

**UK OFFICE**  
**OCTOBER 2011 REPORT**  
**Prepared by: Venessa Alexander**  
**UK Director**

**TOUR OPERATORS**

**Virgin Holidays**

Met with James Killick, Andrea Noble and Sonia Powell, Virgin Holidays and Carol Williams, Travel City Direct. Meeting to discuss current business, product, room nights moving forward and marketing activity for new fiscal year. Virgin Holidays are slightly down for 2011 but are showing substantial increases for 2012 to SPC. Discussed various marketing options which will be presented in more detail at WTM. James also confirmed he had had conversations with a number of accommodations whilst in the area on his last visit and they were on board with regards offering discounted rates during our co-op marketing activity.

**Other Meetings**

**SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment**

Met with Simon Parry to discuss co-op with Virgin Holidays including a possible ticket inclusion in any future co-op activity. They are not averse to this idea and will speak to Virgin Holidays about this. Also confirmed they are happy to co-op on any retail promotions we do with Virgin Holidays retail stores and Thomas Cook retail stores pending final plans and budgets.

**TRADE LIAISON**

- Tour America Show – Florida’s Beaches participated in the annual Tour America Sale Day Consumer Show held at the Red Cow Hotel in Dublin, Ireland. The show is in its 11<sup>th</sup> year and once again was a fantastic success seeing an increase in both sales (26% YOY) and attendance (11% YOY). We were also advised that the Conversion rate in 2011 was 52 % versus 51.4% in 2010. The average selling price however was down 11% showing that consumers are hunting for bargain prices and prepared to forego certain extra’s to make sure they can afford a holiday in the current economic climate.
  
- UK & Ireland Sales Mission – The UK Sales Mission took place from Monday 9<sup>th</sup> – Friday 14<sup>th</sup> October. Over 100 UK & Irish travel agents/call centre reservation staff were visited and trained by VSPC, The Sirata Beach Resort and the Tradewinds Island Grand & Sandpiper Resorts and two successful trade appreciation lunches were held in Dublin and London with a total of 34 tour operators and trade partners attending.

- World Travel Market – Finalised appointments, brochure order etc for World Travel Market which is taking place from the 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2011 at the Excel Centre in London. Meetings have been secured with 26 key tour operators, airlines and trade partners.
- Lastminute.com/Florida's Beaches Training – Attended the scheduled training at Last Minute's call centre in Woking. 20 agents were trained on all four Florida's Beaches destinations and were provided with literature and giveaways. We also provided the team with our PowerPoint presentation to forward to all staff members for future reference.
- Christmas national consumer promotion has been confirmed with Primary Times. Primary Times is a publication designed for parents, teachers & pupils of primary school age (5-11). It is distributed 7 times a year (end of each half term / term and a back to school issue) and has a circulation of 2.6m. It is distributed via primary schools and given out to pupils via the class teacher to take home. A recent survey has shown that it is read by over 1 in 3 parents throughout UK & Ireland! It is franchised out to local publishers. Promotion will take the form of quarter page in the magazine, online homepage banner and landing page, email blasts and social media.
- USAirtours/Florida's Beaches Training – Have confirmed attendance at a Florida Training day in conjunction with Florida's Beaches at USAirtours in Essex during the month of December 2011. Over 20 reservations agents will be trained on all four beach destinations.
- Continental Airlines Ireland: Discussions have taken place with Pat Reede, Leisure Sales Executive of Continental Airlines in Ireland about possibly hosting a joint Irish Travel Trade Fam Trip in 2012 for approximately 10 agents. Discussions on-going.
- Travel Uni – The competition to encourage further sign up to our UK training programme has now finished and prizes will be distributed to the 10 winners. Prizes consist of a VSPC goody bag filled with branded giveaways.
- BA Holidays – We provided British Airways Holidays with the Dolphin Tale Movie Press Release to see if they were able to utilise this via their PR department. Gemma Pascal forwarded the information to the relevant department.
- BA Winter Sun Campaign – The promotion was launched on the 4<sup>th</sup> October and results will be presented at World Travel Marketing.
- Cosmos have submitted a co-op marketing proposal to include online activity via the Monarch Airlines website. The proposal will be discussed at World Travel Market.
- Thomas Cook have submitted a marketing proposal to include a national retail in-store campaign and mailings to their database. The proposal will be discussed further at World Travel Market.

- Travelzoo – Co–op Marketing launched 21<sup>st</sup> September and will continue for one month.
- Virgin Holidays included information on Dolphin Tale in their upsell email and Facebook posts during the month of October.
- Virgin Holidays Retail - Sponsorship of the next Virgin Holidays Regional Managers meeting during the month of October has been postponed until the end of November 2011.
- Travel Republic have submitted a marketing proposal for online co-op activity which will be discussed further at World Travel Market.
- Liaison with Visit Orlando regarding the joint Scandinavian Sales Mission which will take place in January 2012. Arrangements are being made via the Nordic Visit USA Committees for agent and operator events in the evenings and sales calls during the day.
- Visit USA Association Ireland – Our recent press release promoting the launch of the movie Dolphin Tale in the UK & Ireland was featured in the VUSA Ireland’s October e-newsletter sent to both trade and consumers.
- Visit USA Association UK – Updated our profile information for the new VUSA website which is being launched in the UK next month.
- Trailfinders – Provided the Trailfinders product department with new area images to utilise on the website.
- Selling Long-Haul – Provided Sally Parker with details of new images for them to utilise in the future where necessary.

## **ENQUIRIES:**

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

28

## **MARKET INTELLIGENCE:**

03 October 2011 – Source TTG

### **Air travel suffering from slowdown**

The aviation industry is being hit by slowing demand from passengers as global consumer confidence slumps, according to latest figures from trade association Iata Global passenger numbers grew by 4.5% in August compared to the same month in 2010 but this rise was down on the 6% growth seen in July. Tony Tyler, Iata’s director general and chief executive, said: “The industry has shifted gears downward. The pace of growth in passenger markets has dipped and the freight business is now shrinking at a faster pace. “With business and

consumer confidence continuing to slump globally there is not a lot of optimism for improved conditions any time soon.” European airlines saw the strongest passenger growth for international flights during August with a 7.9% year-on-year increase – mainly fuelled by a capacity rise of 8.2%. Iata said this growth was down to a strong business travel market as leisure traffic was “weak” in Europe and that the rise in August was lower than earlier in 2011 - showing that markets were “softening”. Tyler added: “Airlines are bracing for tough times ahead. Economic uncertainty owing to the European sovereign debt crisis and the growing likelihood of a protracted period of slow growth in developed economies mean the industry will be even more focused on reducing costs and improving efficiency. “To ensure that airlines can continue to catalyse economic activity, we need governments to review the often onerous tax burden that they place on aviation.”

04 October 2011 – Source Travelmole

### **Virgin stores open in Sainsbury’s**

Virgin Holidays has opened its first concession stores in two London Sainsbury's outlets, Kensington and Merton. The stores, which expect to reach 100 by March 2012, boast touch screen technology as well as kids areas. “Our research has shown us that there is a real appetite amongst customers for face-to-face contact with someone when booking their holiday. “We're extremely excited about our new venture with Sainsbury's and are very confident about the potential offered by the coming together of two such powerful brand,” said customer director for Virgin Holidays, Mark Anderson.

### **High street enjoys bookings revival**

The percentage of Brits booking with a high street travel agent has risen from 17% to 25% in the last 12 months. The eight percentage point rise was revealed today in the 2011 ABTA Consumer Trends Survey. The survey of over 2,000 holidaymakers found that younger people were more likely to book through a high street travel agent, with 32% of 16-24 year olds using them compared with 15% of 45-54 year olds. It also found that women are significantly more likely to book with a high street travel agent than men, with 31% booking through this route in the last 12 months compared to 19% of men. The survey, which was carried out last month, found another 28% of Brits booked their overseas holiday with a tour operator, compared to 24% in last year’s survey. One in four had also booked through a holiday booking website, while 43% had booked direct with airlines and accommodation providers. ABTA chief executive Mark Tanzer said: “There are a wealth of booking options available to holidaymakers and I am pleased to see that over half are looking for the reassurance and professionalism offered by travel agents and tour operators when going overseas. “It is also encouraging that so many of the internet generation choose to book through high street travel agents and that so many people use their services when holidaying in the UK. “Many ABTA members also provide bespoke booking options on the internet which is an important booking option with one in four customers doing so.”

04 October 2011 – Source TTG

### **ABTA Convention 2011 – ‘There are still people with money who will spend’**

A leading journalist told delegates at the Travel Convention that, despite the bleak economic outlook, there are people who are looking for the “unique treat that takes them away from the

pressure of the world". Jeremy Warner, assistant editor of The Daily Telegraph, painted a grim picture of the economic future in the UK and globally but reminded delegates that in every "calamity", there is a "business opportunity waiting to get out." "Even in a recession, there are people with money and people who will spend," he said. Warner said it would be catastrophic for countries like Greece if they leave the euro zone. "It would push these economies into recession if not outright depression," he said. He added that tourism to these countries would also be impacted: "They would not be able to maintain the standards that travellers expect when they go to these countries." He described the UK as no longer being an effective and productive place to do business, with "skills gaps, excessive regulation and business taxation, a lack of infrastructure, the burden of healthcare" and other restrictions that other economies do not face. He criticised the policies put in place by global leaders at the height of the financial crisis: "We've sent the best of our cavalry into battle and they've come back in tatters." "The assumption so long held that every generation would be richer and enjoy living standards then the last one is gone," he added. "Companies that fail to recognise the seismic game-changing things that are going on are not going to survive," he warned.

05 October 2011 – Source Travelmole

### **Thomas Cook cabin crew to vote on industrial action**

Thomas Cook cabin crew are considering taking industrial action following the breakdown of talks with management over the company's redundancy plans. Unite the Union said 498 jobs face the axe but it has been unable to agree redundancy terms with management. Some 1,300 of Thomas Cook's 1,800 cabin crew will be balloted within the next week, it said. The cabin crews fly from Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, East Midlands Gatwick, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle, and Stansted. In a statement issued today, the union said it has asked the company to put a "realistic" voluntary severance package on the table, but that the management had "point blank refused" its offer of two weeks per year redundancy pay. Unite had requested a minimum of three weeks per year, plus a lump sum payment of £5,000. The average cabin crew pay is £15,000-a-year. Unite regional officer, Mick Whitley said: "The company was only interested in putting in place the building blocks for voluntary and compulsory redundancies. "This has left Unite with no other alternative but to suspend the consultation talks and hold a consultative ballot with the Unite membership at Thomas Cook. The ballot will be conducted within the next week to gauge the feeling of our members. "We are completely against the redundancy terms and any compulsory redundancies purely to make more profit. The group has made £320m this year and is paying out a fortune in bonuses and dividends, as well as sponsoring the Olympics." Thomas Cook will reduce the size of its fleet by from this winter as part of a cost-cutting drive. It has announced plans remove six long-haul aircraft by the end of the year and has confirmed publicly that it plans to shed 250 jobs. It also plans to eradicate the rank of assistant cabin manager, said the union.

06 October 2011 – Source TTG

### **Thomson set for first bio fuel flight**

Thomson Airways will today become the first UK airline to use sustainable biofuel on one of its flights. The carrier will use the biofuel to power its four-hour flight from Birmingham to Arrecife, Lanzarote. Thomson will carry 232 passengers on a Boeing 757 which is scheduled to leave Birmingham 2.25pm. Chris Browne, Thomson Airways' managing director, says: "This is a very exciting day for Thomson Airways and a further step in our commitment to

invest in sustainable aviation bio fuel. “We firmly believe the adoption of sustainable bio fuels by airlines will help achieve the government’s carbon budget which commits the UK to reduce its carbon emissions by 50% by 2025. “Most strikingly, sustainable bio fuel has the potential to reduce aviation emissions by up to 80% in the long term.” Aviation minister Theresa Villiers added: “I very much welcome Thomson Airways’ announcement and wish them well with this project. “The government believes that sustainable bio fuels have a role to play in efforts to tackle climate change, particularly in sectors where no other viable low carbon energy source has been identified - as is the case with aviation.”

06 October 2011 – Source Travelmole

### **Economic expert warns industry of tough times ahead**

Economic forecaster Douglas McWilliams CEBR had some bad news for the travel industry when he spoke to delegates at this year’s ABTA Travel Convention. Warning the audience that “quite a lot is going to be depressing” he told them tough times would continue. “People are going to have their incremental spend squeezed,” he said. “The travel industry is going to have to compete with other industries for the share of the pound. Your product, compared with other products available, is going to be more expensive.” He said perhaps the only silver lining was that more traditional sunny destinations will get cheaper again. “Southern Europe will become cheap again. Even if the euro doesn’t break up it will have to become cheaper,” he said. “But super cheap travel is no longer going to be around with transport costs the way they are.” He advised the travel industry to focus on customer service and to move from its “Primark stage to its M&S stage”. “Parts of the industry need to get away from the ‘rip-off’ image where hidden charges are slipped through. Ultimately customers will not put up with this when they are paying more in real terms.” Finishing on a higher note, he told delegates: “You guys will have to change and I’m sure you will. You have a huge amount of optimism and dynamism, so whatever the future you’ll have a future.”

07 October 2011 – Source TTG

### **Virgin Atlantic named top travel firm for customer experience**

Virgin Atlantic has been voted as the best travel firm for customer experience in a survey of the UK’s top brands. The airline came 3<sup>rd</sup> overall behind online retailer Amazon and department store John Lewis in the Customer Experience Excellence top 100 list compiled by customer research analyst Nunwood. Virgin, which moved up from sixth place in 2010, just beat fellow airline Emirates as the best travel performer with a customer satisfaction score of 7.78 points out of 10. Emirates was placed fourth overall with 7.72 points. Nunwood compiled the list of the top 100 firms after surveying 7,300 UK consumers last month about what they thought of the customer experience offered by 250 of Britain’s biggest brands. David Conway, Nunwood’s chief strategy officer, said: “Virgin customers consistently highlighted their pride in the company’s Britishness – in their eyes each airplane is a mobile island of all good things British. “Virgin Atlantic and Emirates focus on improving every aspect of the customer experience – this is what sets them apart. Both offer a fantastic in flight experience and really serve Brits well.” Other travel companies to feature in the top 100 were Travel Republic (26<sup>th</sup> place), KLM (31<sup>st</sup>), British Airways (54<sup>th</sup>), Thomson and Jet2.com (tied 62<sup>nd</sup>), First Choice (65<sup>th</sup>), Thomas Cook (81<sup>st</sup>) and Monarch (83<sup>rd</sup>).

13 October 2011 – Source TTG

### **Holiday travel down 2% this summer**

Overseas holidays saw a greater decline than international business trips this summer, according to new figures. The latest Monthly Overseas Travel and Tourism statistics from the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) show that total visits abroad for the three months to August declined 4% to 13.8 million, compared with previous three months this year. This was down 5% when compared with the three months to August 2010. For August holiday visits were down 2% to 36.4 million. Meanwhile, business travel was down 1% to 6.6 million visits, while VFR travel was down the same percentage as holidays to 11.1 million. Looking at the past 12 months as a whole, visits abroad by British travellers has fallen 1%. For the three months to August 2011, total overseas visits decreased by 4% to 13.8 million compared with the previous three months, according to the figures. With fewer people travelling overseas, its no surprise that spending was also down 2% in the month to £7.7 billion. The latest figures come after Abta's Consumer Trends Survey for this year suggested that the annual holiday is the luxury that most people are most unwilling to give up. However, Barclays Corporate head of hospitality Mike Saul said consumers are being forced to cut back on their short breaks and weekend getaways. "Consumer spending has fallen in each of the last four quarters at a steadily accelerating pace and the continued pressure on households' disposable incomes means that, although the family holiday remains sacred in most households, periphery trips such as city breaks are continuing to suffer," said Saul. "Most companies we speak to in the outbound travel industry forecast little growth this year or next. Even gap years are being abandoned as students focus on career rather than travel." Saul said Barclays said operators in the middle of the market are feeling the biggest squeeze. "While there are many travel operators at both the budget and high end of the industry succeeding in the current climate, it is the middle that is getting squeezed."

14 October 2011 – Source TTG

### **Florida still the biggest hit on the US scene**

Trade requests more fams in *TTG* and Visit USA's annual survey, which highlights drivers and deterrents for US bookings. Travel agents have said that their leisure sales to the US continue to grow, with Orlando and California remaining firm favourites with UK consumers. This is according to the annual *TTG* US Survey in association with Visit USA, which showed that there is plenty to be positive about in selling the US, although challenges remain. The survey was completed by 230 respondents, 83% of whom were travel agents, and a mix of independents and multiples. Despite the US being perceived to be a good-value destination, price is still a deterrent for some consumers, and having to pay for an ESTA is proving to be a barrier to sales. The individual questions show more clearly agents' thinking when it comes to selling and promoting the US...

### **What would be most helpful to increase your sales to the US?**

Fam trips were easily the most popular option, with 69% citing educational as very helpful, and 51% saying that a dedicated trade website would also be very helpful, while 35% said that more destination training would be equally helpful. "The best way to learn about a destination is to experience it yourself. Customers always buy based on recommendation, and it's a sure-fire way to close sales," said one First Choice agent. One tour operator requested: "Education on the best routes for multi-centre options and lesser-known brands, plus access to luxury, boutique hotels."

**What would make your customers more likely to enquire about and book a US holiday?**

High prices were the chief deterrent, with 67% saying that lower prices would be likely to drive more enquiries. Positive mentions in newspapers and magazines were backed by 56%, while 44% said advertising was still a good way to raise awareness and 42% said that simpler entry requirements would encourage bookings.

**Have the ESTA changes been positive or negative for you and your customers?** It seems ESTA does not have trade backing, with 59% being critical of its introduction. One independent agent said: "It has put people off, especially families, as it increases the cost again. "But a Thomas Cook agent commented: "It has had a positive effect as customers need help with the visa situation and we can advise."

**What type of customers do you sell US holidays to most often?** Middle-aged couples (43%) and families (37%) are the people to target, with young couples, groups of friends and the grey market all coming in at less than 10%.

**What type of US holiday do you sell most often?** Twin and multi-centre is king, with 43% booking more than one US destination at a time. Single centres were the next most popular with a 32% share, while 16% booked city breaks most often, with self-drive and escorted touring the bread-and-butter business for 9% of respondents.

**Which area of the US do you sell most?**

Florida (Orlando) leads the way for 46%, followed by the west (including California) for 30%, while 17% sell the north-west (New England and New York) the most. A total of 37% predicted growth for Florida in the next 12 months, with as many predicting growth for the west too. "There's a lot of advertising for California, which is making people more inclined to go," said one online agent. "Increasingly competitive deals to Florida are aiding sales," said an independent agent, while another said their sales were "a real mixture of east and west".

**Do you think your customers perceive the US to be a good-value destination?** A resounding "yes" for 84%, with just 16% saying "no". "Even with the drop in the US dollar, customers still think they are getting a lot more for their money going to the US rather than Europe," said one Thomas Cook agent. And another agent said: "Shopping can be a big part of a trip to the US and the cost of goods is far better over there." For 78%, customers' perceptions of the value of US holidays were generally more positive than 12 months ago.

**What is most likely to stop your customers booking a US holiday?** There could still be some improvement in the perception of the US as a good-value destination, as 45% said that customers saw other destinations as better value. However, 22% also said that negative perceptions about entry requirements and procedures were a deterrent. Only 12% said that the fact that customers had visited the US before could put them off a repeat visit.

17 October 2011 – Source TTG

**Virgin Atlantic to upgrade Gatwick fleet**

Virgin Atlantic is to spend £50 million refurbishing its fleet of aircraft based at Gatwick. The move is the first step in Virgin's £100 million investment in upgrading its aircraft at both Gatwick and Manchester which will see the interiors of all of its Boeing 747-400's being

retrofitted. The new cabins will include new economy and premium economy seats including an updated entertainment system. The eXphone system for mobile phones will also be introduced. Steve Griffiths, Virgin Atlantic's chief operating officer, said: "We are increasing capacity to the Caribbean this winter, with extra flights to Cuba, Tobago and Grenada taking the total number of flights to this region to 24 a week. "Virgin Atlantic continues to offer passengers the best experience and we are sure that our passengers travelling from Gatwick will enjoy our newly fitted aircraft. "We are looking forward to seeing how customers like our new touch screen entertainment system." The retrofitting process will begin in May 2012 and should be finished five months later. Virgin also operates new Airbus A330 aircraft from both Gatwick and Manchester.

17 October 2011 – Source TTG

### **130 Co-op staff put in consultation**

Staff at Co-operative Travel's office in Manchester have been put on a 90-day consultation period. A spokesman for the Thomas Cook/Co-operative Travel/Midlands Co-operative travel retail joint venture confirmed that this could affect up to 130 staff. The spokesman said that this was in line with the previously announced strategy to centralise a number of support functions. Commenting on the proposals, the joint venture's CEO, Simon Robinson said: "By relocating certain functions and bringing together activities that support specific areas, we believe the sales, service and financial performances of the joint venture as a whole would improve. We have shared with our colleagues today the location proposals and the steps we'll take to support them through this process."

21 October 2011 – Source Travelmole

### **Thomas Cook gets winter credit**

Thomas Cook has managed to secure an extra £100 million credit to help it get through the quiet winter season. The group made an announcement to the City this morning saying it had reached agreement with its bank to increase financial flexibility and has also signed a new short-term committed bank facility to provide an additional £100 million of "headroom around the seasonal cash low point at the end of December this year". The existing credit facilities comprises a £150 million amortising term loan and a £850 million revolving credit facility which mature in May 2014.

21 October 2011 – Source TTG

### **Cook shares surge after bank deal**

Thomas Cook has seen its shares shoot up by as much as 24% today after completing a new deal with its banks. Cook announced today that it has eased its financial worries by securing an amended agreement with its banks which gives the company extra financial "headroom" for the next few months. The news was greeted positively by investors as Cook's shares rose from 45.55p to a high of 55.50p before settling at around 52p - still a rise of around 15% on yesterday's closing price. City analysts had feared that Cook could get close to breaking its banking covenants in December when cash flow is traditionally at its weakest for tour operators. But Cook today announced it had agreed with its banks to change the terms of its bank facilities to "increase financial flexibility". The operator has also signed a short-term

banking deal to give it access to an extra £100 million to see the company through the rest of 2011. Paul Hollingworth, Cook's chief financial officer, said: "We are pleased to have the full support of our banking group in amending the financial covenants so as to provide greater financial flexibility, particularly around the seasonal cash low point at the end of December."

24 October 2011 – Source Travelmole

### **APD hopes are dashed**

The industry's campaign for a fairer Air Passenger Duty has been dealt a blow by the Treasury. Chloe Smith, the new economic secretary to the Treasury, told MPs on Friday that she could not "promise the House that APD will be cut in the near future". She said the Government needed to be "frank about the situation in which we find ourselves" and pledged to continue close dialogue with airports, airlines, and other travel organizations. She acknowledged concerns from some MPs about anomalies in the banding structures, particularly on flights to Caribbean destinations. Smith said she would "hold a series of meetings with stakeholders on that subject". Smith also tackled the question of whether APD should be lower from UK regional airports than from London. "It is fair to say there is no consensus on the matter," she said. "Some regional airports have asked us to consider lower APD rates for the regions, but several airlines have asked us to consider the opposite."

25 October 2011 – Source Travolution

### **New Travel2 website sparks booking surge**

Long-haul specialist Travel2 is seeing a quarter of its business transacted online having seen search volumes increase by 70% since it re-launched its travel agent site last year. The revamped site went live in August 2010 and has attracted a 40% increase in unique visitors and revenue generated by the site has gone up 60%, the operator has reported. Particular growth has been seen for bookings to the US, Middle East, Asia and the Caribbean. New features available on the website included an integrated package holiday search, instant messaging support, 13% commissions for holiday bookings and reward scheme T2 Rewards. Further developments added since launch included a paperless scheme, a homemaker-focussed mobile version and increased product such as transfers, sightseeing, Dublin departures and European cities. Gordon McCreadie, sales and marketing director at Travel 2, said: "We are continuing to receive positive feedback from independent agents on how easy the site is to use and the variety of content available to them. "We have many plans in the pipeline for developing the site around new launches this year and in celebration of our 30th birthday in January. "Other areas such as car hire, charter flights and 'no-frills' carriers integration are also being progressed and we would welcome agent feedback as always as to how we can improve the site further."

25 October 2011 – Source TTG

### **Cook cabin crew vote in favour of industrial action**

Thomas Cook cabin crew have voted in favour of industrial action in a dispute over redundancy payments - the first stage in a process that could eventually lead to strikes. Union Unite said that its cabin crew members had voted "overwhelmingly" in favour of

taking industrial action in a consultative ballot. Unite represents 1,150 of Cook's 1,800 cabin crew workforce and will be holding a meeting of its reps in Manchester tomorrow to discuss future strategy which could include holding a ballot for full industrial action which could involve strikes. A total of 475 members voted in favour of industrial action, with 53 against. Just under 500 jobs are "at risk" as Cook reduces its number of aircraft in the UK from 41 to 35. But the company insists that the number of job cuts will be "significantly fewer" than the headline figure. Unite regional officer Mick Whitley said: "The overwhelming vote shows our members' anger and should be a strong wake-up call for the management to return to the negotiating table with a fair offer. "And until we have had the meeting tomorrow, Unite is not going to speculate about Christmas flights by Thomas Cook. The ball is very much in the management's court – they need to come up with a realistic offer for those facing redundancy. They are a very profitable firm." A spokeswoman for Thomas Cook Airlines said: "We're committed to continuing meaningful consultation with our people, their representatives and Unite as we look for opportunities to reduce the potential number of job losses."