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**AS THE LEADING NETWORK
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A NOD TO THE PAST AND AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

Everyone loves to celebrate a special birthday, and turning 40 is an important milestone in anyone's book. But as delighted as we are to mark this anniversary, at Travellers Choice we are even more excited about what lies ahead.

In 2017, after four decades of championing individual freedom and cooperative strength, no network is better at bringing people together for a common cause. I believe we are unrivalled when it comes to supporting the needs of independent travel agents. And as our company's sole shareholders, our members know they personally benefit from our group's ongoing financial success. That is why Travellers Choice will continue to thrive in a travel industry sure to become ever more competitive.

On behalf of all Travellers Choice members, 'thank you' to all the friends who have travelled with us over the past 40 years. We look forward to working with you to seize the wonderful opportunities that lie ahead!



Christian Hunter | Managing Director

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40 YEARS
1977 - 2017

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travelBulletin

APRIL 2017

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WEDDINGS & HONEYMOONS

TREKKING HOLIDAYS



AROUND THE WORLD

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CRYSTAL SYMPHONY 2018 WORLD CRUISE

From Africa to New Zealand, Central America to the Caribbean - this World Cruise voyage, which includes a grand celebration* for fellow World Cruisers in Sydney, Australia, will be a global journey to remember.

To/From Cape Town to Fort Lauderdale
Dates 07 Jan - 30 Apr 2018
Days 114 days
Fares from US\$41,800pp



CRYSTAL SERENITY 2018 WORLD CRUISE

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To/From Los Angeles to Rome
Dates 23 Jan - 16 May 2018
Days 112 days
Fares from US\$49,635pp



WORLD CRUISE SEGMENT - AUSTRALIA

Time-poor clients will enjoy the World Cruise lifestyle on this voyage segment. From the pristine natural landscapes of the southern coast to the sophistication of Sydney, see the Twelve Apostles and the charismatic charms of Tasmania.

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Dates 05 Feb - 17 Feb 2018
Days 12 days
Fares from US\$4,535pp

For the first time in Crystal's history, Crystal Symphony and Crystal Serenity will each embark on World Cruises in 2018 - offering travellers **four separate global itineraries** aboard award-winning ships.

Guests will be given the unprecedented ability to begin on Crystal Symphony then switch to Crystal Serenity in Sydney for a journey through Asia, India, and Holy Land; or set sail on Crystal Serenity before joining Crystal Symphony in Sydney for a South Pacific route to Fort Lauderdale. During the ships' Sydney rendezvous on 17 February, full World Cruise guests will be treated to a spectacular gala celebration*.

Ranging from 97 to 129 days, the innovative voyages will travel to a combined **111 destinations in 45 countries, featuring 16 maiden calls and 50 overnights.**

Karen Christensen

Karen Christensen
 Senior Vice President
 & Managing Director
 Australia & New Zealand



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TERMS & CONDITIONS. Book Now Fares are cruise-only per guest in U.S. dollars, based on double occupancy, apply to new bookings only, and include taxes, fees and port charges. Fares shown are for Crystal Symphony World Cruise 1 (8201-8208), Crystal Serenity World Cruise 2 (8302-8307) and Crystal Symphony World Cruise Segment 8203, vary by stateroom category and are correct at time of printing. World Cruise 3 and World Cruise 4 Fares available on request. Solo Fares are available upon request. All offers may not be combinable with other promotions, apply to first two full-fare guests in stateroom or suite, are capacity-controlled and subject to availability and may be withdrawn or changed at any time without notice. All itineraries, fares, programs and policies are subject to change. FULL World Cruise guests sailing on Crystal Symphony and Crystal Serenity will enjoy a World Cruise Gala Celebration in Sydney on 17 February 2018. For complete Terms & Conditions, visit crystalcruises.com. ©2017 Crystal Cruises, LLC. Ships' registry: Bahamas.

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Touring is alive
and well

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**From the publisher**

Bruce Piper

THIS month's *travelBulletin* cover story about coach touring has proven to be particularly timely, with the recent launch of a new partnership between newspaper giant Fairfax and Wendy Wu Tours looking set to give further impetus to the sector. Promoting trips to China, the new "Traveller Tours" offered by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* invite readers to take part in a Wendy Wu trip which features participants such as Wendy Wu herself and Fairfax *Traveller* editor Anthony Dennis.

The initiative is believed to have already seen at least one coach-load sold – and keen observers are closely watching to see whether the partnership develops. After all, Asia is just one part of the globe and there are plenty of other operators who would surely be keen to leverage the media clout of Fairfax to promote their trips in destinations such as Europe and the Americas. However Fairfax is walking a fine line, and likely treading carefully, because of its relationships with other suppliers who also happen to be big advertisers. However this develops, it is a clear reflection that contrary to perceptions in some quarters, coach touring is alive and well – and has the potential to provide a strong revenue stream for agents prepared to make the most of it.

To that end we have also included in this issue our inaugural Touring Guide, featuring a range of suppliers with the aim of providing an easy-to-reference guide for travel consultants when recommending this style of travel to their clients. More than 40 operators are taking part, and we expect this will become a popular annual *travelBulletin* feature.

Meanwhile it's April already, which means we are all once again in the throes of National Travel Industry Awards voting. This year the Business Publishing Group is thrilled to be part of the judging panel for the NTIA, with our general manager Christian Schweitzer taking part alongside the other eminent judges who will evaluate the various presentations. As always NTIA season is very busy, and after receiving a record number of nominations and a new, significantly larger venue in the form of Sydney's new International Convention Centre, the awards this year promise to be even bigger and better. Congratulations to all of the nominees – we look forward to the announcement of the finalists and the judging process in the lead-up to the gala night of nights on Saturday 22 July.

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Ian McMahon's perspective

AUSTRALIAN governments, state and federal of all political stripes, are in the midst of a huge infrastructure spending boom, splurging billions of our dollars on roads and public transport.

Good for them. We should be undertaking much-needed investment in the present and future requirements of our expanding population. Besides, this investment is generating thousands of jobs to take up the slack created by the end of the mining boom and the continued erosion of our manufacturing base. In the face of government indifference, neglect and, in some instances, downright vandalism.

But why are our ports missing out?

The economic case for such investment is overwhelming. The soaring growth of Australian cruise passenger numbers, at an average 20% per annum, has smashed through the million passengers a year mark and provided the momentum for credible forecasts of two million passengers a year within the next five years.

The economic benefits of ships disgorging those passengers to spend their money in our ports – and that includes an increasing number of regional coastal ports in addition to our capital cities – is too obvious to need spelling out.

Of course, in terms of the urgent infrastructure needs of 'our ports', I mean principally the country's major gateway

of Sydney. A 21st century terminal with decent passenger handling facilities at Australian cruising's marquee attraction is the sine qua non of continued expansion of our vibrant cruise industry.

The sad fact is that existing facilities are at virtual gridlock with large vessels at times having to ferry passengers ashore because of the lack of berths. If the NSW government continues to neglect the need for serious investment in new Sydney passenger handling infrastructure (at Botany if necessary) it could choke off the growth that has so far contributed so much to the state's prosperity.

Irony of bitter ironies, in exchange for second rate facilities, Sydney levies some of the highest port charges in the world. For example, I calculate Sydney's \$30 head tax would have cost *Ovation of the Seas* around \$140,000 every time she called at Sydney during her recent season Down Under.

While such cash windfalls may provide temporary joy to those who collect them, they would be foolish to allow a cargo cult mentality to blind them to longer term issues. The longer they dither and stall on infrastructure, the more the equatorial port of Singapore, with its superb cruise terminal, will loom as an attractive option for cruise itinerary planners.

Come on, Australian governments (especially in NSW) – get your acts together!

Virgin into China

VIRGIN Australia has unveiled its first route to Greater China, with the planned debut of non-stop Melbourne-Hong Kong services in July this year. The carrier will operate five weekly A330-200 flights between the cities, with the announcement following draft Australian Competition and Consumer Commission approval of VA's wide-ranging pact with major shareholder HNA Aviation. The new service will feed guests from Hainan Airlines, Hong Kong Airlines, Capital Airlines and Tianjin Airlines into Virgin's domestic and trans-Tasman network, and will also take Australian customers onwards to 13 destinations in mainland China.

Fares are now on sale for the new service, with CEO John Borghetti describing China as a "key pillar of our international strategy, allowing us to tap into Australia's fastest growing and most valuable inbound travel market". However there may be some storm clouds on the horizon, with Air China warning the ACCC of the negative impact on competition for feeder traffic within Australia – particularly given the longstanding alignment between Qantas and China Eastern Airlines. Air China also argued the decade-long authorization sought by Virgin Australia was too long. The interim ACCC approval allows the carrier to market the route, with a final decision expected in the coming months prior to the launch.

EK lounge access

EMIRATES earlier this year introduced the ability for travellers to purchase access to its lounges at Dubai International Airport, and last month rolled this out further to much of its global lounge network, including

BUSINESS MONITOR

OUTBOUND MARKET

Top 10 destinations, January 2017

Destination	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Dec 16/ Jan 17	Trend Jan 16/ Jan 17
	000	000	000	%	%
New Zealand	113.2	114.7	123.6	+0.4	+3.6
Indonesia	97.2	96.1	91.5	-0.5	-4.7
USA	88.6	92.5	74.4	-0.3	+2.6
Japan	31.0	30.6	49.0	+0.1	+5.9
China	41.1	42.2	41.0	+2.0	+11.5
Thailand	42.4	43.4	37.6	+0.3	-3.1
India	27.6	27.4	36.2	+0.2	+7.3
Singapore	33.5	35.5	34.2	+1.4	+10.8
Malaysia	21.8	21.8	29.3	+0.8	+1.1
Fiji	31.3	31.6	27.6	+1.1	+7.3
All outbound	836.4	851.9	771.3	+0.4	+3.1

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

INBOUND MARKET

Top 10 sources, January 2017

Source	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Dec 16/ Jan 17	Trend Jan 16/ Jan 17
	000	000	000	%	%
China	109.0	111.5	166.1	+1.4	+11.5
New Zealand	113.2	114.5	87.6	+0.1	+3.6
UK	60.2	60.9	73.6	+0.4	+2.4
USA	62.0	62.7	59.5	-0.0	+10.7
South Korea	25.3	25.9	32.7	+0.6	+10.5
Japan	36.7	37.2	28.8	+1.4	+13.6
Hong Kong	22.0	22.3	22.0	+1.8	+12.8
Germany	18.0	18.3	20.7	+0.9	+10.1
Singapore	34.9	34.2	19.1	-1.6	-1.3
India	22.8	22.4	17.9	-0.2	+15.2
All inbound	713.0	716.7	725.8	+0.3	+8.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

MAIN DOMESTIC ROUTES

Top 10 domestic city pairs at January 2017

City pair	Passengers YE Jan 16 (000)	Passengers YE Jan 17 (000)	% change
Melbourne-Sydney	8,648.5	8,915.4	+3.1
Brisbane-Sydney	4,500.6	4,668.4	+3.7
Brisbane-Melbourne	3,368.5	3,501.0	+3.9
Gold Coast-Sydney	2,641.0	2,697.8	+2.2
Adelaide-Melbourne	2,320.5	2,404.1	+3.6
Melbourne-Perth	2,136.9	2,076.1	-2.8
Gold Coast-Melbourne	1,825.7	1,974.3	+8.1
Adelaide-Sydney	1,840.4	1,874.4	+1.9
Perth-Sydney	1,759.3	1,754.0	-0.3
Hobart-Melbourne	1,496.2	1,568.8	+4.9

Source: BITRE

its Australian facilities in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. Unlike the situation in Dubai, where any member of the Skywards loyalty program can now pay to access the lounge (even the entry-level Blue members), in overseas lounges the option is applicable to Platinum and Gold frequent flyers who can pay US\$100 to have additional companions, over and above their allocation, enter the lounge.

While the carrier said the move had been implemented in response to increasing demand from customers for guest access to the lounges, it will also provide a welcome fillip to the Emirates bottom line, with the entry fee payable by credit card at the lounge check-in counters. Children aged under 12 can access the lounges for US\$50, while infants are free. The announcement was flagged in an industry update which also detailed the removal of several meal options from Emirates economy class, including low-calorie, vegetarian lacto-ovo, and vegetarian oriental meals.

Air NZ 787s to Adelaide

AIR New Zealand continued to expand its 'Better Way to Fly' strategy for the Americas last month, with the planned deployment of wide-bodied Boeing 787-9 aircraft on some flights between Adelaide and Auckland. Announced with a fanfare alongside South Australian tourism minister Leon Bignell, the move will boost peak season capacity by up to 23% as well as introducing new Business Premier and Premium Economy options to the route for the first time. Air NZ chief commercial officer, Cam Wallace, told *travelBulletin* the carrier was seeing strong demand in both directions for the South Australian route, with the new service also

DESTINATION AUSTRALIA SUCCESS



TOURISM Australia (TA) hosted about 300 delegates last month in Sydney at the Destination Australia 2017 conference, with TA MD John O'Sullivan hinting at a 2030 visitor spending target of \$230 billion. He also outlined a switch in marketing strategy from 'demographic' to 'psychographic' profiling as well as a stronger focus on Australia's nature and wildlife in 2018/19. The event included a panel discussion about how Australian tourism operators can make the most of the huge Asian opportunity, with participants (pictured) including Pip Harrison, Tourism Australia executive general manager international; Andy Jiang, TA country manager China; Nishant Kashikar, TA country manager India; Scott Walker, TA country manager South Korea; and LC Tan, TA regional business events director North Asia.

bringing Americans directly into the state rather than transiting via NSW or Victoria.

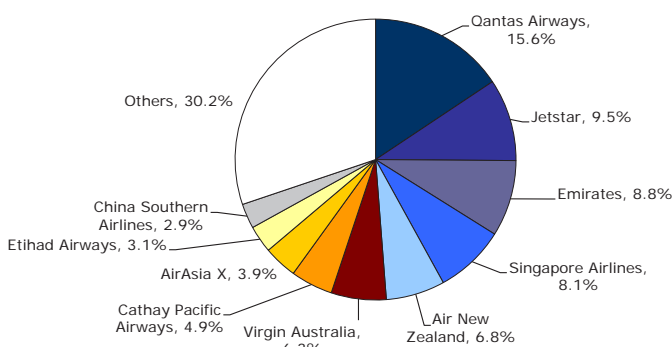
The Better Way to Fly campaign aims to encourage more Australians to choose Air New Zealand for long-haul travel, by connecting via AKL through to Vancouver, San Francisco, Houston, Los Angeles and Buenos Aires. Interestingly the deployment

sees a significant differentiation on the route between Air New Zealand and its Tasman alliance partner, Virgin Australia. It's understood that the previous fully harmonized "Seats to suit" offering has also been modified, with Air New Zealand now only offering its "The Works" fully inclusive product on flights operated on its own metal.

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNATIONAL AIR MARKET SHARE

International passengers by major airline – year ended December 2016



Source: BITRE

DOMESTIC AIR MARKET – January 2017

	Jan 16	Jan 17	Growth (%)	Yr to Jan 16	Yr to Jan 17	Growth (%)
Total pax carried	4.82m	4.96m	+2.8	57.66m	59.07m	+2.4
Revenue pax kms (RPK)	5.81bn	5.96bn	+2.7	68.04bn	69.49bn	+2.1
Avail seat kms (ASK)	7.54bn	7.53bn	-0.1	88.79bn	89.05bn	+0.3
Load factor (%)	77.0	79.2	+2.2*	76.6	78.0	+1.4*
Aircraft trips (000)	50.6	50.9	+0.7	634.6	639.2	+0.7

Source: BITRE * Percentage points difference

DOMESTIC ON TIME PERFORMANCE – February 2017

	Arrivals on Time		Departures on Time		Cancellations	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Jetstar	4,604	75.8	4,472	73.6	125	2.0
Qantas	7,276	87.6	7,437	89.6	86	1.0
QantasLink	7,953	84.8	8,030	85.7	251	2.6
REX	4,517	79.4	4,751	83.5	32	0.6
Virgin Australia	9,210	85.9	9,394	87.6	241	2.2
All Airlines	35,402	82.8	35,924	84.0	781	1.8

Source: BITRE

QF sales restructure

QANTAS last month announced a significant restructure of its sales organisation, with Vanessa Hudson to take leadership of a combined domestic and international sales team as Executive Manager Sales and Distribution. Hudson, who relocated to Australia last year after several years heading up QF operations in the Americas, will have Qantas-wide responsibilities for sales – but the carrier will continue to maintain separate CEOs and CFOs for its international and domestic businesses. Other Qantas Airlines-wide roles under the restructure include Paul Jones as Executive Manager Customer and Digital Strategy; Nandor Locher as Head of Qantas Direct; Phil Capps as Head of Product Planning and Development; and Helen Gray as Head of Food and Beverage.

The change will see the departure of Qantas veteran Steve Limbrick, who stepped down on 1st April as Executive Manager of Global Sales, Development and Partnerships. Limbrick is well known to the travel industry, having worked in a variety of Qantas roles over the last 30 years after joining the carrier as a sales consultant in Alice Springs. “Steve has been a huge part of Qantas for a long time and we will all miss his engaging approach, his deep experiences, his energy and enthusiasm and his sense of humour,” Qantas International CEO Gareth Evans told staff.

Helloworld adding Travel

HELLOWORLD travel agent members and franchisees have welcomed a proposed name change for the company, which will be voted on by shareholders at a General Meeting on 10 April. While the company's

HLO stock exchange moniker won't change, it will become formally known as Helloworld Travel Limited “to more accurately reflect the business conducted by the company”. According to the formal notice of the meeting, “Helloworld Travel Limited will have greater resonance by immediately identifying what the company does within the company's name”.

Interestingly, following the announcement a number of *travelBulletin* readers have contacted us saying that in the early days of the relaunch of Helloworld from its former identity as Jetset Travelworld they made this exact suggestion.

Marriott Tasmania

THE growth in Tasmanian tourism in recent years has been further buoyed with the announcement that global hotel giant Marriott International will manage a new 128-room hotel in Hobart, under it's the Luxury Collection brand. The property, due to open next year, is being developed by Melbourne's Schwartz family as part of a mixed-use project in Parliament Square in the Hobart CBD. It will be the city's first new five-star property since Federal Group opened the Henry James Art Hotel in 2004.

According to a recent analysis Hobart is now Australia's third best performing CBD hotel market after Sydney and Melbourne, with international visitation to Tasmania up 13% last year. While one factor in the growth has been the success of the world famous Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), Marriott International vice president for Australia and NZ, Sean Hunt, said he believed the new hotel would also create its own demand. “We have 100 million loyalty members, which will be the jet engine behind this hotel,” he enthused.

France campaign

THE always innovative French tourist board in Australia, Atout France, looks set to enlist some star power to reinvigorate the market, which dropped by about 20% last year following the attacks in Paris and Nice. A major campaign is being planned, with Aussie Hollywood star Russell Crowe and producer Baz Luhrmann already having signed up. The result of a special funding initiative, the promotion is expected to appear on Australian TV and in cinemas in September this year in partnership with Air France, with the celebrities proclaiming “J'aime Paris” in front of iconic destination sites.

It will aim to show solidarity after the Paris tragedies, position the French capital as a fun, cultural and lively city, and make tourists want to experience the Parisian Art de Vivre. It's the brainchild of the irrepressible Atout France director for Australia, Patrick Benhamou, who hinted that he was hoping to attract other major talents to participate. “We have very strong indications from Hugh Jackman, Naomi Watts and Delta Goodrem,” he said, adding “If needed, I will go and fetch Elle McPherson myself!”

ATPI consolidates

GLOBAL travel management company ATPI has announced the promotion of Lesley Owen to head up its operations in Australia. ATPI acquired Voyager Travel in 2014, giving it a beachhead in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, and further expanded last year when it purchased Plan B Travel along with New Zealand-based Business World Travel. Australia is a clear focus for the company which has 70 offices globally, with ATPI chief operating officer Peter Muller relocating

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNET AGENCY MARKET SHARES

Feb 2017, compared with Jan 2017

Rank Position	Visits Share	Relative Diff	Rank
Websites	Feb 17	Feb to Jan	Jan 16
Webjet Australia	16.35	+4.08	1
Expedia Australia	11.35	-6.74	2
Skyscanner Australia	9.18	+1.31	3
Wotif.com	7.86	+9.0	4
Flight Centre	6.29	-3.62	5
Velocity Frequent Flyer	3.49	+20.47	6
Luxury Escapes	2.64	+2.25	7
Lastminute.com.au	2.39	-0.48	8
Cheap Flights Aus & NZ	2.16	+3.38	9
I Want That Flight!	1.81	+21.31	10

Source: Hitwise, a division of Connexity

INTERNATIONAL AIR ROUTES

Top 10 city pairs [at December 2016]

City pair	Passengers	Passengers	% of	% change
	YE Dec 15	YE Dec 16	total	16/15
Auckland-Sydney	1,540,790	1,604,944	4.3	+4.2
Singapore-Sydney	1,461,382	1,455,015	3.9	-0.4
Singapore-Melbourne	1,214,169	1,362,099	3.6	+12.2
Auckland-Melbourne	1,149,693	1,193,283	3.2	+3.8
Singapore-Perth	1,061,213	1,124,742	3.0	+6.0
Hong Kong-Sydney	993,075	1,075,353	2.9	+8.3
Auckland-Brisbane	968,140	964,097	2.6	-0.4
Los Angeles-Sydney	909,663	906,403	2.4	-0.4
Denpasar-Perth	857,009	896,951	2.4	+4.7
Kuala Lumpur-Melb	825,195	828,845	2.2	+0.4
Top 10 city pairs	10,980,329	11,411,702	30.3	+3.9
Other city pairs	23,886,320	26,205,051	69.7	+9.7
ALL CITY PAIRS	34,866,649	37,616,753	100.0	+7.9

Source: BITRE

SHARE PRICES

at 22 March 2017

Flight Centre (FLT)	\$28.88
Helloworld (HLO)	\$3.95
Webjet (WEB)	\$11.06
Qantas (QAN)	\$3.84
Virgin Australia (VAH)	\$0.195
Ardent Leisure (AAD)	\$1.64
Air New Zealand (AIZ)	\$2.09
Auckland International Airport (AIA)	\$6.36
Sydney Airport (SYD)	\$6.38
Corporate Travel Management (CTD)	\$19.37
Cover-More Insurance (CVO)	\$1.945
Regional Express (REX)	\$0.92
Sealink (SLK)	\$4.40
Mantra Group Limited (MTR)	\$2.68

MAGELLAN CORPORATE FORUM



THE Magellan Travel Group held its first ever Corporate Forum in Sydney last month, and it was such a success that it's going to become an annual event. Members participated at no charge, and as well as hearing from key supplier partners were treated to a behind the scenes tour of the Qantas operations centre. Attendees included several new Magellan members, with representatives of Maxims Travel and CPE Travel present along with Encore Journeys, established in 2013 by David Hummerston and Leon Burman after they sold their former business etm group to Corporate Travel Management some years earlier.

Pictured at the Qantas Integrated Operations Centre are, from left: Kathleen Nicholson, TTFN Travel; Danny Cahalan, Solve Travel; Marnie Turner, Rheom Travel; Kathy Gambell, Encore Journeys; Emmily Strong, CPE Travel; Alison Lee, Complete Travel Services; Simone Kaye, Worldwide Travel; Scott Darlow, Magellan Travel Group; and Greg McCarthy, Platinum Travel Corporation.

here earlier this year. Owen, who has been with ATPI for some years and prior to that held several sales roles at Qantas, Virgin Australia and United Airlines, will report to Muller, and following the integration of Plan B David McHardy has been appointed

to head up ATPI's operations in Western Australia, reporting to Owen. Muller said he looked forward to working with Owen and McHardy "as we continue to realise our ambitions for future growth in Australia and New Zealand".

Travel Daily HEADLINES

- 21 Feb** Spicers moves on Sydney
- 21 Feb** EY, JU alliance draft nod
- 22 Feb** HLO profit turnaround
- 22 Feb** InterCon Syd \$200m reno
- 23 Feb** Flight Centre profit warning
- 23 Feb** Qantas H1 profits slump
- 24 Feb** VA earmarks Beijing route
- 24 Feb** CTM profits surge 28%
- 27 Feb** Travel Partners' sales up
- 27 Feb** Luxury Collection for Tas
- 28 Feb** Queen Liz calls Aus home
- 28 Feb** Star Ratings Aus buckles
- 01 Mar** Malindo Air planning BNE
- 01 Mar** Air NZ boosts Cathay pact
- 02 Mar** Intrepid executive shuffle
- 02 Mar** Beijing Capital to Sydney
- 03 Mar** Destination Network EOI
- 03 Mar** Amadeus to expand rail
- 06 Mar** Thornton leads Intrepid
- 06 Mar** Airport service improves
- 07 Mar** StayWell taps into China
- 07 Mar** Gladiator to push France
- 08 Mar** Industry celebrates women
- 08 Mar** QF Classic Hotel Rewards
- 09 Mar** VA, HNA alliance backed
- 09 Mar** ANZ aviation's one-voice
- 10 Mar** EK faces 'gathering storm'
- 10 Mar** QF unveils BNE Lounge
- 13 Mar** Record NTIA nominations
- 13 Mar** BA business class boost
- 14 Mar** Celebrity Edge revealed
- 14 Mar** Departures trending up again
- 15 Mar** Air NZ 787-9s to Adelaide
- 15 Mar** IVS shows strong growth
- 16 Mar** Australian tourism on a roll
- 16 Mar** Egypt showing recovery
- 17 Mar** WeHo insists ignore ban
- 17 Mar** Google Trips revolution
- 20 Mar** EK lounge access expands
- 20 Mar** QF start-up project debuts
- 21 Mar** Jetstar in bed with Airbnb
- 21 Mar** Virgin confirms MEL/HKG

AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS

International passenger through Australia's major international airports - December 2016

Airport	Passengers YE Dec 15	Passengers YE Dec 16	% of total	% change 16/15
Sydney	13,911,228	15,111,977	40.2	+8.6
Melbourne	8,859,316	9,642,586	25.6	+8.8
Brisbane	5,238,522	5,449,744	14.5	+4.0
Perth	4,192,833	4,379,175	11.6	+4.4
Gold Coast	942,967	1,093,558	2.9	+16.0
Adelaide	871,338	924,179	2.5	+6.1
Cairns	545,733	642,293	1.7	+17.7
Darwin	262,787	272,069	0.7	+3.5
Townsville ^A	11,123	41,479	0.1	272.9
Canberra ^B	n/a	23,771	0.1	n/a
Sunshine Coast ^C	13,598	17,506	0.0	+28.7
Norfolk Island	11,841	9,895	0.0	-16.4
Port Hedland ^D	5,313	8,521	0.0	60.4
All Airports	34,866,649	37,616,753	100.0	+7.9

^AScheduled services recommenced September 2015 ^BSeasonal services only
^CScheduled services recommenced September 2016 ^DScheduled services recommenced April 2015

ATAS ACCREDITED LOCATIONS

at 20 Feb 2017

New South Wales	993
Victoria	711
Queensland	596
Western Australia	292
South Australia	227
Australian Capital Territory	49
Tasmania	41
ACT	49
Northern Territory	22
TOTAL	2,931

Got something to say?

We're all ears, so share your thoughts at:

haveyoursay@travelbulletin.com.au



Steve Jones' Say

WE ALL followed the recent UK inquests into the death of 38 people on a Tunisian beach with a mixture of anger, heartache and disbelief.

And while there was only one true protagonist that terrible June day in 2015, the role of the travel industry was also the subject of intense scrutiny during the distressing seven-week hearing.

Could the industry be held accountable for sending tourists to Sousse in the first place, a town just 150km from Tunis where, three months earlier, 22 people perished in a terrorist attack?

For the families caught up in the Imperial Marhaba hotel massacre, the answer was, and remains, a resounding yes, despite the coroner ruling TUI, the owner of Thomson Holidays, could not be blamed.

Survivors and relatives disagree and will now take civil action.

So what to make of it all?

After the Tunis attack, and prior to Sousse, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office warned of a 'high risk of terrorism' in Tunisia. But it stopped short of advising against travel, as did our own Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Both Governments raised levels after Sousse.

The key question is whether more could

have been done at the consultation and booking stage to alert customers of that 'high risk'?

There can be no doubt the answer is yes.

Evidence given by several survivors at the inquest suggest they received no information whatsoever about the potential risk when they booked their Tunisian holiday. That needs to change.

‘Regardless of the action against TUI, what is clear to me is that an additional conversation must start taking place between agent and consumer’

Regardless of the action against TUI, what is clear to me is that an additional conversation must start taking place between agent and consumer.

That conversation will require agents to deal openly and explicitly with DFAT advice during a consultation.

For retailers, it may be counter-intuitive to alert people to the risks of a destination. It

is introducing a negative – an obvious no-no in the world of selling – and is contradictory to their job of fulfilling dreams.

In short it may put the sale in jeopardy. Well that's too bad. Use your skills to sell an alternative destination if the client is uneasy.

In the wake of Sousse it is no longer good enough for retailers to refer consumers to official travel advice websites and effectively absolve themselves of responsibility.

There will be some who argue people must be accountable for their own decisions. That's fine as long as they are armed with the information to make an informed decision. And that means a travel agent taking consumers through the DFAT advice, not telling them to do their own research.

Travel agents increasingly market their levels of personal service as a way of attracting business. Well personal service means providing all the relevant information for a client to make an informed choice, warts and all.

Agents and operators are rightly praised for picking up the pieces when something goes wrong. It's time to pay closer attention to the risks before it goes wrong.

Those who pride themselves in working for the interests of their clients should not disagree for a moment.

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INBOUND TOURISM ON THE RISE

INTERNATIONAL tourism to Australia continues to climb, with an increase of 11% to a record 7.6 million visitors in 2016, according to the latest International Visitor Survey issued by Research Australia.

Seventeen of Australia's 20 key markets showed record arrivals for the year, including New Zealand, USA, Canada, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Thailand, Korea, Taiwan, Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, France and Italy. Asia was again a key source of growth, with all top ten Asian countries recording double digit increases in visitor numbers.

"These figures tell a strong story," said Margy Osmond, chief executive officer of the Tourism & Transport Forum. "China will soon be our biggest single market, but our future will be driven by the whole of Asia."

International visitor spending also set a new high, amounting to \$39.1 billion for the year, up 7% overall. The biggest spenders were those from China, the UK, USA, NZ and Japan, which combined accounted for 54% of total spending last year.

The managing director of the Australian Tourism Export Council, Peter Shelley, said while traditional inbound tourism remained strong, the country was seeing a broader engagement with newer markets like Malaysia, India and Korea which were showing notable growth.

"Globally there is an increasing appetite for travel and a growing number of people who can now afford to explore the world, particularly from newly industrialised countries which are attracted to Australia as a travel destination," said Shelley.

Visitors are also increasingly using Uber and Airbnb when visiting Australia. Visitors using Uber were up 14% with the biggest demand from the UK, USA, Europe and Canada.

The most common website used to book private accommodation was Airbnb, with 426,000 visitors booking through the site. Other common websites used to make bookings were Stayz (12,000), Vacation Rentals by Owner (VRBO) (12,000) and Couchsurfing (10,000).

All Australian states & territories recorded visitation growth during 2016 except the NT, while the total number of nights visitors stayed in the country was up 2% to 253 million.



AFTA VIEW

Jayson Westbury, chief executive AFTA

FEDERAL Government White Papers only come along every so often and they are an important process to enable the government to assess, review and consider broad policy areas in consultation with stakeholders and industries.

As it turns out, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has announced a Foreign Policy White Paper which will look to inform government on a framework for international engagement over the next five to ten years.

In fact, this Foreign Policy White Paper is the first since 2003 and the government has acknowledged that the international environment has changed considerably over the past 13 years and indeed Australia has a much broader and complex engagement across the globe. So the White Paper opens up an opportunity to help the government choose the path it takes on Foreign Policy for coming years.

‘[It] opens up an opportunity to help the government choose the path it takes on Foreign Policy for coming years...’

AFTA has provided the government with a comprehensive submission which can be found on the www.afta.com.au website.

The paper outlines a critical belief that Tourism needs to be given broader consideration

in a bilateral way. That is, Tourism and Travel, or inbound and outbound movements, need to have a policy framework that allows both aspects to be given proper and considered policy to ensure that the Australian industry is appropriately acknowledged.

We also highlighted the importance of the continuation and future investment in the Smartraveller program to ensure that the government's engagement with Australians taking overseas holidays continues. Smartraveller has provided a solid strategy for information to flow to the industry and consumers, with detailed intelligence that would otherwise be difficult to obtain.

Further, the overseas emergency response process established in DFAT is of great value and we strongly believe continued investment and a policy around Smartraveller is necessary.

The AFTA submission also highlighted the important facts of the comparison between the top inbound markets against the top outbound markets and recommends to the government that consideration should be made to enhance the bi-lateral economic impacts by bringing market balance where possible.

China is a clear example of this with 1.2 million inbound, but only 450,000 outbound. Even the USA with 700,000 inbound and over 1 million outbound demonstrates that fostering better two-way tourism movement could bring greater benefits.

The White Paper is due for release later in 2017. Given Tourism now sits squarely within the DFAT framework, with both the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment having significant responsibility for the way Australia is viewed by the world, it is timely to bring Travel more squarely into the policy framework and we hope our submission has some influence in the White Paper recommendations.

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Exotic Tours launching

NEW Zealand travel wholesaler Exotic Holidays has expanded its operations into Australia, pursuing a larger market under the new name Exotic Tours. Turning to Australia was a natural next step according to Exotic's managing director Rahul Sharma who identified a gap for a boutique company offering niche services.

"The feedback we've received is that there is a big gap in the market for wholesalers and for someone who can offer something new with customised programs, compared to set itineraries that many offer," he said.

Sharma said Exotic had to adapt to the market as he noted the New Zealand landscape was very different.

"As New Zealand is a smaller market, it is easier to compete; meeting everyone is easier because the country is not as spread out and there are more owned and operated agencies."

The plan for Exotic Tours is to extend operating hours for its call

‘The feedback we’ve received is that there is a big gap in the market for wholesalers...’

centre to cater to Australian agencies as well as to attend road shows, produce newsletters and begin advertising to build

relationships in the market.

Initially the company will run its Australian operations from NZ with dedicated staff. There are plans to open an office in Australia in the next six to twelve months if there is strong demand from the Australian market.

Sharma said Exotic was planning to appoint a sales and marketing representative in Australia, with staff from the New Zealand office to visit frequently in the meantime.

He said NZ agents loved the company because of its fast turnaround times, emphasis on service and personal tours, and extended operating hours.

Exotic Tours offers travel in Europe, Asia, India and the Middle East in individual tours, group and special interest tours and conference travel.



TOURISM AUS VIEW

John O'Sullivan, managing director Tourism Australia

PARTNERSHIPS KEY TO SUCCESS

A LOT has been written about China and its impact on Australian tourism industry. And quite rightly so.

With 1.2 million visitors spending more than A\$9 billion annually, China is now Australia's most valuable tourism market, with the potential to grow by a further 50 per cent - to between A\$13-\$14 billion before the end of this decade.

It's an amazing story for our tourism industry and one which is certainly far from over, with further chapters still to be written. But can we continue to grow and do we have sufficient tourism infrastructure to meet future demand?

Over the last six years this market has grown at a compound annual growth rate of around 20 per cent. Can we maintain these high levels of growth? In my view, the answer is no we can't.

The sheer volume of Chinese arrivals today is such that it's just unrealistic to expect to be able to maintain such stellar increases. Numbers will continue to grow strongly, but the rate of growth will inevitably temper. It has to. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

You can now fly direct to Australia from a dozen different cities in mainland China. And the slew of new Chinese services that have started or been announced in recent months suggests that Australia remains as popular as ever amongst China's rapidly growing middle classes. Last year, capacity from mainland China to Australia grew at around five times that of the overall average.

Many of these new flights are from China's secondary cities such as Kunming, Hangzhou and Wuhan, effectively opening up parts of China which are, as yet, largely untapped. And the recent announcement removing restrictions on air services between our two countries is a further positive move.

Where Australia's great tourism opportunity lies is in the mix of our Chinese visitors. We are already witnessing and will continue to see an acceleration in the growth of free and independent Chinese travellers. These are higher yielding travellers who stay longer, disperse more widely and spend more, which is

great for our industry.

On average, today's Chinese visitor spends more than A\$8,000 per trip compared to the average of A\$5,000 spent by international visitors overall.

Nearly 50% of Chinese arrivals today are also repeat visitors - a clear sign that their experience of Australia is a positive one and one that they want to do over again. The introduction of 10-year multi entry visas - available in 48 hours, online and in Mandarin - should give a significant boost to this trend and to regional dispersal.

Australia is a high cost destination. We

‘Increasing aviation capacity in a sustainable way is key to achieving our industry’s Tourism 2020 goals...’

can't compete on price nor, I'd argue, do we really want to. Our proposition is around delivering high value.

Whilst the Chinese market is undoubtedly a highly competitive one, our strategy is deliberately high yield and we have made a very conscious decision to go after the free and independent (FIT) Chinese traveller, rather than the group tour market. And I believe it's working. What we saw over the recent Lunar New Year period was that those operators whose business is built around this FIT market did very well. Those relying upon the traditional group market did less well, with a big factor being Australia's higher cost versus some of those other destinations aggressively courting this lower yielding segment.

Our industry still has much work to do to be China ready, but progress is undoubtedly being made. And market forces should ensure this continues.

I see much to be optimistic about the future of Chinese inbound tourism. The designation of 2017 as China Australia Year of Tourism has already given us a wonderful boost. It's up to us all now to keep this momentum going.

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- 1977 Six WA travel agents unite to create Community Co-operative Travel.
- 1995 With 35 members in WA, the retail travel network is now known as Community Travel Group (CTG) and is the largest in the state.
- 1996 CTG joins Travel Agent Cooperative Vic and NSW to form a national buy group, Australian Travel Agent Cooperative (ATAC), though withdraws within a year to begin expanding into ACT, NSW, SA and Vic.
- 2001 CTG is renamed Travellers Choice and introduces marketing activities to support its national brand. The group expands into Qld and has a total membership of over 100.
- 2011 A website product, Site Builder, is introduced to allow members to offer their own customised websites.
- 2012 Travellers Choice funds membership of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA) for all members.
- 2014 The group becomes the first national retail travel network to fully fund members' participation in the AFTA Travel Accreditation Scheme (ATAS).
- 2015 Travellers Choice is crowned Best Travel Agency Group at the National Travel Industry Awards. A Digital Managed Services initiative is unveiled to give members support in online activities.
- 2016 The company declares its 39th consecutive pre-tax operating profit. The TC Hub extranet system is introduced, with features including comparison tools for preferred supplier offerings.
- 2017 Travellers Choice celebrates its 40th anniversary.

TRAVELLERS CHOICE MARKS 40 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

A model established four decades ago still has a big role to play in the future for one of Australia's oldest agency groups.

IN 1977, Peter Allen put trans-Pacific travel at the top of the music charts singing *I Go to Rio*. Malcolm Fraser was Prime Minister, Jimmy Carter was in the White House and the Australian skies were ruled by Ansett and TAA.

It was the year the Space Shuttle made its first test flight, the year *Star Wars* was released, and the year Concorde began supersonic services between London and New York.

It was also the year six Perth travel agents came together in a partnership that would become one of the most enduring entities in the Australian travel agency landscape.

Today, Travellers Choice is celebrating 40 years since that humble Perth co-operative first appeared and began negotiating as a block with the major airlines.

‘It started with just a handful of agents who realised at the time there was opportunity for them to capitalise on each other’s sales volumes and approach airlines about volume-based deals’

Having grown to around 140 independent travel agencies in every state, the group has kicked off a year of events to honour its 1977 origins and champion the philosophy that led to its inception.

The festivities began with a cocktail party for key supporters and preferred suppliers at Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art late last month, and will culminate with the group’s annual national conference in November, which fittingly returns to Perth this year.

To Travellers Choice managing director Christian Hunter, the celebrations are as much about looking to the future as reflecting on the past, and he credits the group’s founders with creating a culture that still serves its members today.

“It started with just a handful of agents who realised at the time there was opportunity for them to capitalise on each

other’s sales volumes and approach airlines about volume-based deals,” Hunter said.

“If they channeled all their ticketing through a single point, there was enough volume there to interest the airlines in some sort of increased financial arrangement.”

And so a co-operative was born, initially with a small group of like-minded travel agents and a single role to play in their otherwise independent operations.

“They were successful in negotiating some additional revenue through a few carriers and that enabled them to attract other members to the group,” Hunter said. “That then allowed them to extend the product line a little further.”

Originally named the Community Travel Group, its co-operative structure meant the entity was run by the members solely for their own benefit, with any profits distributed back

to the membership.

Over the years the membership grew to more than 30 travel agents and the group’s board began to question what the future held for a West Australian-based buying co-operative.

They decided to move

on from being purely a buying group and expand into marketing services. With a new name and a new look, the group set out to develop a brand that would be better known not just within the industry but also among consumers.

“In 2001, Travellers Choice was launched,” Hunter said. “We moved into the eastern states and went on a recruitment process to sign-up interstate members, to the point where today we have members in all states and territories.”

While successful, the group’s co-op model meant it faced an onerous task complying with different regulatory requirements in each state. In 2006 the decision was made to move on from a co-op to become an unlisted incorporated business under national laws.

“But we maintained the key principles of a co-operative in our constitution,” Hunter said. “Members retain control of the organisation



The Traveller's Choice senior management team (from left): Justin Michael, general manager - finance and administration; Nicola Strudwick, general manager - sales; Christian Hunter, managing director; and Robyn Mitchell, general manager - marketing.

at all times. We have no external shareholders, there's no private equity, the only shareholders are our members and whatever profit we generate gets distributed back to the members.

"It's a model that works really well and rewards the members for the business they are producing."

At its 2017 national conference in Canberra, Travellers Choice highlighted its returns to members as a key achievement. The group had announced its fourth consecutive record profit of \$2.1 million in 2015/16 and had been able to increase its returns to members by 15%, resulting in a tenfold return on their membership fees.

Ninety-four per cent of the year's profits were returned to members, matching the average paid out over the past decade. To Hunter, this is one of the core attributes that has followed the group from its earliest days in Perth.

"We're not about building war chests within the organisation," he said. "It's about continuing to provide really great reward and great returns for our members. Being part of the group isn't a cost to members, it's a revenue generator."

Despite progress, the past 40 years

haven't been without challenges. Industry shocks like 9/11, the Ansett collapse, the Bali bombings and a succession of natural disasters have all resulted in tough times. But the biggest challenge in that time – on the technological front – is something Travellers Choice would like to embrace as opportunity rather than threat.

‘It's about continuing to provide really great reward and great returns for our members. Being part of the group isn't a cost to members, it's a revenue generator’

"Technology has obviously been the biggest advancement over the past 40 years," Hunter said. "Even 20 years ago, if you had a fax you were quite advanced. If you were printing out tickets you ended up with red fingers."

"One of the challenges for any independent agency has been in embracing that

technology as a friend not an enemy. We've done a lot of work in supporting members in digital services and we're seeing strong benefits as result of that."

In the future, Hunter sees technological support being one of the most important evolving functions Travellers Choice will provide to its members.

"Where a lot of independent agents are challenged is with resourcing – whether that's human resources or financial resources – in order to make that digital presence effective," he said. "Many are hampered either in having the internal capability from a tech perspective or having the people power to do it. Being part of a group like ours affords them really cost-effective access to that area."

As it looks to the decades ahead, Hunter said the group's founding principles would place it in good stead.

"The original formation of the group was a pretty innovative and insightful way to structure an entity that could allow the individual businesses to retain their independence but provide greater financial rewards, so I think it was visionary in some ways.

"If the founding fathers could see where Travellers Choice is today, they'd have a tinge of pride in seeing how the group has evolved."

TRAVEL PARTNERS ON TRACK FOR \$100M

By Jasmine O'Donoghue

TRAVEL Partners is set to crack \$100 million in annualised sales this financial year, Jeff Hakim, managing partner Travel Partners announced at the group's annual conference.

Up from \$75 million last financial year, Hakim told *travelBulletin* the boost had been aided by the tripling of BDMs last year, with the country now divided between three staff.

In the past six months, six new member agencies and five Travel Partners have joined the group, bringing home-based Travel Partner numbers to 55, member agencies to 38, franchises to two and wholly-owned offices to five.

"We've had some good calibre agents join us that know their stuff, they've got a good database and they've got a lot of repeat customers," Hakim said.

Hakim said the new member agencies had stemmed from consultants who were looking at continuing in the industry and needed to cut their costs – including "huge franchise fees".

"With a lot of franchises, you have to follow guidelines, certain rules and so on," he explained.

"I think that worked very well in the past... but I think you need to be more versatile, you've got to be able to look at business differently and it's not so much the brand

name now, it's how do you attract customers."

Many Travel Partner agents were finding success by moving into different types of niches, such as a destination or a particular type of sporting organisation.

"Those that will survive, they'll be the ones that provide the service, they've got to give a value-add and they'll be the ones that really are involved in different niches," he said.

‘I think you need to be more versatile, you’ve got to be able to look at business differently and it’s not so much the brand name now, it’s how do you attract customers’

Jeff Hakim, managing partner
Travel Partners

Looking forward, Hakim believes there will be fewer travel agents, but the "ones that remain will be very good at what they do and you'll be going to a travel agent because they're professional and they're giving you value".

As the way people communicate and research their trips changes, Hakim said being positioned in a shopping centre had become less important.

"People are communicating with a Travel Partner in different ways, they're not just coming into stores and really I don't think travel agents can survive when they're paying so much rent," he said.

Travel Partners is expecting its member numbers and sales to continue growing, targeting a 25% increase each year.

But the group is only targeting agents who have been in the industry at least five years and mobile agents who bring in around \$1 million a year.

These experienced agents joined the group with a database and regular customers, Hakim said, so location was not as much of a factor for bringing in business.

"You don't need to be paying \$120,000 to be between glowing shops, you can move home or find some commercial space that will cost you \$35,000 and concentrate on your database," he explained.

Talking numbers, Hakim said Travel Partners offered a different commission split depending on the model, but mobile agents received a 90:10 split and \$350 per month or 80:20 and \$150 per month.

"Financially, you're better off being with us," he said.



Left: the Travel Partners team ready for their Survivor team building activity; and right: Travel Partners' Independent Travel Consultant, Ann Hobbs, accepts her Rookie of the Year award from Travel Partners' managing partner Jeff Hakim (left) and executive general manager Simon Bernardi.



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Trump ban blocked again

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump is having great difficulty implementing his proposed ban on inbound travellers from certain countries, with a second attempt also blocked by a number of courts across America. The ban would stop travel into the US by citizens of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, as well as impose a 120-day pause on all refugee resettlements. However a Hawaiian judge ruled that the ban was discriminatory, and refused to scale back his ruling, despite requests from the administration.

The legal battle over the constitutionality of the ban looks set to continue, with a number of other courts also hearing cases about the proposal. For his part Trump remains undaunted, describing the rulings as “unprecedented judicial overreach” and promising to take the case “all the way up to the Supreme Court” if necessary.

GOOGLE’S reach into the travel ecosystem continues apace, with the new Google Trips app which seems to almost magically collate information from a user’s inbox, automatically creating comprehensive and engaging itineraries. Google Trips was the focus of a presentation at Tourism Australia’s Destination Australia 2017 conference in Sydney last month by Google Australia/NZ MD Jason Pellegrino, who spoke about the company’s vision for artificial intelligence and smart search.

Google Trips knows where you are going and how you’re going to get there – and automatically suggests what you might like to do, with handy tips about local transport, activities and restaurants. In a city for 24 hours? No problem, Google Trips will offer you a range of full and half-day activities including, of course, details on how to get there via Google Maps. It’s also possible to simply download all the details about a destination into a traveller’s device, meaning there’s no need to scramble for a wifi-connection on arrival in order to confirm details of a hotel or transfer.

New features are also constantly being added, with recent additions including currency conversion and information on tax reimbursement. With all this power in the palm of your hand, it seems likely that Google Trips is going to become an essential part of any traveller’s arsenal in the future.

AUSTRALIA ON PREFERRED RADAR AGAIN

PREFERRED Hotels & Resorts, which markets independent properties across the globe, has returned its sights to the Australian market, last month launching a campaign to attract more Australian customers as well as an aggressive expansion plan to build its local inventory. Preferred has a portfolio of about 650 hotels globally, having almost tripled in size since the group was acquired by the Ueberroth family 13 years ago

– but just one in Australia, Melbourne’s boutique The Lyall Hotel – and says there is a “humongous opportunity” to build its business down under.

President and CEO Lindsey Ueberroth, who visited Australia last month for the first time in a decade, confirmed the company has aspirations for significant expansion in

key destinations such as Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and the Gold Coast, as well as Hobart. Ueberroth has led a reinvention of the group in the last two years, consolidating its previous Summit and Sterling brands under a new Preferred Hotels & Resorts banner which now comprises five “collections” - Legend, Lifestyle, Lux, Connect and Residences. The change also saw the 2015 demise of the former Preferred

Boutique brand which was led globally by Australia’s Lynne Ireland.

The new strategy “redefined the way the hotel experience is rated, not by tiers or stars, but by experiences” in order to create greater clarity for independent hoteliers and travellers, Ueberroth told *travelBulletin* at an event in Sydney. Preferred Hotels & Resorts also operates the in-house iPrefer loyalty program which has more than 1.8 million members

globally, and the company is set to imminently launch a new mobile app which will allow guests to quickly redeem reward certificates. A “member rate” program also offers 3% off the Best Available Rate and Preferred will also market last-minute escapes and private offers to iPrefer members.

Ueberroth promised to return in 12 months, by which time she expects there to be a significant number of new Australian hotels which are part of the Preferred family.



Carolyn Holmes, Lindsey Ueberroth, Saurabh Rai, all from Preferred Hotels Group; and Rowina Thomas, owner of Melbourne’s Lyall Hotel

THORNTON TO SUCCEED WADE AT INTREPID

IT'S the end of an era at Intrepid Group, with co-founder Darrell Wade appointing James Thornton as his successor last month. Wade will become executive chairman of the company, which is now seeing "record sales" about 20 months after the dissolution of its former PEAK Adventure Travel Group joint venture with European travel giant TUI. Thornton is aged 35, and will head up the organisation which now has more than 1,600 staff in 27 offices, making it the world's largest provider of adventure travel experiences.

Wade said Thornton had been instrumental in the growth of the business since he and co-founder Geoff Manchester split with TUI. Sales are up 15%, Intrepid has relocated to new offices in Melbourne and London and there have been company-wide bonuses along with more than \$1 million raised for charity. While Thornton takes over day-to-day operations, Wade won't be resting on his laurels, with a vision to pursue new opportunities including developing the Chinese market and further expansion of the group's new small-ship adventure cruise product.

"We've learnt that it's crucial to find people who share your vision

'We've learnt that it's crucial to find people who share your vision and values, which is why the time is now right to hand over the reins for the next generation'

Darrell Wade, co-founder
Intrepid Group

and values, which is why the time is now right to hand over the reins for the next generation. I have every confidence that James will build on what we've created," Wade said.

Thornton joined Intrepid

twelve years ago as its UK Sales & Marketing Coordinator, and has progressed through a range of roles to become Managing Director of Intrepid Travel in 2012 and then MD of the newly-formed Intrepid Group the following year. Other brands in the organisation include Geckos Adventures, Peregrine Adventures, Adventure Tours Australia and Urban Adventures. There are also 19 in-country destination management companies and the not-for-profit The Intrepid Foundation which is chaired by Intrepid co-founder and owner Geoff Manchester.

The new small ship product is being sold under the Peregrine brand, with vessels carrying a maximum of 50 passengers on itineraries in Croatia, Cuba, Iceland, Portugal, Panama and the Greek Islands. Thornton said the company believed the cruise market was "ripe for disruption because the big companies had not responded quickly enough to demand for genuine local experiences that benefitted both travellers and the places and people they visit".

He added that currently there was no real option on water for Peregrine clients, who preferred small hotels and local authenticity, "and would never think of themselves as traditional cruise customers".



From left: Geoff Manchester and Darrell Wade with James Thornton

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TOURING IS ALIVE

Long the mainstay of the travel sector, it seems that growth in coach holidays has in recent years been eclipsed by the huge expansion of ocean and river cruising – not to mention FIT and self-drive touring booked online. However there's plenty of life in touring, as revealed by the latest *travelBulletin/Travel Daily* industry survey. Bruce Piper reports.

REMEMBER the Australian Women's Weekly World Discovery Tours? The brainchild of AFTA's founding president Frank Johnson, who ran World Travel Headquarters, for about two decades these holidays took Australians on a trip which for many was their first and last experience abroad. The initial Australian Women's Weekly World Discovery Tour took place in 1966, and was such a success it sold out in just four weeks. It's no wonder these trips were so popular – a promotional flyer for the 1967 tour confirms pricing starting at just \$1,392 per person for 18 weeks away, including a P&O cruise to and from Europe, a 23-day all-inclusive coach tour of eight European countries, a seven-day tour

of England and Scotland plus sightseeing in London. Accounting for inflation, that's about \$17,600 in today's dollars – not bad for a 126-night trip of a lifetime!

Fast forward to 2017, and despite the attention given to other sectors, coach touring seems to be very much alive and well. The Travel Corporation, which operates brands including Trafalgar, Insight Vacations, Contiki, Cost saver and AAT Kings, has worked hard to reinvent the terminology around the sector, describing its range as "guided holidays" and emphasising the unique "Insider Experiences" it offers – with its initiatives imitated by several operators. Other innovations in recent years have included the move by Bunnik Tours to limit its maximum group size to just 20 passengers

– still with full-sized coaches – while other operators stress features such as the leisurely pace of their tours, guaranteed departures, expert guides and access to local activities.

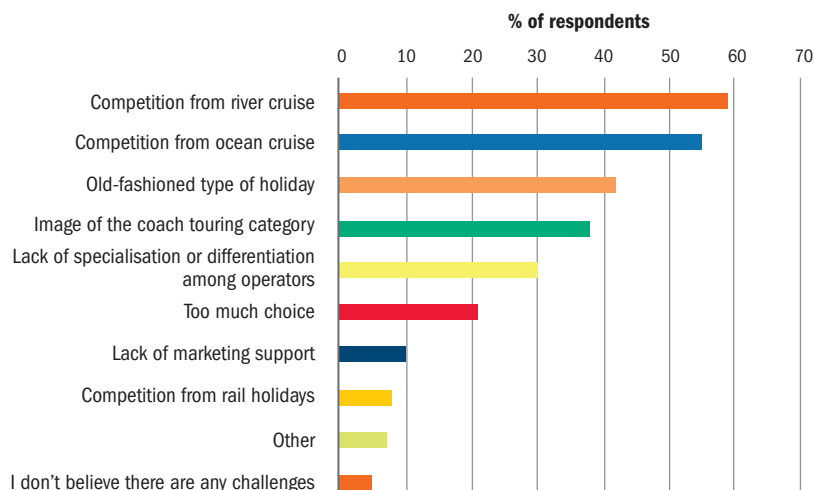
Last year The Travel Corporation upped the ante with the launch of Fly Free deals in conjunction with its products, which by all accounts was a huge success. Other operators quickly followed with their own Fly Free offers or air credit deals, and by all accounts the move has breathed new life into the sector. There's no doubt that a coach tour can offer significant advantages, enabling access to scarce accommodation, unique sightseeing led by a local expert and in most cases working out much cheaper than booking a tour independently.

From a travel agent's point of view coach tours offer relatively high levels of commission, and also make the most of a consultant's ability to coordinate flights, transfers, pre-and-post tour accommodation and dovetail with other products.

But what do agents think about the touring sector overall?



Challenges facing coach tours



AND WELL

THE SURVEY

travelBulletin and *Travel Daily* commissioned Stollznow Research to conduct a poll of travel agents who sell coach touring and other land-based product such as rail and self-drive holidays, with the study undertaken in January this year. Only those who had sold a tour in the last six months were included in the data, with participants incentivised with an offer of a Fitbit Charge 2 and Event Cinema passes. Consultants from across Australia participated, and Helloworld agents provided the largest number of responses at 29%, with Flight Centre just behind at 24% of the total. There was participation across the board from other agency groups too, including Magellan, Express Travel Group, Travellers Choice and all of the home-based networks.

Interestingly, 29% of those surveyed said their sales of touring had increased in the last year, while 48% had seen no growth in the sector, and 23% had seen a decrease. We asked them what the key issues were around selling coach tours, with the biggest factor cited being competition from river cruising, mentioned by 59% of those surveyed. In fact cruising was the major impact on coach touring, with ocean cruising in second place, cited by 55% of respondents as a key competitor for the hearts and minds of potential touring clients. However the sector also still appears to be grappling with issues of perception, with significant numbers of respondents describing it as an “old fashioned type of holiday” or having a “poor image”. See graph on left.

In terms of coach tour brands regularly sold, Trafalgar was the most popular at 56%, followed by APT with 52%, just ahead of Globus with 51% and Cosmos at 46%. AAT Kings and Insight Vacations were tied at 44%, while Scenic was in seventh spot, sold by 40% of the respondents. Rounding out the top ten were Intrepid and Wendy Wu Tours

with 33% each, and Back-Roads Touring at 32%. We asked the agents what their perceptions were of the various brands and how they supported the travel trade in areas such as sales representation, solving customer problems, clear pricing, call centre service and innovative products. In these categories the survey didn't highlight any outstanding performers, with most





Continued from previous page

operators competently servicing travel agents. The top rated suppliers in terms of sales representation were Collette, Tucan Travel, Adventure Destinations, Sundowners Overland, APT, TravelMarvel and Helen Wong's Tours, but the results across all operators were quite similar, without any particular standout performers. See graph below.

However in other areas the travel agents surveyed described significant differences between the various operators. For example, APT and TravelMarvel performed significantly better than other companies in terms of training and development for the trade, with others ranking well in this area including On

The Go Tours, Trafalgar, Scenic and Wendy Wu. Commissions were also an area of differentiation, with respondents ranking APT, Contiki, Trafalgar, Globus, Insight and AAT Kings as above average. In terms of offering great specials, deals and promotions, Trafalgar was the top ranked operator, with other good performers including Contiki, Scenic, APT, Insight, TravelMarvel, Evergreen Tours, Globus and Asia Escape Holidays. Travel agent familiarisation trips were another area where respondents clearly saw differences, with The Africa Safari Co perceived as offering regular educational, along with On The Go Tours, Scenic, APT, Intrepid and Trafalgar.

We also asked the agents which brands

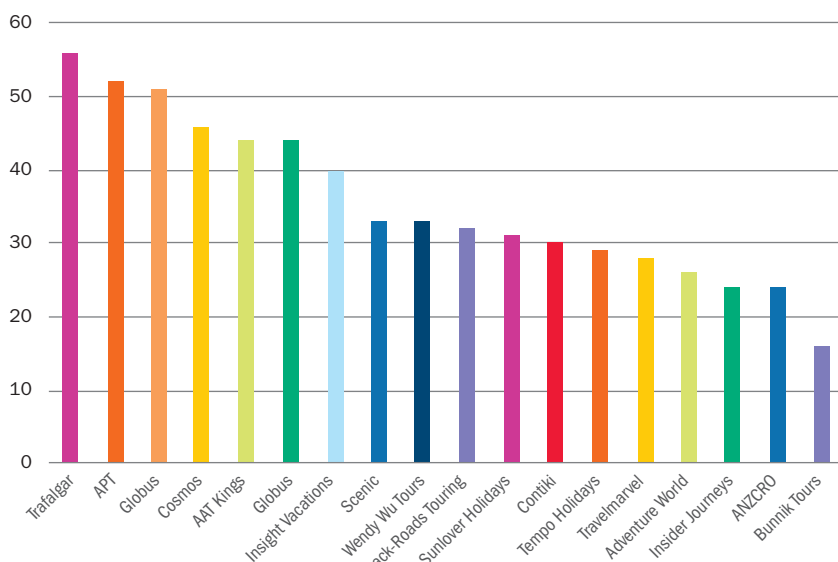
their clients most regularly asked for by name – an indication of the power of the brands in the consumer market. Scenic and APT were both leaders in this area – unsurprising given the huge amount of promotional activity they undertake in the consumer space. Other brands which performed well here included Contiki and Trafalgar, again companies which promote heavily to consumers – and after these top four there was a gap, with decreasing numbers of clients asking for Insight Vacations, Top Deck, Wendy Wu Tours, Globus, TravelMarvel, Evergreen and Cosmos.

RAIL ON TRACK

The research also asked questions about the sale of rail products by travel agents. Clearly a strong sector, almost three quarters of the coach touring-selling respondents to the survey had also sold rail – and interestingly there were less perceptions of competition for rail tours, with a third of the agents saying they didn't believe there were any challenges. However some respondents described barriers posed by timetabling, with operators not releasing schedules far enough in advance. Others cited a lack of availability on some train departures, while some said prices for rail were becoming too high, with coach tours perceived as offering better value.

Canada was a standout performer, with Rocky Mountaineer and VIA Rail featuring strongly in the results. Rocky Mountaineer was far and away the most popular rail product, sold by 48% of the respondents, while the various rail wholesalers including Rail Tickets, Rail Europe/Rail Plus, CIT Holidays and Infinity Rail also showed strong responses. Interestingly domestic product also featured

Coach tours sold in the last six months





strongly in the results of the rail survey, with Great Southern Rail sold by 39% of respondents, along with Queensland Rail Travel which had been sold by 13% of the sample.

The top rail performer in terms of sales representation was International Rail, with agents also hailing the support provided by Trans Siberian Tours, Rail Europe/Rail Plus, Belmond, CIT Holidays and Africa's Rovos Rail. Rocky Mountaineer was the highest rated supplier when it came to excellence in training and development, followed by Infinity Rail and Rail Europe/Rail Plus. Belmond, Rocky Mountaineer and Great Southern Rail were the leaders when it came to competitive commissions, while Infinity Rail was way ahead when it came to hosting regular familiarisations for travel agents. As you would expect, given its strong TV and newspaper presence Rocky Mountaineer was the brand most commonly asked for by name, followed by Great Southern Rail – and funnily enough Victoria's iconic Puffing Billy came in third position in terms of consumer brand recognition.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

The third land category in the poll was self-drive holidays – another key opportunity for travel agents. Again almost 75% of respondents had sold a self-drive or car rental product in the last year, with DriveAway Holidays by far the most popular, significantly ahead of any of its rivals. Some of the agents sold globalCARS product – and gave the wholesaler top rankings when it came to customer service. However the overall achiever in almost every metric was DriveAway, which was top rated for commission, clear pricing, training, call centre

‘Almost 75% of respondents had sold a self-drive or car rental in the last year, with DriveAway Holidays by far the most popular...’

service and solving post-rental problems.

Self-drive holidays also appear to be on the rise, according to 27% of respondents, while the majority (64%) said they had stayed the same over the last 12 months and just 8% said they were had declined. The survey also asked about client brand name recognition, with Avis leading the pack, cited by 71% of respondents – slightly ahead of Hertz at 64%. The two leaders were significantly ahead of third placed Europcar, mentioned by 29% of agents as asked for their clients.

RECOGNITION

The Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) has made great strides in recent years, with land-based wholesalers and tourist offices banding together to provide a single voice for the industry – and in particular to highlight the advantages for travel agents of using a locally based operation so their clients are well looked after. However despite a number of recent publicity campaigns – and an initiative where members have been encouraged to use an individually numbered CATO logo in their collateral – just 39% of respondents to the survey said they were aware of the organisation. About a third said

they had seen the CATO logo, while 20% said they were unfamiliar with it and 44% said they weren't sure. Clearly there is further work to be done here.

Travel agents are hungry for knowledge, and the survey found an extremely high proportion (84% of respondents) would be interested



in a formal certification and accreditation program for land travel. The cruise sector has this well wrapped up with CLIA's extensive product training suites, and clearly there is an opportunity here to increase the overall professionalism of the travel sector. One of the key criteria of the AFTA Travel Accreditation Scheme (ATAS) is workforce development, with participants in the program asked to specify how many of their front line travel sellers have a qualification such as a Certificate III in Travel or above. Perhaps some sort of formal certification relating to land product and/or destination training could be used to feed into this in the future, so that consultants who make the effort to learn about the various features of different travel products can have their expertise formally recognised, in a way that also assists their employers to meet the ATAS criteria. A strong majority of respondents (84%) also said they were interested in attending a conference relating to land travel – clearly something that's needed for the touring sector and perhaps an opportunity for the industry – so watch this space!

TRAMADA UNIVERSITY COURSES

TRAMADA Systems has this month introduced a number of technology advancements for the mid-office space it says are designed to motivate, engage, empower and recognise travel consultants.

An eLearning platform called Tramada University has been developed in partnership with award winning digital learning agency, Savv-e. Tramada University is an overhaul of its existing

training courses, initially comprised of two courses – Tramada 101 and Tramada 102. Its development reduces consultant training time from an average of 20 hours to an expected average of five hours and uses methodology that reflects “how, why, where and when people use tramada, delivering and reinforcing key learning much more efficiently”.

The interactive Tramada 101 course contains six mandatory modules, centred on how to be a successful user of tramada. Tramada 102 has eight modules, and is targeted towards employees in finance, operation and management. Successfully completing the courses will see the agent become a Tramada Accredited

Associate and/or Tramada Accredited Professional.

Tramada Systems' Head of Operation, Education and Support, Brenton Fear told *travelBulletin* that agents completing the courses had the opportunity to be invited into education forums that would directly help influence the direction and strategy of the company moving forward.

A third course, aptly named Tramada 103, is already in the pipeline.

Complementing Tramada University is a tramada Workflow Assist, a helpdesk-like program that provides guidance through a series of pop-up balloons, notification bars and call to action buttons.

For newcomers and infrequent processes, the innovation will also include a collection of online ‘walk-throughs’ for a number of key workflows within tramada, such as processing refunds, adding new team members and clients, outstanding booking reports and logging a support request.

Fear said the new innovation were simple, easy and responsive to use.



AMADEUS EXPANDS ANALYTICS

AMADEUS has launched a new Productivity Tracker system which aims to gather data to provide travel agency managers with information about how to improve the performance of their businesses. The company said one of the biggest challenges in trying to improve an agency's performance can be getting the right information at the right time, relying on reports from disparate systems and sometimes outdated information. Part of the Amadeus Agency Insight suite, Productivity Tracker has the ability to highlight “process inefficiencies,” as well as highlighting what contributes most to overall booking and revenue so managers can better determine where to allocate resources.

“Across the travel industry, innovation and disruption is happening quicker than we have seen for many years – travel agencies must adapt accordingly,” said Amadeus Head of Travel Intelligence, Pascal Clement. “Productivity Tracker enables agencies of all sizes to do this by providing them with actionable insights on their performance, which they can then use to sharpen their

business processes and strengthen their position in a competitive market.”

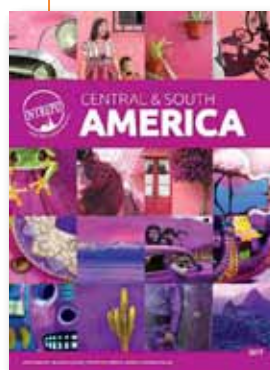
Every stage of travel agency operations is covered in the software's extensive report catalogue, from creation of initial bookings, through to ticketing and then flown revenue, along with all stages in between. Individual

users can customize the display of reports and download them in a variety of formats, enabling staff at all levels to analyse the most relevant information. Amadeus Productivity Tracker is also web-based, meaning managers can monitor their agency's performance at any time and anywhere.





FROM seeing the Canadian Rockies to taking an ocean cruise along Alaska's Inside Passage, APT Canada and Alaska's 2017/18 brochure features many highlights. The solid 186 booklet has cruises ranging from 15 to 22 days including the 22-day Rockies Odyssey and Alaska Cruise. There's a special six-day Bear Springtime experience departing from Vancouver on 24 May and 14 Jun which takes guests to Port Hardy on Vancouver Island where you can search for grizzly bears in Great Bear Rainforest.



INTREPID's Central and South America 2017 guide is out now covering Latin American countries such as Argentina, Chile, Peru, Uruguay and Columbia within its 89-page spread. There's a new range of Cuba tours, an active Costa Rica trip and a suite of Galapagos trips and a variety of festivals such as Mexico's Day of the Dead. There's short break adventures ranging from two days to seven days and flexible itineraries meaning guests can travel the way they desire.



CIT has unveiled its 2017 20-page brochure covering everything Switzerland. Highlights include Swiss Mountain Excursions from the Jungfrau or Schilthorn, the steep climb of Pilatus or the eternal snow on Mt. Titlis. There's different ways to see the country, whether on foot or driving. Stay in the heart of Switzerland's distinctive destinations of Geneva, Lucerne, Interlaken or Jungfrauoch. The brochure features cycling, food and wine, history art and culture, self-drive trips and small group trips.



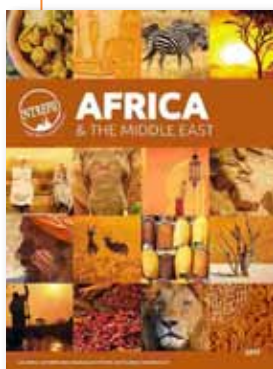
TAHITI Travel Connection's 2017/18 guide showcases plenty of activities such as snorkelling or diving with lemon sharks outside Bora Bora reef, or going on jet-ski and 4WD tours around the islands. Cruise on the 148-guest *Wind Spirit* featuring 24-hour room service menu and 74 luxurious cabins. Honeymoon packages are also available at certain resorts such as Sofitel Moorea la Ora Beach Resort and Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora. The brochure also includes travel tips, passport and visa information.



PONANT has curated The Asia and Oceania Collection, dedicated to the Winter 2017-2018 season. There are seven itineraries available for the Oceania regions onboard *L'Austral* and sister-ship *Le Boreal* going from Hawaii to French Polynesia, the Marquesas Islands and mysterious Easter Island. There are 14 stops at UNESCO World Heritage sites, along with naturalist guides. The Asia selection has eight cruises on the modern luxury expedition ship *L'Austral* and 16 stops at UNESCO World Heritage Sites.



AUSTRALIAN Air Holidays (AAH) 2017 brochure provides a broad sweep of must-see attractions across Australia including ANZAC Day in the ACT and the Wings over Illawarra Air Show. There's over 25 tours to choose from and some great early bird specials. Guests can save up to \$800 per person if they book and pay by 24 April. Meals, commercial flights to and from state capital cities and touring with expert local guides and transfers are included with AAH all-inclusive tours.



INTREPID'S new Africa and The Middle East 2017 guide is packed full of safaris, tours and treks across East Africa, Ethiopia, Southern Africa, Madagascar, North Africa and the Middle East. There's Gorilla trekking in Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park and in Uganda's Bwindi National Park. All trips are rated on a physical scale from one to five and there are other symbols throughout the pages like highly rated trips that receive a traveller rating of over 4.75 out of 5.



ROCKY Mountaineer's 2017 Luxury Train Ride 2017 Guide covers Seattle, Vancouver and the Canadian Rockies. There's a range of two to three-day rail adventures and new additions include a three-day Rainforest to Gold Rush train route, starting at the foot of the Coast Mountains Vancouver and snaking its way through to the Canadian Rocky Mountains and ending in the alpine town of Jasper, Alberta. There's 14 coastal passage routes that travel between Seattle, Washington, USA and Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

CAREER IN FOCUS

JULIE GOLDING

Development Manager – NSW, ACT & QLD, Silversea



1. What does your role involve and how long have you been in your current position?

I am employed as a Business Development Manager NSW South/ACT for Silversea Cruises for just over 6 months now. My role is to grow and develop new and existing accounts in my territory, maintain relationships, and cultivate new ones, and attend client and trade events to grow my sales area.

2. How did you start out in your career? Were you always destined to work in the travel industry?

I started my career in hospitality and Tourism working in Hotels and Resorts around Australia where I was able to confidently deal with domestic and international guests. I was very lucky to work in resorts such as: Dunk Island, Great Keppel Island, and Ayres Rock Resort.

3. Did you complete formal qualifications, and do you think they are important?

At first my direction was to be a Travel Agent and I completed 2 years of Joint Schools Secondary TAFE Program in year 11 and 12 then carried on to do my Travel Certificate and Advanced Travel Certificate at TAFE, I

then decided to swap into Hospitality and completed a Hospitality Course (also at TAFE). I believe TAFE skills give you the practical knowledge you need to support the role you are choosing. Three years ago I completed Training and assessment Certificate IV and then a year later Diploma in Travel and Tourism to dip my toe into teaching travel at TAFE.

4. What do you love about your job?

I am very relationship and results driven so I really enjoy forming long lasting relationships and supporting my trade agencies. Being in sales I also love achieving my targets and setting goals for myself to exceed these.

5. What were some of the greatest challenges you've had in your career?

Learning new processes and systems internally is always tricky for me as I am so focused on what I do "outside" in the field and trying to adapt to what companies require internally.

6. What factors are central to your success?

Making sure I follow through and get back to my agents in a timely manner. Have a vested interest in not only growing your area but their business as well.

7. Did you have mentors, and if so, how did you find them?

Yes, I was lucky enough to be a part of an amazing program at one of my old companies that assigned you a mentor. We met every quarter to discuss my successes, what I can improve and future goals, He was amazing. I also advised someone I admired in the industry, I would love to have her as a mentor and she agreed that I can contact her whenever I need to make big decisions or just bounce something off her.

8. What are the keys to good business?

Personally I believe:

- Reliability: doing what you said you'd do when you said you were going to do it.
- Competence: consistently delivering superior results
- Openness: Being transparent in communication "having open conversations and candid discussions."
- Compassion: Looking out for the best interests or treating everyone as you would want to be treated

9. What advice would you give to others in the industry who would like to follow in your footsteps?

Work in internal departments like Reservations, Inside Sales Coordinators so you understand the business internally, do public speaking courses as you need to present your product to people who do a lot of research so you need to be confident. Have a thick skin, not every travel agent will want to see you, they may have had a client miss an important flight etc, so don't take things personally.

‘I am very relationship and results driven so I really enjoy forming long lasting relationships and supporting my trade agencies’

FEMALES CAN CHANGE THE PAY PARITY AND EQUALITY ISSUES IN THE INDUSTRY

On International Women's Day, Helene Taylor from Jito hosted a Women for Women event to help inspire more female leaders in the travel industry. She provided this summary of her presentation to *travelBulletin*.



I ORGANISED the event with the view of helping drive more equality and address pay parity issues in the industry.

During my talk, I shared how growing up females are socialised to be beautiful to be pretty and to be body image conscious.

Surveys of school-aged young females show that more than 53% of young girls hate some part of their bodies and that is just tragic. For generations, females have been biologically programmed to admire tall, white, thin females.

Females often think if their thighs were a little thinner or hair a little shiner they would be happier - yet when you survey a group of models they will tell you that they are physically the most insecure females on the planet. Females are socialised to be perfect - and as a result develop the worst inner critic, and this inner critic impacts career growth.

In stark comparison, males are socialised completely differently - boys growing up are encouraged to climb to the top of the monkey bars and jump off, climb to the top of the bridge and jump off into the river. Males are socialised to be brave, to be bold, to take risks and fuelled with testosterone they climb the cliff and leap into the ocean.

As an executive head hunter I see how this translates into our careers.

Females gravitate towards jobs that are comfortable, where there is no risk while males gravitate to jobs with risk.

A male will view a job description of ten items and even if he can see five things he can't do he will lean in and apply for

the role. In comparison, a female will focus on the five things that she can't do and not lean in.

It is no wonder we have less females applying for senior roles. And fuelled with testosterone a male will then negotiate, \$5,000, \$10,000 \$20,000 more in salary - while in comparison a female will say she is lucky to get the job.

So, what is the solution?

Well, females can't inject themselves with testosterone but they can learn to tell their inner critic to be quiet. Focus on the things they can do when reading a job description and be brave, be bold and lean in. They need to learn to sell themselves more and to negotiate for their worth.

It's not a female's job to be perfect - it is a female's job to be human.

As a result of this problem I am surveying the industry to see if there is enough demand to organise training for females who want to become leaders - with the aim of helping build confidence, to learn how to sell themselves and how to negotiate salaries so we help the pay parity and equality in the industry, rather than hope this problem will solve itself.

I hereby call on all females to lean in and be brave, to help drive equality and pay parity in our industry.

I am pleased to report that as a result of this one day event several companies have already reported changes to their maternity leave policies, with the aim of helping more women return to the workforce or work from home.

Together we can make a difference and next year Jito will host a second International Women's Day - Women for Women event which is expected to have over 1,000 attendees.

The Travel Corporation has been confirmed as next year's principal sponsor, with Intrepid confirming it also wants to again be part of such an important industry initiative.

travelBulletin and the Business Publishing Group will also support the event which is expected to become a major annual fixture on the industry calendar. ʹ

VICTORIA AT WORK BUILDING A BIG EVENTS FUTURE

VICTORIA'S events industry is set for a renaissance as the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre gets to work on its \$200 million expansion, backed by a string of other new developments.

The first pieces of structural steel were lifted into place at the MCEC last month, putting the centre on track to open almost 20,000m² of additional exhibition space by the middle of next year.

Once open, the extension will integrate with the centre's existing facilities to offer more than 70,000m² of convention and exhibition space, making it the largest venue in Australia.

It will offer flexible multi-purpose event spaces including new exhibition halls and additional meeting and banquet rooms, plus a retractable 1,000-seat theatre that can be used for plenary sessions or withdrawn to create exhibition space.

Other new features include a banquet room for up to 450 guests, pillarless exhibition space of 9,000m², informal networking spaces, an outdoor event courtyard and a balcony area to host 150 guests for cocktail functions.

MCEC chief executive Peter King said the new facilities had been architecturally designed to suit the needs of customers, rather than adapting events to suit the available space.



MCEC's new terrace

"Within our new building, event organisers can stage an exhibition, which can then transform into a plenary session and then convert into a gala dinner space for the same event," King said. "It truly is a dynamic and unique space and our customers are already telling us that this will be a game-changer in the industry."

He said the expansion was critical to catering for growing international demand.

"To date, we have secured or are in the process of contracting over \$15 million of revenue in the new space, which will be ready to house events from July 2018," King said.

The extra space is predicted to attract an additional 74,000 international visitors annually, who will spend on average \$693 each day and contribute an extra \$167 million to the Victorian economy.

A new multi-level car park has already been completed as the first stage in the expansion, while a 331-room hotel will open in mid-2018.

As work on the MCEC progresses, other new and reconfigured event spaces have opened recently in Melbourne.

They include the new Metropolis Events centre overlooking the Yarra River at Southgate, a contemporary space with soaring windows and sweeping views of the city.

It features an expansive outdoor terrace and is large enough to hold 1,000 guests for cocktail parties or 500 for seated dining, and can be separated into two individual sound-proof spaces.

Another recently opened venue is the Australian Events Centre which can host product launches, corporate functions, conventions and grand-scale celebrations for up to 1,400 guests.

Located at the Essendon Fields development in Melbourne's north-west, it offers a flexible configuration with one large space of 1,300m² or four smaller rooms ranging from 64m² to 995m².

Across town, Greenfields Albert Park has been redesigned in a fresh contemporary style, offering space for events of up to 500 people in a pavilion with views across the Albert Park lake.

Meanwhile, a series of new hotel developments is set to boost Melbourne's event-hosting capacity further.

They include the new Four Points by Sheraton Melbourne Docklands which was preparing for opening as *travelBulletin* went to press, offering 273 guest rooms and suites with city or water views.

The hotel will offer 588m² of events space aimed at small- to medium-sized meetings and gatherings of up to 130 guests, including an outdoor deck for hosting cocktail events.

In June the city will welcome the Hyatt Place Melbourne Essendon Fields, connected to the new Australian Events Centre. The hotel will be Australia's first Hyatt Place and will offer 166 guest rooms, located close to Melbourne Airport.

Between 2018 and 2019 the city will welcome other hotels including the 164-room Peppers Southbank, a 279-suite extension to the Hotel Windsor in the CBD and the 127-room Aloft Melbourne in South Yarra.

Outside the city, regional Victoria will this year welcome the 46-room boutique hotel Jackalope at the Willow Creek Vineyard on the Mornington Peninsula, as well as the 58-room Mitchelton Hotel among the vines of the Goulburn River Valley.



Four Points by Sheraton Docklands



Ambassadors honoured

AFTER winning 12 major international conferences worth an estimated \$62.5 million to Victoria, 16 Club Melbourne Ambassadors were presented with awards last month in recognition of their efforts.

Almost 12,000 international delegates will spend a combined 46,000 days in Melbourne for these conferences and attend events such as the 1st Malaria World Congress in 2018, secured by Prof Alan Cowman and Prof Brendan Crabb.

MCEC chief executive Peter King said the ambassadors volunteered a great deal of their time to lure these events to Melbourne.

"They are also working with us to foster and curate some remarkable inaugural events across all industries," he said

Established by the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre in 2005, the program has 119 Ambassadors who have delivered 120 conferences, worth more than \$685 million to the state.

MICE foreign policy

THE Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) has mounted a campaign to make business events a foreign policy matter.

The AACB released details of a presentation it made last month to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which included recommendations for a \$10 million bid fund for attracting conventions and exhibitions of national significance, and a free online visa scheme for delegates.

It has also proposed a travel bursary to bring academics, scientists and business leaders from the Asia-Pacific region to conventions in Australia.

"Business events are a crucial part of the Australian Government's foreign policy strategy," AACB CEO Andrew Hiebl said.

Events worth \$30b to Aus

THE business events industry contributed \$30.2b in direct expenditure in 2015/16, up from \$28b in 2013/14, a report released by the Business Events Council of Australia (BCEA) has found.

It also said business events supported Australia's GDP with a total economic contribution of \$24.9 billion, compared to \$23.1 billion in the previous period.

Matthew Hingerty, chairman of BECA, said the Ernst & Young study demonstrated why governments and industry should continue to invest in the sector, with growth in local (2.7%) and national (13%) delegates.



MCB VIEW

Karen Bolinger, chief executive officer, Melbourne Convention Bureau

IT'S hard to believe we are already in March and have just celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Expo (AIME).

This year we welcomed over 416 exhibitors from 22 countries, with over 6,700 appointments made with global event management professionals, making it the region's largest and most significant exhibition for the meetings industry.

What a legacy this event has had on the business events industry in Australia, and of course Melbourne. The value of business events to Australia 2015 report commissioned by the Business Events Council of Australia states that since 2002 direct industry expenditure has increased from \$17.4 billion to \$28 billion, outpacing inflation over the same period.

For an event that is so important to positioning Australia as a leading business events destination, and growing the economy, it disappoints me that there are some who year-on-year want to bring the show down with misinformed commentary.

AIME is a show that our industry is passionate about and we will always welcome feedback, however speculative comment is not in the spirit of advancing our industry.

Here are the AIME truths:

- Our focus has always been, and will continue to be on ensuring the hosted buyer and exhibitor experience is at the core of everything we do.
- AIME is a Melbourne Convention Bureau owned show, therefore it will continue to

stay in Melbourne.

- With the tender for the show currently in play we have an exciting opportunity to take a good hard look at the show and revamp it to ensure it maintains its status as the preeminent trade show in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Most importantly, we are listening to industry, to ensure the show fulfils its obligations of providing a viable platform for business, networking and inspiration now and into the future.

“Our industry is small and has many passionate people in it. It is this passion that has driven our sector to succeed, in sometimes difficult circumstances”

Our industry is small and has many passionate people in it. It is this passion that has driven our sector to succeed, in sometimes difficult circumstances. What we have seen is that together we can achieve so much more than on our own.

I'm focussed on the big picture of progressing the business events industry for Australia. I hope everyone in our industry is on the same journey.



business events news

- 16 Feb** Amway breaks hotel records
- 20 Feb** MCB unveils 'future of meetings'
- 20 Feb** MEA launches national mentoring program
- 23 Feb** AIME future is bright - Karen Bolinger
- 27 Feb** Events training to continue
- 27 Feb** Gold Coast scores sports conference
- 02 Mar** Sofitel begins countdown
- 02 Mar** ICC's medical debut

HEADLINES FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2017

- 06 Mar** PCOA returns to the Gold Coast
- 06 Mar** Event techs unite
- 09 Mar** Hilton Sydney's new look
- 09 Mar** MICE foreign policy
- 13 Mar** Events to drive Hyatt's newest hotel
- 13 Mar** ATEC event to Perth
- 16 Mar** Club Mel brings \$62m to Victoria
- 16 Mar** MEA skills review
- 20 Mar** Gold Coast plans unveiled
- 20 Mar** Events worth \$30b

THE BATTLE OF THE FORKS

Australia is well-known for its high-quality cuisine and fresh produce, so it's no surprise that when Aussies take to the sea, they expect the best. Eager for their slice of the foodie market, cruise lines have been upping their game in the dining department. Once known for the sheer quantity of food, many are refining their quality, partnering with celebrity chefs and enhancing the dining experience to cater for the everyday Aussie connoisseur. Jasmine O'Donoghue dished out the top specialty restaurant on each cruise line homeported in Australia in the 2017/18 season.



Moderno Churrascaria

Norwegian Cruise Line

Serving: Brazilian

Price per person: US\$24.95

Taste it in local waters on: *Norwegian Jewel*

Capacity: 146

BRAZILIAN steakhouse Moderno Churrascaria was retrofitted aboard Norwegian Jewel and features a modern, sleek ambience. Guests can tuck in to skewers of slow-roasted meats including beef, pork, lamb and chicken, all carved tableside by Pasadores. Moderno's salad bar offers a selection of freshly prepared salads, tuna, French beans, potato, shrimp and roasted garlic, hearts of palm, ceviche, European cured meats and artisan cheeses. The meal can be washed down with Brazil's national cocktail, Caipirinha, made with Leblon Cachaca, lime slices and simple syrup.



SHARE by Curtis Stone

Princess Cruises

Serving: Seasonal signature dishes

Price per person: A la carte or fixed price menu \$39 per person plus drinks

Taste it in local waters on: *Sun Princess*

Capacity: 75

PRINCESS Cruises teamed up with Celebrity Chef Curtis Stone to create the SHARE by Curtis Stone concept. The comfortable, homely atmosphere is reflected in the design, drawing inspiration from Stone's own home – right down to the books on the shelves. A communal table is at the centre of the restaurant, while words that encompass the experience, like family, travel and togetherness, have been etched into hand blown glass pendants. Stone's favourite dish is the roasted king crab leg which is baked with lemongrass and paired with a chicharron powder (crispy pig skin crumble) along with a fermented soybean aioli, while the roast chicken with a bacon slab and onion slaw is popular among guests.



Murano

Celebrity Cruises

Serving: European fine dining with a contemporary twist

Price per person: US\$45

Taste it in local waters on: *Celebrity Solstice*

Capacity: 76

GUESTS can find tableside lobster presentation, a selection of artisanal cheeses and an extensive American and French wine list at Murano. The Wild Forest Mushroom Cappuccino is a signature starter and the Muscovy Duck Breast is another popular option. The Six Senses menu is “designed to stimulate all your senses” and serves six courses in a tasting menu, paired with wine.



Jamie's Italian

Royal Caribbean International

Serving: Italian

Price per person: US\$30

Taste it in local waters on: *Ovation of the Seas*

Capacity: 132

THIS casual Italian bistro is the first seafaring outpost of British Celebrity Chef Jamie Oliver. Serving lunch and dinner, top picks include the cured meat plank, packed with fennel salami, pistachio mortadella, prosciutto and schiacciata picante. The prawn linguine is a popular option, along with Jamie's Italian Signature Porchetta - slow-cooked British pork belly filled with herbs, garlic & spices, served with fennel crackling and a watercress salad.



Salt Grill by Luke Mangan

P&O Cruises

Serving: Contemporary Australian in a modern setting

Price per person: \$39pp for lunch, \$49pp for dinner plus drinks and \$25pp for high tea.

Taste it locally on: P&O Cruises' five-ship fleet

Capacity: 62 on *Pacific Eden*

SALT Grill by Luke Mangan is the first restaurant at sea by an Australian Celebrity Chef. Australian produce is used for signature dishes including Mangan's trademark Sydney crab omelette with enoki mushroom herb salad and miso mustard broth, and for dessert, his Liquorice Parfait with lime syrup. The restaurants have a relaxed and sophisticated vibe.



Pinnacle Grill

Holland America Line

Serving: American

Price per person: US\$33

Taste it in local waters on: *ms Maasdam*

Capacity: 64

PINNACLE Grill is Holland America Line's American steakhouse and seafood specialty restaurant. Headed by executive chef Rudi Sodamin, popular dishes include Dungeness Crab Cakes, Double R Ranch steaks ranging from 7-36oz, and for dessert, the Not-So-Classic Baked Alaska.



Bonsai Sushi

Carnival Cruise Line

Serving: Japanese

Price per person: A la carte from AU\$2-\$22 per item

Taste it locally on: *Carnival Spirit* or *Carnival Legend*

Capacity: 40

BONSAI Sushi serves Asian-inspired delicacies, including sushi and sashimi along with Asian beers, sake and cocktails. The "ship for two" comes out as a boat laden with sushi, offering guests a bellyful of Triple E roll, California roll, tuna and salmon sushi served with a side salad and miso soup to start. The Bonsai Triple E roll is fresh water eel with Japanese eggplant and tamagoyaki.



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Lyndey Milan

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Queen Elizabeth down under

CUNARD is planning its longest deployment in Australia in 2019, basing *Queen Elizabeth* in local waters for two months.

An evolution of Cunard's traditional world cruise program, the vessel will operate seven different round-trip cruises from Sydney and Melbourne.

Queen Elizabeth's local season will offer a total of 27 combination itineraries.

"This will be the first time that Cunard has featured so many voyages to and from Melbourne in addition to Sydney, and will give Australians a much greater number of options to experience Cunard than ever before," said Cunard vice president international development David Rousham.

Celebrity Edge's big reveal

CELEBRITY Cruises has unveiled the first new class of vessel in ten years, Celebrity Edge, touted as "a ship designed to leave the future behind".

The first of four vessels planned for the new class will bear the Celebrity Edge name and begin sailing the Caribbean from December 2018.

The cruise line has revamped the accommodation offering, upping the suites on offer to 12% of the stock, as opposed to 5% on Solstice Class. New additions include the two two-bedroom, two-bathroom Iconic Suites, located above the ship's bridge and boasting spectacular panoramic views and the six split-level Edge Villas, equipped with private plunge pools and direct access to The Retreat – a private utopia for suite-class passengers.

Details on the class' food and beverage concepts will be released in coming months.

Norwegian's big order

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) has penned a deal with shipbuilder Fincantieri for up to six new ships for the Norwegian Cruise Line brand.

The next generation of vessels are priced at approximately €800 million each and will accommodate 3,300 guests.

They will follow in the footsteps of the line's Breakaway-Plus class and introduce "meaningful innovation to the cruise industry," Frank Del Rio, president and chief executive officer of NCLH said.

Norwegian Cruise Line's new additions are set for delivery in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, with an option for two more ships in 2026 and 2027.



CLIA VIEW

Joel Katz, managing director
CLIA Australasia

CHART YOUR COURSE

AT CLIA, we love cruising so much you will often see us using phrases like "full speed ahead" in communicating with you, our members. While using these phrases adds levity to our messages, one phrase in particular is most fitting as we embark – see, there we go again – on another year. It is time to "chart your course" for success in 2017.

Charting your course for success is something that is easy to do if you break down the parts of your professional life and set Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-based (SMART) goals for each aspect of your career. Start with how you manage time and organization, which are two foundational elements of any profession, then focus on your performance and growth.

This is where your CLIA membership comes into play. You have made an investment in yourself by becoming a CLIA member, entitling you to access the CLIA professional development opportunities.

As much as we have a responsibility to you to build significant value into CLIA member benefits and continually communicate how those benefits can help you succeed, you have a responsibility to yourself – and your career's success – to not overlook them.

In the coming weeks and months, we will be providing information on how you can get the most out of your CLIA membership in 2017, leveraging your member benefits into competitive advantage that will help you increase your cruise sales and take your career to the next level. In the meantime, log into your MyCLIA online dashboard and explore all of the powerful e-learning tools to which you have access. Your CLIA membership is not simply the

process of receiving a CLIA decal, it is also about being part of a global community of professionals who use their knowledge and skills to drive the cruise industry forward and prosper as a result.

With the 16th Annual Cruise Industry Awards now behind us, the focus for CLIA is the delivery of our fourth Cruise360 down under on 25 and 26 August 2017.

Cruise360 2017 will have a fresh new look and has been extended to two days to include a ship inspection and lunch onboard P&O's newest addition *Pacific Explorer*. Other changes include enhanced networking and professional development break-out sessions, seminars and analysis into current cruise and travel industry trends, as well as an extensive B2B trade show showcasing major suppliers and the latest developments in the fast-growing cruise industry.

This year's keynotes, featuring top industry leaders, will be presented by Jan Swartz, President of Princess Cruises and Carnival Australia, and Larry Pimentel, President & CEO of Azamara Club Cruises. It is an honour for us to have two of our industry's top leaders take the stage at Cruise360 to lend their knowledge to our travel professional members.

We're expecting a cross-section of cruise focused professionals from Australia and New Zealand including front line travel consultants, owners, managers and CLIA Executive Partners. Cruise360 is without a doubt the best opportunity of the year to meet face-to-face with your peers in the cruise industry.

Earlybird tickets are now available at www.cruising.org – ship inspection spaces are limited so book early.

CRUISE WEEKLY

- 21 Feb** U by Uniworld reveal
- 21 Feb** NCL orders four ships
- 23 Feb** Carnival to build in China
- 23 Feb** Norwegian's big year
- 28 Feb** Australia, get your act together

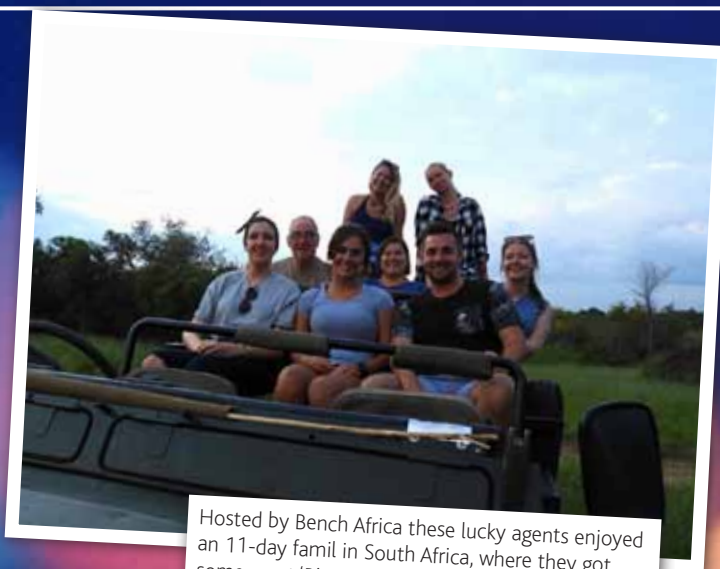
HEADLINES FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2017

- 02 Mar** Collette eyes cruise agents
- 07 Mar** Intrepid's adventure cruising takes off
- 09 Mar** Royal's new ship named
- 14 Mar** Silversea ambassador program
- 16 Mar** Celebrity's local drive

INDUSTRY IN FOCUS



The inaugural WOMEN for Women conference was a roaring success. Convenor Helene Taylor from JITO was snapped being thanked by key presenters at the event.



Hosted by Bench Africa these lucky agents enjoyed an 11-day fam in South Africa, where they got some great 'Big Five' game viewing opportunities.



Ben Agell, Liz Krstevzki and Steve Odell are pictured at Red Ginger restaurant on board *Oceania Sirena* when she made her debut since refurbishment in Sydney.



Excite Holidays treated a group of agents to a culturally rich visit to Fiji, in collaboration with Tourism Fiji and Virgin Australia. They stayed at a succession of luxury properties across the island nation.



It was smiles galore for this group of itravel agents who travelled on one of Emirates' flights from Sydney to Christchurch, experiencing the luxurious business class cabin on the way home.



Managing director of Entire Travel Connection, Brad McDonnell with team; Sophie Meunier, Bryony Cumberpatch and Tina Heyer at the recent Atout France 2017 Good France event.



This group of Travellers Choice agents experienced Norfolk Island recently with Norfolk Select. The group was escorted by Norfolk Select founder David Bantoft, who made his 100th visit to the island.

Nicole Manderson, tourism marketing manager, Pacific Fair Shopping Centre and Don Jolly, ATEC Sth Qld branch manager were just some of the delegates at the ATEC South Queensland workshops, held at Jupiters on the Gold Coast.



These agents attended Northern Europe's biggest travel fair, in Finland. They also headed north on a pretour winter safari.



Six top Air Tickets agents and their guests were lucky enough to see Justin Bieber at his Melbourne concert on Wed night, hosted by Malaysia Airlines. The team arrived in style aboard a stretch Hummer limousine.

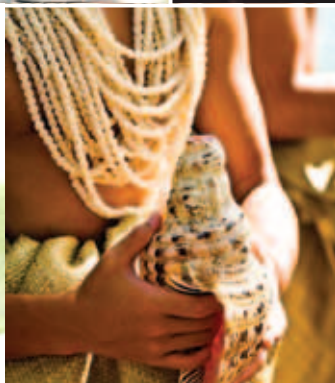


This team of Magellan Corporate agents packed their bags recently for a trip to the Vancouver head office of the group's global partner, Uniglobe. The group also had a great view from the air on their seaplane ride.



A busload of the FBI Travel team rallied together for the Virtuoso Travel Week last month, with many going home with a prize from some of the 30 luxury hotels represented at the showcase.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE



Images © HTA and Tor Johnson

Whether you're on a thrill-seeking mission or looking for secluded luxury, you can be sure to find an island paradise that's just right for you, writes Dilvin Yasa.

CONFUSION often reigns for first-timers travelling to Hawaii. How many islands are there exactly? (18 including the main six below). There's a Hawaii *within* Hawaii? Which one should I visit? In a perfect world, we'd say all of them, but if you've got limited time (and funds), consider your interests and go from there.

BEST FOR THRILL-SEEKERS: HAWAII

Whether you're keen to zipline across waterfalls, leap from tall mountains or simply roll around a black sand beach with a glamorous partner, satisfy your inner James Bond with a trip to Big Island Hawaii – also known as Hawaii's Island of Adventure.

Larger than all the other islands combined, Hawaii island is home to 11 of the world's 13 climatic zones (everything from snow-capped mountains to rainforests), and you can make the most of each one by throwing yourself wholeheartedly into the action. Put swimming with manta rays on Kona Coast, hiking Volcanoes National Park, and star-gazing from Mauna Kea, a dormant volcano some 4,000 metres above sea level, at the top of your list and add further activities from there.

STAY: With private bungalow-style rooms and wealth of five-star features including seven pools and what is arguably the best restaurant on the island, Four Seasons Resort Hualalai is the pick of the bunch.

BEST FOR ROMANCE: LANAI

Celebrate your love for your partner all day – and all night – long on the relatively secluded island of Lanai, where remote beaches, stunning sunsets and opulent resorts come together to give you the 'best of' Hawaii, but without the crowds.

Affectionately known as the 'private isle', the island has no traffic lights and few paved roads, but what it does have is a stunning protected marine reserve and endless deserted stretches of white sand to enjoy. Walk hand-in-hand along the rock formations of Keahiakawelo, or enjoy the scenery along the Munro Trail from a 4WD, then sink a few cocktails as you gaze at the sunset from

picturesque Kaunalpau Harbour. Here's to you and your clever romantic holiday ideas!

STAY: Admittedly you're hardly spoiled for choice in Lanai, but happily the choices you do have are exceptional with Four Seasons Resort Lanai leading the charge. Bordering the marine reserve, the resort features two world-ranked golf courses plus plenty of on-site and off-site activities for two.

BEST FOR GOURMANDS: OAHU

Are you the kind of traveller who's led by your tastebuds? Zero in on Honolulu – not for its shopping malls or nightclubs (although you could certainly take your time enjoying those too), but for the amazing restaurants and eateries that dot the magnificent landscape.

Most gourmands make their first stop at upscale Town which serves up an Italian take on classic American cuisine, or Alan Wong's Restaurant, but we say head straight to the five-star Kahala Hotel & Resort for their paper-thin pancakes before following it up with a food tour such as 'Best of Chinatown'. By all means, give yourself over to fine dining as the mood takes you, but don't forget to leave some room for the island's famous plate meals such as the ones from Rainbow Drive-in. You may need some elasticised waistbands for the trip home...

STAY: Possessing both a grand Victorian charm, and every five-star amenity you could care to imagine, you can do no better than calling Waikiki's historic Moana Surfrider home for a few days.

BEST FOR FAMILIES: MAUI

If there's one thing guaranteed to help you recover from the trauma of enduring ten straight hours of 'Are we there yet?' it's landing in Hawaii's second-largest island which is home to some of Hawaii's best beaches, wildlife and family-friendly resorts.

Depending on what your kids are into, you can ride a genuine 1890s train on the Lahaina-Kaanapali Railroad, marvel at the sharks swimming overhead at the Maui Ocean Centre, zip-line across the jungle, turn kids into Junior Rangers at the Haleakala Visitor Centre, or snorkel by Black Rock where kids young and old can interact with everything from moray eels to sea turtles. In other words, sufficient activity to exhaust them for the trip home.

STAY: Featuring a 1,860m² kid's club complete with video arcade and movie theatre and a pool complex that includes watersides, white-water rapids, rope swings

and caves, the Grand Wailea will keep kids amused 24/7.

BEST FOR PURISTS: MOLOKAI

Ever found yourself pontificating on the how awesome Bali or Byron was before all the tourists came and ruined it for everybody? Book your flight to Molokai immediately and rejoice in a traditional environment that's still largely untouched by tourism (just don't become that bore when you get back).

With the vast majority of locals favouring preservation of land and culture over tourism schemes, 'attractions' as we know them are few and far between, but what you get is the chance to watch fisherman haul in their catch in the harbour town of Kaunakakai free of Instagrammers, or the chance to meander around the 800-year-old fishponds.

If you're feeling truly adventurous, you can ride a mule some 500m to the remote seaside Kalaupapa National Park which has countless historic sites to visit, or you can take a sunrise hike through the jaw-dropping Halawa Valley, but whatever you do, don't come back and write about it like I am (oops).

STAY: Free of big-name chains, the closest you'll find to a resort is Hotel Molokai which offers travellers small luxuries such as an oceanfront restaurant and bar.

BEST FOR NATURE LOVERS: KAUAI

One to schedule immediately after an eating tour of Oahu, the oldest and northernmost island of the Hawaiian islands is Kauai, a jungle-like paradise crammed with emerald mountains and valleys, tropical rainforests and cascading waterfalls and rivers. Add to that some of the prettiest waterholes and beaches in all of Hawaii and you've got the deepest connection you could have with Mother Nature.

Although there are many parts of Kauai you can only access by sea or air (a helicopter tour is highly recommended), the best way to get a feel for the island is to hike what you can – be it the easy-going trails that criss-cross through the rainforest, or the more challenging paths along the NaPali coastline.

Don't just keep it on the land; nature lovers will also enjoy snorkelling on Poipu Beach and kayaking Wailua River – just don't forget to allocate a bit of time to get to know its small yet charming town.

STAY: With its own saltwater lagoon and ten dining options, the luxurious Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort & Spa is the jewel in the island's crown.

ATLANTIS COMING TO KO OLINA

KERZNER International, the parent company of Australia's One&Only Hayman Island and Dubai's Atlantis, The Palm, is partnering with China Oceanwide to develop a new destination resort in Hawaii.

Modelled on the iconic Dubai property, the Atlantis resort at Ko Olina will be built on a 26-acre site positioned between two of the four man-made white sand beaches in the resort community on the west coast of Oahu. It will be the first Atlantis resort in the United States and will sit in the same portfolio of Atlantis, Sanya Hainan, which is slated to open in China this year and The Royal Atlantis Resort & Residences, also in Dubai.

With neighbours including Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa and Four Seasons Resort Oahu at Ko Olina, Atlantis Ko Olina will offer approximately 800 guest rooms and suites, in addition to 524 residences. The company says Atlantis Ko Olina "will introduce a new luxury lifestyle experience to the region. It promises a "variety of unique amenities" such as private gardens and private pools, bars and lounges, luxury boutiques, spa, fitness centre, water park, event space and a beach club.

"Atlantis resorts are iconic entertainment destinations that significantly contribute to the surrounding community, and Hawaii will be no exception," said Kerzner International President and CEO Jean-Gabriel Peres.



"Atlantis will astonish and amaze, as well as celebrate the history and culture of Hawaii... a must-see resort to Oahu".

CEO of Atlantis Resorts, Serge Zaalof said Atlantis Ko Olina would quickly become a new landmark in Hawaii, and introduce "the fun, interactive entertainment experiences at the heart of the Atlantis philosophy."

Founder and master developer of the precinct, The Resort Group's Jeffrey R. Stone

said the project would "undoubtedly enhance the entire destination experience at Ko Olina"

"A project of this scope and quality will heighten Oahu's recognition as a luxury destination for years to come and broaden Hawaii's appeal to affluent travellers around the world, including the discerning millennial market," Stone said.

Construction could start as early as this year and take two years to complete.

NEW ROUTES OFFER MORE ISLAND OPTIONS



HAWAIIAN Airlines has introduced several new regional services, opening up additional travel options beyond Honolulu.

The carrier's regional division, 'Ohana by Hawaiian, last month introduced twice-daily flights between Honolulu and Kapalua Airport in West Maui, as well as a daily flight between Kapalua and Kahului on the same island.

Operated by a 48-seat ATR-42 turboprop aircraft, the flights were introduced on the 30th anniversary of Hawaiian's first services to the destination at the time of the Kapalua Airport's opening in 1987.

"The new routes to Kapalua serviced by 'Ohana by Hawaiian will bring increased air travel choices to the Valley Isle," said Ford

Fuchigami, director of the State Department of Transportation.

Hawaiian Airlines has also introduced a daily non-stop service between Kauai and Hawaii Island. The flights are operated by a Boeing 717 aircraft between Kaua'i's L'hu'e Airport and Kona International Airport.

"Demand from our kama'ina (locals) and visitors for travel between Hawai'i Island and Kaua'i has been growing steadily over the past few years," said Peter Ingram, chief commercial officer for Hawaiian Airlines. "We are proud to now offer our guests direct access between these islands, in addition to our connecting flights through Honolulu or Maui."

Meanwhile, Hawaiian Airlines has been named the world's most punctual airline by air travel data company OAG in its latest, annual rankings. The OAG Punctuality League, covering 200 airlines worldwide, found 89.9% of Hawaiian's flights arrived on time in 2016.

HAWAII WEIGHS UP HOLIDAY RENTALS

TOURISM officials in Hawaii are contemplating the impact of holiday rentals in response to data showing hotels have lost market share in the island state, despite visitor numbers growing steadily. The Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) has commissioned two reports on the impact of alternative accommodation and circulated the results for public review.

“Alternative accommodations, particularly rentals of homes and condos by visitors,

has been a segment of Hawaii’s tourism industry for more than 20 years, but has grown significantly in recent years due to increased demand by travellers,” said HTA’S Daniel Nahoopii.

“Spending by these visitors generated an estimated \$1.87 billion for Hawaii’s economy in 2016,” he said.

“It’s noteworthy that 15% of visitors said they would not travel to Hawaii if alternative accommodations were not available.”

The research found the current market share of visitors staying in Hawaii hotels has decreased 6% since 2000, while total visitor arrivals increased 23% over the same period.

Between 5% and 9% percent of Hawaii residents currently rent out their properties for holidays, the HTA found, however most of those surveyed said they did not want to continue the practice. Of residents surveyed, 60% were motivated by financial necessity to offer their residences to visitors.

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HAWAIIAN
AIRLINES



Dr Who might take to his Tardis to travel through time, but visitors to Israel and Jordan can do the same by coach or car, and uncover thousands of years of history, writes Brian Johnston.

THE neighbouring countries of Israel and Jordan are crammed with biblical and historical sites, rugged coastlines and spectacular desert scenery. Tourism infrastructure and hotels are good, English is widely spoken and Jordan in particular has famously friendly people, making travel through these twin destinations an easy pleasure.

The current Kingdom of Jordan is a relative newcomer on history's grand stage, only created in 1946. Still, its barren landscapes conceal a dizzying array of archaeological sites, from a multilayered, 6,000-year accumulation of ruins at Bet Shean to the sixth-century mosaic-decorated churches at Madaba and a Crusader castle at Karak. Jerash is one of the Mediterranean's best-preserved Roman cities, complete with colonnaded streets, theatres, temples and palaces. You can still see the paving ruts left by chariot wheels, and the bathhouses where Romans once splashed and gossiped.

Amman, Jordan's capital, is one of the most progressive cities in the Middle East, with an energetic vibe and hospitable inhabitants. The hilly city admittedly lacks the glamour and great Islamic architecture of Cairo or Istanbul, but provides delightful contrasts in its gleaming shopping malls and spice-crammed souks, lively nightlife and crumbling ruins. A popular boulevard for evening strolls runs right by an Ancient Roman amphitheatre.

The highlight of Jordan is Petra, ruined sixth-century city of the Nabataeans, an Arab tribe that grew rich on trade and erected extravagant public buildings, temples and tombs. Access to the ruined city is via a narrow, winding canyon called The Siq whose cliff faces are banded in red and orange, at the end of which you get your first magical glimpse of Petra: the famous rose-red facade of the Treasury building. Beneath its columns, camels groan under weighty tourists and hawkers circulate with Roman coins.

TIME

Further down the valley stands a 7,000-seat amphitheatre. You can follow the colonnaded main street of the later Roman city, and trace the outline of marketplaces, swimming pools and palaces. Across the canyon loom royal Nabataean tombs carved from the cliff face. Finally, clamber up to the Monastery and contemplate its brooding, monumental facade. Rocky ridges fall away to the desert below, towards the Gulf of Aqaba.

Jordan's attractions aren't all historical. Wadi Rum in the country's south has spectacular red desert cliffs best experienced at sunset on a camel excursion with the Bedouin. You can stay overnight in a tent strewn with rugs and blankets, sit around a campfire and admire the stars to indulge in a Lawrence of Arabia fantasy.

Fifty kilometres south, the resort town of Aqaba on the Red Sea offers some of the world's best coral reefs for snorkelling and diving: a fabulous blue world that contrasts with the flamboyant orange of Jordan's landscapes. Israel's counterpart just across the border is Eilat, popular with local holidaymakers attracted to its seemingly perpetual sunshine.

Jordan and Israel also share the Dead Sea, and on either coastline you should take to the waters to float in its highly salty buoyancy. The Dead Sea's shores, especially in Israel, are dotted with swanky spa resorts. As an added bonus you can visit the fortress of Masada, last Jewish holdout against the Ancient Romans.

Israel's history is just as long as Jordan's, but the country has more varied scenery, a higher living standard and a booming economy. Old-timers from kibbutzim are giving way to a youthful population, and you'll find an ever-increasing choice of fine hotels and restaurants.

On the Mediterranean coast, neighbouring cities Tel Aviv and Jaffa are a study in contrasts. Jaffa dates back to biblical times, and is filled with tottering Turkish palaces and mosques, medieval monasteries and Crusader remains that create Israel's most beautiful old town. The capital Tel Aviv glitters with skyscrapers and nightclubs, has great



Roman city of Jerash, Jordan



Wadi Rum, Jordan



The beachfront in Tel Aviv, Israel



Amman, Jordan



Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, Israel



Tourist floating in the Dead Sea, Israel

Israel images © Israel Ministry of Tourism and Jordan images © Jordan Tourism Board

beaches and food, and tempts with innovative museums and revamped waterfronts.

In northern Israel, you could base yourself in hilly, sea-gazing Haifa and visit neighbouring Acre – a medieval Arab town of bustling bazaars – and the kibbutzim of the surrounding countryside. The inland Sea of Galilee provides a beach and water-sports getaway for Israelis but is also littered with biblical sites such as Magdala (hometown of Mary Magdalene), Tabgha where Jesus purportedly divided the loaves and fishes, and the city of Tiberias, where ancient tombs and holiday discotheques clash.

And so to Jerusalem, troubled city central

to three great religions, sitting on the political fault-lines of the Middle East. Plunge into the old city for its exotic bazaars and important religious sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Christian), Western Wall (Jewish) and Dome of the Rock (Moslem). The new town is home to world-class performing arts venues, the confronting Yad VaShem Holocaust Memorial and the Israel Museum, a treasure trove of ancient artefacts that include the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. Like both Israel and Jordan, this city is a mix of old and new, a charismatic and often problematic clash of territorial rivalries and spiritual aspirations that will have you mesmerised.

TRAVELLERS

AUST & ISRAEL SIGN AIR SERVICES DEAL

THE recent state visit to Australia by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has paved way for the first treaty-level air services framework between the two countries in a move that is expected to increase travel demand.

The agreement signed between Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Darren Chester and Ambassador of Israel to Australia Shmuel Ben-Shmuel allowed flag carriers Qantas and El Al to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish a new codeshare agreement.

Customers of both airlines will be able to book on select flights, plus earn and redeem frequent flyer points. The codeshare partnership primarily focuses on linking Qantas flights from Australia to Asia with El Al's flights between Asia and Israel's financial centre and technology hub, Tel Aviv. On top of this, Qantas and El Al will codeshare on their respective Johannesburg flights between Sydney and Tel Aviv.

Minister Chester said for the first-time Israeli and Australian airlines could operate flights between the countries with their own aircraft or via code share arrangements.



From left: Ambassador of Israel to Australia Shmuel Ben-Shmuel, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Darren Chester

“During 2016, 12,600 Israeli residents visited Australia, while 22,000 Australians visited Israel. We expect these numbers to grow as the new arrangements are put in place,” he noted.

Qantas International chief executive officer Gareth Evans said Israel was a popular destination for the many Australians with family and friends in the country, as well

as strengthening opportunities for other industries. “The timing’s especially good when you think about the growing number of Australian companies doing business with Israel’s world-class technology and start-up sectors,” he said.

It is planned that the codeshare flights will go on sale during the second half of the calendar year.



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Visitors showing increased interest

BUNNIK Tours has been running tours to Jordan and Israel for more than 10 years, but owner and managing director Dennis Bunnik said demand to Israel and Jordan has recently reached new heights.

“Since launching our new brochure, we have seen a massive increase in demand for tours to the Middle East, particularly for our Egypt, Israel & Jordan small group tour. Our passenger numbers for the first half of 2017 are up 88% compared to 2016.”

Despite unrest and the troubles the region has faced, Bunnik said his company was seeing the strongest sales numbers for the region in five years and expected other operators to expand their offerings as tourists returned.

“If tourism continues to build back up, other operators will be more likely to return and the amount of tours will increase,” he said.

ISRAEL, JORDAN GROWING IN DEMAND



Wadi Rum, Jordan ©A&K

UNTIL recently, bookings for Israel and Jordan have been slow, according to Abercrombie & Kent, but the region is having a real comeback with an increase in demand to the destination and local neighbour Egypt.

Abercrombie & Kent Australian managing director Sujata Raman said booking for Israel and Jordan tours are strong in March and September, with busiest travel months falling in July and October.

“Both destinations offer well-established tourist industries, with exceptionally high

standards of accommodation, transport and guiding,” Raman said.

Apart from modern tourist facilities, the region boasts some of the world’s most spectacular archaeological sites and monuments from an astonishing number of different civilisations.

“While we have found that travel to Israel and Jordan is especially popular with 50+ audiences, the region really does lend itself very well to multi-generational travel,” Raman said.

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STEP BACK IN THAILAND TIME

See a new side of the Land of Smiles by visiting its ancient capital, writes Kristie Kellahan.

IT'S difficult to imagine a place that could be more different from Bangkok than Sukhothai. Today, the Thai capital leads the way with soaring skyscrapers, cosmopolitan rooftop bars and huge shopping malls where bargains are always in fashion. But in Sukhothai, the ancient capital of Thailand, life moves at a much slower pace, as historic traditions are revered.

The seat of Thai power in the 13th and 14th Centuries, Sukhothai is more than 400 kilometres north of Bangkok. The name means 'dawn of happiness', and Thai people look to Sukhothai as the birthplace of their happy Kingdom. Now recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage-listed city, the drawcard is the abundance of fascinating ruins - almost 200 at last count. Combined

with a visit to nearby Si Satchanalai Historical Park and Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park, the history lessons are fascinating.

Sukhothai offers insights into Thailand's proud heritage and traditions. To wander the sprawling Historical Park in the Chao Phraya Valley, with its royal palace ruins and exquisite, all-seeing Buddhas, is to walk in the place where the Thai alphabet was created. The core tenets of Thai language, architecture and political system were honed here, during a golden age in which the nationhood of Thailand really began.

Dozens of temples and Buddha statues are just some of the treasures to be explored at the Sukhothai Historical Park, an attraction at least as impressive as its more well-known Khmer cousin, Angkor Wat. Keen

‘To wander the sprawling Historical Park in the Chao Phraya Valley, with its royal palace ruins and exquisite, all-seeing Buddhas, is to walk in the place where the Thai alphabet was created’



photographers are advised to visit in the hour before sunset to capture the glorious light as it falls on looming Standing Buddhas, lotus ponds and earth-coloured temples topped with bell-shaped chedis.

A popular pilgrimage destination for Thais, this heritage-rich region reveals a far more authentic face of Thailand than the gaudy one shown in places like Pattaya. Thanks to the efforts of archaeologists who took on the mammoth job of restoring the 700-year-old ruins, the Historical Park has been winning rave reviews since it officially opened almost 20 years ago.

A year-round destination, tourist numbers to the region tend to swell in the slightly cooler months of December through February. To miss the worst heat of summer, try to avoid visiting Sukhothai in March and April. And for arguably the most spectacular event on the calendar, plan a visit to coincide with Loy Krathong. A three-day candlelit festival in which the rivers and waterways of Thailand brim with colourful flower offerings and the sky lights up with the release of hundreds of lanterns, it is said that Loy Krathong originated in

Sukhothai more than 700 years ago. Every year in November, during three days of festivities, flaming lanterns and spectacular fireworks illuminate the night sky, while parades and food festivals provide a party atmosphere. Held annually on the full moon in the 12th lunar month, this year Loy Krathong will be celebrated 3-5 November.

To get to Sukhothai, travellers can hop on a 75-minute Bangkok Airways flight from the capital, or board a bus in Bangkok or Chiang Mai. Getting around is easy, with bicycles for rent and private tuk tuk tours costing less than \$10.

Not far from the Historical Park, a range of accommodation and dining options are available from upscale to backpacker-budget. Le Charme Sukhothai Resort is tranquil and lovely; a low-rise village of traditional Thai pavilions surrounded by lotus ponds, tropical gardens and a landscaped swimming pool area where cheerful elephant statues spout water. Just one kilometre from the Historical Park, the resort is well-located.

For adventurous travellers, a local homestay could be a memorable accommodation option. Room and board is provided, along with the opportunity to join in village daily

life: rising early to give food offerings to saffron-robed Buddhist monks, participating in fruit harvesting and preparing dinner with a host family.

There are dozens of good dining options in Sukhothai, from casual Thai to French fusion, woodfired pizza and even a German pub. Ruean Thai Restaurant & Bar is rated highly by locals and visitors.

The region's chefs promote organic and sustainable produce, an initiative supported by government leaders keen to encourage eco-friendly agro-tourism. The Organic Agriculture Project at Sukhothai Airport, known as The Farm, is an award-winning experiment in healthy farming practices. Visitors have the opportunity to learn firsthand about the lives of organic rice farmers, while participating in outdoor classroom activities. Fresh organic food and drinks are available for purchase; stock up on edible souvenirs here.

Don't miss the opportunity to try authentic Sukhothai noodles, a staple at most restaurants in the area. Rice noodles are mixed with green beans, crispy pork, coriander, chilli and peanuts in a soy sauce broth made from a recipe that is said to have been passed down by home chefs for many hundreds of years.



THAILAND PUTS ITS CUISINE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

THAILAND is already well known for its mouth-watering pad-see-ew and massaman curries, but this year the country is hoping to raise its culinary profile even further by promoting Thai cooking and sustainable food processes that benefit both travellers and farmers.

Tourism Minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul has put a focus on food tourism and culture in 2017, encouraging visitors to experience the Thai way of life through the country's food traditions.

Among destinations to be highlighted is the Angkhang Agricultural Station, a project instigated by the late King Rama IX as part of efforts to replace opium plantations with high-quality fruit, vegetable and livestock production.

Located in the Fang District in the north of Chiang Mai, it has become an important resource in the country's ambition to make education a priority in supporting the livelihood of Thai farmers. Through improving agricultural techniques and training model farmers, Thailand hopes to make better use of natural resources and encourage the implementation of organic production.

The Angkhang Agricultural Station had a chance to show off its fresh produce recently when top Thai chefs such as Vichit Mukura, Chumpol Jangprai and Surakit Khemkaew joined a showcase culinary event attended by the Minister and international media.

The group visited landmarks like the Chedi Luang Temple and Maesa Elephant Camp, while the chefs created special menus with ingredients produced at the Angkhang Station.

This and other events are planned throughout this year in the hope chefs will turn to the station as a major provider of ingredients for their restaurants. Tourists will be able to sample the produce in restaurants or visit the station for a first-hand insight.

Chef Chumpol Jangprai said products from station and other Royal Projects were known for their high quality and organic production, and were therefore trusted ingredients.

He said using products from the Royal Projects was a way to support Thai farmers while promoting sustainable agricultural tourism.



An escape for the bookish in Koh Samui

IF THAILAND'S beaches and watersports aren't enough for the literary minded traveller, Design Hotels has a bookish alternative that doesn't sacrifice style.

The Library, a 46-room luxury resort set against the backdrop of Chaweng Beach in Koh Samui, offers a collection of more than 1,400 books for guests who still like to engage the mind when they travel.

Its studios, suites and soon-to-open "secret pool villas" are spread over 12,800m² of grounds, along with the resort's Page restaurant and Drink Gallery.

Now represented in Australia by the Unique Tourism Collection, the resort is currently offering a Samui Traveller Special that includes breakfast on the beach, sparkling wine, a three course dinner and other inclusions from THB9,100 per night during select dates until December.



CAPE KUDU'S LUXURY INCLUSION

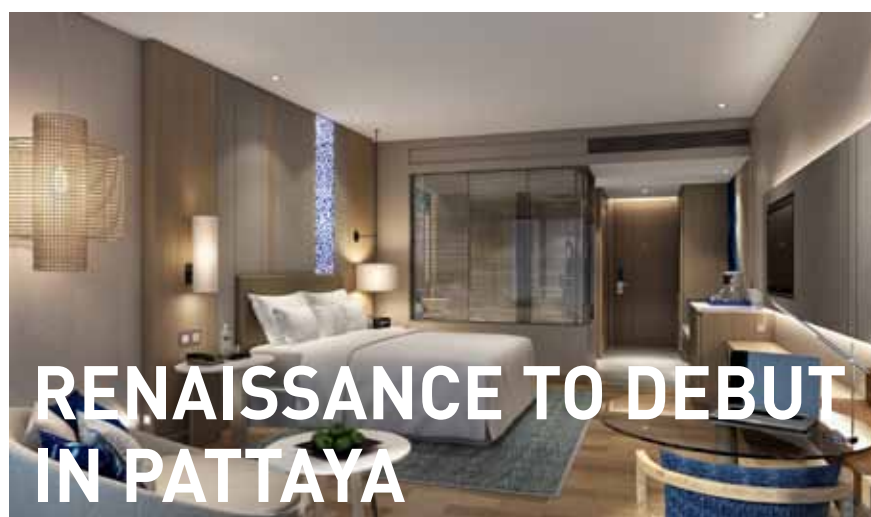
SMALL Luxury Hotels of the World has welcomed the Cape Kudu Hotel to its portfolio after the property's recent opening by Thailand's Princess Sirindhorn.

Located on the small island of Koh Yao Noi in the centre of Phang Nga Bay, the five-star resort is surrounded by limestone islands draped in lush rainforest, about 30 minutes by boat from Phuket

Aimed at both couples and families, it offers a choice of deluxe rooms, pool villas and a Robinson Crusoe Suite. Its Hornbill restaurant offers a mix of Thai and international fine dining, with views across Phang Nga Bay and an opportunity to dine under the stars.

For those wanting a touch of Thai culture, guests can join in a program of organised activities like Batik painting, snorkelling, kayaking, touring other local islands or visiting local fish farms.

The Cape Kudu Hotel is accessed via a 20-minute journey from Phuket International Airport to Bang Rong Pier and a 30-minute boat ride from Phuket.



RENAISSANCE TO DEBUT IN PATTAYA

THE Renaissance brand will open its first resort in Thailand's seaside city of Pattaya by September this year.

The 257-room Renaissance Pattaya Resort & Spa will be a low-rise development in the style of a beach retreat, aimed at a broad market including business travellers, families and couples.

It will feature a kids' pool, kids' club, luxe pool villas, spacious family suites and a luxury spa. Guests will be able to let their hair down at R-Lounge in the lobby area and enjoy handcrafted beverages made by an expert mixologist.

Foodies will enjoy breakfast at 609 Kitchen or can savour fine cuts of meat at Pebble Bar & Grill. Business travellers will be able to attend meetings and functions for up to 350 people and take advantage of tailored excursions and networking events.

The surrounding beach setting of Na Jomtien has played an influence in the coastal interior of the property which combines wood, veneer and metal finishes and an earthy tone, highlighted by marine shades of cobalt and gentian blue.

The managing director of resort owner The Ninesotel Company, Vipavan Mahadamrongkul, said the property would offer a "non-traditional hotel experience".

"With an investment of US\$87 million, pioneering architectural and interior design and the brand hallmarks of Renaissance Hotels, we are optimistic that this hotel will be well received when it launches later this year," she said.

Singapore Airlines to boost Thai tourism

SINGAPORE Airlines has teamed up with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to promote the destination in three key markets including Australia.

For the next two years the pair will co-operate on brand advertising and promotional campaigns, tactical and digital marketing, familiarisation trips, joint roadshows and product development.

"Combined with Singapore Airlines' wide global network and dedication to excellent customer service, we are confident we can increase visitor arrivals into Thailand," said the airline's chief executive officer Goh Choon Phong.

In 2017, TAT has set a target of 34.5 million international visitors, generating an estimated THB1.81 trillion (AU\$68 billion) in international tourism receipts, a 10% year-on-year increase.

Singapore Airlines and its subsidiary SilkAir currently operate 89 flights per week to Thailand. Singapore operates 35 weekly flights to Bangkok, while SilkAir operates 35 weekly flights to Phuket, 14 to Koh Samui and five to Chiang Mai.

KEEP CALM: CALL A WEDDING DESTINATION SPECIALIST

By Bonnie Tai

IT'S common knowledge that wedding planning and stress go hand in hand. Add in a foreign country plus the juggling and transportation of tens of guests, and your special day could turn into a recipe for disaster. Thankfully, it's a task that you don't have to take on alone.

Mandi-Forrester Jones of World Wide Weddings has been in the business of delivering destination weddings since 2009. She believes there is a common misconception among people that it's easier and cheaper to just book their flights, venues and accommodation on their own – when in fact the opposite is true.

"There's no extra cost to do it with someone like myself," she tells *travelBulletin*. "When people decide to book with a specialist they're basically getting our knowledge and expertise for nothing."

Having a destination wedding is a choice made by many Australians every year, but very few people truly understand the amount of work it takes to coordinate such gatherings, she explained, and this in turn can lead to trouble when certain details are overlooked.

Forrester-Jones gave the example of a recent bride who had to be "rescued" after she decided to go it alone without consulting a specialist.

"A bride who was taking a large group to Fiji decided to book her flights online," recalled Forrester-Jones, "and while she was on the island, the airline changed the return flight time".

The carrier then sent the bride an automated email, which unfortunately she didn't receive.

"And when she contacted the transfer company to reconfirm the departure time,

they advised her the flight had changed, so she had to spend the last two days of her honeymoon reorganising everyone's transfers, booking extra nights' accommodation and changing flights."

Natural disasters and other acts of God are also commonly overlooked by the DIY planner, mused Forrester Jones, who has had to move entire wedding parties during cyclones and storms on many occasions.

"The last cyclone in Fiji was a bad one and a few resorts had to close for long periods for renovation...we negotiated with airlines to change flights, we found alternative resorts for weddings, we changed everyone's bookings...imagine doing that on your own!" she exclaimed.

‘The last cyclone in Fiji was a bad one...we negotiated with airlines to change flights, we found alternative resorts for weddings, we changed everyone’s bookings... imagine doing that on your own!’

Forrester-Jones also highlighted the fact that the average consumer would not have the same kind of negotiating power as a destination specialist, meaning if things did go wrong, couples would most likely have to foot the bill at full price – and that doesn't come cheap.

"I've negotiated special offers based on

volume for the guests, then had other people who did not book with me complain that they didn't get the offer," she explained.

Another wedding specialist who has been left to pick up the pieces after disaster struck during an overseas nuptial is Personal Travel Manager Deahann Urqueza.

Urqueza, who is a travel agent that specialises in Fiji weddings, explained to *travelBulletin* that a lot could go wrong when civilians attempted to do a specialist's job.

"I've had clients try to book all their guests' rooms online before all the prices changed due to instant purchase and they weren't able to get all the accommodation confirmed," she said.

"People don't realise that specialists like us actually have the ability to secure fixed room prices."

Other problems that are commonly encountered by those who choose to book their ceremonies online involve people failing to fill in the right paperwork to ensure their weddings are legally sound, as well as having guests scattered all over the place as they were unable to secure a single resort or hotel to accommodate the entire guest list.

"It's not uncommon for a couples' guests and family to be spread across parts of Fiji and not at the designated resort, which can create a logistical nightmare for them on the day of the wedding," she said.

Urqueza explained that while the allure of a six-star location without the six-star price tag was a major draw card for those looking to host an overseas wedding, it was still important to consult an expert before planning such a huge occasion.

"We do weddings every day. We know the suppliers and we have all the contacts – it just makes sense to choose to work with an expert," she said.



TOP TIPS TO PLANNING AN OVERSEAS NUPTIAL

1. Choose the right venue

Make sure the venue you choose is suited to the kind of ceremony you want to have. Consider the people attending (such as elderly, disabled or children) and ensure logistics are planned to suit the entire guest list.

2. Research, research, research

Read as much as you can about the destination to ensure that you have fulfilled the legal conditions for marriage in the country you choose.

For example, Thailand requires that your marriage documents are translated into Thai before they are submitted for certification by authorities.

3. Create a budget

Although it's widely known that holding a destination wedding can be a cheaper option than holding it at home, it is important that you factor in every cost as it can all add up.

It is a good idea to try and pay for as much of the event as you can from home to ensure that any nasty surprises are avoided upon check-out.

BANYAN TREE'S NEW FLOATING WEDDING

BALI'S Banyan Tree Ungasan has unveiled a new wedding option for its guests involving a clear floating platform in the pool of its Presidential Villa. Called Affinity Wedding, the new concept provides an additional venue for ceremonies at the resort.

Occupying 1,200m², the three-bedroom Presidential Villa provides a lush setting for an intimate wedding ceremony, with spectacular views out to sea, facing the sunset.

Banyan Tree Ungasan offers three other venues for weddings, including the White Dove (a triangular structure adorned with hundreds of white doves), the award-winning Ju-Ma-Na Restaurant or under a flower archway set upon on a see-through stage gently floating on the Banyan Tree's infinity pool.

With its own wedding planner, the resort offers packages from US\$8,089 including a picturesque ceremony set-up, indulgent services for the bride and groom and a honeymoon at the three-bedroom Presidential Villa.



White Dove chapel



Malamala Wedding Chapel

MALAMALA Beach Club is a romantic new island day retreat scheduled to open in Fiji in coming months. It will provide a spectacular setting in which to say "I do", with plans for a specially built chapel on site.

Situated on a tiny islet surrounded by clear waters and coral reefs, the beach club is the latest venture by South Sea Cruises and the first facility of its type to be introduced in Fiji.

It will offer all the style of an upmarket resort but in the form of a private venue for groups making day visits. With a contemporary design and coastal decor, South Sea said it will offer fine food, an outdoor bar and private cabanas in its beachside setting among the palms.

Couples will be able to plan a wedding in tropical seclusion, followed by a relaxed reception beside a resort-style infinity edge pool with views of the surrounding ocean and coral reefs.

Malamala Beach Club will be accessible in 30 minutes from Denarau Marina, Fiji's primary transport hub and the gateway to the beautiful Mamanuca and Yasawa islands. Guests will arrive in style by boat transfer, keeping their feet dry as they disembark on a private jetty.

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CLUB MED TO BUILD ON WEDDING PROGRAM

CLUB Med is looking to expand its packaged wedding program after the launch of an initial offering in partnership with SE7EN Agency last October.

The all-inclusive resort operator has begun promoting three of its properties to the weddings market through the Australian travel trade, with more to be introduced in the future.

Its program has been introduced in response to a growing demand for destination weddings, an area Club Med says has grown more than 30% over the past four years. With the average cost of an Australian wedding now more than \$65,000, the resort group says offshore nuptials have become an increasingly popular and cost effective option.

Through SE7EN - a specialist planner that has delivered more than 2,000 weddings since its inception in 2008 - Club Med is aiming to make offshore ceremonies an intimate, stress-free option.

Ceremonies are already available at Club Med Bali and at two properties in the Maldives, Club Med Kani and Club Med Finolhu Villas, with others to be introduced soon.

Package options are at a fixed price and all-inclusive, but can be customised to suit a couple's wishes, both for the ceremony and reception. They also allow for additional services to be added, such as cocktail parties or private dinners.

For trade partners, Club Med's wedding packages are fully commissionable, from flights to the ceremony.

Club Med meetings and events manager

Brendon King said the program allowed the company to offer new forms of experiential group travel.

"With the increase in destination weddings and our partnership with the SE7EN Agency, we have a unique opportunity to give couples a tailor-made once-in-a-lifetime wedding that's hassle-free – so they can focus on simply enjoying their special day with their loved ones," he said.



Club Med Kani, © Club Med



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LUXURY TREKKING



Blue Mountains © VisitNSW



Nepal



Peru © World Expeditions

By Emma Lovell

THE words luxury and trekking are not often found in the same sentence, however trekking isn't all about mud, sweat and tears. Booking your trekking holiday through a local tour company means you can enjoy all the natural surroundings have to offer – without having to rough it! I've trekked around the world and put together a list of my top destinations that combine unique experiences with luxury.

PERU

Trekking to Machu Picchu – the wonder of the world hidden deep in a mountainous jungle – is high on people's wish list. Altitude and the arduous, narrow path can deter many people, but there are many ways to reach the amazing peak, including a combination of rail, bus and on foot. The Inca Trail is the most popular trekking route, but why not try the more serene and secluded Lares Valley? On any one day you may only see five other people on this trail – all Quechuan natives – providing the chance to feel truly connected to this richly cultural country. Local tour operators send a crew of knowledgeable guides, cooks, horses, porters and camp attendants with you. Your tent will be ready each night, with warm water to wash and a hot beverage the following morning at your tent door. There is even a stop to swim in hot springs. Now that's the way to end a day of trekking.

BLUE MOUNTAINS

The famous mountains in NSW are so named for the blue hues seen across its vast, gaping valleys. It is the perfect playground for nature lovers and trekkers alike, with waterfalls, caves and native bushland to explore. Choose from 30-minute walks, to full day hikes; this area caters to all levels of trekker. The best thing about the Blue Mountains region is the wide range of B&B and charming hotels. After a big day of walking, you can come back to a cosy room, warm shower and, in the cooler months, a blazing fire in the dining room. Don't miss the flower-pot scones in Leura – best eaten with a lovely cup of tea. This is trekking with a touch of class.

NEPAL

The Himalayas of Nepal is another popular bucket list choice. The highest mountain range in the world is not to be missed. Of course Everest is the ultimate mountain



to trek, but Nepal offers so many amazing areas to challenge your fitness and see these magnificent peaks up close. For those worried about camping, Nepal's hospitality is evident in the lovely little tea houses dotted along the trekking routes. Take your time along the Everest Base Camp route, stopping at villages such as Phakding and Tengboche to rest and acclimatise. Here you will be able to order pizza at 4,200m above sea level – definitely a luxury for this avid trekker. You'll no doubt feel inspired by the strength of the Sherpa people as they carry the bulk of your luggage on their backs and arrive hours ahead of your group to prepare the accommodation. All you'll need to carry is a day pack. If you forget to bring something don't worry, the path is decorated with little villages that cater to every trekker's need – and the shopping enthusiast's desires. Enjoy a cake and coffee at one of the many German bakeries in Namche Bazaar while gazing out over the sheer magnificence of the Himalayas before you.

BHUTAN

The land of happiness is not known to many but if there is one country you need to add to your list, Bhutan is it! Home to the Tiger's Nest monastery – situated high up in the cliffs of Paro – this Buddhist nation will leave you with an ultimate sense of calm. Trekking starts from 3,000m and offers a diverse scenery of forests, lakes, rivers, fields and mountain peaks. By day you're walking in sunshine and the next, you may wake up to a blanket of snow, turning your campsite

into a winter wonderland. The Bhutanese guides are extremely dedicated to their guests – going above and beyond to ensure your comfort by building fires for warmth, catering to your dietary needs and even holding your hand on tricky parts of the path.

‘The Bhutanese guides are extremely dedicated to their guests – going above and beyond to ensure your comfort by building fires for warmth, catering to your dietary needs and even holding your hand on tricky parts of the path’

Ultimately, the views make it worth every step with breathtaking mountain sides seemingly draped in a patchwork quilt of rich oranges, reds and yellows. Bhutan is best described as aesthetically pleasing.

Wherever it is in the world you choose to take a trek, don't be put off by the hard work. The amazing local tour companies have the experience, knowledge and wonderful hospitality to make your walking holiday a dream. You can never experience a country better than by foot – the sensation of truly connecting to a place is the beauty of trekking; a luxury not many of us get to indulge.

TREKKING NO LONGER EXTREME



TREKKING adventures have often been portrayed as an intensive and grittier form of travel, reserved for only the most intrepid and rugged explorer.

But increasingly, trekking has grown to be more mainstream, where almost any traveller looking for a little extra thrill or excitement can join in.

General manager of Adventure World Neil Rodgers said contemporary adventurers span a wide range of ages and abilities, with the newer, softer incarnation of

yesterday's craggy wanderers wanting more comfort and convenience.

"The majority of the trekking trips that we offer are soft and accessible; and I think that in most cases the average traveller is completely capable of doing it," he said.

Accommodation choices have become more refined, too. At Machu Picchu, Adventure World's trekkers can upgrade to a luxury option with deluxe sleeping camps, hot water showers and massages. Alternatively, they can explore the Lares

or Salkantay trails and hike to boutique Peruvian mountain lodges each evening.

To help travel agents choose a trek that best suits their clients, Adventure World provides a travel scale which indicates the level of fitness required on each trip, ranging from 'leisurely' to 'challenging.'

Rodgers said independent soft adventure trips with classic sightseeing were core product at Adventure World and ensured clients discovered a destination in a more energetic and vibrant way.

NEPAL AND PERU LEAD HIKING EVOLUTION

AMONG the world's great hiking destinations, Peru and Nepal are two of the most iconic, dominated by their respective drawcards Machu Picchu and Mt Everest.

Both are experiencing an evolution as visitors look for new and more diverse experiences, and setting out on foot provides a great way to get the best of out of each.

World Expeditions chief executive officer Sue Badyari said trekking was a fantastic means to experience a destination up close.

"It's also cathartic and a great way to disconnect from our busy urban lives to immerse in nature and enjoy the social joys of walking with like-minded travellers."

Recently the Peruvian Government introduced a trekking permit system to combat overcrowding along the historic Inca trail to Machu Picchu. Badyari says permits could sell out quickly once issued on the open market, thus alternative trails had become popular.

"Our Salkantay trek to Machu Picchu, for

example, is a stunning alternative to the classic Inca trail with unrivalled views of the sacred peaks of Salkantay and Humantay," she said.

Having declined after the deadly earthquake in Nepal in 2015, Badyari said



trekking numbers were now close to or even ahead of pre-earthquake levels.

"For World Expeditions, the Great Himalaya Trails is an important strategy in bringing tourism to isolated and extremely poor corners of the country and to put valuable tourism dollars into these communities," she said.

For the more adventurous trekker looking for a once-in-a-lifetime expedition, World Expeditions offers what must be one of the world's longest treks – a 152-day, 1,700km trek across the Himalayas. Promising an enviable level of fitness for those who complete it, the trek is made up of seven different sections and allows trekkers to join any they choose.

While the Everest Base Camp trek continues to thrive, Badyari said lesser known areas of the country were re-emerging as highly attractive to seasoned trekkers and growing in popularity compared to the Everest district and the Annapurna region.

TREKKING GADGETS



Image courtesy of Camp Trend

SCRUBBA: WORLD'S SMALLEST WASHING MACHINE

The Scrubba is an Australian invention and a great alternative to washing your clothes in a river. Best of all, it weighs less than 145g. The portable pocket size “washing machine” uses no electricity and minimal water and features an internal washboard that gives a quality wash in minutes. To operate, add water and detergent, close and deflate, before rubbing the washboard for 30 secs to 3 minutes and finishing off by rinsing and drying.

■ Price: \$64

HANDPRESSO

Australians love their coffee, and just because you're trekking across the countryside, doesn't mean you should miss out on an espresso. The Handpresso is a handheld espresso maker that is really simple to use: you generate a 16-bar pressure, the same as a bicycle pump, add hot water (from a thermos flask or a kettle) and the espresso coffee of your choice in order to prepare a high-quality espresso. The Handpresso takes either pods or ground coffee and requires no electricity.

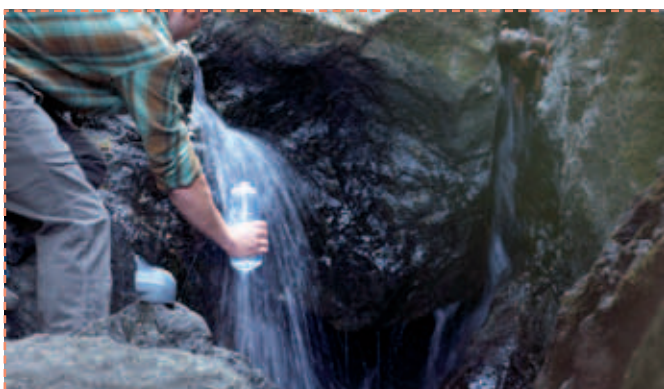
■ Price: \$150



SOLAR USB CHARGING STATION

In our tech based world, chances are we'll need to charge our devices while on the road. Whether it's trekking across the alps or cycling through the French countryside, a solar-powered USB charging station could be your saviour. There are plenty of options on the market to suit different needs, including waterproof ones. Devices such as the Anker PowerPort Solar Lite are very small and portable and are capable of charging an iPhone to 100% with plenty of charge to spare.

■ Prices start at: \$50 for basic models



ALL CLEAR UV WATER PURIFIER

Taking purified water to the extreme, Camelbak has a product called All Clear UV Purifier, which uses UV light to purify water. If you're trekking around the country, lugging a large quantity of water can be a pain. But if you're heading to a location where there's plenty of natural water, this is a simple solution. The bottle uses ultra-violet light to purify water in just a minute. Able to zap more than 80 bottles before needing a recharge, the UV bulb, which is built into the container's lid, lives up to 10,000 cycles. That's enough for three bottles a day for nine years, in case you get lost out there.

■ Prices start at: \$199.95



Anker PowerPort Solar Lite

SUDOKU

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6				1				2
7		8			4			6

Where in the World?



THERE are some iconic castles around the world, particularly all throughout Britain. But where is this one? If you think you know, send your answer to comp@travelbulletin.com.au. The first person to answer correctly will win themselves a double movie pass. Good luck!

APP HAPPY



PACKING for any sort of travel can be one of the most difficult tasks (and certainly the hardest when a brilliant travel agent takes care of all the bookings for you). There is always something vital you end up forgetting and regretting.

Never fear, PackPoint is here to save the day. This nifty app will give you an organised list of everything you need to take based upon the length of your travel, the weather of the destination and any activities planned for the trip.

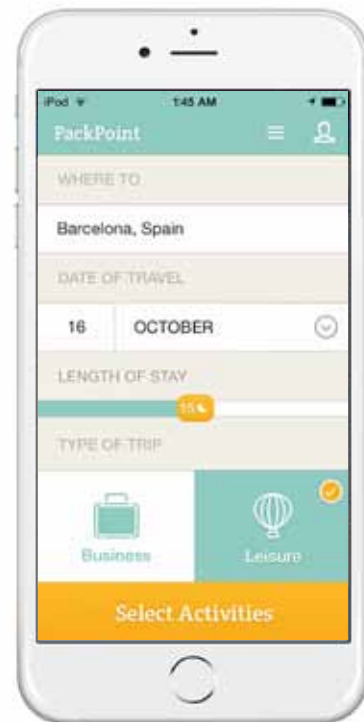
Your list is broken down into handy categories to assist in your actual packing (unfortunately the app doesn't provide support for a packing fairy to do it all for you yet).

As well as shooting out the perfect list for the location, PackPoint also allows you to customise your list with any extra special things particular to you that you can't forget

(like medications, or that particular document for your business meeting).

PackPoint makes travelling with others easy as well, by creating a website for your packing list which you can then share with your fellow passengers.

The app is available for free through the App Store and Google Play store, and offers in app purchases.

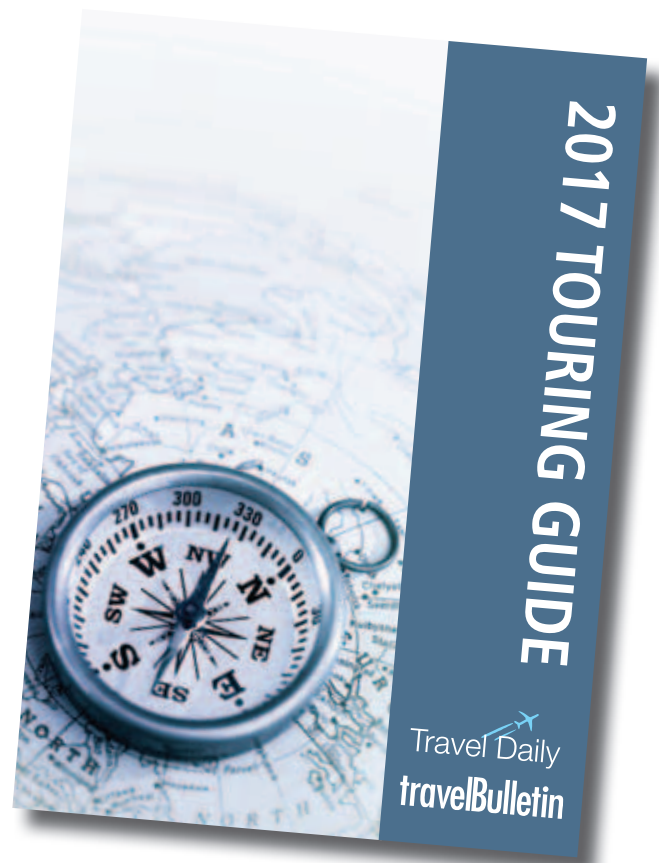


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