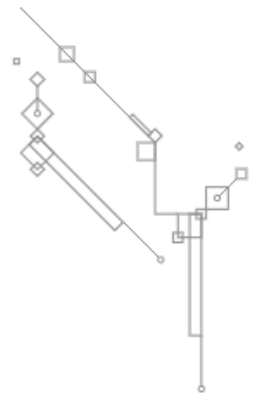
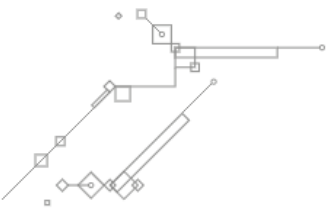


WHAT'S CHANGING IN THE ONLINE TRAVEL SECTOR?



SALT
. a g e n c y



It is without doubt that 2016 has presented one of the strangest years in recent times. Rocked by a changing and unorthodox political landscape, natural disasters, and terrorism — the year has taken its toll on the world travel market, changing forever its future direction.



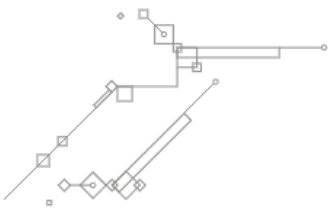
The year without breaks...

Sensitive by all means, the travel market is one of the most responsive and dynamic industries in the world and 2016 has already impacted European travel – both within the continent and to Africa and the Middle East.

In early October Thomas Cook announced that it had cancelled all 2017 summer holidays to Tunisia amidst turmoil and unrest in the country.

Moving into Europe, Turkey's multiple terrorist attacks and failed coup has left its tourism industry reeling from a year of horror — potentially knocking £2.5 billion out of the economy by December, despite Vladimir Putin lifting Russia's ban on package holidays to the country.

The fallout doesn't end with travel agencies however, as low-cost airlines have also felt the pinch amongst the broken pound, air traffic control strikes, and terrorist attacks in both France and Belgium. EasyJet has already revealed that the falling pound will cost the company at least £90 million this year, with its profits expected to tumble by a third. Although the airline saw a record number of passengers over the three summer months, its load factor dropped to 91.1 per cent from 93.1 per cent a year earlier.



Into the New Year

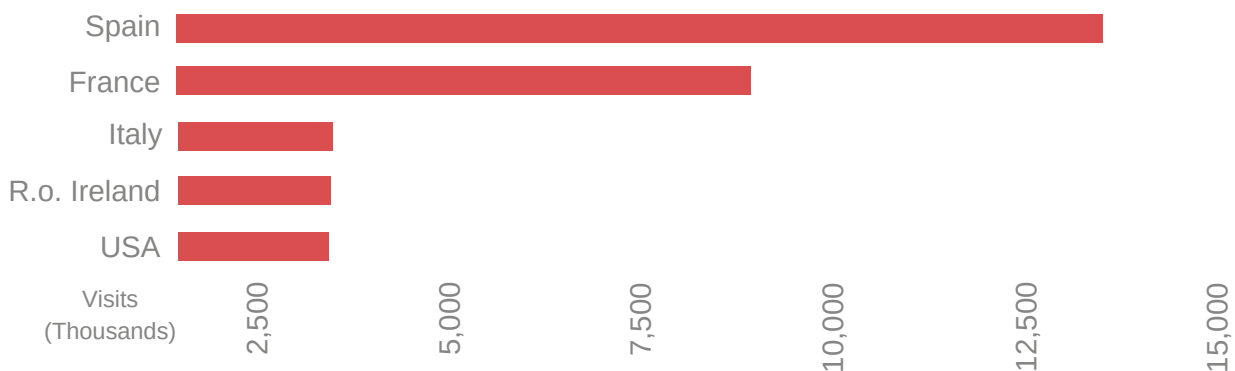
Ryanair, with whom easyJet has been involved in a price war, has also predicted a net profit cut of about five per cent in 2017.

Similar statements have also been released from British Airways owner, IAG, and Germany's Lufthansa. Short haul prices throughout Eastern Europe are expected to rise by four per cent due to limited competition, while prices in Western Europe are expected to go up by a total of 0.5 per cent.

It has also been reported that in the UK at least, staycations are set to be the fashion next year, with 76 per cent of UK residents stating that they are planning at least one UK holiday in 2017.

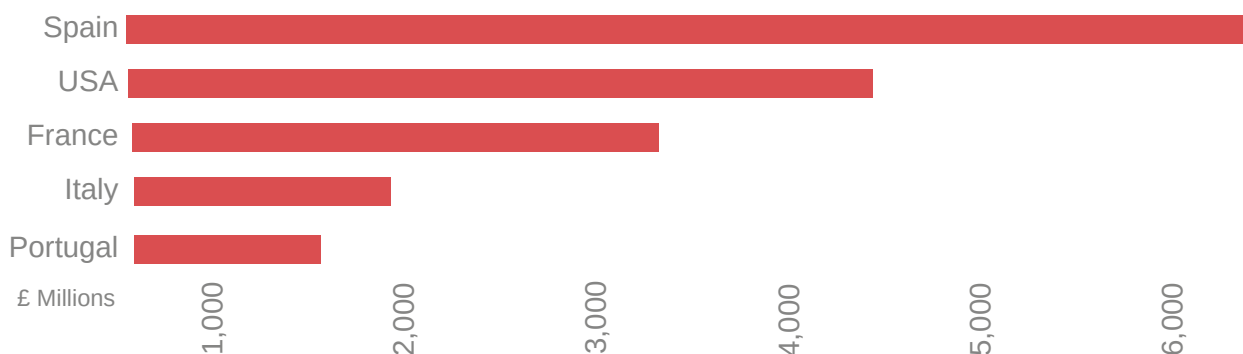
But where have Brits travelled to in the past?

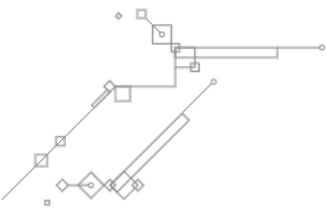
The below chart, using data from the Office for National Statistics in its latest Travel Trends release, shows the top ten countries visited by UK residents for at least one night in 2015:



We at SALT predict that this table shall alter considerably, with short haul destinations slipping lower, while the USA takes a greater chunk of the market next year.

In fact, according to the same publication, trips to France are already decreasing, and have been since 2010. If we look at expenditure, spending in the USA rose by 16 per cent from 2014, with £4.5 billion being spent by UK holiday makers — the second highest country in the top ten:





The USA travel market will be stronger than ever in 2017

Despite a small decrease in long-haul flights from the USA to Europe this summer, after a 6.5 per cent annual growth rate that has been enjoyed since 2011, flights both to and from Europe and the USA are set to grow considerably.

According to reports, the American travel industry fared a whole lot better than its European counterpart in 2016, with overall travel, combining domestic and international, increasing by four per cent on the previous year.

In fact, the United States was the biggest single long-haul source market for Europe, with approximately 25 million arrivals reported in 2015 — beating both Russia and China, whose markets are not to be excused.

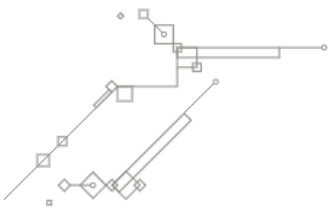
At the end of September Delta Air Lines announced new routes connecting European airports to New York and Boston, beginning in the summer of 2017.

Additionally, tourists are beginning to discover new areas of interest outside of the traditional locations of Florida, New York, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles.

Just outside San Francisco, Silicon Valley, home to Apple Inc., Google, and Facebook, has enjoyed great levels of tourism in recent years.

Further north, Alaska has seen its cruise industry surpass visitor records after welcoming its millionth customer late in the season. The industry states that they expect an additional 45,000 passengers in 2017, potentially breaking all-time records.



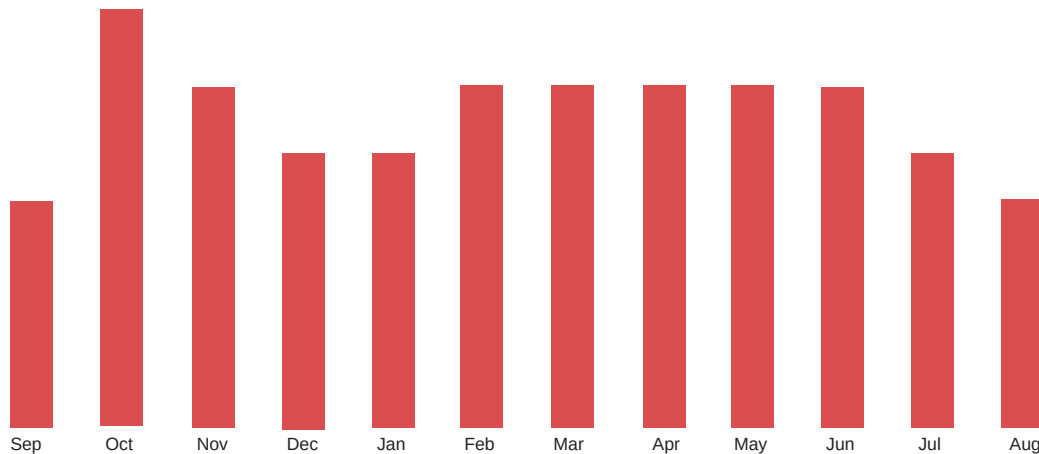


When should search optimisation begin for online travel firms ahead of 2017?

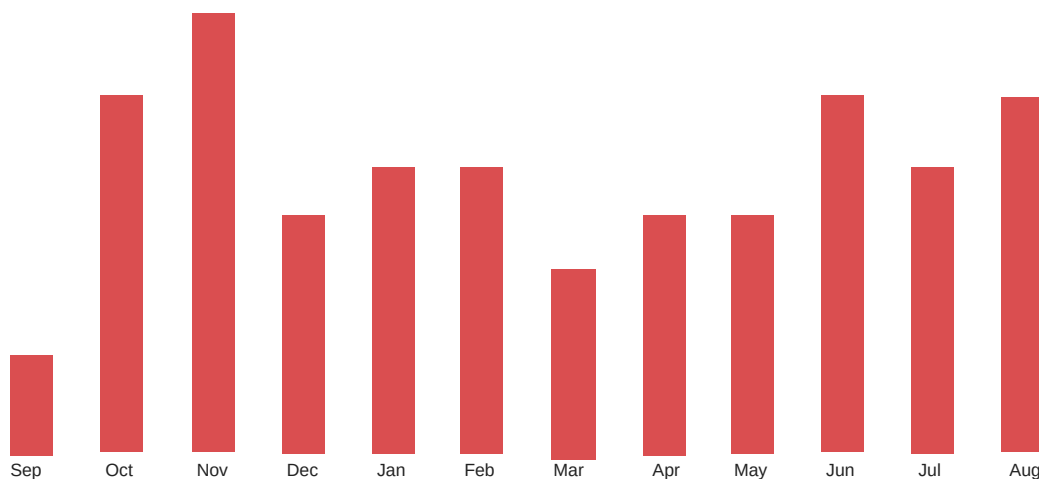
As soon as possible if they want to be ready for the busier months at the start of 2017.

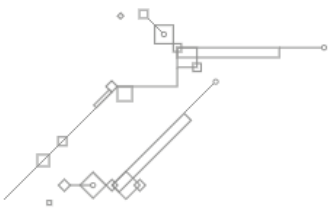
Having researched online bookings from the UK, SALT has been able to identify when people begin researching and planning their trips to the United States.

For example, by looking at the below graph, we can see that the most popular month for the search term **USA holidays** over the past 12 months was in October, with consistent interest shown throughout mid-to-late summer (graphs show data September 2015 to September 2016):



Interestingly however, the search term “US holidays” yielded similar though ever so slightly different results, with November taking the most prominent month, and with a declined interest until late summer.





It is also possible to see completely different SERP results for each term, showing a highly competitive set of results — with the possibly unfocussed addition of Wikipedia.

This means that **there is room** for new and more appropriate travel companies to find their way into the most sought after positions. Below are the 1st pages of Google.co.uk for the the terms **us holidays** and **usa holidays**:

US HOLIDAYS SERP

www.timeanddate.com
www.officeholidays.com
www.wikipedia.org
www.thomson.co.uk
www.publicholidays.us
www.redcort.com
www.britishairways.com
www.thomascook.com
www.buyusa.gov
www.americansky.co.uk

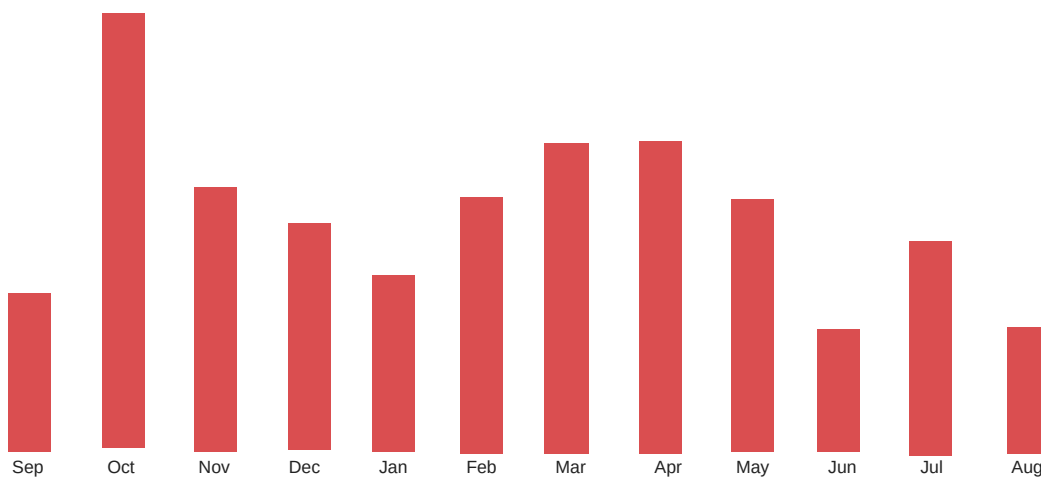
USA HOLIDAYS SERP

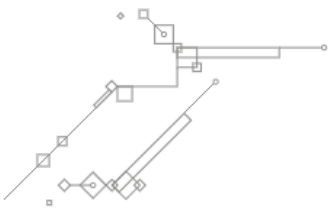
www.virginholidays.co.uk
www.britishairways.com
www.thomascook.com
www.trailfinders.com
www.lastminute.com
www.co-operativetravel.co.uk
www.thomson.co.uk
www.kuoni.co.uk
www.myamericanholiday.co.uk
www.directholidays.co.uk

There are also fluctuations with specific destinations within the USA itself.

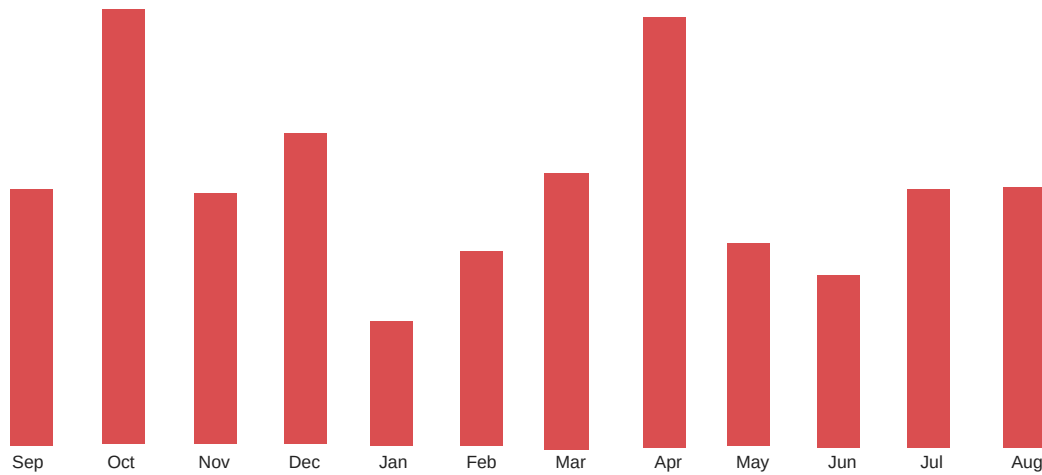
Florida for instance, where 97 million tourists generated \$89.1 billion in 2016 (up from 4 per cent the year before), also shows different trends depending on the search term.

Taking a look at Florida as a whole, the search term **Florida holidays** also indicates that most people planned and booked their travels early on in the year, with a rising interest in early spring and also October — where some families might be looking for **last minute Christmas holidays**:

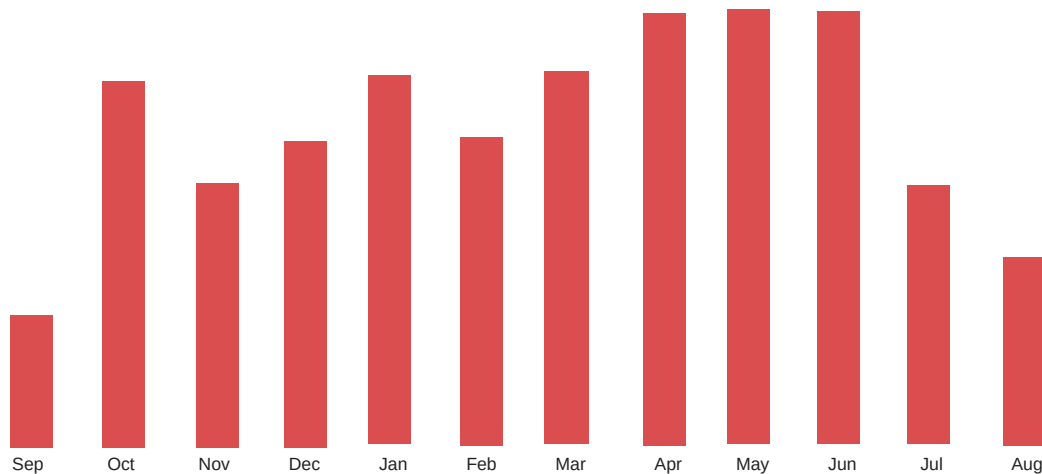




However, by altering the search a little, and using the term **Disneyland Florida holidays** we see an entirely different picture – one with many peaks and troughs and a surprising surge of interest in April:

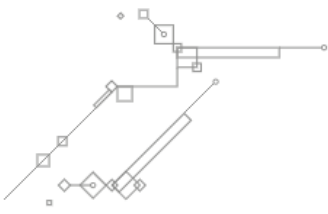


Again, with another variable, this time inspecting **Walt Disney World holidays**, we are able to see a far more consistent approach to the travel market, but with prime searches occurring in earlier spring and October:



One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things...

- Henry Miller



So how do the SERPs match up using **Disney World holidays** and **Disneyland Florida holidays**?

DISNEY WORLD HOLIDAYS SERP

www.disneyholidays.co.uk
www.virginholidays.co.uk
www.thomascook.com
www.thomson.co.uk
www.cooptravel.co.uk
www.travelcitydirect.com
www.disneypackages.co.uk
www.britishairways.com
www.expedia.co.uk

DISNEY FLORIDA HOLIDAYS SERP

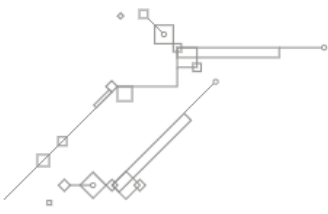
www.virginholidays.co.uk
www.thomson.co.uk
www.disneyholidays.co.uk
www.thomascook.com
www.cooptravel.co.uk
www.britishairways.com
www.travelcitydirect.com
www.travelsupermarket.com
www.disneypackages.co.uk

Again we are able to see a noticeable difference within the search terms. Although most of the main players are present, we find them in a mix of positions.

Most notably, Disney Holidays ranks first for its own brand with **Disney World holidays**, but not with **Disneyland Florida holidays**, where it can be found behind both Virgin Holidays and Thomson.

Again, this indicates that there is room for movement amongst even the top positions, as well as those not shown in the above table.





Getting the best out of the online market

In order to prepare and to make the best for early 2017 spring bookings, it is crucial that travel agencies begin inspecting their technical SEO performances as soon as possible.

Although in the past, many travel agencies relied on links and keywords to bolster their presence in search engines, there's no denying that both now take smaller levels of importance when it comes to success in organic search.

Furthermore, upon the implementation of a successful SEO campaign, it can still take a matter of months before a travel website can find itself in a more lucrative position — ready for the busy season.

Travel companies that have recently found themselves falling through the SERPs, or that have discovered a drop in traffic, still have time to recover for the opening months of 2017.

Technical audits, market gap analyses, penalty inspections, and SEO campaign audits are key to maintaining healthy travel sites.



Let's Talk.

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