - The retail merchandising campaign promotional item packs were mailed to 200 stores and a further 20 were used for as part of the social media campaign
 - The agent booking incentives were available to 5000 active travel agents
 - The call centre incentive was communicated internally with 50 posters as well as via staff emails
 - Total room nights booked to our area were 207 versus 226 in 2018 so slightly down year on year but our area far outweighs bookings in any other Gulf coast destinations with our nearest competitor booking 25% of room nights sold to our area.
- **Trailfinders** – We have been advised that Melloney Styles the Senior Destination Manager for Canada and Florida will be moving over to work on their West Coast product and as such our new direct manager and contact will be Rachel Webb. We have contacted Rachel to welcome her to the team and we will be planning a meeting with her in the spring once she has settled into her new role.

- **Funway Holidays** – A proposal for a Florida Beaches co-op marketing campaign has been received and has been perused. We are currently waiting on further information we need to be received to be able to look at this in detail.
- **VIP Client Event** – Work has started to source a venue for this event to be held on 14th May.
- **American Sky** – Discussions are taking place to secure training with the call centre staff at American Sky in the spring.
- **Virgin Holidays Braehead** – Discussions are taking place with Marie Cassidy, Branch Manager to arrange a quarterly visit to their store in the spring to update staff on all that is new in our area as well as having a meeting to discuss the possibility of sending two more staff members to our area for a personal fam.
- **Gold Medal Travel** – We are liaising with Harriet Hudders at Gold Medal Travel to discuss securing a possible stand-alone National retail in-store campaign with their independent travel agencies.
- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners** – We have finalised the implementation of a staff incentive with USAirtours and TravelPlanners to run alongside the co-op marketing campaigns that will be taking place from February – May to run alongside the co-op marketing campaigns we are running.
- **Visit USA UK Newsletter** – We have confirmed sponsorship of the May issue of the trade e-bulletin on behalf of VSPC. We have also tentatively held space for the September issue. TBC at a later date.
- **Visit Florida Consumer Campaign** – Final Skyscanner piece and social media assets have now been signed off.
- **Visit USA website** – We updated and extended the VSPC brochure request option within the Visit USA consumer site that requests can continue to be received. Will be valid until July 2020
- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners** – We have chased and requested the final campaign report for the joint campaign we ran with USAirtours/TravelPlanners again as this has not yet been received.
- **Virgin Holidays** – We have been advised that Emma Hook, Manager - North America Product and Digital Sourcing is moving roles and will no longer be our direct manager and day to day contact. James Killick will once again be our direct contact and the Product Manager for Florida and he will be assisted by Fiona Lewry.
- **Tour America** – We are discussing and planning a staff incentive with the reservations/sales team at Tour America and discussions are taking place to decide what works well with their staff to push sales further in the coming weeks.

- **If Only** – We have been advised that Rachel McAneny has moved on and left If Only. The new Product and Commercial Manager for the USA and Canada is Calum Findlater who has recently joined from Dnata (Travel2). We have been in contact with Calum to welcome him to the team and introduce ourselves.
- **Travel Trade Gazette (TTG)** – The TTG listed news on the newly renovated St. Petersburg Pier in their product update section of this UK trade publication.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

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MARKET INTELLIGENCE

02 January 2020, source: TTG

Package holiday market ‘unharméd’ by Cook collapse

Out of 1,000 people surveyed by Savvy Marketing for BBC Radio 4’s consumer affairs programme *You & Yours*, nearly two thirds are still happy to book an Atol-protected package trip. It also found 76% of package holidays are booked online versus 17% in store. "Ten years ago, everyone booked their holidays online. People thought they were saving money by booking travel and accommodation separately," said Jenny Lyons, head of sales at Polka Dot Travel, on the Radio 4 episode on 1 January. "But people want reassurance now and you can’t put a price on that. Nothing can take the place of the travel agent who you build a relationship with." The Office for National Statistics has also reported a five-year growth for the package market. *You & Yours* spoke to some shoppers in Manchester, one of whom commented: "Yes, [I always book package holidays], for the security. "I don’t book individually because I’d be scared if something went wrong when I am so far away from home." *TTG* group editor Pippa Jacks also contributed to the Radio 4 programme. She said: "You say package holiday to some people and they will think of everyone getting on the same flight, going for seven nights or 14 nights, a rep on the coach when you get there, a welcome meeting in the hotel on your first morning - but that sort of package holiday is evolving now. "Tour operators are offering more flexibility and consumers want to be more adventurous. "They might want to go on a cruise holiday or self-drive holiday or rail holiday or twinning different destinations, so what consumers want to do is definitely changing and the travel industry has responded to that." However, research for the programme conducted by Company Watch suggests a third of UK travel agents and a third of UK tour operators could go under in the next three years. Nick hood, insolvency expert at Opus Restructuring & Insolvency, said: "These businesses are very fragile, around 15% of UK travel companies are in the commercial equivalent of negative equity - they owe more than their assets are worth. "And a quarter of travel companies have assets of less than £25,000. A puff of adverse commercial wind will blow these straw houses down." He warned those figures do not take into account collateral damage from Thomas Cook.

02 January 2020, source: TTG

Travel Counsellors smashes full-year sales record

The homeworking giant's total transactions for 2019 surpassed £650 million for the first time in its 25-year history. The business also saw a 20% increase in people travelling over the festive period, and 14% increase in those choosing to book their 2020 breaks during December. Popular December destinations included the US, south east Asia and the Caribbean, while full-year favourites included Florida, Dubai, Mexico and the Indian Ocean. Travel Counsellors has also taken on more than 50 former Thomas Cook employees who were left facing an uncertain future when the iconic operator collapsed in September. "2019 has been another record-breaking year for Travel Counsellors, marking the company's 25th year in business and 17th consecutive year of double-digit growth," said Travel Counsellors chief executive Steve Byrne. Byrne added the general election had not dampened end-of-year bookings, and stressed he anticipated increasing interest in non-Eurozone destinations as customers seek greater value for money. Travel Counsellors now has more than 1,900 homeworkers on its books across seven countries. New business owners increased 21% during 2019, including more than 50 after the collapse of Thomas Cook. Byrne said Travel Counsellors had experienced a 12% increase year-on-year in new starters from a tour operating background, as well as a growing number of professionals signing out from outside travel. "With 20% of our business owners hailing from the Thomas Cook community in the last five years, we've also been pleased to help over 50 new joiners who faced an uncertain future this year after the tour operator's collapse, launch a new business in an industry they love," Byrne added.

03 January 2020, source: TTG

'Good feeling' in the air as peaks season gets under way

Westoe Travel director Graeme Brett told *TTG* there had been a rush in custom following the 12 December general election. "We now have a clear election result and hopefully that should mean politics will stop interfering with people's travel plans." Gemma Antrobus, owner of Haslemere Travel, tweeted on Thursday (2 January) morning clients were waiting at the door for the agency to open. "We had really positive first trading day of the year," she told *TTG*. "We are not waiting for anything – Christmas has been and gone, the general election has been and gone, Brexit will happen. We have had so many years of watching and waiting; people want to get back to normality and people who held off last year are now thinking they won't hold off another year." Lance Fougere, senior travel consultant at Baldwins Travel in Tunbridge Wells, described the start of peaks as "manic". "I think 2020 will be a good year – I have a good feeling," he said. The comments come following a survey for BBC Radio 4's consumer affairs programme *You & Yours*, conducted by Savvy Marketing, which found package holidays remain an appealing proposition despite the collapse of Thomas Cook. Nearly two thirds of the 1,000 respondents said they were still happy to book an Atol-protected package trip. "People want reassurance now and you can't put a price on that," said Jenny Lyons, head of sales at Polka Dot Travel, who appeared on the 1 January episode. "Nothing can take the place of the travel agent who you build a relationship with." Meanwhile, 80% of respondents to *TTG*'s own snap poll on Thursday (2 January) said peaks had so far been either "great" (30%) or "average" (50%), underpinned by significant numbers of enquiries. However, another piece of research for *You & Yours*, conducted by Company Watch, sounded a more cautious note, warning a third of UK travel agents and tour operators could go bust in three years. Nick Hood, insolvency expert at Opus Restructuring & Insolvency, said many travel businesses were "fragile". "A puff of adverse commercial wind will blow these straw houses down," he said.

07 January 2020, source: TTG

Norwegian forward ticket sales 'looking good' says new CEO

Jacob Schram was appointed chief executive in November and took on the role from acting chief executive Geir Karlsen on 1 January 2020, with Karlsen returning to his role as chief financial officer. Schram will be tasked with leading Norwegian's ongoing transition from growth to profitability which the carrier, in its December traffic statement, said was born out in overall unit revenue up 7%. Norwegian's 2019 carryings fell 3% from 37.3 million to 36.3 million on account of planned reduction in capacity and optimisation of the carrier's route network. Load factor for the rolling 12-month period to 31 December, meanwhile, increased 0.8 percentage points to 86.6% while Norwegian was able to cut carbon emissions by 4% to 69 grams per passenger. In December specifically, Norwegian's passenger numbers decreased 19% year-on-year to 2.26 million on an improved load factor of 83.5%, up 4.9 percentage points. This balanced against a reduction in capacity of a quarter to 6.4 million seats pushed December unit revenue up 21% year-on-year. "Throughout 2019, Norwegian's dedicated employees have made an impressive effort delivering on the strategy of moving from growth to profitability," said Schram. "The company has worked on reducing capacity in line with demand and worked continuously to set a route structure adapted to the large seasonal fluctuations across the industry. At the same time, emissions are being reduced compared to previous years. The ticket sales for the next months ahead are looking good, both for business and leisure travellers." Norwegian operated 99.5% of its scheduled flights in December, up 0.4 percentage points on the same period last year, with 78.4% of flights departing on time, up 2.7% percentage points.

09 January 2020, source: TravelMole

Willie Walsh to retire as chief executive of British Airways owner IAG

Walsh will be succeeded by Luis Gallego, chief executive of Iberia, which is also part of IAG. "Willie has led the merger and successful integration of British Airways and Iberia to form IAG," said IAG chairman Antonio Vazquez. "Under Willie's leadership, IAG has become one of the leading global airline groups. [He] has been the main driver of this unique idea that is IAG. I hugely admire his commitment, strong leadership and clear vision, always ready to take on whatever challenges lay ahead of him. I am deeply respectful of what he has achieved as chief executive of this group, of his sense of fairness, transparency and capacity to integrate people regardless of nationalities or backgrounds. Vazquez added it was testament to the "strong management team" Walsh had built that IAG would be able to promote a successor, Gallego, from within. "Luis started his career in the airline industry in 1997 with Air Nostrum and, since 2014, he has been chief executive of Iberia where he has led a profound transformation of this airline. The board is confident Luis is the right person to lead IAG in the next stage of its development and we look forward to working closely with Luis in his new role." Walsh said it had been a privilege to have played a major role in the formation and development of IAG. "I have had the pleasure of working with many exceptional people over the past 15 years at British Airways and at IAG. "Luis has been a core member of the team and has shown true leadership over the years and I have no doubt he will be a great chief executive of IAG." Gallego, whose successor at Iberia IAG said would be announced in due course, added: "It has been a great pleasure to work with Willie over the last seven years. It is a huge honour to lead this great company. It is an exciting time at IAG and I am confident that we can build on the strong foundations created by Willie." Walsh will stand down from the role and the IAG board on 26 March before retiring on 30 June.

14 January 2020, source: TTG

Holidaymakers to benefit from strong sterling despite Brexit

Research by the foreign exchange provider found 85% of the Post Office's 40 top-selling currencies were weaker against sterling at the start of 2020 than a year ago. Only six – the Russian ruble, Egyptian pound, Thai baht, Costa Rican colon, Canadian dollar and Indonesian rupiah – were stronger. Moreover, prices are lower than a year ago in 33 of 42 destinations surveyed and have fallen by 10% in 11 of these places. Further good news is the cost of eight tourist staples, including a three-course meal, a beer and sun cream, has fallen in 33 of 42 worldwide destinations and by more than 10% in a third of these. Bulgaria's Sunny Beach bolstered its bargain-basement reputation with the world's cheapest holiday shopping basket with the eight items costing £30.68. The same list in the Seychelles totalled £165.10. Post Office sales of the Bulgarian lev rose 17% in July and August, making it "easily the biggest winner" last summer. Turkey's Marmaris was the second cheapest destination in Post Office Travel's Holiday Costs Barometer (£44.15), with sterling worth 20.5% more against the Turkish lira than in January 2019. Third place Tokyo (£48.21) has overtaken Cape Town as best value long-haul destination, with Cape Town dropping back to sixth place after an 18% price rise. In contrast, the most expensive European destination was Sorrento, where the basket cost £108.39. The survey found big price increases in Mombasa, (£66.95, up 19.8%), Phuket (£97.64, up 18.3%) and St Lucia (£93.99, up 17.4%). Post Office Travel Money head of travel Nick Boden said: "With the price falls, holidaymakers should have plenty of choice this year. In Europe the best deals are likely to be in Bulgaria, Turkey and Portugal, while further afield Japan, Vietnam and Bali are looking like good bets for the bargain-hunter." The Post Office's 20 top-selling currencies are an indicator of travel patterns. The biggest growth in demand was for the Jordanian dinar, up 60%. There was only one new entrant to the top 20, where the Chinese yuan has replaced the Icelandic krona. The demise of Wow Air has cut the number of cheap deals to Iceland, while the yuan's falling value is encouraging more tourism to China.

15 January 2020, source: TTG

Boeing orders hit two-decade low amid 737 Max crisis

BBC News has reported the aircraft manufacturer only made 54 net orders, including cancellations, for the whole of 2019 – down on 893 the previous year. Boeing is no longer the world's largest aircraft manufacturer and is now second to Airbus, which made 863 deliveries in 2019, 8% higher than in 2018. This comes as Boeing announced it would halt production of its 737 Max in December because two crashes had been linked with the model in five months. In October 2018, a Lion Air flight killed all 189 people onboard when it plunged into the Java Sea, and in March 2019, an Ethiopian Airlines flight crashed en route to Nairobi, also with no survivors. Boeing's chief executive Dennis Muilenburg stepped down from his position in December last year after the company's directors decided it was "necessary to restore confidence" in the company. In an email to all employees sent on 13 January, new president and chief executive David Calhoun said: "This is a crucial time for Boeing. We have work to do to uphold our values and to build on our strengths. I see greatness in this company, but I also see opportunities to be better. Much better. That includes engaging one another and our stakeholders with greater transparency, holding ourselves accountable to the highest standards of safety and quality, and incorporating outside-in perspective on what we

do and how we do it." He said "learnings" from the past 18 months had been "painful", and the company's primary focus is to safely return the 737 Max to service.

17 January 2020, source: TTG

Former Funway MD launches not-for-profit travel company

Former Funway managing director Melissa Tilling is poised to launch a travel company which will invest its profits into good causes, as well as giving clients the opportunity to donate to their preferred charities upon booking. Charitable Travel – a community interest company – will launch as a Worldchoice Plus member in April. It will both retail and dynamically package worldwide holidays direct to the consumer via homeworkers and a call centre, with a view to potentially also functioning as a tour operator in the future. Tilling said Charitable Travel would be as “competitively priced as anyone” – despite customers being able to easily donate a portion of their holiday cost to a charity of their choice – thanks to a unique model, which remains under wraps. Additionally, being a social enterprise, surplus profits will be donated to support disadvantaged communities in destinations where tourism is key to the local economy. Tilling, who stepped down from Funway in August last year after 11 years, expressed then a desire to embark on a more philanthropic venture. “My intention is to blend commercial success with underlying compassion – rather than simply to create private profit,” she said. Gary Lewis, chief executive of TTNG, said: “We are very excited by the opportunity Melissa’s new charitable venture offers to raise significant funds for good causes. We look forward to working with Melissa and her team as they launch and grow in the market.” Tilling is encouraging the travel industry to reach out to her to explore working together.

27 January 2020, source: TTG

Saga ‘looks to sell’ touring arm Titan Travel

The Mail on Sunday has reported the company, which provide a range of services for the over-50s, has appointed advisers from Duff & Phelps to shift Titan Travel. It said the company has come under pressure from an American hedge fund, which bought a 5% stake in Saga last year, to make the move. The sale of Titan could represent 25% of Saga’s total value if it is sold between £100million and £150million, the newspaper’s sources said. Potential purchasers are reported as Riviera Travel, Travelopia and private equity firms including ECI Partners and Graphite Capital. Saga was previously owned by Charterhouse Capital Partners, Permira and CVC Capital Partners before it was partially sold in 2014. The firm is reportedly also looking to sell its at-home care branches, Patricia White’s and Country Cousins. A spokesperson from Saga said it “does not comment on speculation”.

31 January 2020, source: TTG

Coronavirus: travel works hard to support clients as virus spreads

Several Gold Medal and Travel 2 clients have found themselves effectively trapped in China as the ongoing coronavirus crisis showed little sign of abating this week. The dnata brands confirmed to *TTG* they were working with industry partners to bring home “a small number” of clients in China, where authorities have tightened restrictions on travel to contain the

spread of the virus, hampering efforts to repatriate Britons. Lisa McAuley, managing director Gold Medal Travel 2, said imminent departures had been cancelled, and all agents with package passengers due to travel in the next 14 days have been contacted. "We continue to work alongside industry partners to support agents with customers impacted," said McAuley. "This includes contacting suppliers to help coordinate alternative travel arrangements, refunds and cancellations. We have supported passengers in resort and have worked with our agent partners to ensure all passengers in or due to travel to the country have been contacted. Regular updates are being posted across our social feeds and we have a dedicated crisis phone number. We are encouraging any agents who require further information or support to contact us." The World Health Organization (WHO) on Thursday (30 January) formally declared coronavirus a global health emergency. The move has spurred several travel companies into more concerted precautionary action on coronavirus, including **Virgin Atlantic** and **MSC Cruises**. It comes after coronavirus was confirmed to have spread to every Chinese region and nearly 20 countries, claiming more than 200 lives. The first cases in the UK were confirmed by the Department of Health on Friday (31 January) after two members of the same family tested positive for the virus. A flight chartered to bring dozens of British nationals back from Wuhan, the Chinese city where the virus is thought to have originated, took off late on Thursday night (local time) and was due to arrive at RAF Brize Norton on Friday afternoon. Passengers will be taken to Arrowe Park Hospital on the Wirral where they will be quarantined for two weeks. At Civitavecchia port in Italy, 6,000 Costa Cruises guests were on Thursday held onboard Costa Smerelda when a passenger developed coronavirus symptoms after arriving from Hong Kong. They were later found to have "common flu" whereby passengers were allowed to disembark. British Airways suspended all bookings for its Shanghai and Beijing flights until the end of the month on Wednesday, while Virgin Atlantic on Thursday night confirmed its Heathrow-Shanghai service would be suspended for two weeks following the WHO's ruling. Air France has suspended all scheduled flights to and from mainland China until 9 February. The carrier will, starting Friday, operate special flights to and from Shanghai and Beijing staffed by volunteer crews to bring customers and employees home safely. Its flights to Wuhan have been suspended since 22 January and will remain suspended until further notice. The travel sector was forced into concerted action on coronavirus on Tuesday when the Foreign Office (FCO) advised against all but essential travel to China, requiring operators and cruise lines – many of whom were already taking their own measures – to postpone or cancel imminent departures. China specialist Wendy Wu Tours told *TTG* the operator currently had no clients in China, as it offered fewer departures over the busy Chinese New Year period. A handful of February departures have been rearranged. On The Go Tours has cancelled all its China trips through 25 March, adding its team, tour guides and their families in China were "safe and well" and looking forward to getting back to work as soon as possible. The company added their foremost concern was the effect on Chinese tourism and has urged fellow operators not to "blanket cancel" tours for the entire year. Several other operators have made short-term cancellations. G Adventures has pulled mainland China departures until the end of the month, as has Intrepid Travel, while Explore has cancelled all its China tours up to 30 April. Exodus Travels is currently not accepting new China bookings this year. Cruise lines have also taken steps. MSC Cruises has moved MSC Splendida out of Shanghai to Singapore. It will now begin its 27-night Grand Voyage to the Middle East and Europe on 14 February. Ex-Shanghai cruises scheduled for 1, 5 and 9 February have been cancelled. The line has also implemented stringent precautionary measures ahead of and onboard all sailings worldwide to guard against coronavirus. These include screening passengers before embarkation for any signs of illness, and barring anyone from boarding if they've travelled from, or visited, mainland China in the past 30 days. Royal Caribbean International has "suspended"

Spectrum of the Seas sailings from Shanghai until 8 February and temporarily postponed shipboard returns for its China-based crew.