

UK OFFICE

February 2017 REPORT

**Prepared by: Venessa Alexander
UK Director**

Tour Operators

- **Virgin Holidays** – Ahead of the February campaign we had a meeting with Nicole Gibson and Rachel Penney to discuss options for the design of the landing page to ensure that the key messages were clearly visible to everyone visiting the page either on desktop, mobile or tablet. Since our meeting we have sent Rachel resized images which were provided by Marcus.
- **American Holidays** – We met with Dee Burdock, Product Manager, who advised that January sale started off fairly slow as people didn't return to work until the first full week of January, but then sales picked up. She believes that the family market is struggling the most, which is due to the exchange rates, and they are hesitant in booking a holiday of such a high spend. The effect of Trump is hard to determine, but the travel ban has caused confusion. She commented that Orlando is suffering the most and is reflective in the offers they are receiving from Disney and Universal. Overall St. Pete/Clearwater is pacing flat versus last year.
- **Tour America** – We visited their office and had a meeting with Veronica Flood and Liz Wright. They advised that January performed really well for them overall, and this was aided by the additional budget they had for marketing activity. Their competitor Budget Travel was proving very competitive with their pricing, however bookings with Tour America haven't been affected, and they believe they have taken share from others. June, September and October are performing particularly well, whereas July and August are struggling. Veronica commented that they had seen a shift from Europe to the US as it was perceived as good value for money even though exchange rates aren't as good as previous years. The exchange rate has had a slight impact on bookings, making the cost on average 10% more expensive than last year.
- **Holiday Genie** – We had a meeting with Johnathan Poole, Product Manager and Craig Ashford, Sales and Marketing Director to discuss how we can grow the business into our destination. Johnathan advised that overall 2017 bookings to Florida were good, particularly for Holiday Genie, which is their long haul brand. Magic Holidays, which focusses on Florida, is also doing well for 2017 travel. He gave an overview of the company and said that Magic Holidays tends to be slightly higher end properties booked compared to Holiday Genie, Bookable Holidays is their short haul programme, whilst

Travel Up offers flight only. Florida remains their top destination (50% of their business), followed by New York, Las Vegas, Caribbean and Dubai. Customers need to book through their call centre for package holidays, approx. 20 sales agents based in Aldermaston and 8 in Blackpool. All of their hotel contracts in our area are through receptives. Johnathan mentioned that they are likely to organise an in house fam trip to Florida in September/October, so we have offered our assistance if they plan to visit St. Pete/Clearwater during their stay. We will follow up to provide recommendations for website updates including new photography and copy.

Meetings/Training/Events

- **Visit USA, Ireland** – We attended their meeting in Dublin where Clodagh provided the latest booking stats to the USA from Ireland. She advised that they were seeing growth in the off peak months; March, September, and November, and that January was generally strong. During the meeting it was mentioned that customers are shopping around for the best prices and were taking a while to confirm. Due to the extra capacity there seems to be a price war, particularly on the flight seats. Clodagh advised that the marketing activity they have been doing is driving increased traffic to the page and they will soon launch activity on Instagram. They will continue with the banner adverts but will be charging partners 200 euros. The recent Holiday World events in Dublin and Shannon were well received and bookings were good. Overall the comments from attendees was that 2017 was going to be a challenging year. Consumer confidence was ok and employment was strong, there is just not enough demand.
- **Holiday Genie** – We visited their office in Aldermaston to provide destination training to approx. 20 of their sales agents and marketing executives. This formed part of their Florida training day, and we were joined by Kissimmee, Kennedy Space Centre and Daytona Beach. The office was decorated with American flags and the team wore red, white and blue to support the day. We gave a destination overview and provided the attendees with brochures, maps and giveaways. The day was very well received.
- **Aer Lingus** – We met with Ivan Beacom, to discuss overall performance of the Florida routes and opportunities to work together in the future. He advised that Trump had affected bookings and that they were seeing a shorter booking window. There is a lot of capacity into Orlando and so customers are price sensitive, making this a challenge. The family market has dropped off, but Ivan confirmed that they were working with Visit Florida and Visit Orlando on marketing activity to support the route. He mentioned that Orlando has 4 flights per week and the Miami route starting in September will have 3 flights per week. Approx. 70% of the customers on the MCO route originate from Dublin, which is higher compared to other US destinations. He commented that they would be interested in partnering with us on Fam trips for Q3 2018, sales missions and key partner lunches/events. Their fiscal year runs January to December, so we will follow up in due course.

TRADE LIAISON

- **Virgin Holidays** – As part of the VSPC February campaign,
 - Redesigned our landing page on the Virgin Holidays site
 - Finalised an incentive for the call centre and retail shops
 - Organised a visit to the call centre to launch the campaign and the incentive
 - Provided final desktop, mobile and tablet creatives for approval.
 - Provided the social media plan, so that Virgin Holidays can plan and support with their own posts.
 - The competition landing page was finalised and ready for the launch of the social media campaign.
 - We have now received approval from Clearcast for the revised TV advert, which now promotes the £1000 discount message. The advert has also been approved for Cinema use.
 - The campaign launched on the 20th February and will run until 19th March. Since the launch of the campaign, we have been in regular contact with James Killick at Virgin Holidays to understand the performance of the campaign. He has advised that the £1000 discount has not been applicable for some days, so we have liaised with Steve Crawley at MAG to invest these funds into additional impressions for the digital activity as well as TV and Cinema. We will continue to monitor the campaign.

- **Tour America** – We have received a proposal from Veronica Flood, Marketing Manager, which will launch during February and run for 4 weeks in line with UK activity. The activity includes;
 - Radio adverts and promotion to win a family holiday including live broadcast each week from their Dublin office (4 holidays being won)
 - themed office
 - window domination
 - Homepage takeover each Thursday
 - 4 email newsletters
 - Digital banners
 - Social activity
 - Staff incentive.

We have agreed the activity with Veronica and work has begun on designing the creatives for our approval. We have sourced tickets for Dali museum and Clearwater Marine Aquarium which will be included in the weekly holiday prizes. All artwork has been received and approved ahead of the campaign. We have also agreed to offer a weekly incentive to the top sales agents for bookings to St. Pete/Clearwater.

On the first activation day, we visited their office in Dublin to provide a short overview of the destination and the campaign to their sales staff, as well as provide them with brochures and giveaways. We met with the Sunshine radio team and were involved in the first holiday prize giveaway on radio. The day was very well received and the lucky winner was delighted with his prize to St. Pete/Clearwater.

- **Hayes and Jarvis** – We provided Isla King, Destination Executive with contact details for Opal Sands Resort as they are requiring images for their Florida brochure.

- **Visit Florida** – We spoke with Gill Standeven who advised that bookings to Florida from the UK was very mixed. She suggested that the larger tour operators were struggling during January, however the other operators were reporting growth. Overall she didn't think that Trump would affect people wanting to travel to Florida, and the biggest threat was the exchange rate. The booking window is shorter than previous years as late business seems to be up, whereas further out is a challenge.
- **Tesco Promotion** – The Tesco magazine and online promotion in partnership with Ocean Florida is due to launch at the beginning of March and will run until the beginning of April. The promotion is based on winning a family holiday for four to St. Pete/Clearwater for a 7 night stay and includes flights, accommodation, car hire, tickets to the Clearwater Marine Aquarium and a £250 pre-paid currency card for meals.
- **Icelandair/Profil Rejser, Denmark**– We provided images of Sheraton Sand Key and Guy Harvey to Charlotte Lindholm at Profil Rejser, so she can finalise the design of the flyer to be distributed at the Ferie consumer show. We have now received the final flyer which has been approved and sent to John at Icelandair to print and bring to the show for distribution on both the Florida Beaches stand and Icelandair.
- **Icelandair/FDM, Denmark**– Ahead of their show in March and to support the new route, we have contacted Birgitte Vraadal, Product Manager at FDM to see if they would like to create a flyer with a price for a holiday to our area. She has confirmed that they would like to participate and will start work on creating the artwork. We have sent her logos, images and copy. The flyer has been approved and will be distributed at the show.
- **Icelandair/Swanson's, Sweden**– We contacted Tommy Swanson to advise that we would like to create flyers to promote St. Pete/Clearwater and the new route, and to distribute at his consumer show in March. Tommy has advised that he would be happy to create the flyer which will include a holiday prize, so we have provided him with copy, logo and images.
- **Visit USA Ireland** – We have confirmed our participation in their roadshow which includes a networking lunch for travel agents and partners where we are able to share information about our destination. This will take place in May in both Cork and Dublin.
- **Icelandair, UK office** – We have contacted Martyn Bell, UK Account Manager to discuss opportunities to work together. We are in process of arranging a meeting for next month. We have also spoke with Josephine Ando at Visit Tampa and again will arrange a meeting at the end of March to discuss further.
- **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment/VSPC VIP Event 2017** – Work and preparations continue on our annual joint VIP event that will take place at Amberley Castle on the 4th May. Invitations have now been sent and we are liaising with the venue regarding details.
- **Bookabed Ireland** – Bev Fly advised that they were able to secure a banner on the Visit USA Ireland website, which was complimentary but included as part of our January campaign. The campaign has been extended into the beginning of February so final results to the campaign will be received in due course.

- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners/Visit Florida** – We have received a final proposal from Linda Dixey for additional activity to take place with USAirtours /TravelPlanners until July 2017. The campaign includes:
 - a double page spread in the print edition of At Home with Lorraine Kelly
 - digital magazine inclusion
 - participation in a competition to win a holiday to St. Pete/Clearwater
 - an e-newsletter
 - Facebook and Twitter posts
 - an MPU banner ad, a banner ad on the Travel Planners website
 - social media, inclusion in the TravelPlanners weekly email for 5 weeks
 - inclusion in the Visit Florida competition with Kissimmee#
 - Destination Focus for June including landing page, a homepage banner ad and inclusion in their weekly email blast, a downloadable poster during June/July and inclusion in 4 weekly emails.

Linda has sourced a prize for 7 nights accommodation, which has been supported by The Sheraton Sand Key Resort.

- **VSPC/Kissimmee/Tampa/SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment** – We have confirmed a joint UK training mission for the week of the 24th April. We will be visiting our top selling tour operators in Preston, Glasgow, Newcastle, Essex and Surrey and conducting training to their Florida Sales Agents. We will also be co-hosting a dinner event in London for 18 of our top tour operator partners and which will be taking place in the private dining room in the Mondrian London at Sea Containers.
- **Gold Medal Travel** – The co-op marketing campaign that we reported about last month has now launched and will continue until March. The trade activity as part of this campaign will take place in April and we are currently discussing the possibility of running an in-store Travel Agent campaign with their top Independent Travel Agencies. Gold Medal is in the process of providing a proposal for our perusal.
- **American Sky** – Work has commenced on the approval process for the creative relating to our joint co-op marketing campaign that is launching this month. Additional activity will take place in March, April and May.
- **American Holidays/Experience Kissimmee/VSPC** – The joint campaign in partnership with Experience Kissimmee and American Holidays in Ireland has now launched and will continue until the end of March.
- **Ocean Florida** – Lisa Barrington, Head of Commercial has advised that St. Pete/Clearwater will be featured as their ‘Beach of the month’ for February, which is complimentary. This includes; 4 pages of things to do, 2 emails, homepage banner, banner on the Florida destination page and 3 social posts.
- **TUI/Travelopia** – A joint co-op marketing proposal in partnership with Experience Kissimmee has been received and is at present being perused.
- **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment/VSPC Mega FAM** – We have worked with Simon Parry at SeaWorld to confirm flights for the 6th -13th October for the Mega Fam. We have

also worked with Michelle Poyet to send out a solicitation for accommodation for the group. Work on this Fam trip will continue for the following months.

- **Trailfinders** – Ahead of our campaign, we have provided Tiffany Cope, Marketing Executive the required assets so that they can begin designing the creatives. This activity will launch in April and we will await the creatives for sign off.
- **Barrhead Travel** – We have received the artwork for; the direct mailer, press advert, radio advert, travel blog, landing page mastheads, e-shot and social media activity, for approval ahead of the campaign, which launches at the end of February. This is in partnership with Experience Kissimmee.
- **Travel Republic** – We have worked with Charlene to ensure our destination is easier to find on their website, with clearer links to our landing page. We have also worked with her to get the page updated which is live on their website. They are currently moving all of their content to a new platform, so we should see easy to access links on the Florida page to our destination page shortly.
- **Expedia** – We spoke with Keri Appleford, who advised that overall bookings to the US were positive and they weren't seeing much impact of exchange rates. They were seeing growth in Thailand, Malaysia and Dubai. We discussed a marketing campaign for both the UK and Scandinavia markets and have now received a proposal for consideration.
- **British Airways** – We spoke with Marc James who advised that they are waiting for a brief from their media agency for the Florida campaign, which they will be able to share in a couple of weeks. We have agreed that we would like to support the campaign and will await further details. Marc James has also confirmed 8 seats for a UK & Ireland reservations/sales agent Fam trip that will take place from 24th – 27th September 2017. A solicitation via the US office was sent to our partners to request assistance with accommodation, site visits, meals etc.
- **Hotel.com (Scandinavian Markets)** – We have now received a proposal from Keri for activity in the Scandinavian markets. We have a call scheduled for next month with David Downing and Rosemarie Payne to discuss marketing activity and a possible sales mission. We will follow up with Keri after this.
- **Funway Holidays** – We have received the artwork for the My America Holiday Microsite page, St. Pete/Clearwater landing page, homepage banner, Facebook and Twitter posts, email and PPC adverts. These have all been approved, and the campaign will launch at the beginning of February.
- **Travel Bulletin North America Showcase** – Preparations have been made for the forthcoming Travel Trade Event in Bristol on the 21st March. Around 60 local travel agents will be attending the training event that will take on a speed dating style format with the opportunity for us to network further with these agents over dinner. Visit St. Pete/Clearwater is the only Florida destination in attendance.
- **Visit Florida** – Gill Standeven provided us with proposed dates for meetings, events and training with our key partners. We have confirmed our participation for; appreciation

dinners for Virgin Holidays and Ocean Florida, the Travel Counsellors training day in Manchester, the Virgin Holidays Retail training day, the UK & Ireland advisory luncheons, and their annual summer event.

- **Visit USA, Ireland** – We provided Clodagh with the press release for Wyndham Grand Clearwater, which will be added to their website.
- **American Holidays** – We have assisted Dee Burdock with renovation details that are taking place at the Hilton Clearwater Beach.
- **Broads Travel** – We provided Jo Heeley, Senior Travel Consultant, with tickets for the Clearwater Marine Aquarium ahead of her trip to St. Pete/Clearwater.
- **Visit USA, Ireland** – We have received the January monthly report regarding traffic to their website during 1st – 31st January 2017 compared to the previous year;
 - 1730 website sessions +154%
 - 1578 users +156%
 - 337 organic visitors +13%
 - 1202 direct visitors +936%
 - 4087 page views +38%
 - Ave time on page 55s versus 41s last year.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

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MARKET INTELLIGENCE:

1 February 2017, Source TTG

Records all round as 2017 starts off strong

As the first month of the travel industry's peaks period comes to an end, TTG talks to a jubilant trade about what could turn out to be a record January for operators and agents. It might be the weather, current events or just plain good value for money, but whatever the reason, the travel industry is reporting a bumper January. Record sales figures are being reported from both agents and operators as the peak booking month comes to a close.

Operators are always keen to talk up a market, but agents on the frontline – who know the true picture – are confirming a healthy January. Leanne Miller, a director of Cumbria Travel, said the agency had seen “its best-ever January”, with sales in its Whitehaven store up 40% year-on-year. A new shop in Workington also doubled its target in the month, she said. “The two have pulled in well over £1 million; people seem to be preparing to spend a lot of money.” She pinpointed seat sales by Gulf airlines as stimulating long-haul multi-centre sales. “A lot of new destinations have come to the fore as a result,” she said, but added that Thailand “had gone through the roof”. “The seat sales have been fantastic and that has

encouraged a lot of people that maybe would have hung on.” She added that social media “has been huge for us”. “We’ve been picking up business from all over the country. We’re pinching ourselves, we can’t believe it.” Among operators, Travel 2 reported its biggest-ever sales week, claiming a 35% year-on-year increase last week. Top-performing destinations for the company so far include the Indian Ocean, up 59%, Asia, up 52% and the Middle East, up 43%. Gordon McCreadie, sales and marketing director for Gold Medal, Travel 2, Pure Luxury and Simply Luxury by Travel 2, said: “To say we have had an amazing start to peaks feels like an understatement. Being able to report that we have achieved the best week for the business in its 34-year history is an incredibly proud moment for us all.” He said strong pricing, investment in training and incentives had helped, but added: “As always, none of this would be possible without the ongoing support of the trade”. A Kuoni spokesperson said last weekend was “one of the busiest we’ve ever had”. “The end-of-the-month pay day, combined with some fantastic sale messages and pro-active marketing, has helped to drive demand,” she said. Kuoni’s TV campaign has a few days left to run and the operator said this had provoked more enquiries for touring holidays. “Overall trade has been performing extremely well, reflecting the additional investment we’ve put into supporting travel agents,” the spokesperson said. The rosy picture extends to the domestic market, with Hoseasons reporting trade sales up 33% year-on-year in the last four weeks. Sales overall in the first week of January were up 26%, with trade sales up 36%.

2 February 2017, Source TravelMole

Long-haul specialist names top destinations

Research conducted by long-haul travel company Southall Travel has revealed Dubai as the most popular long-haul beach holiday destination this year, with Bali named the fastest growing. Mauritius was the second most popular destination in January followed by Phuket in Thailand, with the Maldives and Sri Lanka completing the top five. Bangkok was the most popular city break destination booked in January, followed by Abu Dhabi. Mumbai, the capital city of the Indian state of Maharashtra and the most populous city in India is the third most popular city break destination followed by Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and Las Vegas. Bookings to Bali, the fastest growing destination, were up 60% in January compared to January 2016. Kuala Lumpur bookings were up 43%, whilst Koh Samui, Thailand's second largest island, was up 36%. Sri Lanka and Langkawi (Malaysia), complete the list of the top five fastest growing destinations, with bookings up 32% and 27% respectively. Jaymin Borkhatria, Southall Travel sales director, said: "It has been an incredibly busy month with bookings up around 10% this January compared to last. Dubai is proving more popular than ever and we expect it to welcome many more British holidaymakers to its beaches this year. "Bali is becoming increasingly popular amongst British travellers and with more flights available and many fantastic hotels and resorts offering great value, we expect this trend to continue throughout 2017."

8 February 2017, Source Travelbiz

Hotelbeds to acquire Tourico Holidays

Bedbank Hotelbeds Group is to acquire Tourico Holidays for an undisclosed sum. It said the deal would help fuel its expansion in North America, where Tourico is based. Tourico Holidays is a global travel distribution company contracting directly with hotels, flights, cruise lines, attractions, car rentals, holiday homes and more. It works on a 'high volume, wholesale model' to broker this inventory to over 4,900 clients in 100 countries using proprietary technology. Last April, HotelBeds was sold by TUI Group to Cinven and Canada Pension Plan Investment Board for \$1.3 billion. Hotelbeds executive chairman Joan Vila said: "With the backing of Cinven and CPPIB we are entering the next phase of our development since becoming an independent company back in September. "The proposed deal will enable us to enhance our footprint, especially in Tourico Holidays' home market of North America whilst they will benefit from belonging to Hotelbeds Group's global network. Together we will combine our best in class technology and distribution expertise for the benefit of both our hotel partners and clients." The statement said Tourico Holidays will continue to operate as an independent business but the long-term strategy is to combine the businesses. The deal is subject to customary regulatory and anti-trust approvals.

10 February 2017, Source Travelbiz

Donald Trump's actions 'could hurt Irish tourism to US'

The American holiday market is becoming more lucrative than ever but US president Donald Trump's action on immigration could stall progress, according to the CEO of the Irish Travel Agents Association (ITAA). Pat Dawson told the Irish Examiner that many Irish holidaymakers felt increasingly uneasy about the welcome they would get in Mr Trump's America — a factor that could stymie the increase in numbers of visitors looking to the likes of Florida and California, as old favourites such as Turkey and Tunisia fell by the wayside. The ITAA represents 100 travel agents and 70 other sales outlets. Mr Dawson echoed Thomas Cook's outlook, published yesterday, that showed bookings to Turkey and north Africa suffered due to security concerns. Thomas Cook said it was cautious about the rest of the year due to political and economic uncertainty, sending its shares down sharply, even though the tour operator produced solid first-quarter results and a rise in summer bookings. The introduction of US flights by Norwegian Airlines International and Wow Air was a potential boon to Irish holidaymakers, he said. "With Norwegian and Wow entering the market, you can be sure Aer Lingus and other airlines will not leave them have a free run of it by sitting back and doing nothing," Mr Dawson said. "Norwegian and Wow are going to be providing serious competition. That means the established airlines will have to fight back hard, which means more benefit to the customer through lower fares. The American market could become massive." However, the potential growth of the market was potentially marred by Mr Trump and increasing belligerent talk by the far right on immigration and visitors to the US. There is increasing speculation that legal immigration could also come under the microscope by the Republican-led Congress, while it has also been suggested that even holiday visas, which allow visitors in for 90 days, may be curtailed. Mr Dawson said: "We in the ITAA would like our political leaders to impress upon their American counterparts that such rhetoric coming from president Trump is harmful and sends out the wrong message. "We have found that Americans are among the friendliest hosts in the world when it comes to tourists and it would be a shame if that was threatened." living.

10 February 2017, Source Travelbiz

Visit Florida under threat

A bill has been passed to pull state funding for Visit Florida despite fierce opposition from the state's tourism industry. A House committee in Florida voted by a 10-5 margin in favour of a measure that would effectively kill the tourism marketing organization. Over 150 speakers representing the state's tourism industry warned the bill threatened businesses and jobs. They argued that smaller businesses would be more vulnerable to the impact of the bill than industry heavyweights such as Disney and Universal. The vote is a blow to Governor Rick Scott who had earlier criticised the House, saying the move would hurt Florida's economic momentum.

13 February 2017, Source TravelMole

Virgin cancels 'handful' of US flights in April/May

Virgin Atlantic has cancelled a 'handful' of flights in April and May, blaming 'operational constraints'. The airline said flights to and from Atlanta, San Francisco and Orlando will be affected, but did not provide any more detail. "We constantly review our flying programme and identified that during a peak period we may face operational constraints," it said. "Rather than risk any delays to customers on the day of travel, we have taken the necessary steps, now, to ensure that we can minimise disruption. "It's never our intention to disappoint our customers, and we'd like to apologise for any inconvenience caused by this change. We've offered everyone a choice of alternate flights, or a full refund if they no longer wish to travel." It said it was working closely with partner Delta Air Lines to accommodate as many customers as possible. "For customers that have booked Premium Economy on Virgin Atlantic operated flights and are subsequently moved onto a Delta Air Lines operated flight in main cabin, we will offer partial refunds on their Premium Economy booked seat," it said.

13 February 2017, Source Travel Weekly

Holidaymakers book early fearing post Article 50 pound slump

More holidaymakers are booking early amidst fears the value of the pound will drop after Article 50 is triggered. Since Brexit, it is estimated holidays in Europe cost an extra 15% following plunges in the value of the sterling. Adam Walsh of holiday lettings company Interhome UK told The Guardian concerns over further devaluations had led to unusually high advance bookings. He said Interhome had seen large numbers of bookings from last August for this summer. He said after Boxing Day, there was a rise of 50% on 2015's figures in summer bookings. "What seems to have happened is that people are hedging their bets early," said Walsh. "People are much more aware of the impact of sterling on the price of their holiday." Bookings to Cancun in Mexico have also increased due its attractive currency exchange rate. The peso has been hit by Donald Trump's threats about tougher tariffs and immigration restrictions.

13 February 2017, Source Travel Weekly

Tui confirms sale of Travelopia division for £325 million

Tui has confirmed the sale of its Travelopia division of specialist businesses to private equity firm KKR for £325 million. The division of luxury and adventure holiday brands including Hayes & Jarvis, Jetsave, Citalia and Sunsail was put up for sale in September last year after Tui confirmed in May that it intended to dispose of the portfolio to focus on its core products. Tui's executive board approved the disposal in Hanover on Monday. Travelopia has a large, international customer base of over 800,000 travellers each year and serves over 70 destinations globally through its 53 brands. Will Waggott, chief executive of Travelopia, told a Travel Weekly Business Breakfast in September that he expected the sale to be completed in the first quarter of this year, and said interest had been higher from private equity firms than trade buyers. Speculation has been rife about the potential identity of the buyer, with sources confirming interest had been shown by Chinese conglomerate HNA Group, and media reports also touting Kuoni Group. The Travelopia unit has annual revenue of €1.171 billion and earnings before interest, tax and amortization [EBITDA] of €50 million. Tui was originally reported to be seeking a deal worth around £500 million. The sale was confirmed ahead of Tui's first quarter results that were reported to the City on Tuesday. Chief executive of Tui Group, Fritz Jousen, said: "The sale of Travelopia is the next strategic step in sharpening Tui's profile. We consistently continue to focus on becoming a vertically integrated tourism business. "Both the Group and its shareholders benefit from the negotiated result. We have ambitious goals and want to take the Tui brand into new regions in the world in the coming years. A clear strategic direction supports this course." Mattia Caprioli, member and head of services at KKR Europe, said: "The high-end experiential travel market is underpinned by attractive structural growth drivers. "These include the growing value consumers place on experiences over goods and the increasing mobility of older travelers. We believe that Travelopia is ideally positioned to benefit from these trends. "We intend to leverage our experience in the leisure and travel sector gained through investments such as PortAventura, Get Your Guide, Trainline, Go-Jek and Apple Leisure, to support management in their strategic initiatives." Edouard Pillot, director and head of business services at KKR Europe, added: "KKR has a longstanding and successful track record with corporate carve-outs, in particular in Europe. "Going forward, the company will have KKR's full support and will be able to leverage our technology expertise as well as our global platform. "We look forward to working with the chief executive Will Waggott and his team to support Travelopia in seizing the exciting opportunities ahead, including harnessing the potential from digital distribution and CRM and expanding its geographical reach, notably into China." Will Waggott, chief executive of Travelopia, said: "KKR's experience in the sector, global reach and digital expertise make it the perfect partner for Travelopia as we continue to grow. "We have leading brands, loyal customers, deep destination expertise and a highly committed employee base, which puts us in a strong position to address the large and growing experiential travel market opportunity. "I am very excited about the next chapter in Travelopia's history and what it will offer our customers." KKR was advised by Catalyst Partners, Rothschild, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, Dentons, Deloitte & Touche, and Ernst & Young. Crystal Ski and Thomson Lakes and Mountains were exempted from the disposal and have been integrated into Tui's mainstream business.

14 February 2017, Source Travelbiz

US travel industry has lost \$185m since Trump took office

President Trump has cost the US travel industry around \$185 million (€174m) in lost revenue. That's according to the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), which claims visits to the US have tailed off by 2.2pc since Trump implemented his controversial executive order, which banned citizens of seven mainly Muslim countries from visiting the US. Although that order has since been deemed illegal by a federal judge, the slump in visits has apparently also been accompanied by a fall in demand for US-bound flights. A travel company, Hopper, which analyses billions of flight searches around the world, has said demand is 10pc lower than it was before Trump took office. Hopper claims demand started to dip on the day of Trump's inauguration – down 5pc compared to the previous two weeks – and crashed by as much as 17 per cent in the days following his controversial executive order. Although there has been a recovery since the ban was lifted, Hopper claims searches for flights to the US at the time of writing remain 10pc lower than they were in the final fortnight of the Obama administration. During the same period last year, demand dipped by just 1.8pc, suggesting the change is not simply a seasonal effect. “Trump’s executive order has led to a significant drop in interest in traveling to the US,” concluded Patrick Surry, Hopper’s chief data scientist. “While some would argue that a reduction in foreign visitors is a positive outcome, it’s clear that the vast majority of these potential travellers are simply business people, tourists, family members, students and the like.” Echoing the concerns of the GBTA, Surry fears that the reinstatement of the travel ban could lead to a prolonged “Trump slump” for the US travel industry. “If travel restrictions are reinstated it may send the message that visitors are no longer welcome in America and we could be seeing the start of a significant downturn for the travel and tourism industry,” he said. Data compiled by another travel company, Kayak, which analysed flight searches from the EU to the US, paints a similar picture. It reports a 14pc year-on-year decrease in the number of EU citizens searching for flights to the US in January, when Trump signed his executive order. “With 1.5 billion searches conducted on Kayak websites every year, these percentage changes are really significant,” said Kayak’s Suzanne Perry. “The data strongly indicates that there has been a substantial decline in searches and interest for travel to the US since the start of Donald Trump’s campaign.” While most of the world seems less interested in travelling to Trump’s America, according to Hopper there is one notable exception. In Russia, searches for US-bound flights have increased by a whopping 88pc.

17 February 2017, Source TTG

Thomas Cook to close 39 stores

Thomas Cook will close a further 39 stores as part of a “refurbishment and rebranding programme”. There are a total of 180 people employed across the 39 stores - Cook’s total retail staff in the UK is 5,500. The move comes after the operator closed 28 high street stores between October and December last year. A Thomas Cook spokesperson confirmed that the split of Co-operative Travel stores closing versus Thomas Cook shops shutting was “about half and half”. In December it was announced that Thomas Cook would take full ownership

of its UK retail network after the Co-operative Group exercised its “put option” on a joint venture between the firms. At the time of the announcement, there were 556 Thomas Cook stores and 208 Co-operative Travel branches, totaling 764. Now, there are a total of 757 stores in the network. Today, Thomas Cook said the 39 upcoming nationwide closures would be in areas already well-served by other Thomas Cook shops, to “ensure it is focused in locations where customers want to visit”. When complete, Thomas Cook will have 719 stores. The operator said the affected stores were either in areas where there were too many stores in close proximity, or had seen a decline in footfall which had impacted profitability. Discussions have begun with the employees affected with the hope that “the majority can be redeployed across the business to retain their expertise”. The spokesperson said the consultation period would last “a number of weeks”. According to the government’s website, there’s no time limit on how long redundancy consultations last, but there is a minimum period before an employee can be dismissed. For 20-99 proposed redundancies the minimum consultation period before dismissal is 30 days, and for 100 or more proposed redundancies the period is 45. Thomas Cook has also announced its first step in consolidating its store network into one high-street brand by refurbishing and rebranding 57 Co-operative Travel shops. The aim is to move all stores to the Thomas Cook brand by November 2018. As part of “network improvements”, Thomas Cook will open a new Discovery store this spring in Silverburn, Glasgow. With three openings last year – in Westfield Stratford City, Chelmsford and Belfast – Discovery stores are focused on higher footfall areas such as shopping centres “and have already proven very popular with customers thanks to the fresh new design, dedicated kids areas and interactive video content”. As well as new stores, Cook is planning a rolling programme of refurbishments of existing stores in high footfall areas to the new format, with the aim of having 25 Discovery stores by the end of 2019. Kathryn Darbandi, director of retail and customer experience for Thomas Cook UK & Ireland, said: “We’re continually reviewing our network of stores across the UK to ensure that they’re doing the best job they can in engaging customers in the great range of holidays Thomas Cook offers. “While we’ve seen strong growth in our online sales, we also know that more than two thirds of customers who research online come into store, valuing that face-to-face contact with our travel experts. “The changes we’re making ensure that we’ve not only got the right stores where customers most need them but also that we’re creating an experience that they will recommend to their family and friends.” Cook would not reveal the location of any possible closures.

17 February 2017, Source Travelbiz

Passport renewal service to go online next month

The rollout of an online adult passport renewal service will start next month. It is one of a number of significant customer service improvements being made at a time when the Passport Service is coming under post-Brexit pressure. Passport applications from Britain were up 71% last month, compared to the same period last year, while applications from the North were up 77%. The Department of Foreign Affairs said there had been a “significant increase” in demand for passports in recent months. “While we do not compile information on why citizens apply for passports, it is reasonable to assume, based on the trends in applications from Northern Ireland and Great Britain, that the outcome of the UK referendum

on EU membership is one of the factors that has led to an increase in demand,” the department stated. There was a 13% increase in outbound travel last year, compared to 2015. A large number of Irish people went overseas for the European Football Championship and a spike in applications in 2006 caused a surge in renewals a decade later. The Passport Service issued a record number of passports last year. More than 730,000 passports were issued, a 9% increase on 2015. Foreign Affairs Minister Charlie Flanagan said that increased demand for passports was likely to continue unabated. “In the short term, to respond to the growth in demand, the Passport Service is recruiting over 230 temporary clerical officers, over half of which are already in place,” he said. Mr Flanagan advised people to submit their applications in plenty of time to avoid disappointment or disruption to their travel plans. At least six weeks before the intended date of the trip was recommended. Among Passport Service customer service enhancements being introduced are an online application tracking service and a web-chat social media service.

23 February 2017, Source Travelbiz

Jobs under threat as Visit Florida budget is slashed

Visit Florida is likely to be forced to cut jobs after politicians voted to keep the tourism body but to slash its funding by nearly 70%. The House of Appropriations Committee decided it will receive just \$25 million this year, compared to \$76 million last year. Earlier this month the House voted by a majority of 10-5 to withdraw funding from Visit Florida altogether, but an amended bill put forward by House Speaker Richard Corcoran had been passed to ensure its survival. In addition to the funding cut, it will require the tourism body to be more accountable with staff travel and salaries, and it will have to make contracts public. Visit Florida was rocked by a scandal last year when it was discovered that its former chief had secretly paid rapper Pitbull \$1 million. "We're putting them on a leash - a short leash - and provided that they show measurable progress and success with the new accountability measures that we put in place with this bill, then there is certainly an opportunity down the road for them to ask for more," said bill sponsor Paul Renner. The office of Governor Rick Scott, a staunch supporter of Visit Florida, said the funding cut was likely to cost jobs. "More than a million Florida families rely on jobs in our tourism industry and are threatened with this massive cut," it said. "If we cut the budget by 67%, our state will lose visitors and our families will lose jobs." 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.

23 February 2017, Source TTG

Barrhead expansion plan to include hiring 100 new staff

Barrhead Travel has revealed it will recruit 100 new staff as it continues with its expansion plans. Last year, the firm announced that its second English outlet would open in Leicester this spring and Barrhead has now confirmed further expansion plans for the next two years. This follows a successful first year for their Newcastle store, which opened in late 2015 as the first branded retail outlet in England. More than 12 locations across the UK have been earmarked as part of the two-year growth strategy. Two new call centres will also be opened

to support growth in the travel group's online offering. Sharon Munro, chief executive of Barrhead Travel, said: "To support our growth strategy, we've launched a recruitment drive and are on the lookout for exceptional individuals with a passion for travel." "Our expansion plans this year alone will see us taking on up to 100 new employees, including modern apprentices, destination specialists across our branch network and a variety of non-sales roles, including marketing, web content and business development." Meanwhile, the company has reported a 20% rise in sales year-on-year for January and February. The result comes after year-end performance in the last few months of 2016 showed a 24% year-on-year increase. The agency chain has seen a 25% upswing in family holiday bookings, with a 25% rise in traditionally popular destinations such as Salou in Spain. Top-selling destinations included Dubai (up 132%), New York (up 44%), Thailand (up 150%) and Vancouver (up 24%). Munro said: "We are delighted with our performance so far this year and anticipate continued growth over the coming months."

23 February 2017, Source TTG

Visit Florida moves to reassure UK partners

Visit Florida's global head of sales has flown to the UK to bolster confidence among travel companies following Donald Trump's election as US president. Alfredo Gonzalez, vice-president of international sales and global development, will visit between 12 and 15 key partners this week, including British Airways, Virgin Holidays and Funway Holidays. He said the trade mission was decided in the wake of Trump's attempt to ban travellers from seven countries. Gonzalez said: "We're reassuring our clients not really about Donald Trump, but that we will continue to support all partners in the UK, regardless of what he's doing and saying. "We're seeing as many [partners] as we can possibly talk to. It is about reassuring them that Florida is behind all their programmes. "We don't care who's in the White House; we care about giving them the product and support that they need. "If anything, some of [the suppliers] are discussing the possibility of doing more [to Florida]. We know how important it is to have good relations." Gonzalez also defended Visit Florida after calls to abolish the trade body following funding concerns. Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, Richard Corcoran, made the proposal among a number of measures, including closing down the state's economic development agency, Enterprise Florida. Corcoran criticised the tourist board over a number of spending decisions, including paying the rapper Pitbull \$1 million to promote the state and the ongoing sponsorship of Fulham Football Club. Gonzalez said: "They are trying to stop funding something that has worked so well for so many years and generated so many jobs and so many dollars for Florida. "[Tourism] is our main industry and our main employer." The state received a total of 112.8 million tourists in 2016, a 5.9% increase on the previous year's figure of 106.6 million. In 2015, the visitor numbers from the UK were 1.7 million – a 3% year-on-year increase against the 2014 figure of 1.64 million. The UK represents 11% of the total international visitor numbers to Florida, second only to Canada.

27 February 2017, Source TravelMole

Saturday Night Takeaway partners with Disney and Virgin

Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway has teamed up with Walt Disney World and Virgin Holidays for this season's grand finale. Walt Disney World Resort in Florida will host the final live episode of the ITV show on April 8, with an audience of prize winners and Virgin Holidays customers. Virgin is taking a specially chartered plane to Orlando where 200 guests can stay for five nights at Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort, with spending money and ground transportation. Virgin is giving away two prizes on its website. Other prizes can be won throughout the current series, which launched this Saturday with an average of 7.4 million viewers, peaking at 8.7 million - twice the figures of rival shows The Voice and Let it Shine.