

UK OFFICE

March 2017 REPORT

**Prepared by: Venessa Alexander
UK Director**

Tour Operators

- **Profil Rejser, Denmark** – During the Discover America Denmark workshop, we met with Charlotte Lindholm, Product Manager. She advised that they were seeing good growth for Florida and Bahamas twin centres and also cruise is proving popular. Charlotte mentioned that they were trying to push pre/post cruise stays in our area, so I gave her a destination overview. Bookings to Florida are generally flat and they are being affected by the exchange rates. Customers are booking later as well, but Trump doesn't seem to have affected their business to the US. Since our meeting we have provided Charlotte with images, video, 360 video and maps.
- **My Cruise, Denmark** – We met with Gabriella Blomroos, Product Manager who suggested that Florida was doing well overall. She was looking for some recommendations for pre/post cruise, so we offered some suggestions. Since our meeting we have provided images, links for video and copy.
- **Classic Golf, Denmark** – We had a meeting with Christine Faaborg-Andersen who was wanting some recommendations for golf and other attractions in our area. We offered a destination overview including the Dali museum as they already feature the Barcelona Dali museum is one of their other itineraries.
- **USA Rejser, Denmark** – We met with Christian Willumsen who mentioned that they are seeing more requests for the west coast of Florida compared to previous years and this is reflected in more bookings to our area. Due to exchange rates, customers are downgrading their hotel. Naples and Sarasota are seeing growth as they offer good hotel rates. They are also seeing growth for Florida and Bahamas twin centres. Christian suggested that they would like to get their sales staff on a Fam trip to Florida and would be happy to fly to the UK to attend if departing from there.
- **Gold Medal** – We met with Ross Sinclair who advised that overall they are seeing growth to the US, despite challenges such as exchange rates and Trump. He advised that room nights to our area were generally up, however they were seeing their Thomas Cook numbers declining. He also suggested that the last 6 weeks were up year on year. He mentioned that he will be visiting Orlando at the end of May and we offered our assistance if he wanted to stay a few extra days to view product in St. Pete/Clearwater.

- **Trailfinders** – A meeting was held with Melloney Styles to have a general catch up and advise of all that is new in our area. Melloney advised that sales from January to mid March to the USA were down overall by around 10-15% and that Florida was around 10% down year on year based on comparable room night stats. Melloney felt this was likely due to the low exchange rate as well as the uncertainty over Brexit and other elements such as terrorism worries. We discussed the forthcoming co-op marketing campaign that was due to start as well as the fact that Trailfinders have now added a 5th property (Postcard Inn) in our area to their 2017/2018 brochure. We have since provided Melloney with an update on The Don CeSar's new ownership and a link to our new imagery for future use.
- **America As You Like It** – Met with Maggi Smit and Cath Pusey from America As You Like It for a general meeting. We were advised that Florida is still a great destination for their clients who tend to do a twin-centre holiday with Orlando or Kissimmee and the beaches. AAYLI use receptives to book their properties and utilise Hotelbeds, GTA & Tourico and so have a wide range of properties on offer throughout our area. Cath discussed the possibility of a joint campaign with the likes of Kissimmee and Tampa and will revert back with suggestions of activity including their Destination of the Month Feature.

Meetings/Training/Events

- **Hayes and Jarvis** – We visited their office to participate in their Florida training day. We were joined by; Visit Florida, Tampa, Naples, Fort Myers, Fort Lauderdale, HAT marketing, Florida Keys, Miami, Universal, Sarasota, Kissimmee and Kennedy Space Center. Whilst the format of the day was a free flow of agents, we were able to provide one-to-one sessions with approximately 20 of their sales agents to give them an overview of the destination and what's new for those who were more familiar with our area. We also distributed brochures and giveaway.
- **Visit Tampa Bay** – We had a meeting with Josephine Ando to discuss opportunities to work together to promote the Icelandair flight to Tampa. She was keen to partner on joint FAM trips, trainings and sales calls with key partners in the Scandinavian markets. We are awaiting a marketing plan from Icelandair following our meeting with them at Mid Atlantic in January before we confirm our plans.
- **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment/VSPC VIP Event 2017** – Preparations continue on our annual joint VIP event that will take place at Amberley Castle on the 4th May. A meeting was held with the events co-ordinator to discuss possible activities for guests on the arrival day as well as arranging menu's etc.
- **Visit Florida/Ocean Holidays Appreciation Dinner** – We attended their appreciation dinner for key members of the Ocean Holidays team including Product and Marketing, as well as Harry and George Hastings, Managing Directors. We were joined by Fort Myers, Naples, Universal and SeaWorld. The evening provided a great networking opportunity

and we were also able to provide a short update on our destination. We met the new Product Manager, Matt Rains, who starts the role in April.

- **Visit Florida/Virgin Holidays Appreciation Dinner** – We partnered with Visit Florida and other Florida partners to host the annual Virgin Holidays Appreciation Dinner, which this year was held at Prezzo in Crawley. The event was a fantastic success and was very well attended with Virgin Holidays staff from the departments of contracting, product, finance and marketing. Other Florida partners included, Miami, Universal, SeaWorld, Naples, Sanibel & Ft. Myers, Simon Shopping Malls, Disney and Merlin Entertainment.
- **Discover America Denmark** – We attended their annual workshop in Copenhagen, which was attended by approx. 100 sales agents, product and marketing managers and 40 media. The event consisted of scheduled appointments as well as a free flow of attendees in the evening. We were able to offer an overview of St. Pete/Clearwater and distribute brochures and giveaways. We also supported the event by providing a goody bag, which formed part of a grand Florida prize.
- **Ferie for Alle, Denmark** – As part of Florida Beaches, we attended the annual travel show in Ferie, Denmark, which is the largest consumer holiday show and has been taking place every year since 1997. The fair comprises 13 exhibition halls, two of which are dedicated to international exhibitors, one European and one for long-haul destinations. This year the show received 59,143 visitors during three show days. Florida Beaches had a booth on the Discover America stand within the USA section of the show and the visitors to the stand had a great interest in the destinations, many of them had already booked their flights and were travelling within the next few months. Generally, most of the visitors were going on a fly drive visiting several Florida destinations, and were seeking hotel and activity recommendations. Others were planning their trip for next year and were wanting more information and inspiration. During the show we distributed brochures and maps to the consumers.
- **Swanson's Travel Show, Sweden** – As part of Florida Beaches, we participated in their annual consumer show at their office in Osby, which is one of the largest shows in Scandinavia. The event was held on Saturday 4th March and welcomed 1,250 visitors. As in previous years, each exhibitor had a display booth providing destination information, and visitors were also able to pre-book appointments with Swanson's sales staff. Throughout the day, there were performances from a band which attracted visitors to the tent where the Florida Beaches booth was located. Due to the location of the Florida Beaches booth in the middle of the tent, the stand was well visited and there was great interest in the destination. A large number of the visitors had booked their holidays with the sales staff at the show and were now looking for information and inspiration on activities available. Throughout the day we distributed brochures and maps, and the show was well received. Since the show, Anders Persson advised that 105 bookings were made during the day, of these 35 were to Florida. From the questionnaire they did on the day in which 36% of attendees participated in, it was concluded that 78% of people are planning on travelling to the US either this year or next, and Florida and West Coast were their top choices of destination.

- **FDM Travel Show, Denmark** - In its fourth consecutive year, FDM Travel USA was held at the Docken Hall, located in Copenhagen North Harbour, and attended by approximately 4,000 members of the public throughout the day. The Florida Beaches booth was located close to the FDM sales agents and was very well visited. There was a very good level of consumers who attended the show, all of whom were very interested in the US. Many had already booked a round trip to Florida, visiting all of the Florida Beaches destinations, and were seeking inspiration on activities available and recommendations for hotels.

TRADE LIAISON -

- **VSPC February campaign/Virgin Holidays** – During the campaign, we received a weekly report from James Killick to show how the destination was performing. A homepage banner was added to their website and additional internal communications were sent to their call centre agents and retail stores. Also, St. Pete/Clearwater was featured as their ‘Destination Focus’ in their retail stores for one of the weekends. Some of the funds allocated to discount one holiday per day by £1000 were not used by Virgin Holidays as they didn’t receive any qualifying bookings, so this was invested into further additional impressions for TV and Cinema. On the final weekend of the campaign, Beauty and the Beast was launched in cinemas across the UK, so we were able to invest the money in further impressions during this film. We will await final results in due course. In addition we have received a proposal from Nicole Gibson for their Florida campaign, which forms part of our agreement with them for the VSPC February consumer campaign. The activity includes; Press, Digital Escalator Panels, Digital Display adverts, Social Media and a dedicated Florida landing page. We have agreed our participation and will wait for proofs to be approved.
- **Bookabed** – We have now received the final results from our January campaign with Bookabed and these are as follows:
 - A total of 401 room nights were booked during the campaign period (which was extended for us free of charge from 01 Jan – 27 Feb) and are pacing up really well versus last year which saw around 280 room nights booked in the same period last year
 - The average length of stay has reduced slightly from 7 nights to 5 nights per booking
 - The B2C email sent to 29,200 consumers on the 27th January showed 14.16% unique open rate and a total of 66 clicked through to view the email
 - The Ireland Trade emails sent on both the 26th January (568) and the 14th February (570) both received over 20% in unique open rates but only 2 agents clicked through to view the email in depth
 - The UK trade emails again sent on both the 26th January (2,033) and the 14th February (1,779) received 21% and 19% in unique open rates respectively
 - The Facebook Destination of the Month post reached a total of 1115 and the Visit USA Ireland Facebook page reached a total of 188

- **Gold Medal Travel** – We have now received a retail proposal from Gold Medal to run a campaign from April until the end of May. The campaign will include:
 - A homepage banner ad on their trade page
 - An e-shot inclusion – A4 dedicated destination newsletter
 - A full-page ad in the Gold Medal Trade Magazine
 - A dedicated agent incentive giveaway in Travel Weekly
 - Full page in the Florida preview brochure
 - A3 printed posters to be included in store
 - A dedicated full-page focus in the dedicated mini Florida magazine
 - Social media posts on both Facebook and Twitter.

- **Icelandair, UK Office** – We had a call with Mike Reynolds, Account Manager, to discuss opportunities to grow the business into St. Pete/Clearwater to support their new flight into Tampa. He advised that they currently only work with a couple of tourist boards and would be keen to work with us. Their fiscal year runs January to December. He mentioned that they would be happy to offer fam trip seats with a possible stop-over in Iceland, which could target UK and Ireland sales agents or Product Managers, as well as attendees from Scandinavia. Mike said that searches to the US from the UK were -25% and they are seeing challenges with competitive airfares from Norwegian into the US. Approx. 49% of their business is direct and is bookable online. Booking.com is their provider for accommodation. They offer free stop overs up to 7 nights on any route year round. They have previously worked with Barrhead Travel for marketing, which tends to be offering seats for fam trips in exchange for marketing exposure. They would be keen to look at possible joint marketing in the future. We suggested that we would like to update the destination page on their website, so Mike is going to advise who would manage this from their side. We will follow up with Mike in due course.

- **VSPC/Kissimmee/Tampa/SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment** – Work continues on the UK training mission due to take place from the 24th – 28th April. We shall be visiting Gold Medal Travel in Preston, Thomas Cook and Stella Travel Services in Glasgow, British Airways Holidays Call Centre in Newcastle, USAirtours and Ocean Florida in Essex. Final preparations for the Tour Operator dinner in London have also been confirmed. Guests at the dinner will include Tour Operators, Airline Personnel and Attraction Ticket Wholesalers.

- **Lusso** – Linda Bellis contacted us to advise that she is organising a FAM trip for 8 agents to Florida, which will also include some time in St. Pete/Clearwater. The agents won't be staying in our area, however we offered recommendations including; Caladesi Island, St. Pete Beach, Treasure Island, downtown St. Petersburg, and Clearwater Beach. We also arranged for some brochures, maps and giveaways to be sent to their office ahead of their trip this month.

- **Thomas Cook** – We have received a proposal from Andrew Pickering for a Florida campaign. The activity will include; a dedicated Florida landing page, digital banners across their website, online retargeting, and Florida Beaches mini e-brochure. We have confirmed our participation. We have now provided Kelly Munday, Campaign Support Manager, with images, copy and logos for the activity and will await proofs to be received.

- **British Airways Holidays** – We have confirmed our participation for their Florida training day in Newcastle in April. This will be ahead of the launch of their Florida campaign. We spoke with Keri Mulqueen, who advised that bookings for 2017 travel were +38% vly, so were pleased with the performance. In the past couple of weeks, they have seen a peak in bookings for travel in August. We gave a destination update including information on the Wyndham Grand, Don Cesar and Sirata, and have arranged a follow up meeting for April. We have received a brief from Geminie Patel ahead of the Florida campaign. We have provided our key messages, logos and images and will await artwork.
- **Tesco Promotion** – The Tesco magazine and online promotion in partnership with Ocean Florida is now in situ for the month of March and will run until the beginning of April.
- **British Airways** - We are currently in the planning stages of arranging the joint fam trip that we will be escorting in partnership with BA from 24th – 27th September. Accommodation has been secured at The Tradewinds Island Grand and we will be working on the invitations and itinerary in the coming weeks.
- **Expedia** – We have agreed a marketing campaign which will include advert placements across their portfolio of brands, as well as a dedicated landing page. The activity will launch mid-April and will run for approximately 2 months. We have returned the signed agreement and will provide assets as required.
- **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment/VSPC Mega Fam** – We have received offers of accommodation following the solicitation, which was sent last month to our hotel partners. We have now confirmed rooms at Sunset Vistas Beachfront Suites for the group. Work will continue in the following months to finalise an itinerary.
- **American Holidays/Experience Kissimmee/VSPC** – We have confirmed an in house staff incentive to win shopping vouchers (for each booking made to include St. Pete/Clearwater) with the sales team of American Holidays. This will run in conjunction with the co-op marketing campaign we are doing with Experience Kissimmee but this is not part of the joint campaign, it is a stand alone incentive we are running to increase our sales during this period. We have also approved further campaign creative this month.
- **Trailfinders** – We provided Tiffany Cope, Marketing Executive with images for Sirata and Zamora for use on their website. We also received the offer landing page for approval, which has gone live this month, and forms part of the marketing campaign. We have also received the proofs for print, which have been approved and will be distributed on the 26th and 27th March in various publications.
- **Barrhead Travel** – We have now approved the remaining pieces of artwork for the campaign including the radio promotion, which will be live in March. Results will be provided at the end of the campaign.
- **Visit Orlando/Norwegian Fam trip** – Rukhsana Timmis approached us to see if we would like to support a Fam trip that they are organising with Havard at Norwegian for September. This would be a sales agent trip for agents based in Norway and would

incorporate Universal, Orlando and SeaWorld. We are liaising with the US office and a solicitation for accommodation has been sent to our partners.

- **American Sky** – Further approval of creative relating to our joint co-op marketing campaign that was launched last month with American Sky has been signed off. Additional activity will take place in April and May.
- **Funway Holidays** – The campaign that launched last month and which is currently in place will continue through to April.
- **TUI/Travelopia** – The joint co-op marketing proposal we received is still being considered and we hope to have a response from Experience Kissimmee in the coming weeks with the plan being to launch in May, if agreed.
- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners/Visit Florida** – We have sent Linda Dixey 4 tickets for the Clearwater Marine Aquarium, which will be used as part of the prize for the campaign we are participating in with Lorraine Magazine. Also approved banner ads and e-newsletters as part of the campaign.
- **Holiday Genie** – Following on from our meeting last month, St. Pete/Clearwater was featured as part of a multi-centre with Orlando on their e-newsletter. This activity was free of charge.
- **Hayes and Jarvis** – Isla King, Destination Executive advised that they are planning a Fam trip for their sales agents to Florida in May and will be staying in St. Pete/Clearwater for 3 nights. We are awaiting for their accommodation to be confirmed before we assist with their itinerary.
- **Visit Florida/Virgin Holidays Retail** – We have confirmed our participation for their Florida training day in April at their Virgin Atlantic office in Crawley. This was originally scheduled for December but was postponed due to availability of Virgin staff.
- **Visit Florida/Travel Counsellors Training day** – We have confirmed our attendance for the Travel Counsellors training day which will take place next month in Manchester. The day will consist of scheduled training sessions and networking lunch.
- **Visit USA, Ireland** – We have provided Clodagh with our logos which will be used for the invites for the Cork and Dublin roadshows in May which we are attending.
- **Visit USA, UK** – We have added details and an image on the website of the new Wyndham Grand Clearwater.
- **Premier Holidays** – We have received a request from Samantha Turner for images. We have provided her with images and video for use on their website and brochure.

- **Consumer Request** – We were contacted by Peter Hamilton as he wanted some recommendations for accommodation in Clearwater Beach for April. We have offered some suggestions and our assistance for future queries.
- **Virgin Holidays Retail** – We were contacted by Rachel Johnston, Retail Consultant in their Carlisle store, who is planning on staying in St. Pete/Clearwater in August for holiday. We provided her with contact details for travel trade rates for accommodation and attractions. We have also offered recommendations on things to do whilst in our area.
- **Visit USA, Ireland** – We have received the February monthly report regarding traffic to their website during 1st – 28th February 2017 compared to the previous year;
 - 1414 website sessions +212%
 - 1262 users +214%
 - 286 organic visitors +53%
 - 1088 direct visitors +936%
 - 3524 page views +163%
 - Ave time on page 59s versus 54s last year.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

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MARKET INTELLIGENCE:

1 March 2017, Source TravelMole

US flight searches 'fall off a cliff'

Searches for flights to major US cities this summer are down by more than half compared to last year, according to fares comparison site Kayak. Orlando and Tampa searches are down 58%, Fort Lauderdale has dropped 57% and Miami is down 52%, it said. Searches for San Diego are down 43%, Las Vegas has dropped 36% and Los Angeles has fallen 32%. However, Kayak said airfares were holding firm, although hotel prices for stays in June to August in Vegas are down by an average of 39%. In San Francisco they have dropped 34% and in New York rates are down 32%. Price of flights to many popular European destinations have also dropped for summer 2017, according to Kayak. It said fares to Ibiza have fallen by 32%, despite it being the fifth most searched-for world-wide destination by Brits. Fares to Faro in Portugal have fallen by a fifth, but the biggest flight price drops in Europe are to Pula in Croatia, which have fallen 43% due to the launch of a new flight from Heathrow by British Airways. Many perennially popular resorts have also seen their prices slashed. Fares to Alicante and Mallorca are both down 19%, whilst Malaga has seen average prices for flights fall by 17%, it said. However, Kayak said flights to Mexico City were 'the bargain of the summer', down by 39% on average. Fares to Rio de Janeiro are also down, by 23%, but this is

largely because they were inflated last summer when it hosted the Olympics. An increase in flights to Singapore has led to a 20% drop in air fares, said Kayak, while prices to New Zealand are down 22%.

7 March 2017, Source TravelMole

Trump reissues travel ban

President Donald Trump has issued a new travel ban but this time Iraq has been excluded. The new executive order comes into force on March 16 and places a 90-day ban on people from six mainly Muslim nations - Iran, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Green Card holders from the named countries will not be affected by the new order. The order shuts down the US refugee programme for 120 days, giving the federal government time to develop 'extreme vetting' procedures. But the new directive lifts a blanket ban on all Syrian refugees. The previous order, which was announced without warning and then blocked by a federal court, caused confusion at airports and mass protests across the US. US Travel Association president and CEO Roger Dow said the US travel trade supports efforts to bolster national security and said the Trump administration 'deserves some credit for the substantially more cautious and deliberate introduction of the revised executive order'. "Cabinet officials were on the right track with public statements welcoming lawful visa holders into the US," he said. "Unfortunately, it doesn't appear that the administration fully seized the opportunity to differentiate between the potential security risks targeted by the order and the legitimate business and leisure visitors from abroad who support 15.1 million American jobs. "Clearly this revised order is very encouraging news if you're looking to come to the US from Iraq. The question remains whether the revised order did enough to mollify the prospective traveller from Canada, Europe, or elsewhere around the world who may have been put off by the initial travel ban. If undecided voters need to hear certain things to be motivated to get out and vote, then the same is true for undecided travellers." Business travel body, the GBTA, agreed the revised ban is an improvement over the January 27 version as it is narrower in scope and is clearer about travellers who are not subject to the ban. "The specific exemption for legal permanent residents, dual nationals and current visa holders will help mitigate confusion for the international travelling public," said Michael W. McCormick, GBTA executive director and COO. "Any increased restrictions on passenger travel must be based in safety and security to ensure that the ability to travel is not impeded unnecessarily. It will remain a focus of the business travel industry to hold disruptions to a minimum, and we will continue to monitor the implementation of this ban closely." He said the GBTA is currently polling its global membership to assess the impact on business travel of the revised executive order.

8 March 2017, Source Travelbiz

Virgin selling tickets for special 'Ant and Dec' package

Virgin Holidays is selling tickets for a special package holiday to Orlando in partnership with Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway. The final show in the ITV series will take place at the Magic Kingdom at Disney World Florida on Saturday April 8. Regular customers can

join competition winners on a special package from April 4-9 for up to four people, priced at £999 per person. It includes London Gatwick to Orlando return economy flights on a specially chartered aircraft, access to the v-room before departure, accommodation at Disney's Pop Century Resort, car hire and park entry. Strictly limited numbers are now available to book for the next two weeks. Disney Destinations International's vice president of sales and marketing Peter Welch said: "It will be a British TV first and we can't wait to make TV history with the Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway and Virgin Holidays teams and bring Disney magic into UK homes."

17 March 2017, Source TravelMole

Florida governor takes tourism fight to TV

Florida Gov. Rick Scott is stepping up his dispute with Republican lawmakers in a last ditch bid to safeguard Visit Florida's budget for tourism marketing. Scott has filmed a 30-second TV ad which will air across the state next week. In it he calls out 'Tallahassee politicians who don't get it' referring to opponents who are seeking to cut the state tourism marketing agency's budget by 70% following a recent House vote. "More than a million Florida families rely on jobs in our tourism industry and are threatened with this massive cut," Gov. Scott said at the time. "They don't understand how jobs are created," Scott says in the ad, arguing that a 2% drop in tourism would mean the loss of about 28,000 jobs. The clampdown on Visit Florida was sparked by criticism over a \$1 million payment to rapper Pitbull to promote Florida, which the agency refused to make public. It eventually led to the resignation of then CEO Will Secombe. A Save Florida Tourism online campaign has been set up to fight the changes, asking supporters to share key facts about the benefits tourism brings to the state.

18 March 2017, Source Travelbiz

Brexit travel effects: Everything you wanted to know about holidays after UK leaves the EU

The UK is in the departure lounge, destination unknown. Simon Calder tackles the difficult and unanswered questions about the impact of Brexit on travellers. Will we lose the right to cheap flights? The no-frills revolution which began in 1995 has seen the UK's easyJet and its Irish rival Ryanair become the giants of budget aviation. Both airlines have vast pan-European networks that take advantage of the "open skies" arrangement that allows any carrier to fly on any route within the EU. This may continue, but Willie Walsh, chief executive of IAG — which owns British Airways, Aer Lingus and the Spanish airline Iberia — said: "I fear Europe will see this as an opportunity to damage the UK. "The idea we're just going to go in and say 'here's what we want, now give it to us,' is naive." Ryanair, whose biggest nation for operations is Britain, campaigned strenuously for a Remain vote in the EU Referendum. Last year Michael O'Leary, the chief executive of Europe's biggest budget airline, warned: "Britain has no negotiation position whatsoever. You file the Article 50 in March, you walk off a cliff in two years' time." Both easyJet and Ryanair are likely to set up subsidiaries — easyJet in Europe, Ryanair in the UK — in the hope that they can continue to fly more or less as they do now. But it is possible that Italy, for example, with a weak

national carrier in the shape of Alitalia, might block open skies for post-Brexit Britain. Bilateral treaties would need to be negotiated, adding a vast amount of complexity and cost. It could even impact transatlantic flights. UK-US open skies are a subset of the European Union's access arrangements, and may need to be renegotiated. But John Holland-Kaye, chief executive of Heathrow, believes: "We do have a strong negotiating position. "In aviation there is a consensus to maintain open skies and common standards. The government sees aviation as the enabler to all other industrial sectors." How will border formalities change on trips to Europe? With an EU passport, as the British travel document currently is, there are currently minimal formalities. If you're travelling to Europe by ferry or train, you just need to show your UK passport. Airlines have to collect "advance passenger information" to provide to national governments for security purposes, but the process is light touch. And of course British passport holders can use the "fast-track" lanes for EU citizens and a few other lucky nationalities. But after Brexit, red tape for travellers is likely to get significantly more tangled, with UK passport holders needing to apply online to visit Europe. The European Commission has ambitious plans for a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). This is aimed at nationalities who currently don't need visas — including UK citizens after Brexit. The plan is largely to emulate the Esta scheme that the US set up in the wake of 9/11 to evaluate prospective visitors. According to the latest proposals, you will also need to answer questions "relating to public health risks, criminal records, previous refusals of entry/an order to leave the territory of a Member State". Your data will then be compared a whole range of security databases before a decision is made about whether you can apply for entry. Having been granted permission, your problems are probably only just beginning. The Commission is also proposing an entry-exit system (EES) that "will apply to non-EU nationals, both those that require a visa and those that are exempted, travelling to the Schengen area." Travellers will have to submit to fingerprint checks and to having their photograph taken. This will increase the cost as well as complexity of holidays and business trips. Besides tougher passport control, travellers can expect more scrutiny from customs officials, both travelling to Europe and returning home. The "blue channel" may cease to exist, and strict limits re-imposed on goods that can be taken across borders.

21 March 2017, Source Travelbiz

Brightline: High-speed rail travel will arrive in Florida this summer

The new 125mph trains will cut the travel time between Miami and Orlando to three hours by 2018. Rail travel in Florida is on track to be transformed this summer with new 125mph trains running north from Miami from July. The express train is known as Brightline. Unlike the existing Amtrak service, it is a privately funded initiative. The southern terminus is a brand-new station downtown Miami, called MiamiCentral; existing passenger rail links are a long way from the city centre. Trains will reach Fort Lauderdale in 30 minutes and West Palm Beach — close to President Trump's "Florida White House," his Mar-a-Lago property — in an hour. A high-speed extension to Orlando International Airport will follow next year, cutting the journey between the two cities to just three hours — compared with the driving time, on a good day, of four hours. Existing Amtrak trains take nearly six hours. Five trains are being built for the service, called BrightBlue, BrightPink, BrightGreen, BrightOrange and

BrightRed. Brightline promises: “We’ll have frequent departures to meet your needs throughout the day and evening so that you can have lots of flexibility. “During morning and evening rush hour or other peak travel times, you can be sure that we will have frequent departures to meet your needs.” The trains will be powered by a diesel at each end, like High Speed Trains in Britain. Initially they will have four passenger coaches, but there are plans to expand to seven carriages. The basic product is “Select” class, but anyone opting for “Smart” class gets free food and drink. The firm promises “powerful, free WiFi” for all passengers. Each station will offer a “rideshare” service to reduce the cost of onward travel, as well as bus links. Fares have not yet been revealed, but Brightline says: “We’re still working on it—but we’re working to make it comparable to taking the car.”

23 March 2017, Source Travolution

64% surge in family holiday bookings to Dubai, says Travel Republic

A 64% surge in family holiday bookings to Dubai in the first quarter of the year is being claimed by Travel Republic. The emirate has also risen into OTA’s top 10 destinations for 2017 with an overall increase of 39% across all bookings year on year, with family holidays showing the biggest growth, and strong demand for all inclusions now available across a wide range of luxury hotels. The company cited a “massive” increase in product choice, more affordable flights and guaranteed sun for the heightened interest over the same period last year. Managing director, Ian Simmonds, said: “The increase of family holidays to Dubai from the beginning of 2017 demonstrates an ever growing demand for new destinations that many families haven’t been to before. “Dubai is a destination that has always seen growing popularity with Travel Republic customers, with the majority of our bookings coming from couples’ holidays, so it is particularly pleasing to see such a strong growth and enthusiasm amongst our family customers to take advantage of affordable flights and luxury accommodation in the jewel of the Middle East.”

24 March 2017, Source TravelMole

Sharp drop in Brits travelling to the US

Latest figures from the Office for National Statistics show a sharp drop in the number of Brits travelling to North America in January, the month when Donald Trump became President. While the overall number of Brits going abroad jumped 9% to 4.6 million visits in January, the number of Brits going to the US fell 17%. The figures reflect fears that Trump's election win would damage US tourism. A Travelzoo poll undertaken before Trump's victory found 31% of Brits said they would reconsider travel to the US following a Trump win, while 20% said they would definitely not go on holiday there. The ONS said part of the drop could be explained by January 2016 being a particularly strong month for outbound trips to the US, but said there was still a significant drop. The pound had also weakened against the dollar following the Brexit vote. Based on previous years, the ONS said it would expect to see a rise in visitors to the US in January compared with December, but this year was an exception. While 250,000 Brits travelled to the US in December, the figure fell to 230,000 in January. In comparison, 276,000 Brits travelled to North America in January 2016, either for business,

leisure or to see friends and family. While travel to the US dropped, visits to Europe rose 12% and visits to other countries (every other country outside Europe and the US), rose by 8% in January compared to January 2016. Worldwide, Brits spent more too - £2.6 billion - a 5% increase. Meanwhile, overseas residents made 2.9 million visits to the UK in January 2017, 11% more than the year before. Overseas visitors spent £1.5 billion on their visits to the UK in January 2017, a 15% year-on-year- jump. In the three months to January 2017, the number of visits to the UK increased by 13% to 8.8 million. The largest rise was in visits from North America, up 19%. Holiday visits for this period rose by 22%, largely driven by the increase in holiday visits during November 2016 when compared with November 2015.

24 March 2017, Source TravelMole

Norwegian signs deal with Expedia

Low-cost airline Norwegian has signed an exclusive global partnership with Expedia Affiliate Network. It means the airline's customers can get access to exclusive rates at 300,000 hotels listed on Expedia's accommodation website hotels.com, while also earning cost savings on their flights. Customers will get accommodation suggestions from hotels.com when they receive Norwegian's flight booking confirmation emails. They can choose whether they want to pay for their hotel at the time of booking or on arrival. The agreement, part of Expedia's 'Hotels.com for Partners' product, sees Norwegian co-brand its hotel offering to 'benefit from the strength of the Hotels.com brand'. The 5 million global members of Norwegian's loyalty programme, Norwegian Reward, can also now earn CashPoints when booking hotels, which can be used as full or partial payment for Norwegian flights. Norwegian Reward members can earn 5% CashPoints on each booking. The new partnership comes as Norwegian gears up for the launch of 10 new transatlantic routes from the UK and Ireland to three new destinations in the US this summer.

24 March 2017, Source Travolution

Most travel categories seeing search growth, says Google

Most categories of travel are seeing good volume growth in search queries on Google although packages are an area that is suffering, according to the leading search engine. Ruairidh Roberts, industry head at Google, gave an update on early year peak demand among UK consumers ahead of the latest Travel Weekly Business Breakfast on Thursday. The event, sponsored by Scottish travel technology supplier Traveltek, was the first of its kind to be held at Google's new offices in Kings Cross. Roberts said despite many in the travel trade reporting having a good January peak, its data sees the category down 4.8% in search volumes. On average travel categories were up 1.6%. The Google data revealed city and short break holidays was the best performing category, up 9.9% year on year in February. Also performing well was holiday rental and cruise, both up 5%, and camping, up 3.7%. Hotel was up marginally at 0.1% and air was up by 2.9%. Roberts said growth on February was predominantly driven by searches for overseas holidays. Domestic trips search volumes were flat, while short-haul was up 6% and long-haul 10%. Google data also revealed a momentous year for mobile this peak. "Mobile has finally overtaken desktop during the first part of this

year,” Roberts said. Roberts added mobile search and engagement levels do vary according to what sector of the travel industry firms are in. But he said overall mobile is seeing higher engagement than desktop with 12% of mobile ads clicked in 2016 compared to 11% on desktop. Last year those figures were 10% and 7% respectively. “It’s definitely time to start thinking about your user experience on mobile devices,” Roberts told a senior audience of invited guests at the event. Looking ahead to the second quarter Google indicates the greatest opportunity for advertising on the search engine will be for all-inclusive, pure generic, last minute and weekend search terms.

25 March 2017, Source Travelbiz

Extra 100,000 children ABSENT from school for unauthorised family holidays

THE NUMBER of school absences due to children taken on holiday during term-time without permission leapt up in the last school year following a prominent court case. The number of children who missed school in England for unauthorised family holidays has leapt up by an extra 100,000 a year according to new data. Figures published by the Department for Education show that the percentage of pupils taken out of school during term-time rose from 10.4 per cent in the 2014/15 academic year to 11.9 per cent in 2015/16. This jump followed the widely-publicised court case last May in which father Jon Platt successfully overturned Isle of Wight Council’s fine, issued to him for taking his daughter out of school to visit Disney World during term-time. Mr Platt had refused to pay a £120 fine after taking a family holiday to Florida, USA, which resulted in his daughter missing seven days of school in total. Magistrates ruled that he had no case to answer as his daughter attended school regularly in general. After the ruling, Mr Platt said: "I am obviously hugely relieved. I know there was an awful lot riding on this, not just for me but for hundreds of other parents. "I think it's a very sensible judgement. It wasn't a complicated matter." An appeal was recently heard by the Supreme Court, which is expected to give its judgement in the near future. Over 801,000 children missed at least one school session – half a day – in 2015/16 compared to 692,000 the previous year. The issue of children missing school for holidays came to the fore in 2013, when the government introduced regulations to reduce the ability of headteachers in England to grant up to two weeks term-time holiday for pupils with good attendance. The decision led to a flurry of fines being issued to those who took children out of school and complaints from angry parents. “The figures show overall absence rates remain at historic lows, and thanks to the hard work of schools and local authorities the proportion of pupils who persistently miss school has fallen by more than “The rules are clear – children should not be taken out of school without good reason. “Evidence shows that every extra day of school missed can affect a pupil’s chances of achieving good GCSEs, which has a lasting effect on their life chances. “That is why we have tightened the rules to put teachers firmly back in charge of their classrooms, and we are supporting schools and local authorities to use their powers to tackle unauthorised absence.” The rate of absence in England in 2015/16 has remained the same overall as the previous year at 4.6 per cent – down from 6.5 per cent in 2006/07.a third since 2010/11,” said a Department for Education spokesperson.

25 March 2017, Travel Weekly

New 'ten minute' online passport application process goes live

A new online passport renewal service has been launched by the government which is said to take an average of ten minutes to complete. HM Passport Office piloted the new process last year with 240,000 people. Applicants can choose to upload a "suitable" digital photo from a smartphone or tablet. Once ready for processing, it still takes around three weeks for the Home Office to send out a new passport, providing all documents submitted are accepted. This timescale will stay the same. Immigration Minister Robert Goodwill, said: "This latest offering is a key part of the Home Office's drive to transform the way we deliver our services through digitisation. "It is designed to improve efficiency and convenience by providing a modern and secure service to millions of passport holders and applicants." To be eligible, applicants must live in the UK, be 26 or older, not hold dual-nationality and in possession of their current passport, which cannot have expired before 2012. They cannot apply through the new streamlined process if they have lost their passport or had it stolen, or if they are making changes to their name. This service will gradually become available to all passport customers. In the meantime, all UK customers and British Citizens overseas can complete the majority of their application and pay online, before printing and returning a signed declaration, their supporting documents, and photographs in the post to HM Passport Office for processing. Each year, HM Passport Office issues over six million passports, operating seven regional passport offices and from over 40 passport interview offices across the UK.

28 March 2017, Source Travelbiz

Virgin Atlantic set to plunge into the red as weak pound curbs profits

Virgin Atlantic is predicting it will make its first loss in four years this year thanks in part to the weakness of sterling. Craig Kreeger, the chief executive of the Sir Richard Branson-backed airline, said that he is forecasting a loss for the 2017 calendar year, as the airline struggles to cope with the fall in the value of the pound since last June's EU referendum. Despite delivering the airline's best profit in five years in 2016 - a pre exceptional pre tax profit of £23m, up £500,000 on 2015 - the aviation chief said he is not as hopeful for this year. "Our expectation for 2017 is to be loss making. We are busy working to try and make that not the case," he said. He explained that sterling's weakness has a two-fold effect, reducing sales and upping costs. "What we are seeing is leisure demand down as it's more expensive for Brits to go abroad. And our costs are up as both fuel and airplanes are paid for in dollars," he continued. The 2016 result - the highest profit in the last five years - was £50m lower he explained due to the tail-winds the airline is facing. Extra capacity on the trans-Atlantic routes favoured by the airline has also made business tougher. As a result he has all but abandoned his previous pledge of matching the airlines best ever profit - £99m in 1999 - by 2018. "We were very much on track for it prior to June 23," he shrugged, referencing the date of the EU referendum. "It's definitely possible [we might make that target] but not based on current forecasts." Virgin racked up £300m of losses in the five years to the end of 2013, but since then has been profitable. In order to reduce some of the impact, Virgin is focusing more of its efforts on trying to market the UK as a destination for inbound flights and is focusing on cost savings, particularly in purchasing. "Having a strong US partner," in Delta, which owns 49pc of Virgin Atlantic, "means it's pretty easy to turn on the tape and move more Americans in this direction." Virgin is also upping its sales efforts in China, Hong Kong

and South Africa. Speaking on board an inaugural flight to Seattle, the airline's newest destination, Mr Kreeger was somewhat bearish. "The bottom line is 2016 was a good year in a difficult environment," he added. But there remain some positives, he said. Virgin is two years into a three year £300m investment programme designed to upgrade its technology and operations, while at the same time upgrading its fleet. It took delivery of four Boeing 787-9's last year and placed an order for 12 Airbus A350-100's worth \$4.4bn. So-called passenger load factor - a key metric when looking at airline performance which measures how much of an airline's carrying capacity is used - stood at 78.7pc for the year, up 1.9 percentage points year on year. But airline passenger revenue - another key metric - fell by 4.3pc year on year on a constant currency basis, as a result of increased competition and wavering consumer confidence. The number of passengers carried by Virgin in the year fell significantly, as it closed routes and faced increasing competition on trans-Atlantic routes from low cost carriers like Norwegian. Passenger numbers were 5.44m for 2016, down from 5.94m a year earlier. But at the same time the airline's cost reduction plan, put in place by Mr Kreeger, paid off. Operating costs fell by £225m, driven largely by a reduction in fuel costs of £191m. Total revenue fell marginally from £2.78bn in 2015 to £2.69bn in 2016. This was in part driven by cargo revenue which fell 15.9pc year on year, driven by the fall in sterling and competition in the market. But Virgin Holidays was one bright spot, delivering pre-exceptional pre-tax profit of £19.1m, up 75pc year on year. Tom Mackay, Virgin Atlantic's chief financial officer, said he was "satisfied" with the results against a backdrop of 6pc increased competition on trans-Atlantic routes and a 50pc spike in cost of fuel. "A decline in both bookings and the rate of the pound following the EU referendum materially impacted our revenues, but through sensibly managing capacity and network, our load factors increased and we grew our UK point of sale market share on our routes," he continued. The results were announced to coincide with the launch of Virgin's new route to Seattle from London Heathrow. In recent years, as a result of Delta's investment, Virgin has reshaped its ambitions, closing a number of routes to far-away destinations in Asia and the Southern Hemisphere, and instead focusing more on the US. Approximately 70pc of its revenue now comes from its trans-Atlantic operations. The numbers reflect the third full year of its joint venture with Delta. Some 45,000 passengers connect between the airlines each month, up 30pc on a year ago.

28 March 2017, Travelbiz

Virgin Holidays: 75% profit growth 'confirmation' of direct-sell move success

The boss of Virgin Holidays has described a 75% increase in profits as "confirmation of the success" of its decision to go direct-sell only. Virgin Atlantic has reported a third successive year of profit in its annual financial results. For the calendar year ended December 31, 2016, total group revenue was £2.69 billion, and the Virgin Atlantic Group reported a profit before tax and exceptional items (PBTEI) of £23 million. "This represents a marginal improvement on the prior year (up £0.5 million), despite the challenging macro-environment conditions of 2016, and is the group's fourth year of improving its PBTEI," it said in a statement. The group said a "particular driver of this improved financial result" was Virgin Holidays, the tour operating arm of Virgin Atlantic Group, which grew profits before tax and exceptional items by 75.2% to £19.1 million in 2016, in its first full year following a change in business

model in late 2015 to become direct-sale only. The growth has been attributed to higher passenger volume and margin. David Geer, Virgin Holidays managing director, said: “We’re delighted to have achieved another strong year of improved performance, while continuing to deliver better holiday experiences to even more customers. “This was both a fantastic effort from the entire Virgin Holidays team, and a confirmation of the success of our decision to move to a direct-sale only model. “We are looking forward to another successful year ahead.” Kreeger added that there was no booking evidence to indicate a so-called “Trump slump” affecting intent to travel to the US. “While I have certainly read a number of articles in the UK media suggesting such a thing exists and it may very well at some point we certainly haven’t seen it in our bookings in the first part of 2017,” he said. He added that Virgin Atlantic had noticed British holidaymakers were adjusting their travel spend as a result of currency impact but that the carrier believed the tradition of the holiday is “sacrosanct”. Tom Mackay, Virgin Atlantic chief financial officer, added: “We are satisfied with our performance in an environment that saw increased competition, with a 6% increase in transatlantic market capacity, and a rise in Brent crude prices of more than 50% through the course of the year. “A decline in both bookings and the rate of the pound following the EU referendum materially impacted our revenues, but through sensibly managing capacity and network, our load factors increased and we grew our UK point of sale market share on our routes. We were also disciplined on cost control. “Looking forward, we anticipate the challenges which emerged in 2016 around currency fluctuations, rising fuel prices and lower passenger revenues to continue, but we are well positioned to manage this. “We are flying the right aircraft across the right network, we have a strong cash position and a successful partner in Delta; with them we will look to grow our customer base in both the UK and the US in 2017 and beyond.”

29 March 2017, Source Travelbiz

Brexit BOOM for tourism: Britons opting for stunning staycations ahead of Article 50

UK TOURISM has enjoyed a boost in customer satisfaction. As the nation prepares for Brexit, thousands are opting for staycations rather than flying to another country. Data released on the eve of Article 50 shows a spike in customer satisfaction when it comes to UK tourism. The Institute of Customer Service (UKCSI) has revealed tourism scored 80.2 out of 100, making it the third highest ranking sector in terms of customer satisfaction. Results also showed the tourism sector generates the least problems for consumers. CEO of The Institute of Customer Service Jo Causon said: “As we begin negotiations to create a post-Brexit economy, the way UK tourism responds to the challenges it faces could determine whether we will maintain our position as a popular destination in the future. “At the same time, the industry must also ensure it provides a seamless experience for domestic tourists because, with the pressure on the Pound increasing, we are likely to see greater interest in staycations.”

29 March 2017, Source TravelMole

TUI sees slight rise in summer 2017 bookings

TUI's UK summer 2017 passenger numbers are 3% ahead of this time last year while revenue is up 11%. In its half-yearly trading update announced this morning, the group said 53% of its summer holidays have been sold, with average selling prices up 8% year on year. The price increase is similar to Thomas Cook's, which delivered its own trading update yesterday. It said these results were in line with its expectations, therefore it is still expecting to see 10% growth in its pre-tax earnings for the full year. It said its increase in revenue and the rise in prices in the UK in the first half reflected growth in long-haul and cruise, with the launch of its newest ship, TUI Discovery 2 in May, as well as the rise in the cost of the euro. Lower demand for holidays to North Africa and Turkey was being offset by higher demand for other destinations, such as the western Mediterranean and the Caribbean, it said. TUI said that, excluding Turkey, bookings for the group as a whole were up 7% for summer 2017. It is finishing the winter season with 95% of its programme sold, with revenue in the UK up 20%, passenger numbers up 12% and a 7% rise in average selling prices. The group will issue its first-half interim results on May 15.

29 March 2017, Source Travolution

Virgin Holidays website improvements help drive 75% profit growth

Improvements to Virgin Holidays website have played a vital role in driving its growth of more than 75% in the last year. In the last year, the site has been updated to make search easier for customers and allow Virgin's Flying Club members to use their discounts directly online. Managing director, David Geer, said: "The really pleasing thing is that our investments are paying off, and we are going to continue to invest in sales channels. The website will hopefully continue to be better in terms of functionality." Next year, he added, the website will be more focussed on multi-destinations. They are already offered, but Virgin Holidays plans to make it easier for customers to book flights in and out of different airports to tailor-make their own itineraries. Geer added: "We'll be able to offer a lot more flexibility when we are doing multi-destination holidays."