



Travel Innovation Group Bulletin Number 16

From Michael Edwards, Managing Director

20 November 2020

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1 INTRODUCTION

Could there finally be some light at the end of the longest tunnel in travel industry history? (And let's face it, for an industry effected by everything from weather to politics that's saying something)! In the past two weeks, we've had news of more than one vaccine on the horizon, travel corridors announced for the UAE, Iceland and more, plus there is now a quarantine task force in place looking at halving the quarantine period - with the overall aim of boosting consumer confidence and boosting international travel - about time!

We have also seen the introduction of shorter Ticketing Time Limits for example BA and Virgin (more detail below) and enhanced flexibility policies from some major airlines including; Emirates and Qatar Airways, whose networks span across the Middle East, Africa and the Indian Ocean. Etihad Airways have also just released a new FOC cancellation option, which permits travellers to cancel their IT bookings up until 10 days prior to departure for any reason as per the fare rules. This presents a great opportunity if hotels will agree to similar timings for cancellation and / or payment terms. This way, packages can be sold for travel up to end of March - with significantly diluted risk of loss to yourselves and / or indeed encourage more customers to book - given supplier payments are not committed to + 14 days before departure. I understand some hotels are keen to support this positive step and therefore, if your clients are looking for a Caribbean break on BA or Virgin, an Indian Ocean R&R, a Middle Eastern jaunt, a South African safari or are just desperate to escape the doom and gloom of the UK - these new policies can help. Hopefully this will encourage late bookings for travel January through to March and the so-called pent up demand is converted into profitable business for all of us.

Remember all our IT fares do not require any deposit or financial commitment until ticketing.

In addition to highlighting the above, we have received extensive feedback around our technology capability highlighted in my last edition of this Bulletin, so I thought it would be prudent to give an update on our API connectivity and cache product here, in case you missed it.

Our API capability can provide fares direct into your own proprietary in-house system or to your system provider as we are already connected to many tour operator system providers. This can provide you with a more efficient way of quoting and creating bookings with the transaction happening directly between us and your own systems. We have also developed a techy cache product for those of you who have a consumer booking website and speed of pricing is a key priority.

If you would like to discuss our API/Cache products please email partnerships@travelinnovationgroup.com To read more about our technology and how it can help you, please refer to Bulletin 15, section 3 [here](#).

2 REFUNDS: FLIGHTS

2A. FLIGHTS REFUND TIMELINE

To date, we have now completed each of our 14 refund cycles to schedule. The most recent refund cycle (ending 16 November) included a significant backlog of refunds that had been delayed by the airlines worth £2.1 million. These funds have now all been passed over to you.

Processed for Refund (email confirmation sent to you by us)	Expected Payment date (from airlines to us)	Refunds paid to Tour Operator (at latest by)	Cycle complete
16 to 30 September	17 October	2 November	✓
1 to 15 October	2 November	16 November	✓
16 to 31 October	17 November	2 December	
1 to 15 November	2 December*	16 December	
16 to 30 November	17 December*	5 January	
1 December to 15 December	4 January*	16 January	

*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.

2 REFUNDS: FLIGHTS

2B. AVIATE REFUNDS VIA BSPLINK

This table represents some of our higher volume airlines who are still insisting on manually managing refunds via BSPLink. Please be reminded that these payment timescales are an estimate and as evident from the text following the table, are changeable depending on the airline's circumstances.

Airlines	Estimated payment from airline to Aviate from processed date (email confirmation sent to you by us)
MH/SQ/VN	7-9 weeks
SAA	Zero authorised to date (see update in section 4G of this bulletin.)
UX/TP/DY/AV	Ad-hoc (zero authorised to date, no update)
MK	Refunds delayed until end of year at earliest
WY	One year after original ticket issue

Unfortunately, we are not seeing much in the way of progress for the airlines listed within this table, Air Mauritius, South African, Air Europa, TAP Portugal, Norwegian and Avianca are yet to authorise any refunds to date.

2 REFUNDS: GROUPS

2C. LIME AND AVIATE GROUPS REFUND TIMELINE

The below table shows only the most recently completed cycles. The previous cycles were completed to schedule.

Group booking cancelled (email confirmation sent to you by us)	Expected payment date (from airline to Aviate)	Refunds paid to Groups agent (at latest)	Cycle complete
16 to 30 September	16 October	6 November	✓
1 to 15 October	2 November	23 November	
16 to 31 October	16 November	7 December	
1 to 15 November	2 December*	23 December	
16 to 30 November	16 December*	11 January	
1 December to 15 December	4 January*	23 January	

*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.

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WE ARE WITH YOU

3A. OPERATIONS & RESERVATIONS TEAM SPLIT

Earlier this month, Jayne Bond – Head of Tour Operator Partnerships communicated with you regarding the new structure of our customer service team:

Reservations for: Quotes, new bookings, seating, pre-ticket amendments and general enquiries

Operations for: ticketing, post-ticket amendments, schedule changes and refunds

I am aware that during the transition period, there were a couple of issues with the new email inboxes, for this I apologise. I know that these issues were resolved quickly. Since the transition this new process is working very well and we've had great feedback as we are achieving our service standards.

The communication included essential updates on how best you can reach the right team, if you missed it, you can read them in full below:

[Lime](#) | [Aviate](#) | [Virgin Atlantic Flightstore](#)

3B. A WELCOME BOOST FOR Q4/Q1 BOOKINGS

As mentioned in the introduction, In addition to the enhanced flexibility policies from British Airways and Virgin Atlantic other airlines continue to raise the bar with their flexible change and cancellation policies. AirFrance-KLM, Emirates, Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways and Turkish Airlines all offer extended refund Terms and Conditions guaranteeing refunds for passengers – not only for flight cancellations, but, in many cases, for events such as travel bans, full lockdowns or passengers due to travel returning a positive PCR test result.

It is great to see airlines making these changes, and I would urge you to speak with your hotel suppliers and ground handlers to see if they can mirror these policies. A combined approach would enable you to promote packages departing in the main from now until March with very minimal financial risk and confidence for your customers.

You can see all of our airline flexibility policies for Aviate airlines new bookings [here](#) and for Lime [here](#).

3C. AIRLINE COVID INSURANCE POLICIES

Many airlines are now issuing Covid-19 insurance policies, for Aviate airlines these can be found [here](#), these provide both you and your customers with peace of mind whilst travelling. These Covid policies are designed to cover any quarantine, medical and repatriation expenses incurred should travelling customers be affected whilst in destination. Covid insurance kicks in once the customer has flown their first sector.

3D. SAVE 20% ON COVID-19 PCR TESTS & EARN COMMISSION

Last week, we launched a new partnership with Confirm Testing. Confirm Testing is a leading supplier in rapid Covid-19 testing and supplies all relevant fit to fly certification should a test return a negative result.

Our partnership allows us to extend a 20% discount to all of our customers, simply by directing you to our Confirm Testing landing page www.confirmtesting.com/tig and entering the code 'TIG20' when prompted.

These are challenging times, so we are offering each of our tour operators the opportunity to set up their own unique promocode which will earn you £2.50 commission for every test booked. If you don't already have your own promocode and would like one, just email info@travelinnovationgroup.com. For more information, you can read the full communication [here](#)

The Travel Innovation Group constantly strives to look for unique ways we can support our customers and the wider industry, I want our customers to know '**We Are With You**' and myself and the team will continue to look for different ways we can offer support through this time.

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WE ARE WITH YOU

4A. BRITISH AIRWAYS UPDATES

EXTENSION OF 14-DAY TTL TO COVER NEW BOOKINGS

British Airways announced on Wednesday an extension of their 14-day TTL to cover new ITX and Cruise bookings created from 18 November 2020 and travelling outbound up until 14 March 2021. This 14-day TTL is applicable to bookings created + 17 days from departure. If bookings are created within 17 days of departure the TTL is 3 days after creation, or at least 3 days prior to departure – whichever is sooner. For full details please click [here](#)

INCREASE IN CARIBBEAN CAPACITY

From the period 10 December 2020 – 9 January 2021, British Airways have announced increased flying capacity to the Caribbean as follows:

- **Antigua** will increase from six to seven flights per week with an additional Tuesday service. There will also be extra flights added on 19 December and 26 December, with two Antigua services on these dates.
- **Saint Lucia** will benefit from increased rotations on 27 December and 3rd January, with two Saint Lucia services on these dates.
- **Barbados** will benefit from an addition LGW service being added, totalling five weekly services from LGW over the 10 December – 9 January period, in addition to the daily LHR service.

BRITISH AIRWAYS PART OF FREE ONBOARD COVID TESTING

British Airways and AJB partners American Airlines have launched an optional COVID-19 medical-based testing trial on selected flights from the United States (US) to London Heathrow (LHR), in a combined effort to scientifically demonstrate how COVID-19 testing can reopen international travel and remove the need for passengers to quarantine on arrival. Their findings will be shared with the UK and US Governments to demonstrate how testing programmes contribute to restarting travel. [Read full details here >](#)

DAILY FLIGHTS TO THE MALDIVES

From 10 December 2020, British Airways will fly to Malé, Maldives daily from London Heathrow. Paradise seekers can choose from four cabin options, including the NEW Club Suite private pods.

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PARTNER NEWS

4B. VIRGIN ATLANTIC EXTEND 14-DAY TTL TO NEW BOOKINGS

Previously only applicable to existing bookings, Virgin Atlantic have now extended this shorter ticketing time limit to cover new bookings too. This allows far more flexibility and protection for bookings travelling before 31 March 2021 and will help secure new bookings looking to travel up until that date. Click [here](#) to view the full update.

4C. QATAR AIRWAYS ANNOUNCE CHANGES TO FARE FAMILIES

On 10 November 2020, Qatar Airways announced some changes to fare families, all changes outlined apply to **existing bookings** (apart from baggage amendments).

Most notable is the change to Business Class (R Class) bookings, which now do not include FOC seating, and will no longer qualify for access to airport lounges that other Business Class travellers are entitled to use,

4D. VIRGIN ATLANTIC ANNOUNCE NEW ST. VINCENT ROUTE

This month, Virgin Atlantic increased their Caribbean flying with a new service to St. Vincent. This is Europe's first direct flight to the island and will depart from London Heathrow twice weekly from summer 2021. Flights will be on sale on vaflightstore.com or in your GDS on 24 November 2020.

Read the full update [here](#)

4E. SRILANKAN ANNOUNCE NEW DIRECT ROUTE FROM HEATHROW TO MALÉ, MALDIVES

SriLankan Airlines have announced a new direct flight to Malé from London Heathrow – now available to book via your GDS or on aviateworld.com. SriLankan are the only airline to fly this route direct on an A330 – meaning that Business Class passengers are offered unique benefits on this service including; all seats facing forward, having direct aisle access and converting to lie-flat beds, the full update can be found [here](#).

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PARTNER NEWS

4F. SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS SUSPEND ALL FLYING UNTIL 2021

We have been notified that South African Airways have suspended all domestic, regional and international flying until the end of the year.

However, more positive news it that the airline looks to be inching closer to authorising refunds as the South African government work towards finalising the Business Rescue Plan. The full statement can be downloaded [here](#)

Further editions will be published regularly as required, rather than on a set day of the week, so that we can communicate key news quicker as it becomes available.

Michael Edwards

Managing Director

