

British passengers from Grand Princess on US flight to the UK

British passengers from the Grand Princess cruise ship are returning to the UK on a US flight. The flight, carrying 135 British nationals and their dependents, departed Oakland Airport at 2315 local time, and is expected to arrive in Birmingham Airport early this evening.

A Foreign Office spokesperson said:

The safety, health and welfare of British nationals is always our top priority, and we have been working tirelessly with the US authorities to ensure all British nationals who wished to return could do so.

Background

- Princess Cruises has arranged travel for passengers from Birmingham airport to their homes.
- All British nationals will be required to self-isolate for 14 days in line with Public Health England guidance.

Foreign Secretary statement on Guyana, March 2020

The United Kingdom expresses deep concern about the events following the elections in Guyana on 2 March 2020.

We call upon the President to preserve the principle of free, fair and credible elections. Allegations of electoral fraud and premature declarations of victory prior to the completion of a credible process pose a grave threat to the democratic principles of Guyana.

We call upon President Granger to ensure that proper procedures are followed before embarking upon a transition of government.

We stand ready to offer assistance to ensure a credible election result is produced.

Gender Equality: challenges and opportunities

The event follows on from the Embassy's Business and Human Rights agenda, and the guest-speakers were all female leaders in senior decision-making positions in key businesses in Guatemala and members of Britcham.

Participants included Ruby Asturias, partner at EY, Natalia Callejas, partner at Aguilar Castillo Love and Lucia Valenzuela, founder of Advocacy for Business and Human Rights. The dialogue was moderated by Marielos Chang, Chevening Alumni.

The panel discussion was an opportunity for them to share their own experiences on how to break the work-family narrative that fits with broader cultural norms. The group discussed the impact of the current political and legal systems on a woman's life, and which improvements could be made by Guatemala to positively influence the situation for women around the country.

In addition, the importance for businesses to include a gender perspective in their operations, that for example, improve representation of women in senior decision-making positions, as well as policies that tackle harassment and how to effectively approach the gender pay-gap.

To highlight the Embassy's commitment to focussing on women and girls around the country, the event featured a video of a project in Sololá on girls' education, which addresses child pregnancies and the rights to a choice over their bodies and their future.

Gender Equality in children

Nick Whittingham, British Ambassador to Guatemala said:

Gender equality is a topic we must address; it's the right thing to do and it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that women and girls have the same opportunities and resources available to them as men and boys.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for employees, employers and businesses

If you are an employer or a business owner we encourage you to read and follow the [guidance for employers and businesses](#).

This guidance will assist employers and businesses with advice on:

- the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)
- how to help prevent spread of all respiratory infections including COVID-19
- what to do if someone in the workplace becomes ill
- advice on sick pay and certification of absence from work resulting from COVID-19
- business support measures on rate relief and loans

If you would like to receive updates on the government's response to COVID-19 you can [sign up for email alerts](#).

Business support announced in the Budget and 17 March

In the Budget (11 March 2020) the Chancellor announced a [package of measures](#) to provide support for public services, individuals and businesses to ensure the impact of COVID-19 is minimised.

A new Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, delivered by the British Business Bank, will enable businesses to apply for a loan of up to £5 million, with the government covering up to 80% of any losses with no fees. Businesses can access the first 6 months of that finance interest free, as government will cover the first 6 months of interest payments.

For businesses with fewer than 250 employees, the cost of providing 14 days of Statutory Sick Pay per employee will be refunded by the government in full. This will provide 2 million businesses with up to £2 billion to cover the costs of large-scale sick leave.

A dedicated helpline has been set up to help businesses and self-employed individuals in financial distress and with outstanding tax liabilities receive support with their tax affairs. Through this, businesses may be able to agree a bespoke Time to Pay arrangement. If you are concerned about being able to pay your tax due to COVID-19, call HMRC's dedicated helpline on 0800 0159 559.

There will be a £10,000 cash grant to our smallest businesses, delivered by local authorities. Small businesses that pay little or no business rates and are eligible for small business rate relief (SBBR) or rural rate relief will be contacted by their local authority – they do not need to apply. The funding will be provided to local authorities in early April. Guidance is available for local authorities on [managing the scheme](#).

Finally, the government is introducing a business rates holiday for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England for the 2020 to 2021 tax year.

A £25,000 grant will also be provided to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses operating from smaller premises, with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000.

Any enquiries on eligibility for, or provision of, the reliefs should be directed to the relevant local authority.

Guidance for local authorities on [managing the retail grant funding](#).

Guidance for local authorities on the [expanded retail discount](#).

In addition, the decisions announced by the [Bank of England](#) on 11 March 2020 mean that banks are in a better position to provide additional credit to smaller businesses.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

The coronavirus clearly poses multiple challenges for businesses, and I know from regular calls with business representatives that many are concerned about the longer-term effects on investment, cash flow and the future of their businesses.

Supporting companies through this period is a top priority and a whole of government effort. The measures set out in the Budget show that this government will support business through this turbulent time and keep the economy moving. We will continue to review these measures as the impact of the virus progresses.

Call for businesses to help make NHS ventilators

The government is looking for businesses who can support in the supply of ventilators and ventilator components across the UK as part of our response to COVID-19.

If you think your business can help, please register your details.

Additional resources

- the [government's coronavirus action plan](#) provides detailed information about the government's response
- the government has put a range of support in place for those who do not receive Statutory Sick Pay, including Universal Credit and contributory Employment and Support Allowance
- ACAS has published [information for employees and employers](#), including simple steps to help protect the health and safety of staff
- a number of private lenders are also making funds available to small businesses impacted by COVID-19, including £2 billion from [Lloyds Banking Group](#), £5 billion from [NatWest](#) and £7 billion from [Barclays](#)

If you have a query that isn't covered by this guidance you can contact the [Business Support Helpline](#).

[New chapter in UK-Algeria relations](#)

In the build up to the COP26 conference on climate change in Glasgow, the UK and Algeria have agreed a new working partnership to tackle climate change.

The first UK-Algeria Strategic Dialogue, held in Algiers on 9 March, also focused on education, and led to an agreement for the first British school to open in Algeria and for the promotion of the English language. Both sides also agreed to establish a trade and investment taskforce to allow businesses to continue trading freely after the end of the UK's transition period with the EU.

The UK's Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa, James Cleverly MP, led the UK delegation and was hosted in Algiers by Algerian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr Rachid Bladehane. Discussions also reinforced each side's commitment to cooperation across a range of areas, including political, economic, security and cultural relations.

UK's Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa, James Cleverly, said:

Algeria is a key partner in the region for the UK. These talks made clear the extent of the expanding friendship and co-operation between the UK and Algeria.

I welcome the new Algerian government's commitment to political and economic reform. Our shared future is bright, and I look forward to growing the UK's win-win partnership with Algeria on the issues that matter to us both.

Media enquiries

For journalists

Email newsdesk@fco.gov.uk

Newsdesk 020 7008 3100