

UK OFFICE

May 2017 REPORT

**Prepared by: Venessa Alexander
UK Director**

Meetings/Training/Events

- **VSPC/SeaWorld Parks joint event at Amberley Castle** – We co-hosted an appreciation event in partnership with SeaWorld Parks for our key partners on the 4th May. The event consisted of an overnight stay at Amberley Castle, along with afternoon tea, drinks reception and formal dinner. We had 14 clients who attended with their partners/work colleagues including; Suzanne Harvey, Travelopia, Summa Barton ATD, Lisa Barrington, Ocean Holidays, Nicole Gibson, Virgin Holidays, Elinor Steiner, Travel Republic, Gavin Boswell, Orlando Attraction Tickets, Kerianne Mulqueen, British Airways Holidays, Simon Everett, NAR, Peter Gue, Thomson, Keri Appleford, Expedia, Linda Dixey, USAirtours, Harriet Hudders, Gold Medal, Mark Tanner, British Airways Holidays and Annabel Cove, Do Something Different. The event was a success and very well received by our guests.
- **Visit USA Roadshow, Ireland** – We participated in the Visit USA annual roadshow which provided a networking opportunity for key partners in Cork and Dublin. The roadshow consisted of a drinks reception to enable us to speak with various Tour Operators and travel agencies, followed by a lunch at each venue. We provided a short destination overview including a video, and distributed brochures to all of the attendees. We had 20 attendees in Dublin and 16 in Cork.
- **Visit Florida Advisory Luncheons** – Attended the UK Advisory Lunch on 12th May. Due to the current Visit Florida funding issue, the Irish Advisory Lunch was cancelled.

TRADE LIAISON -

- **Ocean Florida** – We have now received the final results for the activity we ran in February. The activity consisted of; deal of the week email, flash email, homepage banner, presence on the Florida landing page, three social media posts, and four things to do content pieces on their website. This activity was offered as free of charge as we have agreed further paid activity in May.
 - Homepage banner – 7608 sessions
 - Florida landing page – 145 sessions
 - Flash email – distributed to 5285, 11.41% open rate, 53 clicks, 8.79% CTR
 - Email – distributed to 215,337, 5.88% open rate, 422 clicks, 3.33% CTR

- Social media post 1 – 2196 reach, 7 clicks
- Social media post 2 – 2470 reach, 12 clicks
- Social media post 3 – 1558 reach, 35 clicks
- Room nights booked during the campaign – 68 room nights, -50% versus last year. However, Ocean Holidays normally see an uplift in the weeks or month after the campaign has finished. This is reflected in the bookings made in March - 150 room nights +45% compared to last year.

We are running further activity with Ocean Florida in May and ahead of the launch of the campaign we have received creatives for all of the activity, which include; deal of the week email, flash email, homepage banner, social media posts and things to do website content. All elements have been approved and the campaign will run from 23rd May for a month. We have also discussed the possibility of running an internal staff incentive and Ocean Holidays based on winning 'Love To Shop' Vouchers. We were advised that we should run this after the activity as they tend to see more of an uplift in sales after a promotion has run. We have now agreed to run the incentive in the months of August and September.

- **Virgin Holidays Retail** – Following on from our retail training day last month, we received the following feedback from the sales agents;
 - 74% thought the training sessions duration was just right, with the other 26% saying the sessions were not long enough
 - 100% found the day beneficial
 - 100% liked the training concept
 - The average rating of the day was 9.29/10
 - The average knowledge rating before and after the event went from 5.87/10 – 8.35/10. (A 24.8% increase)
 - 50% advised their key learning was on our beach destinations and the fact there is more to Florida than Orlando
 - They found all suppliers/ tables extremely helpful and also learnt about what Florida has to offer and its locations, along with useful hints and tips.

Following on from our Florida training day last month, we received an email from Sally Booty, Sales Agent, who was requesting information on golf and water sports. We have provided her with the relevant information.

- **Thomas Cook** – We have provided Gill Standeven, Visit Florida, a couple of slides for her training presentation to the sales agents at Thomas Cook this month. We also arranged for brochures and giveaways to be distributed during their Florida training day. For our co-op marketing campaign, we have now signed off the landing page. The campaign which includes digital banners, retargeting, mini e-brochure and landing page runs from 15th May to 25th June.
- **Icelandair Fam Trip** – John Rasmussen, Sales Manager contacted us to advise that they have decided that the Swedish Fam trip in October will now include agents from Norway

and Denmark as well. Because of this, they have asked if we could look at alternative dates to cater for each market. We have spoken with Michelle Poyet, who has confirmed rooms at the Alden Suites for the revised dates. We will work on the itinerary in due course.

- **Visit Orlando/SeaWorld Parks/VSPC Scandinavian Sales Mission** – We had a conference call with Rukhsana and Norbert to start planning our annual sales mission in November. Since our call, we have approached Norwegian to see if they would like to support our evening events/lunches that we will be hosting. We have also contacted Tommy Swanson to arrange training at their office for their sales agents.
- **Travel Counsellors** – Following on from our training day in Manchester, we have received a proof of the email which will be distributed to their database of approx. 1.6k Travel Counsellor agents. This has now been finalised.
- **TUI Specialist/Hayes & Jarvis** – As mentioned in last month's report, we have received a proposal from Hayes & Jarvis to run a co-op marketing campaign from May – September 2017. The activity will include:
 - Online activity including 2 x multi-centre offer on their direct consumer e-newsletter to over 100,000 consumers on their database
 - A full-page PDF E-Flyer in the TUI Retail and 3rd party E-Flyer to 800+ Thomson travel shops, 1,133+ travel agents
 - Editorial mention in a direct mail destination guide to 10,000 H&J customers
 - Editorial inclusion in a weekly direct email to 200,000 consumers

We have supplied TUI with copy, imagery and logos and we have already approved the first of the multi centre offers in the direct consumer e-newsletter. Activity on-going.

- **Feel Unique** – We have received a brand affinity consumer proposal to work with www.feelunique.com and are in the process of securing a tour operator partner. The campaign will launch in July and run until the end of August. The campaign will be based on a holiday prize for two to St. Pete/Clearwater including return flights, 7 nights' accommodation, 7 days car hire, a £150 pre-paid card to cover meals and 2 x Clearwater Marine Aquarium tickets. Activity will include the following:
 - Online activity will include a homepage banner ad for 7 days (Dates TBC), a dedicated landing page with copy, images, logos, a dedicated banner ad on the 'Summer Shop' page and a direct link to the competition from the travel shop drop down menu on the homepage top navigation bar
 - A banner in 2 x e-newsletters (over 12 million consumers)
 - Social Media Activity including 2 x Facebook posts (211,000 consumers), 2 x Twitter posts (76,300 followers) and 2 x Instagram posts (171,000 consumers)
- **American Airlines** – We had a call with Corrine Cianfanelli, UK Key Account Manager to discuss opportunities to partner together in the future. She advised that they are currently working on some USA evening events in London, Glasgow and Manchester which will target sales agents and allow us to network with them as well as provide

training. We would also be included in their marketing communications including; invites, press releases, Email blasts to the American Airline, British Airways and Brand USA databases, Travel support pages, Tactical pricing to support destinations, Focus months, distribution of collateral for both airlines sales staff, Newsletter and Social media. We have expressed our interest in working with them and will await more information.

- **USAirtours/TravelPlanners** – We have started approving activity that will be running as part of the At Home with Lorraine Promotion in partnership with Experience Kissimmee. We have already approved the double page feature that will be included in the monthly magazine publication. We have also agreed to run an in-house staff incentive for both the USAirtours and the TravelPlanners teams and details are at present being finalised.
- **THG** – We have received a proposal from John Bowden for marketing activity which includes; online flash channels with Secret Escapes, Voyage Prive, TravelBird, Groupon, Wowcher, Mighty Deals and Living Socials, inclusion in their 2018 Florida brochure, online web campaign, emails and also support for their charity golf day in August. The activity will run from May to September. We have received the proof for the first email, which has been approved and will be distributed this month.
- **Visit USA, Ireland** – Following on from our roadshow in Cork and Dublin, Dee Burdock requested our destination video, which will be added to the Visit USA Ireland website.
- **Bookabed Ireland** – We were asked to provide a testimonial statement for Bookabed to include in their IPW brochure which have duly supplied.
- **American Holidays** – We provided Dee Burdock, Product Manager with Bill Priakos's contact details as she is looking to re-protect some of her customers at Barefoot Beach.
- **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment** – We provided Geoff Dobson, Sales Manager with contact details for the Sirata Beach Resort.
- **Barrhead Travel** – Jade Semple advised that Caroline Donaldson is visiting St. Pete/Clearwater in June for her holiday. We have provided her with contact details for our partners so she can reach out to them to arrange accommodation for her stay.
- **Discover America, Sweden** – We have confirmed our participation in their sales agent workshop in Malmo in September. It is expected that 60-80 agents will attend and the event will consist of timed training sessions followed by networking during food and drink.
- **Funway Holidays** – We have confirmed our participation in a Funway Holidays Travel Agent evening event that is due to take place in Reading, Berkshire on the 20th June. The event will be attended by approximately 80 of Funway Holidays top selling travel agents. We have provided our logo for the invitation and also provided brochures and giveaways for the informal networking event.
- **Visit USA, Ireland** – Gillian Young provide us with the latest stats for travel in 2016. For travel Jan – Sep 2016 vs 2015, visitors to the USA from Ireland were -4.4%. This was

driven by arrivals in the summer (Apr-Sep). She also advised that flight capacity from Dublin, Shannon and Cork into the USA for 2017 is +22% equating to an additional 725,261 seats compared to last year.

- **United Airlines Ireland** – We have been advised that Pat Reede, Director of Leisure Sales in Ireland will this month retire and as yet a replacement has not been announced.

ENQUIRIES:

Telephone/website enquiries for information and/or literature

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MARKET INTELLIGENCE:

3 May 2017, Source Travelbiz

Travel spend up year on year, says new report

Spending on air fares was up more than 8% in the first quarter of this year compared with the same period of 2016, according to new data. Cardlytics, which analysed the spending behavior of more than three million bank customers, found that consumers spent 4% more on travel overall, and hotel spending rose nearly 10% in the first quarter. However, there was a 2% drop in the amount spent on car hire compared with the first quarter of last year, it said. Overall, consumer spending remained steady, despite earlier fears of a slowdown. Cardlytics said this was driven by a boom in eating out, with the amount spent in fast-food outlets rising by 18% year on year.

4 May 2017, Source Travelbiz

The world's biggest airline is making economy class even more cramped

American Airlines, the world's biggest carrier, is planning to cut legroom in its economy cabins by up to two inches, in a bid to make room for additional passenger seats. The seat pitch on board the US airline's new Boeing 737-800 Max aircraft is expected to be reduced from 31 to 29 inches on three rows, and to 30 inches across the rest of the economy class cabin, CNN reports. Passengers in the 18 seats with two inches less legroom will be charged normal economy fares and these seats will not fall under the airline's new basic economy fares, which are lower priced as passengers aren't allowed access to overhead bins, reserved seating or to accrue air miles. It is yet to be determined how the airline will decide which passengers will be seated in the rows with the least legroom, but a spokesperson for the airline claimed the reduced legroom would be hardly noticeable. "The seats we'll use on the Max are designed to maximize personal living space, while allowing more comfort, even in an arrangement like this where the pitch is a little tighter," an American Airlines spokesperson told Skift. The new cramped economy seating will have nearly the same seat pitch as America's "ultra low cost" carriers including Spirit Airlines and Frontier Airlines, both of which have a tight seat pitch of 28 inches. Rival carrier United is reportedly

considering a similar change, according to CNN. The new Max jets - operated mostly on North America routes - will offer more than 170 seats, compared to the 160 offered on the airline's current 737-800s (above), and will retain the airline's costlier 'main cabin extra' economy seats, which offer extra legroom, as well as its 16 first class seats, while the toilets will also reportedly be smaller. A total of 100 Max aircraft are on order, with 40 expected to be delivered by 2019, the airline said. The seat pitch reduction is the latest in a series of changes American Airlines has unveiled this year. Last month, the airline introduced a new "simplified" boarding process, where passengers are prioritised according to nine numbered groups, up from the current four, and with those in the airline's recently launched 'basic economy' class embarking last. And those with priority boarding are split into five groups. Back in January, the world's largest carrier decided to ditch seat-back monitors on its new Max aircraft because most passengers travel with mobile phones, laptops and tablets. Instead of investing in screens, the airline said it will upgrade in-flight internet speed, to ensure passengers can browse the web and stream movies quickly.

4 May 2017, Source TTG

How to appeal to millennials

Travel firms must ensure they create personalised advertising and products if they wish to tap into the lucrative millennials market. That was the message from Bradley Taylor, UK head of brand and customer experience at market research firm GfK, speaking at Abta's Customer Insight in the Travel Industry forum last week. He warned that millennials – those typically born between 1980 and 1995 – had access to “thousands of online reviews at any one time” and firms could not guarantee that traditional marketing strategies would translate to loyalty. “It's no longer about how much you can spend on online advertising,” he told delegates at the forum. “[Millennials] need to feel like someone took the time to make it about them.” He suggested that companies were no longer “master and commander” of how their brands are perceived by consumers. “We are dealing with customers who have access to thousands of online reviews at any one time and you can't control it,” he said. “We need to learn how to manage ourselves and how we react to that, because things can go really pear-shaped these days,” he added. Using data compiled by GfK, Taylor presented his view on the makeup of the millennial consumer, suggesting that typically they fall into two groups: those aged 15-24, and more “mature” consumers, aged 25 and over. He described how the older contingent are climbing the corporate ladder quickly, getting married later in life and are hungry for experiential travel. Presenting data from GfK's UK Consumer Life 2016 study, Taylor showed that millennials' desire for “adventure” was 18 points higher than the UK average, while their need to “travel by plane” was nine points above the national average. He said there was a need for travel firms to begin their relationships with customers early in the booking process and used data from 30,000 tweets compiled in the first week of April to highlight the demand from millennials for buying travel. Taylor explained that 11% of Twitter users studied said they “needed a holiday” in their tweets while 15% said they “couldn't wait” for their getaway – with a total of 47% using “holiday language” while not actually on a trip themselves. “The adventure starts when they want to go on holiday and that's when [firms] need to be there,” Taylor said.

7 May 2017, Source Travelbiz

Today's children get TWICE the holiday fun: How modern families are taking more foreign trips than ever

Last month, schools won the final decision on the matter of whether parents can take their children on holiday during term time. An Isle of Wight father who refused to pay a penalty imposed after he took his daughter to Disney World in Florida was told by the Supreme Court that he was in the wrong. Families argue that parents who have to take their children away in the school holidays have to pay a large premium compared with prices charged for the same holiday in term time – sometimes two or three times as much. Despite the possibility of having to pay way over the odds, a new survey of family holidays shows that children nowadays enjoy twice as many foreign trips as their parents did. Travel to destinations outside Europe has increased 70 per cent since 1997 and not all these foreign trips are sun and sand holidays. Almost a fifth of parents prefer to take their children ‘travelling’ rather than just going on holiday. Today’s parents take their offspring away on an average of two holidays a year and one of these will be overseas, whereas they themselves were lucky to be taken abroad at all as children. Twenty years ago, 82 per cent of foreign travel was to Europe. Since then travel to destinations outside Europe has increased by 70 per cent. Travel to Central and South America has tripled with travel to the Far East, Asia and the Middle East doubling during this time. Package holidays abroad continue to be popular for those travelling with children, but as independent travel increases, more and more of today’s parents want to give their children ‘a more authentic experience’.

11 May 2017, Source Travel Trade Outbound Scandinavia

US to ban all laptops from Europe

U.S. to Ban Laptops in All Cabins of Flights From Europe, Officials Say. The Department of Homeland Security plans to ban laptops in the cabins of all flights from Europe to the United States, European security officials told The Daily Beast. The announcement is expected today. Initially a ban on laptops and tablets was applied only to U.S.-bound flights from 10 airports in North Africa and the Middle East. The ban was based on U.S. fears that terrorists have found a way to convert laptops into bombs capable of bringing down an airplane. It is unclear if the European ban will also apply to tablets. DHS said in a statement to The Daily Beast: “No final decisions have been made on expanding the restriction on large electronic devices in aircraft cabins; however, it is under consideration. DHS continues to evaluate the threat environment and will make changes when necessary to keep air travelers safe.” An official with a major U.S. airline told Skift that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has briefed carriers on possible plans. But the official said late Wednesday that U.S. airlines had not been told when, or even if, a ban would be implemented.

11 May 2017, Source Travelbiz

BRITISH AIRWAYS IS OFFERING FREE FLIGHTS FOR KIDS THIS SUMMER

In an unprecedented move, British Airways is offering free child places on six routes to and from Heathrow. The promotion, which applies for flights from 1 June to 31 October, is primarily intended to fill planes on links where business travel dwindles in summer. The UK destinations are Belfast City, Edinburgh, Inverness, Leeds/Bradford and Newcastle. Aberdeen, Glasgow and Manchester are notable absentees from the list. In addition, Billund airport — adjacent to the original Danish Legoland — is included. Up to two children can fly for free with each fare-paying adult. BA automatically seats children with adults at no charge. A test booking made by The Independent found a hand-baggage only fare for an adult and two children from Heathrow to Billund on 15 August, returning a week later, for a total of £93 return — just £31 each, a historically low fare. The corresponding fare on Ryanair from Stansted on those dates is £183, almost twice as much. Adam Daniels, British Airways' chief commercial officer, said: "Saving every penny counts when it comes to family holidays so flying kids for free will make it cheaper to fly away for fun and see more of the UK and Europe this summer." "The offer also looks set to give UK tourism a boost by encouraging families to visit London, the North, Scotland and Northern Ireland for their holidays." The offer applies to one-way and return tickets, so families could fly from Heathrow to Inverness then travel overland to Edinburgh or Newcastle. Under-16s do not pay Air Passenger Duty, which adds £13 to flights departing from UK airports. If, as expected, the promotion proves popular, availability will soon be an issue. "Blackout periods" apply on some destinations.

11 May 2017, Source TravelMole

Visit Florida's funding is slashed

Florida will be unable to compete with rival US destinations now its funding has been severely cut in the state's budget, politicians have been warned. As expected, Florida lawmakers have passed a budget that allows a big funding cut for Visit Florida, giving it just \$25 million, 67% less than the previous year. Florida Republican Governor Rick Scott, who wanted four times the amount, is now left in the predicament of whether to grudgingly pass or veto it. Scott had campaigned tirelessly for \$100 million in funding for the agency. In addition to the allowance being slashed, there are stringent disclosure conditions over how the money should be spent. The extra scrutiny on Visit Florida was sparked after it was found the tourist board had failed to disclose a \$1 million payment to Miami rapper Pitbull for a tourism marketing campaign. Since then there has been strong opposition to the agency from some lawmakers who wanted to see it disbanded for good and an end to the culture of 'corporate welfare.' Gil Langley, chairman of the Florida Association of Destination Marketing Organizations, said: "With only \$25 million dedicated to promoting our state, there's no way Florida can stay on the same playing field as states like California. "Not to mention, Visit Florida's efforts are what keeps tourists from flying over Florida to Mexico, the Bahamas and now Cuba."

16 May 2017, Source TravelMole

Gadget ban would deter one in three Brits from flying

Over a third of Brits would not board a flight if they had to leave their laptop or other gadget in the hold. A survey of 3,600 people by HolidayExtras.com reveals 35% felt they'd be forced to reconsider their flight if they had to put electronic devices in the hold of an aircraft. Almost one in five people (18%) say they would worry about the safety of their belongings while 17% say they couldn't be parted from their devices or switch off from devices during their journey. The survey also revealed tablets are the nation's most treasured tech, with 34% stating that this is the gadget they'd have most trouble checking in. Kindles came in a close second, proving almost twice as popular with women than men, with 19% taking them abroad. Meanwhile, Travelzoo warns the business sector will be severely affected. Travelzoo travel expert and spokesperson Louise Hodges said: "News that the US will potentially impose its laptop ban on incoming flights from the UK and Europe could have a serious negative impact on trans-Atlantic travel, especially in the business sector. "Having already seen the impact for business travellers from a President Trump laptop ban, Qatar Airways and Etihad Airways have found a way for business-class passengers, lending them laptops as they board. "This though is not a long term solution and poses many issues for travellers, and their businesses, around data protection and security."

17 May 2017, Source Travel Newsgram

TRAVEL TRENDS INDEX: US INTERNATIONAL INBOUND TRAVEL SHOWS SIGNS OF WEAKNESS

Washington: International inbound travel growth continues to avoid an outright decline, remaining in positive territory in March 2017—but the sector's more modest growth compared with the same period a year before underscores a projected slowdown in the months ahead, according to the U.S. Travel Association's Travel Trends Index (TTI). Numerous reports have held that international travel to the U.S. has measurably declined as a direct result of President Donald Trump's executive orders on visas and immigration, the first of which was issued on January 27. However, U.S. Travel economists urge caution, both because the strong dollar, coupled with a weakening global economy, was already having an impact and because any effects of the executive orders could not have shown up in economic data instantaneously. Because of lag times between searches for international travel to the U.S. and actual trips—56.9 days on average, according to data provided to U.S. Travel by the research firm ADARA—any fallout from the Trump executive orders would begin to be captured in April travel data. Therefore, the most comprehensive measurement of the executive order's effects to date will be offered by the Travel Trends Index due to be released on June 6. "Think about it: practically no one who travels internationally books a trip, then gets on a plane the next day," said U.S. Travel Senior Vice President for Research David Huether. "It takes nearly two full months for the average traveler to search for a trip online, book it, then actually travel. Added Huether: "The June TTI will be one to watch because it will give us that April data, two months after the first executive order." Overall, travel to and within the U.S. grew at a faster year-over-year rate in March 2017 than in February 2017. Domestic travel posted strong growth, with business travel growth notably surpassing leisure travel, thanks in part to the timing of holidays like Easter and Passover this year.

18 May 2017, Source Travelbiz

Confirmed: Norwegian's US flights to include Preclearance from Dublin and Shannon

Passengers flying from Dublin and Shannon to the US will be able to avail of US Preclearance, Independent.ie Travel can reveal. Norwegian's first wave of transatlantic flights from Ireland takes off on July 1, with a host of new services from Dublin, Cork, Belfast and Shannon. Whether passengers would have the option of US Preclearance, which allows them to undergo US Custom & Border Protection checks before leaving Ireland, rather than on arrival in the US, had been a source of speculation. Today, the airline has confirmed that its new flights will include use of the US Preclearance facilities at Shannon Airport and Dublin's T2. Passengers landing in the US from these airports will be treated as domestic arrivals, allowing them to avoid immigration queues after they arrive. There are no US Preclearance facilities at Cork Airport. However, a spokesperson for the airport said that Providence Airport has "minimum queues" so clearing checks quickly in the US "will not be an issue." Since announcing its transatlantic routes from Irish airports last February, Norwegian has sold over 25,000 tickets, a spokesperson has said.

18 May 2017, Source Travelbiz

This travel ban is set to cost up to \$1bn

Widening the US laptop ban to include flights from Europe would cost travellers more than \$1bn, the airline industry's global lobby group said. Curbs on carrying electronic devices aboard aircraft on some services from the Middle East and North Africa already affect 350 US-bound flights per week. Extending it to the 28 European Union states plus Switzerland, Norway and Iceland would impact a further 390 a day, or more than 2,500 a week, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimates. That would cost passengers \$655m in lost productivity, \$216m for longer travel times, and \$195m to rent loan devices on board, it says. Expanding the ban on laptops and tablets would cause "significant" disruption in the trans-Atlantic business market, and might not be the best way of countering any terrorist threat, IATA Chief Executive Officer Alexandre de Juniac said in an interview on Wednesday. "Traveling with your laptop is part of everyday life," De Juniac said. "We are not sure that this ban is adapted to the threat. We don't know what is the basis or intelligence that justifies this measure." US and European Union officials met yesterday in Brussels to discuss plans to widen the ban. An EU spokesman said it knows of no evidence to justify the measures. IATA represents 265 airlines around the world, including the main Irish carriers. (Bloomberg)

18 May 2017, Source TravelMole

Laptop cabin ban off the table - for now

The travel industry can breathe a temporary sigh of relief after the threat of a ban on carry-on laptops and tablets on US-EU flights has been taken 'off the table', for now at least. No ban was imposed after a four-hour meeting between EU and US officials in Brussels yesterday, but more talks have been scheduled in Washington for next week. A joint statement said the

meeting would allow them to 'further assess shared risks and solutions for protecting airline passengers, whilst ensuring the smooth functioning of global air travel'. The industry had been sent into a state of panic after reports emerged that US officials were looking to extend to Europe a ban on electronics in cabins on flights from eight mostly Muslim countries. The measure was introduced after a tip-off from an Israeli spy about an Islamic State plot to blow up a US-bound plane by smuggling a sophisticated bomb. The US restrictions, introduced in March, apply to flights from Turkey, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Experts said extending the ban to flights from Europe would affect 65 million passengers a year and could severely dent transatlantic business and leisure travel. Pilots had also warned of the fire risk of having so many lithium batteries in the hold.

19 May 2017, Source Travolution

Phocuswright Europe: Thomas Cook to invest in VR as brochures decline

Thomas Cook will invest in new technologies to create content to promote its product like virtual reality as the role of the traditional brochure declines. Speaking at this week's Phocuswright Europe conference in Amsterdam Gilles Despas, group chief marketing and digital officer, said brochures will reduce in number. He stopped short of declaring the end of the brochure as rival Tui Travel has done, but said the firm wanted to produce more magazine-style and inspirational content. He said virtual reality had been much-hyped and that Cook had made mistakes in the way it has introduced it into its stores but it was continuing to invest. "If you want to go into virtual reality you have to go in for quality. You have to invest money. If you do it, do it right," said Despas. Thomas Cook is working with some of its hotel partners and specialist virtual reality agencies to produce content. Despas said the return on investment was related to the question about the future of brochures in retail. In the UK, where Cook has 80% controlled distribution, he said the brochure would be scaled back and more focus will be put on forms of digital promotion. "There will be a transformation, but not overnight," he said. "With the web you have a lot more possibilities. It's time to move on and be a lot more inspirational." Despas said Cook has increasingly fewer customers that exclusively use its 750 stores in the UK with most also going on line. He said mobile was also a big focus with more than half of traffic in the UK now coming from phones and tablets. He said 40% of online booking are made on smartphones. "The biggest challenge for us is smartphones. It's been a long journey, it did not happen overnight, we have had to put a lot of resources into it but it's starting to pay off. "But it's also a transformation of the consumer who is now researching and booking on smartphones. People are actually booking this more complex product." Although Cook has taken strides to consolidate and control its supply of hotel beds by working closely with suppliers to get exclusive rates and availability, the firm has also adopted a more flexible tour operating model. "We have evolved in terms of business model so it's not just our hotels with our flights," said Despas. "The reason for that is to give choice to the customer where we do not have flights or destinations where we do not have hotel content. That's an extension of our model." Despas said firms like Thomas Cook are under pressure from online competitors like booking.com, Expedia and the low cost carriers. But he said it was important to adapt but keep the best of the tour operator model which means all properties are vouched for as safe. "You have to keep the best of the tour operator model but take the best of the flexibility of

the new models that are here now. There is a question mark around the tour operating model. “We have to prove that there is a good place for those consumers who are travelling more and more but who want assistance, want a 360 degree customer experience and companies that know their hotels inside and out but at the same time provide the flexibility that OTAs are providing.”

19 May 2017, Source TTG

ONS figures show record year for outbound travel in 2016

The number of overseas visits by Britons rose 8% last year to top 70 million for the first time, official UK government figures reveal. UK residents made 70.8 million visits in the calendar year, the first time the figure, which includes holidays, business travel and visiting friends and relatives, has surpassed the 2006 record of 69.5 million. The figures were disclosed in the latest Travel Trends report from the Office for National Statistics, which said: “In general, visitor numbers have increased over time, from 42 million in 1996, although the number of visits fell sharply in 2009 in the wake of the economic downturn. Each of the four quarters of 2016 saw growth, with the winter period showing the greatest increase – the January to March period saw 11% more outbound travel year-on-year, while travel in the final quarter of 2016 grew 10%. Quarter two’s travel figure grew 5%, while in July, August and September outbound travel rose 7%. Consumers spent £43.8 billion on overseas travel, a figure that rose 12% compared with 2015. Spending abroad rocketed in the final three months of 2016, with pre-Christmas travellers’ spend rising 18% compared to the same period in 2015. The ONS recorded double-figure increases in the other three quarters of the year. The report added: “Over the longer-term, the amounts spent on visits have increased broadly in line with the increases in the numbers of visits...although it should be noted that the spending is recorded at current prices and not adjusted for inflation.” Another reason for the travel industry to be encouraged is that the reason for travel indicates people are taking more holidays. The ONS continued: “The underlying trend for business and miscellaneous purposes for travel is fairly flat but numbers are increasing for holidays and visiting friends or relatives. For example, there were 26.8 million holiday visits and 5.5 million friends and relatives visits in 1996, compared with 45 million and 16.6 million respectively in 2016. Spain, France, Italy, Ireland and the USA remain the top five most popular countries for UK residents to visit, accounting for 49% of all visits abroad and 46% of total spend abroad. There were a record 14.7 million visits to Spain by UK residents in 2016, an increase of 13%. Trips to France and Turkey decreased from 8.8 million to 8.5 million and from 1.5 million to 1.1 million, respectively due to terrorist incidents in both countries. Abta commented: “Holidays were the most common reason for travel abroad in 2016, a year which saw uncertainty created by Brexit and ongoing security concerns. People continued to value their holidays overseas, with the number of holiday visits abroad made by UK residents increasing from 42.2 million in 2015 to 45 million in 2016.”

22 May 2017, Source Travel Weekly

Aer Lingus ‘to hire 200 cabin crew’ to meet transatlantic demand

Aer Lingus is being tipped to hire 200 new cabin crew to cope with increasing demand for US flights. Increasing numbers of passengers are flying from the UK to Ireland to avoid Heathrow and connecting to transatlantic flights from Dublin. The Irish carrier owned by British Airways parent International Airlines Group is to announce the addition of cabin crew this week, *The Times* reported. Connections via Dublin and Shannon airports are being favoured by travellers because passengers can pre-clear US customs to speed up arrival in America. Some passengers from UK regions prefer to fly to Dublin to avoid congestion at Heathrow or because it is easier to fly to Ireland than to travel to London. Dublin airport's capacity eases the pressure on Heathrow as it waits more than a decade for a new runway. Airbus says it expects Dublin to become one of the most important emerging hubs in Europe in the coming years.

24 May 2017, Source TravelMole

Brand USA under threat

Roger Dow, the president and CEO of the US Travel Association, has issued a statement questioning proposals to scrap funding for Brand USA. The statement was issued after it emerged that plans to eliminate the tourism marketing agency were included in President Donald Trump's federal budget document. "With all that's going on in the world, unilaterally disarming the marketing of the US as a travel destination would be to surrender market share at the worst possible time," said Dow. "It's especially perplexing that the elimination of Brand USA is on the table when both commerce secretary Ross and OMB director Mulvaney each have supported it previously." Dow argued that the creation of Brand USA was a bipartisan effort led by Republicans that passed both chambers by overwhelming majorities. He said the agency was responsible for adding \$8.9 billion to the US economy last year, according to the firm Oxford Economics, a 28-to-1 return on investment. "Brand USA isn't funded with a dime of taxpayer money, reduced the deficit by \$50 million, and by the OMB's own accounting eliminating it would put the federal budget further in the red," he continued. "With international visitation being the country's number two export supporting 15 million American jobs, we're struggling to understand how cutting Brand USA squares with this administration's stated priorities." Dave Lorenz, vice president travel for the state of Michigan, added his support. "We strongly support funding US Customs and Border Patrol operations at appropriate levels while also funding our marketing efforts through the ESTA program. "All legitimate travellers are welcome to visit the USA and it's important that we continue to 'market the welcome' in an efficient and effective way."

25 May 2017, Source TravelMole

Brand USA appoints Hill Balfour as UK representative

Brand USA has chosen Hills Balfour as its UK and Ireland representation agency, ending a five-year partnership with Black Diamond. The new partnership is initially for one year and officially starts on May 30. Under the agreement, Hills Balfour will provide travel marketing, representation and PR to Brand USA. Hills Balfour managing director Jonathan Sloan said: "We are thrilled to be partnering with Brand USA and working with the team in Washington

D.C. and with US destination marketing organisations to continue to drive numbers from the UK and Ireland to the USA." Hills Balfour already represents several US regions, including NYC & Co, Arizona, Las Vegas, Nevada, Hawaii and Palm Beach. Black Diamond head of travel PR Sarah Barnett said: "We are proud to have established Brand USA as the official destination marketing organisation for the USA in the UK and Irish markets. "We take pride in the successes we have achieved and through our innovative work undertaken on their behalf both in market and globally, winning numerous awards and reaching record visitor figures to the US." The partnership announcement comes amid uncertainty over the long-term future of Brand USA under the Trump administration. As reported on TravelMole this week, US Travel Association president and CEO Roger Dow said he was perplexed by proposals by the Trump Administration to 'eliminate' Brand USA.

28 May 2017, Source Travelbiz

British Airways: Stranded passengers charged thousands for hotel rooms and warned disruption could last days

The British Airways IT crash has caused unprecedented disruption for the airline which could last for several days, experts say. Thousands of holidaymakers were stranded after BA flights from Heathrow and Gatwick were grounded on Saturday. It is feared that it could take days for services to return to normal and clear the backlog of passengers. With some BA services already cancelled this morning, both BA and Heathrow warned passengers not to come to the airport without a confirmed booking for a flight today. A BA statement read: "Work continues to restore all of our IT systems but we expect some further disruption today. We are aiming to operate the majority of services from Heathrow and a near normal schedule at Gatwick." It said travellers affected would be rebooked or have their ticket price refunded, but a spokesman said compensation would be looked at on a "case by case" basis. British Airways have started sending passengers' luggage back to them by courier, opening up the possibility that holidaymakers still hoping to get away this weekend will be in London even as their bags are driven to their home addresses elsewhere. It comes as hotels surrounding the airports charged extortionate prices to stranded holiday makers with some charging between £1,000 to £2,500 a room for the night. Air industry consultant John Strickland said: "There's a massive knock-on effect. "Customers and from the airline's point of view - manpower, dealing with the backlog of aircraft out of position, parking spaces for the aircraft - it's a challenge and a choreographic nightmare." He added that the problems with BA's IT systems last year were not on the scale of this issue. "They were bedding in a new check-in system last year and there were teething problem but not of the magnitude of this," Mr Strickland said. This morning, departure boards showed flights departing from Gatwick early on Sunday, however several flights from Heathrow were cancelled. A Heathrow spokesman said "delays and cancellations of British Airways flights are expected today", while the airline said there would be "some knock-on disruption to our schedules on Sunday, as aircraft and crews are out of position around the world". Heathrow advised passengers whose flights were cancelled on Saturday not to travel to the airport unless they have already rebooked. The disruption has been compounded by the timing of the outage coinciding with a bank holiday weekend and school half-term holidays. "Heathrow ordinarily would be busy but would be exacerbated by the bank holiday, half-term and Ascension Day, which is celebrated in a lot of

Europe," Mr Strickland added. "Even if they could quickly get the show back on the road, which is a big uncertainty, disruption could run into several days." Malcolm Ginsberg, editor in chief at Business Travel News, said: "This is a very, very serious situation, one that will not be solved overnight, even once they get the technology aspects of it done - it's going to be three or four days. "There's only full aircraft at this time of year and there will be aircraft in the wrong positions. "Of course I feel sorry for the passengers but for the staff as well who have got to deal with it all." The chaos happened just after 11am on Saturday when the company's unreliable new IT system crashed worldwide for the sixth time in a year. After thousands of furious complaints from customers left in the dark about their flights, bags and compensation, the company released a video online of CEO Alex Cruz apologising to passengers. In it he said the global IT failure was down to a problem with power supply and that technical teams were working "tirelessly" to get systems back up and running. A man who was caught up in the delays at Heathrow airport after British Airways' systems outage said the airline had lost his and dozens of other passengers' bags by the time his flight landed.

31 May 2017, Source TravelMole

Virgin to increase Belfast flights

Virgin Atlantic is increasing the number of flights from Belfast International in 2018 when it will operate its Orlando service from March to September. The seasonal service, which was launched in 2015, will increase to two flights a week for part of June and July. A weekly flight will operate for the rest of the summer season. Flights will operate on Mondays from March 26 to September 4, and there will be an additional Friday flight from June 22 to July 13. A Boeing 747 will operate the route with 14 Upper Class seats, 66 Premium Economy seats and 375 seats in Economy. Richard Myerscough, senior vice president of sales and distribution at Virgin Atlantic, said: "Since launching our first flight from Northern Ireland two years ago our services have gone from strength to strength - so I'm really pleased to announce that 2018 will be our biggest ever season from Belfast International Airport."