

UK Office May 2019 TDC Report

Prepared by: Venessa Alexander
UK Director

Tour Operators

- **Virgin Holidays** – We met with Emma Hook, Kirsten Greenaway and Brad Smith to discuss sponsorship of the Braehead Virgin retail store and namely what is possible for us to do. We went through a list of all of our ideas and were given the go ahead for everything as well as direct contact with the store manager.
- **Gold Medal** – We met with Ross Sinclair, Ash Pilkington and Harriet Hudders to get an update on their business. Ross advised that they had recently started contracting Sunset Vistas and this was selling well for them. Overall our destination is doing ok in comparison to other Florida Beach areas, but they are tracking at -10% vly for 2019 travel. Orlando is performing well for 2020, particularly now that Disney Dining has launched, but they are struggling with late bookings. Cruise in Florida is doing well due to very competitive offers. Ross mentioned that they are trying to secure additional direct contracts to help support with sale periods. Harriet mentioned about marketing opportunities for 19/20 and would follow up with the team at IPW. She will also follow up in a few weeks with results for the recent marketing activity.
- **Jetset** – We met with Adrian Smyth, Sales Manager who advised that they produce a lot of business to Florida, particularly Orlando, but is keen to grow the numbers to our destination. The trade business is performing well for summer 2019, but is keen to arrange training sessions with his sales team of 20 agents. Since our meeting, we have provided Adrian with images and copy for their website and will arrange training for the coming months.
- **Kenwood** – We met with Nicola Hollihead who advised that customers are now able to book multi-centre trips on their website. Their website has been updated so customers can now search for all properties within St. Pete/Clearwater making the customer journey more coherent.
- **Ocean Florida** – We met with Rachel Thacker who advised that the winner for the Boardmasters' competition which we ran last year has just returned from her holiday. They received some great feedback and the winner is already planning a return trip to Orlando and St. Pete/Clearwater in 2020.
- **USAirtours** - We met with Linda Dixey who advised that business was generally looking good for them, with 2020 sales performing significantly well. Our destination is up compared to last year, which they are pleased with as other Florida beach destinations have dropped and are currently tracking at flat. Orlando is doing well, specifically for Universal properties, and also Disney with their dining offer. They have noticed an increase in length of stay for Orlando, but St. Pete/Clearwater remains at 7 nights. Sirata is doing well compared to last year when they had their renovation, and Tradewinds have

less close outs for 2019 travel. The Norwegian flight into Tampa is performing well due to their allocations.

Meetings/Training/Events

- **Virgin Holidays, Braehead** – We visited the Braehead store to meet with Marie Cassidy, Store Manager. We discussed various elements of our partnership including; staff training events, dedicated fam trip for 2 of their staff, giveaways and brochures for their customers, instore promotions, other branding opportunities within the shopping mall, competitions, goody bags for bloggers, and key support and information they would like from us. Marie is going to follow up with various contacts for additional marketing in the mall as well as dates for trainings, events and the fam trip.
- **BA Lounge Heathrow Terminal 5** – Conducted a site visit of the lounge we are sponsoring this Summer for a better idea of how the space will work and to talk about further branding opportunities.
- **Gold Medal** – We visited their head office in Preston to provide dedicated training to their sales agents. We met with 16 agents and provided a detailed overview of the destination as well as what's new. We also distributed brochures, maps and giveaways.
- **SeaWorld** – We met with Simon Parry and Sophie Hobbs to discuss our upcoming joint fam trip. We have agreed a shortlist of tour operators we would like to invite and will be sending invites to them next month once accommodation has been finalised by Michelle. St. Pete/Clearwater will be included in the SeaWorld online training course, which each participant will need to complete before attending the trip, so we will provide the necessary assets in due course. SeaWorld will also create a welcome guide which will be sent to the participants, so we will provide details of the itinerary once confirmed.
- **Shuffleboard Event** – We hosted our event at London Shuffleboard, which was attended by our key partners as well as media partners. This networking event was very well received and we were able to provide a destination update as well as distribute brochures and giveaways.
- **Visit Florida Regatta** – We were a participating partner in the Visit Florida regatta which saw numerous top tour operator and airline partners enjoy a day of sailing with lunch and an afternoon race. We sponsored one of the boats and hosted partners from BA, Norwegian, USAirtours, Ocean Florida and Virgin Holidays.

TRADE LIAISON

- **Visit Florida Consumer campaign** – We have now received the results for the campaign we participated in with Visit Florida, which ran from 1st January to 31st March 2019;
 - OOH
 - Included - Adverts ran from 13th January to 10th February, Out of Home advertising in Manchester Arndale Mall (Manchester), Intu Braehead Mall (Glasgow) and the Trafford Centre (Manchester) which consisted of 1

Escalator Wrap, 1 Pillar Wrap, 8 Balustrade Wraps and video on large format screen.

Total Impressions - 1,755,000

- 1 Dedicated tube car per line (Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly Lines)

Total Impressions - 465,000

- Social (Facebook Carousel)
 - 7,836,205 Impressions
 - 28,003 Clicks
 - 86,481 Post Engagements
- Expedia
 - 500,064 total impressions
 - 119 clicks
 - 0.02% CTR
 - 43 air tickets booked
 - 81 room nights booked
- Digital TV - Total Impressions 1,375,000
- Total campaign impressions – 11,931,269

- **Virgin Holidays** – We have now received the final proofs for the May/June activity which includes; social, metro print advert and digital banners. These have all been approved and will go live in due course. We will await final results once the campaign has ended. We, together with Fiona have confirmed a staff incentive for the sales agents in the call centre as well as for all of their retail agents, to launch during the Florida campaign. The incentive will offer 3 x prizes for in-house reservations agents as well as 3 x Virgin retail agent prizes. The prizes will be VOU vouchers, the in-house incentive vouchers that Virgin offer their staff and any agent that books a total of 5 holidays to include St. Pete/Clearwater will be entered into the prize draw.
We have also received the final results for the March campaign we participated in;
 - Social – 2,678,372 impressions, 1,131,401 reach, 2814 clicks.
 - Dedicated brochure - 20,000 booklets/brochures were distributed nationwide
 - Email – Distributed to 21.8k audience, 39.5% open rate, 4.7% click rate.
 - Landing page – 1085 clicks from dedicated Florida multi-centre pod, 7339 landing page views.
 - Plasma screens - The 30s video was shown on the plasmas screens in all of their 76 stores nationwide.
 - Room nights booked during the campaign - +10% vly

- **Virgin Retail** – The contract to sponsor the Braehead Virgin Retail Store in Scotland has now been approved and branding for the store is now being worked on.

- **Funway Holidays** – Work continues on the approval of the campaign creative for the Florida Beaches/Funway Holidays/My America campaign. We have approved the Dropped in Facebook competition section as have Brand USA as well as the Florida Unlocked activity.

- **Gold Medal Travel** –The retail promotion in partnership with Gold Medal as reported last month had ended and we have now chased Gold Medal for the final analysis.

- **Travelzoo** – We have received the brief from Travelzoo, which we have completed to assist them in creating all of the artwork and approaching our partners. The campaign will launch 1st September and includes; sponsored story to 4.6 UK members, targeted boost to additional 100k members, homepage banner, partner offers page, 3 social posts, Facebook and Twitter home page promotion, and email footers. The campaign will run for 6 weeks.
- **IPW** – We have assisted Rosemarie and sent further reminder emails to our UK, Irish and Scandinavian partners/contacts who had yet to RSVP to our Tuesday night event in partnership with the Beaches of Southwest Florida.
- **British Airways Summer Beach Event** –
 - Creatives for the lounge have now been signed off and are with BVK for production of final artwork files. During the course of the month, we have been given increased space to fill with St Pete/Clearwater branding
 - We have finalised giveaways to be distributed to the consumer during the 3 months as well as some branded deckchairs to be used in the lounge. We are working with our suppliers to finalise some branded coasters and children’s activity books.
 - We have received the draft version of the landing page and will continue to work with Amelia to finalise this and get approval from British Airways ahead of the launch of the competition.
 - We are also working with the team at BA to select a suitable ambassador who will be representing Visit St. Pete/Clearwater throughout the activity, and plan to meet with the candidates next month.
 - We have arranged for a videographer to be present at the lounge to create footage of the activation.
- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners** – We continue to work on approving creative for the current campaign in partnership with USAirtours/TravelPlanners. The USAirtours Destination of the Month campaign in March as reported has already ended and the TravelPlanners section of the campaign that commenced on the 1st May has also now just ended. Further activity including social media posts etc. continue to be worked on. We have now approved the email which will be distributed next month.
- **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 now launched and will run during the campaign period to drive further bookings to our destination. We will arrange for vouchers and goody bag prizes to be sent to Ella to distribute to the winners, once announced.
- **Ocean Florida** –We have received the first round of creatives for the July section of the marketing campaign and these are at present being worked on.
- **Discover America Sweden** – Goran advised that they had recently updated their website, so we have provided Johnny with new copy and images for use on the website.

- **Kenwood** – We provided Nicola Hollihead with a detailed document which offers our recommendations on restaurants, accommodation, family attractions, and top trips, as well as images, so that they can add to their website.
- **Virgin Holidays** – We have confirmed our sponsorship and attendance at the Virgin Holidays Peak Brochure Launch which will take place from 4th – 6th December in Woburn, United Kingdom. The opportunity allows us to interact, train and network with the 200-top selling Virgin Retail Travel Agents at the same time as the launch of the Virgin Holidays new brochure and is a great opportunity to highlight our destination to these top sellers.
- **VSPC/SeaWorld Mega Fam** – We have been working with Michelle to secure accommodation for the group and will await the confirmation before we begin sending out invites to the participants.
- **BA Holidays** – We have confirmed our participation in their Florida training day which will take place in July at their Head Office in Newcastle.
- **Gold Medal** – Following the recent Fam trip to Florida including St. Pete/Clearwater, the TTG produced an article detailing the group’s itinerary and feedback on the destination, all of which were very positive.
- **AmeriCan & Worldwide Travel** – We provided Samantha Howden, Senior Sales Consultant, with contact details for Sandpearl.
- **Travel Counsellors** – Samantha Spencer advised that she would be returning to her old role and would be responsible for the USA going forward.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

56

MARKET INTELLIGENCE:

1 May 2019, Source Travelbiz

Heathrow passengers won't have to show a passport at check-in and boarding from this summer thanks to new facial recognition technology

£50m project will see passengers link their passports to their facial information. They will then be able to check in and board without showing their passports again. Passengers travelling from Heathrow will be able to check-in and board their flight without showing a passport from this summer. Britain’s largest airport is installing permanent facial recognition technology in the hope that travellers spend less time going through checks. With more than 80 million passengers travelling through Heathrow a year, the technology will aim to reduce the time passengers spend going through. Heathrow's system will require passengers to register for the service by linking their passport to their biometric facial information. This

might involve passengers going to automated kiosks to scan their passport and have their photo taken. The system would 'match' their face to the document and their travel details, so that they could then pass through the airport solely by looking into cameras. While the airport already uses facial recognition when entering the country using the biometric e-gates, this will be the first time a British airport has used such advanced technology at every stage of passengers departing the country. Gatwick, Britain's second largest airport, said they too are looking into using the technology and will run a second trial of the technology next month. Those travelling from Heathrow are required to show their passports at least three times on departure. Passengers flag a passport on check-in or bag drop, security and before boarding the plane. Heathrow's management said that the facial recognition system was more reliable than manual checks. In comparison to other major international airports Britain is behind on the advanced technology. Alex Macheras, an aviation consultant, told The Times: 'Major American airports already have this and Asia is light years ahead in technology. 'From the point of view of convenience it undoubtedly works, although customers will have concerns about how their data is protected and airports must be transparent about this.' Facial recognition systems in the US are being introduced for all international passengers whose faces are compared to a central database and don't require people to scan their passport at the beginning of their travels. Airline British Airways has said their move towards biometric boarding in the US has meant the time it's taken to board flights has halved. Jonathan Coen, Heathrow Customer Relations and Service Director, said: 'As our passenger numbers continue to grow, we must look for innovative ways to make it easier and quicker for them to travel through Heathrow with choice, whilst keeping our airport secure. Biometrics are key to helping us do that and we are really excited about the biggest roll out of this equipment at any UK airport. 'With this technology we'll be able to offer passengers choice on how they travel through our airport, with colleagues on hand to guide passengers that require it. 'Biometric technology has been well received by our passengers so far and we're looking forward to working with our colleagues and the airline community as part of our ongoing transformation at Heathrow, with a focus on enhancing passenger experience.'

1 May 2019, Source TravelMole

Sterling holds its value, but Brits are more concerned about resort costs

Sterling has held its value in recent months amid continuing economic uncertainty, but Brits are more concerned about local prices in their holiday destination, according to the latest Holiday Money Index by Post Office Travel Money. The research reveals rising consumer demand for destinations where local prices are low, with less concern about exchange rates. In the past six months the pound has risen in value against three quarters of the Post Office's 40 bestselling currencies, including the euro (+3.3% compared with October) and US dollar (+1.3%), and is stronger than a year ago against 20 bestsellers. Sterling's biggest year-on-year gain of 34.3% has been against the Turkish lira, giving holidaymakers £128 extra on a £500 currency purchase. The pound is also stronger than a year ago against every European currency except the Swiss franc, where it is down 3%. Gains of 3.1% against the Czech koruna and over 5% for the Hungarian forint will make city breaks to Prague and Budapest cheaper. Visitors to Iceland will get 13.3% more Icelandic krona, while sterling also remains stronger against the euro, up 2.2% year-on-year. Two-thirds (65%) of people are planning to holiday abroad in 2019 and Post Office Travel Money says statistics for 2019 up to the Easter Bank Holiday show some of the biggest sales increases have been to long-haul destinations where sterling is significantly weaker than a year ago. The explanation for this is provided by the consumer research, which found that UK holidaymakers are now less concerned about exchange rates than they are about the costs they face once they reach their destination. Over

three-quarters (77%) of the 2,087-people surveyed said resort costs for meals, drinks and other tourist items were a more important factor in destination choice, compared with only 55% who felt that sterling's strength or weakness was the deciding factor. Post Office head of Travel Money Nick Boden said: "The evidence suggests that consumers are switching on the fact that prices meals, drinks and other staples in resorts and cities can add significantly to their holiday cost, so these are becoming an increasingly important consideration. "Picking a destination where prices on the ground are low can outweigh the impact of a weak exchange rate but a destination where prices are cheap and sterling is strong is the best bet."

1 May 2019, Source TTG

What could go wrong for the industry this summer?

Brexit chaos and too much capacity. Strap yourselves in – this summer could be a bumpy ride. There's no World Cup, and the odds against another record UK hot spell this year are sky-high, so what could possibly go wrong for the industry in summer 2019? Well, Brexit confusion suppressing early bookings for a start, coupled with operators' tendency to add capacity in the unshakeable belief it will sell at top prices. Brexit is now (probably) delayed until 31 October – neatly at the end of the summer season – and the European Parliament has confirmed Brits will not need EU visas post-Brexit, but the damage may have already been done. Tui's mid-April ploy of cutting £100 off two-week European packages was an admission the market was slow, with the operator conceding "people have been waiting to decide". The same message came from Jet2 parent company Dart Group before Easter, which said summer 2019 bookings "though positive, reflect some consumer uncertainty" and "pricing for both our flight-only and package holiday products is more competitive". Both Tui and Thomas Cook are in a closed period before revealing their half-year financial results in May, but a Tui spokesperson told TTG: "Tui has been offering great deals since the turn of the year, aware that many people were waiting on the Brexit outcome before booking. Given the latest extension, the offer recognised that more people may be ready to book." "Everything is pointing towards it maybe being quite an aggressive late market". That's not all bad news for retailers. Andy Stark, Global Travel Group managing director, says of Tui's move: "It seems a little bit rash, but it's a good promotion. It should stimulate the market." Stark is also relaxed about Brexit. "The only questions we're getting are about things that may change: visas, international driving licences and medical treatment," he says. Stark insists agencies "are busy", but adds: "I saw no rush to book after the decision [to postpone Brexit]." In contrast, Travel Counsellors' head of purchasing and partnerships, Louella Fisher, points out: "The week following [the initial date for] Brexit [29 March] saw our strongest week for summer 2019 at +23% year-on-year. We're still ahead overall." She adds the current backdrop means customers are nervous about spending and consumer protection. "We've definitely seen a shift towards options that offer more security on pricing, especially all-inclusive and cruising," she says. The industry's other concern is capacity – and alarm bells should perhaps be ringing. Latest CAA data shows the top 10 Atol holders expanded almost 15% this summer, with growth coming from online brands including Loveholidays and On the Beach Group, together licensed for an extra 774,000 seats. Loveholidays increased its Atol in March by 53% to 1.23 million, moving it from seventh-biggest licence holder to fifth. The big three – Tui, Jet2holidays and Thomas Cook – renew in September and show no adjustments since then. Some increases are formerly unprotected sales coming under Atol, such as flight-only, which were previously sold as "agent to the consumer" bookings. Similarly, OTAs will often not commit to flights or beds, so capacity hikes may be notional. Loveholidays did not provide details, but the company's marketing director, Christian Armond, said: "Prices are more competitive for summer 2019 versus last year, with great

deals in Spain, the Canaries, Balearics and Greek islands.” This could be due to over-capacity and Brexit sluggishness, but there’s also the resurgence of Turkey, Tunisia and Egypt to consider, prompting keener pricing in rival destinations – but offset by the pound’s weakness against the euro. Over-supply might mean operator woe, but Stark says: “It’s good from an independent’s perspective because there’s plenty of availability, though obviously it’s forcing prices down. Everything is pointing towards it maybe being quite an aggressive late market.” “I feel quite a few people have held off, but that people will still book. People have waited and the clouds have lifted.” Travel Counsellors reports “significant” growth in Greece and Cyprus, plus UK short breaks and multi-centre long-haul. Fisher also names South Africa, the Indian Ocean and Japan as hotspots. Premier Holidays has also felt Brexit’s effects in a positive way. Sales and marketing director Debbie Goffin says: “The Channel and UK islands are proving most popular for summer – we’ve seen a big increase to these destinations, which we are putting down to the uncertainty around Brexit.” She added summer bookings were up 6% year-on-year with long-haul – the US and Canada – another beneficiary. “On a smaller scale, we’re seeing growth for Japan in the run-up to the Rugby World Cup, and Singapore and Australia have also increased.” Gold Medal and Travel 2 have reported trading up 10%. Managing director Lisa McAuley insists: “Uncertainty about travel to Europe has not had an impact.” She adds 2020 and beyond is trading “very, very well”. Cruise is a notable star performer for the brands, up 64% year-on-year since January. Elsewhere, Australasia is up 22%, while Maldives sales rose 70% in the past month. “There’s been a raft of new properties and some incredible airfares when transiting through the Middle East,” McAuley says. More negatively, she describes Middle East sales as “spiky”. North America, particularly Florida, is also behind, blamed on an incentive campaign starting later this year. This might not be the only incentive campaign as summer progresses, if short-haul late sales need a push.

1 May 2019, Source Travolution

Bookings on mobile hit 38%, according to Thomas Cook 2019 Holiday Report

Latest figure from leading package holiday provider Thomas Cook has revealed UK customers are using their mobiles to book in increasing numbers. In its 2019 Holiday Report, the travel giant claims it is seeing 38% of bookings come via mobile, underlining that people are becoming more confident using the channel. And the firm says customers are spending big on mobile with the average spend marginally higher than on desktop. The report said: “For years we’ve been using our phones to research our holidays, with idle scrolling through images of tropical beaches helping to while away a long commute. “In 2019, mobile searches on thomascok.com are more popular than desktop searches, accounting for 58% of website traffic. “Showing that phones are our go-to device for purchasing as well as browsing, 2019 is the year that customers became more confident booking their holidays on their phones. “The percentage of bookings on mobile devices has increased by more than five times versus three years ago. “Holidaymakers don’t hesitate to spend big on their phones, with average purchases on mobile via the Thomas Cook website hitting £1,883 – marginally higher than the average desktop spend of £1,878.” Cook also surveyed 18-35-year-olds for the report for the first time to find out what the younger generations are looking for from their annual holiday. Last year Cook closed its iconic youth brand Club 18-30, but says that does not mean younger customers aren’t looking to have fun while on holiday. However, the report says: “The contrast between what today’s Gen Z (18-25 year olds) want from a holiday and what the older generations say they were after when they went abroad is stark. “Gen Z would never dream of slapping on coconut oil to deepen their tans, while previous generations would think nothing of falling asleep in the sun after a night partying. “Young people today

take much better care of their bodies, thanks to increased awareness of healthy lifestyle choices. “Almost all said they go on holiday to relax and recharge. Exploring the local culture is at number three in their list of holiday priorities and enjoying local food and drink at number four. “Nightlife is much further down their list, contrasting starkly to the wild nights of previous generations. “Of course, some things never change and 61% of 18-25s admit to drinking more when they are on holiday than when they are at home. “However, they are more likely to be caught sipping an Aperol Spritz than downing cans of lager.”

2 May 2019, Source TravelMole

Visit Florida granted (another) reprieve

Visit Florida has been granted more time to prove its worth with a reduced budget of \$50 million, down from \$76 million previously. The cash will keep the tourism body afloat until January 2020. Decision makers in the Sunshine State have long been critical of Visit Florida's spending and some have called for funding to be withdrawn, but it has been given another chance, thanks to support from new governor Ron DeSantis. House Speaker Jose Oliva was a vocal critic of the agency but reluctantly yielded to a request from the governor's office to keep it alive till for the rest of the year. It gives DeSantis time to 'make an assessment of his own of how unnecessary it is,' Oliva begrudgingly said. "It is something that the governor wants to see and be able to assess." Visit Florida President and CEO Dana Young said the agency is relieved and ready to continue providing a great return on investment'. "We have great, talented people who work for our organization, and we are very good at what we do, and I have no doubt in my mind that we will continue to produce great results," Young said. Critics point to the agency's past spending mishaps, notably lavishing rapper Pitbull with a secretive \$1 million contract to promote the state. They say Florida - which welcomed 126 million visitors last year - doesn't need a tourism marketing budget as it sells itself. On the other hand, supporters say a single state-wide tourism marketing body is essential to counter and respond to negative media attention over recent events such as Zika, Hurricane Michael and the red tide outbreak.

9 May 2019, Source TTG

Post Office reveals Brits' attitude to exchange rates

Sterling rises in value against a range of currencies, but figures suggest Brits are now less concerned about exchange rates. Over the past six months, the pound has risen in value against three-quarters of the Post Office's 40 bestselling currencies, including the euro (up 3.3% compared with October 2018) and the US dollar (rising by 1.3%), and is stronger than a year ago against 20 of those bestselling currencies. Despite negative headlines suggesting otherwise, consumer research for the Holiday Money Index reveals 65% of people are planning to holiday abroad in 2019, down one percentage point compared with 2018, and currency sales underline this trend. Sterling's biggest year-on-year gain of 34.3% was against the Turkish lira, giving holidaymakers £128 extra on a purchase of £500, while the pound is also stronger year-on-year against every European currency except the Swiss franc (down by 3%). The biggest growth in currency sales has been for the Egyptian pound, where a 687% year-on-year rise in sales highlights the return of visitors to Egypt's Red Sea resorts, despite this coinciding with sterling's biggest year-on-year fall of 8.8% against the Egyptian pound. In city break destinations, the pound's gains of 3.1% against the Czech koruna and more than 5% for the Hungarian forint will please agents selling weekends to Prague and Budapest, while clients heading to Iceland will get 13.3% more Icelandic krona for their pound. Sterling also remains stronger against the euro – up 2.2% year-on-year. However, Post Office Travel

Money, which claims to account for a quarter of UK currency transactions, said its sales for 2019 up to the Easter Bank Holiday show some of the biggest purchase increases have been to long-haul destinations where sterling is “significantly weaker” than a year ago. This is explained, says the Post Office, by UK holidaymakers becoming less concerned about exchange rates than about costs in-destination. Some 77% of the 2,087 people surveyed said resort costs for meals, drinks and other tourist items were a more important factor in destination choice, compared with only 55% who felt sterling’s strength or weakness was the deciding factor. The Post Office said the low cost of living in Bali and Japan helped explain a surge in sales of the Indonesian rupiah (up 9%) and Japanese yen (up 12%) in 2019 to date. A 44% year-on-year growth for the Trinidad & Tobago dollar comes after Tobago rated alongside St Lucia as the cheapest Caribbean island in the Post Office’s Worldwide Holiday Costs Barometer. Yet, in common with the Barbados dollar (7.1% stronger against sterling year-on-year), the Trinidad & Tobago dollar is worth more against the pound (up 3%) than last April. Despite the weaker pound, sales of Caribbean currencies are generally on the rise with significant year-on-year increases of 9% for the Jamaican and Barbados dollars. The Holiday Money Index found the best long-haul offering for budget-conscious tourists was South Africa, with the rand the Post Office’s eighth bestselling currency. Sterling was worth 9.6% more than in April last year, giving visitors an extra £44 on a £500 rand purchase.

10 May 2019, Source TravelMole

Virgin Atlantic eyeing up Cook's long-haul business, say reports

Virgin Atlantic has entered the bidding war for Thomas Cook's airline, according to reports. Sky News reports that Virgin lodged a preliminary offer for Thomas Cook's UK long-haul business earlier this week. A spokeswoman for Virgin said it would not be commenting on speculation. Thomas Cook also declined to comment. Sky News said city sources claim Virgin Atlantic is looking to acquire Thomas Cook's long-haul operation, which flies to Cancun, Las Vegas, Orlando and other destinations from London Gatwick, Manchester and, in the summer, from Glasgow. Lufthansa and private equity firm Indigo Partners have already been named as interested parties in Thomas Cook Airlines. Reports said an update on talks is unlikely to come until after Thomas Cook announces its half-year results next week. Thomas Cook announced in February it is considering selling its airline and talks have also triggered interest from prospective bidders for its tour operating business and in the whole group. Chinese investment giant, Fosun, which also owns Club Med, has been gradually increasing its stake in Thomas Cook and now owns more than 18%. EU regulations would not allow a Chinese owner of Thomas Cook's airline but selling off the airline would allow a non-European investor to buy the rest of the business.

10 May 2019, Source Skift

International Inbound U.S. Travel Growth Stuck in Slump

Beyond a slump for travel, it appears that experts expect a global economic cooldown to happen in coming years. People will always need to travel, but stagnant growth will present a problem for the industry in North America. Travel growth in the U.S. has slowed down in recent years, and the trend shows no signs of turning around. The latest update from U.S. Travel’s monthly Travel Trends Index shows that while domestic tourism demand increased 2.8 percent year-over-year in March, international travel to the U.S. slowed by a significant 5.4 percent, the worst showing since 2015. “The outlook for international inbound travel remains lackluster, suggesting that a further loss of global market share is in the cards for the U.S. in 2019,” said David Huether, U.S. Travel’s senior vice president for research. “Acting

on certain legislative initiatives, such as the long-term reauthorization of Brand USA and the enhancement and expansion of the Visa Waiver Program to include more qualified countries, can help reverse this trend.” While the international numbers look bad, it could be a case of an especially strong March due to the Easter holidays from last year dragging down this year’s comparative results. But taken as a whole, the latest reports from U.S. Travel indicate that travel growth is flattening out. The group expects near-flat growth over the next six months, which doesn’t bode well for the upcoming summer travel season. International inbound growth is expected to exceed domestic travel growth, mostly because it has been so weak over the beginning of 2019. “Broad U.S. economic indicators have remained firm in the face of softer consumer spending and business investment, supporting expectations that overall economic cooling will be gradual,” said Adam Sacks, president of Oxford’s Tourism Economics group. “Domestic travel demand will likely follow a similar path. On the international front, the [forward-looking analysis] projects continued — albeit slower — travel growth.”

10 May 2019, Source TTG

Summer 2019 bookings start to pick up for agents

Independent agents have seen an increase in bookings for the summer 2019 lates market since Easter but they are working “harder than ever” to secure these sales. There are positive signs that consumers who had been waiting for the Brexit crisis to be resolved are now booking their summer breaks – but many are looking for bargain basement deals. Tony Mann, director of Idle Travel in Bradford, told TTG: “It’s been a rollercoaster – it’s definitely been up and down with some really busy days and then it’s quietened off. “We had a promotion last weekend and that definitely worked - we had a queue on Saturday and then it was really busy on the Monday with lots of summer bookings. It does seem to have picked up with quite a lot of lates to the Med for summer 2019.” Steve Cartwright, managing director of Cartwright Travel in Cardiff, said: “Last-minute bookings have been coming in for about a month. I think it will be an extremely late market with bookings coming in June, July and August. We need to constantly stimulate the market with promotions. “People are starting to say “let’s get on with it” rather than waiting for the government to make a decision [on Brexit]. As long as you’ve got six months on your passport you shouldn’t have a problem whatever happens.” Don Bircham, managing director of Hays Travel North West, told TTG the market was crying out for a scrap of certainty from the government on Brexit, which he said could unlock bookings to Eurozone destinations and spark a bumper lates market starting this month. “I would certainly share Cook’s view - we’ve seen significant upturn for Turkey,” Bircham told TTG, citing Thomas Cook’s 2019 Holiday Report, which ranked Turkey as its second biggest seller for summer 2019. “Cruise and long-haul is strong too. The impact [of Brexit] is largely on mainland Europe - the Balearics, Greece, Spain, Portugal, etc. There’s a lot of pent-up demand there to unlock. “I’ve got this feeling May could be the start of lates. If that kicks in, we’ll hopefully see all that money under the bed come out.” Alan Bowen, legal advisor to the Association of Atol Companies, said one of the association’s members had told him there had been “a bounce but on a very soggy pitch”. “April has been better but not sufficient to make up for the lack of bookings earlier this year,” Bowen added. “There is a long way to go for most businesses, we do expect - or maybe hope for - a decent lates market and bad weather this bank holiday may help.” In April, data analytics firm ForwardKeys said it was predicting a “flat” year for UK holiday bookings this summer. Olivier Ponti, vice-president of insights at ForwardKeys, added: “The trends we saw in early April have not changed with the advent of the Brexit extension. If anything, they have continued.”

13 May 2019, Source TravelMole

Orlando reports record year

It was another big year for Orlando tourism, with the destination welcoming 75 million visitor arrivals in 2018. Visit Orlando said the figures solidify its status as the most visited destination in the country, ahead of New York, Las Vegas and Los Angeles. "We saw strong gains from all of our core countries, particularly from Latin America. This success is a testament to the special appeal of our destination that continues to grow and evolve, as well as our strong commitment to strategic marketing initiatives," said Visit Orlando president and CEO George Aguel. Of course, being the world's theme park capital helps. Orlando had 68.5 million domestic visitors, an annual increase of 4.1%, and 6.5 million international visitors, also up by more than 5%. International visitor growth was driven by Latin America, and specifically Brazil and Mexico. Orlando now has more than 120,000 hotel rooms, which is the second highest in the US after Las Vegas. There have been several high-profile additions at Orlando theme parks at Disney, Universal and SeaWorld with more to come. Disney World is opening its Star Wars attraction this summer, Universal Orlando opens a new Harry Potter-themed ride, and SeaWorld just launched Sesame Street land. "We think it will help us carry over in 2020. A lot of these things start to kick in the following year," Aguel said.

14 May 2019, Source TravelMole

TUI promises new product to help extend that 'holiday feeling'

Research by TUI UK has found it takes an average of just 43 hours for holidaymakers to hit the peak of that 'holiday feeling' while on a trip. But the average traveller loses the feeling less than four days after unpacking their bags when they return home. The research, in collaboration with University College London's Affective Brain Lab, has identified a 'Factor 30' list of the key triggers that cause the biggest holiday feelings. These include feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin, stepping off the plane and feeling that wave of heat, and hearing the ocean. With 95% of Brits wishing they could make the holiday feeling last longer, TUI is exploring the findings to assess how it can help guests heighten the holiday feeling in resort. One potential idea is installing 'holiday feeling' photo booths on resorts so guests can physically capture an image of them at 'peak time' and then re-live the moment at home. TUI is also developing a brand-new product launching later this year which will help to extend the holiday feeling back in the UK. It would not disclose details, but chief marketing officer Katie McAlister said: "We will be creating something new soon that will quite literally 'bottle the holiday feeling' in a bid to make it last for even longer." Dr Tali Sharot, director of UCL's ABL, who conducted a qualitative study of guests at a TUI Sensatori resort in the Dominican Republic, said: "It's interesting to see that a significant number of the key triggers that ignite positive holiday feelings happen before we even set foot on the plane. "Planning a trip can spark the feeling of anticipation and joy which activate the brain's "reward centre" - the striatum. This part of our brain receives input from dopamine neurons, providing us with a feeling of intense pleasure. "In other words, just thinking about going on holiday - or planning your next holiday when you return home - will activate the reward system in your brain." One in three Brits start researching their next getaway less than three weeks after returning from their last trip, and 22% book their next holiday less than a month after returning home. To coincide with the research, TUI enlisted the help of John Barrowman to bring the holiday feeling to life in a short film. TUI's 'Factor 30' list of top holiday feeling triggers:

Feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin

Stepping off the plane and feeling that wave of heat

Exploring the local area
Spending quality time with family and friends
Hearing the ocean
Soaking up a picture-perfect view
Not having to worry about day to day chores, like cooking and cleaning
Booking your holiday
Swimming in the clear blue sea
Having dinner with a sea view
Seeing your hotel room for the first time
Watching the sunset
Having your first swim in the pool
Looking at the weather report and seeing 100% sun
Trying new foods
Packing your suitcase
Feeling of sand between your toes
Checking in at the hotel
Discovering a new culture
Smelling the salty sea air
Having a drink at the airport
Taking your first sip of a holiday cocktail, like a pina colada or mojito
Researching where to go on holiday
Smelling your sun cream
Getting ready for dinner or evening activities
Booking a holiday excursion or trip
Checking in to your flight online
Putting your out of office on
Checking your holiday countdown clock - on an app or email
Having an ice-cream

15 May 2019, Source TTG

Thomas Cook to cut up to 150 UK head office roles

Thomas Cook is looking to cut up to 150 roles at its UK head office amid its ongoing cost-cutting measures. The cash-strapped operator confirmed to TTG consultations were already under way with a number of staff at its Peterborough base. It comes just weeks after Cook confirmed it would further trim its UK retail network to 566 stores, placing more than 300 jobs at risk. Cook will post its first-half results on Thursday (16 May), whereby it is expected to announce further details of its proposed cost-saving efforts. Will Waggott, Cook's chief of tour operating, said: "These proposals are part of our ongoing programme to drive greater efficiencies across the business, putting a rigorous focus on cost to ensure Thomas Cook is fit for the future. "They have not been taken lightly and we are doing all we can to support our colleagues who are impacted through the consultation process." A spokesperson confirmed the move could mean up to 150 staff based in Peterborough leaving the business.

17 May 2019, Source TravelMole

Visit Florida to cut jobs

Visit Florida is to axe jobs to save money after its budget for promoting the Sunshine State's to tourists was slashed from \$76 million to \$50 million. The marketing body spends \$12.1 million employing 135 members of staff, but it wants to cut this budget by \$3.65 million. It is

planning to save a further \$17.8 million on strategic marketing. The cuts are necessary even though the state saw a record number of visitors in the first quarter. "It is critical that we keep visitation to Florida, and the revenue it generates, healthy and robust. Visit Florida plays an important role in this goal and we will continue to support their work on behalf of Florida and our hardworking taxpayers," said Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is a fan of the organisation despite strong opposition from Florida lawmakers. The state welcomed 35.7 million visitors in the first three months of 2019, a 6% year-on-year rise. However, the tourism marketing agency Visit Florida has to prove its worth this year or it will lose all its funding in mid-2021. "I remain confident in the value provided by tourism marketing. We must continue our efforts to promote and protect visitation to Florida," said Visit Florida CEO Dana Young. The Florida Association of Destination Marketing Organizations said the marketing agency is key to the state's economy and Visit Florida's marketing budget is money well spent. "People don't come to Florida by accident - it takes the partnerships between businesses, local marketing organizations and Visit Florida to help small and local tourism-reliant businesses thrive and grow," it said. The Florida House had sought to eliminate the agency in the last session but allowed an extra fiscal year after support from DeSantis. A change in marketing strategy will see Visit Florida cut back on expensive TV advertising and concentrate more on digital and social media channels.

20 May 2019, Source TTG

Thomas Cook: Customers can have 'complete confidence' booking with us

Thomas Cook responded to a number of concerns from customers on social media over the weekend, insisting they can "have complete confidence in booking their holiday" with the brand. It comes after shares in Cook plunged on Friday (17 May) when a city analyst said the company's shares were worth nothing. A spokesperson said: "We have taken a number of proactive steps in recent months to strengthen our financial position. "We have the support of our lending banks and major shareholders, and just this week we agreed additional funding for our coming winter cash low period. "We have ample resources to operate our business and at the same time, as usual, our liquidity position continues to strengthen into the summer period. "As an Atol-protected business, all of our holidays are protected under the package travel directive, so our customers can have complete confidence in booking their holiday with us. "We're looking forward to the summer season with 20 new own-brand hotels openings and some great offers for customers."

20 May 2019, Source TTG

It's consumer confidence versus general uncertainty

Last week was not a good one for the travel sector. "There is little doubt now the Brexit process has led many UK customers to delay their holiday plans for this summer," admitted Thomas Cook's chief executive on Thursday (16 May) as the group posted losses of £1.46 billion. News of Cook's losses come as little surprise – speculation around the future of the company and rumours of a potential takeover have been rife in recent weeks, alongside bids for its airline business. More worrying was the unexpected €287.2 million loss posted by competitor Tui the day before – though the fact Tui's share price remained steady suggests the City doesn't expect anything better from the travel sector at the current time. The impact of Brexit is being felt across the industry, with Clia UK chair Tony Roberts warning conference delegates 2019 was proving a "tough and challenging year" in cruise. And yet he insisted there are reasons to be positive, saying: "You only have to look at the \$61 billion

ship order book to see there is real confidence.” This week, we speak exclusively to Royal Caribbean’s new sales director Martin MacKinnon, who is similarly hopeful, while Celebrity Cruises boss Lisa Lutoff-Perlo underlined her line’s commitment to the UK market onboard Edge last week. As MacKinnon concludes: “People still want to holiday.” I think that’s the kind of optimism we can all get onboard with.

21 May 2019, Source TTG

Consumers value high street agents for expertise and personal experience

Holidaymakers value high street travel agents for their convenience, expertise and personal experience, new research has revealed. However, agents must now tackle the perception they are expensive if they are to cement their place on the high street anew. Nearly a quarter (23%) of Brits surveyed by media agency eight&four said they find it “quicker and easier” to use a high street travel agent to book their holidays. A further 23% said they feel travel agents offer a more personal experience while 21% said they appreciate their expertise and in-depth advice. “High street travel agents could make a big comeback if they play the market right,” said eight&four head of marketing Caroline Brosnan. “Consumers, on the whole, recognise their value as experts and like the idea of speaking to a real person, which can sometimes be difficult with online travel booking sites. “The key challenge to overcome is the perception that they are expensive.” Brosnan added agents would also need to adapt their offering to appeal to “information-hungry millennials and budget-conscious Gen Zs” of they are to “weather the storm”. The research, a survey of 2,000 UK adults commissioned by eight&four, found nearly eight out of 10 Brits (79%) had either taken a package holiday in the last year, or were interested in doing so. This increased yet further to 87% among those surveyed aged 18 to 44, while millennials are the most likely age group (55%) to have taken a package holiday in the last year versus just 28% of Brits aged 45 and above. Eight&four’s research also found 26% of those who had taken a package holiday were persuaded by their value for money proposition; 20% convenience and 18% financial and/or Atol or Abta protection. “The package holiday has reinvented itself as a relevant, budget-friendly option for young, price-conscious holidaymakers,” Brosnan added. “As the number of holidays taken by 18-34s per year increases, the need for a hassle-free trip to be part of that mix has become really important – whether that’s enjoying the indulgence of an all-inclusive, choosing a flight and hotel combo to avoid endless paperwork, or discovering new experiences offered by a specialist package holiday.”

22 May 2019, Source TravelMole

Pound falls to five-month low ahead of half-term getaway

The pound fell to its lowest level for five months yesterday, with analysts warning its value is 'set to tumble' over the next few months. If the forecasts are correct, holidaymakers in the peak season will get less for their money because of the unfavourable exchange rates. Yesterday, the pound fell to below \$1.27 against the US dollar, and against the euro, at €1.13. The Post Office says anyone currently changing more than £400 will get slightly over \$1.24 and just over €1.11 for their pound. Back in March 2008, pound was briefly worth more than \$2. Experts say Brexit uncertainty and the US-China trade war have both contributed to the pound's fall, according to the BBC. Sterling picked up again later in the day on Tuesday, but its volatility in the market is set to continue after the Prime Minister failed to win over colleagues with her latest Brexit-deal offer in Parliament. Sterling had gained ground in recent months, but in recent days rates exchange rates have fallen back to the kind of levels seen during the Christmas holidays, the BBC says. Exchangeratesorg.uk warns sterling 'looks

set to tumble' in the run-up to the new Brexit deadline on October 31. James Hickman, chief commercial officer at currency trader FairFx, told the BBC: "When sentiment moves towards a higher likelihood of a hard Brexit, then we see a fall in the pound." Hamish Mures, currency analyst at OFX, said the pound was 'suffering from the renewed uncertainty of Brexit, while investors flood to the relatively safer US dollar amidst the ongoing trade war'.

23 May 2019, Source Travelbiz

Travel companies hope for cool summer as package prices are slashed

Travel companies are pinning their hopes on a cool summer to bring a much-needed bookings boost after being forced to slash prices by up to 50% for the early part of the season due to weak demand. If there's a repeat of last year's heatwave, it will be 'difficult' for everyone, the Barclays annual travel forum heard. According to Barclays Global Economic Update, bookings were up 12% at the start of the year, but 'Brexit scare stories' had led to a 'really tough booking period'. Bookings picked up in April, after Britain's departure from the EU was delayed, but only for certain products such as ferry crossings to France. "Generally we haven't seen a spike yet," said Deloitte Partner Alistair Pritchard, but he added: "Consumers still tell us they want to go on holiday." He said he expects to see stronger booking patterns over the next two months, but added, it 'largely depends on the weather'. Paul Carter, CEO of Hotelplan, which owns several brands including Inghams, Explore, Ski Total and Esprit, said the price of some holidays departing this month had been slashed by 50%, while bookings for committed stock in June are down 30% to 40%. Bookings for July are up, but he said there is 'still some way to go' for August and September. Bookings to EU destinations have been particularly badly hit, with Explore bookings for Europe a third down year on year, although it has made these up elsewhere, added Carter. Martin Alcock (right), director of Travel Trade Consultancy, said even luxury operators, who historically would have been insulated from the downturn, were being hit. At the Advantage Conference last week, Alcock said privately luxury operators admitted bookings were flat. However, travel companies are still having to stump up for expensive online advertising, without the expectation of their spend resulting in additional bookings, or their search engine rankings will suffer. "If you are in the Google ad space you can't afford to stop spending because you'll drop down the search rankings, so it's a double whammy of spending without attracting customers, but you have to keep spending because those with deep pockets are still spending," said Alcock, adding that the costs of online advertising has risen up to 20%. The industry is facing other significant challenges, including low economic growth, labour shortages, wage inflation, the devaluation of sterling, rising business rates, a rise in the minimum wage and the cost of pension auto-enrolment for staff, said Pritchard. Despite the numerous challenges being faced by the industry, Pritchard said he remained optimistic. "The really positive news for the sector is that consumers continue to prioritise spending on holidays," he said, adding that they were also spending more on experiences, such as trampoline parks, which is further good news for the industry as 'travel provides great experiences'. Transformational travel is expected to be 'hot' over the next year or two, as people 'increasingly want to come back to work as something better than before they left', said Pritchard, and there has also been a 204% rise in family-friendly holidays, he added. Some luxury operators have reported strong results too, the cruise market has done very well, and solo travel is growing, now accounting for 17% of all adults, up 2% year on year, he added.

27 May 2019, Source Travel Weekly

Thomas Cook to become 'online holiday marketplace'

Thomas Cook is reported to be considering a radical overhaul of its business to become an online aggregator. According to The Telegraph, Thomas Cook held meetings with shareholders last week and is to focus on its website which would allow users to curate their own holiday. Third-party airlines and hotels as well as excursions would be on offer to create a “pseudo-aggregator” model. The newspaper said the changes were part of a strategy to become an “asset-light” business. However, Thomas Cook would still push ahead with its own-brand hotel expansion through its hotel fund. Thomas Cook reported half-year losses of £1.45 billion earlier this month, which was mainly down to a £1.1bn write-down of its MyTravel business it acquired in 2007. It also warned of more cuts this year following numerous rounds of shop closures. Earlier in the year Thomas Cook announced it was putting its airline up for sale. It has secured £300m financing from banks to help see it through next winter but this is dependent upon the sale of the airline. Last week, Thomas Cook received a bid from German-Swedish buy-out firm Triton for its Scandinavian business.