

Outlook for Travel to Britain

- Good expectations concerning travel to Britain. The destination is very affordable to Belgians and recent research found that they do not intend to cancel holidays and/or city trips. At the last ABTO/WES press conference it was announced that London is already performing well this winter (21/10 – 20/03): up 76.3% in comparison to last year. Our eternal competitor, Paris was down 11.8%.

Britain in the News

- Great coverage on Britain due to the weak pound and many promotions offered by carriers, tour operators and local British suppliers. The Eurostar campaign is very attractive to Belgians.

General Market Mood

- There were a record number of bankruptcies this year compared to the first 11 months of 2008 (+13.3%), which amounted to 8,684 companies and represented 22,045 people losing their jobs. The hardest hit was in the catering industry followed by the construction and transport sectors.
- Due to a fall down of the retail price index of the past seven months, approximately 400,000 employees in a total of 50,000 companies will have their wages cut by 0.5% in January.
- More Flemish people from the middle class who lost their jobs recently are facing mounting debt. In 50% of the cases they are unable to pay their energy bills.

Consumer Behaviour

- In the flash Eurobarometer from the European Commission, their research shows that only 10% of the Belgians booked their 2009 holiday with a last minute offer. 20% admitted to having a diminished vacation budget, while 42% said not to have saved on the holidays.
- Belgians have become more cautious with their bank accounts and never drop into the red (a decrease from 50 to 38%). Also, 4 in 10 Belgians hardly succeed in saving – not even €100 per month.
- It is reported that Belgians have no intention of cancelling holidays/short breaks and prefer to adapt differently towards the crisis: 2 on 3 are saving on electricity and heating, 1 on 5 are sparing on clothes, food, cultural and sport activities and are reducing the use of the car.

Media Matters

- The total number of active Internet connections increased by 1.5% compared to the second quarter and there are now over the 3 million connections. In the residential market, the total number of connections has reached 2,520,481 (+1.59%) following an increase in broadband connections (1.64%), which means that 67% households have an Internet connection at home. On the business market, there has been an increase of 1.17% to 527,779 connections. The broadband connections grew by 6,106 lines and now represents over 97% of all professional connections.
- According to a study by the consumer rights organisation (Test Aankoop/Achat) Belgian customers are paying too much for their Internet and digital TV connections compared to the rates abroad. The Internet providers, Belgacom and Telenet are keeping the prices artificially high.
- A survey of Leuven University reveals that an increasing number of Flemings among the most highly educated part of the population (30%) visit a new website at least once a day. The number of graduates that watch TV news has fallen by 10%.

- Following the yearly Zeitgeist report, Belgians are mostly using the Google search engine to connect to social network sites such as YouTube and Facebook. E-Bay is in the top 5 due to the economic crisis.
- The Belgian government started a campaign inviting people to use computers and Internet connections. 'Start2surf @home' is selling a pack (pc + no limit Internet connection for a year) at €349.

Routes and Fares

- Ryanair Winter season took off with the new Edinburgh route to Brussels South (Charleroi).
- BMI will resume its activities in Belgium on 8 January and shut down their offices in town and at the airport. Their flights from Brussels to London Gatwick are taken over by Brussels Airlines, who are moving the connection to London Heathrow. The other BMI flights remain (Edinburgh, East Midlands, Leeds Bradford).
- Brussels Airlines is optimising its flight offer between Belgium and the UK with an increase in frequencies to and from Bristol and Newcastle.
- VLM airlines flying from Luxembourg, Antwerp and Brussels to many British airports is now called City Jet. A campaign of promotional rates to highlight the new name of the company has been launched last November: Belgium to Manchester from €49, to London from €39 and Luxembourg to London from €39.

Business Tourism

- Due to the current economic climate meetings are cancelled, postponed or held in Belgium itself and/or neighbouring countries.

Leisure Travel Trade

- According to the latest survey of the ABTO (Association of the Belgian Tour operators) and WES, the market share of the tour operators is growing.
- Spectrum Travel, an agency from the Thomas Cook chain, started as a specialised tour operator in Britain last month. It is called 'House of Britain' and is the extension of the company bearing the same name in the Netherlands. Other niche operators attracted by the gap left in the market by the disappearance of Seagull (Tour operator specialised on Britain) will start programmes soon.

Competitor Activity

- According to a survey by WES (WestVlaams Economisch Studiebureau) holidays during the Winter (1 October 2009 until 31 March 2010) – were split into three categories: Winter Sun holidays (27%), Winter sports (23.5%) and city trips (21.2%) France is, and remains the number one destination, followed by Belgium and Spain.

VisitBritain Activity Update

- The joint event 'Travel! The Workshop' took place on 10 October in the Conrad hotel in Brussels with the NTOs of France, Luxembourg and The Netherlands. This is the only event in Belgium dedicated to group travel and to the professionals. The British delegation was present with 10 suppliers. 491 contacts from the travel trade, sport and cultural associations visited the workshop. VisitBritain highlighted the easy accessibility to the destination and the fantastic good value for money.
- Also, VisitBritain Brussels sent press releases on "Britain, good value for money", "London cheaper than other European cities" and 2 e-newsletters on Christmas in Britain and in London.

Upcoming activity

- Meet the Belgian Media has been planned on 21 January 2010 in the Sofitel hotel in Brussels. 10 suppliers (carriers, regions) have registered so far.
- Best of Britain & Ireland on 17&18 March 2010. Organising accommodation in London and familiarisation trip for the Belgian delegation.

Who's in Town?

- Nothing to report for October to December.