

UK Office July 2020 TDC Report

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UK Director

Tour Operators

- **Trailfinders** – We spoke with Rachel Webb, Destination Manager for Florida at Trailfinders and were advised that the Trailfinders Product team and other non-customer facing departments continue to work from home. But I'm pleased to say that, in a step towards normality, their travel centres in England, Wales and Ireland have re-opened their doors to their clients again, with all the necessary precautions in place, and their 3 travel centres in Scotland were set to re-open again at the beginning of July. They have now taken the decision to cancel all US departures up to 1 Aug 20 and Rachel suspects more will be cancelled beyond this. The company strategy very much remains to encourage their clients to re-book rather than cancel and as they get more product on sale, they are seeing more success. They continue to be able to book flights out of range. However, there are still gaps in their programme if their contact has been furloughed so they are having trouble securing a contract. Their receptive partners are also facing similar difficulties securing rates and then having the resources available to load. While they've seen a lot of interest in Florida as a whole, much of the business is being driven to Orlando where much product is on sale to the end of 2021 or, in some cases, into 2022. Currently, there's not the same amount of product on sale as usual in St Pete/Clearwater so the numbers booking are much smaller.
- **American Holidays (Ireland)** – We had an email from Dee Burdock, Product Manager USA & Canada at American Holidays and she said that things are going okay. They are getting new bookings, not as many as they would like, but they are starting to trickle in especially from Belfast and the UK. They are also doing rebooks for the directs and TUI agents in the UK that are holding existing Hayes & Jarvis refund credit notes so, the res team are really working under a lot of pressure since their Belfast team are currently on Furlough. They did manage to bring three of their team back from furlough last week so that is helping but overall it is a lot of work with also looking after their own existing client base too. Anything that is rebooking or new bookings are all for 2021 which Dee think's is the same as most other operators. Dee also advised that with the Irish government delaying the travel advice notice to the 20th of July is probably going to make people very wary about making any travel arrangements until they have definite guidelines in place.
- **Ocean Holidays** – We again had our monthly update from Anna Janssen, Product manager at Ocean Holidays. Anna advised that from their point of view she is delighted to say that Ocean Florida again had a very successful month in June. They finished June on +20% YoY business – all genuine new business. In addition to that they are currently holding a market share of about 80% on Google when it comes to Florida holidays. They are fully aware this is only a temporary situation whilst their competitors are not able to focus on new business as much as they do but they are making the very best out of this whilst it lasts and it seems to work! In terms of booking trends, the consumer demand is still the same: 60% are for travel in 2021, 30% are for travel in 2022 and 10% are for

travel 2023 & 2024 combined. In addition to that they are now offering all customer who were due to travel up until 31st Dec 2020 a date change to a different year. The vast majority of customers are accepting the same. There is only a small minority that are currently keeping their holiday to travel as planned if they can. Anna advised that their main concerns are the current development of cases in Florida and also the timelines around when the US Government will be opening the borders to tourists again.

- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners** – We had a catch up with Linda Dixey, Product & Partnerships Manager who advised that due to Covid-19 and the decline in bookings over the past few months, that some of the team that were on furlough have now been made redundant. They now have a total of 46 staff compared to 86 back in January 2020. The team are currently changing all bookings that had been made for September/October 2020 and trying to get these clients to re-book into 2021. It's still a case of all hands-on deck and staff are constantly multi-tasking. Linda did advise that they were down 50% year on year for the month of June which is actually better than they had predicted. Until borders open up they will do all they can to assist customers with existing bookings and re-booking where they can or cancelling holidays for customers who are requesting cancellations and refunds.
- **Virgin Holidays** – We spoke with James Killick, Destination Manager for Florida and were advised of their latest flying developments for August 2020. They had hoped to resume sending bookings to the USA during the month of August but with the restricted entry requirements still existing from the UK to the US, they are in the process of cancelling all USA bookings up to and including 31st August. James advised that they have pushed the start of their flight schedule into Orlando back to 6th October. He reconfirmed that funding is in the process of being approved which has given a sense of stability both internally and externally. Most bookings that are coming in (albeit on much smaller scales) are being booked for 2021 as consumers are becoming more and more unsure as to when the borders between the UK and USA will reopen and overwhelmingly, customers already booked are again changing to 2021. One other update that James shared was that retail stores are planning to re-open in August (phased re-openings based on location and demand for that region) but that the service they offer will not be customer facing – they will be linked in with the sales team at head office and will be working alongside the reservations team.

Meetings/Training/Events

- **Visit USA Committee Ireland** – We have provided and participated in the Visit USA special training opportunity and showcased our 5 Virtual Fam Series videos for inclusion as part of this initiative that is being sent out to all travel agents and reservations staff on the mailing list in Ireland. We provided details of the Virtual Fam Series and were also able to include the link to the relevant travel trade section where our videos are housed on our Visit St. Pete/Clearwater.com website.
- **Visit Florida UK & Ireland Office** – We had our regular catch up meeting with Gill Standeven and discussed further opportunities that will be coming into play for the UK partners. These include training opportunities with Travel Weekly, TTG and Travel Gossip. Discussions are ongoing and we are currently waiting for further details to be able to show our support and partner on these initiatives where possible.

- **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment** – We had a call with Ruth Roseweir, UK & Ireland Marketing Manager at SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment. Ruth advised that the team of 10 had now been reduced to a team of 4 in the UK and that all staff remaining are still on furlough until further notice. They have not been actively promoting anything in the UK even though their parks are now open in the US. We planned a further catch up once the team are back from furlough to discuss any potential joint partnership opportunities moving towards our new fiscal year.

TRADE LIAISON

- **Visit Florida UK Winter Campaign** – We have now received the final campaign analysis for the Visit Florida Winter Campaign that ran from mid-January to March 31 2020. The primary target markets were London and Manchester and secondary target markets were Dublin and Glasgow. Results are as follows:
 - Out of home advertising ran from Jan 13 – Mar 08 2020 (with a bonus of 4 weeks added to the original package): Total impressions = 18,560,000 and total media value = \$92,500
 - Paid Social media Activity: Total impressions = 6,339,332 and total media value = \$7,600
 - Digital Skyscanner custom article: Total media value = \$5,000 and conversant programmatic = 378,146
 - Public Relations: Influencer (@alongdustyroads (Andrew Fraser Slim & Emily Jane Gough) received a total of 224,094 Instagram impressions, 328,900 total Twitter impressions, 47,105 Facebook impressions and 620,424 total blog impressions. Total impressions = 1,220,523 and media value = \$40,250 (Host Partners were VSPC, The Don CeSar, Opal Sands Resort & Hertz)
- **UK Office Weekly Newsletters** – We have continued to send bi-weekly email updates to our trade partners and trade press contacts promoting the fact we are participating in the Brand USA Discovery Programme, the Travel Advisor Training Programme, details of the new St. Pete Pier, the new Winter The Dolphin's Beach Club hotel and promoting other items such as rooftop bars in the area.
- **Travelbiz Ireland** – Travelbiz reporter Shane Cullen has requested imagery and since included details of our rooftop bars and rooftop dining options in our destination as well as promoting our participation in the Brand USA Discovery Programme via their social media channels and on their weekly e-newsletters.
- **Visit Florida** – We have been advised of the LoveFL initiative the enhanced Share A Little Sunshine initiative and new identity to showcase what Floridians and the states visitors love most about the destination. The initiative debuted at the end of June and is the definitive source of discovery for all things Florida.
- **America First Coast Travel** – We were contacted by America First Coast Travel. The operator is an independently owned Florida specialist tour operator. Their target market is 35+, typically repeat to Florida travellers, couples or families with older children. They

offer flexible holiday arrangements and showcasing the “away-from-the-normal” areas of Florida and are currently showcasing 45 regional areas of Florida and 120+ hand-picked hotels including St. Pete/Clearwater. We have been asked to supply them with our logo and imagery which has duly been sent as well as checking their dedicated VSPC webpages and that their general content is correct., which we have also assisted them with.

- **Selling Travel** – The opportunity from Steve Hartridge, Senior Editor at Selling Travel to be part of their ‘Travel Talks’ Visit USA Association UK interviews that are promoted to the UK travel trade on a regular basis was promoted at the beginning of July. We liaised with Mackenzie and Rosemarie and the interview took place with Laura Gelder of Selling Travel and that Rosemarie participated in on our behalf. The idea of the interviews is to discuss our area in general, how we are promoting ourselves during the Covid-19 pandemic and to discuss things such as The Brighter Days Ahead campaign, our Visit USA UK Membership opportunities and our Virtual Fam Series. The e-newsletter was distributed to their mailing list on the 14th July.
- **USAirtours/Brand USA/VSPC Campaign** – We have been in the process of discussing the campaign that was paused earlier in the year with Linda Dixey and have agreed that as borders are still closed we will be suspending the elements of the campaign that were placed on hold. We received an updated proposal and purchase order that shows the cancelled elements of the campaign and have provided these to Brand USA to finalise payment of the activity that did proceed before this was suspended. We confirmed that activity that did indeed take place was the USAirtours Destination of the month activity as well as one of the USAirtours solus trade emails featuring our destination and some of the free social media activity we were offered FOC. The campaign results were as follows:
 - The Destination of the Month (DOTM) USAirtours email sent in February had a total of 1,506 engagements
 - The Facebook offer of VSPC twin centre with Orlando post (June) reached a total of 2,961 travel agents/trade personnel
 - The Facebook DOTM social media post (February) reached a total of 2,180 trade personnel
 - The Facebook VSPC Sirata Beach Resort (February) reached a total of 2,556 travel agents/trade personnel
 - The VSPC Facebook offer post (February) reached a total of 2,237 trade personnel
 - (Please note USAirtours/TravelPlanners were unable to give us an accurate account of room nights booked during the months of February to June because of Covid-19 and the fact that most bookings were switched or cancelled once the US border closed – their internal system was unable to generate accurate totals due to them not having had a system in place to compensate for the outcome of the pandemic)
- **Trailfinders** – We received a request from Rachel Webb, Florida Destination Manager at Trailfinders to see if we would be able to contact the Opal Sands Resort and The Don CeSar Resort to find out when rates beyond May 2021 would be loaded into their receptive partners bookings systems. We duly contacted Nancy Cimney and Mohammed Daod who kindly assisted us in and with our response to Rachel. Mohammed also kindly

provided us with up to date images and a press release for the Don CeSar and Beach House Suites Renovations.

- **2021 Net Rates Request** – We received assistance from Rosemarie & Michelle with regards to receiving rates into 2021 and beyond after receiving requests from some operators that could not obtain hotel rates after May 2021. Responses were received from our industry partners and forwarded to our tour operator partners.
- **Visit USA Committee Ireland** – We were asked by Tony Lane, Executive Director to provide details of our training programs and duly sent details of our Virtual Fam series videos for them to include in their next trade e-newsletter.
- **Funway Holidays** – We were advised by Nick Talbot, Sales & Marketing Director to advise us of the closure of the closure of Funway Holidays in the UK. Nick will be in the role until the end of September when the office officially closes.
- **Selling Travel** – The e-newsletter from Selling Travel sent to travel industry personnel offering weekly ideas and travel inspiration that was sent on the 16th July to their trade database featured our VSPC Brand USA Discovery Training Programme in their news section.
- **Brand USA** – The UK & Ireland Team at Brand USA promoted our new training badge on their monthly e-newsletter as a training badge spotlight.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature: 19

MARKET INTELLIGENCE

01 July 2020, source Travelbiz

Government committed to finalising roadmap for safe overseas travel ‘shortly’

Ireland ‘out of step’ with rest of Europe on overseas travel, says Ryanair. The Government is committed to finalising its roadmap for safe overseas travel “very shortly”, the assistant general secretary at the Department of Taoiseach has said. Speaking at a Government’s Covid-19 briefing on Wednesday Liz Canavan said that the advice is still to avoid non-essential travel abroad. This week at least six cases of coronavirus recorded are related to international travel, she said. “We have largely suppressed the spread of the virus in the community in Ireland and this is a major achievement,” she added. “It’s important to remember in the early days of this pandemic, that our early cases in Ireland were associated with international travel.” She said the Government understands the issue of foreign travel is causing “great uncertainty and worry”. “Some people have holidays booked and are wondering what to do. We are acutely aware of this and we would ask you to bear with us ... the Government has committed to preparing a roadmap for safe overseas travel and will finalise its considerations on this very shortly,” she said. Ms. Canavan said new outbreaks of the virus in other countries in recent weeks shows “how easy it is for this virus to begin to take hold again”. “Countries that have had a low incidence are seeing a resurgence. Countries that had eased restrictions and thought they were through the worst have had to

lockdown cities or areas again,” she said. “That is happening in Europe and worldwide.” Follow-up calls. It emerged last night that not every passenger arriving into the country is receiving a follow-up call to check that they are self-isolating for 14 days following their arrival into the State. The Department of Justice said that since early last week it has only been in a position to make 60 to 70 per cent of the follow-up calls to passengers arriving into the State to check up on their 14-day quarantine because of the increase in passenger numbers arriving into the State. The department said Covid-19 Passenger Locator Forms, which passengers are required to fill out, are randomly selected and a “large cohort” from every flight but not every passenger is called. Figures released last week show that of the follow-up calls made between May 28th and June 21st more than a third of calls to passengers contacted in follow-up calls went unanswered. The department said that as the passenger numbers increase significantly over the coming days, the task of making the follow-up calls will fall to the HSE as the department’s border management unit “will need to focus exclusively on their core function of immigrating passengers.” Biggest enemy’ Ms. Canavan warned that “complacency is our biggest enemy now” and the public must continue to do the “simple things” such as washing hands regularly, good sneeze and cough etiquette, maintain social distancing and wear face masks on public transport. “It is really important that we are aware that Covid-19 is still with us and hasn’t gone away,” she said. “If each of us as individuals is not careful, if we do not continue to moderate our behaviour, it can begin circulating again.”

01 July 2020, source TravelMole

Survey reveals most-hunted travel brands during lockdown

Jet2holidays was the most searched for package holiday company during the lockdown, according to research by consumer site money.co.uk. It said that online searches for Jet2holidays during April and May were up by 178%. Tui came second in the survey, with a 71% rise in searches, followed by First Choice, up 56%. However, many people looking for Tui holidays were probably searching for its retired brand 'Thomson', which saw a 55% increase making it the fourth most-searched-for brand, even though the name was ditched in September 2017. Thomas Cook came eighth in the table, even though it collapsed last September. EasyJet Holidays was in fifth place, with a 53% increase, British Airways Holidays came sixth in the survey, but the number of searches fell 9%, and Virgin Holidays came seventh following a 17% drop in searches. Lastminute.com, Expedia, Opodo, Kuoni, Princess Cruises, Viking Ocean Cruises and Riviera Travel were among a number of other travel brands to see a fall in interest during the pandemic, according to money.co.uk. Its Brand-A-Lust survey took the top companies from YouGov's Popularity Ratings and applied Google Trends and Google Search Volume data to reveal the most searched for brands during lockdown. The most searched for travel brand overall was Butlin's, with 186% more searches in April and May than previously. The top luxury brands were James Villa Holidays, up 98%, and Sandals Resorts, up 92%.

02 July 2020, source TravelMole

Sir Richard digs deep to bail out Virgin

Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Group is to provide £200 million of funding to Virgin Atlantic, in which it has a 51% stake. A further £400 million is expected to be committed in shareholder support. Additional article in City A.M states: Virgin Atlantic secures £200m from Virgin in bid for £1bn rescue deal. Virgin Atlantic has secured £200m in additional funding from parent company Virgin as the embattled carrier seeks a total of £1bn in the coming weeks in order to stay afloat. The airline, which has seen its planes grounded for three months due to the coronavirus pandemic, has had its finances decimated by the virus and is set to cut a third of its workforce to survive the crisis. The FT first reported that Virgin

would provide an initial £200m, with an additional £400m in shareholder support due to be committed through deferrals and waivers. The transatlantic flier, which was founded by Sir Richard Branson in 1984, is 51 per cent owned by the Virgin Group and 49 per cent owned by US airline Delta. Industry sources confirmed that the deal would be structured so that the airline's ownership structure would not be changed. The funding is not the first time Branson has reached into his pockets to protect the carrier, after last month selling \$500m in Virgin Galactic shares to prop up various wings of the Virgin empire. In addition, a group of private investors are due to stump up £250m more to prop up the carrier, which is due to return to flying in July. Hedge funds Davidson Kempner Capital Management and Elliott, as well as Centrebridge Partners, are involved in talks, the FT reported. Before the Open newsletter: Start your day with the City View podcast and key market data. Up to £250m will be provided by credit card firms and lessors, who are currently withholding fees. Virgin has set an informal deadline of early July for a potential funding agreement. Over the weekend a spokesperson told City A.M. the airline was "looking to wrap things up next week". The new financing arrangements do not involve any input from the government, with which Virgin Atlantic has been in frequent negotiations throughout the coronavirus period. Virgin Atlantic's proposal for a £500m package of commercial loans was rejected by the Treasury in April after failing to impress the government. The airline is also yet to follow its rivals in the sector by using the Bank of England's financing schemes to draw down extra funding. A Virgin Atlantic spokesperson said: "Virgin Atlantic has been working on a comprehensive, solvent recapitalisation of the airline to ensure that we can continue to provide essential connectivity and competition to consumers and businesses in Britain and beyond. "We greatly appreciate the support of our shareholders, creditors and private investors and by working together, we will ensure that Virgin Atlantic can emerge from the crisis a sustainably profitable airline, with a healthy balance sheet."

03 July 2020, source Travolution

Lastminute.com reports spike ahead of lifting of UK travel quarantine

OTA lastminute.com has reported a spike in searches and bookings ahead of the UK's lifting of its two-week quarantine rules. The firm claims that bookings in the UK for June are just 4% down on the same month last year, a remarkable turnaround after bookings collapsed from March. Lastminute.com says it has seen up to a 150% rise in searches for Spain and Greece ahead of the much-anticipated lifting of quarantine. The online travel reported an "enormous uptick" in international holiday searches from more adventurous travellers throughout June, peaking in the past week. Spain and Greece experienced a 146% and 149% rise between the first and final weeks of June, with France and Italy experiencing a 138% and 75% rise, respectively. The OTA also said the UK is also set to enjoy a boost in local tourism with Brits opting to take "staycations" instead of overseas trips. Managing director Andrea Bertoi said: "With social distancing measures in the UK relaxing, we're seeing more activity in the city break category at home which could make up the shortfall of international tourists – especially in cities like London and Edinburgh who usually host millions of overseas visitors per annum. "But our search data shows that international sun and beach holidays remain popular – so, as soon as the go-ahead is given, we can expect lookers to turn to bookers, as people head back to the likes of Majorca, Benidorm and the Costa Del Sol for their traditional summer breaks." Lastminute.com also reported bookings for January and February are seeing a bigger share than normally expected for June, suggesting some customers are choosing to suspend, rather than cancel, summer holidays. Group chief executive Marco Corradino, said: "Europe usually generates £300 billion a year from international tourism, so the ban on international travel has come as a huge blow to their economies, as well as our own. "So, to see such a huge rise in bookings in the past week is

fantastic, as an influx of tourists from July will bring with it a much-needed cash injection, and also help to ensure the long-term survival of holiday resorts across the continent.”

07 July 2020, source Ireland’s Travel Trade Network

Research shows 60% of Adults in Ireland would not be more likely to travel

Research shows 60% adults in Ireland would NOT be any more likely to travel abroad in 2020 to countries that have established ‘Air-bridges’ with Ireland, despite the lower risk of transmission of COVID-19. 9 in 10 (90%) adults in Ireland believe that holidays to countries with high rates of COVID-19 should NOT be permitted. Following the re-opening of hotels in Ireland, 50% of all adults expect to take breaks and holidays in such venues in the coming weeks and months. Following the re-opening of hotels in Ireland and the establishment of ‘air-bridges’, between countries that have low or similar transmission rates of COVID-19, iReach has surveyed adults in Ireland to determine their revised holiday plans for 2020.

- 60% of all adults would still not travel abroad in 2020 to countries that have established ‘air-bridges’ with Ireland (a travel agreement between countries that have low or similar transmission rates of COVID-19).
- Those aged between 18-24 are most likely to travel abroad to a country with an ‘air-bridge’, with 59% of adults within this age group stating they would do so in 2020.
- 9 in 10 (90%) all adults believe that holidays to countries with high rates of COVID-19 should not be permitted. Those aged 55+ feel even stronger on this with 96% of this age group believing holidays to these countries should not be permitted.
- Following the re-opening of hotels in Ireland, 50% of all adults expect to take breaks and holidays in such venues in the coming weeks and months. This number is slightly higher among the younger generation with 59% of those aged between 18-24 and 52% of those aged between 25-34 hoping to make a stay in Ireland, in such venues, the coming weeks or months.
- Over half of adults (53%) who wish to take these ‘staycation’ holidays hope to do so before the end of August of this year. Those aged between 25-43 are most determined to take a staycation before the end of August, with 77% of this age group stating so.

07 July 2020, source Travel Weekly

Funway Holidays to cease trading in September

Funway Holidays is to cease trading on September 30 after 27 years.

The tour operator, which specialised in the US and the Caribbean, said it had made the “difficult decision” to close Funway Holidays International because of the ongoing impact of Covid-19. No new bookings or re-bookings will be accepted from July 7. All bookings departing on or after September 1 have been cancelled, all deposits will be refunded in full and all refund credit notes paid in cash. The operator, licensed by Atol to carry 4,530 passengers a year, said it was contacting all travel agents with live bookings. In a statement it said: “The ongoing impact of Covid-19 has been so severe that the difficult decision has been made to close the business. “Rest assured, we will honour our obligations and ensure a smooth wind down of our company over the next three months.” The operator also thanked agents for their support, saying: “We would like to say a huge thank you to all our wonderful agent partners. Whilst the Funway journey is coming to a close, we hope all of our partners

emerge from this crisis and enjoy a most prosperous future.” Sales and marketing director Nick Talbot said: “It’s an incredibly sad day for the Funway team and our closure reflects just how severely the travel industry is being impacted by Covid-19. I would like to pay testament to our truly incredible team who have demonstrated unwavering professionalism and positivity in the most challenging of times.” Vice president and general manager Carla Van Der Giesen added: “I can only echo Nick’s comments. The closure of Funway International LLC is a decision that has not been taken lightly. “I feel privileged to have been able to lead our fantastic team that have represented the Funway brand with continuous passion and devotion. We leave behind a legacy of truly memorable holidays that our team has helped create for our many customers over the course of several decades.

07 July 2020, source TravelMole

Agents 'devastated' at Funway closure, trade pays tribute to staff

Travel agents were shocked today to hear that US specialist Funway Holidays has become the latest victim of the coronavirus pandemic. The 27-year-old company, which also sold tailor-made packages to Mexico and the Caribbean, will cease trading at the end of September. Responding to the news on the travel industry Facebook group Travel Gossip, agents said they were 'devastated' and 'heartbroken' and described it as 'tragic'. One wrote: "I absolutely love the Funway and can't believe they won't be around anymore. Such a huge loss to the industry." Funway Holidays will take no more bookings from today. It blamed the severe impact of the coronavirus pandemic for its decision to wind down the business, after first honouring its obligations. All bookings departing after September 1 have been cancelled. The company said all deposits will be refunded and Refund Credit Notes issued for cancelled holidays will be paid. Around 50 employees are affected. They were praised by agents for their service and dedication to the job. Dozens of other tributes were paid to Funway on Travel Gossip. One agent said it was 'an amazing company', another said it was 'always my go to company as an agent'. Another agent wrote: "This company was amazing, so sad." One agent described Funway's decision to close as a 'huge loss'. In a statement, Funway said: "We would like to say a huge thank you to all of our wonderful agent partners. Whilst the Funway journey is coming to a close, we hope all of our partners emerge from this crisis and enjoy a most prosperous future." Sales and marketing director Nick Talbot added: "It's an incredibly sad day for the Funway team and our closure reflects just how severely the travel industry is being impacted by Covid-19." "I would like to pay testament to our truly incredible team who have demonstrated unwavering professionalism and positivity in the most challenging of times." VP and general manager Carla Van Der Giesen said: "I can only echo Nick's comments. "The closure of Funway International is a decision that has not been taken lightly. I feel privileged to have been able to lead our fantastic team that have represented the Funway brand with continuous passion and devotion. "We are very thankful for the amazing support we received over the years from our many industry and travel agency partners. We leave behind a legacy of truly memorable holidays that our team has helped create for our many customers over the course of several decades."

08 July 2020, source TravelMole

Third of holidaymakers will avoid air travel because of coronavirus

A third of travellers say they will avoid flying for both leisure and business in the future due to fears of catching coronavirus. A study by international airline body IATA found that the biggest worry was sitting next to someone on the plane who might be infected. Other concerns raised by passengers include travelling on an over-crowded bus or train on the way to the aircraft, queueing at the airport, using toilet facilities at the airport and on the plane and

'breathing the air on the plane'. When asked to rank the top three measures that would make them feel safer, 37% said Covid-19 screening at departure airports, 34% agreed with the mandatory wearing of facemasks and 33% said social distancing measures on aircraft. Major UK airports, including Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester have begun testing passengers' temperatures, but at the moment this is a trial and no-one with a higher-than-normal reading is prevented from travelling. None of the major airlines flying out of the UK, with the exception of Delta, intends to leave seats empty to maintain social distancing on board, despite passenger concerns. IATA defended airlines' decision not to block out middle seats. "Governments advise to wear a mask (or face covering) when social distancing is not possible, as is the case with public transport. This aligns with the expert ICAO (international air safety agency) Take-off guidance," it said. "Additionally, while passengers are sitting in close proximity on board, the cabin air flow is from ceiling to floor. This limits the potential spread of viruses or germs backwards or forwards in the cabin. "There are several other natural barriers to the transmission of the virus on board, including the forward orientation of passengers (limiting face-to-face interaction), seatbacks that limit transmission from row-to-row, and the limited movement of passengers in the cabin. "There is no requirement for social distancing measures on board the aircraft from highly respected aviation authorities such as the US Federal Aviation Administration, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency or ICAO." While 45% of passengers surveyed indicated they would return to travel within a few months of the pandemic subsiding, this was a significant drop from the 61% recorded in IATA's April survey. "This crisis could have a very long shadow," said director general Alexandre de Juniac. "Passengers are telling us that it will take time before they return to their old travel habits. Many airlines are not planning for demand to return to 2019 levels until 2023 or 2024. "Numerous governments have responded with financial lifelines and other relief measures at the height of the crisis. As some parts of the world are starting the long road to recovery, it is critical that governments stay engaged. Continued relief measures like alleviation from use-it-or-lose-it slot rules, reduced taxes or cost reduction measures will be critical for some time to come." The 11-country survey was conducted during the first week of June 2020. All those surveyed had taken at least one flight since July 2019.

08 July 2020, source Travolution

Flight Centre reveals plans to replace stores with 'virtual network' of consultants

Flight Centre has revealed it is considering replacing some of its shops with a virtual network of travel consultants and an 'associates' model. Flight Centre said it was "having to consider making some very difficult business decisions", which included "exploring the potential closure of stores in England and Scotland", as a result the company is in consultation with its workforce over restructure proposals. The Australian agency group confirmed it was reopening 12 of its 78 stores, however when *Travel Weekly* asked whether the remaining 66 were at risk of closure a spokeswoman declined to comment. Flight Centre said it intended to "maintain a strong concentrated presence of stores in the south east", adding that it was also working on introducing both a virtual network of agents and an 'associates' model for those operating in regions without a store. "We are excited about the new options this gives us nationwide," Flight Centre said in a statement. The statement said: "As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the global travel industry for both leisure and corporate, came to a virtual standstill. We are seeing some green shoots of growth but these remain to be far lower than what we are used to. "No one knows when significant travel demand will return, but we do know that when consumer and business travel does resume, it will look very different. "Like all organisations in the travel sector, we are having to consider making some very difficult business decisions and sadly one of those was exploring the potential closure of our stores in

England and Scotland. “We are in consultation generally with our workforce about our restructure proposals and we have recently confirmed to our people that we plan to reopen 12 stores (from our overall 78 footprint). “Resilience and preparation are critical to ensuring we are in the best shape possible to operate in the post-pandemic era, providing the best possible service to our customers, as well as ensuring that our people have greater certainty about their jobs going forwards. “Once demand lifts, we believe we will be well placed, having made these strategic decisions, to bounce back stronger than ever before. “The focus is to maintain a strong concentrated presence of stores in the South East, however, we are working on both a virtual network of consultants and an ‘associates’ model to those consultants operating in regions without a store, which will allow a new flexible working model for them and enable them to maintain their strong relationships with our customers. We are excited about the new options this gives us nationwide and we are working on some innovative new plans to bring this to life further.”

09 July 2020, source TravelMole

BA ramps up July schedules

British Airways has unveiled the resumption of flying to more destinations across its network, including a small number of long-haul routes. Services will resume across the Americas including flights to Bermuda, Dallas, Miami, Seattle and Toronto, although at lower frequencies. Last month BA reinstated San Francisco and other US cities, including Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York (JFK) and Washington with a very reduced schedule. Alongside Hong Kong and Singapore, restarted in June, BA will also resume flights to Haneda in Japan this month. It will also restart limited schedules to Barbados and Kingston in the Caribbean. Across the UK and Europe, the airline will return to more short haul destinations by the end of July, including Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Morocco, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. Domestic flights will resume between London and Belfast, Inverness, Jersey, Manchester, Newcastle and Newquay and the airline will move to double daily services to Edinburgh and Glasgow. BA has introduced a range of Covid measures including social distancing and hand sanitisers, mandatory face masks and asking passengers to store their hand luggage under the seat in front of them. It claims the air on all BA flights is equivalent to hospital operating theatre standards thanks to HEPA filters, which remove microscopic bacteria and virus clusters with over 99.9% efficiency. Chairman and CEO Alex Cruz said: "Following months of lockdown and stress, we know people will want to travel to be reunited with friends and family and to take a well-deserved break. "We have put in place measures - to UK Government and aviation regulator standards - to ensure we're doing all we can to protect the wellbeing of our customers and colleagues and we'll be asking them to play their part in that too."

10 July 2020, source Travel Weekly

Hays Travel targets 100 Travel 2 staff with new Glasgow office

Hays Travel is to open an office in Glasgow to support its growing in-house tour operation and is hoping to recruit 100 Travel 2 staff whose jobs are currently at risk. Managing director John Hays said he had options on a number of potential buildings, including one in the same business park as Travel 2, and hopes to open the office by the end of July or early August. Hays said he had chosen Glasgow to “tap into the talent” that will be available following dnata’s announcement of a restructure in which the closure of its Glasgow office and the merger of Travel 2 into Gold Medal have been proposed. He said: “We need talent and it doesn’t grow on trees, which is why we chose Glasgow for this new office. We’re looking to recruit as many Travel 2 staff as we can. Some have been in touch already but we need

more.” Hays said he had approached dnata UK to inform it of his intentions, and that the two businesses were “in conversation about potential redeployment opportunities”. Lisa McAuley, dnata’s managing director of B2B tour operations, said: “We can confirm that we have been approached by Hays Travel to discuss whether there may be the opportunity for the redeployment of a number of our employees following our collective consultation process. “In the event our proposals proceed, and we must stress we are still in consultation with our impacted employees at this time, we would welcome discussions with potential employers as we would understandably want to do everything possible to help secure gainful employment for all employees who may leave our business by reason of redundancy.” Hays urged interested Travel 2 staff to contact his recruitment team. “We need at least 100 people to work across all kinds of things,” he said. “Travel 2 staff have the skills we need to run a tour operation. We need people with GDS experience; knowledge of worldwide destinations and cruise, administration, customer service, customer relations, duty office.” He said sales of Hays Tour Operating Ltd (HTOL), had “gone through the roof” in recent weeks. “The market’s way down of course, but we’re seeing three times the volumes we usually do. It’s up 200% every day; driven particularly by our Peace of Mind Guarantee, which has gone down really well,” he said. “We’re already struggling to cope with the volume, so when the market comes back, we’re going to really not be able to cope unless we recruit about 100 people.” Hays added that the “varied behaviour” of tour operators during the Covid-19 crisis in relation to refunds had encouraged him to control more of his own destiny by expanding his tour operation. “The behaviour of tour operators has varied from excellent at one end of the spectrum, to ok in the middle, to appalling at the other end. In some cases, things have been pretty fraught. We still haven’t had a penny out of some partners,” he said. Hays said he would consider opening up the Hays tour operation to other agents in time, but said the current priority was his own team. “It’s under consideration; it’s on our roadmap, but to be brutally honest, we have to look after ourselves first,” he said. “It’s absolutely horrible what’s happening in the industry. But right at the start of this, we sat down and said, this is going to be terrible but there are going to be winners and losers and we want to be the winners.”

14 July 2020, source Travel Daily Media

Consumer confidence in travel is slowly returning

Consumer confidence is slowly returning, with two main trends- short-term booking windows and long-term reservations towards the end of 2021. This was revealed by the latest edition of the Duetto Pulse Report, which tracked data from 15-28 June across three key hotel metrics – bookings, cancellations and web traffic. In North America, new bookings for July, August, and September saw double-digit growth in the current Pulse Report, when compared to data from the previous edition, which tracked data from 1-14 June. Overall, pick up for the North American market is still pacing 42% behind same time last year (STLY), although some markets are faring better than others. Nashville and Florida, for example, both saw positive growth in the second half of June, while Chicago, Los Angeles and New York stagnated or even saw declines. Latin America is unfortunately reporting a different story, with declines in on the books business, as the region is hit by new Coronavirus cases. According to the Pulse Report data, LATAM’s pace is not only behind last year, but it is worse week-on-week. For example, looking at on the books for July 2020, the progression over the past four weeks leaves on the books at 1% less for the week of June 22-28 than it was for the week of June 1-7. In other words, LATAM has less on the books for July 2020 now than four weeks ago, which suggests the region is losing more bookings than it is gaining. UK hotels reopen; Data for EMEA was buoyed by the announcement that hotels in England could reopen on July 4 and in Scotland by mid-July. New bookings in the UK saw strong acceleration, with July

recording a 479% increase, August 280% and September 88% compared to the last Pulse Report edition. In comparison, the DACH and Iberia regions showed figures plateauing with slight increases of 30% for August and September compared to the last Pulse Report. Similar trends were seen in web traffic for EMEA, the main driver being the UK, which saw a 361% increase in traffic for July, 286% for August and even 188% for September. Additionally, the UK is seeing percentage increases in the mid 100s through the end of the year. Steady growth for APAC; The latest edition of the Pulse Report showed a 95% increase for net pick up for stays in the month of July for hotels and resorts in Asia Pacific. Business in the region continues to be very short-term, with 65% of the net pick up volume for the next 13 months converted for stay dates in July. Short-term travel interest is again highlighted in web traffic data for APAC hotels, with a 110% increase in web traffic for stay dates in July since the last Pulse Report. There appears to be no major shift in consumer behaviour for mid- to long-term travel dates.

14 July 2020, source TravelMole

Virgin Atlantic secures rescue deal, but will it survive?

Virgin Atlantic deal has secured a rescue deal worth £1.2 billion, having been refused a government bailout. Much of the funding will come from its existing shareholders - the Virgin Group and Delta Air Lines - and from a new investor, hedge fund Davidson Kempner Capital Management. Virgin Group, the biggest shareholder, will pump in a further £200 million, while Davidson Kempner will lend the airline £170 million. Both Virgin Group and fellow shareholder Delta will defer payment of £400 million of loans to the airline. Other creditors are expected to defer payments of a further £450 million. Virgin Atlantic said the deal will pave the way for the airline to return to profitability in 2022. But will it? The plan still needs to be sanctioned by Virgin's creditors under a court-sanctioned process. While they are expected to give the go-ahead and ensure Virgin's medium-term survival, the airline doesn't have a lot of new cash to play with. Much of the £1.2 billion package is in the form of deferred loans, with only £370m of fresh funding. This will allow Virgin to stave-off bankruptcy in the short term, but its long-term survival is not yet guaranteed. That said, the airline has taken drastic measures to reduce its overheads, including shedding 3,500 jobs and closing its Gatwick base. It will relaunch flights on 20 July as a much slimmer airline, but, like its competitors, it has a long battle ahead.

18 July 2020, source Travel Weekly

Government confirms refund credit note protection

The government has confirmed Atol-protection of package holiday bookings extends to refund credit notes for cancellations due to Covid-19. Transport secretary Grant Shapps confirmed the government would underwrite the protection of refund credit notes in a statement issued at midnight saying the move would “boost consumer trust in the aviation and travel sector”. Shapps said: “We want to send a clear message to passengers that they can book their summer holidays with confidence, which is why we’re stepping in to protect refund credit notes issued as a result of Covid-19 cancellations. “This is not only good news for anyone looking to get away for a break in the sun, but also for the aviation and travel sector which has been hit hard by the pandemic.” Millions of holidays have been cancelled since the lock-down in travel due to Covid-19 began in March, placing huge financial stress on travel firms to refund consumers. In a statement, the Department for Transport (DfT) said: “Passengers who accept refund credit notes for cancelled holidays as a result of Covid-19 will be protected by the Atol scheme – even if the company they have booked with later collapses.” It added: “By providing confidence to holidaymakers that their refund credit notes are protected if they choose them over refunds, today’s move will mean customers are

able to support the travel sector's recovery from the pandemic by accepting a refund credit note." Business secretary Alok Sharma said: "This new protection will give consumers the confidence they need to book some time in the sun, safe in the knowledge that their money is protected no matter what. "For those Atol-protected holidaymakers whose trips have already been cancelled, today's reforms will give them the freedom to choose between a refund or a fully-protected refund credit note for use at a later date." Martin Lewis, founder of consumer website MoneySavingExpert.com, said: "This is a key travel intervention we've been calling for. "It's far from a cure-all, but Atol is a statutory scheme and the fact the government will now effectively underwrite credit refund notes gives a solid bedrock of security for customers willing to take them. "The pandemic has been devastating for the travel industry and travellers. Taking an Atol credit refund note if you're likely to re-book shows welcome forbearance and flexibility and the fact that, if you don't use it, it can be exchanged for cash gives peace of mind." The industry and consumers have been waiting for months for government confirmation that refund credit notes for holidays cancelled due to Covid-19 are protected by Atol. Part of the reason for the delay could be the involvement of so many government departments. The Atol scheme is overseen by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) which reports to the DfT, but the Department for Business (BEIS) is responsible for the Package Travel Regulations which the Atol scheme supports. The Air Travel Trust fund which pays Atol refunds in the event of a travel provider's insolvency is funded by a £2.50 fee on protected bookings. However, the fund was largely depleted by the collapse of Thomas Cook in September last year, requiring the government – and therefore the Treasury – to agree to underwrite the Atol scheme for now. The government's announcement noted: "Today's action follows on from a separate series of measures introduced to support the aviation sector, including a comprehensive package of financial support incorporating loans and guarantees, tax deferrals and covering the cost of statutory sick pay."

20 July 2020, source TravelMole

WTM London WILL go ahead at ExCeL this year

Organisers have confirmed WTM London will go ahead between 2 and 4 November 2020 and will be one of the first major exhibitions to take place globally since the Covid-19 pandemic. It will take place at ExCeL, during London Travel Week. Travel Forward, WTM's tech-focused exhibition will also go ahead. This year's event is centred on the concept of recovery, rebuild and innovate, as global travel and tourism leaders will meet to discuss the future of the industry and begin its resurgence. WTM said: "The show will reflect the diverse needs of the travel and tourism industry by incorporating both a live event, at ExCeL London, as well as a virtual event taking place online the week after. "Furthermore, the leading travel technology exhibition, Travel Forward, which is co-located with WTM London at the ExCeL Centre, will also be taking place this year inspiring visitors to embrace the latest technology that will help rebuild the industry. "The highest standards of health and safety will be followed across all elements of the shows this year with WTM London, Travel Forward and London Travel Week adhering to UK Government guidelines on social distancing and all other aspects of Covid-19 prevention. "Visitors can be safe in the knowledge that not only will they have the chance to meet other travel and tourism professionals in person for the first time since the outbreak of COVID-19, but they will be able to do this in a safe environment too." ExCeL has been working with the Association of Event Venues (AEV) and other key stakeholders to develop the All Secure Standard, an industry wide benchmark to enable the safe return of organised events. ExCeL said: "The vast majority of the venue (90%) has been restored to its original state now, with the remaining space secured as equipment storage for NHS Nightingale. This ongoing support will not impact the normal operation of our venue and the centre will be able to host safe, secure, and successful business events and

conferences from 1 October onwards." WTM London Event Director Simon Press said: "This is truly fantastic news to hear with regards to not only our industry but also the thousands of companies we directly support through WTM London in the global travel and tourism industry. "We look forward to welcoming people to London this November in a safe way and providing the platform to help our industry recover, rebuild and innovate. In the lead-up to the event, we will be in constant communication with the UK Government with regards to plans surrounding the NHS Nightingale hospital in London making sure to find a solution for all parties involved. "By hosting both a live and virtual event as part of WTM London 2020 we will be providing a truly essential service for the global travel and tourism industry as it looks to rebound heading into 2021. We look forward to welcoming you once again to the event where Ideas Arrive - WTM London."

22 July 2020, source Travel Weekly

Airlines call for US-European virus testing scheme

Major airlines have asked for a joint coronavirus testing programme, so transatlantic travel may resume. The BBC reports that International Airlines Group (IAG) – the owner of British Airways – Lufthansa, American Airlines and United Airlines are among the carriers which have signed a letter to US and European Union leaders. Most travel between Europe and the US is banned at the moment because of the coronavirus crisis, and airlines are fighting to survive amid a drastic drop in passengers. In a letter sent on Tuesday to US and European governments, airline chief executives called for a US-EU testing programme for transatlantic flights. "Given the unquestioned importance of transatlantic air travel to the global economy as well as to the economic recovery of our businesses, we believe it is critical to find a way to reopen air services between the US and Europe," the letter said. It was sent to US vice president Mike Pence and Ylva Johansson, the European commissioner for home affairs, reports the BBC. "We recognise that testing presents a number of challenges, however we believe that a pilot testing programme for the transatlantic market could be an excellent opportunity for government and industry to work together," the letter added. The EU does not currently allow visits from US residents, although it has relaxed rules for non-essential travel from 15 countries with lower coronavirus infection rates. The UK requires people arriving from the US to spend 14 days in self-imposed quarantine, while the US restricts travel by most passengers coming for Europe. China also wants passengers of inbound flights to provide negative Covid-19 test results before boarding. The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) made the announcement on Tuesday as the government looks to further reduce the risk of imported coronavirus cases.

22 July 2020, source Travel Daily Media

1 in 5 UK holidaymakers want to go on holiday ASAP

One in five (19%) UK holidaymakers are determined to holiday as soon as possible in the UK or abroad, with 6% claiming that they don't mind where they stay, and 6% planning a blow-out holiday as soon as they can (rising to 11% of under 34s). The Opinium survey of 2000 UK holidaymakers, on behalf of iCarhireinsurance, a leading provider of car hire excess insurance, reveals that almost a third (31%) will only travel to places where they feel their health will be safe, with older age groups much more likely to say this (38% of over 55s). A third (33%) of holidaymakers think it is too risky to travel abroad this year, 15% won't travel until there is a vaccine and 7% say their finances have been hit and they can't afford to holiday this year. A third (33%) of UK holidaymakers' plans had been cancelled this year due to the pandemic. Almost one in seven (14%) say that the pandemic has changed the way they will travel forever. A third (33%) plan to holiday more in the UK in the future, rising to 40% of over 55s, and almost a fifth (18%) of holidaymakers aim to fly less. In terms of

holiday accommodation, one in ten (10%) are now wary of staying in all-inclusive resorts, and 11% will choose self-catering over hotels in the future. Ernesto Suarez, founder and CEO of iCarhireinsurance said: “The pandemic has changed the way we travel, holiday and relax for the foreseeable future, yet it’s clear that the appetite for a holiday is still strong for most British holidaymakers. Whether your holiday plans are in the UK or abroad, hiring a car is a great way to explore the local area, without having to worry about social distancing. However, don’t forget to organise your car hire excess insurance in advance.”

23 July 2020, source Travel Daily Media

WTTC warns country-wide border closures could seriously stall global economic recovery

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) has warned governments around the world that further country-wide border closures could seriously jeopardise global economic recovery. It is urging authorities to take a more carefully calibrated approach and introduce localised measures, and only when necessary. This would avoid blanket restrictions, prevent stalling the fragile economic recovery and not cripple the already bruised and battered travel and tourism sector. It would support the opening of city to city ‘air corridors’ between global financial centres, such as London and Frankfurt and New York. This would help restart business travel which is crucial to kickstarting the economic recovery. Unfortunately, a number of countries around the world are experiencing local coronavirus spikes. This is forcing a re-think by a number of governments which are now having to consider reintroducing tough and unwelcome new ‘anti-travel’ measures. According to the latest statistics from Johns Hopkins University in the US, the worldwide COVID-19 death toll has passed 606,000 while the number of confirmed coronavirus cases has now surpassed more than 14.5 million. Gloria Guevara, WTTC president and CEO, said: “Governments should not close off access to other countries in their entirety. Only regional border measures should be imposed if essential, so that the recovery of a country’s whole economy is not jeopardised in future. The establishment of ‘air corridors’ between financial centres where infection levels are low, such as between London and New York, would provide a vital boost to business travel and aid the economic recovery.” “It is perfectly possible to fight COVID-19 and support the economic recovery through the tourism sector at the same time. We urge governments to consider only local lockdowns as the key to opening the door to a successful way forward,” she added. Restoring business travel, especially via transatlantic flights, is key to help kickstart the economic recovery. WTTC research shows that for two of the world’s top business centres, business travellers account for one US Dollar in every three spent in New York and one-pound Sterling out of every four spent in London.

27 July 2020, source Skift

Tourism’s Jagged Reopening May Be Worse Than Not Reopening At All

If June was the beginning of “We’re reopening for tourism,” July is proving to be the time of “actually — not so fast.” The UK government on Saturday abruptly announced a mandatory 14-day quarantine on travelers arriving back in the UK from Spain, prompting a fall in travel stocks on Monday morning. The decree was so sudden that it caused a scramble of passengers who sought to get back quickly to avoid 14 days indoors at home. After rumors that the UK would exempt the popular holiday regions of the Balearic and Canary Islands, the Foreign Office said late on Monday they would be included as well. Meanwhile, some nations in the Caribbean — one of the only regions that has been accepting American tourists — are rethinking that offer. The Bahamas and Puerto Rico both reneged their invitation to Americans as rising cases made them rethink the prospect of welcoming visitors from the U.S. hotspot. Then, on Monday, the Bahamas changed its policy again, saying that arrivals

from all nations (including the U.S.) will have to quarantine for 14 days in a government facility at their own expense. All the confusion raises the specter that reopening for international tourism when the pandemic isn't just far from over — but far from even stabilized in many places — could have a worse impact on tourism in the long term than the marginal gains in the short term. There are a variety of factors that determine when and whether a destination reopens. The government policies in source markets, government policies in the destination itself, and the individual decisions of business owners and operators about whether it's economically feasible to open for a lower number of arrivals. This matrix of factors mean that any "reopening" is less a coordinated strategy, and more a hope that everyone stays aligned for long enough to see a summer season. However, with governments that have proved as fickle and unpredictable as Boris Johnson's — which changed its policy on foreign travel three times in one month — uncertainty is to be expected. Spain's tourism industry is simply the latest casualty of its chaos. It's no secret and entirely understandable that tourism businesses need revenue to survive. But these jagged reopening could also lead to sunk costs that prove to be the final straw for small operations without reliable cashflow. As many small businesses have painfully learned recently, spending the cash to reopen in keeping with new guidelines — only to find out days later that business isn't coming after all — can be the difference between just hanging on or closing shop entirely. In addition, the confidence of travelers is already shaky, having survived the March global shutdown where many had traumatic experiences at borders, in airports, and long, fruitless waits on airline phone lines — and even longer waits for refunds. As the European Tourism Association's Tim Fairhurst told Skift last week, there's a considerable and understandable fear in some tourists' minds about getting "stuck" on the wrong side of the border. More news of scrambling at airports or having to cancel a trip right as you were gearing up to go won't help restore travelers' long-term confidence. In response to the UK's sudden quarantine decision, World Travel and Tourism Association President Gloria Guevara released a statement saying the move "will be hugely disappointing for thousands of UK holidaymakers — and is disastrous for the hard-pressed Travel & Tourism industry, both in Spain and the UK." "WTTC believes quarantines do nothing to help restore consumer confidence at a time when we need to encourage people to return to travelling, in line with our Safe Travels protocols, to give a hope of saving some of the 2020 summer season." That may be the case. But travel consumer confidence in the middle of a raging pandemic is a perhaps a misguided thing to chase. When it comes to tourism right now, there are no easy answers, no foolproof opening strategies, no risk-free trips. A month or so into the great reopening experiment, it's worth pondering whether it not only carries public health risks, but economic ones too.

29 July 2020, source Travelbiz

Aer Lingus services to US full of cargo, not people, says CEO

Aer Lingus is maintaining services with the United States chiefly to ship thousands of tonnes of pharmaceuticals and other exports, the airline's CEO told the Oireachtas yesterday. Sean Doyle was responding to claims from TDs at the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response that airlines were 'super-spreaders' of the pandemic, particularly from the US, where Covid-19 is more rampant than in Europe. Mr Doyle said Aer Lingus was operating only three US services connecting Dublin with Boston, Chicago and New York. He said Aer Lingus at this time last year was delivering about 4,200 passengers daily from the US - but that has fallen to barely 150. Most coming here were on essential business travel, returning Irish citizens, or using Dublin only as a transit hub to other destinations. He said goods, not people, were sustaining Aer Lingus's core transatlantic services. "What I would urge people to understand

is the amount of freight or cargo on those flights. We are transporting thousands of tonnes of exports and imports - a lot of pharmaceuticals into and out of the island of Ireland. That is one of the main drivers of us maintaining the network." He confirmed that some exports for the US were being trucked from the west of Ireland to London's Heathrow for transport on British Airways flights, because Aer Lingus had limited use of wide-body aircraft on US routes. This includes shipments by Boston Scientific plants in Clonmel, Cork and Galway, which normally would access Boston's Logan Airport from Shannon - an airport with no current Aer Lingus services. "We don't have the capacity in Dublin to meet that particular flow," Mr Doyle said. "The most important thing that we can do is provide a service to Boston Scientific to get their goods out of the country. "A solution that works for them isn't available at the moment on Aer Lingus. It normally would be, because we would have a wide body (aircraft) in Boston. But the overall cargo demand and the overall passenger demand don't justify the deployment of that type of solution on that route. If demand came back, then we would have an 'island of Ireland' solution that would enable that freight. But at the minute we don't." Mr Doyle said Aer Lingus hoped to identify with US and Irish authorities a regime of advance Covid-19 testing for passengers intending to fly here from US airports. "The United States is significantly behind Europe in terms of the progression of the pandemic. But the US is important. FDI (foreign direct investment) is fundamental. The number of foreign nationals who work for US companies in Ireland - who will need to start traveling to and from their homes on work and business - will be a big issue. We need to find solutions to enable that flow safely." He and Eddie Wilson, chief executive of Ryanair DAC, repeatedly told the committee that the Government was wrong to tell people to avoid flying. They asserted that travelling by air was no riskier than staying at home. Both executives said Ireland should follow the policy adopted in the rest of the EU for the entire bloc to be 'greenlisted' as safe. Currently most of the EU - including the UK and Spain - is excluded from Ireland's list of countries that do not require a 14-day quarantine upon return. "Germany have been open for travel since June the 19th," Mr Doyle said, "and at every stage of this crisis they've been a role model."

30 July 2020, source Travel Weekly

Tui to close 166 travel agencies

Tui has announced that it is to close 166 high street travel agencies in the UK and Ireland. The move will leave Tui's retail network at 350 shops. The stores that Tui proposes to close have been selected after consideration of local market data, consumer trends and predictions on the future of travel. The travel giant, second in its high street presence only to Hays Travel, said it will create a new homeworking sales and service team. Tui said 70% of 900 impacted roles will be moved into this team, and it aimed to protect UK jobs and mitigate redundancies by moving other affected retail advisers to vacancies across the remaining high street stores and closing overseas third-party contact centres. The locations of the shops that are closing are yet to be confirmed. In May, the wider Tui Group announced it was to reduce overhead costs globally by 30%, with approximately 8,000 roles impacted and continue with its programme of digitalisation as it anticipated Covid-19 would be the travel industry's "greatest crisis ever". Tui said it carried out a review of UK customer booking behaviours, before deciding to close the 166 high street stores in the UK and Ireland. Andrew Flintham, managing director of Tui UK and Ireland, said: "We want to be in the best position to provide excellent customer service, whether it's in a high street store, over the telephone or online, and will continue to put the customer at the heart of what we do. It is therefore imperative that we make these difficult cost decisions, look after our colleagues during such unprecedented uncertainty and also offer a modern customer service. "Customer behaviours have already changed in recent years, with 70% of all Tui UK bookings taking place online.

We believe Covid-19 has only accelerated this change in purchasing habits, with people looking to buy online or wishing to speak with travel experts from the comfort of their own home. We have world class travel advisors at Tui, so we hope many of them will become homeworkers and continue to offer the personalised service we know our customers value.” Earlier this month, and before the UK government’s decision to remove Spain from its list of ‘safe’ countries, Flintham said Tui was aiming to reopen all of its travel agencies. He also said there was a cross section of customers so loyal to high street travel agents that they did not push for their refunds for cancelled holidays until they could visit stores after the Covid-19 lockdown measures were relaxed. The TSSA union, which represents staff in the travel trade, reiterated its calls for government support for high streets in reaction to the news. General Secretary Manuel Cortes said “We have been warning for weeks that high street travel shops could become a thing of the past unless the government took urgent action to help our industry navigate this crisis. Today’s announcement by Tui means that ministers must sit up, smell the coffee and act without further delay. “We need a bespoke package of measures to save our travel industry. I call on Tui and other employers to engage with our union so we can jointly lobby government for this to happen.”