a taste for travel? Finnair to sell plane food in shops

Finnish carrier Finnair will start selling business class airplane food in supermarkets in a move to keep its catering staff employed and to offer a taste of the airline experience to those missing flying in the COVID-19 times.

The state-controlled airline said that in a pilot scheme the handmade meals, called "Taste of Finnair," would initially be offered at one store as of Thursday.

The ready-made dishes include options like reindeer meatballs, Arctic char and Japanese-style teriyaki beef and are suited for Nordic and Asian palates and would cost about 10 euros ($12) to 13 euros, Finnair Kitchen said. Finnair is one of the main airlines flying between Europe and Asia, and several Asian chefs and cooks work at its catering unit.

The move comes as airlines around the world try to employ their idled resources during the pandemic and tap into people's desire to fly when most planes are grounded. Some are offering simulated flights, fake trips where the aircraft takes off and lands in the same location, or even just time to sit in the plane.

Kimmo Sivonen, store manager at the K-Citymarket Tammisto which will sell the Finnair meals, told the newspaper Ilta-Sanomat that the dishes have been modified to have less salt and spices than those offered in the air, where people's sense of taste is dulled by high altitude.

Takeaway food sales have boomed in Finland since spring after an estimated 60% of local work force started working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP)

In this file photo, passenger planes of the Finnish national airline company Finnair stand on the tarmac at Helsinki international airport, Helsinki. The airline said that in a pilot scheme the handmade meals, called 'Taste of Finnair', would initially be offered at one store as of Oct 15, 2020. (AP)

US stocks slip as virus spreads in Europe

S&P 500 on track for its first weekly loss in three weeks

NEW YORK, Oct 15, (AP): Stocks are falling on Wall Street in early trading Thursday, extending the market's pullback this week as optimism that Congress will deliver another round of stimulus for the economy wanes and new data show another weekly surge in the number of Americans seeking unemployment aid.

The S&P 500 was down 0.9%. The benchmark index is now on track for its first weekly loss in three weeks. The selling was widespread, with technology, health care and companies that rely on consumer spending driving the decline. The pullback follows a broad sell-off in markets overseas as rising infections in Europe led governments in France and Britain to impose new measures to contain the coronavirus. Treasurys yields were mixed, while the price for US crude oil headed lower.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 226 points, or 0.8%, to 28,288 as of 10:15 am Eastern time. The Nasdaq composite dropped 1.3%. The Russell 2000 index of small-cap stocks was off 0.9%.

Stocks have been mostly climbing this month, but have pulled back this week as talks between Democrats and Republicans in Washington over another economic stimulus package drag on, dimming investors' hopes for a deal that can deliver more aid for the US economy in the near term.

The government's latest weekly tally of unemployment aid claims underscores how the economy continues to be hobbled by the pandemic and recession that erupted seven months ago. The Labor Department said Thursday that the number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits rose last week to 898,000, a historically high number that exceeds analysts forecasts.

In this file photo, pedestrians pass the New York Stock Exchange, in New York. Stocks have been mostly climbing this month, but have pulled back this week as talks between Democrats and Republicans in Washington over another economic stimulus package drag on. (AP)

The report follows recent data that have signaled a slowdown in hiring. The economy is still roughly 10.7 million jobs short of recovering all the 22 million jobs that were lost when the pandemic struck in early spring.

The 10-year Treasury yield was down to 0.71% from 0.73% late Wednesday.

Investors continued to weigh the latest batch of earnings reports from major US companies. Several reports so far have been better than expected, but the health crisis continues to cloud the outlook.

United Airlines slumped 4.4% Thursday after reporting that its revenue plummeted over the summer. Morgan Stanley was up 0.6% after the investment bank said its third-quarter profit jumped 25% thanks to a surge in trading revenue and higher fees. Walgreen Boots Alliance rose 2.5% after the drugstore chain's latest quarterly results topped Wall Street's forecasts.

Across the S&P 500, analysts are expecting companies to report another drop in profits for the summer from year-ago levels. But they're forecasting the decline to moderate from the nearly 32% plunge from the spring as the economy has shown signs of improvement.

A resurgence in coronavirus infections in Europe has also given investors cause to turn cautious. Fears are rising that Europe is running out of chances to control the new outbreak, as infections hit record daily highs in Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy and Poland. France slapped a 9 pm curfew on many of its biggest cities and Londoners face new travel restrictions as governments take increasingly tough actions.

The limits on public life are not as strict as the full lockdowns imposed during the spring, but will stunt or even reverse the economy's recovery from recession, experts say.

European markets fell broadly after France imposed a curfew on many of its biggest cities and Londoners faced new travel restrictions. Germany's DAX lost 2.9%. The CAC 40 in France slid 2.5%. The FTSE 100 in London fell 2.2%.

Britain 'urged' to conclude EU deal

LONDON, Oct 15, (AP): A leading international economic watchdog urged the British government to conclude a free trade agreement with the European Union in the coming days and weeks to support the recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

In its latest survey of the the British economy, the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said Wednesday that a trade deal that ensures a close relationship will minimize the costs of Brexit.

The OECD, which monitors and advises its 37 member countries, said the British economy will likely end this year 10.1% smaller than the start of the year after the impact of the pandemic, which led to a wide-ranging lockdown in the spring. After a summer lull, the resurgence of the virus has led to further restrictions on businesses by the government, both nationally and locally.

It warned that the economy won't have recovered all the ground lost in the spring by the end of 2021 as it is factoring growth of 7.6% for that year. That forecast is based on the assumption that the UK and the EU will have reached a free trade arrangement.

Alvaro Pereira, on OECD director, said in a news conference that any form of Brexit "obviously compounds" the economic effects of the pandemic but that a trade deal would "help minimize the impact."

Though a trade deal would ensure there are no tariffs and quotas on trade in goods between the two sides, there would be technical costs, partly associated with customs checks as well as non-tariff barriers on trade in services.

A summit of EU leaders on Thursday had been set as a deadline for the trade by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. But the talks are now widely expected to continue for a few more weeks.

UnitedHealth tops Q3 profit forecast, hikes 2020 outlook

NEW YORK, Oct 15, (AP): UnitedHealth Group beat third-quarter earnings expectations and finally hiked its 2020 forecast after holding off while trying to gauge COVID-19's impact.

But the nation's largest health insurance provider also is thinking conservatively about its 2021 growth prospects as the coronavirus continues to spread widely.

Health insurers have approached 2020 forecasts cautiously, even though many reaped huge profits in the first half as the pandemic kept people home and out of the health care system.

Both analysts and insurers have said they expected medical costs to rise in the second half of the year, as communities that had shut down opened back up and people felt more comfortable seeking elective surgeries.

UnitedHealth said Wednesday that both care patterns and prescription volumes approached normal levels in its recently completed quarter. The company now expects 2020 adjusted net earnings to range between $16.50 to $16.75 per share.

That compares to a forecast it first laid out late last year for earnings of between $16.25 and $16.55 per share. UnitedHealth usually raises its forecast a couple of times during the year. The new range mostly exceeds the average forecast on Wall Street for earnings of $16.57 per share, according to FactSet.

But the range's middle point is only about 1% higher than the same spot in the previous forecast, and it implies fourth-quarter earnings that could fall short of expectations, SVB Leerink analyst Stephen V. Tanal said in a research note.

Based in Minnetonka, Minnesota, UnitedHealth Group Inc runs a health insurance business that covers about 48 million people, mostly in the United States.

Its Optum segment also runs one of the nation's largest pharmacy benefit management operations as well as a growing network of clinics and urgent care and surgery centers.

Overall, the company's net income dropped 10% to $3.17 billion in the quarter, due partially to costs tied to the pandemic.

The company booked medical costs from COVID-19 care and testing. It also gave some customers premium breaks and temporarily waived fees like co-payments for doctor visits.

UnitedHealth's adjusted earnings totaled $3.51 per share in the third quarter. Revenue rose about 8% to $65.11 billion.

Analysts expected, on average, adjusted earnings of $3.10 per share in the quarter on $63.79 billion in revenue, according to financial data provider FactSet.

CEO David Wichmann told analysts Wednesday that the company still has confidence in its long-term goal of 13% to 16% earnings growth.

But he also noted that the pandemic's impact remains a big potential challenge. They still don't know how it will affect the economy or a return to more normal levels of health care use. He told analysts to expect UnitedHealth to begin with a conservative starting point for next year.

The company will talk more about its growth prospects at its Dec. 1 investor conference.

Company shares slipped less than 2% to $325.72 Wednesday morning, while the Dow Jones Industrial average was flat.

This file photo shows the UnitedHealthcare headquarters in Minneapolis. UnitedHealth Group beat forecasts for its earnings in the third quarter, and the US's largest health insurance provider finally hiked its 2020 outlook after holding off while trying to sort out COVID-19's impact. (AP)

Gulf Insurance skids 25 fils, NAPESCO soars

Kuwait bourse ends in red after volatile session

By John Mathews
Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Oct 15: Kuwait stocks pulled lower on Thursday to end the week on a dour note. The All Shares Index slipped 12.41 points in volatile session to 5,735.23 pts weighed by some of the heavy-weights.

The Premier Market dipped 21 points to 6,377.45 points while Main Market rose 5.6 pts to 4,457.71 points, The BK 50 Main index was little changed at 4,519.57 points. The volume turnover meanwhile receded after hitting month's high in the previous session. Over 311 million shares changed hands – down 32 percent from the day before.

The sectors closed mixed. Oil and Gas outshone the rest with 4.18 percent gain whereas Insurance sector shed 1 percent, the biggest loser of the day. Volume wise, Financial Services topped with 130.54 million shares and Banking sector continued to dominate with KD 22.3 million.

In the individual shares, sector bellwether National Bank of Kuwait dropped 6 fils to 890 fils after moving 9.6 million shares and is up 20 fils from start of thee month while Mabanee Co added 3 fils on back of 1.4 million shares. Gulf Insurance dived 25 fils to 575 fils and Kuwait Investment Co shed 10 fils. NAPESCO soared 90 fils to KD 1.170.

Zain inched 1 fils higher to 616 fils after moving over 3 million shares and Ooredoo was up 5 fils at 627 fils. STC rose 5 fils to 855 fils and Agility stood pat at 695 fils with a volume of 5.4 million shares. Humansoft Holding jumped 59 fils to KD 2.881 and Boursa gave up 12 fils to close at KD 1.108.

The market opened weak and fell sharply in early trade. The main index pulled up in a volatile session to peak at 5751 points almost half way into the session . It dipped amid a bout of selling and plumbed the day's lowest level of 5725 pts before clawing back some of the losses in the final minutes to end in a shallow trough.

Top gainer of the day, REAM soared 17.14 pct to 108 fils and National Ranges shot 10.14 pct up to stand next. Kuwait Investment Co skidded 6.6 percent, the steepest decliner of the day and Aayan topped the volume with 24.9 million shares.

Reflecting the day's drop , the losers outnumbered the winners. 56 stocks advanced whereas 64 closed lower. Of the 133 counters active on Thursday, 13 closed flat.12,849 deals worth KD 46.9 million were transacted during the session.

National Industries Group eased 1 fil to 201 fils after trading over 6 million shares and Mezzan Holding stood pat at 619 fils. Boubyan Petrochemical Co was down 3 fils at 577 fils and Al Qurain Petrochemical Co tripped 1 fil. Integrated Holding gained 5 fils and Aznoula ended 1 fil in red.

Jazeera Airways took in 1 fils and ALAFCO fell 2 fils to 165 fils after trading over 2 million shares. OSOS and EK Holding clipped 1 fil each and Bareeq climbed 5.2 fils to 83.2 fils. Oula Fuel ticked 1 fil down to 119 fils and Soor dialed up 2 fils. Inovest ticked 0.8 fil higher to 78.3 fils.

Kuwait Cement Co eased 1 fil to 229 fils and Kuwait Portland Cement scaled 14 fils. Metal and Recycling Co was unchanged at 38.8 fils while ACICO and Educational Holding Co clipped 1 fil each to close at 104 fils and 307 fils respectively. Gulf Petroleum Investment inched 0.2 fils down after moving 8.8 million shares.

Kuwait Foundry Co climbed 4 fils to 259 fils and Gulf Cable erased 3 fils. Burgan Well Drilling Co dialed up 2 fils while Combined Group Contracting Co dialed down 1 fil. PAPCO added 0.9 fil and IFA Hotels and Resorts gave up 0.9 fil to close at 23.9 fils.

Kuwait and Gulf Links Transport Co erased 0.5 fil and KGL Logistics eased 0.4 fil to 30.1 fils. QIC paused at 72 fils whereas Automated Systems Co trimmed 0.4 fil. KCPC climbed 11 fils to 327 fils and KPPC took in 1 fil.

In the banking sector, Kuwait Finance House tripped 1 fil to 708 fils after moving 4.7 million shares and Gulf Bank followed suit with a volume of 7.6 million shares. Kuwait Internatuional Bank paused at 219 fils and Boubyan Bank ended 1 fil in red.

The market was mixed during the week. The main index closed lower in three of the five sessions bit is up 11 points in last five sessions. It has scaled 290 points from start of the month and is down 550 points year-to-date.

Ryanair blames European govts for winter cuts

LONDON, Oct 15, (AP): Ryanair became the latest European airline to announce big reductions in its winter schedule after coronavirus-related travel restrictions were reimposed across the continent.

Casting the blame on European governments for "mishandling" air travel during the pandemic, the Ireland-based budget airline said Thursday that it will cut around a third of its flight routes this winter.

It said demand for flights has been "heavily curtailed" to and from the UK, Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Portugal and much of central Europe.

The airline said it will maintain up to 65% of its route network between November and March and will close its bases in the Irish cities of Cork and Shannon, and Toulouse in France through the period. The routes that continue operating will see fewer flights.

Overall, the airline said its winter capacity will be 40% of what it was a year earlier, compared with the 60% it had previously pencilled in. It also said it expects to fill 70% of seats on its planes.

As a result, the airline said it will implement more unpaid leave and job-sharing during the winter, a move that Chief Executive Michael O'Leary described as "a better short-term outcome than mass job losses."

However, he said there will "regrettably be more redundancies in those small number of cabin crew bases where we have still not secured agreement on working time and pay cuts, which is the only alternative."

In this file photo, passengers disembark a Ryanair plane, at the Marseille Provence airport, in Marignane, southern France. Ryanair has cast the blame on European governments for 'mishandling' air travel during the pandemic. (AP)

With the resurgence of the coronavirus in Europe over the past few weeks, many governments have sought to limit travel once again after easing restrictions during the summer.

O'Leary said the cutbacks have been "forced upon us by government mismanagement" of European air travel.

"We continue to actively manage our cost base to be prepared for the inevitable rebound and recovery of short-haul air travel in Europe once an effective COVID-19 vaccine is developed," O'Leary said.

Over the past few months, airlines including Air France, British Airways and easyJet have cut back their already reduced winter schedules as a result of the resurgence of the virus and the travel restrictions.

Ryanair's share price in London fell 4.3% after the announcement. Others airlines saw their stocks fall too, including British Airways' parent company, International Airlines Group, which was down 2.8%.

"Spikes in coronavirus cases across Europe are resulting in fresh regional lockdowns, adding to worries that the international travel sector will remain depressed for a lot longer than previously feared," said Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at stockbrokers Hargreaves Lansdown.