

# travelBulletin

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

**SOCIAL RECRUITMENT:  
CLEVER OR NEVER?**

**THE PHILIPPINES  
BOUNCES BACK**

**DISCOVERING DALLAS**

**MEDITERRANEAN  
MAGIC**

**BRUNEIAN  
BRILLIANCE**



# WOMEN IN TRAVEL



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## From the managing editor

### Bruce Piper

JUST about every consumer in Australia is smiling at the moment each time they fill up their car. Unlike just about everything else we buy, fuel prices have actually fallen at an unprecedented rate in recent months, with outlets in some Australian capital cities now selling petrol at less than \$1 per litre. The price of Brent Crude Oil has fallen from US\$110 per barrel last June, to below US\$50 in late January – a whopping 55% drop over a seven month period.

This has to be excellent news for the travel industry, with one analyst commenting that the amount saved on fuel by an average family will have the same impact as a 0.25% drop in interest rates. Potential travellers will have more money in their pockets, and hopefully the resulting lift in consumer confidence will in some way redress the negative impact that the government's ongoing budget impasse is having on spending patterns across the economy.

Of course, the airlines are another massive beneficiary of the drop in fuel prices – although they are quick to downplay the impact on their bottom lines and the possibility of any change to fuel surcharges. First imposed a decade ago (and at the time as a non-commissionable element of airfares) fuel levies have relentlessly increased since then, and in the case of Qantas and Emirates, now amount to almost \$1100 on a return business class flight to Europe. Virgin Australia also charges \$680 on Los Angeles flights, while for other carriers fuel surcharges continue to comprise a significant proportion of their fares.

Although commission is now payable on fuel levies in Australia, the surcharges are a significant source of revenue for carriers because in most cases, frequent flyer redemption tickets require an additional cash payment to cover the surcharge component.

In November, Qantas told *Travel Daily* that while the recent trend of falling fuel prices was a positive sign, "we would need to see a much more sustained and significant benefit before we would be in a position to revisit fuel surcharges". Financial markets certainly seem to think there's a significant upside for airlines from the price decline, with the QF share price surging from below \$1 to around \$2.30 – and the ACCC is also looking at the matter at the behest of Senator Nick Xenophon.

Airlines hedge their fuel purchases in advance, so the full benefit of the price decline may not be apparent yet. But whatever the justification, keeping surcharges at current levels is definitely not a good look.

## This month's contributors

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## Ian McMahon's perspective

### CONGRATULATIONS CRUISECO

CRUISECO, which will hold its 2015 conference in Melbourne next month, is possibly unique in the world. Certainly there is nothing else quite like it in Australia and, according to senior cruise executives who regularly fly from across the globe to participate in its conferences, the group is also without peer elsewhere.

But when people talk about the things that make CruiseCO different I am not sure they always home in on what makes the consortium really special.

Mostly, they point to the way CruiseCO has brought together a consortium of elite specialists to market cruise product that cuts across agents' allegiances to the major franchise chains and retail groups.

This is, of course, the case and there is no doubt the major chains are kicking themselves (or should be) that they didn't come up with the concept before CruiseCO's founders - Phil Hoffmann, Steve Lloyd & Kevin Dale - got the jump on them. Now the chains are having to play catch-up.

It was well over 10 years ago that CruiseCO's founders had the vision to see what is now blindingly obvious to all – that the cruise market has massive potential and that bricks and mortar agents are particularly well positioned to develop it.

But there is nothing new about agent consortia exploiting a growing market. In

the 1970s, when air travel exploded as jumbo jets came into service and IATA fare regulation crumbled, agent consortia quickly emerged to take advantage of the situation. We called them consolidators.

They were classic middle men. They played a major role in the commoditisation of air fares and the downward price spiral that destroyed margins on fares.

CruiseCO is sometimes misleadingly described as a cruise consolidator, but it has taken on a role well beyond that of a middle man using volume to gain a market advantage through price cutting.

The real achievement of CruiseCO, in my view, is that it adds value to the product it markets. It does this partly by "manufacturing" its own special products through charters, exclusive representation deals and creative packaging.

It is also proactive in ensuring agents have the specialist knowledge necessary to educate their clients in the range of very different products available, and to steer those clients to what will suit their needs - the very opposite of commoditisation.

Exclusive product, specialist knowledge and client service – the ideal formula for bricks and mortar agents to protect their margins and ward off the looming threat of cut-price online merchants.

Well done Steve, Phil and Kevin.

### Flight Centre warns of leisure travel slowdown

FLIGHT Centre confirmed general suspicions of a weak outbound market just before Christmas, when the company issued a profit downgrade due to "challenging" trading conditions in Australia.

Consumer confidence is the key issue, with Flight Centre's bottom line also impacted by increased wage, occupancy and and sales & marketing costs.

Flight Centre MD Graham Turner cited the ongoing uncertainty around last year's Federal Budget, saying "unfortunately we are yet to see tangible signs of a full recovery, and the overall leisure travel market in Australia continues to be flat year-on-year".

Despite the downgrade, it should be noted that Flight Centre is still forecasting a full year underlying profit result of between \$360 million and \$390 million - meaning the company is continuing to make around \$1 million every week.

### ATAS insurance benefit

THE AFTA Travel Accreditation Scheme this month received a significant boost when Gow-Gates Insurance Brokers confirmed it would offer a new "affordable" option for travel agents to cover wholesaler insolvency - but only in the case of wholesalers who are themselves part of ATAS.

Supplier insolvency has been a thorny issue for ATAS, with dire warnings about the impact of supplier collapses in the wake of the Travel Compensation Fund demise.

However insurers are now coming to the party, with the Gow-Gates offering following the launch of wholesaler coverage options by Allianz, which underwrites Aussietravelcover

## BUSINESS MONITOR

### OUTBOUND MARKET

Top 10 destinations, September 2014

Destination	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Aug 14/ Sep 14	Trend Sep 13/ Sep 14
	000	000	000	%	%
Indonesia	95.2	95.3	110.0	+1.0	+17.7
USA	77.9	76.4	104.5	-0.4	-2.9
New Zealand	97.3	96.2	96.6	-0.3	-2.0
UK	47.1	44.5	59.1	+0.3	+2.4
Thailand	44.3	44.7	50.2	-2.4	-16.1
China	32.4	32.7	45.3	-0.6	-3.6
Singapore	30.8	30.5	34.5	+0.3	+1.6
Fiji	26.7	25.7	31.8	-1.4	-4.5
Italy	15.7	15.1	31.6	+0.0	+8.3
Malaysia	24.1	25.6	26.2	-1.4	+1.1
All outbound	763.6	759.0	900.2	+0.1	+3.2

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

### INBOUND MARKET

Top 10 sources, September 2014

Source	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Aug 14/ Sep 14	Trend Sep 13/ Sep 14
	000	000	000	%	%
New Zealand	101.2	100.8	113.2	-0.2	+1.8
China	77.0	77.7	61.8	+2.4	+24.7
UK	54.8	54.5	44.2	+0.1	+2.8
USA	44.4	45.8	35.0	+0.5	+5.4
Singapore	30.9	31.7	29.0	-0.7	+4.5
Malaysia	29.0	31.0	28.3	-0.2	+17.4
Japan	27.6	26.1	24.6	-0.7	+2.0
South Korea	17.2	17.8	15.6	+1.3	+2.0
Germany	15.5	15.0	14.8	-0.6	+8.6
India	17.0	17.1	14.2	+0.6	+15.1
All inbound	578.7	580.4	517.5	+0.2	+7.1

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

### MAIN DOMESTIC ROUTES

Top 10 domestic city pairs at October 2014

City pair	Passengers YE Oct 13	Passengers YE Oct 14	% change 13/14
	(000)	(000)	
Melbourne-Sydney	8 238.2	8 305.8	+0.8
Brisbane-Sydney	4 420.4	4 477.3	+1.3
Brisbane-Melbourne	3 183.8	3 308.2	+3.9
Gold Coast-Sydney	2 571.5	2 594.7	+0.9
Adelaide-Melbourne	2 176.8	2 267.6	+4.2
Melbourne-Perth	2 228.3	2 159.9	-3.1
Adelaide - Sydney	1 754.6	1 804.8	2.9
Perth-Sydney	1 798.0	1 798.6	0.0
Gold Coast-Melbourne	1 683.3	1 747.1	+3.8
Hobart-Melbourne	1 394.8	1 388.6	-0.4

Source: BITRE



and CHI insurance (**travelBulletin** Nov/Dec).

Other insurers such as Suresave and Cover-More (which signed an exclusive preferred partnership with Helloworld in early December) are yet to match the wholesaler coverage, with some agents telling **travelBulletin** this creates a clear differentiation in the market.

### Etihad doubles Melbourne

LONG haul international capacity out of Australia continues to grow, with Etihad announcing the addition of a second daily Melbourne-Abu Dhabi flight from August 2015.

The move will significantly improve connections to various European ports as well as adding more than 4,500 weekly seats to the route, with CEO James Hogan saying the additional 777-300ER flight supports "strong two-way demand".

Emirates is joining its UAE rival in boosting Australian capacity, with one of its triple daily services from Perth to Dubai to be operated by an A380 - the first time a scheduled superjumbo service will be flown into the Western Australian capital.

### Qantas shuffles exec ranks

THE announcement of the shock departure of Simon Hickey and Lyell Strambi from Qantas last month left the industry reeling, with the pair both seen as highly respected managers carrying much of the load of the carrier's ongoing transformation program.

The newly constituted executive team will see Andrew David taking Strambi's role as CEO of Qantas Domestic, while former CFO Gareth Evans assumes Hickey's mantle heading up the troubled international division.

Rumours have swirled about the changes,



## QANTAS OPENS NEW LAX FIRST CLASS LOUNGE

QANTAS has reinforced its dedication to the North American market with the red carpet opening of the new First Class lounge at Los Angeles International Airport.

Last month QF ceo Alan Joyce officially launched the lounge which is modelled along the same lines as the airline's flagship First lounge in Sydney. Celebrity guests were treated to a performance by Australia's own Human Nature, and enjoyed signature cocktails, a full barista service and Neil Perry-designed culinary delights.

As with the Qantas First lounges in Sydney and Melbourne, the carrier has

partnered with Sofitel to offer a superior service experience, while the new lounge also offers seven shower suites featuring Aurora Spa ASPAR products.

"This new lounge is symbolic of our continued investment in our customers and commitment to the US market," Joyce said.

Qantas First Hosts will also smooth the way for passengers with dedicated check-in and boarding plus fast track immigration.

Alan Joyce is pictured above at the launch with Qantas head for Americas, Vanessa Hudson, chef Neil Perry and the boys from Human Nature.

which came just over 18 months after the pair were appointed in May 2012. Hickey and Strambi will be gone by the end of February, with the new structure also seeing QantasLink CEO John Gissing taking an expanded role as Group Executive Associated Airlines and Services.

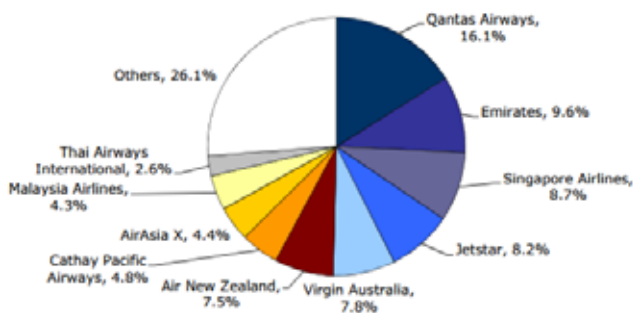
Meanwhile Qantas CEO Alan Joyce and chairman Leigh Clifford have been basking in the company's resurgent share price, which has risen from 90c to more than \$2.30 as analysts factor in the huge drop in fuel prices

*Continues over page*

## BUSINESS MONITOR

### INTERNATIONAL AIR MARKET SHARE

International passengers by major airline - year ended October 2014



Source: BITRE

### DOMESTIC AIR MARKET - October 2014

	Oct 13	Oct 14	Growth (%)	Yr to Oct 13	Yr to Oct 14	Growth (%)
Total pax movements	5.24m	5.28m	+0.8	57.49m	57.63m	+0.3
Revenue pax kms (RPK)	6.21bn	6.25bn	-0.6	67.66bn	67.98bn	+0.5
Avail seat kms (ASK)	7.85b	7.82bn	-0.4	88.22bn	89.26bn	+1.2
Load factor (%)	79.1	79.9	+0.8*	76.7	76.2	-0.5*
Aircraft trips (000)	56.7	56.6	-0.2	645.0	641.4	-0.5

Source: BITRE \* Percentage points

### DOMESTIC ON TIME PERFORMANCE - Nov 2014

	Departures on Time		Arrivals on Time		Cancellations	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Jetstar	5,550	83.3	5,539	83.1	48	0.7
Qantas	7,919	86.7	7,787	85.3	79	0.9
QantasLink	8,628	87.1	8,420	85.0	252	2.5
Tigerair	1,564	82.9	1,500	79.5	15	0.8
Virgin Australia	9,183	89.0	8,888	86.1	123	1.2
All Airlines	39,972	87.3	39,020	85.2	548	1.2

Source: BITRE

Continues from previous page

as well as the perceived success of the Qantas Transformation Program.

## Vale Paul Glaser, Australian travel industry legend

THE industry is still mourning the sudden death of Paul Glaser in early December, with the 76-year-old suffering a heart attack at his home in Mosman, Sydney.

Glaser's long career in travel started at Ansett before he moved to Pan Am, with other airline roles including positions with QantasLink, Continental Airlines and more. He was also one of the co-founders of the Sydney North Skol Club.

In later years, he worked with UTAG and Travelscene American Express, and continued to maintain a keen interest in the industry following his retirement.

## Garuda drops Brisbane again

A NETWORK restructure by Garuda Indonesia has seen the airline's on-again off-again services between Brisbane and Bali once again suspended, just 18 months after they were restarted following a five year hiatus.

It's part of a 'Quick Wins' program aiming to boost efficiency and "secure the carrier's financial condition" in the face of currency pressures and "other factors".

The final flight will take place at the end of January, with affected passengers offered refunds or rerouting via Garuda's nonstop flights from Sydney or Melbourne.

Other routes to be dropped include Denpasar-Tokyo Haneda and Jakarta-Nagoya which will cease operating from 28 March this year.

## Stats needed, stat!

THE Australian travel and tourism sector is flying blind at the moment, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics having not been able to produce its regular monthly reports on arrivals and departures since September.

Normally published early each month, the vital figures, which provide key market insights for both inbound and outbound markets, are compiled from passenger departure and arrival cards supplied by the Department of Immigration and Border Processing.

In October last year a new provider of processing services was engaged, along with the implementation of systems to ensure a high level of accuracy.

"Errors in these systems have been identified which have resulted in the required levels of accuracy not being met," the department said, with a formal report into the cause of the problems having been requested "including process improvements to ensure they do not occur again".

According to the latest ABS release, the January 2015 figures are still expected to be compiled by early March, but there's no confirmation of what will become of the statistics for the final quarter of last year.

## Briggs sells Coral Princess

CORAL Princess Cruises is the latest Australian cruise operator to move into foreign ownership, with Tony and Vicky Briggs selling 90% of the business which they founded 30 years ago to Singapore-based private equity group Kallang Capital Holdings.

It's business as usual for the Cairns-based business which will maintain all existing trade relationships, while the new investment will also see upgrades to existing vessels.

# Travel Daily HEADLINES

- 02 Dec** New fare structure for SQ
- 03 Dec** CTM sets Europe foothold
- 03 Dec** Scenic's *Mekong Spirit*
- 04 Dec** SQ Biz class fare blunder
- 08 Dec** AirAsia X drops Adelaide
- 09 Dec** ADS adds demerit points
- 10 Dec** SQ, VA boost codeshares
- 10 Dec** Helloworld & Cover-more
- 11 Dec** Red Gum deal "not fair"
- 12 Dec** Wotif Expedia platform
- 12 Dec** Air NZ to Argentina
- 12 Dec** QBT wins WOAG contract
- 15 Dec** Strambi, Hickey out of QF
- 15 Dec** Big ad spenders revealed
- 16 Dec** Coral Princess sold
- 18 Dec** QF LAX First Class lounge
- 18 Dec** FC profit growth slowdown
- 18 Dec** Scenic to Portugal
- 22 Dec** New CCL, HAL ships
- 22 Dec** Savenio set for agent push
- 23 Dec** Nick Zaferis joins itravel
- 29 Dec** AirAsia A320 goes down
- 29 Dec** AirAsia MEL-DPS canned
- 31 Dec** ANA plots Sydney return
- 31 Dec** New Qld routes for Rex
- 05 Jan** Skytrans ceases operation
- 08 Jan** VA, DL seek ten year renewal
- 13 Jan** GA drops Brisbane again
- 15 Jan** Star Ratings B2B dashboard
- 16 Jan** Gow-Gates wholesaler insurance

## BUSINESS MONITOR

### INTERNET AGENCY MARKET SHARES

Week ending 27/12/2014 ranked by visits

Rank	Company	Market share	Rank	Rank
		W/E 27/12/14	W/E 01/11/14	W/E 29/09/14
1	1 Webjet	13.27	1	2
2	Wotif.com	12.95	2	1
3	Expedia	9.70	3	3
4	Flight Centre	8.03	4	4
5	Skyscanner	6.12	5	5
6	Lastminute.com.au	5.80	6	6
7	au.edreams.com	3.30	7	8
8	STA Travel	1.33	8	9
9	FareCompare	1.32	*	10
10	BIOjet	1.31	9	*

\* Not in top 10  
Source: Experian Hitwise Australia - www.hitwise.com.au

### INTERNATIONAL AIR

Top 10 city pairs (at August 2014)

City pair	Passengers	Passengers	% of	% change
	YE Aug 13	YE Aug 14	total	13/14
Auckland-Sydney	1,412,236	1,461,582	4.5	+3.5
Singapore-Sydney	1,356,129	1,369,726	4.2	+1.0
Singapore-Melbourne	1,092,708	1,128,073	3.5	+3.2
Singapore-Perth	1,003,065	1,054,233	3.2	+5.1
Auckland-Melbourne	976,204	1,013,580	3.1	+3.8
Hong Kong-Sydney	922,461	939,259	2.9	+1.8
Kuala Lumpur-Melbourne	691,316	908,317	2.8	+31.4
Los Angeles-Sydney	895,308	895,570	2.7	0.0
Auckland-Brisbane	860,002	891,602	2.7	+3.7
Denpasar-Perth	849,801	841,360	2.6	-0.1
Top 10 city pairs	10,059,230	10,503,302	32.2	+4.4
Other city pairs	20,676,504	22,136,313	67.8	+7.1
ALL CITY PAIRS	30,735,734	32,639,615	100.0	+6.2

Source: BITRE

### AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS

International passenger through Australia's major international airports\* - October 2014

Airport	Passengers	Passengers	% of	% change
	YE Oct 13	YE Oct 14	total	14/13
Sydney	12,827,444	13,271,056	40.4	+3.5
Melbourne	7,222,044	7,905,692	24.0	+9.5
Brisbane	4,625,613	4,906,108	14.9	+6.1
Perth	3,852,507	4,133,725	12.6	+7.3
Adelaide	770,309	967,973	2.9	+25.7
Gold Coast	870,394	883,560	2.7	+1.5
Cairns	508,116	464,031	1.4	-8.7
Darwin	324,550	330,717	1.0	+1.9
Norfolk Island	11,313	11,370	0.0	+0.5
Sunshine Coast	8,405	10,248	0.0	+21.9
All Airports*	31,020,695	32,884,480	100.0	+6.0

\* Total passenger numbers also include Townsville (scheduled services ceased October 2011) and Sunshine Coast (scheduled services from July 2013-Sept 2012, June 2013-Oct 2013 and June 2014). Source: BITRE



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# ENSEMBLE AUS: HAS THE BOAT SET SAIL?

MANY travel retailers spotted an opportunity to expand when Helloworld stumbled onto the stage back in 2013.

As the brand made its first tentative steps, competitors looked to capitalise on rising disenchantment as Harvey World Travel, Jetset, Travelworld and Travelscene American Express were consigned to the scrap heap.

The result was a raft of recruitment drives as groups courted wavering agencies, all pondering their future. Since then, many have made their call, electing to embrace the new era or opting to cut and run.

Which is why I find it curious that North America-based Ensemble believes the time is now right to launch in Australia. If a local operation for Ensemble has been in the pipeline for three years as Australia and New Zealand vice president Trish Shepherd suggests was the case, why did it not launch earlier when a greater number of JTG agents were at their most malleable.

Has Ensemble not missed the boat?

Explaining the reasons behind the launch, Shepherd cited the industry's rapid period of change, with many agents considering their options in light of the Helloworld consolidation.

That was certainly the case, but is less so now. Eighteen months have passed since Helloworld's launch and many retailers have either stuck with Helloworld or been seduced with promises of riches by rival groups.

## ‘Is there room for another travel group in Australia?’

Travellers Choice, itravel and Escape Travel all picked up disaffected former JTG agents amid the upheaval. Of course there are some who continue to ponder which direction to take, but the pool of potential members for Ensemble has diminished.

In addition, is there really room, or a need, for another travel agency group in Australia?

According to Shepherd, Ensemble is in talks with an “extensive list” of agents, and more have expressed an interest. You wouldn't expect her to say anything else.

But aside from the ‘big two’ of Flight Centre and Helloworld, there are several well established bricks and mortar groups catering for a broad cross section of agents, while the home working networks are growing forces.

And I can't imagine wholesalers will be doing cartwheels over the thought of servicing another group of agents.

To achieve the buying power which Ensemble requires will need critical mass in terms of agency numbers and turnover. Shepherd suggests that will happen “quickly”.

She may be right, but I can't help thinking it won't be quite so straightforward.

It could also be tough going for the industry as a whole in 2015 judging from Flight Centre's profit downgrade shortly before Christmas.

The retailer said travel spending slowed in the first five months of the financial year in what was a worrying sign for the rest of the sector. Trading conditions are “challenging”, Flight Centre revealed.

While that may be put down to economic conditions, I can't help thinking that travel and tourism will also be impacted by world events. Travel has been remarkably resilient in recent years but events in Paris – and in Sydney with the hostage tragedy – seem to have created a wave of paranoia I have not seen before. And the spate of air disasters over the past few months will not have helped public confidence.

Travel could be in for bumpy year.



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Be part of a team of 4 runners joining Gianni Di Stefano, Sales Manager for LH Group in Australia. Prize includes return flights to Vienna, 5 nights accommodation and your relay marathon entry ticket. Runners will depart from Sydney on April 7th giving you time to explore this beautiful city before the race on April 12th.

Simply email your entry to [sydsalesupport.gp@dlh.de](mailto:sydsalesupport.gp@dlh.de) telling us in fifty words or less why you would like to run in the Vienna marathon, what running experience you have and which distance best suits you: 16.1km, 5.7km, 9.1km or 11.295km.

All entrants must sign up to the Vienna Experts Club <http://www.viennaexpertsclub.at/int/en>

Entries close 11 February and winners will be notified by 13 February, so start preparing now!

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## PHONE A friend

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## AFTA VIEW

Jayson Westbury, chief executive AFTA

### MIXED BAG FOR 2015, BUT FUTURE PROMISING

AS we all prepare for the year ahead and launch into what I am sure will be a big year for the travel industry, a moment to reflect on the terrorism events in Sydney and Paris is necessary.

Both events were dreadful and an unwelcome reminder that we still live in a time in which events such as these do still happen. For tourists across the globe this plays into their minds when making decisions to travel and I think this will have some impact on the 2015 travel year. Coupled with the lagging Aussie dollar sitting around US\$0.80 which is struggling to improve consumer confidence, we may have a year of mixed desires when it comes to booking travel.

I don't believe that these factors will cause a significant drop in Australians' intention to travel overseas, but it may influence their decisions on destinations, length of stay, and make them take a moment to think more about what they want to do.

‘We may have a year of mixed desires when it comes to booking travel’

A fascinating time of war will be remembered this year. Gallipoli 2015 is going to be a very significant time for Australia, New Zealand and Turkey, along with many other countries. But for Australia there has been a lot of planning and a lot of discussion. A great deal of arrangements are already in place but there is bound to be a building of interest as the year draws closer to the 100th anniversary of the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli.

Australians travelling to Gallipoli will, for the most part, already have their plans set. But as with all events of this magnitude there is always interest and I have no doubt that the travel industry will see an increased interest in this event over the months ahead. Adding to this, media coverage in the lead up to the event will bring with it interest in the general area and more broadly, Europe.

This year we will also have two state elections; Queensland at the end of January and NSW in late March. Elections always have an impact on travel decisions. Fortunately the QLD election will be done and dusted early in the year so the impact should be less painful, but with the NSW election set for March it will be interesting to see if this influences consumers' decisions to travel.

All sides of state politics are now committed to the new regulatory settings including ATAS, and AFTA continues to work with all sides of government in all states to seek further funding to educate consumers and market the benefits of using an ATAS accredited travel agent. We will continue on this quest over the coming months leading into and beyond the election cycles.

So my 2015 prediction is that the travel industry will have a strong year, with several facts influencing consumer's intentions and decisions. I hope for everyone that 2015 is a successful and prosperous year.



### SKYTRANS PULLS THE PIN ON OPERATIONS

MANY within the travel industry have had their eye on the softening Australian dollar in recent months, but few more than Skytrans managing director Simon Wild who announced the demise of the Queensland regional carrier at the beginning of the year.

Delivering the shock announcement in a five-page statement on 2 January, Wild explained that a series of events had contributed to the airline's downfall, namely higher airport and landing fees, the declining resources sector and an "inevitable price war" with the carrier's key competitors on Cape York routes. But the plummeting Australian dollar was the "straw that broke the camel's back", he said.

"The Australian dollar has continued its nose dive in recent months, pushing up our operating costs. Despite weathering the many storms of the aviation business... market forces have collided in the last three months and we've been hit by the perfect storm," Wild's statement read.

The announcement, which was delivered one day after the carrier's 25th anniversary, comes just months after Skytrans wiped more 120 staff from the books in November and December after losing a large government contract to a rival airline. Wild attempted to pull the company from the brink of defeat by issuing a "smaller" business plan late last year, but soon concluded that market forces were beyond the carrier's control. Instead, he opted to pull out of the market to "maximise cash and asset reserves".

But Wild stressed that the wind down would be a seamless process, as the company ceased trading before it flat lined all together.

Outlined in the 2 January statement, Wild confirmed that all staff had been made redundant, with over \$4 million paid out in staff entitlements. Wild also set aside an additional \$2 million to cover affected customers before he stepped down as MD and handed the liquidation over to administrators, Bentley Chartered Accountants.

The demise of Skytrans follows the collapse of two other regional airlines over the past 14 months, Brindabella Airlines and Vincent Aviation. But its competitors QantasLink, Virgin Australia and Regional Airlines are showing no signs of slowing and have been quick to fill in any gaps. Rex quickly expressed interest in former Skytrans employees, and West Wing Aviation picked up two ex-staffers within weeks. Rex also wasted no time seeking emergency clearance from CASA to cover some routes which were left unserved after Skytrans' departure – a move that was initially knocked back and is still in the pipeline.

While some remote communities would have felt Skytrans' absence with no access on some routes following its collapse, its competitors are unphased and have acted quickly to fill the carrier's place.



# AIRASIA IN HOT SEAT FOR MEL-DPS BLUNDER

AIRASIA had a turbulent year in 2014, making headlines for all the wrong reasons in recent months. The AirAsia Flight 8501 that crashed into the Java Sea featured most prominently in global headlines, with investigations likely to continue well into the year. But the carrier's Indonesian arm also felt the wrath of the media after pulling the pin on its planned Melbourne to Bali service after hitting regulatory hurdles - but not before selling thousands of tickets to customers.

The carrier received approval from Indonesia in September before announcing Melbourne as its inaugural route back in October. The following day, the carrier advertised tickets from as low as \$99 while regulatory approvals were still underway – a process that is currently allowed under Australian law.

However, the blunder came to a head on Christmas Day when passengers were notified via text message that their flights – due to commence on December 27 – had been cancelled after the carrier failed to gain all the required regulatory approvals. Customers were rerouted to Bali via Kuala Lumpur on a later flight, more than doubling the journey



to 13 hours and throwing travellers' holiday plans into disarray. The carrier offered refunds to travellers scheduled to fly until the end of January, while it's believed thousands more tickets were sold for following months.

Consumer affairs group Choice came out with guns blazing, claiming travellers were left "high and dry" by the mix up and were entitled to lodge a claim for unexpected expenses.

"We believe AirAsia has misled consumers by advertising and selling a flight on a route they hadn't yet been approved to fly," the company reported on their

website. "Consumers are entitled to seek compensation for out-of-pocket expenses, such as unexpected accommodation costs or the cost of booking another airliner."

Choice also issued a reminder that consumers have rights to protect them against "dodgy travel services in Australia", and encouraged displaced travellers to contact the department of fair trading or take the issue up with the airline. AirAsia has been quiet on the issue, but is forging ahead with plans to launch the MEL-DPS service when all regulatory processes have been finalised.



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# TRAVEL INDOCHINA DITCHES BRAND NAME

TRAVEL Indochina has dropped its 21-year name and logo and rebranded as Insider Journeys to “better reflect” its expanding destination portfolio which now extends to Japan, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

Explaining the shift to *travelBulletin*, managing director and co-founder Paul Hole said the company had come a long way over the past two decades, with the addition of new destinations meaning that the company’s brand name was no longer in line with its product offering.

The company’s brochures were also in need of a refresh to more effectively communicate the company’s offering to the trade, he added.

“The name Travel Indochina no longer described us geographically and didn’t describe what we do... We needed to lift ourselves to a place where we could communicate better with our audience,” he said.

While initially reluctant to wave goodbye to the Travel Indochina brand which he created back in the early 90s, Hole said market research which indicated the brand’s relevance was lagging was an eye opener that paved the way forward for the new look.



“There was so much recognition for the brand, but when we were confronted with the research we couldn’t hang on to the emotive side,” he said.

Launching into Bhutan and Mongolia three years ago, Hole said bringing new product to market has been a strong focus for the company, adding that new

destinations are “absolutely” on the company’s radar. However, he was tight lipped on further details, insisting that the company’s focus was currently invested in setting firm foundations for the new brand.

“New destinations are absolutely part of our thinking but our focus is now on bedding down the core business. However, I can now say that we are no longer limited geographically,” he claimed.

As to be expected from any rebrand, the company has rolled out new brochures and marketing material, including three FIT brochures which are now available.

New to the 141-page Insider Journeys brochure are categories which list itineraries by type, including unique, local, special stays and taste. Keeping in line with the Travel Indochina of old, all tours are small group journeys tailored to the over 40s market, with a maximum of 16 passengers. Hole also stressed that all tours with one or more bookings are guaranteed to depart.

“We have always done these things, but we haven’t been very good at communicating them,” he said. “The time is right to make this major change.”



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# CRUISEFUSION POISED FOR GROWTH

RETAIL cruise brand Cruise1st is looking to forge stronger bonds with travel agents by expanding the reach of its trade arm, CruiseFusion.

CruiseFusion officially hit the market last year, specialising in all-inclusive cruise packages encompassing air, cruise, land and guided tours. With up to 100 pre-packaged tours available online, agents can search and book inventory in real time with wait times of around three

minutes. Agents

can also tailor packages for their clients, and access is free of charge once a customer log in has been confirmed.

The result of two years of research and development, CruiseFusion secured its first preferred arrangement with TravelManagers last year, but Cruise1st managing director Carl Frier told *travelBulletin* that the "time was right" to roll it out on a larger scale.

"We've bedded down the operation and now feel confident that we have the right information and technology systems in place," he said.

Frier expressed particular interest in distribution agreements with "independent agencies who have limited resources and want off-the-shelf product for their clients".

"Our key focus is providing agents with a wide range of competitively priced product that is ready to go. All they have to do is market the product via their distribution channels," Frier said. "We are now ready to expand our penetration into the general market."

Frier added that CruiseFusion provided an "alternative solution" to internal cruise platforms, adding that the wholesale brand is completely independent, with no preferred agreements in place.

"While some franchise groups have their own internal cruise platforms, we think the rest of the market will enjoy the amount of content we provide in addition to our reservations and support infrastructure," Frier said. Commission rates lead in from 10%.

Visit [www.cruiseFusion.com.au](http://www.cruiseFusion.com.au) for details.



## Travelport to bed down air

TRAVELPORT has revealed plans to build on its existing air platform to grow its customer base in the year ahead.

Travelport general manager Pacific Kaylene Shuttlewood told *travelBulletin* that the GDS's key focus for 2015 was to "further develop" its air platform and build on the latest version of SmartPoint which was released in November last year.

With more than 90 airlines currently on board, Shuttlewood said adding inventory was on the cards, as was building awareness of the new features within the SmartPoint platform. Among the changes, the latest version now includes an interactive airline fleet map and booking capabilities across ancillary services so that agents can up-sell within the same workflow.

"A key part of our plan in 2015 is to expand our air platform and further develop our existing technology. We also want to build on our customer base, but we recognise that to do that we need the right technology and inventory," she said.

Shuttlewood also flagged plans to expand Travelport's reach beyond traditional markets such as transfers, but said discussions were ongoing and there was "nothing definite" to announce at this stage.

## CATO VIEW

Peter Baily, general manager, CATO



## SELF REGULATION UNITES AUS TRAVEL INDUSTRY

THE Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) held its most recent meeting and dinner in Sydney last year which was well supported by members and included an appearance from guest speaker Jayson Westbury from AFTA.

In his report to members, CATO Chairman Rod Eather expressed excitement at the prospects that 2015 will bring and reiterated that members' support and participation was the mainstay behind CATO. These two things, he said, ensured that CATO would continue to offer and maintain the integrity and commitment expected by agents and the travelling public.

The past year will go down in history as the year the government closed down the outdated licensing system for travel agents and allowed the travel industry to start its own form of self regulation.

This chance to self regulate is a great opportunity for our industry to unite together and support the initiative shown by AFTA in forming ATAS the new travel accreditation scheme.

For the future, CATO is looking at an ambitious plan to increase membership involvement and ensure that it remains relevant and accessible to travel agents and the public in this new self regulated era.

The benefits of membership are many and various, and CATO remains committed to providing a voice for tour operators through the trade and general press, and lobbying where necessary. We also aim to improve the professionalism of the tour operator sector with our code of conduct, best practice, information sharing, and by ensuring the CATO logo remains a sign of integrity. Members also benefit from networking opportunities at meetings and trade events, in addition to marketing benefits through the CATO website and Facebook page.

To enhance CATO's role further, plans also include the production of a bi-monthly industry newsletter to keep members and agents informed. Articles will cover a variety of subjects including member and committee profiles, general news, interest stories, and tourism office updates.

A survey of members has been undertaken and the results, yet to be released, will assist in guiding CATO into the future. The industry has changed dramatically since CATO's inception, especially with the introduction of digital and online media. While many members continue to be "traditional wholesalers", there are others with new, fresh ideas that will assist all in their significance within the industry. Following on from the survey, CATO will look at commissioning papers on a variety of topics including insurance, crisis management planning, and IT and reservations systems.

The next CATO meeting followed will be held in Melbourne on Wednesday 4 March. Please contact [gina@afta.com.au](mailto:gina@afta.com.au) for details.

“The chance to self regulate is a great opportunity to unite together”



# ETIHAD LURES TRAVELLERS WITH LUXURY

ETIHAD Airways has set new standards in aviation luxury and design, with the launch of super premium suites, new uniforms, and new livery which will be rolled out across its entire fleet.

Going well beyond lie flat seats first introduced over a decade ago, Etihad's enhanced offering includes a three room suite with a bedroom, private bathroom, sitting room and butler. Accommodating up to two travellers, 'The Residence by Etihad' suite carries a hefty price tag, with return fares from Sydney to London coming in at around A\$86,000. But it also positions Etihad as the first commercial airline to roll out such an opulent offering for customers.

Unveiling the luxury suite in Abu Dhabi in December, Etihad also rolled out the welcome mat for its first Airbus A380 *Superjumbo* and Boeing 787-900 *Dreamliner*, both carrying the new 'Facets of Abu Dhabi' livery which will be introduced to the carrier's entire fleet of 190 aircraft. New crew uniforms were also revealed to complement the new look.

Etihad CEO James Hogan said the series of announcements were part of a broader strategy to introduce a "new era of luxury, comfort and service" to commercial aviation and lure more passengers onboard across the entire class spectrum.

"We are reshaping the landscape of modern air travel in our own way," he said.



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# COLLETTE LAUNCHES AUS OPERATION

By Guy Dundas

COMPETITION for the Australian outbound tourist dollar is set to heat up with the debut of US escorted tour operator Collette.

Twelve months after sending a research mission to Australia to engage with agents and scope out the local tourism market, American travel firm Collette has signalled its intention of being a bigger player in the escorted touring scene.

The firm has established an office in Sydney, led by Australian business manager Alison Mead who is the former sales manager for Intrepid in Australia (four years) and New Zealand (10 years).

Mead is joined by Collette business development manager for Australia, James Cartmell, who relocated to Sydney from the US for the role. Two district sales managers based in Melbourne and Brisbane and two reservation staff complement the operation, while the addition of a product manager for the South Pacific region is also being evaluated.

Collette offers more than 160 four-star tours, river cruises, small group itineraries (maximum of 24 passengers), rail journeys, gardening trips and 'Spot Light' city stays.

Headquartered in Rhode Island, the 96-year old travel company offers product in North America, Europe, the UK, Ireland, South Africa and East Africa, Egypt, South East Asia, China, Japan, South America and Central America.

Closer to home, Collette also offers a selection of tours in Australia, NZ and Fiji.

The company is no stranger to the Australian market, having previously set up an office in Melbourne in 1999. However that venture was short lived as a result of a business restructure after the September 11 attacks in 2001.

"Collette has always wanted to return to Australia but it hasn't been high on the agenda



as the company focused its efforts in developing the UK market and supporting growth there over the past 10 years," Mead explained.

She told *travelBulletin* that the number of direct consumer bookings from Australia had escalated over the past 18 months, with minimal support.

"We feel that if we are getting these bookings, there is a real opportunity to ramp up our passenger numbers," she said. "There was initially a lot of scepticism about Collette's vision for an Australian branch. But suddenly agents have a brochure in Australian dollars, a call centre and a localised website. It has made people sit up and take us more seriously."

Its Australian office kicked into gear in early January, and the response from the trade to date has been "meeting expectations".

The localised brochure features 92 itineraries, valid for bookings starting 1 May 2015. However, additional product – including

Australian and Antarctica journeys – will also be accepted before this date.

Mead acknowledged that the Australia touring market was already "crowded" and instilling trust in the product from travel agents would be one of the "biggest challenges".

**‘You won’t get anywhere if you don’t support the industry’**

"Yes it may be a crowded market, but we are bringing decades of experience in North America to the Australian market. We have the product, the standards and an extensive portfolio," she commented.

Targeting primarily the over 50s market, Mead suggested Collette's main competition would come from the likes of Trafalgar, Scenic Tours and APT. However its "true competitor" would be Insight Vacations, Mead said.

Collette has a handful of standalone agency distribution deals already in place and is now working through its local office to cement more substantial preferred agreements with larger retail networks.

Mead also commented that the trade had a crucial role to play in Collette's long term success. "You won't get anywhere if you don't support the industry," she said.

An agent 'locator' features on the [www.gocollette.com](http://www.gocollette.com) website, and consumers calling Collette directly will be asked if they have a preferred travel agent at the start of an enquiry. "All our collateral and calls to action will be to 'speak to your travel agent' or contact us. We are dedicated to the industry," Mead said.

■ Call 1300 792 196 for enquiries.

## HoL SWISS SPECIAL HITS SHELVES

HOLIDAYS on Locations' latest Switzerland Holidays brochure has hit agency shelves, with new rail touring products, ski packages and city programs featured in the 2015/16 line up.

With an additional 12 pages than the previous program, the 80-page brochure marks the wholesaler's largest Switzerland program, with two new rail touring products including an eight-day Swiss Cities itinerary. More apartment stays in Basil, Geneva and Zurich have been added to the books in addition to more city stays, a coach touring program, and ski programs to provide a more

"comprehensive" Switzerland program.

HoL business development manager John de Steiger said the additions were part of a broader strategy to position the wholesaler as the leading Swiss specialist.

"While Switzerland is not a major destination for Australians, it is easy to access other areas and we fill in the gaps for Australians travelling to Europe," he said.

The HoL Switzerland brochure complements a suite of other programs covering Italy, Scotland, Britain & Ireland and Scandinavia. It also precedes the launch of an expanded Canadian Holidays brochure in the coming months.





# SIVB CEO VOWS TO “ARREST DECLINE”

WITH a career spanning Tourism Fiji CEO and Blue Lagoon Cruises general manager, Jo Tuamoto knows the ins and outs of the industry, but 12 months into his tenure as Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB) CEO, he has a renewed focus on growth.

Cruising is front of mind for Tuamoto as SIVB looks to tap into the burgeoning cruise sector which has captured the attention of travellers right across the globe.

Speaking with *travelBulletin* on a whirlwind visit to Australia, Tuamoto brushed aside suggestions that Vanuatu and Fiji were vying for the same business, insisting that the Solomon Islands is a “different destination” than its bigger sisters in the South Pacific. But he also acknowledged the need to progress to boost the region’s profile, singling out cruising as the “most logical” option.

Work is now underway to modernise Honiara wharf to ease access for large vessels, with construction slated to finish in 2016. Tuamoto is also in talks with big players Carnival Australia, Royal Caribbean and Lindblad to lock in big ship cruising business for 2017 and beyond. But it’s small ship expedition cruising that he has in mind.



Jo Tuamoto

“Big ship cruising is quite restrictive for us because visitors only stay for eight hours and don’t really get to experience the destination. Time limitations also mean they can’t spend much money, so we are also looking to expand our reach with expedition cruising which is not restricted by large ports,” he said.

While large ship cruising brings in numbers of up to 2000 a hit, Tuamoto said

expedition cruising allows travellers to access the smaller villages and support remote communities in terms of spending. It also provides a better overview of the Solomons to woo repeat visitors, he added.

But numbers only form a part of the equation, with the Solomons’ 25,000 annual visitors a long shot compared to Fiji’s 700,000 and Vanuatu’s 100,000. Tuamoto told *travelBulletin* that the Solomon Islands “doesn’t do big numbers”, instead focusing on its strengths as a cultural destination.

“The Solomons is unlike Vanuatu and Fiji; we are an untouched destination and we sit on our own in terms of adventure, diving and war memorial tours. We can’t compete with the numbers of Fiji and Vanuatu, but we can continue to grow,” he said.

For now, he said, the focus is on rebuilding the Solomons after a challenging 2014 which was plagued by floods, political upheaval and air service issues with the Fiji Government. “We had a hard year in 2014 but our main focus for 2015 is to arrest the decline, achieve small growth in 2016 and then aim for double digit growth in 2017,” he concluded.



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Men take the podium when it comes to high paying jobs but the travel industry has its share of prominent women who are challenging the gender divide. **Louise Wallace** sat down with some of the most accomplished women in the biz to lift the lid on the glass ceiling and shine the spotlight on some of the most inspirational figures in the industry.



# WOMEN IN TRAVEL



## ELIZABETH GAINES

CEO helloworld

**T**O call Elizabeth Gaines a high achiever is an understatement. With a CV that reads like a business report, she is no stranger to executive roles. But her current position as CEO of one of Australia's largest travel agency groups is arguably the meatiest role of her career that has also earned her the title as one of the most influential women in the Australian travel industry.

Taking some time out of her hectic schedule to speak with *travelBulletin*, it's clear that Gaines is the right person for the job as she rattles off an impressive acumen spanning decades in commerce and senior management positions. But her journey to the top has come with risk, perseverance, and a lot of bloody hard work.

After scratching plans to pursue a career as a professional French horn player many moons ago, Gaines completed a commerce degree in Perth before becoming a chartered accountant with Ernst and Young. But like many recent graduates, itchy feet soon took her to Europe with a loaded backpack and plans for an adventure.

A temp job with a merchant bank in London saw her travels turn into a five year jaunt before the pull back to Australia got the best of her and she opted to complete a Masters in Applied Finance at Macquarie University.

The decision worked in her favour and she soon joined a large conglomerate, Heytesbury, as general manager, working her way up to CEO before making the move back to the UK to take on the role as CFO for an IP media rights company in London. But the cards all lined up for Gaines when CVC bought Stella in 2008 and she was head hunted for the role as CFO of The Stella Group.

Joining just months before the GFC hit hard, Gaines remembers the early days as an intense period of restructuring to bed down the business including 24 hour stints in legal offices. But the experience also put her in good stead for the subsequent merger that has been Helloworld's key focus for the past 18 months.

"It's been a big task and a bold move but brand consolidation was absolutely fundamental... Our marketing spend was so fragmented and we weren't getting the same share of voice," she says.

The move ruffled the feathers of some



agencies who felt the firm would be best placed to run with an established brand such as HWT, but Gaines isn't one to dwell on the past: "The initial response was understandably mixed and everyone had something to say about it. But sometimes you have to wait to bring these things to life and convince [agents] that you have their best interests in mind."

It's taken more than a year for helloworld to woo some agents onboard, but the firm is edging closer to its goal of 1000 stores Australia-wide – spread across fully branded stores, affiliates and associates. Certainly the merger has its skeptics within the industry, but Gaines is unphased, seeing it as a challenge that will resolve itself in time. More pressing, she says, is the need to tap into global trends to stay on the front foot in the retail space.

"Change is hard when you're going through it, but it's not us versus them [agents], we're in it together. The challenge for us is stressing that these are long term decisions and we're not cutting corners," she says.

While pragmatism and balance sheets are at the core of Gaines' job, her softer side is clearly apparent as she explains the intricacies of her role which covers all aspects of financial management, mergers and acquisitions and integration.

"It's easy in my job to just look at figures and balance sheets, but what we do has a genuine effect on people and staff – it's their livelihoods and their businesses, and I'm very mindful of that," she says.

No stranger to 12 hour days, Gaines admits that her job consumes most of her time. Throw into the mix supplementary roles on the AFTA board and as Fortescue Metals

‘It's easy in my job to look at just figures and balance sheets, but what we do has a genuine effect on people and staff...’

non-executive director, and it's not surprising why. But behind the tailored suit and the business talk, she's a relaxed woman from the Kimberley who likes to reconnect with nature with her husband, Kevin.

With an impressive array of high profile roles under her belt, Gaines challenges the paradigm of a glass ceiling, but she acknowledges that gender diversity is a "real issue" that is often hindered by inflexibility in allowing talented women to progress.

As a step mother of three, Gaines is no stranger to the pressures of balancing a family and career, but she refuses to see gender as a barrier. "I do understand the gender diversity issue, but you have to manage your own career whether you're a man or a woman. Ultimately, it's your own responsibility," she says.

Gaines' advice to ambitious travel business owners, managers or consultants is to set goals, improve your skills, take risks and work damn hard. But above all, she says people should stay true to themselves, pursue opportunities and have a strong definition of their own success.

### GETTING TO KNOW

**Years of travel industry experience** – 6.5 years

**Favourite holiday destination** – Istanbul for a city experience and the Amalfi Coast for a relaxing holiday.

**Worst holiday** – I plan carefully with the help of an experienced travel agent, so I've never had one of these.

**Career highlight** – Being appointed CEO of Helloworld and having the opportunity to lead the business and work with talented colleagues (so far).

**Most inspirational figure** – My parents for instilling in me a lifetime love of learning, the discipline of hard work, a sense of curiosity about the world and the belief that anything is achievable – there are no barriers.

**Favourite way to relax** – A long walk along the beach with my husband and our two dogs.



## PENNY SPENCER

Spencer Travel managing director

**M**EASURING success isn't clear cut, but building a \$40 million business that has cleaned up several consecutive NTIA Awards has got to be up there. However, when you consider that Penny Spencer's foray into the industry began as a 19-year-old junior PA, the journey is as intriguing as the achievement.

Speaking to *travelBulletin* at the trendy Spencer Travel head office in Surry Hills, Spencer is well voiced, sharply dressed, and clearly the central cog in the seemingly well-oiled business. But the gloss and glamour hasn't come easy.

First stepping her foot in the door as a volunteer, Spencer folded brochures for six months before landing a role as a receptionist and working her way up the ranks as a tour guide for Newmans Tours. But it was a role with World Travel that Spencer first discovered her knack for corporate consulting and developed a hunger to pitch for big business.

After putting in the hard yards for several years, Spencer gave in to the pull to go on her own and in 1998 sold off her Telstra shares to get Spencer Travel off the ground.

"The industry was very male dominated and I wanted to take a different approach. As a female, I also wanted to make a real difference and have an impact on the industry," she says.

Spencer recalls the early days as a "humbling" experience which involved enough cold calls to make any seasoned sales rep wince. With just one other consultant and a part time book-keeper, the tiny office had just



'I used to say I'd be happy when I get to \$10m turnover, then I got there and figured I would try and double it, and then the same happened again when I hit \$20m'

one computer, one email account and a fax machine. There was no back office, no tech support and Spencer filled her days typing itineraries and handing out cards to anyone who would listen.

But it didn't take long for new clients to come on board and within a year the business was pushing well above \$1 million in corporate business. Just over 16 years later, the firm now has 60 staff on its books across five offices and most corporate consultants write off around \$3 million each year.

As Spencer reminisces about the past in her sunny top floor office, she says her competitive streak and driven personality are the catalysts for her success.

"I used to say I'll be happy when I get to \$10m turnover, then I got there and figured I would try and double it, and then the same thing happened again when I hit \$20m.

"I've got the passion to follow the next challenge and the hunger to grow the business," she says.

Describing herself as "obsessively goals driven", Spencer says she's always been

hungry for an adventure such as when she drove across the Nullarbor Plain in a Honda Civic at age 17 in the hope of satisfying her curiosity for an adventure. But when it comes to business, she says strategy is king and taking a "helicopter view" of the company has allowed her to synergise the business.

But she says letting go of control was also instrumental to the firm's long term success. A defining moment for Spencer was when she was still opening the mail when her time was valued at around \$300 per hour.

"I remember thinking this is ridiculous, what am I doing? I'm a control freak and I'm the first to admit it but if you're a CEO you can't do everything... you've got to run the show," she recalls.

Motherhood was another stepping stone in Spencer's career that softened her approach to business, albeit slightly.

Scaling back to four days per week to help look after her two children, now aged 12 and 7, Spencer admits that "mother guilt" is inevitable for women in high profile positions.

But the trade off, she says, is being an inspirational role model for her children who push their chests out with pride every time she is on radio or TV. Failing that, planning ahead helps to iron out the creases at home, and having a hands-on husband always helps, Spencer quips.

On the role of women in travel, Spencer says there is still a "gaping gender divide" in the male-dominated travel industry, but she also believes it's up to females to put their hands up if they have their sights on executive positions.

Spencer is the first to admit that it can be a challenge for women to progress at the same level as men when maternity leave is taken into account, but she stands firm in her belief that women need to step up.

"It's tough to have a big job and manage home life, but there is flexibility and opportunity for women in travel. Motherhood does introduce another element of difficulty but it is possible to have a career and home life. But you've got to want it."

Looking forward, Spencer is backing a big year for the company with new partnerships and another agency based in Sydney. She's also got her sights on another NTIA award to complement the already packed shelf of business trophies and is keen to see the \$40m figure edge slightly higher. But while her goals remain largely the same year after year, one thing remains constant:

"I am hungry for business, but I honestly believe the key to success is to respect others and treat everyone as you wish to be treated. You have to have values in business."

### GETTING TO KNOW

**Years of travel industry experience** – 33 years

**Favourite holiday destination** – Mexico

**Worst holiday** – Camping on the South Coast

**Career highlight** – Opening my own business, Spencer Travel

**Most inspirational figure** – There are so many to choose from – Hillary Clinton, Richard Branson, my mother, Minnie Mouse.

**6. Favourite way to relax** – Around a pool with a cocktail and Kindle.

## TRISH SHEPHERD

Senior Vice President and  
General Manager of Ensemble's  
Australia/NZ division

**T**RISH Shepherd is no shrinking violet. With the ability to fill any room with a hearty laugh and a broad smile, she's quite the opposite. But as the driving force behind Ensemble's newly formed Australia and New Zealand division, she knows a thing or two about the travel industry, and she's got big plans for the future.

First stepping into the industry with American Express at the age of 17, Shepherd progressed through the ranks from the foreign exchange department to travel administration, co-ordinating manager for the franchise business and finally regional director of franchise and alliances during her impressive 27 year stint with the company.

Unsurprisingly for a tenure spanning almost three decades, it wasn't all smooth sailing and in 1992 AMEX made her role redundant when she felt her time wasn't up.

Shepherd remembers being devastated at the time, but instead earned a degree in commerce at the University of Wollongong. She also became a mother to identical twin boys, but life quickly returned to the fast lane when a position opened up and she stepped into the role as manager of AMEX's franchise network when the boys were just 10 weeks old.

Delighted to be back in the company, she poured all of her energy into building the franchise business with strategic alliances and crafty marketing. Shepherd also headed up a nationwide expansion with 65 new offices in one year, signed new partners and rolled out a program in Japan.

But after AMEX formed an alliance with Travelscene and the company took a new direction, she decided to take a step back from corporate life in 2007 to be with her family and spend more time with her son who was seriously ill.

"I was ready to go at that time... There was a lot of change and far too many owners. But it was also a great time for me; I climbed Macchu Picchu, spent a lot of time with my family and started the first discussions about Ensemble," she recalls.

After her son had made a full recovery, Shepherd was ready for a new venture and planted the seed for the launch of Ensemble



'I used to get a message from kids saying 'mum we're going away this weekend and your laptop and phone are not invited'

in Australia with her colleagues in the US. But the GFC quickly doused the chances of success and instead Shepherd picked up consulting work and began mentoring young entrepreneurs.

After several years out of the industry, Shepherd bumped shoulders with old colleagues at an event for one of her mentorees and immediately the buzz for the travel industry returned.

Quickly planting her feet back in the industry, Shepherd reignited plans to launch Ensemble in Australia when the timing finally fell into place. Teaming up with an old colleague, she flew to Toronto to meet with Ensemble's North American board in 2014 and quickly received unanimous support to expand in Australia/NZ. Things moved quickly from there and no time was wasted in setting up a small office in Sydney with the view of launching in full in the first quarter of 2015.

"AMEX was so structured that it was hard to make headway at times, but I'm now in a company that only focuses on risk and goals which is extremely exciting," she says.

As Shepherd explains, the company will operate much like Ensemble in the US but also have an in-house ticketing program. But size will not be an immediate focus,

instead a trigger for other stages of the business to be rolled out. Explaining the plan in more detail, Shepherd says quality will be a strong focus for the group which will work like a partnership cooperative and only target agents who are willing to drive the business forward.

She's clearly confident Ensemble will make waves in the Australian market, but Shepherd is not out to step on the toes of its competitors: "We're not out to undercut the big guys - we're happy to sit under them. There's room for another type of business with a rich value proposition other than Flight Centre and Helloworld."

No stranger to the realities of the travel business, Shepherd is well aware of the challenges. But with three decades of industry experience behind her, she's got the skills and ambition to make it happen. And with three kids almost out of school, she's keen to pour every ounce of her energy into her success.

"Work-life balance doesn't come naturally to me... I used to get a message from my kids saying 'mum we're going away this weekend and your laptop and phone are not invited'," she recalls.

But while her balance may swing a little to one side, it's clear that she has a rock solid relationship with her family who, she says, has kept her grounded over the years.

"You can never take yourself too seriously. Sure, you have to work hard, but you have to have compassion and be able to take a step back and laugh," she says.

Shepherd believes inspirational people are the key to her success and says working alongside a mentor is the best way to build skills and knowledge from others.

### GETTING TO KNOW

**Years of travel industry exp** – over 30 years

**Favourite holiday destination** – Italy, without a doubt. I love the food, the wine, the history and the warm and wonderful people. Closely followed by Ireland where I have relatives.

**Worst holiday** – A trip to Adelaide where all of my family were very ill. It was just awful!

**Career highlight** – The recent launch of Ensemble in Australia.

**5. Most inspirational figure** – Pam Turner is a woman who I admire greatly.

**6. Favourite way to relax** – I love spending time in the Australian wilderness with my family. A terrific meal on the fire, a glass of red wine, and a running river along our campsite is like heaven.

## DONNA MEADS-BARLOW

Managing director Donna Barlow  
Corporate Travel

**D**ONNA Meads-Barlow doesn't take challenges lightly. And throughout her 35 year career in the travel industry, she never has.

Making her way into the workforce in the late 70s with Rural Bank – which then housed an impressive travel division – she side-stepped naysayers who said her dream gig was out of reach, going straight to management to secure a career in travel.

After being told by HR that women work as bank tellers and then go on to have children, she acted swiftly: "I had set my sights on travel and had no intention of having babies any time soon, so I quit. My parents completely flipped ... that was just not what you did back in the 70s."

But the decision only sharpened her desire to get into the travel industry which came in the form of a junior role with Eastwood Travel after knocking on agency doors. After learning the ropes on the job and completing a tourism course at TAFE, Meads-Barlow quickly discovered that the best way to wrap her head around the industry was to gain first hand experience, so she packed it in to travel around Europe for 18 months.

The trip was a game changer for Meads-Barlow that opened her eyes to the travel industry – and taught her a thing or two about penny pinching. "I stayed in graveyards and



bus shelters to save all my money so I could see as much of Europe as possible. I never wanted the trip to end," she recalls.

After several months of roughing it, she landed a job with the Australian International Travel Centre in London and went on to clock up an impressive CV encompassing roles with Adventure World, Cathay's ticket office and Lane Cove Travel before being head hunted to manage Burns Philp Eastwood back in Australia.

After the agency sold out to Jetset in 1986, Meads-Barlow saw the writing on the wall and insisted that the owners buy her out to save her opening up shop next door. Within 12 months she bought a 51% stake of the business and re-branded as Donna Barlow Travel (DBT) in 1987.

The first day in the manager's seat has been etched in Meads-Barlow's memory: "One of the senior employees told me she was only willing to work from 10am-3pm, and I said 'sweetheart that's not going to work for me. Unless you're prepared to work a full day and help me take the business forward, pack your bags'. I was shaking like a leaf on the inside but I knew if I gave in I would get trampled."

While she remembers it as an eye opener, Meads-Barlow has taken staffing issues in her stride and applied the same vigour in her management style over the years.

"You've got to be strong but you've also got to be a psychologist, friend, mentor and keep staff at arm's length. That's probably one of the hardest and most valuable lessons I've learned in management," she says.

But business development could never prepare Meads-Barlow for the devastating loss of her 17-year-old daughter Danii to

‘You’ve got to be strong but you’ve also got to be a psychologist, friend, mentor and keep staff at arm’s length’

Type 1 Diabetes complications in late 2011. Danii's passing is still fresh in the minds of the Meads-Barlow family and while the grieving process will never end, she has poured every ounce of energy into prevention with the formation of the Danii Foundation.

Dedicated to introducing life saving technology to prevent diabetes emergencies, the foundation has raised over \$1 million in the past two years and is now delivering technology in trial phase to families across Australia. The foundation also heads up the annual Jellybean Cruise which aims to promote awareness among young families and diabetics, in addition to the annual Jelly Bean Ball each year in June.

"I wouldn't want anyone else to go through what I have and I've often questioned why this has happened to me. Many of my colleagues have said it's because I'm strong and can make a difference. I don't know about that, but I do feel fortunate to have so many amazing colleagues within the industry," she says.

Whether it's a coping mechanism or Meads-Barlow's tireless work ethic, she has regained momentum with a strong focus on growth across her three businesses Cruisescene, DBT and the Danii Foundation – albeit with a different outlook on life.

But her passion for the industry has not wavered and she is constantly on the lookout for new avenues to help agents improve their skills and advance their careers within the industry.

With three thriving firms under her belt, Meads-Barlow is clearly an accomplished businesswoman who's not afraid to make big decisions, but she attributes much of her success to setting boundaries early in the game - such as service standards and how proposals should be delivered.

Meads-Barlow admits that she accepts nothing but the best, but certainly, compassion underpins everything she does.

"If people remember that we are all equal and everyone is touchable, it keeps us honest and humane. At the end of the day we have to be genuinely interested in our peers and work together for better outcomes."

### GETTING TO KNOW

**Years of travel industry experience** – 35 years

**Favourite holiday destination** – I love cruising the Mediterranean because you can access so many exotic locations in a short time.

**Worst holiday** – A CTC cruise many moons ago. Just about everything went wrong from cold food to staff not speaking English, toilets overflowing and horrendous weather. But I still cruised with great company.

**Career highlight** – Winning my first large corporate account for DBT.

**Most inspirational figure** – Karen Van der Plight

**Favourite way to relax** – We just bought a sports cruiser which is a great way to relax.



## TAMMY MARSHALL

Senior Vice President P&O Cruises

**C**HOOSE a job you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life. They're wise words and ones that Tammy Marshall delivers with confidence.

Throwing in the towel as a chartered accountant many years ago, Marshall opted to pursue a career in tourism after learning how to ski during a six month stint abroad. The trip was a game changer for Marshall that saw her take up ski guiding with a large conglomerate and pick up skills across the entire supply chain.

With a natural talent for business and numbers, Marshall quickly proved her worth, becoming sales manager, Queensland state manager and eventually general manager.

After 14 years with the company, Marshall was put forward for the role of Australian managing director role of Contiki, stepping in at a time when the brand was hemorrhaging revenue and in dire need of a shake up. Marshall added destinations and leveraged heavily off social media channels to breathe new life into the brand, ultimately doubling the size of Contiki and giving it legs for the future.

When the global managing director role at AAT Kings became available, Marshall was quick to put her hand up, seizing the opportunity to run a global business with a full fleet of coaches. Stepping into the role when the currency turned against the industry, she remembers it as a challenging time that threw her in the deep end.

But the highlight, she says, was building the off-road coach touring brand Inspiring Journeys from a blank canvas.

"How many times do you get to create something new and exciting from scratch? It is still one of my proudest moments - I suppose it's my legacy from my time with AAT Kings," she tells *travelBulletin*.

Not one to rest on her laurels, Marshall was again quick to act when the position with P&O surfaced. Having never boarded a cruise ship, it wasn't so much the act of cruising that attracted her to the role; it was the potential for growth at a time where the industry is set to push one million annual travellers in Australia.

"Cruising is the sweet spot in the tourism industry and there are so many dimensions to it. The way I see it, I'm sitting in the best seat in the house as far as tourism goes," she says.



Just over two years in the role, she has led some dramatic changes. For one, she has shaken up the advertising space to take the focus away from images of deck chairs and one-dimensional maps, and turned the spotlight to people and passengers.

The Earthlings campaign, for instance, couldn't be further from the norm; it's brave, edgy and it tackles a new approach that's far removed from the days of old. Marshall admits that it has unsettled some of P&O's loyal customers, but the way she sees it, there's no other way.

"I'm a change agent; I reinvent and refresh brands which is crucial to remain relevant. What got you there won't keep you there, so it's a matter of constantly evolving and that's exactly what we're doing," she says.

With a career spanning 25 years in the tourism industry, Marshall has seen her share of sketchy balance sheets, but she considers staffing to be the biggest challenge. Having inherited some "tough" teams throughout her career, she doesn't dance around the issue. "The biggest challenge leading a business is getting the right people on the bus. Performance takes a blow if you let it continue so you need to shake it up and act quickly," she says.

While stress comes with any high profile position, Marshall says letting go of factors that are out of her control helps her to sleep at night. But with an outgoing personality and a relaxed outlook on life, it's her social life that keeps her going. "I have a busy social life and travel a lot when I can. Sure, I probably work too many hours, but I live life to its fullest. But then again, I don't have kids, so that probably helps," she quips.

‘I’m a change agent, I reinvent and refresh brands which is crucial to remain relevant. What got you there won’t keep you there...’

On the perceived glass ceiling in travel, Marshall says there is certainly an imbalance, but she's also confident the industry is at tipping point and more women are stepping up to the plate.

"We're at an exciting time in terms of gender balance, but women need to learn a few tips," she says. "Men are good at networking but women tend to spend less time building relationships which will drive their career path. They need to be braver and back themselves."

Looking back on her career, the one thing that Marshall would have told her younger self is to always keep your eye on the future and do what you love: "You need to be passionate about what you're doing and step out of the comfortable zone. Don't sit still, keep moving."

### GET TO KNOW

- 1. Years of travel industry exp** – 25 years
- 2. Favourite holiday destination** – Europe, from exploring the back roads, to learning about the culture, the history, the fashion and of course the food.
- 3. Worst holiday** – A "glamping weekend" in the bush. The tent was damp the entire time because it did not stop raining. The toilets were outdoors, there were too many mosquitos, and no mobile phone reception. I felt truly disconnected, but not in a good way.
- 4. Career highlight** – The recent reinvention of the P&O Cruises brand. We've moved the cruise line into a more contemporary travel option that's popular with a young worldly market of couples, groups and families.
- 5. Most inspirational figure** – At the moment, I would have to say Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund.
- 6. Favourite way to relax** – A beach or resort style holiday, where there is time to read a book, swim, go for long walks on the beach or a hike, and do yoga.

# SOCIAL RECRUITMENT CLEVER OR NEVER?

Social outlet, networking platform and marketing tool - social media is a jack of all trades. The divide between professional and social treads a thin line, but the rise of social media also has some experts questioning whether it can be an effective recruiting tool, as **Louise Wallace** writes.

**S**OCIAL media has gone from zero to hero in the past decade. Sites such as Friendster and MySpace born in the early 2000s were an instant hit, gaining close to three million users within a few months. But with Facebook and LinkedIn now hosting around 1.19 billion and 260 million users respectively, you get the picture.

Social networking sites have earned their stripes as an online forum to connect with peers, but they're also gaining traction in the corporate space. Hard figures are hard to come by, but the latest annual ASX200 Social Media report revealed that almost 60% of Australia's top 200 publicly listed companies use social media for recruitment purposes. Around 80% use at least one social media channel, the report found, and more than 65% expressed plans to boost their social media activity in the year ahead.

The stats aren't terribly surprising when you consider that over half of Australia's population are active on social media, but JITO managing director Helene Taylor says social recruitment is tipping 90% in the travel industry, with the vast majority of companies using Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Google+ to find and review candidates before the interview stage.

In an industry facing chronic skills shortages, Taylor believes social media has a valuable position in the corporate space. But she also says travel businesses have been reluctant to realise its full potential.

"Social recruiting is the way of the future, but some of the industry has been slow to engage in social recruiting simply because they don't know where to begin," she told *travelBulletin*. "There are so many options that it can be an overwhelming task but once you build a simple strategy and know how to engage and drive recruitment, the rewards can be measurable and substantial."

While fear of the unknown sends many travel businesses packing at the thought of

recruiting staff via social networks, Taylor says social recruiting has already proved its worth on a corporate level.

Using stats to drive her point home, she told *travelBulletin* that just six percent of Australian businesses used social media to attract talent back in 2010, compared to a whopping 94% in 2014. LinkedIn is the front runner, she says, with 94% of employers using it for recruitment versus 65% for Facebook and 55% for Twitter. And the trend is showing no signs of slowing with LinkedIn reportedly growing at a rate of two new members per second.

While usage statistics show, quite convincingly, that social recruitment is on the rise, there is something to be said about the flow on effects - and there are many.

For instance, potential candidates can gain a deeper insight to a company and its culture

before considering applying for a job. They can also track feedback online and gauge what kind of people work for the company.

But SEEK public relations manager Sarah Macartney says candidates should also be wary of the power of social media, telling *travelBulletin* that the devil is in the detail.

"People's increased propensity to share information in public forums has meant that viewing and researching people on social media who are in consideration for a role is increasingly common. In some cases this may work for a candidate, in others against," she says. "Candidates need to ensure their achievements at work are strong to quash any concerns a hirer may have based on their social media activity."

Employers and candidates would do well to heed Macartney's warning, but with a bit of caution, social recruiting can also lead to improved candidate quality, time savings and a higher success rate per hires. It can also increase employee referrals and is cheaper than advertising, but it removes personal elements that can reveal a lot about an individual, Macartney says.

Taylor explains that social recruiting is marking the end to the traditional resume, but says a number of factors come into play for employers and potential candidates. For one, employers have to understand that not everyone is using the same network and avoid making assumptions based on age: "Don't assume that candidates using social media are all younger Gen-Xers or millennials or you could miss out on a larger pool of highly qualified workers."

Taylor also warns that travel businesses should spare a thought on how they use social recruiting. "It's no longer just about pushing your role out to potential candidates, it's about engaging and creating a community so people can share, discuss and engage," she says. "Social recruiting can be very effective if it's used properly and can have a great impact on your offline activities too."

## FAST FACTS

94% of companies use social media for recruitment purposes

**45% of large firms include links to social media on their career page sections**

Around 66% of companies use Facebook and 54% use Twitter

**Social media has led to an increase of around 30% in employee referrals**

Around 65% of recruiters compensate employees for referrals

**Most hiring managers and recruiters check candidates' social profiles, so watch what you post**

Approximately 14.4 million people in the US have used social media to search for a job

**Around 30% of job seekers use social media as their primary tool for job searching**

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From the Industry, for the Industry



# NEW YEAR, NEW CAREER

IF the thought of doing the same job for another year has got you down, it could be time to change. *travelBulletin* asked some of the industry's top recruitment experts to share their tips on how to bring in the new year with a new career.

**Nicole Carrett, Flight Centre Careers  
NSW/ACT team leader**

**Can you share your recommendations for those looking to advance their career in the year ahead?**

Reflect on where you are at in your career, where you want to be and consider the things you need to do to take the next step. This may include seeking new learning opportunities to further develop your skills.

**What are the best job searching resources?**

Look directly on the career pages of individual travel companies, network with business leaders at industry events, and connect with people of influence on LinkedIn.

**Is there anything that job seekers should avoid?**

Don't sit there and wait for opportunities to come to you. If nothing changes, nothing changes so be proactive in furthering your career.

**Sarah Macartney, PR manager SEEK Limited**

**What are the key factors consultants should consider if they are thinking of changing their career path?**

If you're thinking about changing your career, you're not the only one. Our research shows that seven in 10 Australians would like to work in an industry other than their current one. Here are some tips to help you on your way to follow your career calling:

**1. Make yourself open to opportunities**

Sometimes the hardest part of change is knowing where to start. Setting up a job profile is a great way to make yourself open to opportunities as hirers can find you.

**2. Identify what you love in your work and why**

This can help you to ascertain your strengths and provide guidance on job types where those skills are most valued.

**3. Talk to people**

We don't know what we don't know, but we can learn from talking to our own personal and professional network as well as other



professionals. Speaking to a learning consultant can also be helpful in making people feel confident and aware of their opportunities.

**Judith O'Neill, Aspirations Consulting**

**Are there any considerations job seekers should take into account when changing roles?**

If there is a good career advancement opportunity available elsewhere, be very clear about why you want the new job and what skills you can bring to the role. It is also worth pursuing any opportunities within your current company if your employer is open to discussing them.

**Any recommendations for consultants want to change but aren't sure how to take action?**

There are many different roles for travel consultants; leisure consultant, corporate business consultant, corporate VIP consultant, groups and incentives consultant, wholesale reservations – the list is endless. Talk to people in the roles mentioned and find out if you want to change direction. Remember to be positive about your current job but clear that you need to take on a new challenge.

**In your opinion, what are the best resources for job seekers?**

You are your best resource, but next is recommendations from industry colleagues. Ensure you have positive and honest references that can attest to your positive attitude.

**Tracy Parkinson, Travel Counsellors  
general manager**

**What are the best resources for people looking for new roles in the industry?**

Industry publications and e-newsletters are great to see relevant roles in a timely manner. It's also good to work with a good recruitment agency, as they will get to know you and put you forward for jobs that are best suited.

**Any advice on how agents can build their reputation in the industry professionally?**

The key is to network, go to a range of industry events and always be positive. Make sure a conversation with you is a happy experience. It is a good idea to have a concise elevator pitch prepared for when you meet that important person – you never know who could lead you to that dream job.

**How significant is the role of social media in the job hunt?**

Social media plays a vital role in any job search, so keep your LinkedIn profile up to date. Most employers will now research any candidate, so ensure that you don't post content that you wouldn't want your future boss to see (read more on p.22). Social media will never replace face-to-face networking but will work alongside it to enhance the means of accessing available jobs.

**Top interview tip?**

Look clean, neat and smart, as well as dressing for the particular role. Get there early but not more than 10 minutes, and research the company you are applying for. Finally, have three strengths and three weaknesses prepared.

**Suzanne Laister, TravelManagers Australia partnership manager**

**What are your practical tips for consultants who are seeking change in their work life?**

Think carefully about where you would like to take your career. Also, always complete thorough research of the role and the company you are applying for. If work-life balance is your focus, make sure you have a definite work schedule in mind. Know how much time you want to invest in your career and look for a company that offers travel opportunities.

**Anything that consultants should avoid in their job search?**

Don't change jobs because of outside pressure from family or friends, or based on the success of others. Avoid spelling and grammatical errors in your communication, as this will make you look lazy. Finally, ask how remuneration works, including targets, incentives, commission payments or set-up costs.

**Your advice for creating a great resume?**

Be concise and don't ramble. Also, be sure to update the focus of your resume to highlight the position you are applying for and have a personal cover letter specific to the role.



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# RECRUITING 101



Staff are the life blood of any business, and outstanding employees are the face of every outstanding organisation. Staff turnover is part of the biz, but getting the right people through the door will save employers cash, time and effort. Recruitment can be hit and miss at the best of times, but there are a number of ways to broaden your search and get the right people on board. *travelBulletin* took a closer look to help your business ward off the dreaded brain drain.

## 1. Develop relationships

Time pressures are nothing new in a busy travel agency, but a surprise staff departure can leave employers and employees scratching their heads for answers. Recruitment doesn't come easy, but you can save time by developing relationships with potential candidates before you need them. Build your talent pool early so you have some good potentials in the pipeline before vacancies exist, whether it's friends, industry colleagues or competitors.

## 2. Spread the word

Chances are that your employees are connected to hundreds of potential candidates via social media networks – and that they know someone who is ideally suited to the job. Industry experience is also priceless in the travel industry, so spreading word of mouth about the position can bring home a winner. Encourage staff to reach out to their networks, let your industry colleagues know you are on the hunt, and spread the word to as many contacts as possible.

## 3. Know what you're after

Rather than taking a gamble when it comes to recruitment, develop a clear picture of who you want to fill the job. Building a comprehensive job description is a good starting point, but it's just as helpful

to have a clear idea of the behavioural characteristics and qualities you want in the office. List your top responsibilities and characteristics and use them as a guide to screen resumes. It can also be useful to look for candidates who are similar to existing employees. Take time to consider and understand the qualities you need from a candidate before beginning the interview process and assemble a team of people who fit the bill.

## 4. Get online

Rather than starting your search from scratch, introduce a 'Join our Team' section to your website which sells your vision and values to potential employees. Steer clear of bland job listings and explain what sets your agency or business apart from the competition. Your job posting should ooze with personality to reel in potential candidates. It should also be easy for candidates to submit resumes for future consideration.

## 5. Work your contacts

One way to save your blood pressure in the event of a surprise staff departure is to maintain ongoing contact with interested candidates. Keep in touch with potential candidates rather than dismissing them once you have filled a position and keep them in the loop with job openings. Former

rejections can also be worth a look in and can make great hires down the track. It may be worth keeping in touch with them to see if they're still interested.

## 6. Don't rely on the interview

The interview process is a fundamental part of recruitment, but it is not the only criteria that must be used to evaluate a candidate's performance. Most employers will have had the experience where an employee interviewed like a dream but fell short in the performance department. Background screenings and reference checks are a must for potential candidates. But again, don't rely solely on references from friends or colleagues. Take a close look at the candidate's skill set and ask the right questions in the interview; touch on flexibility, dependability, interpersonal skills and common sense.

## 7. Cultivate the culture

Arguably one of the best ways to maintain talent is to create a company culture where employees want to work. Positioning your business as a preferred employer can mark the end to staff hiccups and difficulties sourcing quality individuals. Building a strong rapport with staff will also put you in good stead. Ultimately, your staff will provide better service and your business will benefit overall.



**CENTRAL COLLEGE**, a division of Group Colleges Australia (GCA) is pleased to announce their appointment by the IATA Training & Development Institute (ITDI) in Montreal Canada, as an IATA – Authorised Training Centre in Sydney Australia. Central College, through their Sydney campus will be offering a variety of IATA self-learning and on-line course modules that will provide students global recognition as travel professionals. Over 200 million professionals work in the travel and tourism industry worldwide. The IATA Training Centre is designed to give the skills and knowledge professionals need to maximize their career opportunities in this rapidly expanding industry.

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- SMART Course
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- Travel Agent Fees: Best Practices
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# IATA TRAINING WITHIN REACH IN NSW

CENTRAL College in Sydney is now welcoming students to upskill with nationally accredited courses after receiving the green light to operate as an authorised IATA Training & Development Institute (ITDI).

The campus, located in Redfern, now offers a variety of IATA self-learning and online course modules covering international travel and tourism training, international cargo training and IATA aviation training.

An IATA leadership and management training program, and an aviation management course are also available, with all pricing and course conditions set by IATA, based in Montreal.

Group Colleges Australia human resources director Gerard Newcombe told *travelBulletin* that the college caters for students who are looking to enter the industry or complement their existing skill set with courses that are recognised across the country.

“Students now have an opportunity to achieve national industry accreditation in a flexible environment that is engaging and effective,” he said, adding that Central College is the only accredited college in NSW.

“There are many options for students; all



they have to do is choose a course, contact our admissions centre to enrol, and complete the course and final exam, which provides them with accredited training,” Newcombe said. Students can also register for standard courses ranging from certificate level to

advanced diploma. Options include a Certificate III in Travel, Diploma of Travel and Tourism and Advanced Diploma of Travel and Tourism.

■ [www.centralcollege.edu.au](http://www.centralcollege.edu.au)

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# KEEP THE CASH FLOWING

By Sean Johns

**C**ASH flow is the lifeblood of any business. If your travel agency runs out of cash and you can't pay suppliers, you will soon end up with nothing to sell. From there it's a quick, vicious dive into insolvency.

A good business needs a positive cash flow where the amount of money coming in each month at least matches the amount going out. Many agents are commenting on slower sales since the drop in consumer confidence and it's times like these when cash flow problems can emerge.

Cash flow needs to be monitored at every stage of business growth and when your business is being affected by economic conditions or other factors, you need to keep an even closer watch on your finances.

Here are 10 tips to help you monitor cash flow.

## 1. Set up a forecasting system

A cash flow forecast is a simple tool that will pinpoint obvious gaps in your finances and allow you to take steps to minimise the effects. It only takes an hour or two to set up and a few minutes to update each week. Enter every expense and update your planner regularly to form a good habit. This information will be invaluable in running your business.

## 2. Monitor cash flow

Many small business owners hire a bookkeeper, but that's not enough. Don't expect them to tell you everything you need to know. Be on top of the financial patterns of your own business and use budget forecasts to anticipate problems, review performance and find reasons for variances.

## 3. Know when to adjust your strategy

The whole point of monitoring cash flow is to catch small problems before they turn into big ones. If forward bookings are poor, ask yourself what you could be doing to stimulate sales. Are you communicating well with your existing customers? It's much easier to tackle issues in their early stages, so use forecasting and budget control as an immediate call to action.



## 4. Focus on conversion and yield

Lead conversion is often neglected when times are good. Make sure all inquiries are followed up and be wary of cutting prices and affecting yield. Simply chasing cash flow at any cost will hurt your business in either the short or long term (or both).

## 5. Get a bigger deposit

While you do have to collect a deposit to cover suppliers, it's worth collecting a little more to cover the time you have invested in preparing the customer's travel arrangements. This may not help cash flow immediately because the deposit will be held in trust until the customer's final payment, but you won't be chasing money if the customer cancels.

## 6. Bring forward customer payments

Change your payment terms and ask for final payment a few weeks earlier than suppliers suggest. Your commissions are sitting in the trust account until you receive the final payment, so this will free up your portion of cash flow quicker. However, be wary of exchange rate fluctuations and pay suppliers immediately so you don't carry the risk.

## 7. Finalise customer files

Make sure all existing customer files are accurate. Their money will contribute to your cash flow rather than sitting in the trust account.

## 8. Chase your commissions

Follow up with hotel and CCCF commissions; they should be in your account rather than theirs. If cash flow is tight, this is a job worth assigning to a consultant for a specified period each week.

## 9. Lease instead of purchase

Leasing does cost more in the long run, but buying on instalment means less up front costs and more cash in your hand.

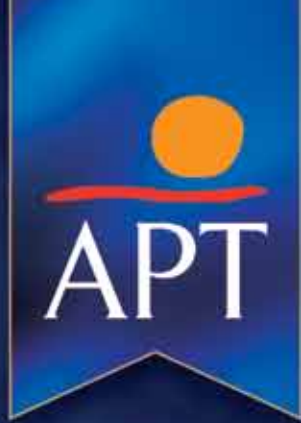
## 10. Communicate

Keep everyone up-to-date including your bank, suppliers and business advisers. If you think you'll need help managing a looming problem, get in fast. Early proactive solutions are far easier to deal with than drastic last-minute measures.

Sean Johns has worked in training, sales and management positions in retail travel and currently holds the post as Resurg Group executive director of client performance.







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# PRINCESS ADDS EMERALD TO THE CROWN

AUSTRALIA'S thriving cruise industry has prompted Princess Cruises to add yet another passenger ship to its line up for the 2016/17 season, with the 3082 pax *Emerald Princess* to make its Australian debut late next year.

Joining the cruise line's existing fleet of four vessels during the season, the *Emerald's* Australian inauguration will bump the cruise line's Australian capacity up to a record 11,800 berths across five ships.

The *Emerald* outshines most of its sisters in the Australian fleet as one of the youngest and largest to be deployed in Australia and New Zealand. With 1500 rooms on board, guests can expect all the mod cons of modern cruising including more than a dozen dining options, eight showrooms and lounges, two night clubs and four swimming pools.

But of more interest to the cruise industry is the indication of where Australia's cruise sector is heading, with the addition also positioning Australia as the home to the largest Princes Cruises fleet outside of the US.

Making the announcement last month, Princess Cruises vice president Australia & New Zealand Stuart Allison said the expansion followed strong demand from Australians who had "embraced" Princess' itineraries. It also marks a logical step for the cruise line, with *Emerald Princess* to cruise from Sydney while the cruise line's four other ships will offer programs from Melbourne, Brisbane, Fremantle and Sydney over the 2016/17 summer.

The industry is steaming towards the golden figure of one million annual Australian cruisers by 2016, but CLIA would no doubt be rubbing its hands together at the additional



capacity which will set the benchmark even higher. Currently, the US and Europe dominate the global cruise sector with 11.82 million and 1.73 million passengers respectively.

Australia comes in at third place, albeit at a much leaner 833,000 annual passengers, but it is the clear winner in terms of market growth and penetration, with passenger numbers increasing 20% in 2013 - more than double the rate of the US and Europe.

And CLIA is quietly confident the trend will continue as the relatively young Australian cruise market matures.

With the 113,000 tonne *Emerald* to call Sydney home from November 2016 until April 2017, the additional capacity has also renewed concerns regarding infrastructure

shortfalls in Sydney.

With the Overseas Passenger Terminal stretched to the limit and the White Bay terminal out of reach for larger ships, all eyes are on Garden Island as the answer to Sydney's infrastructure crisis.

Up to three ships are currently permitted to dock at Garden Island per season under an arrangement with the Royal Australian Navy; a short term deal that provides a shoestring solution to a much greater issue.

The issue will no doubt continue to take shape in the years ahead and the cruise industry will, hopefully, win over much needed support it needs to reach new heights. In the meantime, Princess Cruises will roll out detailed itinerary information next month.

## SCENIC RIVER CRUISE FLEET EXPANSION

SCENIC Tours Group has brought in the New Year with the announcement it will expand its cruise ship fleet to 20 and introduce a new class of luxury ship to Myanmar.

The *Scenic Aura* will be Scenic's first step into ship building in Burma, with the vessel to debut on the Irrawaddy from late next year. Featuring 22 cabins, the ship is expected to be similar in design to the 34 suite *Scenic Spirit* that is scheduled to launch on the Mekong next January.

The move has been in the pipeline for some time, with the travel company signing a deal with Myanmar's Upland Shipyard mid last year. Scenic has also thrown its weight behind the project, investing approximately \$7.5 million into the ship build.

Meanwhile, Scenic has also confirmed that another 'Space Ship' is in the pipeline in Europe, marking its 16th vessel and 20th for the group including four Evergreen Tours marketed ships.

The 85-cabin *Scenic Amber* is slated to launch in March 2016 sailing on the Rhine, Main and Danube.



Scenic's 'Space Ship'



## CLIA VIEW

Brett Jardine, general manager  
CLIA Australasia

### CRUISE3SIXTY EDGES CLOSER

TICKETS are selling fast to the Australasian cruise industry's only trade focused conference, Cruise3sixty. To be held at The Star in Sydney on Friday, 27 February, the 2015 event will feature outstanding panel sessions with a stellar line-up of 20 senior cruise industry executives from around the globe.

Local brand leaders will open the conference with a focus on the challenges and opportunities facing home port cruise lines. With 70% of Aussies and Kiwis choosing to cruise from local ports, there will be keen discussion on where we are headed in the coming years.

Meanwhile, with 30% of Australasian passengers cruising internationally, overseas-based executives will be discussing our region's role as a source market, examining the current growth trends and looking at what is being done to ensure the cruise boom continues into the future.

‘Local brand leaders will open the conference with a focus on challenges and opportunities’

The conference will also include a panel of successful CLIA retail members who will discuss some of their cruise successes. It's sure to be an inspiring and motivating session.

A highlight will be a special keynote presentation from Norwegian Cruise Line executive vice president international Andy Stuart. Stuart will talk about his personal journey and discuss how the cruise industry has changed over the years. He'll also look at how we have worked with the trade to achieve sustained growth, examine the innovations and technology that have driven cruising into the 20th century, and forecast what lies ahead.

Feedback from our inaugural event in 2014 indicated a desire for continued discussion around how cruise lines market their product. To cater for this, we're holding a session with senior cruise line representatives to learn about their approach to the cruise customer, discuss new marketing opportunities, and hear their tips for agents. This is sure to help cruise specialists who are keen to target the all-important new-to-cruise consumer.

We'll also see an encore of a popular session from Cruise3sixty 2014 with head of travel and tourism at Google Australia Ross McDonald returning for our second keynote presentation. He will present the latest cruise search trends and discuss how these ebb and flow as the cruise industry continues to surge.

This year's thought-provoking closing session will see four prominent industry leaders discuss current cruise industry affairs from a leadership perspective and share their insights on how best to support the trade's efforts.

In addition, CLIA retail members will be able to attend an exhibition of cruise lines and cruise industry suppliers during an extended morning tea and lunch break.

As always, there will be plenty of opportunities for networking at the closing function, so we look forward to welcoming the industry to a productive and enjoyable event.

### MILESTONE FOR ECRUISING

PIONEERING online cruise specialist agency ecrusing.travel celebrated its 15th birthday this month, hosting key clients and a who's who of the Australian cruise industry at a dinner function at Sydney's Sheraton on the Park hotel.

The business was founded by Brett Dudley in 1998, who recounted his journey which started with a launch event on board Norwegian Capricorn Line - at which he happened to meet his now wife Philippa.

CLIA chairman Gavin Smith paid tribute to the Dudleys, with an insightful address where he described how ecrusing had helped kick start the growth of the now massive Australian cruise sector.

As well as being a top producer for many cruise lines, the company has had major success with a range of bespoke "cruise tours", many involving full ship and aircraft charters. It also enjoys key partnerships with many hotels and other suppliers around the globe.

The ecrusing story has also included the launch of an offshoot in Hong Kong as well as a swathe of awards - which kicked off with being named the top cruise travel agency in Australia in the 2003 National Travel Industry Awards.

It's onwards and upwards for the business which has just appointed former Cruise Team and Harvey's Choice Holidays chief Alastair Fernie as its new executive general manager.

Fernie and Dudley laid out a vision to double the company's business while at the same time boosting its portfolio of cruise tours, which are marketed to ecrusing's following of more than 30,000 "posh club" loyalty members.



Philippa and Brett Dudley with Stuart Allison, Princess Cruises.

## CRUISE WEEKLY

### CRUISE HEADLINES JANUARY 2015

- 02 Seabourn signs new order
- 02 Coast takes pitch on road
- 04 Fernie onboard at Ecrusing
- 04 New Dawn out of blocks
- 09 Voyagers back and dazzling
- 09 Silversea wave incentive
- 11 Cruising's top advertisers
- 11 Qatar joins cruise alliance
- 16 CMV to purchase MS Astor
- 18 Scenic launches onto Douro
- 06 Ponant hits Aussie shores
- 08 Emerald Princess to call Sydney home
- 08 Legend year round for Sydney
- 13 APT 2016 itineraries
- 15 Venice removes ship ban





APT has reported an overwhelming response for its Kimberley cruising program, with 2014 sailings trumping previous years as more Australians choose to holiday at home.

Speaking with *travelBulletin*, APT marketing manager Justine Lally made special mention of the touring firm's Kimberley program, describing it as a stand out performer in 2014.

"We were in growth overall for 2014, but our Kimberley program has really boomed and is now among our top growth destinations," she said. "Whether it's the Australian dollar or a change in traveller trends, it's probably a reflection that more people are choosing to holiday at home."

However, Lally added that 2014 also had its challenges. "2014 was an unpredictable year for us and the industry as a whole," she said,

referring to plans to delay construction of a new ship which was set to launch in Russia this year. "Russia remains an uncertainty at this stage. Ship builds are challenging because decisions have to be made so far in advance... It's very unpredictable."

APT expects to have more information in the first quarter of 2015 on whether construction will continue as planned, Lally added. In the meantime, APT has turned its focus to expanding its European river cruise portfolio with itineraries that explore more "regionalised areas".

APT was the first touring firm off the mark with its European River Cruising preview brochure for 2016. Now on agency shelves, it features a range of itineraries with a strong focus on the Bordeaux region of France.

## RCCL GONE FOR ESPRESSO

ROYAL Caribbean Cruises is claiming to offer the "industry's most advanced reservation system", with the launch this month of Espresso.

Developed to help RCCL's travel agent partners sell more cruises and grow their businesses, the new platform offers a host of consultant-friendly features such as side-by-side comparison views of selected itineraries and a powerful search engine to find the best available price and applicable promotional offers.

"Royal Caribbean's relationship with travel agents has always been our number one priority and this is another demonstration of our commitment to making our brands the easiest in the industry to do business with," said Royal Caribbean International senior vice president of sales and trade support & service, Vicki Freed.

A key feature of Espresso is centralised inventory, while agents are able to select up to four stateroom categories at once for quick and easy comparison.

Celebrity and Azamara Club Cruise product is also available via Espresso, enabling agents to compare individual pricing against reserved group space.

Espresso is optimised for tablet devices and offers interactive deck plans, highlighting the best available staterooms with photos and layouts all available in the same place.



## COMMUNIQUÉ FROM...

**KAREN CHRISTENSEN**

General Manager & Director  
Sales/Marketing, Australasia

### MED 15 VOYAGES INCLUDE SHORE EXCURSIONS & WIFI

Silversea's 2015 Mediterranean voyages now include Silver Shore Select excursions and 2 hours of WiFi per day. Whether it's stepping back in time at the Vatican Museum in Rome or at the Acropolis in Athens, these expertly designed tours will ensure your clients' experience is as extraordinary as the places they visit. Along with butler service, gratuities, meals and beverages, guests can now roam free, aboard and ashore, compliments of Silversea.

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# INDUSTRY IN FOCUS



Rocky Mountaineer served up a feast at an industry event in Sydney late last year, with 150 industry partners invited to put their aprons on and recreate specialties served aboard the luxury train.



These TravelManagers consultants gave their cameras a workout on a nine-night famil to Switzerland courtesy of Switzerland Tourism and Swiss International Airlines.



The Bench International team enjoyed some trivia and fine dining at the CATO Christmas party last year. Pictured from left are Julie de Palo, Martin Edwards and newcomer Lara Behrens.



Almost 40 agents clocked up some frequent flyer points on a mega famil to South Africa late last year. A visit to Nelson Mandela's house was among the highlights (pictured), along with a tour of the Blyde River Canyon and shark cage diving with Great Whites.



The Red Centre put on a stellar display for these top selling agents on an AAT Kings famil last month. A BBQ and sunset tour of Uluru topped the agenda before agents crossed the South Australian border aboard The Ghan via the Flinders Ranges.



No cruise aboard RCI's *MS Allure of the Seas* would be complete without frocking up for a night of dinner and dancing. Pictured are Infinity and Flight Centre consultants from NSW at the iconic Pinnacle Lounge.





Cruising to nowhere may not sound particularly appealing, but these agents were all smiles on the *Voyager of the Seas* cruise to nowhere departing Sydney late last year. The whirlwind sail came just 13 days after a US\$80m revitalisation as the vessel began its third Australasian summer.



Cancun may be Mexico's answer to the Gold Coast, but you won't find Club Med on the Goldie. These top selling agents experienced the newly renovated Club Med Cancun first hand on a recent famil courtesy of Club Med and Virgin Australia.



Istanbul, Cappadocia, Pamukkale and the ancient city of Troy put on their finest for these helloworld agents on a recent famil to Turkey, courtesy of Sun Island Tours.



Hawaii put on a rather nippy display for these agents on an Experience Aloha famil aboard the *MS Pride of America*. There was still plenty of sight seeing to be had along with some snorkelling and diving off the Kona coast.



Shannon Kidd from Rocky Mountaineer and Lizzie Doyle from Travel Alberta couldn't hide their excitement on a recent trip to Australia which saw them take part in a hands-on cooking class with around 150 agents at the Shangri-La Sydney.



These Tassie agents stopped off for a quick visit to the Dubai Aquarium on a recent Bentours & Emirates famil, but not before filling their shopping bags to the brim.



# PHILIPPINES

## The pursuit of perfection



By Catherine Marshall

**H**UMIDITY strikes with a vengeance in the Filipino summer, encasing one's body in an ever-present film of sweat. Even on the breezy steps of the Spanish-built La Immaculada Concepcion Church which overlooks Coron Bay on the island of Culion, locals fan themselves against the circling heat. Despite the temperature, this island – located on Palawan's northern tip – is a paradise of looming, rocky islands rimmed by waters swirling in dip-dyed shades of turquoise, aqua and peacock blue.

It's hard to reconcile the beauty of this place with its history; at the turn of the 19th century, Culion was the world's largest leper colony. This utopia became a place of exile for people suffering from leprosy, and so feared was the disease that sufferers even had their own currency to avoid potential contamination. A cure for leprosy came in the 1980s, and today the stories of those who suffered are poignantly told in the island's museum.

The dichotomy between past and present, paired with its exceptional natural beauty, are the very things that make Palawan such a

compelling destination for Australian visitors. But for many travellers, the Philippines remains synonymous with Boracay, a tiny smudge of an island located to the north east of Palawan. Boracay is routinely filled with tourists whose numbers are disproportionate to its size, drawn in by a trifecta of beautiful beaches, an established nightlife and an array of resorts that naturally enhance one's stay.

Palawan, by contrast, is far larger in size and lesser known to Australians looking to holiday in the Philippines. Stretched lengthways between the South China Sea and the Sulu Sea, Palawan is, in fact, a collection of almost 1800 islands, most of them uninhabited. With its big toe pointed southwards, reaching out to touch Malaysian Borneo, the archipelago is also known as the country's final frontier.

This is a place that appeals to the thoughtful traveller – those who like to spend their holidays decompressing, exploring the natural environment and spending time in gentle contemplation. Its calm and unstructured sensibility make it the perfect alternative for those not attracted to busier destinations. Put simply, it's a relaxing 'bookend' for travellers hoping to relax after hitting the shops in Manila or the lively party scene in places like Boracay.

While a stunning beach is never far from any location in the Philippines, the region is also an up-and-comer for nature lovers. Hundreds of volcanoes are dotted around the archipelago offering bird's eye views of the islands. Hikers can delight in endless stretches of deserted coastlines and nature lovers can scale the World Heritage Site of the Banawe Rice Terraces carved into the mountains of Ifugao.

With numerous island resorts spread around the archipelago, travellers also have a seemingly infinite choice of accommodation and are almost certainly guaranteed to wake up to a beautiful view each day.

Turning inland, visitors will find Palawan's islands rising majestically from the ocean and filled with an abundance of lakes, rivers and mountains. But the archipelago's pride is the Puerto Princesa Underground River, a subterranean waterway that flows for eight kilometres. It lies in the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, a protected area located around 80 kilometres north of the gateway city of Puerto Princesa. Access is no problem, with Cebu Pacific and Philippines Airlines offering daily services between Manila and Puerto Princesa.

Visitors can enter the limestone cave system with tour guides, spend time





## Manila: At a glance

MANILA is an essential stopover for clients who want to experience city life in the largely rural archipelago country that is the Philippines.

Densely-populated, restless and vibrant, the capital city has a variety of attractions that appeal to the most discerning travellers, and visitors' experiences will be limited only by the amount of time they have available.

A visit to the historic, walled city of Intramuros is a must, constructed by the Spanish colonial government in the 16th century as fortification against attack.

The riverside walls which house dank dungeons where prisoners were routinely crammed hauntingly contextualises the country's long history as a Spanish colony. This precinct of Old Manila is best seen from

atop a calesa – a horse-drawn carriage – or by foot.

Travellers can also thread their way along cobblestoned streets and pop into the 425-year-old UNESCO heritage-listed San Agustin Church which is affectionately known as the wedding capital of the Philippines.

For a taste of one of the Philippines' other major cultural influences, visitors can take a walking food tour of nearby Chinatown. Retail needs are easily met at the SM Mall of Asia, the world's 10th largest shopping mall which attracts around 200,000 people each day. The only dilemma travellers will face is how much they can fit into their shopping bags and which restaurant to try first.

■ [www.tourismphilippines.com.au](http://www.tourismphilippines.com.au)

trekking through the park's jungles and mangroves, and visit an ethnographic museum which tells of the history and culture of the indigenous Batak and Tagbanua people who inhabit the region.

When the time comes to fuel travellers' energy, there is no end to the surfeit of Filipino dishes to choose. The local mango is a clear favourite, far sweeter than the Australian version. But the range of traditional Filipino delicacies are something to behold including halo-halo (a summer favourite which contains shaved ice, evaporated milk, sweet beans and purple yam), gulaman (a drink filled with tapioca pearls), Filipino BBQ, and balut for those game enough to try.

The Philippines is gaining traction as a popular option for Australian travellers thanks to increased promotional activities and growing awareness of Palawan as a destination, and the Philippine Department of Tourism is expecting the trend to continue well into 2015/16.

Its turquoise waters, pristine sandy beaches and breathtaking scenery makes the Philippines a safe bet for nature lovers looking to relax. But just a word of caution, the humidity sticks.



## NEED TO KNOW

**GETTING THERE:** Philippine Airlines flies from Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne to Manila including daily services between Sydney and a three times weekly service from Brisbane via Darwin. The Melbourne service also operates three times weekly. Cebu Pacific has also launched direct low cost flights from Sydney to Manila.

**WHEN TO GO:** Travelling in the country's dry season from December to March is a safe bet when the chance of cyclones and rain is less likely. The hottest month is May while the coolest and least humid months are January and February.

**GETTING AROUND:** There are no shortage of options when travellers hit the ground, with boat and train travel easy to come by. Ferries are also a popular option and 'fastcraft' are becoming increasingly common for inter-island travel.

**CASH:** Travellers can get around on P1000 per day (A\$26), but mid range travellers can expect to travel on P1950 (A\$51) daily. More discerning travellers can expect to hand out A\$90 for a restaurant and A\$15 for a restaurant meal.

**CURRENCY:** The Philippines currency is the peso (P). One Australian dollar buys around P\$0.37.

# PHILIPPINES MAKES A COMEBACK



THE Philippines is bouncing back from a number of natural disasters in 2013, with Infinity Holidays reporting “modest growth” in bookings from Australian travellers.

A 7.1-magnitude earthquake struck the archipelago in October 2013, followed weeks later by Typhoon Haiyan, one of the strongest tropical cyclones ever recorded.

Coming at a time where tourism was emerging as a key economic driver, the disasters delivered a blow to the industry. But Infinity product specialist Asia Judy Anglim said the region is now making a comeback, albeit at a “slower rate” than previous years.

While bookings for late 2014 were more subdued than the same time in 2013, the Philippines was last year named among Infinity’s top ten selling destinations in November.

“What has been pleasing to see is that we have seen a pick-up in bookings for November. We are also seeing a nice pick-up in sales for the first six months of 2015,” she said.

With sales expected to gain further momentum in 2015, Infinity is set to increase its range of accommodation in Manila, Boracay, Bohol and Palawan around the Puerto Princesa areas.

The wholesaler is also preparing for the launch of its first stand alone brochure next month, featuring 16 pages of dedicated Philippines content and nine new properties.

“It is an exciting time for the Philippines and our brochure shows our confidence in supporting growth to this area of Asia,” Anglim told *travelBulletin*.

However, Anglim said the Filipino tourism industry was still in its infancy and there was still “some way to go” for the destination to compete with the likes of Thailand and Bali.

“In order for more growth there is still much work to be done to increase awareness. There is also the need for sharp airfares to compete with Thailand and Bali. But it is very encouraging to see change... [and] all this will help to lift the public perception of what the Philippines has to offer,” she concluded.

## CEB HONES IN ON AUS

CEBU Pacific Air’s foray into the Australia market has been well received, with the five times weekly service from Manila to Sydney driving a 29% increase in total traffic in the first month of operation.

Launching at a time where connections between Australia and the Philippines were “very underserved”, general manager long haul Alex Reyes said the service was a direct response to “strong demand” in the market. “The rise in numbers for Australian leisure travellers heading to the Philippines has more than doubled in the past nine years with a 25% growth in the last two years... [and] we expect this to continue,” he told *travelBulletin*.

He also remained confident that the service, which launched in September 2013, would facilitate further growth by providing low cost options and opening up more destinations for travellers.

“We expect this non-stop service to Manila to grow demand for the market. Our presence in Australia is opening up many untapped destinations across the Philippines ... so travellers can easily visit two or three destinations in one trip,” he said.

Meanwhile, the airline will “continue to explore” further growth opportunities, Reyes added.



## Profile boost needed: G'day

WHOLESALE G'day Philippines has described the Philippines as an “under appreciated” destination in the Australia market, claiming that it packs well above its weight compared to other island destinations.

Speaking with *travelBulletin* last month, G'day Philippines director Stephen Muscat said demand for the Philippines was strong, with Australian travellers particularly lured by cultural tours and diving packages.

But he said awareness remained a barrier for the destination, with many travel agents more inclined to sell traditional beachside destinations such as Thailand, Fiji and Bali.

“The Philippines is often overlooked because Bali and Fiji are familiar and easy to sell to Australians. But the Philippines is well priced, clean and offers a more cultural experience than many other island destinations,” he said.

With the profile of the Philippines still a far cry from other island destinations, Muscat said building the region’s profile was crucial to its long term success in the Australia market. He also stressed the importance of the trade in conveying the message to consumers.

Meanwhile, G'day Philippines has reported a “pleasing” response to its inaugural brochure which was launched in June last year, just seven months after the wholesaler entered the market.

Featuring accommodation, package tours, dive packages and guided tours, the 43-page brochure covers Manila, Boracay, Cebu, Bohol and Palawan. The flagship 14-day Luzon Jewels itinerary visits Manila, Pampanga, Sagada and Banaue from \$4250 per person twin share.



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## Intrepid island hop

INTREPID Travel has expanded its Asia portfolio for 2015 and added tours allowing travellers to explore more of the Philippine islands.

The Philippines Island Getaway itinerary is the latest addition which traverses the Palawan region on the west coast. Tailored for island lovers, the eight-day tour takes in the region's beaches starting from Puerto Princesa and continuing on to Sabang and El Nido.

Priced from \$1386, the tour includes transport, accommodation and some meals, with group sizes limited to 12 passengers. The first departure for the year kicks off on 12 March.

The Philippine Discovery Overview also covers untouched landscapes and cultures over 11 days. Highlights include trekking Mt Pinatubo, exploring the Banaue rice terraces and meeting locals on a village tour. Priced from \$1795, the tour can also be combined with Intrepid's 18-day Philippines Island Getaway for a comprehensive Filipino escape. Starting in Manila, highlights include a three day trek with a local guide, a visit to Bontoc Museum, guided walk to Hanging Coffins, and trekking Mt Pinatubo from \$3190.

## Aussie arrivals boom

THE number of Australians visiting the Philippines is creeping higher with the latest tourism figures confirming a 5% jump in Australian arrivals for January to October 2014 compared to the previous year.

Just short of 174,000 Australians visited the Philippines in the first 10 months of 2014, up from 165,000 the previous year.

March was the most popular month with over 21,000 visitors, followed by January and February with 21,000 and 17,000 respectively.

Philippine Department of Tourism attache Consuelo Jones said Australia played a "very important role" for Philippine tourism, representing the fifth largest source market and third largest in tourist spend. "We have seen a steady increase in arrivals and I am confident the market will grow," she added.

## Q&A

**Want to know how to sell a tropical destination in a country rimmed with easy-to-reach destinations like Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia? Catherine Marshall gets some insider tips from MTA member Lareina Dulch.**



### When is the best time to visit the Philippines?

Between January and March - you get the tail end of the busy December season and the cooler weather. Palawan in January also has breezy evenings and warm beach-perfect days.

### The Philippines has plenty of competition from more easily accessible tropical destinations. What does it have to offer that they don't?

The Philippines comprises more than 7000 islands, which is something that no other destination can match. While not all of the islands are inhabited, the magic is in the variety of offering. As a destination it offers choices from 'shop until you drop' tours of Manila to the breezy weekend getaways up in the mountain province. Or even a cultural journey through the UNESCO heritage town of Vigan, to mention but a few.

### Which resorts in Palawan would you recommend for singles, couple and families?

Dos Palmas Island Resort caters for all tourist types because of the activities and facilities on offer. I would also recommend El Nido Pangulasian Island to couples, particularly those celebrating

a special occasion such as a honeymoon or anniversary.

### What kind of activities would you recommend to first time visitors?

It is key to understand what kind of experience travellers are looking for, but I would recommend either Cebu or Manila for a fantastic shopping and dining experience, as well as a day trip to the walled city of Intramuros to see Old Manila town.

Time permitting, I would also recommend visiting one of the island beaches as well as downtown Manila where visitors can experience how laid back Philippine island life is in contrast with how busy modern city life has become.

### Do you have any tips for travel agents who want to improve their selling skills to this emerging destination?

Visit the Philippines so that you can offer firsthand experience to travellers. The Philippines appeals to a broad range of travellers and you can sell everything from the luxury island hotel or the busy city hotel. You will also receive the same warm and hospitable smile whilst experiencing an interesting Oriental/Western mix of cultures.

# G'DAY PHILIPPINES

# DISCOVERING DALLAS

## MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE



Dallas Skyline (Credit: DCVB/Matt Pasant)

By Bruce Piper

**T**HE launch of Qantas flights between Sydney and Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) in 2012 has created a new awareness of Texas as a destination, and the recent expansion to non-stop Qantas A380s in both directions (*travelBulletin* October 2014) makes visiting Dallas Fort Worth even easier for your clients.

While the convenience of DFW transits mean many Aussies simply connect through to their final destination in the USA or Mexico, the twin cities of Dallas and Fort Worth are also a great stopover option and are definitely worth exploring for a few days.

Dallas is known for its eponymous TV series, but many Australians will be more familiar with the city through the JFK assassination in 1963 and its attendant conspiracy theories which have generated a host of books and movies. No visit to

Dallas is complete without taking in the Sixth Floor Museum, located at the Texas School Book Depository where Lee Harvey Oswald allegedly fired the fatal shot. It's located on Dealey Plaza, adjacent to the so-called Grassy Knoll where the busy road is marked with an X indicating the position of the president's limousine when the so-called "magic bullet" struck Kennedy. However the museum is much more than just a remembrance of the presidential murder – it's a celebration of the new era of American optimism heralded by John F. Kennedy when he was elected.

Initiatives such as the Peace Corps and the launch of America's space program are showcased along with JFK's inspirational speeches plus the drama of the Cuban missile crisis, and I defy anyone to leave the exhibit with dry eyes.

But there's lots more to Dallas than just JFK. Get some perspective with a visit to the Reunion Tower – described as the 'iconic centrepiece of the ever-changing Dallas

skyline' with great views across the city. The tower is topped by a massive LED lighted dome which provides a nightly light show. The Dallas arts precinct has a wide array of galleries, sculpture gardens and exhibits (mostly funded by generous Texans); sports fans will enjoy the opportunity to take in an NFL, baseball, basketball or even ice hockey match; there are some large upmarket shopping malls offering a wide array of premium brands; and the city also boasts some great outdoor spaces including the Klyde Warren Park, a delightful urban green space built over a freeway connecting uptown, downtown and the arts district.

For some authentic Texas gear, head to Wild Bill's Western Store in the downtown area – great for cowboy boots, hats and other souvenirs. Also worth a visit is the George Bush II Presidential Library – a collection of displays, memorabilia and documents from

*Continues over page*





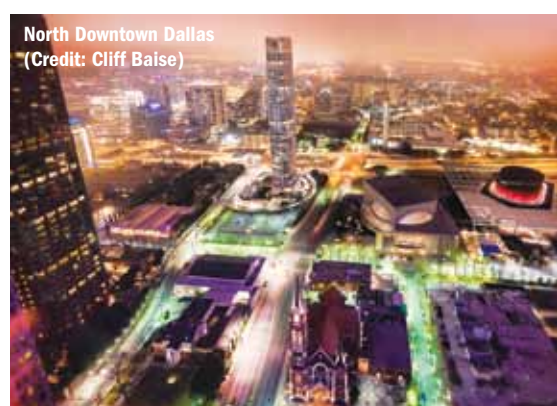
Big Tex (Credit: DCVB)



Dallas Westend (Credit: DCVB)



Cowboy boots (Credit: Dave Wilson)



North Downtown Dallas (Credit: Cliff Baise)

the presidency which included momentous events such as the 9/11 attacks and America's response.

Right next door to Dallas is the twin city of Fort Worth which offers a genuine Wild West experience. Also known as "Cow Town", Fort Worth proudly maintains its western heritage with twice daily cattle drives down the main street of the Fort Worth Stockyards National Historic District – a dusty reminiscence of when the area was a major livestock trading centre. There are some great bars where you can sample the local brew, or soak up the atmosphere at Billy Bob's Texas Honky Tonk – a massive entertainment venue which includes its own live bull riding ring. Don't miss the Cowtown Coliseum which hosts a rodeo every Friday and Saturday night complete with bull riding, calf roping, barrel races as well as lots of events for kids.

Fort Worth bills itself as the city of Cowboys and Culture, and along with its wild west heritage has plenty of other options for visitors. The Kimbell Art Museum has a great collection of major works by greats such as Rembrandt, Monet, Matisse and Picasso, and there's also

the American Airlines C.R. Smith Museum which is devoted to commercial aviation. Don't miss the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, while the Modern Art Museum has an amazing portfolio including names such as Andy Warhol and Jackson Pollock.

The city centre has a memorial to JFK adjacent to the Hilton Hotel where he spent his last night, while the nearby Sundance Square Plaza is a very pleasant space to relax and take in the Fort Worth vibe. More energetic visitors will enjoy the square's fantastic interactive water feature which provides hours of cooling entertainment.

It also goes without saying that you can get a great meal in Dallas and Fort Worth, with fabulous cuisine ranging from simple take-aways right through to upmarket restaurants, and of course some massive Texan steaks.

So next time your clients head to the USA, don't miss the opportunity to recommend Dallas and Fort Worth. As they say, everything is bigger in Texas and the metroplex offers another perspective on the intriguing American lifestyle which many Aussies find so fascinating.

## NEED TO KNOW

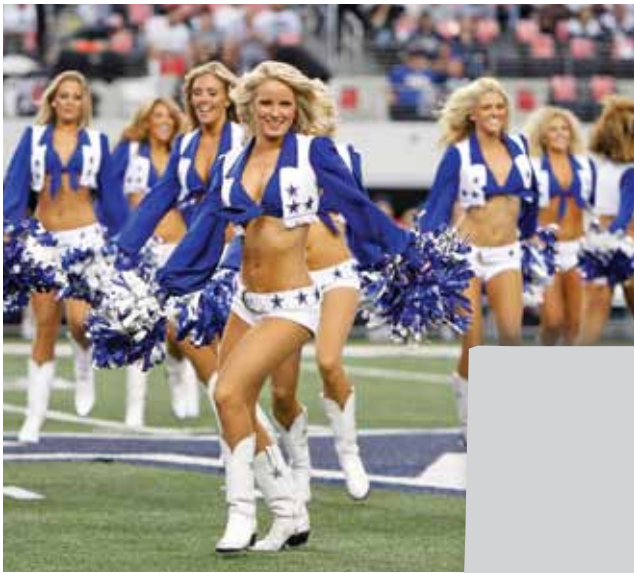
**GETTING THERE:** Qantas offers six-times weekly direct flights to Dallas Fort Worth, flying on A380s in both directions. The flight time is around 15 hours from Sydney.

**GETTING AROUND:** The easiest way to travel once on the ground is by car, with both downtown areas laid out on a grid. However, both cities also have extensive bus services and Dallas has an efficient light rail system.

**WHEN TO GO:** The best time to visit is between September and November when temperature isn't too warm, averaging around 15°C to 25°C.

**WHERE TO STAY:** The options are endless in Dallas and Fort Worth, with options to suit all budgets. There are all the hotel chains you would expect from a metro area including the Hyatt, Le Meridien, Hilton and Best Western.





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# MEDITERRANEAN MAGIC



By Karen Halabi

**G**REECE may be struggling financially but there are few signs the tourism industry is suffering – if anything it's the reverse. The same goes for Turkey, which is reeling with an influx of 40 million tourists each year.

If figures are anything to go by, Istanbul is sitting pretty with a population of 14.1 million – a figure that's edging higher each year and placing a strain on infrastructure. But it's the juxtaposition of old versus new that tourists come to see, and they're coming in droves with some 11.6 million overnight visitors in 2014, up from 9.9 million in 2013 and 8.8 million the previous year.

On a quick run around the bustling city it's easy to see why Istanbul ranks so highly among tourists; historical buildings from

500 BC are a stark contrast with modern skyscrapers, and there is a burgeoning arts scene and night venues pumping with 360 views. It also provides a snapshot of what it's like for a local coping with the daily tourist onslaught – but they seem unphased, somehow acclimatised to the ordered chaos.

Athens follows the same vibe, and like Istanbul it is rising through the tourism ranks. Formerly rundown areas are becoming gentrified and desirable places to stay, and tourists are responding with bookings. But it's the rooftop bars where both Athens and Istanbul shine, allowing travellers to really see the cities at their finest.

The market and the palace are almost an afterthought in Istanbul nowadays. Think instead sleek rooftop bars that rival New York, designer hotels, designer gourmet food and chefs, plus shopping.

The traditional sites almost become

incidental in a city that has grown like a chrysalis into an art, design and foodie's hub.

The other emerging trend in Istanbul is designer hotels such as Witt Suites, a small boutique property in the upcoming trendy area of Ortakoy. Witt Suites is also opening a rooftop bar this year which has been hotly anticipated by locals and tourists.

In Istanbul, The Pera Palace is a gem of history from another era with an Agatha Christie room on offer. As a regular guest, legend has it that Christie wrote *Murder on the Orient Express* within the walls of room 411. Now part of the Jumeirah Group, this historic property is considered one of the most charming buildings in Istanbul and overlooks the magnificent Golden Horn and the historical old city.

Istanbul has some impressive hotels that fall into the ultra-luxury category, but the newest contenders are Raffles Istanbul



Dubrovnik Harbour

## HOT DEALS

**SEADREAM YACHT CLUB** is offering a 10% discount on combined sailings of Croatia and Greece for the months of June and July, 2015. The two-week option to cruise the Eastern Mediterranean aboard the mega motor-cruise *SeaDream I* (pictured) departs Venice on 27 June, arriving in Piraeus on 11 July. Prices lead in from US\$10,352pp twin share with a \$500 pp discount. Overnight stays include Opatija, Sibenik, Split and Dubrovnik passing the Corinth Canal.

■ [www.seadream.com](http://www.seadream.com)



**BEYOND TRAVEL** are offering discounts of up to \$780 per couple on the eight-day Jewels of the Cyclades mega-yacht cruise for departures in 2015. Travelling on board the 25-cabin *MS Galileo*, prices start from \$2260 per person twin share. Savings of \$420 per couple are available for Category C cabins, with prices starting from \$3840 per person twin share for Category A cabins. Departures are scheduled between April and October.

■ [www.beyondtravel.com.au](http://www.beyondtravel.com.au)



**APT** is inviting guests to set sail on a 28-day Greek Islands cruise with APT owner and founder Geoff McGeary. Departing Athens on 04 July, the Aegean Odyssey kicks off with a cruise aboard the luxury yacht *MV Tera Moana* (pictured) before continuing with a rail journey aboard the Danube Express. Prices lead in from \$24,795 per person twin share, with bookings made before 28 February eligible for savings of \$4000 per couple.

■ [www.aptouring.com.au](http://www.aptouring.com.au)

which opened in November last year and the Shangri-La on the European coast of the Bosphorus.

On the waterfront overlooking the Dubrovnik, the new kid on the block – the Shangri-La – is Istanbul's first property borne from Asian investors. A converted old tobacco warehouse, the property's 186 rooms are housed in a less palatial setting than its direct competitors, the Kempinski and the Four Seasons. But it adds a hint of Asia to a city that has always kept a dual East-West identity. The property has even imported a Chinese tea master for the Shang Palace, which is now considered among the finest Chinese restaurants in the city.

Greece and Turkey are becoming extremely popular as prices outside the major cities continue to decline, making it a bargain for dining and transport. But luxury yacht cruise line SeaDream takes any accommodation issues out of the equation as it floats at the

height of the European summer, one island to the next through Turkey and Greece.

SeaDream's Norwegian owner Atle Brynstad is somewhat of a visionary, foreseeing that the future of cruising was moving towards more exclusive small ship cruising. His name is synonymous with yacht-like cruise ships, having founded Seabourn in 1986, then selling it to Carnival before founding SeaDream Yacht Club.

As I board the flagship *SeaDream* mega yacht, I'm informed that it's forbidden to call it cruising onboard – it's yachting, I'm told.

I also discover that small ship cruising is a great way to access the Greek islands in luxury, plying the waters of the Mediterranean and stopping at ports that larger ships can't access. Another advantage is that the *SeaDream* can stay in ports until late in the evening, giving guests the chance to spend more time ashore or return in the evening

– not just shore excursions during the day.

While many agents send their clients to the larger tourist islands of Santorini and Mykonos, they bear little resemblance to a real authentic Greek village. There's little chance to interact with locals and instead they are overrun with tourist shops and restaurants with inflated prices.

Santorini in particular is flooded with tourists, flights are difficult to get and accommodation can be steep. On the other hand, islands such as Paros, Samos and Lesbos are far more appealing and relatively quiet. Lesbos even has an olive oil museum at Papados and original Ouzo factories for demonstrations and tastings.

Santorini and Mykonos still hold a certain charm for Australian travellers, but if your clients are after an authentic getaway in the heart of the Eastern Mediterranean, don't be afraid to stray from the crowds.



## GREECE & TURKEY BOOM



Santorini Greece

ONGOING political instability in the Middle East has led to a surge in interest in Turkey and Greece, with wholesalers reporting a spike in bookings to both destinations.

Eastern Eurotours was among a number of wholesalers who last year tweaked their product offering in response to problems in the Middle East, replacing many tours with itineraries to Israel, Jordan and Turkey.

Eastern Eurotours managing director Chip Popescu said forward bookings for Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan were currently down by around 5% on last year, adding that further instability could "hinder" the area from making a comeback in recent years. But he said Turkey and Greece were the "big winners", with bookings for both countries growing by 48% and 35% respectively.

"Following an encouraging earlybird season with strong interest in Mediterranean holidays, the area is set for a good start to 2015," he told *travelBulletin*.

Escorted tours have led the trend, increasing 15% on previous years, with ongoing growth also extending to school groups and special interest groups such as architecture and history enthusiasts.

"[Bookings] have been growing in scope as a result of the more affordable levels charged by suppliers following the economic downturn experienced throughout the Eastern Med in recent years," Popescu said.

Icon Holidays has also reported an "unprecedented number" of forward bookings for Greece in 2015, and Melbourne-based wholesaler Touchdown Tours is predicting a strong year ahead.

"We're expecting a bumper year [and] Greece is hugely popular right now," Touchdown Tours managing director Jaqui Preketes said.

Touchdown Tours' 16-day Glories of Turkey and Greece tour covers Istanbul, Gallipoli, Ephesus and Pamukkale from \$3804 per person twin share. Highlights include tours to Troy, Gallipoli and ANZAC Cove, and a free day to visit one of the villages of Santorini.

## Beyond boutique expansion



MS Splendid

BEYOND Travel is celebrating 21 years in the business with more tours and a new brochure including escorted group tours and small ship sea cruises.

Featuring six-pages dedicated to newly launched vessels, the Waterways & Beyond brochure includes the new *MV Corona* which covers the Dalmatian coast over eight days. Other new ships include the *MS Kleopatra* and *MS Macao* which cruise from Split through the Dalmatian Islands with prices leading in from \$1490 per person.

This year will also see Beyond Travel enter new destinations in Croatia including Slano, Omis and Puciscahe aboard *MS Splendid* over eight days. Priced from \$1320 per person twin share, cruising is limited to 36 passengers.

Hot air balloons  
Cappadocia

## AUSSIES HONOUR ANZACS

STRONG demand for ANZAC commemorative tours has prompted wholesalers to roll out additional itineraries, with demand outpacing supply well ahead of the centenary milestone.

Tempo Holidays sold out all Anzac Day tours months ahead of schedule, and Greece and Mediterranean Travel Centre added several additional tours in December after its ANZAC sailings all sold out.

Among the new capacity, the 13-day Centennial Diamonds covers Istanbul, Cappadocia, Limnos and Izmir before finishing in Gallipoli to visit ANZAC sites, while the 13-day Centennial Jewels tour cruises Istanbul, Ephesus and Pergamum before arriving in Gallipoli.

Prices lead in from \$3336 with departures

scheduled for 13-18 April, 2015. Availability still exists on both departures.

Greece and Mediterranean Travel Centre is also predicting strong bookings for the Battle of Lone Pine memorial in August ahead of its 12-day Classic Battle of Lone Pine itinerary.

"Including ANZAC we've seen a 15% increase for 2015 and we believe that the introduction of events in August for Lone Pine may see a larger spike later in the year," marketing manager Vanessa Morgan said.

Departing from Istanbul on 28 July, the tour covers Cappadocia, Konya and Izmir before continuing to Gallipoli to visit the WWI open air museum, ANZAC Cove, and Lone Pine Cemetery. Accommodation, transfers and entrance fees are included from \$1988.



## Hosted Group Journeys with a Difference...

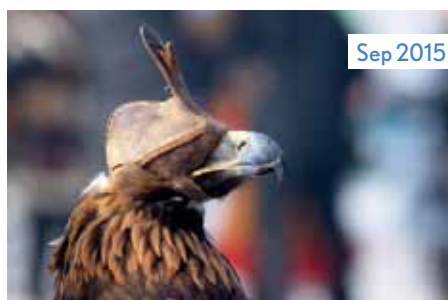
For over half a century, Abercrombie & Kent has been a pioneer in the world of luxury travel. Using the expertise of over 50 offices and 2,200 staff worldwide, we're pleased to announce our new portfolio of Hosted Group Journeys.

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Sep 2015

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Call 1300 851 925 or your local travel agent for more information.

[abercrombiekent.com.au/hosted\\_group\\_tour\\_journeys](http://abercrombiekent.com.au/hosted_group_tour_journeys)





# EGYPT MAKES A RECOVERY

EGYPT'S tourism industry has been slow to recover in the wake of the Arab Spring, but arrivals are bouncing back with government figures showing a 70% year on year increase for the quarter ending September 30, 2014.

The country welcomed 2.77 million arrivals during the period and 7.3 million for the year ending 30 September, marking a boost of confidence for wholesalers including A&K, Insight Vacations and Contiki which recently resumed operations in Egypt after pulling out in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Bunnik Tours, which never ceased trading, is also confident the industry will perform a full circle and re-emerge as a central tourist hub.

"There is a lot of pent up demand for Egypt and we are confident it will bounce back relatively strongly in the coming months,"

Bunnik Tours MD Dennis Bunnik said.

Once averaging 120 groups per year, Bunnik said current figures were a "dramatic" departure from previous levels, with demand

down around 90% since 2010 and group sizes taking a hit from around 24 to 8-10 pax.

But with the country's recovery still in its early stages, he insisted that now was a great time to travel to take advantage of competitive deals. "Egypt has taken a hit in recent years but it's ripe for people to return before the crowds hit in May and June," he said.

Abercrombie & Kent managing director Sujata Raman agreed, telling *travelBulletin* that staff on the ground have reported a "return to normality" in Egypt.

"There is now a real hope for the future which gives us renewed optimism and the confidence to put our energies back into the destination," she said.

A&K last year launched two new journeys to Egypt including an eight-day exploration of Cairo and the River Nile. Highlights include guided tours to the pyramids, the Sphinx, the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities, and luxury accommodation from \$4995.

## Q&A

Beyond Travel is one of the largest wholesalers covering the Eastern Mediterranean, with a range of cruises, rail journeys and tours throughout the region. National sales and marketing manager Bryce Crampton shared his top tips on selling the destination to your clients.



**What's the hottest area at the moment?**  
Croatia and the Balkan states.

**What kind of travellers are visiting?**  
The Eastern Med is becoming hugely popular across the board, even with the luxury market. It's also emerging as a viable FIT destination and there is more product aimed at the older 55+ market.

**What kind of new product is emerging?**  
New slick hotels are opening, particularly in Bosnia and Montenegro, as well as on

the Croatian coastline. The opening of an Aman Resort property in Montenegro is an indication of the direction things are taking.

**What trends are emerging?**  
FIT travel has become more popular in the region, including FIT island hopping. People are also spending 2-3 nights on each of the islands, so 12-14 nights in total.

**What's the top selling point for Australians?**  
Self-drive has taken off in a big way. Turkey still has a few challenges - it's not easy for

FIT once you get out of Istanbul - but the Balkans peninsula, particularly Bosnia and Montenegro, has really shown growth. One-way cruises are also now emerging.

**What factors should agents be aware of?**  
Firstly, the need to book early as it's a seasonal coastline, but also the weather. Although the summer season officially stretches from May to September, the Greek islands are still great in October. However, Croatia has a shorter summer season.

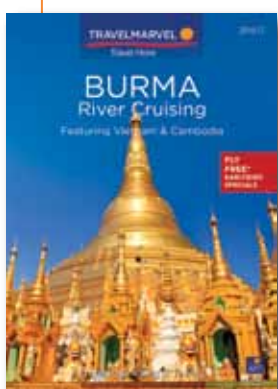
# TOUCHDOWN TOURS



ALLWAYS Dive Expeditions has released a Solomon Islands brochure outlining the best places to dive and stay in the Solomons. Featuring an overview of accommodation and dive operations, it also outlines a number of diving locations matched with ability. The Discover Uepi Island package includes seven nights of accommodation in a garden bungalow at Uepi Island Resort, all meals, airfares, transfers, and 10 guided dives with equipment from \$3623.



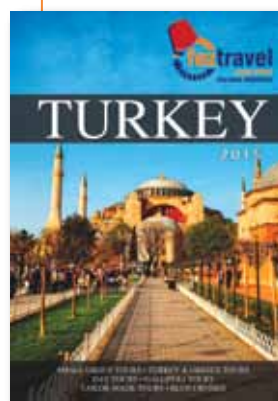
SMALL group tours to Turkey and tailored packages of Croatia are some of the latest additions to Tempo Holidays' 2015 Greece & Turkey brochure. The 108-page program also re-introduces packages to Slovenia and features a range of escorted tours. Earlybird bookings receive a 20% discount on the Iconic Aegean 6 Greek Islands & Turkey cruise which includes port calls to Mykonos, Rhodes, Crete and Santorini. Including all onboard meals, entertainment, taxes and gratuities, prices lead in from \$1480 per person.



TRAVELMARVEL is continuing to further its grasp in Asia with the release of the inaugural Burma 2016/17 brochure. Rolled out late last year, the program includes journeys on the new boutique vessel *RV Princess Panhwar* with 24 sailings between January 2016 and April 2017. The flagship 15-day Majestic Burma – Irrawaddy Cruise from Yangon to Mandalay covers Shwedagon Pagoda, Bagan and selected monasteries from \$5795 per person twin share.



50 DEGREES North has rolled out a 2015 summer brochure encompassing dozens of tours in Scandinavia and Northern Europe. The 60-page program features more tailored itineraries than previous brochures and a larger selection of group tours, small ship voyages and active holidays. Covering travel from Iceland to Mongolia and Kamchatka, the 2015 program also features Stockholm Archipelago Island hopping for the first time.



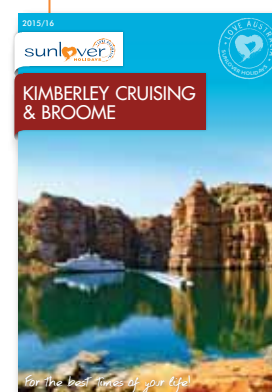
NEW centenary anniversary tours form a significant part of FEZ Travel's latest Turkey brochure. With 2015 marking the 100 year Anzac Day anniversary, the operator has launched a range of new commemorative tours including extended visits to Gallipoli. The 12-day Anzac the Colonel tour starts from \$2949 and includes visits to the Gallipoli battlefields, the 100th commemoration celebrations, a day-trip to Troy and a tour to Cappadocia with an optional hot air balloon flight.



CONTIKI is continuing with the theme of 'choice' in its 2015 Asia brochure, with three new travel styles and the introduction of tours in Japan. Featuring eight trips in total, the Japan Unrivaled itinerary is the latest addition which kicks off in Tokyo before venturing on to Hiroshima, Kyoto and Osaka. A meditation lesson, sushi making class and karaoke night are included. Three travel categories have also been added including Discovery Plus, In-Depth Explorer, and Easy Pace tours.



LINDBLAD Expeditions-National Geographic has added over a dozen new itineraries to its 2015/16 Explorations brochure including new trips in South America, Europe, the South Pacific and Borneo. The *National Geographic Orion* will explore the waters of Antarctica, Africa and the Indian Ocean in 2015, in addition to the Kimberley and the South Pacific. Norway's Fjords and Arctic Svalbard itinerary covers Norway's coast line from Bergen to the Svalbard Archipelago over 15-nights from \$16,860.



NEW sightseeing tours in Broome are part of Sunlover Holidays' latest 2015/16 Kimberley Cruising & Broome brochure. Itineraries on the *MS Caledonian Sky* are also on offer, along with the 10-night Silversea Cruises Kimberley Hidden Treasures journey. New touring options in Broome have been added to the line up in addition to new accommodation options in Western Australia's north west.



# BRUNEIAN *brilliance*

**Brunei may be a tiny state engulfed by Malaysia's borders, but there's a wealth of history, wildlife and luxury to be explored as GARY WALSH discovered on a recent trip.**

IT'S all about the numbers at Ulu Ulu National Park Resort in Brunei. There are three modes of transport to get to the property, grade-one rapids to be negotiated on the way, and about a million birds, bats and bugs to be experienced. Most importantly, there are 100 steps and 60 metres of scaffolding in order to climb to one of Southeast Asia's great spectacles.

The trip begins at a public jetty across from Kampong Ayer water village, where travellers join a speedboat for an exhilarating slalom trip through mangrove stands. After a short journey by road, it's into a narrow motorised canoe on the Temburong River, piloted by a local man with supernatural balance, to plunge upstream through rapids and into increasingly dense rainforest.

The resort sits at the confluence of the Temburong and Bealong rivers. There is no phone or internet coverage, so a digital detox

is compulsory. Guests can swim in the river or float on inner tubes, visit waterfalls and go on guided night walks through the rainforest.

But by far the most memorable experience is the taxing dawn canopy walk. It begins with a short pre-sunrise boat ride, then a long, slow climb from the riverside into the depths of the forest. The punchline is ascending a 60m high scaffolding leading to a series of



Ulu ulu ride

metal boardwalks above the green canopy.

Reaching the top as the sun creeps above the horizon with the calls of gibbons and a myriad of birds for company, mist rises slowly from the valleys. The view goes forever, spanning the treetops well into the Malaysian border, and all is well with the world.

Brunei is a small country and access isn't always easy. Getting to Ulu Ulu, for instance, involves travelling by road and longtail boat, crossing in and out of Malaysia. But the challenges are overshadowed by Brunei's natural appeal and cultural integrity.

Its history and culture are informed by Islamic faith which is omnipresent in Brunei. For the average tourist, this is manifest mainly in a ban on alcohol apart from a limited duty free allowance.

Brunei's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, is a serene place that is more like a country town than a national capital. It's low-rise, with no buildings permitted to build beyond the height of the main mosque's minarets. But with a modest population of around 200,000, the restrictions are easy to bare.

As many as 40,000 inhabitants live in the stilt homes of Kampong Ayer, a water city comprised of 42 villages situated a couple

hundred metres from the edge of the central business district. It is reached only by boat, but then linked by 36kms of boardwalks and bridges which connect locals to the district's own schools, shops and mosques. While the water village has been dubbed by some as the Venice of the East, its rickety appearance sets it apart from most European destinations. But it does provide a glimpse into a lifestyle that's far removed from Western life.

Certainly, Brunei's modern mosques are among its most important tourism attractions, especially the stunning Jame'Asr Hassan Bolkia mosque which is rich with ornamentation. Also of interest is the Royal Regalia Museum, devoted to the reign of the current Sultan of Brunei and indicative of the wealth of this small nation.

Just outside Bandar, the Empire Hotel and Country Club offers Brunei's most extravagant accommodation. Rooms and suites are enormous, the golf course is world class, and the facilities include a luxurious spa, cinema, bowling alley and indoor and outdoor pools.

Royal Brunei Airlines is the key to the country's tourism, offering daily flights

from Melbourne to Bandar Seri Begawan with connecting flights throughout Asia and on to Dubai and London. Extremely competitive fares, including for Royal Brunei's sterling business class service, have seen the airline claim a solid share of the market.

The B787 Dreamliner service to London was first introduced in April last year, and has so far been well received. With more spacious cabins and lie-flat beds in business class, comfort factors have come a long way for customers.

Features such as higher cabin humidity levels and advanced LED lighting have also driven an increase in positive customer feedback, according to the airline.

Royal Brunei says "exceptional fare deals" in the Australian market saw visitor numbers to Brunei increase in 2014, and while the airline has no immediate plans to increase services to Australia, this may be revisited in 2016/17 when new NEO A320s are delivered.

■ Gary Walsh visited Brunei courtesy of Royal Brunei Airlines, flying the Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

## MALAYSIA GAINS GROUND



Sapi Island

WHILE tourism figures creep higher in Brunei, its bigger sister Sabah on the island of Borneo has also seen a consistent increase in Australian arrivals.

The latest tourism figures released in October 2014 show that around 24,000 Australians visited Sabah in the first nine months of 2014, marking a 4% increase on the previous year. European arrivals saw the greatest growth with an 11% increase, contributing to a total 2.4 million visitors from January to September.

The Government of Sabah has vowed to increase the number hotel rooms over the next four years to cater for an expected influx of tourists, with a number of renovations and new hotels in the pipeline. Sabah Tourism is also predicting an increase in interest for medical tourism in 2015.



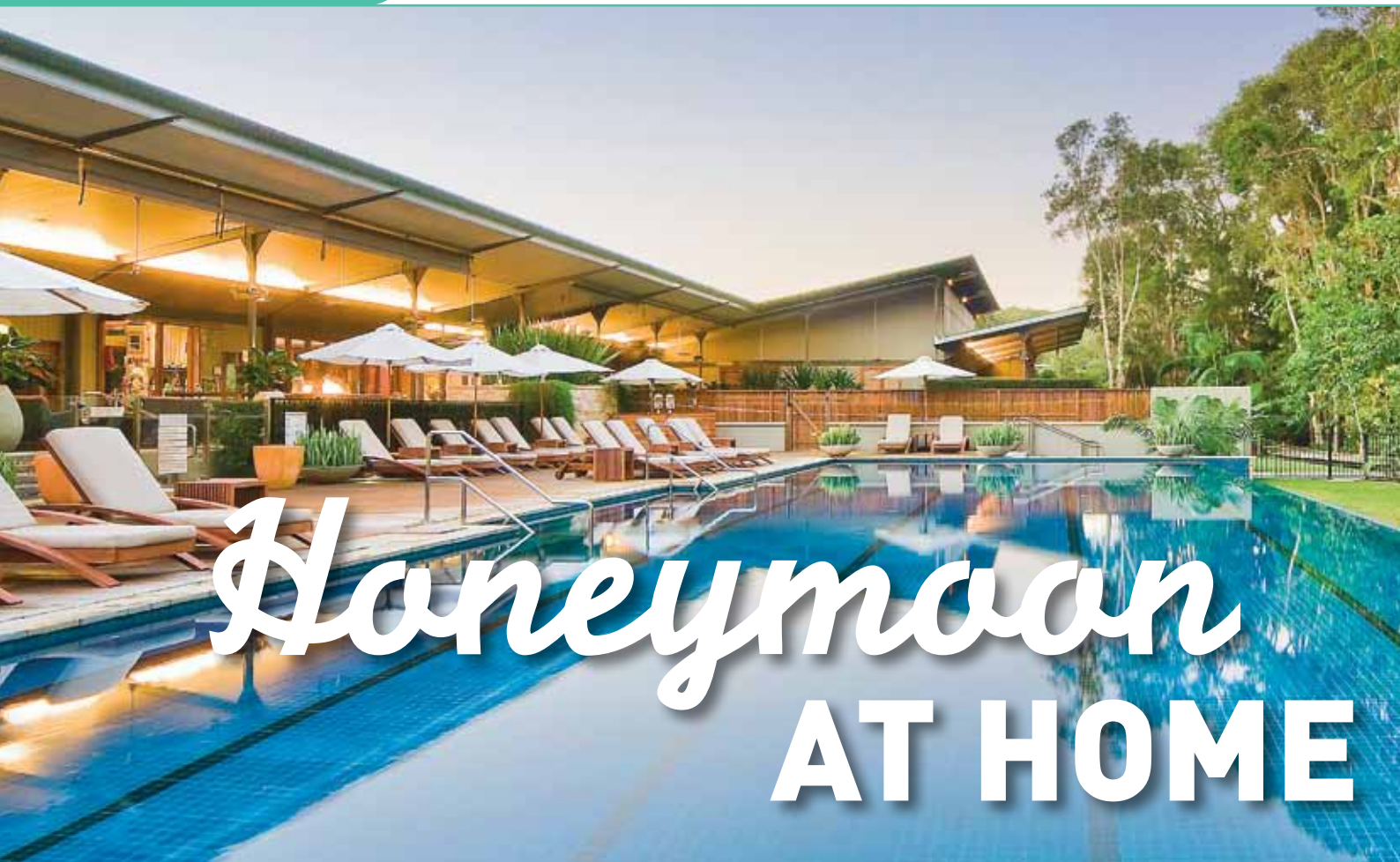
www.sabahtourism.com



SabahMalaysianBorneo







# Honeymoon AT HOME

**A**FTER exchanging vows, popping the champagne and cutting the cake, a holiday is the perfect excuse to take the edge off the wedding hype.

But there's no need to pack the passport, with plenty of options in Australia's backyard.

**Louise Wallace** took a closer look at the key contenders to bring you Australia's top honeymoon destinations.

## TROPICAL TRAVELS BYRON BAY

Byron Bay is a long time favourite with couples for its pristine beaches and tranquil rainforest hideaways. Throw mountain views, white beaches and renowned surfing spots into the mix, and it's easy to see why Byron Bay is a favourite among newlyweds.

There is no shortage of accommodation in this beachside paradise, with The Byron at Byron Resort and Spa earning a solid list of accolades for its unique blend of luxury and laid back beachside living. With couples massage, five-star dining and complimentary yoga, newlyweds are well catered for. The resort also offers a honeymoon package with three nights' accommodation, breakfast, a spa voucher, sparkling wine and cheese platter on arrival from \$1770 per couple.

Rae's on Wategos is another option which offers five-star accommodation priced from \$550 per night for a garden suite.

## COUNTRY CHARM DAYLESFORD

Quaint cottages, lush green surroundings and natural hot springs; Daylesford ticks all the boxes for newlyweds. Serving up a perfect blend of country meets city, the relaxed atmosphere is part of its charm but the impressive array of restaurants and cafes delivers a level of chic that makes it a worthy honeymoon destination.

Luxury accommodation is easy to come by with the Peppers Mineral Springs Hotel offering garden rooms and self-contained villas from \$695 and \$1220 respectively per couple for two nights. The Lake House also provides an idyllic backdrop for any honeymoon with rates leading in from \$275 per person including dinner and breakfast.

## NURTURE NATURE KAKADU

For couples who have had their fill of beaches and city escapes, Kakadu is worth a look in. Around three hours from Darwin, Kakadu's remote location is a major drawcard for honeymooners, but it's the wildlife and

natural landscapes that have earned this one such high acclaim.

Honeymooners won't find six-star luxury in the Top End, but the trade off is boutique accommodation with a five-star touch.

Wildman Wilderness Lodge, a private eco-retreat in the heart of Arnhem Land, is the pick of the bunch. With 10 luxury free-standing cabins and luxury safari tents, all accommodation features premium furnishings complemented by top notch cuisine sourced from local ingredients. The three night Wildman Kakadu Adventure includes three nights' accommodation, breakfast and three course dinner daily, a billabong cruise and full day Kakadu tour from \$2229 per couple.

AAT Kings also offers a range of tours including the Top End Highlights from \$2350 over six days which visits Litchfield National Park, Katherine Gorge and includes a tour of the rock art galleries of Ubirr.

## CULINARY CULTURE MARGARET RIVER

Romance and fine wine go hand in hand, and the Margaret River caters for both. Renowned for its delicious chardonnay, the region produces over 20% of Australia's premium wine which is a clear indication of the quality of the stuff. But this picturesque region





Byron at Byron



One&OnlyBeach House

also boasts equally delicious scenery with spectacular beaches, towering karri forests and rugged landscapes in every direction.

The Merribrook Retreat offers a three night honeymoon package including breakfast, a double massage treatment, flowers and chocolates on arrival, and late checkout from \$1155 per couple. The Losari Retreat also has a honeymoon package of its own including three nights' luxury accommodation, breakfast hamper, a bottle of local bubbly and a cheese platter from \$1320 per couple.

### SOUTHERN SOJOURN TASMANIA

With remote wilderness, temperate rainforest, and a selection of boutique wineries, Tasmania packs a punch for Australia's tiny island state. Between the scenery and culinary delights, there are also intimate accommodation options for loved up newlyweds such as Peppers Cradle Mountain Lodge which is billed as one of Australia's most iconic wilderness experiences.

Located 2 hours from Launceston and 1.5 hours from Devonport, it's nestled in the heart of Tasmania, but that's part of its charm with warm hospitality and spa treatments to rejuvenate after the big day. The resort offers a food and wine package

from \$784 over two nights including breakfast, a three course dinner and wine and cheese tasting for two.

Self-drive is the best way to see this gem, with tour operator Premier Travel Tasmania offering a number of self-drive options ranging from five-day sojourns to 18-day epic adventures so newlyweds can experience Tasmania on their own watch. Agents receive 10% commission on all bookings.

### SEASIDE SAFARI WHITSUNDAYS

With cloudless skies, endless white beaches and turquoise waters, the Whitsundays hosts more than 1500 weddings a year. Event planners know how to iron the creases out of any Whitsundays wedding, but this one is also a top location for any honeymoon or romantic getaway.

‘Couples massage, five star dining and complimentary yoga, the resort has lovebirds covered’

The Whitsundays is all about relaxing, and with a number of five-star resorts and coral reefs, it's not hard to understand why. Cruising and sailing are among the most popular options for newlyweds with a number of operators offering single and multi-day options.

Five-star accommodation tops the agenda, with One&Only Hayman Island resort serving up adults only five-star luxury complete with day excursions, hiking and experiences that can be savoured by two. Qualia also boasts 60 private pavilions which look onto the Coral Sea and surrounding Whitsunday Islands, with rates leading in from \$995 per night.



Margaret River. Alan Lam



Peppers Cradle Mountain



Lake House, Daylesford





Wedding chapel, Outrigger Resort Fiji

**A**USTRALIA'S wildlife and beaches lure travellers from across the globe, but the world is your oyster when it comes to tying the knot. With dozens of beachside destinations with luxury venues scattered across the globe, the options are endless, so **travelBulletin** spoke with a handful of operators to give your clients some inspiration.

### MALAYSIA

Langkawi has been a longtime favourite with honeymooners over the past decade, but Tourism Malaysia's Sydney director Roslan Abdullah says the weddings market is booming as Australians catch on to the destination's diversity as a destination.

"Previously we were best known as a honeymoon destination but increasingly couples are choosing to get married in Malaysia as well," he told **travelBulletin**. And with a growing number of resorts offering wedding packages and the exchange rate faring well against the Malaysian Ringgit, he expects the trend to continue.

The Pangkor Laut Resort organises ceremonies on the Emerald Bay, complete with a bridal bouquet, bottle of champagne and five course seafood dinner on the beach. Meanwhile, the Cameron Highlands Resort

takes a slightly different spin, offering a classic colonial style wedding on the terrace with a cocktail reception and banquet in the grand ballroom.

### THAILAND

With a surge in wedding packages hitting the market in recent years, more Australians are exchanging vows in Thailand.

Viva! Holidays covers packages for all tastes and budgets, from three-star events to lavish ceremonies. Prices depend on the venue, but the cr me of the crop is the SALA Sumui Resort and Spa ceremony package including celebrant, floral arrangements, wedding bouquet, photography and a couples' treatment from \$3315. Naka in Phuket opened its doors late last year, featuring floor to ceiling wrap around glass and its an outdoor wedding chapel overlooking the Andaman Coast.

But for couples who want to combine Thai traditions with a hint of Western culture, the Sarojin Western Wedding Package includes a personal wedding planner, bouquet, wedding cake and ceremony, monks or celebrant and a private breakfast from \$3095.

### MALDIVES

With crystal blue seas and remote island retreats, the Maldives is the perfect clich e.

While the 11 hour flight from Sydney is harder to swallow than slighter flight times for Bali and Thailand, the level of luxury makes up for it. It also provides the perfect excuse to tag a honeymoon on the trip.

Club Med Finolhu Villas is the latest addition, slated to open later this month. Moving away from Club Med's focus as an all-inclusive family resort, the adults-only property paves the way for a new direction for the company. The 22 beach villas and 30 lagoon villas have private pools and terraces, breakfast and afternoon tea served in villas, not to mention personalised butler service.

Minor Hotel Group also has a handful of properties in the Maldives including the Huvafen Fushi Resort complete with glass bottom bungalows.

### FIJI

Fijians epitomise laid back living, but they also know how to put on a good show.

Many key resorts are now hosting more than 200 weddings a year with per event size figures also gaining momentum as the quality increases.

Outrigger's Castaway Island Fiji resort offers an Ultimate Fiji Beach Wedding Package including four nights' island bure accommodation for the bride and groom, a banquet wedding reception for 20 people, a family choir and wedding celebrant and all the add ons for \$6980.



Pangkor Laut Malaysia



Mac Qin, Maldives



The Sarojin

# DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

Romance doesn't always involve long beachside walks or relaxing poolside ventures. Getaways that stray from the norm are often the most memorable, so here are a few options for clients after something a little different.



## Heli-wedding

For clients hoping to tie the knot with a twist, an alpine heli-wedding should do the trick. The Rees in Queenstown offers a complete package which takes a small bridal party up to the Remarkables or Cecil Peak for an alpine wedding ceremony. Starting from NZ\$3550, the package includes two nights' accommodation, breakfast and wine, a celebrant, wedding photographer and return helicopter flight.

## Glamping on the road

Glamping is winning fame as a laid back luxury holiday, but Airstream Adventures adds a bit of retro chic to the mix with tailored glamping tours in a 1930s state-of-the-art caravan. Newlyweds can opt for a pop-up campsite in which the caravan is picked up and dropped off daily from \$675 per day, while chauffer driven airstream tours lead in from \$1275 per day. All agent bookings receive a 10% commission.

[Airstreamadventures.com.au](http://Airstreamadventures.com.au)



LincolnFowler,  
Tourism Australia



## Hang in the treetops

The Sunshine Coast Hinterland hardly needs an introduction, but Secrets on the Lake offers something a little different. Newlyweds can stay in individual artisan treehouses perched high in the hinterland on stilts. Polished trunks and giant planks are used in every part of the building's structure other than the sunken double spa. Priced from \$215 per night, all agent bookings receive 15% commission.

[www.secretsonthelake.com.au](http://www.secretsonthelake.com.au)

## Set Sail

Cruising has boomed in recent years and cruise liners have thought of everything including onboard weddings.

RCI has a number of wedding packages with prices varying depending on the vessel, while P&O Cruises has been operating its Ceremonies at Sea program for four years running. Including priority boarding, a dedicated venue, flowers, photographer, sparkling wine and wedding cake, prices lead in from \$1320.



## Antarctica

As the world's largest desert Antarctica isn't the typical honeymoon destination, but more newlyweds are heading south after exchanging vows. Wholesalers including Peregrine, Chimu Adventures and Adventure World offer a range of packages including Peregrine's 12-day Antarctic Explorer which covers Ushuaia, Drake Passage, the South Shetland Islands and Antarctica from \$8100 per person.

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## CELEBRITY SPOTTING



Send your celebrity pics to [celebrity@travelbulletin.com.au](mailto:celebrity@travelbulletin.com.au) and keep your eye out for the next issue of *travelBulletin*.

With three Emmys and four Golden Globes up her sleeve, Claire Danes hardly needs an introduction. So it's no surprise that Swagman Africa founder Wayne Hamilton wasted no time cosying up for a picture with Danes and hubby Hugh Dancy at Skukuza airport while they were on a break from their filming schedule.

## FUN FACTS

Did you know...

The shortest flight that you can buy tickets for lasts two minutes and runs from the Scottish island of Westray to Papa Westray.

**Around €3000 is tossed into Rome's Trevi Fountain every day. The money is collected every night and donated to charity.**

Singapore Airlines is the second largest buyer of Dom Perignon champagne in the world.

**It's estimated that a plane is taking off somewhere in the world every three seconds.**

Around 300 people get married in Vegas every day.

**A Boeing 747 is made up of six million parts.**

One in eight jobs in the US depends on the travel and tourism industries.

**British Airways passengers consume around six tonnes of caviar each year.**

## Where in the World?

Any idea where you'd be standing if you were taking this picture? If you've got any clue, drop us a line at [comps@travelbulletin.com.au](mailto:comps@travelbulletin.com.au) for your chance to win a double movie ticket. You've gotta be in it to win it!



## KEEPING IT CLEAN

Now here's a nifty way of dodging those hexy hotel washing bills. The Scrubba wash bag – said to be the world's smallest washing machine – is fitted with a flexible washboard which produces a machine quality clean in just a couple of minutes. Developed by Aussie entrepreneur Ash Newland on a trip to Mt Kilimanjaro, the Scrubba was first designed with backpackers in mind but has been snapped up by campers, cruise lovers, and intrepid travellers right across the globe. You can pick one up for \$64.95 with some of the proceeds donated to charity.

■ [www.thescrubba.com.au](http://www.thescrubba.com.au)



## IN THE HOT SEAT



**As Silversea Cruises' GM and director of sales & marketing Australasia, Karen Christensen is an avid cruiser. But she's also not afraid to venture off the beaten track, as *travelBulletin* discovers.**

**What is your career highlight?** Christening the *Silver Discoverer* in Singapore earlier this year. It's the first Silversea ship to be operating in the Asia Pacific year round.

**Top travel tip?** Give yourself time to recover from long haul flights.

**What is your favourite holiday spot?** Tuscany.

**Most exotic destination you've visited?**

The Taj Mahal; it's a unique travel experience.

**One thing you can't leave home without?** My Bose headphones to cut out noise.

**What's the item you most commonly leave at home?** My family, too often.

**Most embarrassing travel story?** Trusting a friend in a local restaurant in Shanghai... It really wasn't chicken!

**What three features do you look for when choosing a hotel?** Luxury, location and delivery of superior customer service.

**What three features do you look for when choosing a hotel?** Luxury, location and delivery of superior customer service.

**Favourite piece of luggage?** Anything Tumi.

**Who is one person you wish you could sit next to on a plane?** Helen Mirren.

**One food you would like to see added to an airline menu?** Toasted ham and cheese sandwiches.

**Favourite childhood memory?** Watching the ocean from our caravan on my first family holiday to Shellharbour.

**Best part of your job?** My team and perhaps the Silversea brand.

**And the worst?** Budgets.

**What's next on your travel agenda?** Monaco for meetings.

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