

UK OFFICE

January 2018 REPORT

Prepared by: **Venessa Alexander**
UK Director

Meetings/Training/Events

- **Virgin Atlantic** – We met with Jan McKeown, Coordinator Trade Partners, who advised that they would really appreciate some support for the Belfast and Glasgow route to Orlando. We advised that we are keen to partner with them, particularly with Belfast, so Jan will ask Holly Best to follow up with us on opportunities.
- **Discover America Sweden** – We attended their annual travel agent workshop in Stockholm. We were joined by 14 other USA suppliers and the format of the evening was 5 minute presentations to small groups of approx. 9 agents, before the group moved to the next supplier. We provided an overview of the destination and what's new, and we distributed brochures, maps and giveaways. There was also an opportunity after the workshop to network with the agents during the buffet dinner. Overall, we met with 130 agents.
- **Resia, Stockholm** – Whilst we were in Stockholm we visited Resia to provide training to their sales agents who were unable to attend the Discover America workshop. We provided a detailed overview of the destination allowing the agents to ask questions. We also provided them with collateral and giveaways.
- **Icelandair** – We met with John Rassmussen and Christian Haggstrom, Sales Managers, who advised that the route to Tampa was doing ok and there were no plans to change its frequency. They were confident that the USA would perform better this year due to the increased demand from customers. Christian mentioned that their office is now closed in Sweden, however the Copenhagen office remains open until further notice. All of the sales team report directly into Iceland.
- **Visit Tampa Bay** – We met with Josephine Ando to discuss the forthcoming sales agent fam trip in June. She has requested the seats with British Airways to Tampa, which have now been confirmed. 10 seats have been held for 14-20 June, which will include 3 nights in Tampa followed by 3 nights in St. Pete/Clearwater. The trip will be escorted by Tampa. We will start sourcing accommodation and will also plan to work on the itinerary.
- **Scandinavian Sales Mission** – We met with Ruhksana Timmis, Visit Orlando, and Norbert Simon, SeaWorld Parks, to discuss the previous joint sales mission and to start making plans for this year. We explored potential dates rather than November, however this time works well for each partner as well as the agencies as it's just before the peak booking period. We have decided that we would consider fewer events and will ask the Florida Keys if they would like to partner with us.

- **Reislivmessen, Oslo** – As part of Florida Beaches we attended their annual consumer and trade travel fair in Oslo. The event took place across three days, 12th, 13th and 14th January 2018. On Friday 3,620 members of the trade were admitted as well as 6,440 members of the public. Saturday was the busiest day; welcoming 17,600 attendees and Sunday saw 14,700. Overall, 42,360 people attended the show. Exhibitors included destinations, hotels and travel products across the USA and the world. The Florida's Beaches booth was located in the Discover America section on one of the main walkways, ensuring a good positioning to attract passersby. The stand was extremely well visited and was one of the most visited in the Discover America section. Visitors were very interested in Florida and many had already booked a roundtrip and were looking for further ideas regarding activities and hotel recommendations during their stay. We also met with several travel agencies and tour operators including: Albatros, American Adventures, Benns, Berg Hansen, Cruisespecialisten, Escape Travel, HRG, My Cruise, Nordmannsreiser, Reisegiganten, The Key, Ticket, USA Rejser and USA Specialisten. During the 3 days we distributed brochures, maps and giveaways.
- **Boardmasters/BrandKiss** – Following on from initial conversations with Stuart Gordon at BrandKiss, we met with Yan Li, Partnerships Director and Les Seddon-Brown, Director, Boardmasters to discuss the proposal further. The festival will run from 8th – 12th August, and we would be positioned at Fistral Beach in the Headlands area along with up to 4 other partners. We would be their only destination partner. This space offers great prominence as visitors walk past this area to reach the beach activities, and this is predominately where the families will spend their time. We advised that we would like an activation that was engaging and will be shared through social media, and we would be happy to provide a family holiday to increase the reach further. Yan provided further information on the tickets included in our agreement and possible accommodation options for our VIP guests. We have confirmed our participation. Since our meeting, we have provided Les with our available budget who will provide some suggestions for our activation.

TRADE LIAISON

- **Consumer Campaign** – Interim booking results received from Expedia show substantial increases in room nights over the first half of the campaign period compared to the same period last year. The campaign will run to end of January.
- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners** – We have now received a final proposal that we have agreed will be a stand-alone opportunity as Experience Kissimmee are already working with USAirtours on other activity. The proposal this year will see both promotions running in tandem on the USAirtours brand site (Trade) and TravelPlanners brand site (Consumer). The activity will commence in May and will run for a period of one month online but will have additional activity taking place throughout the whole of the spring/summer months. Activity includes: For Travelplanners: Destination Focus, destination banner displayed on homepage, dedicated landing page, inclusion in 2 email newsletters sent to consumer base 200,000, social media post and for USAirtours: Destination of the month, one month campaign promoting destination, banner on agent zone and link to special offers and Destination page, 2 x A4 downloadable posters, inclusion in 2 email newsletters sent to 7500 travel agents, agency sales team promoting destination on phone calls, agent visits and Road shows and social media posts. As part

of the Visit Florida Q2 Campaign we will receive inclusion in 2 x Travelplanners and 2 x USAirtours emails and banners on both websites. We are also looking at a possible OK Magazine Promotion or likewise still to be confirmed. This campaign will be in partnership with Brand USA.

- **Ocean Florida** – We are awaiting a proposal for activity for 2018 and this will be with us shortly. The Visit Florida campaign that we are a partner of, which includes activity with Ocean Florida, has now launched and is currently in market and will continue into next month. We have confirmed training for the staff and new recruits in March.
- **Brand USA** – Confirmation has been received as to the programmes that will run through the LOA with Brand USA
- **Virgin Holidays** – Co-op marketing plan has now been approved with activity to launch March 2018. Activity will include brochure launch email, marketing banner on homepage, retail activity and a full page in the Virgin Atlantic in-flight magazine as we as participation in the Visit Florida campaign.
- **Tour America** – We have now received our joint activity proposal moving forward into 2018 from Tour America. We will be running a 3-way out of home campaign with Experience Kissimmee and have been advised that the campaign has a due start date of the 19th February. The campaign will be in partnership with Brand USA. The proposal includes the following activity;
 - 4FM Radio Promo & Live OB Launch (2 weeks) - From 19th February
 - 4FM Adverts (3 weeks) - From 19th February
 - Prizes - 2 x 7-night holiday prizes
 - 2 x Email Newsletters 19th & 26th February
 - Social media takeover for 2 weeks - 19th February & 5th March
 - Website Takeover for 2 weeks - 19th February & 5th March
 - Sunday World Full Page Ad (3 weeks) - 19th & 26th February and 5th March
 - Digital Display Ads (3 weeks) - 19th & 26th February and 5th March
- **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment** – Following on from our meeting with SeaWorld in December, we have confirmed seats with Virgin Atlantic in October for our joint sales agent fam trip. We have sent the details to Rosemarie and Michelle to source accommodation for the group. The Sheraton Sand Key has now kindly offered rooms for this trip, so we will be in touch with them closer to the arrival with final rooming lists and itinerary details. Likewise, we will work with Michelle in the coming months to start arranging the itinerary.
- **TUI** – Ongoing discussions with TUI with regards possible co-op marketing. We are currently awaiting a proposal from them.
- **Bookabed** – The recent Destination of the month campaign with Bookabed yielded the following results;
 - The Facebook post reached a total of 4,607 people

- The 1st e-newsletter (02 Oct) was sent to a total of 27,859 agents with a unique open rate of 3,777 (13.78%) with a total click through open rate of 30 (0.69%)
 - The 2nd e-newsletter (30 Nov) was sent to a total of 922 with 129 unique opens (14.07%) and a CTR of 1.55%
 - The 3rd e-newsletter (30 Nov) was sent to 2,832 with 405 unique opens (14.58%) and a CTR of 0.83%
 - Room night stats showed a total of 374 booked during the campaign period
- **Visit Florida Campaign** – Work continues in supplying assets to tour operator partners in conjunction with the Visit Florida annual winter campaign. We continue to complete sign off on some activity with Funway Holidays, Thomas Cook and Ocean Florida. British Airways activity as part of this campaign is due to start next month.
 - **Experience Kissimmee/Visit Tampa Bay/SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment** – After our meeting last month, work has now commenced on the joint training mission that will be taking place from 16th – 19th April 2018. This year we will be visiting Dublin, Belfast, Peterborough, Cambridge and the Kingston area. We have also confirmed that we will be hosting a trade dinner in both Dublin and London and a travel agent lunch event in Belfast.
 - **USAirtours** – Linda Dixey advised that their new 2018 brochure has launched which has a page dedicated to St. Pete/Clearwater featuring 4 of our partner hotels. Our area is also featured in their suggested multi-centre itineraries with Orlando.
 - **Funway Holidays** – We have received the final copy of the Florida brochure which has been approved. Following on from her meeting at Huddle, we have provided Amy Shine, Product Manager with our logo for marketing activity. We have also provided Adam Traynor, Marketing Executive with copy, USPs and images for the upcoming Florida Beaches campaign. We should expect to see the proofs next month.
 - **Visit USA, Ireland** – As a member of Visit USA we have been offered the opportunity to display our brochures at Holidays World in Dublin at the end of the month. We have arranged for these to be sent to the venue. We have also taken a video slot to showcase our area video at the show.
 - **Visit USA, UK and Ireland** – We have updated our destination page to includes news on the new museums and exhibits, including; The James Museum of Western Art and Wildlife, Imagine Museum, and Star Wars exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts.
 - **VSPC Product Manager Fam Trip** – We are currently looking at the possibility of a Product Managers FAM trip to our area in partnership with British Airways in September. We were unable to secure convenient dates with Experience Kissimmee due to other commitments already having been scheduled by both parties so we will re-visit this partnership opportunity in 2019 and we will now look to host a solus destination FAM.
 - **Visit Florida** – We have confirmed our attendance at their next partner meeting, which is scheduled for next month. This was postponed from December. Rachel Houston contacted us to advise that they were doing a Florida feature with Selling Long-haul and asked us for an image. We have provided her with the necessary assets. Samantha

Williams, Account Executive contacted us for our logo for inclusion on a Visit Orlando sign board for TravMedia.

- **Brand USA Mega Fam** – We have been working with Michelle to finalise an itinerary for this trip. This includes; dinner at Marriott Suites, breakfast at Renaissance Vinoy, The Dali Museum, beach time at Tradewinds, a beach party at The Sheraton Sand Key and breakfast at The Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach. The group will be staying at the Sheraton Sand Key Resort. Transport will be arranged by Brand USA once the itinerary has been confirmed. We have provided Lucy Russell of Brand USA with the itinerary as they will start sharing the information with the agents. We will follow up with our partners once we have the names and details of the agents who will be participating.
- **TBO Holidays** – Patrik Birkhofer, Commercial Director contacted us after meeting Mohammed Daod at WTM in November. He advised that he is looking to promote St. Pete/Clearwater so we provided him with copy and images which can be used for the UK market. We also put him in contact with Marion for assistance for the other European markets, and Rosemarie for other markets.
- **THG Holidays** – John Bowden advised that he is looking to include St. Pete/Clearwater in a Secret Escape promotion and is looking for support from our hotel partners. We have asked Michelle to approach our suppliers to see what they may be able to offer for inclusion in this promotion. We have confirmed our support for their charity golf day which will be held in August, and we have also confirmed marketing activity which will include; online flash sales, website campaign and offers, emails and posters/flyers for their retail stores. The activity will run throughout the year. We have provided John with assets for the creatives and billing details.
- **Discover America, Scandinavia** – We have received Jan – Jul 2017 US arrivals from Scandinavia from Karin Gert Nielson;
 - Denmark – 196,577 visitors +0.8% vly
 - Sweden – 298,469 visitors -6.3% vly
 - Norway – 179,180 visitors +4.5% vly
 - Finland – 84,665 visitors -3.4% vly

From January 1st to July 30th 2017, a total of 835,006 Nordic travelers crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and even though this is still a slight decrease of -0.5% compared to the same period last year, it is a clear indication that visitation is already getting back to the same positive development that has dominated the Scandinavian tourism to USA for years. “The constant increase in visitation we have witnessed for the past many years is a clear indicator of the big Scandinavian appetite for USA. When you combine that with the number of new route openings, which has been especially significant in recent years, it was only a matter of time before the positive numbers would once again set the agenda,” says Karin Gert Nielsen, Managing Director in Discover America Denmark.

- **Tour America** – Linda Ryan has advised that Kathleen O’Rourke will be covering Veronica Flood during her maternity leave. Kathleen currently manages social media and will be our main contact during this time with regards to marketing activity.

- **XLNT Travel, Sweden** – Following on from the Discover America Malmo travel agent workshop in September, Peter Hellstrom, Regional Sales Manager, contacted us for more information for his trip to St. Pete/Clearwater in December. We have provided details on the accommodation choices in our area.
- **USAirtours** – USAirtours promoted a twin-centre holiday to Kissimmee and St. Pete/Clearwater (The hotel featured is The Sirata Beach Resort) and they provided this to us free of charge. The 14-night holiday prices started at £649 per person, a saving of over £360 per person.
- **Gold Medal/Travel 2** – We have received the draft copy of our destination page for their 2019 Florida brochure. We have sent our comments and will await the final copy for approval.
- **Kenwood Travel** – Nicola Hollihead contacted us to advise that she is now the USA Product Manager at Kenwood Travel in London and will be our main contact going forward. She advised that they are looking to increase their online content, so we have provided the necessary assets. We will follow up with her next month to arrange a sales meeting. Nicola also advised that they had included our destination in their BA Exclusive newsletter, which was complimentary.
- **Boardmasters**– Following on from our meeting, we have now confirmed accommodation in Fistril Beach for the event.
- **British Airways Holidays** – We have confirmed our participation in their annual Florida training day which will be held in Newcastle in April.
- **Tour America** – Tour America have made the final three for the ITAA Marketing Awards having submitted our joint marketing campaign in February 2017.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

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MARKET INTELLIGENCE:

2 January 2018, Source Travel Weekly

Norwegian boosts premium class capacity on long-haul routes

Budget airline Norwegian is raising premium class capacity on long-haul routes. The expanded premium cabin on new Boeing 787 Dreamliners will have 60% more seats. The 56-seat cabin configuration will offer passengers more than a metre of legroom and 11 inch Panasonic monitors providing free in-flight entertainment. The new cabin will be fitted on 20 Dreamliners set for delivery from February. Ten out of 11 new aircraft to be added to the airline's long-haul fleet from Gatwick will feature the new premium cabin. Twelve new Boeing 737 MAX aircraft will join the fleet this year to serve the carrier's transatlantic routes from Edinburgh, Belfast and Ireland to the US east coast. Norwegian will begin to expand in-

flight Wi-Fi on long-haul routes at an unspecified date later in the year. Chief commercial officer Thomas Ramdahl said: “This year will see us fly to new heights as the UK will continue to be centre stage for our international growth. “We want to fly people further for the best possible value which is why we’re investing for the future in low-cost long-haul travel. “We’re upgrading the long-haul passenger experience by introducing a bigger premium cabin, inflight Wi-Fi and more brand-new aircraft to service our expanding network.

“It has never been a better time to fly Norwegian and we’re excited to launch affordable flights from London to Argentina where we have active plans to take-off this year.”

6 January 2018, Source Travel Weekly

Margins in family market tipped to feel pinch in 2018

The outlook for the year is positive, say industry leaders, but the mainstream market could be ‘a battleground’. Ian Taylor reports. Margins may be squeezed in the mainstream family market in coming months, leading industry figures have warned. Abta chief executive Mark Tanzer reported members’ annual turnover at a record high of £37 billion, but told a Travel Weekly Business Breakfast at the end of last year: “You can’t just look at the top line. There has been a squeeze on margins.” He said 2017 had proved “better than I imagined”, but added: “At a certain point you have to recognise there is going to be a change, that different segments [of the market] will move in different ways and the industry needs to adapt.” Tanzer was speaking at the launch of the Travel Weekly Insight Report 2017-18 at the Deloitte head office in London. Alastair Pritchard, Deloitte UK lead partner for travel, insisted: “The outlook is positive. Everything in the research [for the report] suggests people will go on holiday, but they are starting to change habits. “The proportion [of UK consumers] planning a seven-night overseas holiday in 2018 has risen four points year on year, while demand for 14 nights is down. We see growth in appetite for two and three-star hotels and continued demand for all-inclusive holidays in the lower-income bracket. “The fall in sterling is clearly driving up costs, and there is a perception that people want to go to a safe destination. That will push up prices. But demand overall should hold up as consumers prioritise spending on holidays.” Tanzer said: “The suggestion that people are taking shorter holidays in two and three- star hotels is a sign of wealth being lower. It’s a sign of how much people have to spend on holidays in the long term. “There are segments powering ahead where people have disposable income – you can see margins holding up there – and others where it’s going to be tough, where it’s going to be a volume game.” Miles Morgan, managing director of agency chain Miles Morgan Travel, reported “a record year” in 2017 and said: “The report confirms that our market, ABC1s and 55-plus, is a winning sector to be in. “Cruise is particularly buoyant at the moment.” But he said: “Some other sectors, particularly the family market, will be squeezed. “The economy is slowing, interest rates are going up, Brexit concerns will start to crystallise. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to work out all-inclusive will become more popular because people need to budget. “The battleground for easyJet, Jet2 and Thomas Cook is going to become challenging. Margins will come under pressure if these guys keep increasing capacity.” Helen Caron, Tui UK and Ireland distribution and cruise director, said: “We see strong demand for all-inclusive, for cruise [and] for differentiated hotels. We are looking forward to a strong January.” Sophie Dekkers, easyJet UK country director, added: “Forward bookings for us are up year on year, given that Ryanair and Monarch capacity has come out of the market.”

6 January 2018, Source Travel Weekly

Tui issues optimistic forecast for ‘Sunshine Saturday’

Almost one million people are expected to visit a Tui travel agency or the operator's website to search for summer holidays on 'Sunshine Saturday' this weekend. It is predicted to be the busiest day of the year for bookings according to the UK's largest travel firm, based on booking figures over the past five years. Turkey, Montenegro, Halkidiki, Croatia and Cape Verde are expected to be this year's hot spots with a predicted rise in 'mid haul' holidays. Traditional seven and 14-night beach breaks are likely to be shunned in favour of ten and 11 night holidays, which are expected to become the "new normal," according to Tui. Holiday bookings in store peaked at noon this time last year with Tenerife, Palma and Lanzarote the top three destinations. Goa, Costa Rica and Vietnam are tipped to be the high demand long-haul destinations together with multicentre holidays. New Asia cruises Marella Explorer for 2018 include Koh Samui in Thailand. Tui UK and Ireland commercial director Richard Sofer, said: "Over the last few years we've seen an early booking trend for summer holidays and this week we expect this trend to continue with our busiest booking day of year taking place on Saturday. "This year we expect to see Brits returning to classic mid-haul favourites such as Turkey and exploring new destinations such as European hotspot Montenegro, which is set to be the new mid-haul gem, as people look for holidays that offer more than just a week on the beach." Tui Airways spent more than 41,000 hours in the air last summer jetting millions of holidaymakers away, which equates to flying around the world more than 600 times.

8 January 2018, Source TravelMole

BA unveils multi-million pound investment in World Traveller catering

British Airways has unveiled a multi-million pound investment in its long-haul economy catering. From January 17, it will introduce an 'exciting and expanded' new World Traveller menu that will change every six months. It claims the move will improve both the quantity and quality of its meals and snacks on long-haul flights. The changes come exactly a year after it controversially switched to paid-for catering on short-haul flights, introducing M&S snacks. Director of brand and customer experience, Carolina Martinoli, said: "Our customers tell us that when they're taking a long-haul flight, great food and beverages make a real difference to them. "It's a huge driver of customer satisfaction so we want to make sure we deliver a great experience. With this multi-million pound investment we've focused on introducing more quantity and quality to the catering, delivering tasty meals and great snacking options throughout the flight." Changes include pretzels with the welcome drink, a four-course meal with a bottle of water, a second light meal of a sandwich or pizza wrap, Magnum ice creams and snack boxes. "Our customers have also told us they want to be able to save some items for later in the flight, so we've replaced the water cup with a bottle of Highland Spring on the first meal, and added Graze snack boxes on our longest flights. We're also offering Magnum ice-creams on daylight flights from London and a Tuck Box on inbound and overnight flights," added Martinoli.

10 January 2018, Source TravelMole

Cash-strapped Brits not cutting back on holidays

Brits appear to be cutting back on everyday luxuries but are still planning to splash out on holidays this year, according to new research. A survey of more than 2,000 Brits by audit, tax and consulting firm RSM found 51% now describe themselves as 'cost-conscious' buyers when it comes to spending on clothes, homeware, technology, beauty and eating out. But a quarter of consumers, across all generations, said they had spent more on holidays in the past 12 months, with the same proportion planning to increase their spend on travel and tourism

this coming year. "We're seeing the rise of the experience economy," said Ian Bell, partner and head of travel and tourism at RSM. "Whilst our research illustrates the emergence of cost-conscious consumers as the economic squeeze on living standards intensifies, today's consumers still want to spend big on brag-worthy experiences whilst showing more restraint on everyday necessities." David Taylor, managing director of Neilson Holidays, added: "The summer holiday remains sacrosanct - they're effectively ring-fenced, and it is during these holidays that consumers will have the propensity to spend more, come what may. Whereas winter holidays remain more discretionary and vulnerable to the cost-conscious, particularly in times of austerity. "Life is a lot more pressured than 25 years ago. Our lives are busier. The pressures applied at school and in our jobs are far greater. Holidays have therefore become the beacon for reconnecting with our family and friends and unplugging from our daily lives and distractions. Holidays, and more significantly experiences, have become far more important to us. "The fast growing experience economy is fuelled by both ends of the demographic scale - by a health-conscious generation Z who have always prioritised active holidays and experiences, and by the more mature who increasingly want to do more than sit on a beach. Consumers across the board are recognising that people switch off better by switching on - it's a more effective means of distraction from our daily lives." Bell added: "While travel operators are likely to be the biggest winners in the experience economy, success is not guaranteed. Gathering consumer data, watching trends and tracking shopper behaviours will deliver the information retailers and operators need to stay relevant. The key will be to employ people with the right skills to make sense of it."

10 January 2018, Source Travolution

January holiday searchers are 'cost conscious' as popular destinations revealed

Online travel retailers are noticing customers looking to get more bang for their buck based on data from the January sales period so far. Data from deals publisher icelolly.com suggests holidaymakers searching this January are "cost-conscious" – with a rise in the number of searches for all-inclusive and half board getaways. Other trends seen at the start of the peak booking period include 40% of searchers looking for four star hotels and as many as 30% searching for five star accommodation. Cruise, on the Mediterranean in particular, is also on the up, according to searches on the website. Richard Singer, chief executive of icelolly.com, said: "January searches at icelolly.com highlight that holiday-goers are still cost-conscious, but if they are going to treat themselves to a holiday they want luxury and relaxation. "We've seen searches for holidays with a meal plan – either all inclusive or half board – up by a third versus last year. This is no surprise, as we know that holidaymakers are concerned about exchange rates and this will save them money and remove uncertainty. "More than 40% of our users are filtering searches to four star resorts, and a further 30% to five star resorts. The message here is loud and clear: Brits this year aren't just looking for cheap deals, they are seeking out a little luxury. "Following a 20% rise in searches for cruise holidays at the end of 2017, we've now seen a clear trend in rising demand for Mediterranean cruises, which have also jumped up by 20% compared to this time last year." Lastminute.com said bookings during January have risen "sharply" compared to last year, with Sunday January 7 bringing in a record number of sales. Meanwhile, OTA Kayak.co.uk revealed its top ten most-searched destinations so far this January to Travolution. As of January 9, they were: 1) New York 2) Amsterdam 3) Bangkok 4) London 5) Orlando 6) Paris 7) Sydney 8) Barcelona 9) Tokyo 10) Malaga.

11 January 2018, Source TravelMole

Florida sees record visitor numbers

Florida is celebrating a record number of visitors during the first nine months of 2017 when more than 88 million arrived in the Sunshine State. Speaking at Florida Huddle this week, Visit Florida CEO Ken Lawson said the tourism body was much more optimistic than a year ago when the government was threatening to withdraw its tourism funding. In an exclusive interview with TravelMole MD Graham McKenzie, Lawson said: "We are in a different place. Last year was about survival, there was a question about whether Visit Florida would be fully funded. Since the government and legislature decided to fund Florida at £76 million, we have been kicking tail." Following the hurricanes that struck Florida towards the end of last year, causing extensive damage to parts of the Keys, Lawson said more money had been pumped into its winter campaign to highlight the fact that entire state is 'open for business'.

12 January 2018, Source Travelbiz

Spain overtakes US to become the world's second most visited country despite terror attacks and Catalonia crisis

The number of tourists visiting Spain increased for a fifth consecutive year. Spanish PM Mariano Rajoy confirmed that 82million came to the country in 2017. This was despite the Barcelona terror attacks and the Catalonia political crisis. Spain now has more tourists than the US, which saw visitor numbers drop off. Spain has beaten the United States to become the world's second most visited country after France, it has been revealed. The Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy confirmed that his nation has seen a surge in tourism while speaking at an event during a visit to Italy. He revealed how 82million people had visited Spain in 2017, a nine per cent increase from the previous year that came despite the Barcelona terror attacks and the political crisis in Catalonia. In 2016, Spain welcomed 75.3 million visitors, just behind the United States with 75.6 million, while France - despite its own terror woes - easily remained the world leader with 82.6 million visitors, according to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). However, international tourism to the United States shrank during the first five months of Donald Trump's presidency, according to the US International Trade Administration. Arrivals fell five per cent in the first quarter and three per cent in the second quarter, official figures show.

13 January 2018, Source Travelbiz

Travel agents, airlines and retailers introduce new 'rip-off' fees for ALL customers as they dodge ban on charges for credit card users that was designed to save consumers millions

Soon companies won't be able to add extra if someone pays by credit card. Yet there are no obstacles to adding a fee as long as it applies to everyone. So businesses, like Just Eat, will now add a service charge for every transaction. Firms are set to pocket millions of pounds by introducing rip-off charges to get around a ban on credit card fees. From today, businesses are forbidden from imposing an extra charge if someone pays for a product or service by credit card. Companies have always insisted the charges were only imposed to cover the extra fees they had to pay for the cost of processing credit card payments. Campaigners, however, said they were hugely inflated and a brazen customer rip-off. It was hoped that the ban would save consumers £473million a year. But it has now emerged that some firms are trying to get around it. Travel agents, takeaway firms, airlines and football clubs have already admitted the dodge. Although the new rules ban discrimination against anyone using a particular form of payment, there are no obstacles to adding an extra fee as long as it applies to everyone equally. Businesses have seized the opportunity to charge more, imposing new 'service

charges' or extra commission to ensure they don't lose out. MPs and campaigners last night slammed firms for trying to get around the ban, saying their plans were deeply cynical. Hannah Maundrell, of comparison website Money.co.uk, said: 'This makes a mockery of the law which is trying to protect us from getting ripped off.' Takeaway delivery business Just Eat was one of the first to announce a fee hike in the wake of the European Union-wide ban. It previously charged 50p when a card was used to book an order, but has now imposed this 'service charge' on all orders. Research by Barclays investment bank suggests the new charges will add as much as £15million to revenues because customers who pay with cash will now be charged extra. Travel agents thought they would face a tight squeeze with the new rules. According to accountant RSM, the industry is braced for a £150million hit. But a survey by data company Wex found that 21 per cent of agents expected to charge all customers a new 'booking fee' to recover their profits. And another 29 per cent said they will put up the overall cost of holidays. As long ago as August, the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO) told the 122 holiday firms it represents to introduce a flat 0.5 per cent commission on all bookings received through travel agents. Kate Kenward, of AITO, said: 'Members are bound by our code of conduct and provide their specialist holiday services over and above the requirements of the package travel regulations and other legal requirements.' Airlines could employ the same tactic. Ryanair only stopped charging 2 per cent per booking this week – at the last possible moment. But boss Michael O'Leary is widely expected to put up prices elsewhere. Alex Paterson, a transport analyst at Investec bank, said: 'Currently, businesses can only pass on payment charges that genuinely reflect their costs. 'Many airlines charge in excess of this, with Ryanair charging 2 per cent, and we expect them to increase underlying prices to compensate.' The taxman has also been attacked for hypocrisy after HMRC stopped taking credit cards to avoid the extra cost of paying providers' fees itself. However, an MP gave a stern warning to companies trying to dodge the rules. Speaking in a personal capacity, Rachel Reeves, chairman of the business select committee, said: 'Companies should not be fleecing customers by charging an additional fee in an attempt to get around the ban. 'The effectiveness of the ban should be monitored by the Government and the regulator.' She added: 'If necessary, they must take action to stop companies from shamelessly misleading customers.'

13 January 2018, Source Travelbiz

UK tourists set for lower costs in 40% of top destinations

Long haul destinations offer the largest decrease in prices, according to Post Office Travel Money. UK holidaymakers will enjoy lower costs in two out of five (40%) popular destinations in 2018, according to a new study. The fall is driven by sterling's year-on-year gains against 70% of the top 40 holiday currencies, according to Post Office Travel Money. The pound has strengthened by 9.4% against the US dollar, 10.3% against the Kenyan shilling and 17.3% against the Turkish lira compared with January 2017. Long haul destinations offer the largest decrease in prices as the stronger pound combines with lower charges in shops, restaurants and bars. Prices have dropped 36% in Dubai (Jumeirah Beach), 31% in St Lucia (Rodney Bay) and 27% in New Zealand (Auckland). Japanese capital Tokyo was found to be the second cheapest destination for UK tourists buying eight tourist items such as a meal for two, sun cream and mineral water. Only Bulgaria's Sunny Beach resort is cheaper, according to the research. Portugal's Algarve is in third place, ahead of Prague in the Czech Republic and Cape Town, South Africa. Andrew Brown of Post Office Travel Money said: "The squeeze on spending at home means holiday resorts and cities where the pound will stretch further or where local prices are cheap are likely to reap the benefit of increasing visitor numbers in 2018."

15 January 2018, Source Travel Weekly

Holidaymakers to defy 'Blue Monday' with sales surge, says Travel Counsellors

Holiday bookings are expected to increase by 16% today as consumers defy 'Blue Monday'. Statistics from Travel Counsellors reveal that Blue Monday is set to be the busiest Monday of the year for bookings. In particular, data shows significant rises on Christmas and October half term bookings – up 36% and 34% respectively – as families look to plan ahead. This surge in demand follows strong growth figures for the travel company, with sales for January to date already up by 12% year-on-year. This includes a range of sun and city destinations, with Costa Adeje in Tenerife the most popular location so far this year. Dubbed the most depressing day of the year, 'Blue Monday' typically occurs on the third Monday of each year. Established in 2005, the day is said to be the end of the post-Christmas good spirits, with many people already struggling with new year resolutions and increasing debt levels. But Travel Counsellors UK managing director Kirsten Hughes said: "Following the return to work after the Christmas break, consumers are always looking to find the next thing to plan and look forward to. "The introduction of Blue Monday has given people the excuse they need to make that booking, resulting in growth in sales across the board on that day. "That impulsive nature has led to a rise in last minute travel booked for February and March in recent years – a trend we expect to see continue to build momentum again this time around. "This year promises to be the biggest rise in bookings yet, with sales already at strong levels. "Families have shown an increased willingness to plan ahead, with Christmas skiing breaks and summer and half term bookings already a priority."

17 January 2018, Source TravelMole

Record sales day for Barrhead

Barrhead Travel recorded its highest ever sales day on Saturday January 13, a 28% rise on the same day last year. The agency said footfall in its stores was high but there was also huge demand online, with bookings up 26%. Top destinations included Majorca, Orlando and Tenerife while all-inclusive holidays were 'by far the most popular holiday choice'. The agency also reported strong demand for cruise bookings, particularly Barrhead's own tailor-made cruise product, which couples cruises from Barcelona, Genoa and Venice with exclusive British Airways charter flights. Cruise bookings overall were up 11% year on year.

18 January 2018, Source TravelMole

US travel trade bodies unite to end 'Trump slump'

Concerned that the US is missing out on growth in global tourism due to President Trump's policies, travel bodies have joined voices to try to change the mindset in the White House. The US Travel Association, the American Hotel & Lodging Association, the National Restaurant Association and US Chamber of Commerce have created the Visit US Coalition to end the 'Trump slump'. It says it wants to work with the Trump administration to show the economic benefits of a strong inbound tourism sector. The current dip is a 'hindrance to the President's economic goals' and contrasts with several years of robust growth, it says. "Travel and tourism is our country's second largest export. We can't afford to lose ground to other countries," said Katherine Lugar, CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association. That has already happened. While global tourism was up, the US saw its market share of that shrink from 13.9% to 11.9% from 2015 to 2017. The slump is not just about Trump and his policies; the slide began before he entered the Oval Office, with a strong US dollar a

deterrent. However, the coalition aims to refine the overall message to ensure a more welcoming atmosphere for prospective visitors, from the rhetoric coming from the government to streamlined, respectful service at border points. "It's an opportunity to step forward and move beyond rhetoric," said Roger Dow of the US Travel Association.

19 January 2018, Source Travolution

Holidaymakers consult just two to five websites before booking, Qubit study finds

Travel brands will come under pressure from a highly competitive online market and conflicting customer appetites in 2018, according to new research from Qubit. The survey of more than 1,000 UK and US consumers highlighted that plenty of the 2018 market is still available midway through January, with 65% of UK consumers yet to book a holiday for the year ahead and almost 48% having not started researching. Qubit's research found that three out of five respondents will only consult two to five websites when booking their holiday. Other studies have estimated consumers visit dozens of websites prior to booking. Qubit suggests that "effective personalisation techniques" such as tailored recommendations are set to serve brands well with younger travellers and families. Three out of five [60%] under 35-year-old travellers and more than half [56%] of family bookers found recommendations received from travel websites very or extremely useful. These groups also consider "social proof" – being influenced by the decisions made by other customers. Qubit found that 57% of under 35s and 53% of family bookers wanted to know which holidays and destinations were popular while booking online and 49% of under 35s and 46% of families said it would be helpful for travel brands to show them the demand for a product or service as they look. Both groups also called for counters to show when availability or offers were likely to expire. But travellers over the age of 35 appear to be more resistant to personalisation, Qubit says. Instead, they were driven by cost and user experience. Four out of five older travellers agreed that their favourite travel websites were those that were easy to use, and 51% said price was the most important factor. Almost a third (32%) of older travellers said they would consider switching brands if another website was cheaper or had more choice. Qubit's research also suggested that while online "continues to dominate" 11% of its respondents visit bricks and mortar stores for research and 13% book in store. Two percent use call centres for inspiration, booking or post-booking advice. Online customers should be targeted for ancillary sales, Qubit suggested, with 36% of customers using the website of the brand they booked with to buy extras. Dan Bensley, travel industry lead at Qubit, said: "As we enter travel's peak period, brands will come under pressure to deliver more sophisticated online experiences if they're to win over those customers yet to book holidays in 2018. Businesses that invest in AI-powered personalisation technology will be well positioned to capture the low hanging fruit of the younger and family travel market. However, brands will also need to deploy an array of methods to appeal to the high-spending older demographic. This research shows that a one-size-fits-all digital approach is not enough in this increasingly hyper-competitive market."

24 January 2018, Source TravelMole

More silver travellers booking online

A survey of over 50s has found 67% now research and/or book their holidays online, up from 61% in the same survey last year. The rest prefer to arrange their travel face to face or over the telephone. The poll of 1,000 Brits - two thirds aged 50-69 and the rest over 70 - was carried out by Silver Travel Advisor. For holiday inspiration, 23% said they would see or speak to an agent in the first instance, but the internet and travel review websites were found

to be emphatically the first ports of call at 68% and 70% respectively. The survey found 75% of people book between one and nine months ahead and only 17% book further out than this. When it comes to the biggest reasons for choosing a particular travel company, price came bottom of the list (23%). The most compelling reason was having previous good experiences with the company (73%), followed by company reputation (60%), good customer service (57%) and being fully bonded (49%). Debbie Marshall, MD of Silver Travel Advisor, said: "Today's older travellers are very much part of the digital age - over half the over 55s are on social media now and more 55-64 year olds do research online before making purchases than the average adult overall. And when it comes to travel, two thirds of the over 50s are looking and/or booking online, either through travel agents or direct with travel companies, hotels, airlines and intermediaries. "The more complicated the booking, the more likely older people are to use travel agents. These are savvy, smart, resourceful people who just happen to be older than most of the working population. And although things are not easy for all of them, they are still where most of the travel money is." The survey found 85% of respondents expect to take the same number (65%) or more (20%) holidays in the coming year compared to the previous 12 months. But they are spending less as economic worries take hold. The proportion of people expecting to spend over £3,000pp a year on travel fell to 40% this year, from 48% last year while nearly double the number of people (20%) said they would spend less than £1,000pp. Over 80% of respondents felt that the wealth of pensioners is exaggerated in the media.

24 January 2018, Source TravelMole

Travelzoo survey finds UK market is still price sensitive

Brits want to travel more in 2018, but spend less. That was the conclusion of deals website Travelzoo after it surveyed more than 2,296 of its UK-resident members in December. It found that 78% say they intend to take at least three holidays or short breaks in 2018, a year-on-year rise of 32%. But the number of members intending to spend less on those trips has also risen by 19 percentage points, from 37% to 56%, indicating a stronger desire for deals and value in 2018. Joel Brandon-Bravo, general manager at Travelzoo in the UK, said the travel industry should 'take heed that the price-sensitivity of this market isn't going away soon'. For short breaks, there has been a 12% swing away from the mid-range price category (£301-£600 per person, per short break) towards the value end of the scale (up to £300). More than half of members (57%) intend to limit their budget to £1000 per person per 'full holiday', an 18% increase on last year. "Consumers and travel companies face a complicated landscape in 2018, with interest in cheaper, but more frequent, holidays in conflict with rising prices and the impact of political and economic uncertainties," said Brandon-Bravo. "However, the definite signal from holiday makers is that they are looking for value. This is good news for travel companies with deals to share, but will put even more pressure on margins at the value-end of the market."

26 January 2018, Source Travelbiz

Which travel trend is making a comeback?

Holidays are supposed to help us relax and unwind, but in recent years the holiday planning process has become stressful and overwhelming. Northern Ireland has seen a rise in DIY travel (organising your own flights, accommodation and tours separately online). While the age of DIY travel has opened up new destinations all over the world like never before, the detailed research needed can often be painstaking. The sheer volume of destinations, accommodation choices and booking websites available can actually make the holiday

planning process more complicated than it needs to be. It takes a huge amount of time and effort to plan a holiday – starting with choosing the most convenient flights and transfers, you then have to think about accommodation, car hire, tours and much more. With DIY travel, there's also always the risk of something going wrong, from flight cancellations, missing your transfers, staying in terrible accommodation or even just getting lost. So how do you make life easier for yourself, take away all the hard work and stress and still ensure you have an amazing holiday experience? Well, it might be time to rethink the benefits of a guided holiday. Guided holidays are making a comeback, particularly for long-haul trips where you are dealing with an unfamiliar destination, foreign language and unknown culture. There's nothing better than booking a guided holiday with one phone call or click of a button, sitting back and relaxing, knowing that everything is organised for you. Guided holidays are tried and tested, so you know that you are getting the best travel experience possible, including flights, transfers, hand-picked accommodation and guided tours to the top tourist highlights. You can also take comfort in the fact that guided tours are secure and protected. If something goes wrong, you will have a local guide to assist you and a company on the other end of the phone to help. The key is to book through a trusted company that has experience in your destination of choice. An experienced guide can offer extra comfort for the entire experience. Why start from scratch in sourcing local information when you can go on a guided tour and soak up all the knowledge of a local guide, ensuring that you have an authentic experience? The quality and passion of a great local guide is second to none when it comes to a well-organised guided tour, helping you to get under the skin of your destination of choice. Guides can also offer a safer experience than going it alone, particularly on long-haul trips if you're reluctant to be a camera-toting tourist in an unfamiliar location. Most guided holidays also include some free time for leisure, which offers you the best of both worlds! It's even better given the fact that you always have an expert guide on hand with suggestions for what to see and do in your leisure time. No matter what type of holiday experience you are looking for, you don't need to start applying filters as you search the entire Internet looking for your personalised experience. Guided holidays are not just limited to long-haul travel, so whether you favour a city break or a European escape, there are tours that will combine your tastes with a guided option. Again, the richest of holiday experiences can often be because of the talents of expert local guides who bring the subjects that you are passionate about to life. It's often the people you meet that are the highlight of the entire trip and you'll have great memories of the shared experiences you had together. The beauty of a guided tour is that you travel with a group of similar people so whether you're flying solo or just bored with your travel companions, you'll have someone to turn to. Not to mention the added bonus of being accompanied by a local guide who will introduce you to their country and bring you behind the scenes, ensuring you have the most authentic experience possible. So, if you would like to avoid the stress and outsource your holiday planning to the experts, then why not consider a guided holiday? It's so much easier and more practical to sit back and relax on a guided tour, handing over all your responsibilities where they belong – at the departure gate!

26 January 2018, Source Travolution

Mobile bookings on the rise but user experience still key

The use of mobile devices for booking travel continues to rise, according to a Criteo study which concludes that companies must not sacrifice user experience for convenience. Criteo's Travel Insights Report found travel companies with mobile apps took 60% of bookings via mobile devices in Q4 2017, up from 41% in the same period a year earlier. Online travel agents now take 45% of bookings on a smartphone or tablet, the commerce marketing firm found. Suppliers take around 16% of bookings via mobile devices. The Criteo report analyses

browsing and booking data from over 1,800 travel advertisers globally, looking at more than 3 billion bookings across desktop, mobile sites and applications in 59 countries. It says the increase in mobile travel booking is being driven by travellers looking for last-minute deals and over-night stays. Searches on smartphones and bespoke travel booking apps now account for 89% of traffic for those last-minute bookings, it went on, adding that up to 80% of last-minute bookings are now made on mobile devices. Conversion rates on apps were twice those on desktop and five times those on mobile web. In terms of bookings on mobile devices, Europe – at 25% – is ahead of North American, at 22%, the report found. “Travel companies are seeing more and more travel bookings coming from apps and smartphones,” said Pauline Lemaire, head of travel and classified, Criteo. “The flexibility of these platforms means that shoppers can leave their booking to the very last minute. However, with travellers everywhere taking advantage of these different touch points, retailers need to ensure that convenience doesn’t come at the price of a great user experience. This means connecting all of those touch points across devices and enabling the shopper to book that last-minute getaway on the device of their preference.”

29 January 2018, Source TravelMole

Barrhead unveils plans for new experience store

Barrhead Travel is to invest £3.5million in a new experience store at Fort Kinnaird Retail Park. The store, due to open in mid-2018, will be the fifth Barrhead Travel store in the Edinburgh area. It will have a dedicated cruise and longhaul areas as well as a foreign currency unit, with 16 staff. Open seven days a week, and open until 10pm on weekdays, the store is close to an M&S, Primark and TKMaxx. It will be the fourth Barrhead store to open this year as part of the independent agency's drive to expand its footprint across the country. The travel retailer said the expansion was to meet the demand of more customers who want to book in store, bucking the industry trend. "We really look forward to welcoming both returning and new customers to our new location," said chairman Bill Munro. "Holidays are an emotional purchase and customers want to feel they are getting the best possible value for money, sound advice from genuine specialists and to know that their holidays are fully financially protected." Barrhead Travel now has more than 70 stores, call centres and offices and employs over 1,000 people. It is recruiting throughout the UK for experienced sales consultants, team leaders and managers.

29 January 2018, Source Travel Weekly

BA boss Cruz vows to make up ground on competitors

British Airways will continue to be positioned as a premium carrier, boss Alex Cruz has stressed. He addressed criticisms of the airline scrapping free food on short haul flights, the power outage over the spring bank holiday last May which left 75,000 passengers stranded and union accusations of cost-cutting in a wide-ranging interview yesterday. “There were a few days last year that were bad so it had an impact on our reputation,” the BA chairman and chief executive told the Mail on Sunday. “This year, I think, is the year we sort ourselves out.” BA is spending £4.5 billion on buying new aircraft, upgrading much of the current fleet and on other improvements including high speed Wi-Fi in the sky. “We don’t have an internal project that says we are bringing BA back to the glory days – but we need to turn this airline around from the customer perspective,” Cruz admitted. “The association with Britain, with British values is something that is absolutely in our DNA. As we prepare to celebrate our 100th anniversary next year, it will play a big part. If there is one attribute no one can take away from us and where no one can compete with us, it is this. “We know when we

haven't delivered up to the standards we should – and we are absolutely trying to remedy every situation that is bad. People feel hurt, because we are part of the fabric of this country.” He outlined a vision of BA's fleet as a flying showcase for British brands, including bedding from the White Company, washbags from Liberty of London in first class, gin from Sipsmith and Fevertree tonic, plus wines from the Bolney estate in Sussex, M&S for the sandwiches and engines by Rolls-Royce. “We are going to be a platform for British brands to continue to develop,” Cruz said. “There are many other partnerships we will announce with British companies. “BA was incredibly pioneering back in 2000 when we made this big announcement of the first lie-flat bed in the market, even in the world. But now we have ground to make up with our competitors.” He has invested in new data centres which he said will avoid repeats of the IT meltdown last year. “That wasn't a computer problem, it was a power problem,” he insisted. “We are much more resilient around power, systems and data now.” Cruz added: “We will continue to be a premium airline for the rest of our lives, there is no way around it. “Whatever we do, BA will always have a premium edge to it. There are very few plane seats left in Europe where you still get free food.” Addressing the UK leaving the European Union, he said: “When you bring Brexit up, my feeling is we will be one of those cornerstone British companies that people will rely on. “Over 100 years this airline has survived a world war, 9/11 and the financial crisis. The spirit of BA is to keep on flying.”

30 January 2018, Source TravelMole

Plans to push up price of passports

The price of a British passport looks set to rise by £12.50 from March 27 for postal applications. At the moment, an adult passport costs £72.50, regardless of whether you apply online or by post. But under government plans, which are subject to parliamentary approval, this would rise to £85 for postal applications and by £3 to 75.50 for online applications. The price of children's passports will also go up by £12.50 from £46 to £58.50 for postal applications, but will be £49 online. The Home Office justified the price difference, arguing that postal applications cost more to process than online applications.

31 January 2018, Source TravelMole

New deal to make long-haul travel easier for Scottish passengers

Flybe has added its Glasgow to Manchester route to its codeshare agreement with Virgin Atlantic to make it easier for passengers from Scotland to transfer to long-haul flights. Available to book from now, the agreement covers seven Virgin Atlantic destinations from Manchester, including New York, Barbados, Las Vegas and San Francisco. The partnership with Flybe means customers in Scotland are able to connect to and from Virgin Atlantic flights, with one boarding pass and their bags checked through for the entire journey. Virgin chief commercial officer Shai Weiss said: "Last year was the biggest ever for our Scottish customers, as we ran our longest ever season of direct flights to Orlando. "In 2018 we're taking our Scottish travel offering one step further. Thanks to our extended partnership with Flybe, holiday makers from Glasgow can now take advantage of our entire Manchester route network, meaning more flights to the USA and Caribbean than ever before." Last year, Virgin Atlantic announced that its Flybe partnership would also operate between Heathrow and Edinburgh and Aberdeen, allowing travellers access to the airline's Heathrow routes. The extension of the partnership was announced this morning as Flybe revealed that its third-quarter revenue per seat was up by 13.3% in the third-quarter after it cut seat capacity by 4.2%. Passenger revenue for the quarter was up by 8.5% to £158.8 million. Flybe said cutting costs remains a key focus for the business and the need to balance improved reliability with

higher maintenance costs has been reviewed. Maintenance costs have increased, but the rate has slowed as the business has achieved greater control over reliability, it said. The implementation of its new digital platform is progressing to plan, it said, and is expected to launch in the second half of the 2018/19 financial year when it should improve the booking experience, attract new customers and enhance the airline's customer relationship management. In the fourth quarter, seat capacity is down 2% year on year, 43% of seats are sold compared with 41% this time last year and there has been a 5% rise in passenger revenue.