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20 October 2026: Leeds Bradford strikes paused; Saudi connections need review

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This UK Outbound Travel Briefing covers 14–20 October: Leeds Bradford's strike suspension changes half-term messaging, while Saudi-related disruption requires itinerary-level checks. ([unitetheunion.org](https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2026/october/leeds-bradford-airport-strikes-suspended-for-talks)) A newly published ONS baseline supports market sizing, but describes 2025 travel—not this week's bookings—and carries important comparability restrictions. ([ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/traveltre

Headlines

- Leeds Bradford walkouts suspended for negotiations—not settled.[1] ([unitetheunion.org](https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2026/october/leeds-bradford-airport-strikes-suspended-for-talks))
- Specified Etihad Saudi cancellations extend through 24 October.[2] ([en.aletihad.ae](https://en.aletihad.ae/news/business/4699843/etihad-airways-extends-flight-cancellation-to-saudi-airports))
- ONS publishes 2025 outbound totals; annual 2024–2025 comparisons remain inappropriate.[3][4] ([ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/traveltre
- Birmingham contactless eGates change return processing, not passport requirements.[5][6] ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/getting-through-the-uk-border-faster/contactless-travel-using-egates))
- Jet2 extends Leeds Bradford–Tunisia flying into November 2027, not this autumn.[7] ([leedsbradfordairport.co.uk](https://www.leedsbradfordairport.co.uk/the-latest/jet2-expands-tunisia-programme-from-leeds-bradford-in-response-to-strong-customer-demand-from-early-bookers))

Key figures

62%[8]

UK adults reporting an overseas holiday: background survey

2026 · ABTA's representative UK-adult survey, released 13 October 2026, measures overseas holidays in the preceding 12 months, not current bookings or completed calendar-year activity. [R1682][M1]

61.5%[9]

GB adults intending an overseas overnight trip: background survey

2026-09 · VisitBritain's weighted GB-adult survey, released 22 September 2026, measures next-12-month intentions among people aged 16+, not bookings. [R1686][M1]

Developments that matter

1. Leeds Bradford disruption messaging needs correction. Unite announced on 19 October that strikes by over 130 workers, scheduled for 23 October–2 November, were suspended for Acas-brokered negotiations. Air traffic controllers and hourly paid workers had rejected the latest offers. Recommendation: remove statements that these walkouts remain confirmed, without promising disruption-free departures; the suspension is not a settlement.[1] ([unitetheunion.org](https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2026/october/leeds-bradford-airport-strikes-suspended-for-talks))

2. Saudi exposure needs a separate operational review. On 20 October, the Ministry of Defence announced additional defensive support, citing escalating Houthi attacks and condemning attacks on King Khalid International Airport. This establishes a security development, not which passenger flights operate. Recommendation: prioritise Saudi itineraries and connections for carrier checks rather than treating every Gulf journey as affected.[10] ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/operational-update-20-october-uk-military-support-to-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia))

3. Market sizing has a newly published baseline. ONS released its 2025 Travel trends estimates on 16 October as official statistics in development. The release is fresh; the journeys are historical. Recommendation: update planning references, but do not interpret this publication as stronger October sales or construct annual growth across the survey redesign.[34]

([ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/traveltrend

Destination access and operations

Aletihad’s 19 October report of Etihad’s statement specifies cancellations through 24 October 2026: all flights between Abu Dhabi and Dammam or Riyadh, plus Jeddah services EY601, EY602, EY603 and EY604. Recommendation: identify affected UK-origin connecting journeys, including pilgrimage packages, by flight number and date; confirm alternatives with the airline. This does not establish that every Saudi service is suspended.[2]
([en.aletihad.ae](https://en.aletihad.ae/news/business/4699843/etihad-airways-extends-flight-cancellation-to-saudi-airports))

The inspected FCDO Saudi page was updated on 21 October 2026, after the edition cutoff. It is registered solely to document this verification limitation: advice applicable on 20 October was not verified, and no later advice level or destination-entry clearance is imported here. Recommendation: retain timestamped official advice and entry checks alongside carrier notices.[11] ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/saudi-arabia))

4. Birmingham’s return-border process changes. Border Force’s 20 October update specifically confirms contactless eGates at Birmingham. The collection was first published on 6 December 2016; its history records the contactless factsheet addition on 6 October 2026. Birmingham availability—not first publication—is this week’s material change. Initial eligibility is restricted to British citizens, who must still carry valid passports. Recommendation: revise arrival instructions without promising shorter queues.[5][6]
([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/getting-through-the-uk-border-faster/contactless-travel-using-egates))

5. Tunisia gains future programme depth. Leeds Bradford’s 16 October announcement extends Jet2’s weekly Saturday Enfidha service to 27 November 2027, previously 30 October, with resumption from 12 February 2028. This is future inventory, not extra October 2026 capacity; the announcement supplies no quantified booking uplift.[7]
([leedsbradfordairport.co.uk](https://www.leedsbradfordairport.co.uk/the-latest/jet2-expands-tunisia-programme-from-leeds-bradford-in-response-to-strong-customer-demand-from-early-bookers))

Value and holiday calendar

Reuters’ 20 October report, published at 10:15 UTC, recorded sterling at $1.3343 and the euro at 84.04 pence. These are intraday market observations, not closing rates, retail exchange offers or

evidence of cheaper packages. Recommendation: refresh currency-sensitive quotations using executable supplier rates and retain their validity times; do not advertise savings without a verified price comparison.[12] ([aol.com](https://www.aol.com/articles/sterling-rises-strong-labour-market-101550000.html))

For schools following Leeds City Council's calendar in England, the last school day is 23 October and half-term runs 26–30 October 2026. Individual schools may differ. This local window matters for Leeds Bradford communications, but should not be applied across England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. The council page is undated background, not weekly news.[13] ([leeds.gov.uk](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-holidays-and-term-dates))

Recommendation: test a Tunisia shoulder-season package proposition against confirmed 2027 flight and hotel availability, showing baggage, transfers and meal inclusions consistently. Compare enquiry-to-quote progression and margin with an existing proposition. Treat affordability and conversion as hypotheses, not outcomes established by the programme extension.[7] ([leedsbradfordairport.co.uk](https://www.leedsbradfordairport.co.uk/the-latest/jet2-expands-tunisia-programme-from-leeds-bradford-in-response-to-strong-customer-demand-from-early-bookers))

Latest market evidence

ONS estimates UK residents made 99.9 million visits abroad in 2025 and spent £86.2 billion. Within those totals, GB residents accounted for 95.5 million visits and £83.9 billion. Published on 16 October 2026, these external figures count visits, not unique travellers, and must retain their UK/GB distinction. They are not stored TravelSpy numerical records.[3] ([ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/traveltrenc

The accompanying methodology update identifies comparable quarters from Q3 2024 to Q4 2025, but advises against comparing annual 2024 and 2025 estimates because the IPS design changed during 2024. No annual growth rate is presented here.[4] ([ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/improvingo

Stored evidence remains dated background: the inspected pack's ONS annual visits series ends in 2023, released 17 May 2024.[14][15] ABTA's 62% overseas-holiday participation figure was released on 13 October, outside this reporting window.[8] VisitBritain's September overseas-trip intention figure is 61.5%, released 22 September; its weighted population is GB adults aged 16+. Neither survey measures current bookings.[9][15]

The inspected pack has no usable UK Google Trends series. Its inventory was compiled on 21 October and supports retrospective pack-audit disclosures only—not contemporaneous market evidence. No previous edition is supplied within the pack, so snapshot additions cannot establish weekly statistical changes.[15]

Actions for travel businesses

- Recommendation — operations: replace Leeds Bradford's confirmed-strike warnings with suspension wording, assign a dispute-monitoring owner and track unresolved affected itineraries. Retain contingency arrangements while negotiations continue.[1] ([unitetheunion.org](https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2026/october/leeds-bradford-airport-strikes-suspended-for-talks))
- Recommendation — Saudi connections: reconcile departures against the specified Etihad cancellations, record airline confirmation times and measure time to contact affected travellers. Do not extrapolate the notice to other carriers or airports.[2] ([en.aletihad.ae](https://en.aletihad.ae/news/business/4699843/etihad-airways-extends-flight-cancellation-to-saudi-airports))
- Recommendation — customer information: audit Birmingham return instructions for passport-free claims and segment family messages by school calendar. Track corrections and repeat enquiries rather than assuming improved service.[5][13] ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/getting-through-the-uk-border-faster/contactless-travel-using-egates))
- Recommendation — commercial planning: test Tunisia inclusions and total-price presentation on confirmed inventory; measure quote acceptance and contribution margin before expanding promotion.[7] ([leedsbradfordairport.co.uk](https://www.leedsbradfordairport.co.uk/the-latest/jet2-expands-tunisia-programme-from-leeds-bradford-in-response-to-strong-customer-demand-from-early-bookers))
- Recommendation — analytics: label ONS charts with geography, observation period, release date and methodology break. Keep completed travel, survey intentions and live sales reporting separate; this evidence does not establish a weekly demand surge.[3][4][9] ([ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/traveltre

Data gaps and limitations

- Advice applicable on 20 October 2026 was not verified: the inspected FCDO Saudi page was updated on 21 October and is cited only to document that limitation, not as contemporaneous advice or destination-entry clearance.11 ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/saudi-arabia))
- The inspected pack's stored ONS annual outbound visits series ends in 2023 and is stale; the verified 2025 release is cited separately as external evidence, not inserted into key_figures.14 153 ([ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/traveltre
- No valid, unambiguous UK Google Trends series is available in this frozen evidence pack.15
- The inventory timestamp is 21 October 2026; it supports retrospective pack-audit disclosures only, not developments known by the edition cutoff.15
- No previous edition is supplied within the inspected pack; records newly appearing in this snapshot are not necessarily newly published.15
- The cited evidence does not establish current-week booking growth or package-price changes: ONS describes 2025 visits, surveys are not bookings, and intraday currency observations are not package quotations.3891512 ([ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/traveltre The Tunisia announcement provides no quantified booking uplift, and the border guidance provides no measured Birmingham queue-time improvement.756 ([leedsbradfordairport.co.uk](https://www.leedsbradfordairport.co.uk/the-latest/jet2-expands-tunisia-programme-from-leeds-bradford-in-response-to-strong-customer-demand-from-early-bookers))
- Leeds school-calendar publication timing is unverified; it is used as undated local background, with individual-school checks required.13 ([leeds.gov.uk](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-holidays-and-term-dates))

Methodology

Figures come from official UK statistics stored by TravelSpy with their release dates, licences and attribution. Each report is drafted by an AI research analyst, automatically checked figure-by-figure against the stored records, and then independently fact-checked by a separate AI reviewer before publication. Sources keep their own periods and units and are never blended. Sentiment and search interest are not bookings, and airport passengers include inbound and connecting traffic.

- **UK travel research**: included

- **UK resident outbound travel**: included
- **UK search interest**: not included (No valid, unambiguous UK series stored for this source.)
- **UK airport passenger context**: included
- **UK travel sentiment**: included

References

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    Snapshot of TravelSpy evidence only, not a claim about data available elsewhere. UK travel research: available. ABTA survey findings are not bookings; retain the study methodology and population. UK resident outbound travel: available. ONS resident travel estimates; publication frequency is not report frequency. UK search interest: unavailable. No valid, unambiguous UK series stored for this source. Search interest is a normalized index, not traveller counts or bookings. Only identically normalized series are comparable. UK airport passenger context: available. CAA UK airport passengers include non-residents, inbound and connecting traffic. They are not UK resident outbound demand. UK travel sentiment: available. Survey intentions and sentiment are not bookings; retain the survey methodology and population.

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