

UK OFFICE

November 2014 REPORT

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Tour Operators

Voyage Prive

Met with James Williams to discuss opportunities to expand their Florida programme to members with new hotel offerings from the VSPC area. Voyage Prive is the World's largest members only travel club with a focus on private sales for luxury properties. They have over 12.5m members across global territories of France, Spain, Italy, UK, Poland and Brazil. They work with hotels to drive incremental room nights and revenue through short window promotions to a closed user group with exclusive offers. Hotel profile sought is 4/5* only, preferably boutique properties mainly focussed on leisure travel that can offer exclusive rates guaranteed best in market. A solicitation was put together and sent out with follow ups planned for December.

Audley Travel

Met with James Butler, North America Product Manager. They are a high-end tour operator with a discerning customer base that doesn't currently have a Florida programme. They are looking to add Florida product sometime next year as they lead up to a new USA brochure in September 2015 that may target more mid-market customers. They are not interested in beach/theme park content but instead mentioned product areas like nature/wildlife, history and culture as areas of focus. Relevant information was provided and he was surprised to learn about some of the area attractions that would fall into these categories. Follow ups including a likely solicitation for 4/5 star hotel content (especially boutique hotels) was agreed for later in the month.

World Travel Market

The following meetings were held at World Travel Market:

USAirtours/TravelPlanners

A meeting was held with Linda Dixey, Product Manager to have a general catch up and discuss 2015 co-op marketing opportunities. Linda advised us that VSPC room night stats for 01 Jan – 30 Sep 2014 were a total of 1610 versus the same period last year which at that time totalled 1123 room nights. Their top selling properties continue to be the Tradewinds Resorts and Sirata Beach Resort on St. Pete Beach and the Hyatt Resort on Clearwater Beach. Linda also advised us that 50% of their company's total bookings are now coming from TravelPlanners, their direct consumer brand. As such, we are keen to look at working with TravelPlanners in 2015. Awaiting a proposal for 2015 activity.

Gold Medal Travel

Met with Harriet Moon, marketing manager to discuss performance of VSPC and possible marketing opportunities. Gold Medal are 49% up to our area having booked 1643 room nights to end of October 2014 which Harriet feels is definitely as result of consistent marketing support. Spoke about the possibility of an in-store promotion through their independent retail agents and awaiting a proposal.

Premier Holidays

Meeting with Heidi Blades, General Manager. Premier Holidays are tracking 2% down to our area which is consistent with their general bookings to Florida. Discussed the possibility of promotions around their cruise business which has grown substantially over the past 12 months. Currently awaiting a proposal.

BA Holidays

Meeting with Mark Tanner, Marc James and Pete Brudenell regarding product and marketing. BA Holidays are tracking 56% up for us to end of October with 4700 room nights booked and are already showing 53% up for forward bookings in 2015. Just as an indication of the growth we are experiencing with BA Holidays, in 2012 they booked 2600 room nights to SPC. Discussed marketing opportunities in 2015 and will follow up with Pete Brudenell further in the New Year. Also secured 10 fam seats for a fam in the current fiscal.

THG Holidays

A general catch up was held with John Bowden from THG Holidays. John advised that Florida bookings are flat for THG year on year but they are seeing some great enquiries coming through to them for 2015. They are currently working on their new brochure and will continue to feature The Tradewinds Island Resorts, The Sirata Resort, The Holiday Inn Harbourside and the Hilton in Clearwater Beach. We discussed the possibility of looking at another joint Secret Escapes promotion and we are currently awaiting information on costs.

Platinum Travel (Ireland)

Met with Ciara Foley and Austin Carroll, the management team of Platinum Travel in Ireland. We were advised that Florida is again doing very well for them with quite a lot of advance bookings in 2015 already secured. This is mainly due to the Irish economy picking up slightly and also the fact that Platinum Travel are able to offer low deposit bookings until the end of 2014. We have since our meeting also provided images and copy as a follow up and for Austin to utilise on their website.

American Holidays

Met with Dee Burdock who advised we are flat for 2014, having booked 1042 room nights to end of October. Discussed joint marketing opportunities and will follow up to request a formal proposal.

Expedia

Met with Afsheen Qureshi who advised that we had booked 5027 room nights with them to end of October 2014 compared with 4851 for the same period 2013. Discussed joint marketing and advised of the available budget. Currently awaiting a proposal for activity to launch late December.

Travel Junction

Met with Andy Facer as a follow up to our meeting a few months ago. Andy advised us that the Travel Junction updated website has now gone live but with limited capacity that will be increased by January in time for Q1 in 2015. They have advised us that they are currently using Expedia and Destinations of the World for their hotel inventory and very happy with their coverage within our area. We were told that they are currently working on area landing pages (we have already supplied area images, copy) as well as looking at ways to be able to report to us on room night stats. Andy will be attending Huddle next year.

Barrhead Travel

A meeting was held with Caroline Donaldson and Jade Semple. Caroline advised that Barrhead Travel have a turn of year campaign starting in January but are currently working on bettering their statistical reports after we had voiced our concerns due to their inability to run reports/room night stats for us when we are partnering with them on co-op marketing activity. As such Caroline has decided to include St. Pete/Clearwater in the turn of year campaign anyway to show their support of our destination and to keep the momentum going from our previous years' joint activity. Provided the Barrhead Travel Marketing Department with updated imagery, copy, logos and key messages.

Travel Up/Magic Holidays

Met with Ian Moore for a general catch up. Magic Holidays has now been operating for 10 months and have already had 5,000 passengers travel to Florida with them. The Travel Up brand already sends 30,000 (seat only) passengers to Florida. Magic are seeing a trend of twin centre holidays being booked in Florida with quite a few different variations with around 25% of these including the Miami area. The website is very much a work in progress but they are constantly adding/updating this portal.

They are based in Blackpool and earlier this year we trained the call centre staff on our area.

Visit USA Ireland

A meeting was held with Clodagh Oxley and Ciara Foley of the Irish Visit USA Association. Discussed the Irish market in general as well as discussing some of the partner opportunities they have available to members in 2015. We advised them that we would be very keen to partner on the Trade road show next year that will be taking place in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. We are currently awaiting dates to be confirmed to be able to confirm our participation.

American Sky

Met with Geoff Dobson, Florida Product Manager at American Sky to discuss our area and product in general. We were advised that St. Pete/Clearwater continues to be their top selling Florida beach destination and that they are very happy now with their product portfolio for the time being. VSPC will have a 1 page allocation in their forthcoming 2015/2016 brochure and the page will feature The Hilton Clearwater Beach, Postcard Inn on the Beach, The Sandpearl Resort and the Barefoot Beach Resorts. They have advised us that room night stats year to date were just over 500 and that this is a very big increase YOY due to the fact that their Florida product has not been a top priority in the past but has been more so over the past 12 months.

Virgin Holidays

Met with Simon Edwards and Sonia Powell to discuss the February ad campaign and to discuss with Simon, the possibility of securing favourable hotel rates for the campaign. Simon advised we are tracking 32% up on 2013 with just over 11,500 room nights booked to end of October.

Western & Oriental

A meeting was held with Ava Metha at Western & Oriental Travel after they started featuring our area for the first time on their website back in the summer. Ava advised that they are very pleased with their website landing page and as such will be looking to feature VSPC in their 65 page USA brochure in 2015. Western & Oriental are looking to increase their USA sales as they offer a very upscale product and currently only send 1000 passengers to the US. We discussed the possibility of conducting training for their call centre staff in Q2 of 2015.

Ocean Holidays

Met with Lisa Barrington to discuss our partnership with Ocean Holidays moving into 2015. We both agreed that we wished to keep the momentum going after our successful joint campaign in April/May 2014. As such we have already received a proposal and confirmed our participation in a joint campaign. The campaign will include banner ads, e-newsletters, social media activity and a dedicated destination blog. Currently awaiting suggested campaign dates to be able to proceed.

Aer Lingus

A general catch up meeting was held with Ivan Beacom from Aer Lingus. Ivan confirmed that Aer Lingus will be increasing their capacity from Dublin into Orlando next year and that the flights will rise from three to four flights a week (45k passengers). Aer Lingus passenger carryings edged up by 2.3% last month (October) to 979,000. Long-haul provided the greatest growth with numbers up by 29% to 129,000 over October 2013. Overall carryings for the year to October were up by 4.2% to more than 9.6 million. We discussed the possibility of co-hosting another Irish Fam as we did in May 2014 and Ivan will advise if this may be a possibility early in 2015.

James Villa Holidays

Met with Edward Frampton-Fell who is the new USA Product Manager at James Villa Holidays. Edward advised that they would like us to again send out a solicitation request for 2,3,4 and 5 bedroom self-catering options in the area (a previous solicitation had been sent out in the spring of 2014 but did not receive an adequate response) as they are still keen to feature our area in their Florida portfolio. A solicitation has been duly sent and we will follow up again in due course.

Bookabed

A meeting was held with Beverleigh Fly to discuss our area in general and offer any assistance that they may need moving into 2015. We were told that Bookabed now has 190 Irish Travel Agencies using their b2b service in Ireland and over the last 4 years have grown over 600% overall. 18 months ago saw Bookabed launch in the UK as an alternative bed bank and they now have commercial agreements with World Choice Independent Travel Agents, The Virgin Flight Stores, Freedom Travel, Hayes Travel & Mid Counties Co-op groups. We discussed touching base in Q2 of 2015 for additional call centre and Irish Travel Agents training.

TUI Specialist

Met with Rachel McAneny, Florida Product Manager for TUI Specialist to discuss continuing our partnership into 2015. Requested up to date room night stats that Rachel will be forwarding and also discussed a joint co-op marketing campaign in conjunction with Visit Tampa. TUI Specialist will be sending forward a joint proposal as well as room night stats in the coming weeks.

Letsgo2

A brief catch up meeting was held with Casey Hurford, Product Manager. Their Florida programme is slowly picking up and over the past 6 months has seen nearly 50 room nights booked to the VSPC area. Casey will continue to push twin centre offers with Orlando to hopefully see further growth. We also continue to share area information with Casey so that they can promote events via their social media activity.

Sunway Holidays (Ireland)

Met with Barry Hammond for a general update on Sunway Holidays. Barry joined Sunway 5 months ago. He has reviewed their product offering and they are currently happy with their featured accommodations. Barry had requested images and copy and these have duly been forwarded. Requested room night stats and we have been advised to request these in early January as Barry is also working on their reporting systems and this should hopefully be completed at the end of 2014.

Visit Tampa

Met with Visit Tampa to discuss joint partnerships into 2015. Discussed the joint fam trip in conjunction with British Airways (10 seats have been confirmed by BA), the British Airways Holidays 2015 Spring Campaign as well as looking at which tour operators to target in terms of co-op marketing opportunities. Tour operators we have discussed include TUI Specialist and Expedia in the UK and American Holidays and Tour America in Ireland. Discussions will continue to take place in the coming months.

Tour America

Met with Veronica Flood to discuss marketing opportunities for 2015 and currently awaiting a proposal for Jan/Feb activity. Florida is selling extremely well for them and they witnessed a 45% growth in September alone. Current room night stats to be forwarded to us.

Stella Travel Services

A meeting was held with Jonathan Couch and Lindsay Miller. Jonathan advised us that the VSPC area room night stats were up 10% year on year with just over 600 room nights having been booked through Travel 2 and 2015 advance sales are also up year on year. Stella advised that their top selling hotels include the Hilton on Clearwater Beach and The Sirata Beach Resort on St. Pete Beach. We discussed attending their possible Florida training day in May around the launch of their new brochure and Jonathan will be in touch with further details should this be taking place. Also discussed co-op marketing opportunities and currently awaiting a proposal.

Travel Republic

Met with Elinor Steiner from Travel Republic. Discussed the success of our 2014 campaign and agreed we would like to look at a joint marketing campaign with Travel Republic again in 2015 and so a proposal will be put together and sent to us as soon as possible. Travel Republic advised us that

they now send over 26,000 passengers annually to Florida (an increase of 34%) and currently have 1783 room nights booked to our area (an increase of 38% year on year). We also discussed training in for their call centre staff at the beginning of Q2 2015.

Thomas Cook Signature

Met with Charlotte Aldridge at WTM to discuss our area in general. Charlotte advised that the Thomas Cook Group will be running a daily flight into Orlando and will also be offering regional UK departures from Manchester, Glasgow, London Stansted and Belfast in the summer of 2015. They will also be offering 2 flights per week from Manchester to Miami from May to November next year. This is part of a 40% capacity increase to the USA in 2015. Thomas Cook Signature booked a total of 501 room nights in 2013 and year to date have booked 454 room nights in total for 2014. A further meeting has been requested with Charlotte Aldridge and Jill Townsin to discuss moving forward into 2015/16 as well as discussing their charter programme.

Bon Voyage Travel & Tours

Met with Karen Niven and advised her of all updated news in our area and Karen will be posting some of the events we discussed on their social media forums. Karen advised us that Florida continues to be in their top four US holiday destinations and they currently still contract with The Sheraton Sand Key Resort, The Sirata Beach Resort, The Dolphin Beach Resort and the Tradewinds Island Resorts. Also discussed training in Q2 of 2015 for Karen's in house sales staff. We have, since our meeting, sent new images, copy and a large quantity of Gulf to Bay brochures to their Southampton office as requested.

Meetings/Training/Events

VSPC/Visit Orlando Ireland Training Mission – The Dublin/Belfast trip in partnership with Visit Orlando took place this month. During the 3 day trip we conducted joint training sessions at Cassidy Travel, American Holidays and World Travel Centres in Dublin. We also attended the Visit USA Ireland AGM before hosting a joint tour operator/press lunch at the Baan Thai restaurant in Ballsbridge, Dublin. In Belfast we sponsored an evening dinner/training event with staff from Virgin Holidays Retail stores in Belfast along with their Regional Sales Manager. Training sessions were also conducted at American Holidays and Cooperative Travel in Belfast. Brochures and giveaways were sent out to all training locations ahead of time. We received some very good feedback and responses from all who attended the sessions – the new training video is proving very popular!

Royal Caribbean – Met with Karen Tucker, Product Manager for UK & Ireland, to discuss pre/post Tampa cruise opportunities. Provided an overview of the area and discussed their existing hotel content strategy as well as the enhancement of their Cruise to Stay programme in the first quarter of 2015. They currently have a small volume of UK-originating customers taking cruises from Tampa but with 2 ships assigned to sailing Tampa-Caribbean cruises into 2016 there are possible opportunities to expand their programme to cover our area. We agreed to follow up and continue discussions after Karen had reviewed the materials provided and reviewed options internally.

TUI Specialist - Attended TUI SHG (Specialist Holidays Group) Dinner for 105 Top Selling agents held in the Ascot Suite of the Gatwick Hilton on 20 November 2014. The evening started at 7pm with a drinks reception followed by a sit down dinner. VSPC hosted a table of 10 top selling agents and one of the agents was Billy Leighton, top seller for mainstream TUI sales in the UK and number 5 for SHG. Sean Dowd, the General Manager covering Beaches for Hayes and Jarvis also joined our table. When dinner had finished, there was an announcement made thanking each of the sponsors and we acknowledged our presence there for VSPC.

TRADE LIAISON

- Discussions with BA Media regarding the possibility of a running a survey on ba.com targeting Tampa and Orlando passengers. This is a new facility available from January 2015. Costs have been received and we will be proceeding with this from April.

- Ongoing work on the February ad campaign including:
 - Liaison, changes and sign off on the OOH and digital elements and liaison with Virgin Holidays for their comment and sign off
 - Re-negotiation of the deadlines for provision of artwork to Media Agency Group
 - Sign off on the TV ad and the YouTube ad
 - Substantial input with regards the landing page content including Virgin Holidays content
 - Re-direction of Rooster PR to supportive PR campaign for February
- Florida's Beaches
 - Booking of booth at Ferie in Herning
 - Ongoing liaison regarding the Oslo show
 - Confirmation of brochure distribution at Matka in Helsinki and arrangements for shipping
 - Liaison with Fort Myers, Fort Lauderdale and Miami regarding quantities of brochures to be shipped to which shows
- Scandinavian Sales Mission – finalised itinerary, shipping requests and powerpoint for the December trip.
- Visit USA Newsletter – Provided information on the Dali/Picasso exhibit for inclusion in the next Ireland and Denmark e-newsletters to both trade and consumer databases.
- Florida's Beaches – coordinated logos and artwork options for new bag design with Fort Myers, Fort Lauderdale and Miami. New bags will be ready for the first of Florida's Beaches trade shows in Scandinavia next year.
- USAirtours – Provided Linda Dixey at USAirtours with contact details for the Postcard in on the Beach after we discussed the hotel. USAirtours would like to look at possibly featuring this hotel in their 2015 programme.
- American Sky/Tropical Sky – Tropical Sky promoted a holiday package to the Loews Don Cesar Resort on St. Pete Beach in their November e-newsletter.
- Hayes & Jarvis – The TUI Specialist brand of Hayes & Jarvis promoted hotel offers to the Sirata Beach Resort on St. Pete Beach in their weekly e-newsletter to their consumer database.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

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MARKET INTELLIGENCE:

3rd November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

WTM 2014: Brand USA boss hails industry input on Ebola response

The chief executive of US marketing agency Brand USA has hailed the input of the American travel and tourism industry to ensure a 'measured and responsible' approach to border control in the wake of the Ebola outbreak. Speaking at World Travel Market, Chris Thompson said the creation of a central travel and tourism strategy and an enhanced presence in Washington, D.C meant that the industry now had a voice to highlight the potential consequences of decisions affecting inbound travel.

"It is a great testament to what has been achieved with this National Travel & Tourism Strategy that the industry was at the table," he added. Thompson said he expected to see solid growth from the UK market after a flat period during and after the recession. And he said the take-up of co-operative marketing opportunities by the trade demonstrated the value suppliers and agents were seeing in engaging with Brand USA.

"We have developed very strong programmes with the likes of BA, Thomas Cook and Tui, and we

have just signed agreements on two new consumer campaigns with Hayes & Jarvis and Virgin Holidays," he said.

"This sort of activity is where all the hard work of the past four years (since Brand USA's foundation) really comes good. Our brand presence is very strong, and both the suppliers and us have a good platform to measure ROI with a call to action for them."

Thompson added that he was confident Brand USA would achieve its target of increasing incoming visitor numbers to the US to 100 million a year by 2021, and said he expected reauthorisation for the organisation's next five-year term to come from the US government in early December.

3rd November 2014 – Source Travolution

Virgin Holidays and Microsoft launch 'digital alternative' to brochures

A digital alternative to traditional holiday brochures has been created by Microsoft and Virgin Holidays. 'Plan-it Mojo' is built as an extension of the Virgin Holidays website and is supported by rich media multi-platform advertising across Microsoft's services. It acts as an interactive guide to all the operator's locations across the world. Features include on-the-ground information about each destination, pulling in content sources from across the internet and pin-pointed using an interactive map using Bing Maps functionality. This allows consumers to select and save their flagged places of interest to the cloud from a number of categories such as entertainment, sport, food and drink, nightlife and hotels. The 'Plan-it Mojo' hub is built using responsive design to optimise to any screen, be it PC, tablet or mobile, and is designed to provide Virgin Holidays' customers with a tool to research, refine and book their holidays. All content is sourced and created to ensure that it resonates with Virgin Holidays audiences, such as Blogs and Vlogs from well-known travel writers with expert views on activities, sights and entertainment spots, as well as bespoke videos. Experian targeted traffic drivers will ensure that Virgin Holidays' most important segments are reached across the Microsoft network. The hub will be supported with branded editorial content developed for the travel section of the new MSN, along with rich media advertising across Outlook and Skype with a custom Windows 8 Ads-in-Apps creative that will follow the initial launch. Owen Sagness, general manager of Microsoft Advertising & Online UK, said: "It's exciting when an innovative brand like Virgin Holidays sets you a unique challenge like this one. "Leveraging our technical expertise and ecosystem our ad solutions team has been able to build the 'Plan-it Mojo' hub from the ground-up. "Supported with a range of digital creatives driving traffic to the interactive hub, the campaign is designed to reach audiences across any screen through a number of Microsoft's services. "The combination of our technological abilities, the depth of our content offering on the new MSN and the reach of our advertising offering across screens and ecosystems means we are in a unique position to deliver this campaign for Virgin Holidays." The operator's head of marketing, Sam Otter, said: "This industry first provides a new and engaging way for consumers to view our content, creating an interactive platform for them to plan their holiday. "It's only been possible thanks to our unique media partnership with Microsoft, and we can't wait to see our customers' reactions to what is a yet another pioneering activity from Virgin Holidays."

4th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Thomas Cook launches first direct UK service to Reno-Tahoe

Thomas Cook Airlines has introduced the UK's first non-stop service from London Gatwick to Reno-Tahoe, USA. The twice-weekly service, in partnership with Ski Lake Tahoe, will increase ski holiday options for UK travellers and will depart on Wednesdays and Saturdays, operating from December 19 2014 to April 19 2015. Christoph Debus, chief executive of Thomas Cook Airlines said, "It's fantastic news that we're able to offer skiers from the UK the first ever non-stop flights to Reno-Tahoe, opening Lake Tahoe as a real option for their winter break.

"On top of our new routes to Miami and New York next summer and our brand new Premium cabin, we're leading the way in offering a quality experience at great prices for the discerning traveller heading to the USA."

Andy Wirth, vice chairman of the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority, said the combination of incredible skiing and Reno-area casinos will make the new flight a unique and unforgettable experience for travellers.

"We're thrilled to welcome Thomas Cook Airlines and Great Britain to the Reno-Tahoe International

Airport,” Wirth said. “With this unparalleled nonstop convenience and a world class travel partner in Thomas Cook, this flight really opens up one of the best skiing markets in the world, the United Kingdom, to Lake Tahoe and the great casinos and night life of Reno.” The new route goes on sale this week.

4th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

US introduces new security measures to identify terrorists

New security measures have been introduced for travellers entering the US from Europe in a move designed to identify potential terrorists with Western passports. The US is now asking all those visiting America from countries which do not require a visa to declare if they hold a second passport amid concern about the number of “foreign fighters” returning from Syria and Iraq. The measure will affect millions of travellers from Europe, Australia and other “friendly” nations who are not required to obtain a visa when visiting the US for short trips, including around 2.5 million British tourists a year. As many as 2,000 Islamist militants are thought to have travelled from Britain, Australia and other western countries to Syria and Iraq in recent months to join up with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil), the *Telegraph* reported.

America fears that their ability to enter the US without the need to obtain a visa makes them difficult to track. As a result, the Department for Homeland Security announced that those seeking to enter under the Visa Waiver Programme will now be required to say if they hold another passport, or if they have travelled in the past under another name or alias. Additional information about their place of employment and previous addresses are also now required. The data will then be checked against terrorist watch lists. The new rules add to a system introduced in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which require all travellers entering under the Visa Waiver Programme to submit detailed personal information, including an address in the US, and obtain an authorisation code before boarding an aircraft or ship.

Announcing the changes yesterday, US secretary for homeland security Jeh Johnson said that those seeking to travel to the US from countries in the Visa Waiver Programme “will be required to provide additional data fields of information in the travel application submitted via the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA). “The new information sought includes additional passport data, contact information, and other potential names or aliases. “We are taking this step to enhance the security of the Visa Waiver Programme, to learn more about travellers from countries from whom we do not require a visa. “We are also confident these changes will not hinder lawful trade and travel between our nation and our trusted foreign allies in the Visa Waiver Programme.”

In response, US Travel Association president and chief executive Roger Dow said: “Even programmes that are unquestionably effective should be continually evaluated and evolve along with the shifting security landscape, and the announced adjustments to the Visa Waiver Programme are evidence that the current administration wholly embraces that approach. “The Visa Waiver Programme is already esteemed by security experts as a vital tool for counterterrorism efforts, and the programme should continue to serve as a model both for innovative policy and sound policymaking. “An important element of any policy shift is clearly communicating details to the public. “The travel community stands ready to help disseminate information about the changes, and we urge the administration to pursue every available means to make sure inbound travellers from Visa Waiver Programme countries are made aware of the new requirements.”

4th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Icelandair announces new routes in the UK and US for 2015

Birmingham is set to become Icelandair's fifth gateway in the UK from February 5 next year, as the carrier launches a twice-weekly service between the airport and Reykjavik. 2015 will mark the 70th anniversary of the airline's UK flights, and will see Icelandair move its Heathrow operations to the new Terminal 2 in March. The Icelandair network has expanded rapidly in recent years, with capacity increasing at an average of 15% per year, said senior vice president of marketing and sales, Helgi Mar Bjorgvinsson.

By next summer, the airline will fly to 25 European destinations and 14 cities in North America, after the launch of flights to Portland, Oregon in May. "Half our network is transit traffic," Mr Bjorgvinsson said. "Our key competitive advantage is that Iceland is in between the UK and North America, and we have a lot of capacity for a small domestic market. We have 100 weekly departures from Reykjavik to the US - more than Helsinki, Stockholm and Oslo combined." Icelandair hopes to continue its close relationships with the UK travel trade, with joined activities and trade missions next year, including its latest activity to promote stopovers. The carrier is also updating its fleet, with 16 Boeing 737 MAXs on order, the first to arrive in 2018. Onboard Wi-Fi, currently available on half the network, will be on offer fleet-wide by the end of next year.

5th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Expect consolidation in bed bank sector, says Hotelbeds boss

The boss of Tui-owned Spanish bed bank Hotelbeds has predicted continued consolidation in the sector as tight margins put pressure on suppliers. Speaking to Travel Weekly at World Travel Market, Carlos Munoz, general manager, said he expected there to be failures and buyouts while new players will continue to enter the space. This year saw the collapse of Holiday Brokers, part of the On Holiday Group, and in recent years many bed banks have moved their operations overseas to avail themselves of more advantageous tax regimes. This week saw the announcement of the arrival of Australian wholesaler Excite Holidays' entrance into the UK market. Former Thomas Cook chief Manny Fontenla-Novoa backed supplier Magic Rooms also launched this year.

Munoz said: "With the level of investment needed in technology and contracting it is very difficult to make this a profitable business in the long run. There are plenty of businesses entering the bed bank space, small and medium sized companies. "The investments required can make it unsustainable if you want to compete and make profits unless you have big volumes. Margins are very small in this space. You need to be extremely efficient and have a lot of volume. At some point in time there will be consolidation."

Hotelbeds this week announced it has seen its business grow global by 19% and it now offers 67,000 properties to the trade. Munoz said the planned restructure of parent Tui after the merger of Tui Travel and Tui AG which will see Hotelbeds put in a separate division to the firms' mainstream vertically integrated businesses would underline to the trade that the bed bank is run separately and does not compete with other parts of the business. He dismissed speculation that Tui had structured the merged business with a view to selling businesses outside of its core operators and retailers. He said Tui will continue to run Hotelbeds to maximise value and all options are open as to how that is done. But he said: "What is clear is there has been no conversation around disposal of this business. This has been confirmed internally. Hotelbeds is a business unit of Tui and we will keep developing and performing as we have done in the past."

Hotelbeds division Hotelopia hopes to be continuing to prepare the ground for a launch with new partner EasyJet Holidays by the 2015 turn of year peaks, said Munoz. The firm won the contract in April after current supplier Lowcost Beds opted not to re-tender after its three year contract expired. Lowcost has continued to supply EasyJet Holidays since then pending the switch to Hotelopia. "We are still working on the technology and pricing," said Munoz.

5th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Aer Lingus plans long-haul growth as profits rise

Aer Lingus expects this year's operating profit to top the 2013 level of €61.1 million as it plans more long-haul growth. The forecast came as the Irish carrier reported a 19% rise in third-quarter operating profits to €112.9 million. Revenue in the three months to September 30 was up by 13.9% year on year to €531 million driven by strong short-haul performance and continued long-haul capacity expansion. Chief executive Christoph Mueller said: "Aer Lingus's short-haul traded strongly in a tough environment, with revenue growth increasing by 5.5% in the quarter.

“This is a reflection of the inherent strength of our business model and the success of management actions taken to address the effects of industrial disruption in the second quarter. “In long-haul, we carried nearly a quarter more passengers compared to last year while increasing our load factor and revenue per seat. We target further profitable growth of our long-haul business into 2015. “Our new Dublin to Washington service will be launched in May 2015 and services on existing transatlantic routes will be increased. “This will provide even more connectivity for our passengers and strengthen Aer Lingus's and Dublin's position in traffic between Europe and North America.” He added: “Assuming the current trading environment is maintained, management now expect that Aer Lingus's full-year 2014 operating profit, before exceptional items, will be ahead of the 2013 operating result - €61.1 million.”

An additional leased Airbus A330 will be added to the fleet from next May to operate the new Washington route four times a week. Frequency on the Dublin-San Francisco route will rise from five flights a week to a daily service while the Dublin-Orlando route will rise from three to four flights a week. A Boeing 767 will also be deployed during the 12-week summer 2015 peak to raise capacity on the Shannon-Boston route while a third daily frequency on Dublin-New York will be operated by a 757. Aer Lingus is reassessing the deployment of aircraft supplied to run Virgin Little Red UK domestic services which are being phased out next year.

Aer Lingus passenger carryings edged up by 2.3% last month to 979,000. Long-haul provided the greatest growth with numbers up by 29% to 129,000 over October 2013. But mainstream short-haul numbers dropped by 2.1% to 738,000. Aer Lingus regional operations achieved growth of 8.7% to 112,000 passengers. Overall carryings for the year to October were up by 4.2% to more than 9.6 million.

6th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Thomson to increase number of design stores to 25 by Christmas

Thomson plans to have 25 of its ‘holiday design stores’ open by Christmas, and is seeking a location for its first London shop. The travel giant launched the first of its new-look stores in Bluewater shopping centre in Kent last year and now has 19 such stores; the most recent opened at Meadowhall shopping centre in Sheffield in October. Thomson declined to reveal where the six new stores would be. Doug Glenwright, Tui Travel general manager for retail transformation, said two further stores would open in early 2015 and one was likely to be in London. He said the two Westfield shopping centres – in Stratford and White City – were being considered but it was still “very early days”.

Glenwright said it was important to make the holiday process fun, adding that that hadn’t necessarily been the case in previous years. “If you make it a fun experience, customers will come back,” he said. “In the past there has been too much focus on the process of booking the holiday and not enough on fun.” He also said there had been too much focus on ensuring customers booked on their first visit, rather than letting them go away with a brochure, after which “they will come back and book”. He said the new-generation stores had resonated with customers, adding: “When we replaced two units with one bigger store at Bluewater we set targets and the store outstripped these because we focused on the customer experience.” As well as introducing two new stores, Thomson is also refitting others to give them aspects of the holiday design store concept, such as advice bars, interactive maps and booths.

6th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Kuoni earnings down in 'demanding' global market

Kuoni Group saw operating earnings drop in the first nine months of the year, while describing the global business environment as remaining “very demanding”. Earnings were down to CHF [Swiss franc] 65 million from CHF 79 million in the same period last year. However, net profit was up from CHF 1.5 million to CHF 52.5 million in the period to September 30. The Swiss-based company confirmed that it was in profit during the summer quarter but said: “The global business environment remains very demanding. “For the 2014 financial year as a whole, Kuoni Group expects operating earnings (EBIT) in the range of CHF 85-95 million and net profit at around the previous year’s level.” Kuoni added: “Despite travel warnings for important destinations in Kenya and Thailand, results in the UK market matched the prior year’s.”

Chief executive Peter Meier said: "The FIT business posted positive growth, with hotel room nights booked topping the 10 million mark after nine months for the first time. "The market situation in Scandinavia remains difficult, though we have managed to stabilise average sales prices. "Visa services provider VFS Global reported healthy growth and achieved a significant improvement in operating results.

"The business environment hasn't changed much in recent months and remains very challenging."

6th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

New Aer Lingus service puts Bristol passengers on fast-track to US

Passengers flying from Bristol to the US are being given the option to fast-track their journey via Dublin. Pre-clearance at Dublin airport by US Customs and Border staff means travellers from the southwest airport will be able to avoid delays of up to two hours at security checks on entry to America. The service is being introduced as a result of a link by Aer Lingus Regional from Bristol to Dublin, which will connect to Aer Lingus's new four-times-a-week Dublin to Washington-Dulles service from May 1 next year. The Irish carrier will also operate daily flights from Dublin to San Francisco from next summer and four weekly flights from Dublin to Orlando.

Simon Fagan, chief commercial officer at Stobart Air, which operates the Aer Lingus Regional service, said: "This service is designed to save passengers from Bristol time on their transatlantic travel.

"Now local business and leisure passengers can travel to the American capital of Washington with greater speed and ease." Bristol airport aviation director, Shaun Browne, added: "Washington is mentioned time and time again by passengers as a required destination to be added to the Bristol airport route network. "This is great news, particularly for defence-related industries in the region and the benefits of US pre-clearance via the Dublin transatlantic hub, saving passengers time on arrival in America."

7th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Virgin Holidays to bring iconic v-rooms to the high street

Virgin Holidays is to open its iconic v-room lounges as a new retail concept across the high street next year. The long-haul operator will open eight in key cities across the UK, with the first one likely to be in the north of England in the first quarter of 2015. They will form part of its retail estate which consists of three concepts - the v-room standalone stores, the concessions within Debenhams and House of Fraser and its 'Retail Lite' concept, which are located within Tesco supermarkets. Virgin Holidays operates 60 Debenhams and House of Fraser concessions, all of which are to be refreshed with a new look and feel and more technology next year. It is opening another 10 Retail Lite outlets by the end of the year so it will have a total of 20 going into the January peaks.

Managing director Mark Anderson said of the new high street v-rooms: "This is a new standalone lighthouse concept which will be a beacon for our brand on the high street. "They will be less a shop and more of an experience with more tech, props and amenities. People will be able to buy holidays, but they will be less transactional than our other shops and more a place to relax and a place where customers can immerse themselves in their holiday - an oasis of calm." Anderson said elements of Virgin Holidays v-room lounges such as adult relax zones, kids play areas and green screens enabling customers to put themselves in the holiday moment would feature in the new store, plus lots of new technology. The operator's concierge service and staff with exceptional knowledge will also be available.

"People can't just wander in off the street and use all the amenities but, if they come in and book a holiday, or are a customer with an existing booking, this offers them a unique experience and provides us with retail hubs around the UK which can become beacons for our brand. "The unique thing about selling holidays as opposed to a product like an Apple computer is that they're intangible, so we, as retailers need to make the experience come alive for our customers; make it more fun and more memorable. "It's a way to tease and excite customers about what they are going to be getting when they go away on holiday with us and we'll use all the v-room features and more to do that," he added.

Anderson also revealed that Virgin Holidays was looking to open two new actual v-room lounges at London Heathrow Airport for Virgin Holidays and Virgin Atlantic customers, and at Orlando airport next year as part of its strategic investment plans. He said: "Lounges at both locations are under review. Clearly people like to go to our lounges on their way out to their holiday and they would like to have a v-room to go to on their way back too."

10th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Flybe secures Aer Lingus codeshare for transatlantic services

A new codeshare pact has been agreed between Flybe and Aer Lingus to open access to US and Canada flights via Dublin. The deal will enable Flybe passengers flying from Exeter, Inverness, Southend and Southampton to access Aer Lingus transatlantic services with a single stop in Dublin. The Irish carrier's expanding North Atlantic network includes 10 daily flights to Boston, New York, San Francisco, Orlando, Chicago and Toronto. This codeshare agreement includes Flybe franchise partner flights to the Irish capital from Donegal with Loganair and Flybe's joint operation from Southend with Stobart Air. The agreement means that travellers can gain pre-clearance by US Customs at Dublin airport. The Aer Lingus agreement builds on Flybe's five existing codeshare partnerships with Air France, British Airways, Etihad Airways, Finnair and KLM, along with 17 interline partners including Emirates, Virgin Atlantic, Delta, Air Portugal and Qatar Airways.

Flybe chief commercial officer, Paul Simmons, said: "Our new codeshare agreement with Aer Lingus is another exciting development for Flybe and we are delighted to be working with such an excellent and well-respected airline. "It further demonstrates our commitment to providing seamless connectivity from the regions of the UK, which means passengers do not have to face long road or rail journeys to the UK's south east hub airports." The Irish airline's chief strategy and planning officer Stephen Kavanagh added: "The combination of our services will give both airlines increased network reach and will help Aer Lingus to further develop our transatlantic hub at Dublin to the benefit of customers in the UK and the US."

10th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Airline boss calls for APD to be cut or abolished for children

Air Passenger Duty should be cut or abolished altogether for children, according to BMI Regional chief executive Cathal O'Connell. He urged chancellor George Osborne to act on the aviation tax in his autumn statement on December 3. High APD is holding back the industry, preventing inward investment and discouraging visitors, O'Connell said. "APD in the UK is the highest in the world and a real blow to business as it makes us less competitive," he said. "On average, UK APD is five times higher than the remaining countries in Europe who still charge the tax, while Ireland, Belgium, Denmark, Malta and the Netherlands have scrapped it completely." O'Connell added: "Getting rid of APD for children would be a big step towards helping UK families afford a foreign holiday, but scrapping APD across the board would be a real shot in the arm for the whole economy in the longer term." Broadway Travel product and marketing director, Jason Waldron, backed the call for cutting the cost of holidays by scrapping APD for children. "In just 20 years, APD on a long-haul holiday has soared from £40 to £388 for a family of four. On top of that, children aged 2 years or older are taxed at the same rate as adults," he said. "We think parents deserve to have a great holiday with their children without being hit by unfair APD."

11th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

WTM faces fresh calls to drop fourth day

The body representing overseas tourist offices in the UK is calling for the fourth day of World Travel Market to be dropped. More than half of those (60%) in a poll for the Association of National Tourist Offices and Representatives (Antor) said they did not meet the contacts they had hoped to see on the Thursday of this year's exhibition in London. Of these respondents, 80% added that the exhibition would be more successful run as a three-day event. Exhibitors tried to ensure a high presence of exhibiting partners, yet survey results reported an average of one-third of total exhibiting partners attended on the final day, with some respondents reporting less than one-fifth.

Forty nine members of Antor exhibited at WTM but three quarters only attended on the Thursday because it is a four-day show as opposed to 11% who attended for the events and seminars on offer. Ninety per cent of respondents were exhibitors at the show and more than 75% classified themselves as manager level or above. They all attended on the Monday, 98% on the Tuesday, 98% on the Wednesday and 88% on the Thursday. Antor conducted the study in conjunction with Pata, the Latin America Travel Association, African Travel & Tourism Association and Skal to gain a better understanding of how to maximise on the four-day WTM. Antor worked in conjunction with organiser Reed Exhibitions this year to promote a new event for the final day of WTM in anticipation of drawing more people to the exhibition. However, the voluntary comments on the survey, resulting in a follow-up poll of members, suggest the four-day exhibition would be more suited to three days. This would be in line with international trends for travel trade shows including WTM Africa and WTM Latin America. Pata, Lata and Atta, who also polled their members, expressed an equally strong preference for a three-day WTM London in the future.

The first two and a half days of this year's show resulted in a 7% unaudited increase in visitors, including buyers, a total 82,213 visits compared to 78,035 by 1pm on the third day of the 2013 event. Atta chief executive Nigel Vere Nicoll said: "The first three days were well attended but the anticipated improvement in attendance on Thursday did not materialise. "Africa was dead, with no sign of buyers and sparsely manned stands; indeed the pictures circulated across the web tell the tale. "Many of our exhibiting members, across differing stands in the Africa section, commented that the cost and waste of this fourth day, giving no return whatsoever, is substantial and in no way sustainable. "Indaba, Africa's leading tourism event held in Durban, reduced to three days last year, a move that the industry welcomed.

"Our members urge the organisers of WTM to do the same or face an erosion of exhibitors to other more cost effective options". Pata UK chairman Chris Lee echoed those views and said: "No doubt from our region it was extremely quiet with the exception of a couple of stands whose food, drink and entertainment offerings attracted the student audience. "Only three of Thailand's 80 co-exhibitors attended on Thursday with just a handful of appointments between them – with this in mind, many of our members will not be able to justify keeping the stand open if they continue with a fourth day next year."

Skal London president Paul Hoskins said: "The numbers were very low in our section of Europe - Thursday was hardly worth the effort." Antor chairman Tracey Poggio said: "Antor members would happily support a four day show if the number of visitors on the fourth day was consistent with those on the second day. "However, as already discussed with Reed Exhibitions, who have put an enormous amount of time and effort into increasing visitors on the fourth day, it is preferable for time poor tourist boards to reduce the show into an action packed three-day event. "Antor members understand that reducing the show by a day will not necessarily bring a reduction in the cost of the space." European Tour Operators Association CEO Tom Jenkins suggested using the Thursday for ministers and VIPs to help with stronger networking.

11th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Airport expansion options outlined to aviation minister

The three cases for airport expansion were put before aviation minister Robert Goodwill yesterday ahead of the Airports Commission's three-month public consultation. Two rival plans for expanding Heathrow and one for a second runway at Gatwick have been shortlisted in the consultation after London mayor Boris Johnson's Thames estuary hub proposal was ruled out. The official Heathrow proposal is for a new 3,500-metre third runway constructed to the north-west of the existing site. It would cost around £15.6 billion and be operational by 2025. The airport could then handle 740,000 flights a year, up from 472,000 today. Passenger numbers would be expected to rise from 80 million to 130 million. But former Concorde pilot Jock Lowe has won support for his own consortium's cheaper £12 billion 'Heathrow Hub' concept involving the lengthening the current northern runway to at least 6,000-metres and operating it for both departures and arrivals. Lowe told delegates at the Airport Operators' Association conference in London that it had the advantage of helping to defuse opposition from local residents and would be easier for politicians to 'sell' to the public as 'it's not a third runway'. Lowe added: "Our runway is super-long, super-safe, and cheap." Heathrow chief executive John Holland-Kaye said the 'political wind' had changed and many MPs,

business leaders and residents spoke of ‘when, not if’ Heathrow will expand. He told the Daily Mail he was “relaxed” about which option is eventually chosen, but added: “If the government says it will be the Heathrow Hub, we’d be happy. But if it is between Gatwick and Heathrow, then the answer has to be Heathrow.” Lowe, writing in the Daily Telegraph, said: “Our own independent concept – to extend the existing northern runway and divide it in two – would avoid the need for Heathrow Airport’s third runway and bring no new communities into the noise footprint. “It would also allow for aircraft to land on the western runway extension during the critical early morning period – thereby flying higher over west London – and potentially for the abandonment of night quota flights. “The arrival of the next generation of quieter jets and new technology enabling two-staged, curved and variable approaches would substantially mitigate noise.”

Goodwill told the Aoa conference: “The level of interest in the debate emphasises the importance of the Airports Commission’s work. “Previous attempts to find a solution to the capacity challenge failed. They failed because they used old evidence. “And so they resulted in a lack of consensus. By bringing together a new, better, evidence base, the right decisions will be made. Decisions that will end decades of uncertainty.”

Airports Commission chairman Sir Howard Davies is due to address the conference today (Tuesday).

12th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Public supports new runway at Heathrow or Gatwick, Abta research finds

Almost half (45 %) of the travelling public agree that there should be a new runway at either Gatwick and Heathrow, latest Abta research shows. Just 16% do not welcome either option and 39% remain neutral, according to the study released at the Airports Commission started a three month public consultation into the three shortlisted options. These are third runway at Heathrow, an extension to one of the airport’s current runways, or a second runway at Gatwick. Additional Abta research found that 71% of MPs agree that the UK will be left behind if there is no clear, imminent plan on airport expansion.

Abta chief executive Mark Tanzer said: “It is encouraging that the public and politicians alike recognise the need for increased airport capacity. “With more people welcoming new runways than opposing them the pressure is surely on for the government to take a clear plan forward once the Airports Commission delivers its final recommendation next summer. “There are undoubtedly concerns over noise and environmental impacts, as well as the costs of delivery and these must be openly discussed as part of this consultation. But, in our view the case for additional capacity is overwhelming – and will be fundamental to ensuring vital growth and jobs for the longer term.” Tanzer added: “It’s essential now that we are transparent about the benefits of expansion and mindful of the huge risks we face as a country to our prosperity and competitiveness if urgent action to deliver capacity isn’t prioritised in the next Parliament.” His comments came as commission chairman Sir Howard Davies warned said that making no decision after the general election would pose significant risks to the future of the UK economy. “You could start to see some quite unpleasant things happening from the point of view of the UK economy,” he said. Airlines and businesses could start to “marginalise” London in favour of other airports in Europe if there is insufficient connectivity, he added.

12th November 2014 – Source TTG Digital

Virgin Holidays plans new luxury product

Virgin Holidays is to introduce a new luxury brand and villa complex offering to meet rising customer demand. Managing director Mark Anderson said the new luxury product currently has the working title of Premium Plus and its launch date is planned for next year. He added the aim of the brand was to make luxury trips more available to consumers, a skill that he believes the operator is already well versed in. Anderson said: “We can sell luxury in a less complicated way. “We’ve done a lot of work in those few months really looking at luxury products because we’re a premium brand within that space. “It [the new programme] is trying to take luxury and make it more accessible, particularly around weddings, honeymoons and birthdays.” He said the operator was also working on a Virgin Village concept, which would allow consumers to book a villa with all the usual facilities they require. However, he added that by having a village run by the brand, additional facilities such as a

larger shared swimming pool and shops can be added to give it the Virgin feel. Anderson said: "I want to create something different."

12th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Gold Medal acquisition boosts dnata's half-year sales

The acquisition of Gold Medal by Emirates Group-owned dnata Travel Services helped boost the division's sales in the first half of the year. The expansion of the travel division's international offering with the Gold Medal deal contributed to a "substantial increase" in the unit's underlying net sales of 29% to \$1 billion. Revenue from dnata's Travel Services operation contributed \$238 million, up 161% from the same period last year. Dnata has since acquired Travel 2 parent Stella Travel Services. Dnata's revenue including other operating income for the six months was up from \$1 billion to \$1.2 billion, but overall profit dropped by 26% to \$92 million due to a number of factors including the impact of 80 days of runway improvement work at Dubai international airport which saw dnata handling fewer aircraft. Emirates Group revenues reached \$12.9 billion for the first six months of its 2014-15 financial year, up 12%, with net profit rising by 1% to \$607 million. Net profit at Emirates airline was up 8% year-on-year to \$514 million despite having to temporarily ground part of its fleet due to the runway closure. The Dubai-based airline and travel group said the results showed a "steady performance and growth, despite a challenging business environment marked by ongoing health pandemic concerns, regional conflicts, and weakening global markets".

Chairman and chief executive, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, said: "It is those external threats that we cannot anticipate or directly manage, such as the global economic malaise, the Ebola outbreak, currency fluctuations, and regional conflicts, that could negate our efforts and plans. "These issues appear to be piling up, impacting commercial aviation and travel, but show no signs of speedy resolution.

"Therefore it is critical that we stay agile as we grow. The ability to adapt and act quickly will determine our continued success. "Moving forward, we will keep a watchful eye on these challenges, but continue to focus on our long-term goals and invest in the infrastructure of both Emirates and dnata."

17th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Virgin Atlantic to lease out Little Red Heathrow slots

Virgin Atlantic is to lease out two pairs of valuable Heathrow take-off and landing slots to competitors while it awaits its new fleet of Boeing 787s. The airline, 51% owned by Sir Richard Branson, is in talks to rent out the slots to rival carriers, rather than use them itself. Virgin Atlantic said it does not currently have the aircraft to fill the slots, but plans to use them eventually as it expands, The Sunday Times reported.

The slots have been freed up by the decision to axe its Virgin Little Red domestic airline. It has used the afternoon and evening slots to fly between London and Manchester. The other slots, freed by Little Red's demise, will have to be returned to British Airways as they were part of a European regulatory deal following BA's takeover of BMI.

Virgin Atlantic told the newspaper: "We are planning to lease these on a short-term basis, but they will remain open to us and that gives us options for growth as our new aircraft become available. "The slots in question are not peak slots; they are not well timed for transatlantic flying . . . We still want to see an increase in capacity at peak times." Airline analysts said the decision to relinquish the slots was curious because Virgin's joint owner, Delta Air Lines, was keen to lay on more transatlantic flights. Virgin is upgrading its fleet to include fuel efficient Boeing 787 Dreamliners, with the first arriving last month.

Slots at Heathrow are highly prized. American Airlines paid Cyprus Airways nearly £20 million for a pair of noon take-off and landing slots at the airport in the summer, the report said

18th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

Thomas Cook to use customers in first group-wide marketing campaign

The first group-wide marketing campaign by Thomas Cook is to exploit social sharing as well as advertising to consumers. The 'One' campaign is set to bring the group's strategy of placing the customer at the heart of everything it does to life by incorporating real people. Holidaymakers will be

invited to share their photos on social media platforms, with the images incorporated into future marketing and product collaterals across all channels and markets. The group-wide push, including TV advertising, kicks off in Germany today (Monday) with the UK expected to follow at Christmas to coincide with the peak booking period for summer 2015.

It will run across all communication channels - TV and print media, email marketing and social media – as part of the company’s omni-channel offering in store and online, as well as internal and external communications.

The campaign approach, messaging and look-and-feel will be incorporated into marketing activities across all source countries, although each will be responsible for their own straplines and commercial messages.

Group chief executive, Harriet Green, said: “For the first time in our history as a unified business, we have developed a game-changing communication concept across all our markets that truly differentiates the Thomas Cook Group by using all channels to interact with our customers. “Using the same creative across all markets will allow us to work more efficiently together and achieve better results. “It will also make it easier for our customers to understand the full strength and end-to-end value that travelling with one of our brands brings, coupled with our full innovative offering of services and products.” Chief marketing officer, Remo Masala, added: “The One campaign offers us a fantastic opportunity to fully engage and involve our customers as we look to inspire and excite them with a new visual style and identity based on ‘togetherness’.

“Our aim is to engage with our customers on an emotional level with inspirational content that brings our holidays to life. “We wanted to create stand out with a brand-building message that simply reiterates the great times our customers will have when on holiday with our brands.” The new campaign was designed by Swedish advertising agency Forsman & Bodenfors.

19th November 2014 – Source Travolution

Expedia set to introduce branded airfares in 2015

Branded fares from selected airlines will start to become available from Expedia in 2015. The online travel giant has teamed up with Amadeus to create a standardised solution that allows participating airlines to seamlessly offer their branded fares to users. The company plans to go live with selected carriers by the middle of next year with more coming joining by the end of 2015. Expedia global tour and transport senior vice president Greg Schulze said: “Price remains the single most important attribute for our customers when searching for their flights. “However, when it comes to actually selecting flights, we are seeing customers pay closer attention to features such as baggage inclusion, seat selection and changeability as critical variables. “The challenge with branded fares when customers see it at scale across multiple airlines will be ensuring they can make heads or tails of the increasing number of competitive offers. “Instead of choosing from a few dozen flights that suit your needs from point A to point B with the times and airports you want, you’ll now see a whole set of branded fares on top of that.” He added: “The role Expedia has played since its inception is turning all of the data across the travel market into a set of understandable choices for customers, turning travel chaos into travel magic. “The work we’re doing on branded fares in partnership with Amadeus and the airlines will help the industry innovate our way to that magic for our joint customers all around the world.” Holger Taubmann, distribution senior vice president at Amadeus, said: “This will allow airlines to seamlessly distribute their branded fares through one of the largest full-service online travel agencies in the world.

“Merchandising and retailing are vital elements in order for travel players to better meet to the needs of the traveller and to unlock additional revenues in a rapidly changing market, and this partnership is in line with our vision to make these revenues available for our customers. “We believe this standardised solution will be hugely beneficial for the industry.”

20th November 2014 – Source TTG Digital

Norwegian finalises Prestige Cruise Holdings purchase

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings has completed the acquisition of the parent company of Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises for \$3.03 billion. The amount paid for Prestige Cruise Holdings includes both cash and stock. Kevin Sheehan, president and chief executive officer of Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, said: “While for years we have competed successfully with our one

brand in an increasingly consolidated industry, our acquisition of Prestige creates a new cruise operator with a range of complementary offerings as diversified as any in the industry. “We now shift our focus from planning for the successful integration of these organisations to the implementation phase, with an organisational structure that allows for the realisation of significant synergies while maintaining the integrity of the Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises brands that have made each a success in their respective segment.”

Frank Del Rio, chief executive officer of Prestige Cruise Holdings, added: “Together, we will further our brands’ position as leaders in the upper-premium and luxury cruise markets by continuing to deliver an exceptional onboard experience for our guests, and expand the reach of both Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises throughout the world.” The new Norwegian will operate a combined total of 21 ships with five more set to be introduced over the next five years.

21st November 2014 – Source TTG Digital

Amazon to move into travel sector?

Internet behemoth Amazon is reportedly preparing to launch its own travel service. According to Skift.com <<http://skift.com/2014/11/20/exclusive-amazon-to-get-into-hotel-booking-with-launch-of-travel-site/>> , the retailer has been sounding out hotels with the new proposition set to launch on January 1.

The initial roll-out looks set to focus only on hotels. Skift reported that hotels signed up to Amazon’s new service would load up details onto an Amazon network and would then pay the US-firm 15% commission.

21st November 2014 – Source Travolution

Global travel giants lead in delivering personalised mobile experiences to UK users

Booking.com offers the best mobile travel experience in UK travel sector followed by Expedia, according to a benchmark report published by EPiServer. The report looked at the ten most popular travel sites in the UK and scored their Apple and Android apps and mobile websites on 25 factors. The study found many of the most popular sites are failing to deliver a consistent experience across devices, despite widespread adoption of mobile. David Bowen, e-commerce product manager at EPiServer, said: “Mobile has become a disruptor in the digital commerce sector. “In order to differentiate in what is fast-becoming a mobile-first sector, travel brands must connect their content with the commerce experience, leading visitors seamlessly through the entire customer journey from search, to reviews, to transaction. “There is a thirst among consumers for researching and booking travel via a range of mobile devices. “The challenge for brands is to deliver personalised content for every visitor, and efficiently being able to provide the same, quality experience regardless of whether they visit you through an app, mobile site or desktop to keep them engaged on the path to purchase.” The EPiServer report wanted to find out whether brands are “meeting consumer demand for rich, personalised experiences and seamless journeys from browsing to booking”. It found Booking.com, which came out marginally ahead of Expedia with a score of 72%, offered “clear navigation and design, scoring highly for ease of use, the ability to find essential information and support for touchscreen gestures”. However, the top two were said to be rare examples of firms providing a seamless and quality experience across devices. EPiServer said brands were focusing attention on just one or two devices, and giving far less than satisfying customer experiences to others, particularly Android tablets. Scores from the 10 travel companies varied from 72% to 31%, with an overall average score of 54%.

The scores for the ten travel brands: 1. Booking.com - 72% 2. Expedia - 71% 3. TripAdvisor - 67% 4. Thetrainline.com - 54% 5. LateRooms - 52% 6. EasyJet - 51% 7. SkyScanner - 51% 8. British Airways - 49% 9. lastminute.com - 40% 10. Ryanair - 31%

24th November 2014 – Source Travel Weekly

French all-business-class carrier 'seeking Gatwick slots'

A French airline running all-business class transatlantic flights is rumoured to be seeking rights to fly from Gatwick. The Sunday Times business section Prufrock column claimed La Compagnie is seeking runway slots, citing a source at the airport. The carrier started all-business class flights from Paris Charles de Gaulle to Newark in July using a single Boeing 757-200 six times a week. The

aircraft is configured with 74 seats which recline to almost lie-flat position. Fares start at around \$1,800 return, undercutting established premium services by more than half. Deputy CEO Peter Luethi told USA Today: "The proposition we have now ... is not to be the best business class, but the best in price point. "That obviously is very attractive to independent business travellers that don't have the benefit of a large corporation's discounts. "It's this kind of customer we try to attract (with) comfort at a reasonable price." Previous attempts to run all-business class services between the UK and US resulted in the failures of Silverjet, Eos and Maxjet.

25th November 2014 – Source TTG Digital

Try before you buy? Thomas Cook to launch virtual reality in UK stores

Thomas Cook has announced the next stage in its plan to feature immersive virtual reality (VR) content. Following a successful trial in August at Thomas Cook's concept store at Bluewater shopping centre in Kent, customers visiting selected outlets in the UK will be given a closer look at holidays via a head-mounted VR display unit. These VR "taster" experiences feature a variety of destinations such as a helicopter tour of Manhattan, a trip to the pool at a Sentido resort in Rhodes and a visit to the restaurant in a SunConnect resort in Cyprus. As part of Cook's multi-channel retailing strategy, known as Omni-channel retailing, holiday-oriented content will also be available on the company's website to complement the current, standard video content. Marco Ryan, who was recently appointed chief innovation officer at Thomas Cook, said: "Thomas Cook has a long history of innovation, continually exploring ways to offer unique experiences to the customer. "Our use of VR is set to further enhance the in-store shopping experience for Thomas Cook customers, allowing them to make informed decisions." The technology will become available at Bluewater and two other UK locations yet to be confirmed. Shops in Germany and Belgium will also be trialling the virtual reality headsets.

26th November 2014 – Source TTG Digital

Thomas Cook chief Harriet Green steps down

Thomas Cook chief executive Harriet Green has stepped down as the company reveals strong full-year results. In a statement, Cook said Green would be replaced by chief operating officer Peter Fankhauser who would take over "with immediate effect". "The transformation of Thomas Cook into a company with a market capitalisation of just under £2 billion and a share price of over 130 pence is one I have been proud to lead. I always said that I would move on to another company with fresh challenges once my work was complete. That time is now. I wish all of the team at this re-energised company continued success, as they move to the next phase of the company's development", Green said. Shares in the company fell 18% following the announcement, partly driven by Cook's more measured outlook for 2015.

Green joined Thomas Cook two years ago when the company's share price had fallen to 14 pence and it had a market capitalisation of £148 million. Her remit was to transform the company, placing it on a sound financial footing with a solid operational team able to compete in the consumer travel market. Green's replacement, Peter Fankhauser has held a number of senior roles over the last 13 years at Cook, and was promoted to chief operating officer in November 2013, "in recognition", Cook said, "of his success in turning around the UK business". He will be supported by Michael Healy, who will continue to serve as group financial officer and Christoph Debus, chief air travel officer. Commenting, Fankhauser said: "I feel very honoured to be leading this business which means so much, to so many people. I am determined to work with all our great colleagues worldwide to build on Harriet's achievements, continuing to deliver great holidays for consumers and good returns for investors." Fankhauser has pledged that there will be "no change" to the Thomas Cook strategy following Green's departure. Frank Meysman, chairman of Thomas Cook added: "Harriet has had a highly positive impact on this company. We emerge from her transformation stronger, with a clear strategy, world-class leadership team, updated brand, and a renewed focus on the customer. The succession plan she devised will now take effect and the new chief executive, Peter, will drive the company forward as we focus on winning the commercial battle against other operators."