

1. Hellenic Seaways refreshes its Saronic fleet with three catamarans. Three newly built catamaran passenger ships will as of next spring replace the old “flying dolphins” that have served destinations in the Saronic Gulf for more than 40 years, as Hellenic Seaways is renewing its fleet. The Attica Group subsidiary has ordered three 150-seat vessels designed and made in Norway that are also environmentally friendly with low carbon emissions. They even sport solar panels to cover each boat’s needs in terms of lighting and electricity. The Saronic is one of the most beneficial routes in the country, serving popular destinations such as Aegina, Poros, Hydra, Spetses and Porto Heli, which have a longer tourism season than the Cyclades.

2. Major slump in 2020 tax revenues. Budget data for 2020 showed that the health crisis resulted in a considerable contraction in tax revenues, which missed their target by 7.6 billion euros. The lockdowns, the furloughs and the drop in corporate income tax deposits were the main reasons for the slump in tax takings, which is expected to continue in the first quarter of this year. Revenues from value-added tax were €3.2 billion below the original estimates, finally settling at €15 billion. A large part of the losses were due to the closure of food service and retail commerce.

3. Consumers sticking with e-commerce. The closure of stores until just a few days ago, fear of crowds and the increasing familiarization of consumers with e-commerce have led many Greeks to continue shopping online. The latest six-month survey by the Association of Business and Retail Sales of Greece (SELPE) has shown that the percentage of consumers who shop online is growing, even though the satisfaction rate remains low. Half of the consumers who make online purchases say they will continue to buy online even after the full opening of brick-and-mortar stores. Among internet users 61% performed online purchases over the two-week period of the survey in December, up from 51% in the previous survey last June. In 2019 the rate had stood at just 21%.

4. Electric cars attract plenty of interest. The “Kinoume Ilektrika” state program of subsidies for the acquisition of electric vehicles has received about 10,000 applications since July 2020, General Secretary for Energy Alexandra Sdoukou told a conference on

Wednesday. She added that out of the state subsidies program’s total budget of 45 million euros, about one-fifth – or 9 million euros – has already been absorbed, generating turnover of €42 million in the market. The target of electric vehicle registrations for 2020 was exceeded, Sdoukou reported, saying that 2,150 registrations were implemented against a target for 1,265 vehicles included in the national plan for energy and the climate.

5. Americans look to Greece for post-pandemic vacations. Greece is Americans’ preferred destination in Europe for post-pandemic vacations, according to online searches over the last six months monitored by Google and analyzed by web travel marketplace Koala. The data suggest that the majority of Americans are planning a trip fairly close to home once pandemic-related restrictions allow it, with Puerto Rico the most popular destination. However, when it comes to European destinations, Greece is the most searched-for country, accounting for about 247,000 searches in that period by US users, with Iceland a surprising second with 189,000 searches.

6. Attracting more digital nomads. Greece can be a strong candidate to be an ideal destination for many so-called “digital nomads” if its infrastructures are satisfactory, says John Roese, chief technology officer at Dell Technologies. Speaking to Kathimerini about Greece’s prospects in that respect, he stated that “I can easily think of myself working from an island in Greece. This is a very beautiful country. As an employer I am also interested in the talent and not the country a worker is based in,” adding that “it is important for the country to have network infrastructures and a broader ecosystem of technology that allows remote working.” Greece has already started attracting foreigners who are able to work online for their employers in other countries while living here.

7. First innovation hub under way. The initial steps in the creation of Greece’s first innovation hub were taken at the former facilities of the Piraeus Dye Works (Chromatopoiia Pireos). The aim of the project is to transform the site into a multipurpose complex that hosts research centers and startups, allowing for fruitful synergies between science and innovative entrepreneurship.

1. Rapid growth of board games market faces pandemic hurdles. The board games market registered 20% growth in 2020, riding the desire for a “digital detox” and a break from tumultuous times. Despite the positive trend, new problems have emerged during the pandemic. A booming demand for puzzles has board game companies stepping up investments to increase production capacity. Current trends show an uptick in interest among adults, with a global board game segment worth around \$15 billion (€12.4 billion) growing more than the toy market as a whole.

2. Boeing 737 MAX returns to US skies for first time in almost two years. The American Airlines flight was the first commercial flight in the US since the Max was grounded in March 2019. Two plane crashes in Ethiopia and Indonesia meant authorities barred the plane from taking to the skies. A Boeing 737 Max bound for New York took off from Miami International Airport on Tuesday with some 100 passengers on board for the aircraft’s first US commercial flight since faulty sensor readings led to two crashes in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Nevertheless, the airline gave passengers the chance to switch flights if they felt uncomfortable traveling with the Max.



3. German car industry doubles down on Africa. The German Association of the Automotive Industry (VDA) has joined hands with AAAM, the Association of African Automotive Manufacturers, hoping to improve those stats. Africa has been touted as the final frontier for the global auto industry, which is eager to get the continent’s fast-growing middle class to buy its vehicles amid rapid urbanization as demand falters in traditional European and US markets. There are currently 45 vehicles for every thousand inhabitants in Africa against a global average of 203, with the continent’s more than a billion people, or 17% of the world’s population, accounting for just a little over 1% of cars sold worldwide.

4. Virtual Davos aims to heal pandemic wounds. The Davos summit is taking place this year against the

backdrop of a crisis that has shredded livelihoods and widened inequalities. The annual event says it hopes to help drive a robust, green recovery. It’s that time of the year again when a sleepy Alpine town in Switzerland comes alive as the global elite descends on its snow-clad slopes to debate global challenges. This year, however, Davos has been left undisturbed with its eponymous annual jamboree moving online amid a still raging COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Cruise lines appoint new chief. Pierfrancesco Vago, executive chairman of MSC Cruises, has been appointed to a two-year term as global chairman of the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) to become the first European in this position. Vago will assume the global chairmanship effective immediately, succeeding Adam Goldstein, who recently completed his second term at the helm of CLIA.

6. EU pins hope on Norway raw materials discovery. Norway has discovered a huge deposit of critical raw materials. This could make the EU less dependent on China and Russia and boost the bloc’s energy transition. DW’s Mikhail Bushuev has this exclusive report. What sounded rather unspectacular at first has turned into one of Europe’s most fascinating discoveries. Norway does not belong to the EU. Its huge deposit has certainly piqued the interest of the 27-member bloc and China. Wurmser’s company claims to have discovered the biggest deposit of its kind globally, which could produce 70 billion to 80 billion tons of ore-containing material.

7. SpaceX transports record number of ‘spacecraft’ in single launch. SpaceX has celebrated what it described as a record-breaking cargo launch on Sunday. The aerospace company’s Falcon 9 rocket successfully transported 143 satellites and other spacecraft, lifting off from its launch complex in Cape Canaveral in Florida. The cargo was deployed into orbit roughly two hours after launch. “The most spacecraft ever deployed on a single mission,” said Andy Tran, a SpaceX production supervisor. Tran added that the rocket carried 133 commercial and government spacecraft as well as 10 SpaceX satellites. Shortly after taking off, the Falcon 9’s main booster successfully landed following a controlled fall. The booster landed on an unmanned spaceport drone ship dubbed Of Course I Still Love You in the Atlantic Ocean. It was the booster’s fifth successful launch and return.