

UK Office June 2019 TDC Report

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UK Director

Tour Operators

Attended IPW in Anaheim and met with the following tour operators and airline partners:

- **Travel 2** – Part of DNATA and one of their B2B brands. We had a general catch up with Lindsay Miller who advised that the US is still their number one market although Florida is currently 23% down year on year. They sent a total of 44,000 passengers to Florida in 2018 and that they have booked 15,000 for 2019 year to date. Lindsay advised that consumer demand to Florida is down generally as well as the exchange rate not being favourable and the uncertainty of Brexit. Room night stats to our destination totalled 118 as of 31st May 2019.
- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners** – Linda Dixey advised that the promotions we are currently running are faring well so far. Florida in general is selling well but the beaches bookings are currently either flat or slightly down year on year. This she feels is due to Disney Dining program having been released so customers are booking Orlando at present and staying in resort as they have some great offers available. Room night stats to our area were at 1740 for 2019 (a total of 73% sold already versus 2018) as of 31st May and 2020 already has a total of 362 room nights booked as of the same period this year.
- **American Holidays** – Dee provided a general update and advised that Florida is down overall year on year by 16% and that room night stats in 2018 to our area ended on 689. This year to date they have booked a total of 513 room nights as of 31st May 2019. She advised that St. Pete/Clearwater is still their number one beach destination on the west coast. We discussed the possibility of a joint promotion in partnership with Experience Kissimmee to run in October 2019 when our new fiscal starts and we will discuss this again in the near future once 2019/2020 budgets have been finalised.
- **Virgin Holidays** – Emma Hook advised that we are currently tracking at approximately 6% up year on year and passenger numbers are up by 11%. Their top selling hotel in Clearwater Beach is the Marriot Suites Sand Key followed by the Sheraton Sand Key Resort and their top selling property in the St. Pete Beach area is currently the Sunset Vistas Beachfront Suites. We are participating in their Visit Florida campaign as well as having our own campaign in-market and have also now confirmed the Braehead Store sponsorship which we also discussed and reviewed when we met.
- **Ocean Florida** – New room night information for the period January – April 2019 shows that room nights booked to our area total 706 which is down year on year but Anna-Maria advised that this should pick up as we have just run the first part of our joint campaign for 2019 and the fact that we are also going to be their Florida partner in July should help to close this gap. They are happy with their product in resort and are not looking to expand their offering as they feel they have an adequate selection of different types of accommodations.

- **Premier Holidays** – They advised that 2017 was a great year in general but that 2018 ended flat year on year. 2019 Florida bookings are up by 29% year on year and that VSPC is still their number one beach destination on the west coast. We discussed a possible partnership when they launch their year-round destination campaign but as they did not provide any room night stats we advised we could not consider this until these have been shared with us.
- **Gold Medal Travel** – Discussed the recent retail campaign and Harriet advised results will be with us soon. Gold Medal had a slow start to Florida sales this year but that bookings to VSPC are turning around as Florida is being promoted constantly at present. Orlando is currently 24% down in sales year on year and VSPC is currently 40% down year on year but as advised Harriet feels that the constant promotions should help to turn this around over the summer months.
- **Selling Long-Haul** – Met with Sally Parker who discussed possible advertising opportunities with both the UK Visit USA association and Selling Travel Magazine. Provided Sally with the most up to date New & Now newsletter and advised we would possibly consider these opportunities in our new fiscal budget year from October 2019.
- **Bookabed** – Discussed and confirmed that we would like to sponsor the annual Bookabed Ireland Staff BBQ & summer party and have been advised we will be promoted to their trade database of followers on all social media channels. Also confirmed that we would like to be their Destination of the Month partner in September 2019 and this is now confirmed. We were asked if we were able to provide up to date imagery and a selection has now been sent for their consideration.
- **Abercrombie & Kent** – We met with Charlotte Wells, Senior Product Manager North America. Charlotte advised that they are currently down year on year with sales to the US by 17% versus 2018 and she felt that this was due to the uncertainty of Brexit and a low exchange rate. Florida is an emerging market for them and as such we have supplied Charlotte with new copy, images and key selling points for their consideration for inclusion on their website.
- **Swanson's Travel** – Magnus Hermansson advised that the past two years have seen a decrease in bookings to the US generally as they are suffering from a weak SEK versus USD and customers are conscious about value for money and also what he called 'the Trump effect'. Last year saw an amazing summer in Sweden and so people held off travelling. Swedish consumers are also concerned by environmental issues and asking whether they should be travelling by plane and train. We discussed the Swanson's travel show that will again take place in 2020 and advised that we will be participating in partnership with Fort Lauderdale.
- **Barrhead Travel** – Discussed the decline in sales to our area despite co-op marketing and training their sales agents in the past and discussed what we could do to improve these based on less than 100 room night sales to our area. They advised additional co-op marketing could possibly assist but based on their sales, this will be very unlikely moving forward.
- **Travelbag** – Part of DNATA and a B2C brand. Followed up again with Suzanne Harvey after a meeting held with Gemma back in April and asked how things were progressing

with their new website which they advised is still being worked on. Travelbag requested video content as well as new imagery which we have duly sent as they are looking to grow their US business and this will be their starting point after updating their product range.

- **Tour America** – General meeting was held with Veronica Flood, Marketing Manager. Veronica advised that Tour America will be 25 years old in 2020 and that they will be incorporating their celebrations with their annual Red Cow consumer show which is held in the suburbs of Dublin, Ireland. Trading is 7% up year on year across the board in what she described as a tough year. Florida is doing well as they are offering lead in prices starting from €399 which is exceptional value for money. We have since sent new video content for them to update their website.
- **Thomas Cook** – General catch up meeting with Andrew Pickering who advised that Thomas Cook's Florida summer charter capacity is down by 1% year on year but that their scheduled bookings are up 20% for 2019. He advised that there may be a possible September campaign which could be billed later after I had explained that our budget for this year has now been allocated and as such, we asked to be included in the information when this is sent. Room night stats for 2018 totaled 2243 which was down 10% year on year versus 2019. Andrew did not have any room night stats at our meeting but has since advised they have booked a total of 1700 year to date as of 4th July 2019.
- **British Airways** – BA advised that the Tampa flight is currently up 3% year on year overall. Discussed the forthcoming Fam trip to our area in partnership with Experience Kissimmee and agreed to advise of dates we will be visiting our sponsorship of the BA Terminal 5 London Heathrow Lounge so that they may possibly join us.
- **Trailfinders** – Melloney advised that our area finished flat in 2018 (1127 room nights booked in total) but that year to date for 2019 we are pacing 8% up (970 room nights booked as of 31st May). Trailfinders are looking to produce a family brochure and she was keen to see VSPC taking part if this proceeds as Florida twin-centre holidays still work very well for their customers. Advised Melloney to touch base when this is in the pipeline.
- **Funway Holidays** – We met with Melissa Tilling, to get an update on business. She advised that St. Pete/Clearwater was tracking at -6% for 2019 travel which is in line with the market. However, Orlando is pacing at +16% which is largely driven by Universal, I Drive hotels and homes. Disney is down compared to last year due to capacity. Mexico and Caribbean are struggling for them as they have seen competitors offering very low prices, particularly British Airways Holidays, and also the charter operators such as TUI and Thomas Cook. Overall their business has been affected by Mexico and Caribbean, but the US is up for 2019. There has been an increase in booking for multi-centres in the US assisted by the support and competitive airfares from United airlines.

Meetings/Training/Events

- **BA Lounge Heathrow Terminal 5** – We had a meeting with Ali Kasmani, Terminal and Account Manager, and Shaheen Gani, Marketing Manager at Team Spirits, who are the agency for recruiting brand ambassadors for the BA lounge. We provided an overview of

the destination and the various aspects of what will be included in the activation. We also shared with them the creatives. We have advised of the key responsibilities we require of the staff and what we are wanting to achieve by the end of the event. Shaheen shared with us information about the variety of activations at Heathrow that their staff have recently been involved with and were very confident that they would be able to deliver. We agreed that we would arrange a conference call with the staff members in the coming weeks to provide the key messages we require them to deliver during the event. Shaheen will work with Ali to confirm the staff schedule and will share with us in due course.

- **Funway Holidays** – We visited their head office in Bromley to provide training to their sales agents. We met with 10 of their agents, but the home workers also dialed in to listen to the presentation. We gave a destination overview, as well as what's new, and distributed brochures, maps and giveaways. This will assist the agents during the Florida campaign.
- **Florida Beaches Partnership (IPW)** – We held a catch-up meeting with all Florida Beaches partners at IPW to discuss forthcoming shows that we will be attending in 2020, arrangement of producing co-branded giveaways as well as discussing general administration duties.

TRADE LIAISON

- **Virgin Holidays, Braehead** – We had a call with Marie to discuss training opportunities and their in-house staff fam trip. We decided that due to other commitments with their staff for the coming months, we would visit their store again in September to provide training to the remaining agents and this has now been secured for the weekend of the 14th / 15th September to coincide with a client consumer event also being held during that weekend. Additional opportunities to advertise within Braehead Mall are also being investigated to support the client event as well as discounted holiday offers from Virgin Holidays and a competition prize.

We are also in the process of arranging additional branding in store by way of a 'Totem' which is currently being worked on. We provided a details key selling points sheet for staff to also utilize to assist them in selling the destination and will be sending them some kids' activity sheets.

- **British Airways Summer Beach Event** –
 - The final artwork has now been produced by BVK and sent to the agency for production. We have also arranged printing of the competition graphics and entry forms.
 - BA have been in contact with Rooster with regards to social activity during the campaign and they will liaise directly.
 - We have now finalised the coasters, activity sheets, and branded t-shirts for staff to wear, which will be delivered to the airport ahead of the launch.
 - We have finalised the destination video and provided this to BA.
 - We have been working with the airport agency to confirm visitor passes to allow us access to the lounge. We will visit throughout the 3 months alongside the brand

ambassador and will assist in the activation including speaking with the consumers and ensuring they are entering the competition to win the holiday.

- Brand Ambassadors – We have provided the staff with training, key talking points and responsibilities whilst they are representing Visit St. Pete/Clearwater in the lounge.
- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners** – We have received the TravelPlanners/Cheap flights email, which has been approved and will be distributed this month.
- **Brand USA Fall 19 campaign** – To assist with the launch of the Brand USA Fall campaign, we have received a brief from Tryla, which we have completed and also sent assets. The activity will be live from 1st September to 31st October 2019 and include; print, digital, Facebook and partnership with Expedia.
- **Travelbiz.ie** – We are discussing the possibility of continuing our double page spread in the 2020 Travelbiz directory which is produced for trade in Ireland.
- **Thomas Cook** – We finalised details with Ella to run a staff incentive based on winning Love to Shop vouchers or runners up prizes of branded goody bags. The incentive has been agreed to be extended and will run during the campaign period to drive further bookings to our destination. We have arranged for vouchers and goody bag prizes to be sent to Ella to distribute to the winners, once announced.
- **Funway Holidays** – Finalised all creative as part of the Funway Holidays Florida's Beaches campaign. Additional activity will run throughout the month of July and the beginning of August.
- **VSPC/BA/Experience Kissimmee Product Manager FAM** – Provided Rosemarie with an in-depth overview and justification form for the proposed Fam in November. We have also agreed accommodation will be provided at The Sheraton Sand Key Resort and we will continue to work on this initiative in the coming months.
- **Bookabed** – Sent branded items to Beverley Hart to utilize during the staff summer BBQ that we are sponsoring for use in photos to be used on their social media platforms as part of this initiative.
- **Virgin Holidays** – We have received an email from Joe Thompson, Managing Director of Virgin Holidays to advise that they are proposing bringing the Virgin Atlantic and Virgin Holidays Marketing teams in both organisations together. They plan to create a Marketing 'Centre of Excellence' working on behalf of both brands, enabling them to deliver more effective and efficient marketing. Under the new structure, they will continue to have a dedicated brand partnerships team working on our business. The only difference is that the team will work on behalf of both Virgin Holidays and Virgin Atlantic brands. By making this change, they will be able to optimise partner campaigns and activities to maximise the overall return across the brands.
- **Ocean Florida** – We have received the creatives for the July campaign, which have all been approved. We have also arranged for cakes to be sent to their Florida staff to show our appreciation of the business they book to St. Pete/Clearwater.

- **VSPC/SeaWorld Mega Fam** – We have provided Rose and Michelle with some suggestions for the itinerary so they can start work on this. SeaWorld have advised that the print deadline for their brochure is mid-august, so we will provide all of the necessary information ahead of this date. We have also confirmed rooms for the group at Sheraton Sand Key. We have also sent invites to our key partners to obtain details of the agents participating in the trip.
- **Cowboyreiser, Norway** – Christian Bolstad contacted us to advise that he is looking to add Florida to their product in the coming months and asked for our assistance. We have provided destination information and images and some recommendations for the programme.
- **Jetset** – We have arranged for training next month with the staff at their office in Enfield. They have also included the destination in some of their marketing which includes banners and video on their agent booking website. This will be live for 2 weeks and was offered as complimentary.
- **Thomas Cook** – We have scheduled a meeting with Andrew Pickering for next month, to meet at their London office to discuss initial results from the recent campaign and an update on business to our area.
- **Virgin Holidays** – We have been working with Fiona Lewry and Michelle in our office on the itinerary for their upcoming Fam trip to St. Pete/Clearwater. We have provided Michelle with the agent's details and have sent the final itinerary to Fiona to share with the participants.
- **American Sky** – St. Pete/Clearwater was featured in their newsletter as part of a multi-centre itinerary with other Florida beaches. This was provided complimentary.
- **Visit USA, UK** – We updated our details for use in the 2020 Travel Planner brochure.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

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MARKET INTELLIGENCE:

4 June 2019, Source TTG

What uncertain exchange rates mean for summer holidaymakers

In these days of political turmoil, one immediate impact for both agents and their clients can be exchange rates – particularly the value of the pound when measured against key currencies such as the euro and US dollar. While the pound has been in the doldrums against both the euro and dollar since the EU referendum in June 2016, sterling had been slowly gaining in value against the euro for the first few months of 2019, despite the seemingly endless Brexit crisis. The pound reached the giddy heights of 1.18 euros in early May, its highest level for

about two years. But within three weeks, it was back down to a rate of 1.13 euros to the pound as worries about a no-deal Brexit and the US-China trade war took their toll. As for the US dollar, the pound was trading at about 1.32 to the dollar in early May before sliding to 1.26 dollars by 29 May – the lowest exchange rate since January 2019. By comparison, the pound has gone up by about 26% against the Turkish lira over the past 12 months. With a new Conservative leader and prime minister due to be elected later this summer, there could be more turmoil ahead for currency, especially with several candidates declaring their willingness to forge ahead with a no-deal Brexit. Gino Ravaioli, chairman of the Dynamic Currency Conversion Forum, said: “The pound’s volatility is likely to mean uncertainty and confusion when it comes to holiday spending this summer. “If the weak pound does push British holidaymakers to venture further afield to non-eurozone countries – such as Turkey, Tunisia or Bulgaria – many may opt to pay by card rather than exchanging cash before they jet off.” Nick Boden, head of Post Office Travel Money, added the “pound still packs a punch” in some short-haul destinations. “In Europe, sterling is performing best against currencies for Turkey, Sweden and Hungary, so a city break in Stockholm or Budapest or a beach break in Marmaris will give you more cash in your pocket than in other destinations,” he said. Peter Lilly, business development manager of foreign exchange specialist AFEX, added that rates of European currencies against the pound were actually “comparable” with previous summers since the 2016 EU referendum. “The cost of travel money to holidaymakers shouldn’t be much higher than in previous years,” he said. “Yet, if the public perceive that the pound is weak, then we could see an impact. “For instance, we have witnessed on a couple of occasions where foreign exchange rates for travel money have caught the headlines – normally when sub-parity exchange rates for euros have been offered in airports.” Despite the pound’s instability, many holidaymakers still leave it until the last minute to obtain their foreign currency. Specialist forex firm Caxton found 25% of people purchased holiday money only days before departure. Alana Parsons, Caxton’s chief operating officer, said: “Getting the most value for your travel money can be tricky, but not if we spend as much time planning our finances as we do researching our holiday destinations.” Parsons added consumers could “build up a travel money fund” and then “lock in” an exchange rate for their next trip on a currency card to mitigate any sharp fluctuations in the pound’s value before they travel.

5 June 2019, Source Travelbiz

EXCLUSIVE: More safety concerns for Boeing as FAA says its 'Dreamliner' planes could lose braking and steering function - taking nearly 100 of the 787 jets out of the air for \$5million repairs

The Federal Aviation Administration have identified safety flaws in Boeing's 787 jets - called the Dreamliner. The tires and wheels of the 787-9 and 787-8 jets 'could be susceptible to damage, which could result in a loss of braking on one main landing gear truck'. The FAA also found an issue that could see a 'loss of nose wheel steering and loss of directional control on the ground when below rudder effectiveness speed'. Repairs required to fix this particular safety concern will cost more than \$5million, the FAA reports. This model is flown by 72 major airlines including United, Virgin Atlantic and American and will affect an estimated 87 airplanes. Boeing has been hit by new safety concerns affecting two further plane models and requiring million of dollars worth of repairs. It is just two days since the Federal Aviation Administration announced a new problem with the company's 300 grounded 737 MAX jets. According to the FAA the tires/wheels of the recently launched 787-9 and 787-8 'could be susceptible to damage, which could result in a loss of braking on one main landing gear truck, loss of nose wheel steering and loss of directional control on the ground when below rudder

effectiveness speed.' The regulators' directive will be effective from Thursday, June 6 and affects an estimated 87 airplanes on the US registry. The 787 Dreamliner is flown by 72 major airlines around the world, including United, Virgin Atlantic and American and Boeing recently announced 235 new routes. UK airlines British Airways and TUI Airways also use the Dreamliner model. BA has 12 787-8's in its fleet and 18 787-9's. Boeing has proudly boasted that its 787 Dreamliner fleet is an 'industry leader,' the largest of which can fly 330 passengers internationally. The model is flown by 72 major airlines including United, Virgin Atlantic and American and Boeing recently announced 235 new routes. The FAA estimates that the repairs required to rectify this particular safety concern will cost operators more than \$5million. Further directives require airlines to conduct detailed inspections of particular parts in all 787s in their fleets following reports of damage causing dangerous hydraulic leakage in the case of lightning strikes. Boeing spokesman Paul Bergman told DailyMail.com in a statement, 'Boeing works closely with the FAA to monitor the fleet for potential safety issues and take appropriate actions. This is a continuous and ongoing process.' He said that, for their part, the issues had, 'been resolved with system improvements that have been incorporated into production of all 787 models.' The new FAA directives compel operators to make the required repairs on affected aircraft already in use in their fleets. Some international carriers have voiced skepticism that the plans will be back in the air by August as some US airlines have suggested.

5 June 2019, Source TTG

Thomas Cook Airlines to fly to Florida year-round

Thomas Cook Airlines will offer year-round flights from the UK to Florida with the introduction of new services between Manchester and Orlando early next year. The new flights to Orlando will operate every Tuesday and Sunday from January to March 2020. Cook will offer two cabins on these flights with economy seats offering a seat pitch of 31 inches and premium seats with a 35-inch pitch. Return flights start at £299.99 for bookings made by 21 June or from £319.99 after this date. Prices include hand luggage and a three-course James Martin in-flight meal. Seven-night packages start from £535 based on two adults and two children sharing, departing 7 January 2020.

6 June 2019, Source TravelMole

Heathrow buys new scanners so liquids can be left in bags

Passengers travelling through Heathrow airport will be able to keep their liquids and laptops inside their bags once new security equipment is installed. The airport is investing £50m in the computer tomography (CT) security scanners, to be rolled out over the next three years, which will be able to provide a clear picture of a bag's contents. Heathrow first began testing the CT scanners, which are similar to those used in hospitals, in 2017 and it plans to complete the roll out by 2022. Passengers have been banned from carrying containers holding more than 100ml of liquid in their hand luggage since August 2006 and, at the moment, smaller bottles of gels and liquid must be placed in clear plastic bags at security. Heathrow said the 100ml restriction will remain after the introduction of the new scanners, but passengers will be able to leave their liquids in their bags, cutting down on plastic usage and also saving them time. "This cutting-edge kit will not only keep the airport safe with the latest technology, but will mean that our future passengers can keep their focus on getting on with their journeys and less time preparing for security screening," said Heathrow chief operations officer Chris Garton. Aviation minister Baroness Vere added: "Passenger safety remains our top priority, and this programme clearly shows the huge importance we place on security." The

technology is already being used in the US, including Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson airport and Chicago's O'Hare. The US Transportation Security Administration hopes to deploy 300 of the scanners by 2020.

7 June 2019, Source Skift

Selling U.S. Tourism in Trump Era Leaves Industry Grasping for Fixes

During the past couple of years, American government policies have been smearing the welcome mat that the U.S. travel industry tries to roll out for international tourists. As one U.S. Travel official noted this week: "Travel will go where it's easiest to go." And these days coming to America is not easy. Let's face it. Brand USA and U.S. Travel had a daunting task this week at the 2019 edition of IPW, the annual travel gathering held in Anaheim, California. Leaders of both associations had to convince the international buyers and journalists attending the trade show designed to "bring the world to America" that the country is welcoming, despite looming trade wars, travel bans, and onerous visa regulations. That's why it's no surprise that many of the press conferences held by national and state officials were filled with non-answer answers to questions about any controversial government policy. For example, Christopher Thompson, president and CEO of Brand USA, the organization charged with marketing the country as a travel destination, tried to downplay the new policy requiring nearly all visa applicants to provide details of their social media history. "Providing security is our highest priority," he said. "The new requirements for visas have already been in place for visa waiver country, so the policy is already in existence, just expanded." Well, that's one way to look at the slippery slope. Speaking of slopes, according to recent figures released by U.S. Travel, the country is losing international market share. Although there was a 3.5 percent growth in international visitation to the United States last year, the growth rate worldwide was seven percent. That means the U.S. is getting a small piece of the total pie. During his press conference, Roger Dow, president and CEO of U.S. Travel, suggested that while some attribute the anemic growth rates to the current administration, the industry has been working diligently to educate the White House about the importance of international travel.

10 June 2019, Source TravelMole

Holidaymakers name worst and best value destinations

Two-thirds of holidaymakers are still planning to travel abroad despite the possible impact of Brexit on their pockets, according to a new survey by Post Office Travel Money. Spain and Greece still offer the best value, they believe, however two out of three holidaymakers admitted they weren't able to stick to their budget during their last trip. Couples expected to spend an average of £717, but the Post Office found that two-thirds of those surveyed spent £184 more than they intended. However, only 6% of those planning holidays abroad this year intend to increase their budget. Only 3% of the 2000-plus people quizzed said they would avoid countries in the Eurozone because of high prices. Some 87% said they thought Spain offered good value, while 85% thought Greece and Bulgaria were good value and 82% said Portugal was good value too. Italy and France fared poorly, with only 64% rating Italy as good value and only 58% giving France the thumbs up. Of the popular long-haul destinations, Thailand was rated as good value by 82%, followed by Mexico which was rated good value by almost three-quarters of those asked, while only two-thirds thought they got good value for money in the US and the Caribbean. Dubai, above, came bottom of the poll, rated as poor value by 72% of holidaymakers.

10 June 2019, Travelbiz

Thomas Cook surges after tour-operator business offer

Thomas Cook surged as much 24 per cent after confirming it received an offer for its tour-operator business from Chinese investor Fosun International. Hong Kong-listed Fosun, already Thomas Cook's biggest shareholder, owning about 18 per cent, has submitted a preliminary approach and talks are underway, the UK company said in a statement on Monday. Sky News reported on June 8th that takeover negotiations were being held. Thomas Cook, the world's oldest travel agency, rose 12 per cent to 18 pence as of this morning in London, after hitting 20 pence earlier. Fosun's tourism arm is a division of billionaire Guo Guangchang's drugs-to-insurance conglomerate, which owns the luxury resort brand Club Med. The Chinese company jumped 4.2 per cent in Hong Kong on Monday, the biggest gain since March, 29th. Thomas Cook has lately been grappling with dwindling bookings and uncertainty related to the UK's departure from the EU. Selling at least part of the operation is crucial to the company's survival because a new £300 million (€338 million) loan announced last month is conditional on making progress with a disposal. Shares of the London-based firm had plunged 86 per cent in the past year, prior to today. An acquisition of the world's oldest travel agency would help the Chinese conglomerate gain control of a business that serves 11 million customers and reported £7.4 billion in revenue last year. It would also give Fosun a say in the future of Thomas Cook, whose shares and bonds have tumbled amid concerns over the company's ability to return to profit and avoid being crushed under a pile of debt. In 2016, Thomas Cook and Fosun set up a travel agency partnership to cater to the wealthiest 20 per cent of tourists from the mainland. Club Med Fosun Tourism chairman and CEO Qian Jiannong said in a May 28th interview that acquisitions as well as organic growth would be part of the company's business model. Fosun is well placed to take advantage of the European and Asian markets, he said. "We do believe we have synergies with this company because the European market is still the largest in the leisure holiday business," he said of Thomas Cook last month. "If you combine the market of these two continents together, it will make a very, very interesting business." Any deal would exclude Thomas Cook's airline business, which Fosun would be unable to acquire due to European Union rules, Sky said. Other companies may also be weighing bids for parts of Thomas Cook. The tour operator last month received an offer for its Scandinavian arm from private equity company Triton Partners. It said it was evaluating the offer, though no decision had been made.

11 June 2019, Source TravelMole

More Brits to holiday in UK this year

2019 is set to be the strongest year so far for holidaying at home, according to research by Travelodge. This summer, 69% of Britons will take their annual summer holiday in the UK up from 57% last year. The average holiday this year will last for eight days, according to Travelodge Holiday Index. British holidaymakers are spending more on their summer break, at an average of £874. This is the highest spend since Travelodge started its annual holiday index in 2011 when the average spend was £399.28. Collectively Britons will boost the UK economy by £40 billion by holidaying on British shores this summer. The annual Travelodge Holiday Index, which surveys 1,500 British adults on their summer holiday plans reveals, this year, reveals 58% of adults have opted to holiday at home due to Brexit uncertainties. In 2019, 45% of British holidaymakers are taking a three location Summercation and 85% of Britons are splitting the traditional two-week annual holiday into a seven-day block supported with three short breaks throughout the year. For the fifth consecutive year, Cornwall is the nation's top holiday destination. In second place is Blackpool rising up the ranks from 15th

position in 2018. Devon has slipped down to third position after previously holding the number-two slot for several years. UK city breaks are the second most popular type of holidays for 29% of Brits, with London taking the number-one spot, followed by Bath at number two and Birmingham at number three. The British countryside is the third most popular type of summer Staycation break for Britons this year. Almost a quarter (24%) of adults is taking a rural break this summer. The top destination are the Lake District, North Wales, and the Cotswolds. The report reveals the UK's top staycationers are from Liverpool with 84% opting to take their annual holiday at home this year with the average spend at £847. Sheffielders take second place as the nation's top staycationers with 83% of people from Sheffield spending £703 on their summercation. Residents in Leeds are in third place with 80%, spending on average £905 on their annual staycation break. People from Brighton take fourth place in the rankings and those from Cardiff are in at number five.

14 June 2019, Source Travelbiz

UK tourists still in love with long-haul holidays despite flight shame movement

The popularity of the package holiday remains undimmed for British travellers hooked on trips to the US and Caribbean, according to a new Abta report. Long-haul package holidays are more popular than ever among UK travellers, according to a new report from the Association of British Travel Agents (Abta). Despite the rise of the flight-shame movement and a growing interest in holidays by rail, an increasing number of British travellers are choosing package holidays to destinations across the Atlantic, with bookings to Mexico up by 3,500% since 1994. The Abta report examines how UK travel habits have changed over the last four decades, by analysing International Passenger Survey air travel figures and consulting with travel agents and tour operators. It also found that package holidays to the US and the Caribbean have more than doubled in the same period (with the exception of Barbados, which saw an increase of 22.5%). The report attributed the rise of long-haul packages to increased air capacity and more fuel-efficient aircraft. Conversely, Abta's Travel Trends report for 2019 (published in November 2018), found a rise in awareness of responsible travel, with 45% saying sustainability was an important consideration when booking a holiday (up 6% on the previous year). As travellers become more conscious of the impact their visit has on a destination, an increasing number said they believed travel companies should ensure a holiday benefits both the environment and the local community (69%, up from 51% in 2011). Around a third (32%) were also willing to pay more for a holiday with a company that had a better environmental record (up 13% since 2011). "The UK continues to be a nation in love with the foreign holiday as tens of millions of people head abroad each year, with package holidays still dominating a large proportion of the travel market," said Mark Tanzer, Abta CEO. The type of package holidays available today look very different from trips of previous decades, featuring more adventure holidays, river cruises, wellbeing holidays, and increased personalisation – from choosing a room to pre-booking a sun-lounger. Abta's report also found that authentic culture and local experiences are also now preferred to a "home-from-home" holiday or choosing places where friends and family have been.

17 June 2019, Source Travel Weekly

Travellers to US warned of tougher visa restrictions

Immigration lawyers have warned travellers they could face tougher visa restrictions when entering the US. Stricter enforcement of border rules by President Donald Trump's government has resulted in more visas being declined to travellers with a history of drink

driving or drugs. Charlotte Slocombe, a partner at London-based immigration law firm Fragomen, told the Financial Times she was seeing “one or two business travellers per week having difficulty getting into the US”. Arrests, cautions and convictions for drug-related offences, either cocaine or marijuana, were among the offences cited as reasons for entry being refused. UK employees do not have to disclose spent convictions to employers, but US visa rules state that any offences are relevant regardless of when it happened and arrests that did not lead to criminal charges or cautions. Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, who have both recently admitted to taking cocaine, would now be ineligible for an ESTA visa waiver entry permit since this requires applicants to confirm they have never “possessed, used or distributed” illegal drugs. According to US Customs and Border Protection, there was a 108% increase in refusals of inadmissible persons at US ports of entry in 2018 compared with 2015. US officials are also looking at social media sites to find habits that have not been voluntarily disclosed with the ESTA form now requiring visitors to include their handles.

18 June 2019, Source TTG

Does the US need to do more to attract international visitors?

Despite an upswing in US arrivals, does the nation need to do more to attract international visitors? Peter Ellegard investigates. The US is continuing to lose share of international travel, despite rising visitor numbers and efforts to convince the Trump administration of the sector’s importance to the country’s economy. Speaking at the annual IPW travel convention in Anaheim, California, US Travel Association president and chief executive Roger Dow said the latest arrival figures from the US Department of Commerce showed global visitor numbers to the US grew by 3.5% in 2018, reaching almost 80 million compared with nearly 77 million in 2017. “That might sound very good, but global travel last year grew by 7%,” said Dow. “This means the US is still falling behind the competition to attract international visitors. And it means we’ve got a lot of work to do.” The US’s share of the global travel market dropped from 13.7% in 2015 to just 11.7% in 2018, which Dow said represented “a huge number of visitors and tens of thousands of jobs”. “That’s why we need Brand USA reauthorised this year,” he said, referring to the fact the marketing organisation needs reapproval every five years and is currently only authorised until 2020. “A lot of people would like to lay this at the feet of our president, but we’ve come a long way in helping the administration appreciate and understand what a crucial value travel is to exports and as a job creator for our country.” Dow revealed he met president Donald Trump late last year together with some of the travel industry’s most prominent chief executives to talk about the importance of travel to the US economy. The president, he said, was “receptive to the message that travel growth can be achieved without compromising security”, adding a regular dialogue was being maintained with the White House and other parts of the administration. Preclearance facilities are also being expanded internationally, according to Dow. He said there were currently 15 airports in six countries with US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facilities allowing passengers to clear customs before boarding flights to the US. They include eight in Canada and two in Ireland – Dublin and Shannon. “Sweden and the Dominican Republic are among countries that recently signed agreements to have preclearance sites,” said Dow. “We are also supporting CBP’s efforts to have these sites in countries such as the UK, Japan and Colombia.” Dow, though, said he could not yet specify when the UK facilities might open. Conversations are ongoing.

20 June 2019, Source TravelMole

On the Beach reveals fastest growing holiday hotspot

Dubai is the fastest growing summer sun destination this year, according to OTA On the Beach. Whilst the UAE remains outside its top 10 holiday hotspots, it is the one that has increased the most, along with Barbados and Tunisia. On the Beach research also found that while bookings to Europe continue to rise, 2019 is a big year for non-euro destinations, possibly as holidaymakers look for places for lower in-resort costs. Spain is still the most popular destination for British holidaymakers, followed by Greece, Turkey and Portugal, with Cyprus replacing Malta to make up the top five. The Canaries and the Balearics are the most popular choices for those looking for last-minute deals this summer, according to On the Beach. Marketing director Alan Harding said: "With its year-round warm weather, the UAE is popular a destination this year and our data shows Brits are heading to the hot spot in their droves. "However, Spain continues to dominate but with Greece attracting high volumes of holidaymakers and the resurgence of Turkey, we may see more of a shift next year." "There are still some great value last minute holidays available for those who have yet to book their summer break, with holidays in Turkey available for just over £200 per person. If Brits can be flexible with their departure date and destination, there are some fantastic bargains out there."

20 June 2019, Source Travelbiz

British Airways summer holiday HELL: Pilots to vote on strikes - flights may be disrupted

BRITISH AIRWAYS pilots have announced plans to vote on strike action which could be set to impact the travel plans and flights of thousands of families. This is what you need to know about the potential BA industrial action. British Airways pilots could be set to go on strike this summer, potentially disrupting the flights of thousands of Britons. This is the latest travel advice. Three unions - representing 40,000 staff across pilots, cabin crew, ground staff and engineers - have joined forces for the first time to reject a pay deal. British Airline Pilots' Association (BALPA) announced on Wednesday that it would hold a strike ballot for pilots to vote on industrial action. Fellow trade unions Unite and GMB also revealed they would also hold ballots. BALPA has said it would ballot members for a full walkout, with the month-long ballot due to start next week. The pilot's union represents nine in ten BA pilots meaning large numbers of aircraft would have to be grounded should they walk out. If a resolution cannot be found, pilots could be joined in their strike by cabin crew and ground handlers. British Airways and the unions have been in discussion over pilots' salary since November. However, negotiations have since broken down, with BALPA rejecting the most recent pay offer which was made in May. The pay offer proposed by BA involved an 11.5 per cent pay rise over three years which is well above inflation. However, the union are demanding a bigger increase alongside an improved profit-sharing scheme. In a media statement, BALPA said: "Set against a backdrop of record profits, and despite there being some progress, BA's offer is too little too late. "It also fails to address the fundamental principle of fairness by denying employees a reasonable share of the success they have helped produce." BALPA General Secretary Brian Strutton told Express.co.uk: "We regret the breakdown after six months of negotiations with British Airways that has led to us issuing a strike ballot notice. "Pilots have no wish to disrupt passengers travel plans so BALPA will be doing everything it can to reach a deal with BA – the question is, will BA reciprocate?" A British Airways spokeswoman told Express.co.uk: "We are extremely disappointed that the pilots' union, BALPA, has raised the prospect of a ballot for industrial action. "We urge them to join us for mediation with the conciliation service ACAS, to reach an agreement and protect hard-working families planning their summer breaks. "We believe our pay and benefits for pilots are among the best in the industry, with around 1,000 applications from pilots who want to

move to us from other airlines every year. BALPA is posting out ballots on 26 June, with a closing date of 22 July, according to The Independent. This would mean, if strike action were to go ahead, it would begin, at the earliest on 5 August. A Unite spokesperson also told Express.co.uk: "Unite reps will be having further discussions with BA and meeting in the coming days to discuss their next steps. "These next steps could include a consultative ballot on any revised pay offer or a ballot for industrial action." BA pilots are paid an average basic salary of more than £150,000 a year, plus an hourly rate when they fly.

21 June 2019, Source Travolution

OTAs and online apartment booking sites blamed for rise in consumer complaints

A spike in the number of complaints from consumers about travel agents is primarily coming from the OTA sector, according to a leading complaint handling service. A Travel Weekly Business Breakfast on the Competition Markets Authority new Small Print, Big Difference campaign heard from Resolver, a free mediation service with 2.8 million users. Martyn James, a consumer right expert at Resolver, said the main areas of complaint in travel are tour operators, travel agents and hotel and online apartment bookings companies. He said Resolver has seen a significant increase in the latter, but that complaints about agents had doubled last year having doubled the year before that. "The world has changed dramatically in the last few years and the way we buy things has changed. People are going online increasingly to buy holidays. "They are no longer going to a high street store to buy a package holiday and this creates other problems because people look for the cheapest flights or hotels. "And they often look to combine products, so things can go wrong. They do not necessarily understand the impact of not reading the terms and conditions. "I get lots of complaints from people who have not booked travel insurance when they have booked their holiday. They do not necessarily think these things through." Asked about why there had been such a rise on travel agent complaints, James said the increase related "primarily to online travel". Andrew Hadley, assistant director of policy at the CMA, said travel has been chosen as an area of focus for the terms and conditions campaign not because it has a particular problem. But he said the CMA felt it is a sector that attracts a lot of media attention and is also a sector which, unlike finance or utilities, does not have its own industry specific regulator. "We would not argue that travel is one of the areas of higher consumer detriment but it is one where there is not another regulator," he said. Paula Macfarlane, senior solicitor at trade body Abta whose members include most of the main travel agency and tour operator brands, said: "We do not think there is a major problem in the industry at all. Having said that the principle of the CMA campaign is a good one and we have always said terms should be fair and legal. "Abta members have great businesses and part of that is being within the law. We are behind the campaign and we are here to help our members have legal T&Cs."

21 June 2019, Source Travolution

Booking.com customers underline influence of 'people powered' reviews

Booking.com has reported the findings of a study that indicates a majority of travellers chose to book a stay based on guest reviews. Globally, travellers are not placing great value on website images and descriptions, the OTA said. Instead, travellers will look at 'people powered' guest reviews to choose their next travel experience particularly when looking for alternative types of accommodation. Booking.com has reported that 70% of UK travellers rated reviews as an important factor to identify a friendly and welcoming host. Globally, the figure based on responses from 21,500 travellers across 29 markets increased to 75%. The accommodation booking website also found that 42% of UK travellers will not book a stay

when there are negative reviews about the host, despite the price, location and quality of accommodation being exactly what they are looking for. Globally, the figure increases to 53%. The 21,500 respondents from various countries completed an online survey between December 2018 and January 2019. Booking.com's own data revealed that on average, the websites users rate the staff higher than any of the other categories such as: services, cleanliness, comfort, value and location.

21 June 2019, Source Travolution

Thomas Cook Airlines launches social media campaign with three TV celebs

Thomas Cook Airlines has introduced a new social media campaign in which its followers will make decision for three celebrity holidaymakers. The campaign Takeover My Trip will see people in Cook's social network determine over social media what three TV personalities do on their trips to different destinations. The campaign will include a three-part video series presented by ex-Love Islander Samira Mighty, comedian Ben Shires and ex-CBeebies presenter and family advocate Alex Winters. Each will represent a different holiday demographic. Thomas Cook Airlines will ask its social media followers to make up to eight decisions per day on how each trip unfolds in real time. There will also be Facebook live streams and Instagram stories from each location. Mighty will highlight experiences for singles or groups of friends when she returns to 'Love Island', Palma de Mallorca, on July 2 and stay in Cook's Club Palma Beach, one of Thomas Cook's on-brand hotels. Social media users will vote on whether her luggage is collected from her home using Airportr and when at the resort, what Mighty wears, where she eats, what activities she will take part in and more. Shires will go on a long-haul flight to New York in late July, where he will explore five nights or less with Thomas Cook Airlines, aiming for an 'ideal couple' stay. Winters will take a family holiday to Antalya, Turkey in August and stay at the Paloma Orendo Resort. According to the Thomas Cook Holiday Report 2019, Turkey is the second most popular holiday destination, coming after Spain, and account for a quarter of the airlines flight-only bookings this summer. Claire Hoang, Thomas Cook Airlines social media lead said: "We can't wait to try something innovative that puts our customers at the heart of the key decisions made when flying on holiday. Each trip will be wrapped into a short film so our customers can see what we got up to behind the scenes."

24 June 2019, Source Travel Weekly

Norwegian releases 'lowest' US fares for summer 2020

Transatlantic fares starting at £157 single have gone on sale for 2020 with the release of more than one million seats by Norwegian. The budget carrier has released fares for nine US destinations from Gatwick for next summer. Boston and New York lead in at £157 while flights to the Los Angeles and San Francisco on the US west coast start at £197. Prices to Orlando and Tampa in Florida cost £172 with Miami at £192 and Denver at £187. Other destinations include Austin at £197. The remainder of the summer 2020 programme will be released in stages over the coming weeks. Long-haul commercial senior vice president Matthew Wood said: at Norwegian said: "Brits love a bargain which is why we are giving consumers plenty of time to start planning next year's summer holidays with early access to our lowest fares to the USA. "We will be releasing more flights in phases that make up the rest of our summer 2020 flight schedule but until then, we recommend that consumers book early to secure the best fares and their preferred seats on board our modern environmentally-friendly aircraft to the USA's top cities."

25 June 2019, Source Skift

Brand USA Fights for Its Future as U.S. Inbound Travel Weakens Under Trump

Brand USA is confident about securing future funding due to bipartisan support for the program. The reality, however, is that the program faces an administration not focused on welcoming visitors. You might think with the amount of pop culture, global headlines, and power and influence America exports to the rest of the world, it wouldn't need a marketing department. But Brand USA, the public-private partnership that serves as the nation's destination marketing arm, is currently fighting to prove the opposite. Forty-seven senators from both parties signed a letter last week calling for the reauthorization of funding for the program. For every \$14 spent on the U.S.'s visa waiver program known as ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization) by an international traveler, \$10 goes to Brand USA's efforts, with a maximum payout of \$100 million per year, which is then matched by the private sector. The program will lose that funding mechanism at the end of 2020's fiscal year if Congress doesn't act. The public-private partnership enjoys relatively bipartisan support by the standards of 2019. That's historically been the case too. It was passed overwhelmingly in both houses as part of the Travel Promotion Act of 2009 and reauthorized again in 2014. Donald Trump first proposed eliminating its budget in May 2017, however, a move that Brand USA was not prepared for or warned about. Then, in February 2018, as part of the budget cap deal that was passed by Congress to avert another shutdown, the program's funding source was diverted to a general revenue fund in order to offset other provisions of the deal. The U.S. Travel Association (USTA) describes the latter move as more or less an oversight — Brand USA was not the only program that received this fate — rather than a direct axing of the program. Since then, America's marketing department has been fighting for its future at a time when U.S. inbound travel is already losing international market share. Set against a backdrop of imperiled state-level destination marketing budgets, reduced resources for the U.S.'s global entry program, the downward pressures of the U.S.-China trade war, and the prospect of Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric and stricter visa policies deterring even more visitors, efforts to save the program have kicked into high gear.

'They're Just Not Choosing to Go to the U.S.' Brand USA, by law, is not allowed to lobby for itself. It has plenty of muscle working on its behalf in D.C., though, with both USTA and the Visit U.S. Coalition making it a top priority. The Visit U.S. Coalition is a group of 15 trade groups — including the American Hotel and Lodging Association, the Cruise Lines International Association, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and USTA — formed one year into the Trump presidency to combat the decline in America's market share of international travelers. "More people are traveling globally, they're just choosing not to go to the U.S.," said Andrea Riccio, spokesperson for the Visit U.S. Coalition. "There are reasons this is going on. Some of them are linked to the strong dollar. Some of it is a perceived unwelcoming message coming from the U.S., but at the end of the day we have policy proposals that we're working towards to increase visitation." Renewing Brand USA is the top priority, which both the coalition and USTA are hoping to do by educating new class of Congressmen about its effectiveness. In addition to the aforementioned letter being circulated in the Senate, a similar letter co-sponsored by Republican Representatives Greg Walden and Gus Bilirakis is planned for the House. In terms of the program's return on investment, a study from Oxford Economics, which conducts Brand USA's studies, says the program's total return on investment for 2018 was 25:1, generating a total of \$47.7 billion in total economic impact and 52,000 incremental jobs since its founding. It's worth noting that, in the past, critics have pointed to the generous figures of Oxford's accounting. "We are confident Brand USA's results demonstrate the significant impact we are having on fueling the nation's

economy by bringing millions of incremental visitors and billions of incremental dollars in spending to the USA,” Brand USA said in a statement. Tori Barnes, executive vice president of public affairs and policy at the USTA, said the current efforts to get the program renewed were ramped up after the February 2018 budget decision, but overall they are confident about the program’s future. “We started the process early because we wanted to ensure that the funding mechanism is right and people were well educated about what happened around the diversion of fees,” Barnes said. “But things in Washington are moving a little bit slower than we would like to have regular order. But we have strong bipartisanship so I don’t think it’s anything other than having the right vehicle to move this forward.” While Brand USA’s congressional support has been bipartisan, that doesn’t mean there has always been strong bipartisan support for the idea of the U.S. government playing a role in travel and tourism. At the state level, various disputes around public funding are being fought, even in states like Florida where tourism’s contribution to the economy can’t be questioned. The U.S. has historically lagged behind other countries in this regard. The decade from 2000 to 2008 is often referred to as “the lost decade,” as post 9/11 security policies made visitors feel unwelcome and a lack of active tourism promotion on the part of the government meant that the U.S. lost 68 million visitors and \$509 billion in spending revenue. The creation of Brand USA under President Barack Obama was a watershed moment in terms of the U.S. actively promoting itself to international tourists. It’s important to note that Brand USA uses no taxpayer dollars; it is entirely funded by the visa waiver program, or ESTA, which has always made it an easier sell to tax-averse conservatives. Funding it beyond 2020, Barnes says, could mean increasing that fee marginally — she did not specify by how much when asked — which would allow the current budget structure to stay as is. This could be done by attaching it to another provision, such as another budget cap deal, or moving it forward as a stand-alone provision. “There is not a lot moving in Congress right now which complicates the moving of the stand-alone bill because [there’s not a lot of] floor time to be able to do that,” Barnes said. She later added, “usually in Washington it’s up against deadlines [that things happen], so we could be looking at the September 30th fiscal end of year or we could be looking at calendar end of year.” While there may be no direct political opposition to the Brand USA’s funding being revived, in other words, the current political climate appears to be making it a challenge at a time when U.S. inbound tourism is on the decline. “I absolutely think that it’s important to market the U.S.,” Barnes said. “The best opportunity for us from an economic perspective is to continue to have Brand USA operating on all cylinders to ensure that international travelers want to come here.”

26 June 2019, Source TTG

Norwegian relaunches package travel brand

Low-cost carrier Norwegian has relaunched its package travel brand Norwegian Holidays. The airline is now working with new technology partner TripX, which provides tailor-made IT platforms for package holidays to more than 100 destinations. Eivind Christiansen, senior vice-president of digital innovation at Norwegian Holidays, said: “Since 2012, Norwegian Holidays has helped hundreds of thousands of travellers to enjoy great-value holidays to a range of destinations, and now it is time to offer a more modern and user-friendly solution to adapt to increasing demand. “We believe that the intuitive new design, combined with quality products in terms of both aircraft and hotels, will ensure that consumers continue to choose a package deal with Norwegian Holidays when they travel.” UK consumers who book through Norwegian Holidays will continue to receive financial protection from the Norwegian Package Travel Act, rather than the UK’s Atol scheme. “Norwegian Holidays will grow in line with Norwegian,” added a spokesperson for the airline. “The UK is among our most

important markets in Europe and so we currently have region specific websites for each in addition to the Nordic countries to be relevant and appeal to local audiences. “We will naturally focus on the markets where Norwegian is expanding its brand presence, and the UK is where we see a lot of potential going forward.” Consumers who book a Norwegian Holidays package and are members of the Norwegian Reward loyalty scheme will be able to earn CashPoints through their holiday bookings.

27 June 2019, Source Travelbiz

British Airways upgrades the perks for premium economy passengers with the introduction of brand new amenity kits, quilts and cocktails

New amenity kits will include an eyeshade, socks, a toothbrush and toothpaste. The new quilts and cushions will have a classic herringbone design. The bar menu is being revamped with three new cocktails added to the list. British Airways is introducing a new range of amenities for customers in its premium economy cabin. From July 1, those travelling in World Traveller Plus will be given brand new amenity kits, quilts and cushions and, for the first time, be able to enjoy cocktails from the bar. The kits, made from recycled plastic bottles, will include an eyeshade, soft socks, a pen, a toothbrush and toothpaste and lip balm from the Scaramouche & Fandango range. The 'stylish' new quilts and cushions have a herringbone design that is synonymous with the pattern that runs throughout the airline's first class cabin. The new cocktails are Gin Fizz, made of gin, orange juice and sparkling water; and Bloody Mary and Citrus Twist, consisting of orange juice, apple juice and a twist of lemon. The new amenities follow improvements made earlier this year to the World Traveller Plus cabin, including new menus with a focus on seasonal ingredients. Customers travelling in World Traveller Plus have the ability to pre-order their main meal up to 24 hours before departure, guaranteeing their first choice on flights departing from London. Customers can select this option by using the 'manage my booking' tool on ba.com. Carolina Martinoli, British Airways' director of brand and customer experience, said: 'We're investing £6.5 billion for our customers and these improvements to World Traveller Plus mark part of that investment. 'The new menus that we introduced in World Traveller Plus earlier this year have been a huge hit with customers and this second phase, including the new wash bags, quilts and cushions, will really add to the comfort of the cabin.' British Airways is celebrating its centenary this year. To mark the occasion, the airline is investing £6.5 billion over five years in new aircraft, new cabins, new catering, new lounges, WiFi, and new routes.

27 June 2019, Source TravelMole

High street agencies should create 'experiences'

High street travel agencies which offer an 'experience' for their customers are the ones who are most likely to succeed. This was the advice from Martin Alcock, director of The Travel Trade Consultancy, who spoke at this week's ABTA Travel Matters Conference. Outlining trends affecting the travel industry, Alcock said high streets have changed forever, with many businesses closing down, mainly banks but also casual dining and high street fashion businesses. Instead, there has been an influx of new boutique gyms, plus 'vaping and baking' outlets. "Customers want to come to the high street to have an experience, not to buy commodities. Those travel agencies which can offer an experience will be the ones that will do well," he said. Alcock said consumer confidence has been hit in recent years, but was not as low as in the period around 2010-2012.

27 June 2019, Source ITTN

Travel Counsellors Ireland's Top Five Last-Minute Long-Haul Bookings

The USA is the top long-haul destination for last-minute bookings according to Travel Counsellors Ireland. The top five destinations for late bookings with TCI this summer — all made within the past 10 weeks — also include Australia, Canada, Maldives and Thailand. Bookings are up 6% on last year, made within six months of travel, up to 31 October. Cathy Burke, General Manager, Travel Counsellors Ireland, said: “A disappointing start to the Irish summer has seen a 6% increase in last-minute bookings of long-haul travel, which traditionally would be booked over a year in advance. As a nation, we are travelling further and further afield and families in particular are more adventurous and are booking more long-haul flights. Really, there isn't a huge difference in price when booking long-haul travel in summer compared to staying in Europe. “USA's top spot isn't surprising as holiday-makers take advantage of the flexibility and favourable rates that the USA has to offer. Travelling into one state and out of another, with a road trip such as the Pacific Highway from San Francisco to Los Angeles in between taking in the sights, is proving very popular. “Going eastbound is also good value as the low prices of food and accommodation in destinations such as Thailand make the overall cost a lot more manageable. In Thailand, Koh Samui is very popular, while in the Maldives, particularly the Kuramathi Resort, is a beautiful spot that everyone is talking about.” In the top five last-minute European bookings, Spain is the most popular destination, followed by Portugal, Italy, Greece and Croatia. Cathy added: “Although you might find a last-minute bargain flight to certain European airports, be warned as you may be hard pressed finding affordable accommodation in the late market.” Travel Counsellors also revealed its top 10 list of long-haul bookings since November 2018, with USA firmly in pole position, followed by Mexico, Australia, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Maldives, Canada, Japan, Thailand and Mauritius. Cruise holidays have also seen a huge rise in demand, with an increase of 38% in bookings when compared to the same period in 2018.

28 June 2019, Source TTG

US dominates long-haul flight bookings for summer 2019

The US is the most popular long-haul destination for summer 2019, according to research from travel technology giant Travelport. Travelport's data showed there were 320,000 advance flight bookings to the US for travel between 28 June and 8 September – well ahead of second-placed India with just under 87,000 over the same period. United Arab Emirates ranked third in the list of the top 10 most popular summer destinations with just under 78,800 forward bookings, pipping Canada with 77,100 bookings. Paul Broughton, Travelport's vice-president and managing director for Northern Europe, said: “To put just how popular the US is into perspective, to date we've seen more advance flight bookings made from the UK to the US over the summer than to the rest of the top five most popular long-haul destinations combined.” The destination to see the largest year-on-year rise was China with 29,900 bookings – up by 13% on the same period in 2018. South Africa also saw a 7% rise year-on-year to 29,600 bookings from the UK. “It was interesting to see China become a top 10 long-haul summer destination for UK travellers this year, having sat just outside in 11th place last year,” added Broughton. “Interest in the country seems to be rising. We are starting to see this translate into increased booking volume, and I expect this trend to continue in the years to come as more people recognise just how much the country has to offer tourists.”