



# *Travel Innovation Group Bulletin Number 14*

*From Michael Edwards, Managing Director*

18 September 2020

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Mid-September and rather than the world opening up, there is trepidation as to what destinations will stay open and what may close. I have spoken to many of our customers about the current state-of-play over the last couple of weeks. I think we are all desperate for the government to recognise the turmoil and financial constraints our much-loved industry is operating within.

It appears madness to me that, at this time (6 months in to the worst crisis our industry has faced), we are not yet seeing a joined-up approach from the government ( in terms of quarantine, testing, support) and from the airlines, hotels and ground handlers to give the general public confidence to book foreign travel again. We are an industry that relies upon each other. In normal trading we can live with occasional challenges. However, now we need to find a way to come together with a real understating of each other's pressures. What we can do **together** to truly provide a product that customers have confidence in?

Sadly, there does not appear to be an appropriate forum where such issues can be debated and resolved. For our part, as your flights' provider, we are in constant liaison with the airlines presenting the case on behalf of our tour operators. Aside from a few 'wins' , we have not yet seen solid traction and a shift to a more aligned approach. We will keep trying!!

On a more encouraging note, our **We Are With You** plans have been very well received as positive, practical measures to support you. To further assist, we thought it would be worthwhile sharing our forward booking picture as it does draw positives looking into 2021, as well as other initiatives.

## 2. We Are With You

Our **We Are With You** promise is engrained in everything we do and every decision we make. We continue to take steps forward to support you in every way we can.

### A) Disruption Protection Scheme

As you are aware, our Ticket Protection Scheme is live. This scheme has been so well received that we are looking to offer an enhanced product covering a wider range of potential travel disruption elements. I would be grateful if you would help us refine a new Disruption Protection Scheme by answering a few quick questions on the issues that cause problems for your business during Covid and during normal trading.

The survey can be found [here](#) and can be completed in under 5 minutes.

### B) Portals and Policies

We have received positive feedback around the way we have communicated with our tour operators during this time. We are pleased that we continue to be your fares provider of choice and the consolidator you trust. We are here to support you when you need it most and to give you the facts you need to confidently sell to your customers. With that in mind, I would like to remind you of the Covid-19 policies comparison chart we created to highlight preferable policies for **new** bookings, this can be found [here](#).

We continue to update our websites with airline change policies, book with confidence policies, travel requirements, health and safety initiatives and any other key updates. These can be found in dedicated Covid-19 portals linked below:

[Lime](#)

[Aviate](#)

[Virgin Atlantic Flightstore](#)

# 2

WE ARE WITH YOU

## 2. We Are With You

### C) Crisis Management Plan (Pandemic Version)

We recognise that we are an integral partner in support of our customers during any crisis (including a pandemic!). To react swiftly and professionally to a crisis the Travel Innovation Group (Lime and Aviate) has a comprehensive Crisis Management Plan in place to support you. To aid a coordinated response to a disruptive crisis, and as part of our We Are With You promise, we now publish an external summary of our plans so that you are informed of the actions being taken and we can work together for optimum outcomes, which can be found [here](#). We hope that this gives you the confidence to know we are planned and rehearsed to deal with the on-going issues – and if the worst occurs, a second peak and/or lockdown.

### D) Aviate's Travel Heroes

You may have seen our Aviate Travel Heroes campaign launch this week. We wanted to take some time to recognise how tough this year has been for you and we wanted to take this opportunity to spread a little joy to you, our travel heroes and treasured customers. For two weeks, from 28 September, we will be giving away prizes each day, all you have to do is sign up [here](#) by 24 September to receive a unique code each day, which will unlock a door on Aviate's travel heroes beach to see if you've won – that's it. No booking necessary!

Prizes include:

2 x return economy flight tickets for 2021 from Aegean Airlines, Aer Lingus, Etihad Airways, Icelandair, Qatar Airways, TAP Portugal,, Turkish Airlines and Virgin Atlantic. Plus a cabin for 2 people onboard one of Virgin Voyages Mediterranean sailings in 2021.

Good luck!

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WE ARE WITH YOU

# 3 REFUND PAYMENT CYCLES

## A. Lime and Aviate Flights via GDS

To date, we have completed all 11 of our refund cycles to schedule. Due to the number of cycles now completed - going forward we are only showing cycles starting in August 2020 onwards in the below table.

Processed for Refund (email confirmation sent to you by us)	Expected Payment date (from airlines to us)	Refunds paid to Tour Operator (as latest)	Cycle complete
1 to 16 August	02 September	16 September	✓
17 to 31 August	17 September	01 October	
1 to 15 September	02 October*	16 October	
16 to 30 September	16 October*	02 November	

\*We will need these clear funds from IATA/the airlines before processing your Refunds to you. Refunds will be made back to the original form of payment.

# 3 REFUND PAYMENT CYCLES

## B. Aviate Flights via BSPLink

Several airlines continue diverting all refunds through BSPLink which, as we have stated previously, adds significant delays into the system and means it takes much longer to refund you than we would like. However, we are pleased to have seen positive movement from some volume airlines - notably; Emirates, Cathay Pacific, Virgin Atlantic, Lufthansa, Turkish Airlines and Air France-KLM have been removed from this BSPLink table as they have now opened up GDS refunds. This means that you will begin to see refunds from these airlines come through to you more quickly. Refunds from these airlines will be issued in line with the refund table in section 3A of this bulletin (in the 16 to 30 September cycle)

The below table represents some of our higher volume airlines who are still insisting on manually managing refunds via BSPLink and outlines estimated payment timescales. The table below is our best estimate based on what we have seen from these airlines so far, however some refunds are falling outside of these predicted timescales. I would like to reiterate that, as part of our **We Are With You** promise, when refund monies are returned to us by an airline, we act swiftly to repay you your monies. Rest assured, we are doing what we can and when we are in receipt of the refund - you will be, very shortly afterwards too.

Key Airline	Expected Payment date (to Aviate from submission date)	Refunds paid to Tour Operator (as latest)
SQ/VN	7-9 weeks	+ 2 weeks
WY/UX/TP/MH	6 months	+ 2 weeks
MK	24 months	+ 2 weeks
DY	Ad-hoc	+ 2 weeks

It is worthwhile noting that we are yet to see any refunds authorised by Norwegian or Air Mauritius to date, if this situation changes, we will update you as soon as possible. We are monitoring this situation closely, so we politely request that you do not contact us regarding refunds from these airlines, as unfortunately this is out of our hands.

# 3 REFUND PAYMENT CYCLES

## C. Lime (British Airways) & Aviate airlines Groups Refunds

The below table shows only the most recently completed cycle and cycles beginning in September 2020. All previous cycles have been completed to schedule.

Processed for Refund (email confirmation sent to you by us)	Expected Payment date (from airlines to us)	Refunds paid to Tour Operator (as latest)	Cycle complete
16 to 31 July	24 August	07 September	✓
1 to 16 August	02 September	21 September	
17 to 31 August	17 September	07 October	
1 to 15 September	02 October*	23 October	
16 to 30 September	16 October*	06 November	

\*We will need these clear funds from IATA/the airlines before processing your Refunds to you. Refunds will be made back to the original form of payment.



# 3 REFUND PAYMENT CYCLES

## D. Virgin Atlantic GDS Refund Process Explained

Virgin Atlantic reopened refunding via GDS on the 14<sup>th</sup> September. As of that date we were enabled us to process new refund requests via the GDS. However, the airline did put restrictions in place about processing your existing refunds, the Virgin Atlantic policy stated that we must wait for the refund application in BSPLink to be rejected before processing your refund in the GDS. As the airline only rejected a handful of refunds up until Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> September we could only process a very limited number via the GDS for you.

Yesterday, Virgin Atlantic modified this policy and as of 17<sup>th</sup> September 12:00 we are now able to refund all existing refunds sitting in BSPLink via the GDS instead – this time, without restriction. We are now working through the backlog of BSPLink refunds and will be able to process these back to all our partners by the end of October, in line with the 16-30 September payment cycle outlined in section 3A of this bulletin.

# 4 FORWARD BOOKING TRENDS

I wanted to take the opportunity to share some of our key forward bookings trends, to provide you with some insight on how the IT leisure market is performing as a whole, and hopefully this will allow you to see how your business is aligning with general booking patterns during this time. I am pleased to say there are some positives.

It seems that since the beginning of September, we are starting to see some more confidence in booking foreign travel. As of 15 September (halfway through the month), we can see that September bookings, if they continue on their current trajectory, should end tracking at +73% on August. For comparison, bookings grew in July by 30% compared to June and in August 3% compared to July. Therefore, if you felt like you had a pretty flat July and August that would fall in line with our market trends and you should be expecting to see a steady increase in bookings made this month.

For bookings made in September so far, the top forward booking departure months are summer 2021. In particular July 2021 is looking enormously strong. The summer period is followed by March and April 2021 (Easter) in terms of booking numbers. We are seeing lower than normal bookings for Christmas departures with December 2020 only the ninth most popular departure month for bookings made this month.

What is interesting to note is October 2020 is our third most highly-ranked departure month going forward (for bookings made this month), so I am confident there is a late booking trend emerging, and given the uncertain situation around quarantine/FCO advice, this is likely to remain for the foreseeable.

Customer confidence in making advance bookings seems to rise for bookings departing from March 2021. With the winter sun season 2020 seeming to struggle the most for securing advance bookings – we hope to see this return, maybe in the form of the aforementioned late booking trend.

Turning our attention to destinations featuring within our forward bookings, below is a list of our top 10 performing destinations, across the group, from an ITX booking perspective.

1. South Africa (significant data attributed to the Lions tour July/August 2021)
2. USA
3. Maldives
4. UAE
5. Canada
6. Italy
7. Barbados
8. Japan (significant data attributed to the Olympics)
9. Mexico
10. Greece

# 5

## AIRLINE NEWS

### A) British Airways announces new direct flight to Lahore

British Airways has announced that it will begin flying from London Heathrow to Lahore, Pakistan, four times per week from 12 October 2020. Full details can be found on the Lime website [here](#).

### A) Air France KLM unveils no-cost option for travellers not wishing to travel

Air France-KLM (AFKL) are now allowing ticketed passengers to voluntarily convert tickets to EMD vouchers. This is a new option for your passengers who may not wish to travel in the next few weeks and months, regardless of if their flight has been cancelled or not. Particularly useful as Air France – KLM hubs are currently on the UK governments quarantine list. This additional flexibility gives your customers more options to retain the value of their ticket, to rebook within a year of the EMD being created to any AFKL destination worldwide. If the passenger does not use the EMD within 12 months, they are entitled to a full refund once the year lapses.

### A) Westjet launches Covid19 insurance

Westjet have launched Covid19 insurance. For reservations made on or after September 18, Westjet will provide travellers with no-charge COVID-19 travel insurance. Coverage will be automatically applied at no additional charge at the time of booking creation for travel until August 31, 2021 for up to 21 days.

This follows in the footsteps of Emirates, Etihad Airways and Virgin Atlantic who also offer free of charge Covid19 insurance to their bookings.

Don't forget to provide your customers with the gov.uk link containing information and a mandatory form for completion within 48 hours of their return to the UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/provide-journey-contact-details-before-travel-uk>

and to check entry requirements of the intended destination before travel commences.

# Michael Edwards

*Managing Director*

