

UK OFFICE
AUGUST 2011 REPORT
Prepared by: Venessa Alexander
UK Director

TOUR OPERATORS

Cosmos Holidays

Met with Neil Garner, Head of Product to discuss how they feature our area, update on business to our area and co-op opportunities. Cosmos have had a very good year to Florida. Monarch Airlines which is part of the Cosmos group has added 2000 seats to Sanford in 2011 and will increase capacity again in 2012. They are one of the only airlines to Orlando/Sanford that have done this

Travelzoo

Met with Simon Ferguson at Travelzoo to discuss the possibility of a discounted campaign. Spoke about a one month campaign to include email blasts to 2.5 million subscribers, destination of the month feature and exposure on the Travelzoo website. Negotiated a £6000 discount and the campaign is due to launch on 21st September.

TRADE LIAISON

- UK & Ireland Training Sales Mission: Preparations for the forthcoming sales mission continued including securing acceptances to both our London and Dublin trade lunches and finalising details with the tour operators we will be visiting for training.
- Visit Florida/Bon Voyage – Confirmed participation in a joint promotion with Visit Florida and Bon Voyage to be held at the Gun Wharf Quay Shopping Centre in Portsmouth Harbour. Bon Voyage will have a stand at Gun Wharf Quay over the weekend of 3rd and 4th of September. Expected footfall is 75,000 consumers per day. Bon Voyage will also put together some enticing Florida offers and will distribute their Florida and Beyond brochure and will be handing out Florida information including our visitor's guide and area maps. There will also be a competition to win a £100 M+S voucher and this will allow some data capture. A number of Florida destinations will be participating in this promotion.
- Finalised forthcoming TDC and Leisure Travel Forum presentations as well as itinerary for forthcoming visit to SPC.
- Finalised registration for WTM. Bigger booth space is being taken this year as we will have 3 hoteliers joining us.
- Followed up again with James Killick regarding new product for the Virgin Holidays programme.

- The latest room night stats available show that BA Holidays are up 110%, Expedia are up 42%, Tour America are up 2% and Virgin Holidays are down 24% to our area.
- Travel trade appreciation months – negotiations taking place with BA and Virgin Atlantic to see if they are able to provide very low travel industry rates to Tampa and Orlando during specific months. These rates will then be combined with travel industry rates in local hotels and attractions to provide very competitively priced packages for travel industry to visit St Pete/Clearwater
- Provided new images for inclusion in the Ireland travel trade directory
- Visit Florida PR – Provided the new Visit Florida UK PR Office (Gosh PR) with details of our PR agency, Fleishman Hillard so that they can liaise together on future opportunities.
- Barrhead Travel – Finalised details of the forthcoming staff incentive & online activity due to take place with Barrhead Travel during the month of September. The banner ad and landing page has now been approved and details of the staff incentive have been distributed to all staff members via e-mail.
- BA Holidays – Assisted BA Holidays with their product range of hotels in our area and suggested properties they do not already have listed to continue to grow their offering of accommodations to our area. Gemma Pascall, Product Executive at BA Holidays will also be visiting the area in September and we offered assistance with ground arrangements should this be needed. We were advised that they would contact us if assistance was required.
- BA Holidays – Images and logos have been sent to BA marketing for the forthcoming Wintersun campaign. Currently awaiting first artwork proofs.
- BA Holidays – Z cards for inclusion on meal trays on all flights to Orlando and Tampa during September have been finalised.
- Visit USA Association Ireland – Preparations being made for the VUSA Association Ireland Travel Agent workshop which is due to take place in September 2011 at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Dublin.
- Virgin Holidays Retail Marketing – Chased Julia Mullin, Retail Marketing Manager at Virgin Holidays for a joint retail marketing proposal. We have been advised that plans are being finalised and will be forwarded to us in the near future.
- Virgin Holidays Retail – The staff incentive results have been received from Virgin Holidays Retail and a total of 206 bookings were made to our area during the period of the incentive (14th – 28th June 2011). The top seller was from Leeds and the top selling store was also Leeds.
- Virgin Holidays Retail – Chased Dan Buckingham regarding sponsorship of a regional manager's meeting for their retail shops and awaiting a response. TBA.

- Travel Uni / Selling Long-Haul – Provided Travel Uni with a description and photograph of the recent UK Fam Trip in conjunction with Virgin Atlantic and SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment to see if we could get this included into the September edition of Selling Long-Haul.
- Travel Uni – A competition to win VSPC ‘goody bags’ has been arranged with Travel Uni for the month of September. Ten agents will have the chance to win a goody bag full of VSPC giveaways if they complete all four modules of our training programme during that month.
- Tour America – The recent staff incentive in conjunction with Tour America during the month of July has been extended to incorporate the month of August as per a request from Veronica Aherne, Key Account Manager. We have agreed to extend the incentive until the end of August and results are now due to follow in September.
- Tour America – In conjunction with the Florida’s Beaches consortia, Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater will be participating in the annual Tour America consumer show held at the Red Cow Moran Hotel in Dublin, Ireland on the 2nd October. Preparation has begun and will continue until all details have been finalised.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

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MARKET INTELLIGENCE:

01 August 2011 – Source TTG

Plans unveiled for £50 billion airport on the Thames

One of the UK’s leading architects has drawn up plans for a £50 billion new airport in the Thames estuary near London. According to reports, Lord Foster has created a plan for the airport which is located close to the proposed site of the ‘Boris Island’ airport in Kent, which is the brainchild of London mayor Boris Johnson. The airport designed by Foster would be built on the Isle of Grain in north Kent and would feature four runways capable of handling 150 million passengers a year. Johnson aims to talk to chancellor George Osborne about the new potential airport. Although the coalition government has already ruled out any new runways in the south-east, including a third runway at Heathrow. Foster has been involved in several other airport projects including the new Chek Lap Kok airport in Hong Kong and a new terminal in the Chinese capital of Beijing.

03 August 2011 – Source Travel Daily

Facebook fuels copycat holidays – study

One in four Brits has booked a holiday after suffering from holiday envy over a friend’s foreign trip, a new study has revealed. Research by Teletext Holidays found that after viewing someone’s holiday snaps, increasingly via social networking websites, three quarters

of people admit they often become jealous and more than a quarter (27%) end up booking their own holiday soon after. One in 10 also admitted to arranging their own holiday after hearing about a friend's trip, despite not previously having planned to go away anywhere. And almost a fifth of Brits have even booked an identical trip, right down to the same hotel, apartment or villa, after hearing about someone else's getaway. "It's not surprising that holiday envy is on the rise. Social networking sites make it easier than ever to gloat about where you've been or where you are going," said Mark Bloxham, Marketing Director of Teletext Holidays. "New technology means that the minute you've booked a holiday you can immediately share that information with friends – who can then go on to book exactly the same trip." The study of 3,000 Brits found Australia to be the destination most likely to leave others feeling jealous, followed by the Caribbean islands of the Bahamas and Barbados. The USA, Maldives, New Zealand, Mauritius, Seychelles and Canada also featured in the top 10. The study also revealed however, that 10% Brits have lied about how much fun they've had on a holiday to impress their friends.

03 August 2011 – Source Travelmole

Shock departure of Thomas Cook Chief Executive

Thomas Cook Group chief executive Manny Fontenla-Novoa has resigned with immediate effect. The shock announcement came in a statement to the London Stock Exchange this morning as the Group released its interim management statement. Sam Weihagen, currently chairman of the Northern European segment and deputy to the Group CEO, will take over the role of chief executive until a permanent successor is found. Chairman Michael Beckett said: "The Board would like to thank Manny for his contribution to the Group. He leaves with our very best wishes for the future. "In Sam Weihagen, we have a highly successful and experienced executive and the Board has every confidence in his ability to lead the Group until a new CEO is appointed." Fontenla-Novoa added: "Thomas Cook and its people have a sound heritage and I have been proud to have been part of the company." Fontenla-Novoa has led Thomas Cook since 2007 following its merger with MyTravel, having joined the company upon the acquisition of Sunworld in 1996, but in recent months he has come under increasing pressure from the Group's institutional investors to step down. Some have blamed Fontenla-Novoa for the company's plunging share price and shrinking profits and they have questioned his decision to merge Cook's retail operation with The Co-operative Group and Midlands Co-op to create the UK's largest high street travel retailer. In his interim statement to the Stock Exchange today, Beckett said: "The Board is focused on restoring market confidence in the Group, which has been impacted by concerns over debt levels and the poor performance of our UK business. "We are taking actions to strengthen the balance sheet, including a disposal programme that we expect to realise up to £200m. In addition, Sam Weihagen's extensive experience in the travel industry will be invaluable in guiding the UK through its strategic and operational review." Cook's underlying operating profit for the three months to June 30 was £20.1m, compared with £25.8m in the same period last year. The Group said its results were impacted by a weak performance in the UK and the impact of the Middle East uprisings, which it estimates cost it £25m in the quarter and it expects a similar impact in the fourth quarter. In the UK, its average selling price for summer 2011 is up 4% year on year but margins are still lower. Its capacity has been reduced by 1% and it has 5% fewer holidays left to sell than this time last year, it said. Its winter 2011/12 programme is 22% sold. The Group estimates its full year underlying operating profit to be in line with expectations at around £320m.

03 August 2011 – Source Travelmole

New president for lastminute.com

Travelocity Global today announced that it has named Matthew Crummack president of lastminute.com group. The move follows an announcement that current president Ed Kamm is stepping down after 17 years to “continue my career outside the group”. Crummack was previously he was senior vice president of Lodging at Expedia.

04 August 2011 – Source Travelmole

60,000 hit by collapse of Holidays 4U

Thousands of customers could be left out of pocket following the collapse of Brighton-based Turkey specialist Holidays 4U yesterday. The Civil Aviation Authority confirmed that around 60,000 holidaymakers will be hit by the failure of the company, which also traded as Aegean Flights. Some 12,800 people were abroad with the tour operator when it announced it had gone into administration and the company had taken a further 20,000 bookings, with an average of three passengers for each one. The CAA confirmed that all flights and packages sold by the operator will be protected under its ATOL, but customers who bought flight-only deals will not be refunded for the accommodation they bought separately. "We don't know what proportion of the company's forward bookings were flight only, but it could be a significant number," said a CAA spokesman. The CAA said those who are abroad at the moment will be allowed to continue their holidays and fly home as planned and they should check-in at the airport as usual. If flight times have changed, these will be posted on the CAA website www.caa.co.uk. All future departures to Turkey have been cancelled. Passengers who have booked packages or charter flights through Holidays 4U should make a claim for a refund through the CAA. PwC have been appointed as administrators by Holidays 4U, which blamed 'difficulties faced by the travel industry in 2010 and 2011' for its collapse. The company, which has a turnover of £35m, said it was no longer able to continue trading. Up to 18 members of staff have lost their jobs.

09 August 2011 – Source Travelmole

Former Hilton boss lined up for Thomas Cook role?

Speculation is mounting that Sir David Michels, the former Hilton Group boss and deputy chairman of Marks & Spencer, is one of two candidates lined up to become chairman of Thomas Cook. According to a Sky News City Editor Mark Kleinman, Michels has been approached about replacing Michael Beckett, who is due to step down at next February's annual meeting. He believes a decision about Beckett's successor is likely to be made within weeks. Michels is due to step down from the M&S board in the next few months. He is also on the Board of EasyJet and is due to step down from that role by the end of the year. “Michels would be a logical choice as Thomas Cook's chairman. One large shareholder in the travel group told me this afternoon that he would bring "enough grit and guile to turn the company around",” said Kleinman.

10 August 2011 – Source Travel Mole

Strong UK performance boosts TUI profits

TUI managed to grow underlying operating profit by 57% to £88 million in the third quarter thanks to a “strong” performance in the UK and Nordic countries. The travel giant said the late timing of Easter, the lack of volcanic ash disruption and the sale of differentiated product

had helped drive its performance. But events in North Africa have continued to impact significantly on trading for its French tour operators. It said selling prices and margins continue to develop in line with expectations in all source markets except France. Overall, volumes left to sell are in line with prior year. Chief executive Peter Long said: "This performance is particularly pleasing in the UK against a background of weak consumer sentiment. "I believe that this is testament to our management team and our focus on exclusive and differentiated product which offers our customers quality, value holidays that are only available through our brands and sold principally across our own distribution channels." He said the group had reacted quickly to events in North Africa by moving capacity mainly to the Western Mediterranean, but many French consumers are choosing to holiday in France. "For the Summer, our overall volumes left to sell are in line with the prior year and we are confident of meeting our expectations for the full year in what is a challenging trading environment," he added. In the UK, load factors and margins are ahead of last year for all remaining months of the season. Average selling price has improved by 4% year on year, driven by the higher proportion of differentiated product sales, which are up 15% for summer 2011. Shorter duration holidays have proved more popular this year, with 10-11 night and 7-night stays increasing by 24% and 4% respectively. All-inclusive holidays have continued to sell well, now making up 46% of sales to date, up 2 percentage points on last year. The proportion of bookings made online has increased from 38% to 40%, equating to 1.3 million UK customers booking via TUI's websites. For winter 2011/12, UK cumulative bookings are down 9% on the back of a capacity cut of 7%. Load factors to date are in line with prior year. Average selling price is up 5%, which partly reflects increases in fuel and accommodation costs. Sales of differentiated product are up 14% compared with this time last year. Looking ahead, TUI said: "The travel and aviation industry is facing a number of headwinds. These include the high cost of fuel, weakness of sterling and the slower than anticipated recovery in the important North African tourist destinations particularly for the French tour operators. "Like the rest of the industry we are not immune to these pressures. Our market leading positions, together with our ability to manage capacity due to the flexibility of our business model, mean that we are able to focus on maintaining margins and delivering operational efficiencies in these continuing challenging times."

10 August 2011 – Source Travel Mole

Virgin returns to profit

Virgin Atlantic is to invest £100 million in product development after reporting a strong year of trading and a return to profit. Its full-year pre-tax profit was £18.5 million, compared to a loss of £132 million a year ago. Meanwhile, 2010/11 revenues were up 13% to £2.7 billion with load factors of 82%. Despite the winter closure of London Heathrow and the ash cloud crisis costing the business a combined £40 million, the airline said strong growth in business traffic and solid load factors across all cabins delivered a good recovery. The performance of its tour operator business, Virgin Holidays, was also driven by high demand for its core Orlando and Caribbean holidays. The operator is doubling its UK retail network to 120 stores, creating 200 jobs nationwide. Chief executive Steve Ridgway said: "We have demonstrated the resilience of our business by weathering the toughest economic period for aviation and have now returned the business to profit. "A sharp recovery in the first half of the year has been tempered by more challenged trading in the latter period due to increased capacity in the market and high fuel prices. "Since the turn of the year, market conditions have become tougher with increased capacity, faltering consumer confidence and high fuel prices. "We are also seeing softer trading in the areas that are hit hardest by the continued

rises in Air Passenger Duty, particularly the Caribbean routes and Premium Economy cabins. Whilst business traffic remains strong, demand in the economy cabin is more challenged.”

11 August 2011 – Source TTG

Overseas visit's by UK residents increases by 5%

Britons made more visits overseas during the second quarter of 2011 than they did for the same period last year. The number of visits abroad by UK residents increased by 5% for the three months to the end of June while spending also went up by around 6% for the quarter, according figures released today by the Office for National Statistics. There was also a 1% rise in overseas visits to 56.4 million for the 12 months to the end of June compared to the previous year. North America saw a 5% rise in UK visitors to 3.7 million over the year while visits to Europe were flat at 43.5 million. The rest of the world saw a 2% rise to 9.2 million. The number of holidays being taken abroad was flat while business trips and visits to friends and family were up by 2%. Mike Saul, head of hospitality and leisure at Barclays Corporate, said: “While today’s figures highlight more positive trends in outbound traveller numbers, it is still a fine balancing act for the sector. “Fragile consumer confidence, marred by ongoing economic uncertainty, is beginning to permeate the outbound travel market industry, emphasised by the failures and profit warnings of recent weeks.”

16 August 2011 – Source Travelmole

Travel Republic races up list of e-retailers

Online travel agency Travel Republic shot up the list of top e-retailers last quarter, finishing in 28th place, 18 places higher than the same time last year. First Choice also rose 12 places to return to the Top 50, having dropped out last quarter. Several other travel brands and low-cost airlines also improved their rankings last quarter as consumer's rushed to book last minute flights and packages, but Travel Republic and Train Line were the only two travel companies to finish higher than last year. Thomson was the best performing travel brand, finishing in 10th place, one head of EasyJet,. Expedia finished in 14th place, eight ahead of Lastminute.com, and Ryanair finished 15th. Thomas Cook was in 17th place and British Airways 34th. Tina, Spooner, chief information officer at IMRG, an industry association for online retailers, said: "During the summer months the travel companies always perform well, although growth for some of them was more modest than last year. "Two of them however, The Train Line and TravelRepublic.co.uk, have exceeded the rankings they achieved in summer last year."

16 August 2011 – Source TTG

Cook/Co-op merger gets final clearance

Thomas Cook’s retail merger with The Co-operative Travel has today been given final clearance by the Competition Commission. The commission gave the merger provisional clearance on July 21 and has now rubber-stamped that decision. The commission said that the joint venture “will not result in a substantial lessening of competition in any markets in the UK, in particular for customers buying package holidays from high street travel agents”. This removes the final hurdle to the deal which will create the UK’s biggest travel retail chain with 1,240 shops, although the merged company is likely to close around 75 shops. The deal is now expected to be completed late next month or in early October – almost exactly a year

after the merger was first announced. The merger will bring together 780 shops owned by Thomas Cook, 360 Co-op Travel stores and another 100 outlets run by the Midlands Co-operative. As part of the deal, Cook's Going Places shops will disappear and will be rebranded as Co-op Travel stores. The merger was originally agreed in October 2010 by former Cook chief executive Manny Fontenla-Novoa, who stepped down earlier this month following a profits warning on July 12 which sent the company's shares tumbling. Cook has remained committed to the merger since Fontenla-Novoa's departure on August 3. But analysts have questioned why the company wants to expand its retail operation when the UK high street is struggling. A report that Cook was discussing the closure of "hundreds" of stores has been dismissed by the company which said there was "no substance" in the claim.

18 August 2011 – Source TTG

'It's astronomical' - lates market arrives

Agents have experienced an "astronomical" summer, after the much longed-for lates market finally materialised. One travel agency told TTG that it had experienced its busiest day in its six-year history during August, and all-inclusive holidays continue to grow in popularity, as customers look to manage their budgets. Dave Clayton, managing director of the Global Travel Group, said passenger numbers were up 4.4% year-on-year in July and 15.7% in August. Growth revenue was also up by 16% last month and 16.5% in August, compared with this time last year, he said. Despite the economic gloom, the average selling price climbed by 11.1% in July compared with last year, although August saw an increase of just 0.7%. "July was a good month for Global agents," Clayton said. "There is a big market out there for lates. People aren't waiting to see if there is a cheaper price, they are waiting to see if they actually have the money, because earlier in the year, they may have been unsure about their jobs." Geoff Cowley, managing director of Hoseasons Group, said that bookings for its holiday parks in the UK had taken off since the start of the school holidays with a rise of 34% in the past three weeks compared with the same period in 2010. "They have been leaving it to the last minute - we have had people calling on a Thursday to travel two days later," said Cowley. "Business is coming in strongly now, although there are lots of offers." Bookable Holidays' marketing director Craig Ashford said the company had experienced a "record-breaking" day on August 2. "Over the past seven to eight weeks, the market has been buoyant," he said. "The lates market is astronomical for us at the moment." He added that Spain, the Canaries and the Balearics remained the most popular destinations, while Greece had remained "steady" but Turkey had been "much slower" this year. Tui said all-inclusive holidays had made up 46% of sales this summer to date, up two percentage points compared with last year. Chief executive of Barrhead Travel Sharon Munro said: "All inclusive remains strong, as what is driving most enquiries for lates is price - destination and duration seem to be secondary considerations in many cases."

22 August 2011 – Source TTG

Virgin Holidays' profits hit by ash and snow

Virgin Holidays saw its pre-tax profits fall by around £9 million due to the costs of last year's volcanic ash cloud and the closure of Heathrow in December. The tour operator made a pre-tax profit of £15.4 million for the year to the end of February – compared to a profit of £24.1 million in the previous year. Virgin said that repatriating customers stranded by the ash cloud

in April 2010 had cost £3.5 million. The operator also lost another £1.8 million in cancelled bookings across both the ash cloud and snow disruptions and a further £1.2 million in lost sales after April 2010 because of the “uncertainty in the UK in relation to further anticipated closures”. But Virgin said it was “pleased” with the company’s overall performance as operating profit - once these one-off costs have been excluded - was only down slightly from £25.5 million in 2010 to £25.3 million this year. Virgin Holidays’ turnover was up 2% to £515 million year-on-year thanks to growth in destinations such as the Far East and Africa. The company has also announced it plans to double the number of high street travel agencies in the next year from its current total of 60 outlets, which are based in department stores and supermarkets. The results come as sister company Virgin Atlantic Airways returned to profit – just a year after posting a £132 million loss. The long-haul airline made a pre-tax profit of £18.5 million for 2010/11 as revenues rose by 13% to £2.7 billion from £2.4 billion in the previous year.

25 August 2011 – Source TTG

UK Aviation forecast shocks Virgin

Virgin Atlantic has described new aviation forecasts from the Department for Transport (DfT) as ‘of extreme concern’. The DfT’s ‘UK Aviation Forecasts’ looks at future UK passenger numbers and the expected rise in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. The document highlights the effect of airport capacity constraints in the UK and says that as many as 50 million passengers a year could potentially be lost due to current airport capacity limitations and other economic factors. Virgin Atlantic said the report’s suggestion that only 45 million visits will be made to the UK by foreign residents by 2030, compared with 48 million previously forecast is of particular concern. The airline said it believes the decline in inbound visitors could cost the economy as much as £1.7 billion, according to its own calculations. The airline’s chief commercial officer Julie Southern slammed the government’s APD and visa policies as contributing to the challenges facing UK aviation. “Aviation has a crucial role to play in UK tourism and the wider economic recovery, contributing over £50bn to GDP in 2009. But this economic contribution is being stifled by an unpalatable mix of constraints on growth, ever increasing air passenger duty, and prohibitive visa processes,” she said. “At a time when kick-starting the economy is such a priority for the government, it must consider this projected drop in passenger numbers and how this can be addressed as part of the current Sustainable Aviation policy process. These projections also show how crucial it will be for the industry to get a favourable outcome from the current consultation on APD,” Southern added.

25 August 2011 – Source TTG

TUI insists overseas holidays are more popular than ‘staycations’

TUI has hit back at claims by Visit Britain that ‘staycations’ are winning favour over other holidays. The tour operator said bad weather in the UK in August had prompted Brits to head abroad for their summer holiday, rather than taking a break in the UK, as the domestic tourism board suggested. Tui also said passenger numbers were higher than in 2009 and 2010. “As yet another August is blighted by heavy rain across the UK, a lot of Brits are still looking to go overseas for their main summer holiday,” a spokesperson for Thomson and

First Choice said. “For summer 2011 we have seen a strong demand for our differentiated holiday offerings. These resorts give our customers options that you cannot find here in the UK, and they are selling well. We have also seen the trend for all-inclusive holidays grow from strength to strength, something you certainly can’t get on a staycation.”

30 August 2011 – Source TTG

95% of ABTA members want airlines included in ATOL

Airlines should be brought into the Atol system, according to the “overwhelming” majority of Abta members. Abta said that 95% of respondents to its questionnaire about the Department for Transport’s Atol reform proposals wanted airlines to be included in the scheme. The association has already been calling for airlines to become part of the Atol system of consumer protection - although this is not part of the current proposals which includes Flight-Plus and the introduction of an Atol Certificate. Abta has also continued to “express concern” about the new Atol regulations being implemented too quickly – currently they are scheduled to be introduced in January 2012. Mark Tanzer, Abta’s chief executive said: “There is overwhelming support for airlines to be included because without them, the scheme will not provide a truly comprehensive and fair system of consumer financial protection. “We are also concerned about the lack of clarity regarding key elements of the reform proposals. “It is absolutely essential that principles are clear and mechanisms affordable, if the trade is to be able to support the government’s objective of providing better protection for consumers.” Other major concerns for Abta members include the lack of detail on protection offered by the Air Travel Trust Fund (ATTF) under the reforms, the implementation of Atol Certificates and the bonding requirements for companies which will now have to take out an Atol licence. Consultation into the Atol reforms runs to September 15 when submissions for comments to the Department for Transport will close.

30 August 2011 – Source TTG

New Barrhead franchise for Northern Ireland

A new Northern Ireland travel and events company has opened as a Barrhead Travel franchise. GKA Travel & Events in Antrim, headed up by Gavyn Andrews, specialises in group travel, event organisation and leisure travel. Andrews said he plans to initially work from home and aims to open his first branch in Antrim in the next few months. “After working in travel for a number of years, I felt that the next logical step for me was to become my own boss – there were so many things that I felt I could do differently or better, and the only way to do that was to set up on my own, but with the backing of a large, but flexible, organisation,” said Andrews. Barrhead Travel’s homeworking & franchise manager, Laura Hibbert, added: “We felt that we had a similar philosophy, as Gavyn had so many ideas, as well as the passion and attitude required to make his venture a success.”