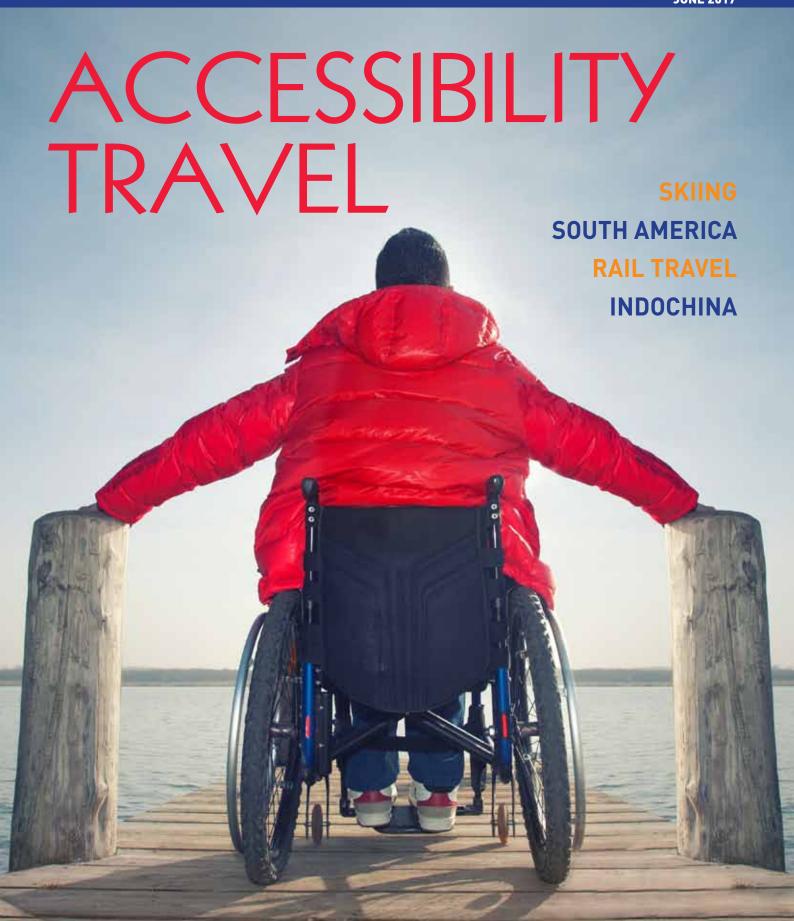
travelBulletin

JUNE 2017





Immerse yourself in tradition and firelit wonder, amongst the raw and untouched beauty that is Samoa. The friendly Samoans are ready to entertain you, and they've been rehearsing for the past 3,000 years. **Beautiful Samoa awaits...**





COVER STORY

Accessibility travel

FEATURES

- 42 Skiing
- 46 South America
- **52** Rail
- Indochina 56

MONTHLY

- **02** State of the Industry
- **06** Issues and Trends
- **17** Brochures
- 24 Technology
- 26 Business Events News
- **30** Careers
- 32 Cruise Report
- 40 Industry in Focus
- 64 Last Word

COLUMNS

- 02 Ian McMahon
- 06 Steve Jones
- 08 AFTA View
- 10 TTF View
- AACB View 29
- CLIA View



From the publisher **Bruce Piper**

THIS issue of travelBulletin marks the end of an era, with the final column from founding editor Ian McMahon. After the magazine was acquired by the Business Publishing Group in 2014, lan graciously agreed to continue as Editor at Large, with his incisive and insightful commentary always a popular part of the publication. Ian is stepping down after this month and we, along with the whole industry, want to pay tribute to his decades of fearless reporting and outstanding expertise. Ian has been a travel industry media legend for many years and we hope we can maintain his legacy.

MEANWHILE the ongoing evolution of the distribution landscape continues, with Qantas last month confirming plans which target a direct relationship with online travel agents. Head of Industry Partnerships, Rob Harrison, said that from 1 July the airline will start to enforce an existing policy which provides that no commission is payable to travel agents who are consolidating tickets on behalf of an OTA. The change will have significant impacts on existing relationships, with Webjet among some of the large operators currently ticketing via consolidation rather than having a direct relationship with the carrier. If Qantas succeeds in cutting the consolidators out of the loop it will be intriguing to watch whether other airlines follow.

That's just one development in distribution, with other trends including the ongoing push by carriers to gain direct bookings from consumers. A number of travelBulletin readers have highlighted this issue in recent days, with one contributor, who didn't wish to be named, noting that agency distribution including GDS costs - is in the single digits of percentage costs. Despite this, carriers continue to discount heavily via their websites, with senior airline staff on a "direct to consumers mantra" which has seen them spend huge amounts on web booking systems targeting direct sales, "regardless of the illogical commercial realities".

"The build and running costs of these web systems are booked as commercial... they are not accounted as distribution costs or linked to yields, making agency commissions 'the enemy' in the eyes of some," he said. At the same time they have significantly downsized or restructured their industry sales teams, reducing their investment in this area despite the agency platform comprising the cheapest retail distribution product in the world, providing airlines flying from Australia with 70% plus of their ticket volumes. Many readers will echo these frustrations, which are seeing carriers in some cases heavily discount their direct fares, despite agents being able to deliver them better yields.

This month's contributors

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lan McMahon's perspective

ONE of my first assignments as a fledgling travel industry journalist was to report on an address to junior consultants by industry elder statesman Wal Edney. He told them a career in travel was unlikely to provide great riches. But if they worked hard, he said, they could make a comfortable living, enjoy an enviable lifestyle and cement lifelong relationships with travel industry colleagues.

In the more than 40 years since then, I have reported on a succession of tumultuous events that have seen the industry transformed ("disrupted" is, I believe, the current vogue word) only to be re-shaped again and again and again.

Established agents, whose business models were based on selling line voyages with rigorously capped commissions paid only to those with APAC accreditation, saw the wide bodied B747 revolutionise mass travel. Almost overnight, it seemed, the line voyage became virtually redundant.

Then non-IATA Asian carriers exposed the IATA cartel's attempts at retail price maintenance as restrictive and outmoded. Backed by the law of the land, Qantas attempted to hold back the tide but failed as legislators recognised the futility of prosecuting agents for discounting airfares.

Consolidators flourished, paying doublefigure overrides on international fares thanks to the entrepreneurial flair of the likes of Isi Leibler, Eddy Baldacchino, Les Cassar, Harry Mrska and Spiros Alysandratos. The internet enabled airlines to wrest back much power from agents and zero commissions became a reality. The last man standing among the pioneering consolidators is Spiros Alysandratos whose low profile belies his huge success and enormous influence.

AFTA became a powerful representative of agent interests with a war chest derived from insurance commissions but lost its way as franchised chains flourished and took over many of its functions. Due to a combination of complacency, hubris and, at times, incompetence, it faced extinction but was saved thanks to Mike Hatton. His remarkable achievement laid the groundwork for his successor, Jayson Westbury, to persuade government to free agents from the red tape of an archaic licensing system.

Despite what Wal Edney had to say, some individuals became very rich indeed – none more so than Graham Turner and the three other co-founders of Flight Centre, a global travel empire that is one of the great success stories of Australian business.

But as I pen this, my last column for travelBulletin, I can attest to the underlying truth of Wal Edney's words, in particular about lifelong relationships. The true treasure to be found working in the travel industry lies in the camaraderie, the fellowship and the friendships.

Qantas wants OTAs direct

QANTAS has put the cat among the consolidator pigeons with a review of its distribution strategies, which will see it commence monitoring compliance with an existing policy which provides that it "does not remunerate travel agents for revenue generated from consolidating on behalf of online travel agents (OTAs)".

The most notable OTA affected will be Webjet but a number of other large players are also impacted, with these online players putting large volumes of tickets through consolidation which also handles all of their re-issues, cancellations and changes. Qantas head of agency partnerships, Rob Harrison, said working directly would mean the airline could "better support the channels that customers choose to book Qantas," with OTAs invited to register their interest in a new direct agreement on the QF Industry Sales website.

The move raises the question of what actually constitutes an OTA? If a bricksand-mortar store evolves to have an online presence will they be captured by this new strategy? In the event that a consolidator has a franchisee relationship with an OTA, is a third party such as Qantas able to force a change in how that works? A hypothetical case in point would be a business like BYOjet, which was a Helloworld member prior to being acquired by Flight Centre about 18 months ago. If BYOjet was still part of Helloworld, this move by Qantas would effectively stop HLO receiving any remuneration for volumes transacted by BYOjet, despite it being a longstanding franchisee. It's understood consolidators are reviewing their options in the light of the move, with some in the industry speculating the ACCC may become involved.

BUSINESS MONITOR

OUTBOUND MARKETTop 10 destinations, March 2017

Destination	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Feb 17/ Mar 17	Trend Mar 16/ Mar 17
	000	000	000	%	%
New Zealand	112.8	112.9	116.7	+0.1	+4.6
Indonesia	95.1	93.6	81.7	-0.8	-10.6
USA	85.9	84.6	72.8	-0.8	-1.5
China	38.5	38.9	44.2	-0.9	+3.2
Thailand	43.2	43.5	40.3	+0.6	-3.1
Japan	31.8	31.3	34.8	+0.2	+6.7
UK	51.8	49.4	33.9	+0.2	+5.3
Singapore	34.4	32.8	31.3	+0.7	+13.0
India	26.8	26.5	24.5	-0.7	+2.6
Vietnam	21.2	20.9	21.6	+1.2	+5.8
All outbound	823.2	803.9	720.5	-0.3	+1.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

INBOUND MARKET

Top 10 sources, March 2017

Source	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Feb 17/	Trend Mar 16/
		·		Mar 17	Mar 17
	000	000	000	%	%
China	106.2	106.5	110.4	+0.0	+7.9
New Zealand	113.6	114.5	108.7	-0.1	+4.0
UK	61.7	59.1	79.0	+0.5	+4.9
USA	61.7	62.7	76.7	+0.5	+8.0
Japan	37.1	38.2	50.4	+1.0	+9.5
Singapore	36.2	37.3	36.6	+0.3	-2.2
Malaysia	32.1	33.3	34.7	+0.0	+3.6
India	23.0	22.2	24.1	+0.2	+11.6
South Korea	23.8	23.3	24.0	-1.2	+1.7
Germany	18.1	18.4	21.1	+0.5	+10.0
All inbound	712.8	710.8	768.5	+0.1	+6.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

MAIN DOMESTIC ROUTES

Top 10 domestic city pairs at February 2017

City pair	Passengers YE Feb 16	Passengers YE Feb 17	% change	
	(000)	(000)		
Melbourne-Sydney	8,696.4	8,885.7	+2.2	
Brisbane-Sydney	4,526.1	4,666.2	+3.1	
Brisbane-Melbourne	3,387.3	3,487.5	+3.0	
Gold Coast-Sydney	2,664.0	2,692.4	+1.1	
Adelaide-Melbourne	2,332.2	2,400.2	+2.9	
Melbourne-Perth	2,139.8	2,062.3	-3.6	
Gold Coast-Melbourne	1,843.9	1,970.5	+6.9	
Adelaide-Sydney	1,847.5	1,873.1	+1.4	
Perth-Sydney	1,763.1	1,747.9	-0.9	
Hobart-Melbourne	1,498.1	1,575.3	+5.2	



STAR Alliance recently celebrated 20 years since Air Canada, Lufthansa, Scandinavian Airlines, THAI and United Airlines came together to create the world's first airline alliance. The group's chief executive board gathered in Frankfurt on 14 May to discuss a 10-year plan on harnessing digital technology. According to Pedro Heilbron, current chairman of the Star Alliance chief executive board, "Passengers want to have control over their journey at their fingertips. That means having full access

to a wealth of information, but also being able to personalise it to their own particular requirements." He said this was the central pillar of the alliance's new strategic focus. The group today serves over 1.300 destinations in 191 countries.

Wicked Travel goes under

A NUMBER of large domestic suppliers have been hit by the closure last month of backpacker specialist travel agency network Wicked Travel. With 12 stores in Brisbane, Cairns, Melbourne, Sydney, Byron Bay, the Gold Coast and Airlie Beach, Wicked Travel ceased trading owing more than \$1 million to players such as Quicksilver, Tandem Skydive, Explore Whitsundays, Queensland Resorts and Spaceships Australia. As well as money owed to the suppliers it appears staff superannuation entitlements have not been paid and the Australian Taxation Office is also a significant creditor of the group.

Interestingly Wicked Travel operated some of its outlets as Greyhound Wicked Travel under a strategic alliance with transport

operator Greyhound Australia. Some of the stores reopened as Greyhound Travel the day after administrators were appointed, with a number of Wicked Travel staff offered a contract with a new company. Greyhound has distanced itself from the collapse, saying it is "in no way a part of the now liquidated Wicked Travel" - but also promises that all coach travel purchased via Wicked Travel will be honoured. The company is recommending clients with bookings made before 29 April 2017 contact the administrators of the failed company, or tour operators direct.

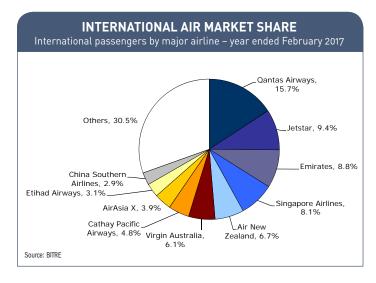
Air Canada Melbourne launch

AIR Canada country manager Paul McLean has hailed the strong support of the Australian travel trade for giving the carrier the confidence to launch a new seasonal service between Melbourne and Vancouver over the upcoming Australian summer. The flights will mark Air Canada's third Australian destination, with the new Victorian route to be operated by Boeing 787-9 aircraft four times a week from 3 December 2017 through to 4 February 2018. The launch comes less than a year after Air Canada added non-stop flights from Brisbane and is a "major vote of confidence in the Australian market," McLean said.

"By operating the only non-stop service between Melbourne and Canada we are making it easier than ever before for Victorians to experience Canada's unsurpassed winter attractions," he added. Arriving in Vancouver

Continues over page

BUSINESS MONITOR



DOMESTIC AIR MARKET – February 2017							
	Feb 16	Feb 17	Growth (%)	Yr to Feb 16	Yr to Feb 17	Growth (%)	
Total pax carried	4.46m	4.35m	-2.4	57.90m	58.97m	+1.8	
Revenue pax kms (RPK)	5.09bn	4.93bn	-3.1	68.29bn	69.35bn	+1.5	
Avail seat kms (ASK)	6.87bn	6.56bn	-4.6	89.18bn	88.76bn	-0.5	
Load factor (%)	74.1	75.3	+1.2*	76.6	78.1	+1.6*	
Aircraft trips (000)	50.6	48.5	-4.0	637.4	637.3	+0.0	
Source: BITRE * Percentage p	oints differenc	e					

DOMES	TIC ON	TIME	PERFOR	MANCE	– March	n 2017	
Arrivals on Time			Departure	s on Time	Cancel	Cancellations	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Jetstar	4,769	69.9	4,620	67.7	187	2.7	
Qantas	7,467	81.7	7,651	83.7	171	1.8	
QantasLink	8,144	79.0	8,267	80.2	448	4.2	
REX	4,798	72.1	5,109	76.8	134	2.0	
Virgin Australia	9,384	78.9	9,638	81.0	507	4.1	
All Airlines	36,593	76.7	37,346	78.3	1,528	3.1	
Source: BITRE							

Continues from previous page

at 7.30am, the new flights will provide smooth access to key Canadian ski destinations, as well as offering seamless connections with Air Canada services to other cities in North America such as New York and Las Vegas. McLean told *travelBulletin* the addition will help Air Canada capitalise on peak demand over the Christmas period, with the 787s offering lie flat International Business Class, Premium Economy and Economy cabins.

Alitalia administration

THE Board of Directors at Alitalia chose to proceed with a filing of 'extraordinary administration' in compliance with Italian law after shareholders realised the "serious economic and financial situation" the airline was facing. The early May decision came after staff rejected plans to wind back its workforce and implement pay cuts. Etihad Airways, which owns a 49% stake in Alitalia and has invested €1,722 million into the struggling airline over the past few years, said it was disappointed with the decision.

•All flights and services will continue to take place as planned and without any changes •

Outgoing president and chief executive James Hogan said "it is clear this business requires fundamental and far-reaching restructuring to survive and grow in future".

Aviation Online, the local representative for Alitalia, insists the Italian carrier's operations

and flights "have neither been, nor will be, affected by the current Company situation".

"All flights and services will continue to take place as planned and without any changes," Aviation Online moved to assure the trade. "Tickets already purchased are therefore valid".

In a further sign of confidence, the International Air Transport Association has implemented terms of a security deposit with Alitalia. Travel agent transactions through BSP will proceed as normal.

Australia next for laptop ban?

AT THE time of press, the Federal Government was considering implementing its own laptop ban, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull confirmed on 16 May in South Australia. Turnbull said the Government was aware of the changes made around the world and in due course an announcement would be made by the Transport Minister. "We are looking at it very closely, taking into account all the information and advice we are receiving internationally and working very closely with our partners," he said.

The development on Australia's possible ban comes after reports emerged that US President Donald Trump had told Russian officials about an Islamic State terrorist threat linked to the use of laptops on aircraft. Federal Transport Minister Darren Chester said the Government was monitoring shifts in the threat environment domestically and overseas to ensure the best security arrangements were in place to meet any challenges. Australia's potential ban would follow those of the United States and the United Kingdom which in March banned passengers from bringing laptop computers into the cabin on certain international flights from the Middle East and North Africa.

Flight Centre acquires Europe agency

FLIGHT Centre recently acquired a 25% stake in 3Mundi, the existing FCM Travel licensee in Switzerland and France, which also operates a "business travel innovation lab" in Barcelona, Spain. The move will give the company a "platform for further expansion in large and rapidly growing markets". Flight Centre Travel Group managing director Graham Turner said France and Switzerland were important corporate travel hubs for existing clientele as well as "new multi-national accounts that we are targeting globally".

As well as strengthening the company's existing European operations, the deal will also deliver "new technology, products and tools that can be adapted and rolled out in other geographies and brands within our global network," Turner said. The deal made by Flight Centre includes options to move to 100% ownership in the future if desired, with the deal set for formal completion by July. The acquisition continues Flight Centre's European expansion after recently acquiring corporate businesses in Germany, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden.

Qantas integrated terminal

QANTAS will develop a new international wing at Perth Airport's Terminals 3 and 4 which will feature an integrated domestic and international passenger hub. The new Perth facility is being constructed ahead of the commencement of Qantas' new non-stop 787-9 *Dreamliner* services to London which launch in March 2018, and will also be used for the airline's other international services to Singapore and Auckland, along with its entire domestic operation.

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNET AGENCY MARKET SHARES

Mar 2017, compared with Feb 2017

Rank Position Websites	Visits Share Mar 17	Relative Diff Mar to Feb	Rank Feb 17
Webjet Australia	16.42	+0.07	1
Expedia Australia	11.76	+0.41	2
Skyscanner Australia	9.06	-0.11	3
Wotif.com	7.99	+0.13	4
Flight Centre	6.28	-0.01	5
Velocity Frequent Flyer	3.58	+0.09	6
Cheap Flights Aus & NZ	2.54	+0.38	9
Lastminute.com.au	2.51	+0.12	8
Luxury Escapes	2.29	-0.35	7
I Want That Flight!	2.00	+1.81	10

INTERNATIONAL AIR ROUTES

Top 10 city pairs (at February 2017)

City pair	Passengers YE Feb 16	Passengers YE Feb 17	% of total	% change 17/16
Auckland-Sydney	1,544,327	1,593,641	4.2	+2.5
Singapore-Sydney	1,469,405	1,454,153	3.8	-1.0
Singapore-Melbourne	1,244,231	1,372,831	3.6	+10.3
Auckland-Melbourne	1,161,939	1,200,536	3.2	+3.3
Singapore-Perth	1,080,591	1,127,828	3.0	+4.4
Hong Kong-Sydney	1,022,000	1,081,462	2.9	+5.8
Auckland-Brisbane	971,069	961,094	2.5	-1.0
Los Angeles-Sydney	926,493	891,020	2.4	-3.8
Denpasar-Perth	852,463	882,760	2.3	+3.6
Kuala Lumpur-Melb	802,894	828,514	2.2	+3.2
Top 10 city pairs	11,085,412	11,393,839	30.1	+2.8
Other city pairs	24,342,710	26,499,944	69.9	+8.9
ALL CITY PAIRS	35,428,122	37,893,783	100.0	+7.0
Source: BITRE				

SHARE PRICES

at 17 May 2017	
Flight Centre (FLT)	\$36.66
Helloworld (HLO)	\$4.14
Webjet (WEB)	\$12.16
Qantas (QAN)	\$4.915
Virgin Australia (VAH)	\$0.18
Ardent Leisure (AAD)	\$2.06
Air New Zealand (AIZ)	\$2.61
Auckland International Airport (AIA)	\$6.30
Sydney Airport (SYD)	\$7.30
Corporate Travel Management (CTD)	\$21.81
Village Roadshow (VRL)	\$3.45
Regional Express (REX)	\$0.96
Sealink (SLK)	\$4.16
Mantra Group Limited (MTR)	\$3.095

JEAN KITTSON CHRISTENS AZURE



SCENIC has christened its first river cruise ship on Portugal's Duoro River, the 96-passenger Scenic Azure. The new addition makes Scenic the first operator to own and operate a purpose-built river cruise ship in the region.

Sailing through the Douro Valley from Porto down to Vega de Terron, the 80m-long Scenic Azure is designed to "deliver a truly exceptional and intimate river cruising experience".

Australian comedian and godmother of the ship. Jean Kittson (pictured) christened the vessel on Saturday 29 April.

It will offer an outdoor deck with alfresco seating, a streamlined immigration and customs area to enable a faster transfer experience, new food & beverage outlets and a Duty Free store. An International Transit Lounge will also be incorporated which will offer a dozen shower suites, a wellness centre and space to relax for passengers connecting between domestic and international flights. Qantas said it intended to relocate to an expanded Terminal 1 facility at Perth Airport by 2025, pending a commercial agreement.

The industry's night of nights

THE travel fraternity is gearing up for the industry's night of nights next month, with the finalists announced for the 2017 National

Travel Industry Awards. More than 3,200 votes were cast during the voting period, resulting in a finalist list with a mix of old and new faces. Jetstar joins Qantas Airways and Virgin Australia as finalists in the Best Domestic Airline category, while Luxury Escapes, TripADeal, Cruise Guru, Fly365.com and Global Journeys are finalists in the Best Online Travel Agency category. travelBulletin and our sister publication Travel Daily will be involved in the event as a key partner, while judging will take place at the Qantas headquarters in Mascot, with Qantas once again the NTIA major sponsor for 2017.

The National Travel Industry Awards will be announced at a gala dinner at the International Convention Centre Sydney on 22 July.

AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS International passenger through Australia's major international airports – February 2017

Airport	Passengers YE Feb 16	Passengers YE Feb 17	% of total	% change 17/16			
Sydney	14,180,820	15,235,473	40.2	+7.4			
Melbourne	9,032,309	9,741,496	25.7	+7.9			
Brisbane	5,286,459	5,470,771	14.4	+3.5			
Perth	4,223,461	4,376,102	11.5	+3.6			
Gold Coast	962,338	1,101,195	2.9	+14.4			
Adelaide	860,431	937,844	2.5	+9.0			
Cairns	569,523	640,427	1.7	+12.4			
Darwin	259,697	278,386	0.7	+7.2			
Townsville^	17,079	42,641	0.1	149.7			
Canberra`	n/a	37,746	0.1	n/a			
Sunshine Coast*	17,376	13,728	0.0	-21.0			
Norfolk Island	11,793	9,973	0.0	-15.4			
Port Hedland~	6,836	8,001	0.0	17.0			
All Airports	35,428,122	37,893,783	100.0	+7.0			
AC-b-d-l-d-s-d-s	AC-b						

ATAS ACCREDITED LOCATIONS at 19 May 2017

New South Wales	997
Victoria	716
Queensland	604
Western Australia	290
South Australia	228
Australian Capital Territory	49
Tasmania	42
Northern Territory	22
TOTAL	2,948

Travel Daily **HEADLINES** 20 Apr Virgin activates wi-fi trial

20 Apr Emirates hit by US bans

21 Apr New low-cost SIN-LGW link

21 Apr VA to fly PER-CBR direct

24 Apr TravelCube to join Hotelbeds

26 Apr QR adds a dozen routes

26 Apr Ardent appoints new CEO

27 Apr TIME executive program

27 Apr RCI commits three ships

28 Apr Xi'an event targets Aussies

28 Apr QF PER/LHR now on sale

01 May Newcastle Apt going int'l

01 May OF to expand UnionPay

02 May Evergreen repositioning

03 May Beijing Capital to Brissie

03 May Alitalia into administration

04 May Fiji plans local expansion

04 May NTIA 2017 finalists unveiled

05 May QF tips near record profit

05 May Fiji to target lux market

08 May Wicked Travel whacked 08 May Jetstar Indonesian MoU

09 May Dreamworld keeps diving

09 May Fiji air capacity increase

10 May Tourism budget backlash

10 May QF confirms PER facilities

11 May AU/NZ 'one visa' one-sided

11 May Luxon bullish on outlook

12 May Select gathers in Taiwan

12 May Emirates to boost BNE

15 May APT river ship revolution

15 May Record year for cruising

15 May Aurora adds newbuild

expedition ship

15 May ETG enhances 'Book Safe'

16 May FCTG expands in Europe

16 May Qantas targets OTAs direct

17 May Laptop ban down under? 17 May QF code back to Port Vila

18 May Virgin loses \$69 million in third quarter

18 May Helloworld means business

18 May Virgin Samoa to conclude

Got something to say?

We're all ears, so share your thoughts at: havevoursav@travelbulletin.com.au



Steve Jones' Say

JETSTAR is the worst airline in the world. Well, so says research conducted by consumer advocacy groups in eight countries around the globe, including Australia's own Choice.

Ok, not every single airline was included in the survey of 11,000 passengers. Only 73. Sample sizes for other carriers were either too small, Tiger Airways included, or the airlines did not feature at all. Hardly surprising when passengers from the UK, Germany, US or Asia weren't anywhere to be seen in the survey. So there are probably worse airlines out there.

Still, last out of 73 in a survey that examined, among other things, punctuality, service, cleanliness and meals isn't great.

Virgin Australia won't be too chuffed either. It was considered better than only 22 airlines, finishing 51st.. Qantas, too, will hardly be taking out ads spruiking its popularity after finishing mid table. Thirty five airlines are, apparently, superior to Australia's flag carrier.

Jetstar felt so aggrieved it felt it necessary to issue a statement rejecting the survey findings. I don't know why it bothered. All it did was add fuel to a fire that was barely flickering and would have died out naturally within 24 hours.

• People have short and selective memories, often limited to the last flight they took or the worst experience they can remember... •

Jetstar should have taken it all with a pinch of salt. As a reporter, I used to regard these stories as space fillers on a slow news day. A low cost carrier gets another kicking in a less-than-robust survey. So what's new?

That's not to say Jetstar, and others, don't have work to do to improve the quality of their product and service. Of course they do. The experience can be painful at times.

But people have short and selective memories, often limited to the last flight they took or the worst experience they can remember, whether it was one they endured personally or simple read about. It makes the survey somewhat less than scientific.

I've flown Jetstar many times, as I have the punching bag that is Tiger Airways, and experienced a few late departures and a cancellation or two. But the unremarkable flights – incident-free, on-time, perfectly reasonable service – far exceed the number of grim experiences. We remember and focus on the negatives, conveniently dismissing or forgetting that most of the time the flights been perfectly adequate.

Furthermore, I don't buy a low cost fare for comfort, fine wines, a gastronomic food experience or to receive a "welcome back Mr Jones" greeting. You get what you pay for. So comparing Jetstar with a Qantas or Emirates or any other full service carrier in a survey like this is nonsense and worthless.

TRAVEL INDUSTRY EXHIBITION

& CONFERENCE

LUNA PARK, SYDNEY 20-21 JULY MCEC, MELBOURNE 25-26 JULY



Headline Speaker:
Zelda la Grange,
Presidential Aide to
Nelson Mandela



RICHARD ERNSTER
MD & Cofounder
HELPING HAND GROUP &
GOODWILL GETAWAYS



ANTHONY DENNIS
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LEARN FROM INDUSTRY LEADERS & DEVELOP KEY SKILLS TO BECOME AN AGENT OF CHANGE

OPPORTUNITIES LIE IN WAIT FOR NZ

By Guy Dundas

TOURISM New Zealand's new boss used the annual tradeshow TRENZ to confirm the organisation's tourism growth strategy for the next four years, with an increased effort to drive visitor dispersal to regional areas and into shoulder travel seasons. Stephen England-Hall, a fresh face to the tourism industry, took up the position of chief executive at TNZ in early April and said now is an opportune time for New Zealand to focus on growth, to be achieved by "working more closely with government and industry to improve the visitor experience by bringing our deep knowledge of the visitor and marketing insight to life for the NZ industry".

Speaking with travelBulletin at TRENZ, held at The Cloud in Auckland early last month, England-Hall said there were near-term opportunities for mature and established markets like Australia and the UK, and high growth markets such as China and Indonesia.

He said protecting, sustaining and improving the New Zealand experience was key. "The very best way to ensure that Kiwis advocate for tourism is to get smarter about matching supply and demand, understanding how we need to evolve and continuing to embrace the cultures that visit us, and providing relevant visitor insight to industry and the communities in which we engage," he said.

Last year, Tourism New Zealand took over the national quality assurance organisation Qualmark for NZ-based attractions & leisure activities. It's redevelopment over the past several months is seen by England-Hall as a way to "protect what makes New Zealand tourism distinctive and unique".

RENEWED TIES WITH AIR NEW ZEALAND

Keen to build on its successful five-year relationship with Air New Zealand, Tourism New Zealand inked a fresh Memorandum of Understanding to inject an additional NZ\$10

million each this year into its marketing alliance, taking the total joint investment NZ\$100 million to date. Air New Zealand chief



Christopher Luxon (pictured below) told travelBulletin the partnership was an efficient way of doing business in offshore markets.

Luxon said working 'hand-in-glove' with TNZ provided greater synergies and "much more impact if we can do things together rather than cross purposes".

The Air New Zealand boss also reiterated the carrier was assessing multiple potential new routes within the Pacific Rim, in the Americas (specifically the US east coast and mid-west) and Asia - the latter offering "huge opportunities for us".

Luxon commented that while tourism growth has been good for NZ, there were still billions of dollars in increased productivity that can be tapped into for the sector. He said when New Zealand's tourism industry is benchmarked against other developed countries, it sits about mid-table in terms of productivity. "If we can get to the top 10%, there's another nine billion dollars, and that really comes from us thinking about how we can create more higher premium value visitor experiences."

COMMON BORDER ONE-SIDED

The continued push for a common border between Australia and New Zealand was raised as a bone of contention by Tourism Industry Aotearoa's chief executive Chris Roberts at TRENZ. Roberts fired up the debate for the often talked about, yetto-be fully supported initiative between transTasman neighbours, saying the ball remained in Australia's court to fully back the "one visa" strategy.

"We had one visa during the Cricket World Cup...[but] that was essentially not a true one visa. It was New Zealand accepting

the Australian visa," Roberts explained to travelBulletin. During the Cricket World Cup jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand in 2015, the only real beneficiaries of the common border made available over the sixweek tournament were travellers from China. "They didn't actually come for the cricket. They just used the visa that was available. But there were no issues, no problems caused during that period."

"If you turned up in New Zealand and you had an Australian visa in your passport, we let you in. But it didn't work the other way. And Australia is still saying it's not prepared to do that," Roberts said.

He slammed Australia for making "lots of excuses", preventing the one visa adoption between the countries. "We have to accept that it is not the way Australia wants to go, so the alternative really at the moment is to make travel between the two countries basically a domestic-like experience."

The very best way to ensure that Kiwis advocate for tourism is to get smarter about matching supply and demand, understanding how we need to evolve and continuing to embrace the cultures that visit us?

Stephen England-Hall CEO Tourism New Zealand

CRUISE BOOM – BUT LIMITS LOOM

THE wave of Australians heading to sea continues to surge, with a record 1,281,159 Aussies taking a cruise in 2016, a massive 21% increase on 2015.

The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) Australasia's 2016 Australian Ocean Passenger Cruise Industry Source Market Report revealed one in 19 Australians took a cruise in 2016, achieving the highest per capita ratio of market penetration in the world.

The South Pacific was unveiled as Australia's favourite cruise destination, attracting more than 42% of ocean cruise passengers, followed by domestic cruises (26%), New Zealand (8.3%) and Europe (7%).

While Alaska saw a 25.5% boost in Australians heading to the destination in 2016, other long-haul destinations generally experienced a decline, attributed to the impact of geo-political events, with Europe and the Mediterranean falling by 11.8%.

New South Wales remained the largest source of cruise passengers during the period, responsible for 40.8% of all cruisers, followed by Queensland (23.8%) and Victoria (16.8%).

CLIA Australasia's managing director Joel Katz noted Australia's ocean cruise passenger numbers had increased by an average of 19.4% annually since 2007.

"However, future growth of Australia's cruising sector will be hindered by a lack of berthing options in major capital cities," he said.

"To achieve the 11.8% annual Australian passenger growth needed to achieve the goal of two million passengers by 2020, there are significant challenges facing us as an industry here in Australia, particularly in Sydney. These must be urgently addressed."

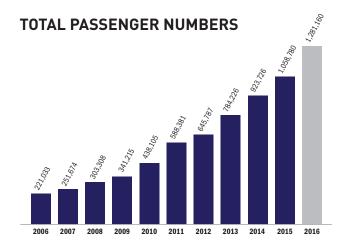
Katz's comments were echoed by both Carnival Australia and RCL Cruises, who called for an infrastructure solution.

"In celebrating such stunning growth, there remains a cautionary tale," Carnival Australia's executive chairman Ann Sherry said.

"Future strong growth and economic performance can only be sustained if port infrastructure challenges particularly in Sydney are addressed," she warned.

Weighing in on the issue, RCL Cruises' managing director for Australia and New Zealand, Adam Armstrong said Australia was now at a cross roads.

"In order to continue to capitalise on the very significant economic benefits that cruising brings, the government and people of Australia, particularly NSW, now have the opportunity to review the berthing capacity for big ships in Sydney, east of the Harbour Bridge," Armstrong said.





LAST month the federal government handed down its budget and there was very little for the travel and tourism industry to celebrate apart from the fact that (at least for now) there are no new taxes for the industry.

In one way this could be taken as a good budget, since travel and tourism have often been seen as an easy target for increasing revenue through heavier taxes, and this budget does not do that.

I am sure as you read this you will recall the big fight we had last year with the federal government over the increase to the Passenger Movement Charge (PMC) from 1 July 2017 which will increase to \$60 per person. But in real terms what this year's federal budget did do is decrease the amount of appropriation or funding to Tourism Australia. And they have also failed to provide anything new for the industry. So once again the government will take a small fortune in increased PMC and not award any of

From where I sit it is simply that this government does not really seem interested in the travel industry?

it back to any part of the industry to support policies that support the industry.

It's a vicious circle really and this game is played every year. The industry spends considerable money submitting professional

proposals to the pre-budget process, including AFTA and what we get in return is a reduction in funding.

One could suggest that our submissions must not be worth the paper they are written on and some may have that view, but from where I sit it is simply that this government does not really seem interested in the travel and tourism industry.

It is a shame that a government that during the election was all talk about how travel and tourism was a future growth industry has not put its money where its mouth is and increased its support for the various concepts and ideas put forward by the industry for the industry.

As the inbound and outbound numbers continue to increase and the industry appears to, in spite of the lack of government support, continue to grow, I guess those in Canberra feel that they don't need to worry about us.

One thing that the federal budget did announce is the new Western Sydney Airport (WSA) is going to be built. In of itself this is a very big deal as it has been a topic of conversation for over 40 years. The budget has indicated that it will come at a cost of \$5 billion and will be complete by 2026. That's nine years from now, and a lot can happen in nine years, but clearly not the building of an airport. It just seems inconceivable that it will take that long to get it built. Perhaps the federal government is planning on using convicts to move the rocks.

The wonderful people at Wellcamp (WTB) in Toowoomba managed to get an airport built and operational in 18 months. The mind boggles. But to finish on a much more positive note, at least the WSA project has bipartisan support and as such will happen. Well that is what the politicians have said, so it must be right. Let's just hope they are this time.

"Blessed are the curious, for they shall have adventures."

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TURNBULL FLIES SOLO INTO BADGERYS CREEK

SYDNEY'S second airport at Badgerys Creek is set to proceed after the allocation of \$5 billion in funding in last month's Federal Budget, ending months of speculation over who would develop the facility.

Prime Minster Malcolm Turnbull announced the Government would fund and develop the project itself after it became clear the private operator of the existing Sydney Airport would decline its right to take on the new facility.

Construction of Western Sydney Airport will now begin late next year, with an opening slated for 2026 - news welcomed by tourism industry bodies including the Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF).

"Securing funding to build the Western Sydney Airport has been at the top of TTF's list for many years now, and we are very pleased to see the Turnbull Government has finally made a rock-solid commitment to get it off the ground," said TTF chief executive Margy Osmond.

"The benefit of the Western Sydney Airport to the region's visitor economy cannot be overstated - it will be a massive economic engine that will drive investment and jobs growth through the roof."

But within days of funding being announced, questions were being raised over the cost of the project and whether a private operator might still take responsibility for the build.

The private developer behind Toowoomba's Wellcamp Airport, Queensland's Wagner Group, said the Sydney plan was over-priced, with its Chairman John Wagner suggesting he could build the airport for around \$3.5 billion and would lodge a bid with the Government.

Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce backed the potential for private involvement, telling ABC radio a non-government builder could offer "a better outcome".

"I'm a big fan of John Wagner, they've delivered an airport for a very low cost, on time and on budget," Joyce said.

"If there's a way to have private enterprise like the Wagners, I would be supportive of that. And if there's a way to have that dynamic in the construction of (Western Sydney Airport) we'll end up with a better outcome."

Meanwhile, debate continues over transport facilities around the new airport. Although the Federal Government has committed to preserving a rail corridor, no funding was set aside to develop a rail link to the Badgerys Creek site.





TAKING GROWTH FOR GRANTED

AS CHINA stands poised to overtake New Zealand for the first time as Australia's biggest source of international visitors, and other Asian markets continue to skyrocket, the rise and rise of Asian tourists to our shores is shaping up to be one of Australian tourism's great success stories.

However, we cannot continue to take this growth for granted. Without a commitment from governments at all levels to provide long-term support and investment in the tourism sector, we run the risk of not capitalising on the seemingly limitless growth of the Asian visitor market.

The recent 2017-18 Federal Budget was a disappointing departure from a Government that until now had provided an encouraging commitment to grow the visitor economy through measures such as providing Tourism Australia with the funding it

These cuts also have the very real potential to adversely affect the almost one million Australians with a job linked to tourism?

needs to compete with other nations that are increasingly ramping up their investment in destination marketing, in a bid to win a greater slice of the booming Asian visitor market.

Next year, Tourism Australia will have \$8.5 million less than this year to spend on

promoting Australia to the world. This decision is a serious blow to the sector and will inevitably have a negative impact on growth in international visitor arrivals in the years ahead.

These cuts also have the very real potential to adversely affect the almost one million Australians with a job that is linked to tourism – jobs that are dependent on the hundreds of thousands of visitors that come to our shores off the back of Tourism Australia's destination marketing campaigns.

We simply cannot grow the visitor economy to its full potential in the face of extraordinary competition from other markets when the budget of our primary marketing vehicle is reduced.

In another disappointing blow to the sector, the Government also announced in the Budget that visa application charges will now be indexed in line with the CPI, raising an expected \$410 million over the four years of the forward estimates.

This visa hike is an extremely short-sighted move that has resulted in Australia not only becoming one of the most expensive countries in the world to obtain a visa for, but will also make the task of competing against the multitude of other destinations for the international tourist dollar a whole lot harder.

Overall, this Budget was a disappointment to the visitor economy. While there was welcome spending on roads, rail and airports, which will provide a boost for domestic tourism, TTF remains concerned that the lacklustre approach to funding for Tourism Australia and the increase in visa fees will reduce the potential of the sector to boost Australia's growth and create jobs.

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ISSUES & TRENDS



SELECT PUTS OUT CALL TO DIVERSIFY

By Bruce Piper

THE Select Travel Group network operated by Express Travel gathered in Taipei, Taiwan, last month for its 16th annual conference - and it was the biggest and best yet, attended by a record number of delegates. Continuing the group's ongoing theme of Learn-Engage-Succeed, delegates were urged to continue to diversify their businesses, with Express Travel Group CEO Tom Manwaring highlighting strong growth in non-Asian destinations as well as other segments such as ocean cruising which is up almost 40% year on year for the network.

He warned agents that reliance on air revenue was not sustainable in the long run. "If you want to be replaced by a computer, just keep selling air," he said. The group is working hard to help members boost their profitability by building relationships with an ever-expanding portfolio of suppliers as well as continually developing and enhancing the extensive suite of marketing, ticketing

and support tools provided. The strong turnout thrilled suppliers, with airlines, travel insurers, cruise companies and technology providers all vying to capture more business from Select. Manwaring confirmed the overall Express Travel Group - including Select, Independent and italktravel members now numbers over 720 agencies, with more being added every month.

The conference took place at Shangri La's Far Eastern Hotel and included a gala dinner and awards night where top achieving agents were rewarded for their efforts. There was also a city tour and many networking opportunities, with the nearby Carnegie's Taipei a popular Australian hangout after the evening events. Manwaring opened the event by detailing a tough year which has seen the turbulent economic and political landscape of the last 12 months as well as increased airline capacity hit the group's yield, despite record passenger numbers.

One of the major announcements during the conference came from Express Travel

Group executive general manager Ari Magoutis, who detailed the addition of supplier insolvency cover to the company's in-house Book Safe Agent insurance product. Available to any ATAS-accredited member of the group, Book Safe Agent provides a key point of difference to both online and bricks-and-mortar competitors, Magoutis said, because clients could be assured their funds were safe even in the event of a wholesaler collapse. The policy covers the failure of ATAS accredited

wholesalers and in so doing protects the agents from credit card chargebacks. It also optionally includes add-ons such as scheduled airline failure insurance and crisis management insurance.

Other revelations included a new Select Travel Group member platform and consumer website, unveiled by marketing manager Tracy Lockie, which now features full social media integration including the ability for members to push out specials and other marketing messengers via a range of channels including Weibo and WeChat. The new site also improves the agent finder functionality, simplifying the process for customers wanting to find an agency to service their particular travel needs. A new consultant rewards program was unveiled, with the scheme set to roll out in the coming months to enable suppliers to drive loyalty from frontline agents, complementing the Express Rewards program for agencies.

Cruise was a key focus of the conference which included a dedicated session presented by long-time partner Royal Caribbean's Peter McCormack and Susie Goumas from Creative Cruising which is offering a full range of cruise wholesale packages to Select members including the opportunity to earn Express Rewards loyalty dollars. The overall Select Travel Group top achiever for the year was NSW agency Best and Less Travel (left), but almost every delegate took home a prize courtesy of the generous suppliers who provided scores of giveaways for those who had completed a series of questions based around the exhibitors at the Saturday Product Market. The Product Market also featured massages and live craft demonstrations from a number of traditional Taiwanese artisans including calligraphy, paper cutting and bamboo leaf figurines.





Congratulations to all of the Select Travel Group Agency award winners for 2017 and a big thank you to all who attended, making it one of the most memorable conferences to date!







BACK TO THE FUTURE FOR HELLOWORLD

By Bruce Piper

DELEGATES at last month's Helloworld Travel annual conference on the Gold Coast were given a full update on the company's new branding, which has seen "travel" added to the company name and new logos and looks for branded, associate and corporate members of the group. CEO Andrew Burnes showcased the new logo for fully branded members which includes the former Harvey World Travel "the travel professionals" tagline - and unveiled the new Helloworld Travel jingle which simply replaces "Harvey" with "Hello" in the familiar tune.

The transformation of Helloworld Travel goes far beyond branding - although the new look (pictured) is a key element which incidentally is being paid for by the group's head office. Burnes outlined a host of other initiatives during the conference opening session, including a complete restructure of member remuneration. The existing 'loyalty reward' structure, which he said was confusing, opaque and inconsistent, will from 1 July be superseded by a simplified system promising to increase agency remuneration by an average of 40%. Attendees welcomed the announcement of a change to the group's previously exclusive preferred deal with Cover-More, which is being replaced by a new agreement as well as the addition of SureSave as an alternative insurance supplier.

Conference attendees were updated on the company's "co-investment strategy" which was first announced at last year's Singapore conference. Formal details of this option are now available, with HLO offering to swap 25% of shares in franchisee businesses for the equivalent value of shares in Helloworld, which would be escrowed for a couple of years. Burnes said this would enable members to "join HLO as a true partner in business" while at the same time having the security of having some business equity in a relatively liquid format.

Digital initiatives also formed a significant part of Burnes' presentation, with the conference coinciding with the

customise elements and deals, and a customer relationship management database which is private to each franchisee. Helloworld's digital ecosystem will also incorporate mobile, with agencies able to offer their own branded version of a smartphone app to clients, allowing them to make bookings on the fly which are fully commissionable back to the agency.

system so owners and managers can

But there's more - Helloworld is also launching a 'translation' app which offers speech recognition in 28 different languages, and will eventually evolve to be able to push destination deals to clients while they are travelling, enabling Helloworld members to

> earn commission on activities booked while their customers are on the road Helloworld's technology evolution also includes the launch of Readyrooms for Business - an accommodation portal which Helloworld Business Travel members can deploy to their corporate clients as an online booking tool.

Interestingly, Qantas CEO Alan Joyce also appeared at the conference and reminded delegates that the airline is not only a business partner but is one of the largest shareholders in Helloworld. "A very large part of the market continue to want your services - we want to help you and participate with you in growing that business," he said. "We want strong competition in the Australian domestic market. We welcome your new brand, and we know that strong brands can outperform," Joyce concluded.



long-awaited revamp of the Helloworld website, significantly improving the online booking options and adding better flight searches, more accommodation and a full suite of static cruise content courtesy of the company's acquisition of Cruise Factory earlier this year. The same functionality will roll out in the coming months to individual agency micro-sites, which will offer full bookability, an in-built content management







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FIJI SETS A COURSE FOR HIGH GROWTH

By Jon Murrie

WITH a string of new luxury resorts opening and an expanding air network, Fiji's tourism leaders are upbeat about the ambitious targets they've set for the years ahead.

The island nation is aiming to boost annual tourism revenue by more than a third to FJ\$2.2 billion (about A\$1.4 billion) by 2021, committing it to arrivals growth of at least 5% each year while at the same time lifting average visitor spend.

Barely a year ago the country was cleaning up after the most devastating cyclone to hit the region in recorded history. But today, there's little sign of anything more than a blip in visitor stats and Tourism Fiji is pressing ahead with plans to expand its team and harness new markets.

"Last year was an excellent year," said Tourism Fiji chief executive officer Matthew Stoeckel at the Fijian Tourism Expo last month, which attracted a record number of buyers and exhibitors.

"Not only did we achieve our targets of 5% growth across all markets, but we achieved this despite some challenges. The biggest of these seems like a distant memory in Cyclone Winston, which goes to show that tourism in Fiji has matured a lot so that when we have weather events we're able to mitigate our losses and get back on the horse and achieve our targets."

Fiji's annual international arrivals reached a new record of 792,320 in 2016, a 5% increase on the previous high set the year before. Markets in New Zealand, China and the US all showed strong growth,

though Fiji's biggest source of tourism, Australia, posted a slight decline of 1.9%.

Aiming for a return to growth in Australia, Tourism Fiji is preparing to expand its local presence with the appointment of new specialists in areas such as social media, digital marketing and promotions.

"We'll be making additional appointments in the Australian operations as a move from having just a sales focus to also having a consumer-oriented approach," Stoeckel said.

"A big part of that will be a re-invigorated brand – research in our core markets shows our brand is strong but could be stronger."

New branding and marketing initiatives would be launched in Australia later this year and were likely to capitalise on a series of new high-end developments, he said.

Recent upmarket openings including the Fiji Marriott Resort Momi Bay, Kokomo Private Island and the upgraded Sheraton Resort & Spa Tokoriki Island will be backed by other properties in the pipeline including the Six Senses Fiji due to open late this year.

This had provided a "critical mass" of luxury product, Stoeckel said, enabling Tourism Fiji to embark on a new level of promotion.

"We see huge potential still in our Australian market and we need to broaden the consumer's understanding beyond a family destination to include all the other outstanding product we offer," he said.

"An example is the new luxury offering. This is very much aligned to our aim to not just bring in arrivals but focus on visitor spend and yield." Elsewhere, expanding air connections are opening new opportunities in other markets. Fiji Airways has introduced year-round flights to San Francisco in response to strong growth from the US, while in Asia the carrier has announced a code-share agreement with India's Jet Airways on its Singapore flights, launched last year.

"We are noticing quite an uplift of the countries around Singapore on the back of the flights – a surprising lift in Indonesia and Malaysia, as an example," Stoeckel said. "We are getting more staff to assist with marketing effort there and forming partnerships off the back of the new routes:"

China is also showing strong growth as Fiji's fourth largest market, with arrivals up 22% last year. To back its development, Tourism Fiji is planning a dedicated online presence and social media channels for the China market.

Meanwhile, Fiji Airways is hoping to continue its expansion by adding a new route each year, the next of which will be to Adelaide at the end of this month.

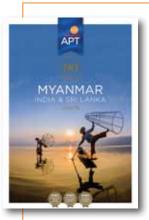
The airline's executive general manager of sales and marketing Andrew Stanbury said the announcement of Adelaide flights had been well received.

"I think we've got a good product for South Australia and we're very pleased with early demand, and it's now building," Stanbury said.

From next year Fiji Airways will begin replacing its aging fleet of five Boeing 737-700 and 800 aircraft with five new Boeing 737 MAX 8, at a cost of US\$550 million.



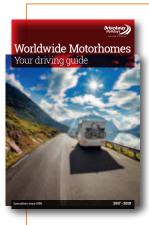
ABERCROMBIE & Kent's latest brochure covers journeys around Australia and New Zealand and an adventure cruise in Papua New Guinea. New additions include a six-day hosted journey in Queenstown, New Zealand, featuring mountain biking, hiking and lake trips. Active travellers will enjoy hitting the Great Ocean Road in Victoria and foodies will enjoy the gourmet adventures in the south-west of Western Australia. There's also a family getaway section featuring visits to the Red Centre of the Northern Territory.



APT's Myanmar, India & Sri Lanka 76-page brochure for 2018/19 features a visual index of itineraries at a glance including a 15-day trip from Yangon to Mandalay. Signature experiences include a full-day tour of Ananda temple and the golden Shwezigon Pagoda, APT's Freedom of Choice options include a shopping tour of a village market in Old Bagan and visiting Birla Mandir and Bangla Gurudwara Sahib - some of Delhi's holy temples.



ONCE-in-a-lifetime experiences like sunset barbeques on the remote Wessell Islands and walks to Forbes Island summit are key features of Aurora Expeditions' Kimberley Coast 2017/18 program. For those keen to get off the beaten track, there's a selfguided 4WD adventure to Fitzroy River, the Bungle Bungles and Kununurra over 11-days. A special feature is a complimentary personalised photo book which Aurora provides to travellers featuring their voyage's daily programs and sailing co-ordinates.



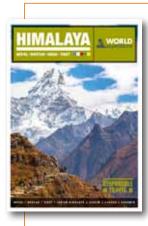
DRIVEAWAY Holidays Worldwide Motorhomes for 2017/18 covers Australia & New Zealand, the USA & Canada, the UK & Ireland and Europe. The New Zealand Classic Wine Trail will appeal to gourmet food and wine lovers and visits Hawkes Bay on the North Island and Marlborough on the South Island. There are handy hints included like carrying an International Driving Permit with your domestic driver's licence at all times as many countries require it when hiring a motor vehicle.



GUESTS can say Bula to a range of destinations like Nadi, Denarau and the Coral Coast within Rosie Holidays Fiji 2017/18 brochure. Within the 55 pages are a range of short tour options like taking a dive with sharks in Bega Lagoon or canopy zip lining in the Fijian rainforests. Travellers also have the opportunity to take a seaplane transfer to the Mamanuca or Yasawa Islands from Nadi Airport or take a cruise in the Mamanuca Islands onboard a South Sea Cruises luxury catamaran.



SCENIC'S South America Program for 2018 profiles hot spots like Havana in Cuba, Buenos Aires in Argentina and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Tours range from nine to 29 days, while combined cruise and tour packages are available from two to 41 days. There is a maximum of 36 guests on each tour to allow for an intimate travel experience. New for 2018 is 29-day Icons of South & Central America tour which begins in Lima and visits Cuba, Panama, Trinidad and Colombia before heading south to explore Peru, Argentina and Brazil.



HOT off the press is World Expeditions Himalaya brochure for 2017 featuring several new additions. Active travellers will enjoy the Bhutan Hike & Bike where riders can pedal through the Paro Valley to the foot of the Taktsang 'Tigers Net' Monastery, built on the Himalayan cliff. Another fresh addition is a 14-day mountaineering skills program which will be run by Australian guide Soren Kruse-Ledet. A new 21-day Cholo Expedition offers adventurers the opportunity to climb in an area surrounded by Everest and Cho Oyu.



AQUA Expeditions' new four-page brochure provides details of its three, four and seven-night cruise offerings. French oceanic explorer Jean-Michel Cousteau will run cruises based on ocean conservation and environmental protection, appearing aboard the Aqua Mekong travelling in Vietnam and Cambodia, and onboard Aqua Amazon in Peru. Photography tours will also be conducted during Aqua Mekong sailings and videographer and photographer Francisco Marin will host a trip from 08-12 December this year.



2017 afta NATIONAL TRAVEL INDUSTRY AWARDS **FINALISTS**

CATEGORY 1 // BEST TRAVEL AGENCY GROUP (50 OUTLETS OR MORE)

- Flight Centre
- Helloworld Travel
- Travellers Choice

CATEGORY 2 // **BEST NON BRANDED TRAVEL AGENCY GROUP**

- Independent Travel Group
- Helloworld Business Travel
- Magellan Group
- My Travel Group

CATEGORY 3 // **BEST TRAVEL AGENCY RETAIL - SINGLE LOCATION**

- Bicton Travel
- helloworld Lane Cove
- Out and About Travel
- Wentworth Travel

CATEGORY 4 // **BEST TRAVEL AGENCY RETAIL - MULTI LOCATION**

- Destination HQ
- helloworld Hunter Travel Group/RACT Travel
- MTA Mobile Travel Agents
- Phil Hoffmann Travel
- TravelManagers Australia

CATEGORY 5 // **BEST TRAVEL AGENCY CORPORATE - SINGLE LOCATION**

- Anywhere Travel
- CCM Travel
- helloworld Newcastle Corporate
- Spencer Travel
- Sanford International Travel

CATEGORY 6 // **BEST TRAVEL AGENCY CORPORATE - MULTI LOCATION**

- Corporate Traveller
- Goldman Travel Corporation Platinum Travel Corporation
- Stage & Screen Travel Services
- The Travel Authority

CATEGORY 7 // **BEST NATIONAL TRAVEL MANAGEMENT COMPANY**

- American Express Global Business Travel
- Carlson Wagonlit Travel
- Corporate Travel Management
- FCM Travel Solutions

CATEGORY 8 // COMING 2018

CATEGORY 9 // **BEST ONLINE TRAVEL AGENCY (OTA)**

- Cruise Guru
- Fly365.com
- Global Journeys Luxury Escapes
- TripADeal
- www.cruiseguru.com.au www.fly365.com www.globaljourneys.com.au www.luxuryescapes.com www.tripadeal.com.au

CATEGORY 10 // **BEST BUSINESS EVENTS TRAVEL AGENCY**

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- American Express Global Business Travel
- Event Travel Management
- Platinum Event Solutions
- The Events Authority

CATEGORY 11 // **BEST TRAVEL CONSULTANT - RETAIL**

•	Giselle Pennington	Spencer Travel Southside	NSW
•	Jake Hodges	Flight Centre Cardiff	NSW
•	James Jang	Where2travel	VIC
•	Jo Kennedy	Kennedy & Turner Travel Associates	QLD
•	Lena Nielson	Flight Centre Sydney International Airport	NSW
•	Lena Nielson	Flight Centre Sydney International Airport	NSV

CATEGORY 12 // BEST TRAVEL CONSULTANT - CORPORATE

Alison Irwin	Stage & Screen Travel Services	NSW
David Phillips	Platinum Travel Corporation	VIC
Samantha Lake	Show Group Enterprise Pty Ltd	NSW
Selena Byrnes	Corporate Traveller	QLD
Vicky Woolnough	The Travel Authority	NSW

CATEGORY 13 // BEST TRAVEL AGENCY MANAGER - RETAIL SINGLE LOCATION

Danny Englman	FBI Travel	VIC
Darian Foot	Phil Hoffmann Travel Norwood	SA
Debbi Ashes	helloworld Lane Cove	NSW
Phillip Boniface	helloworld Carlingford	NSW
Rane Reguson	Jetsetter Travel	QLD

CATEGORY 14 // **BEST TRAVEL AGENCY MANAGER - RETAIL MULTI LOCATION**

•	Gina Maitland	Alpha Travel	WA
•	Lori Kirk	italktravel Hornsby & italktravel Castle Hill	NSW
•	Louise Dann	Hunter Travel Group	NSW
•	Pauline Grummit	Escape Travel	QLD
•	Stuart Ingram	Destination HQ	VIC

CATEGORY 15 // BEST TRAVEL AGENCY MANAGER - CORPORATE SINGLE LOCATION

	Chérie Drummond	Corporate Travel Management	NSW
•	Chris Cheyne	Goldman Travel Bondi Junction	NSW
•	Donna Meads-Barlow	DBT Corporate Travel	NSW
•	Kevin Headings	Sanford International Travel	NSW
	Tina Killeen	Spencer Travel	NSW

CATEGORY 16 // **BEST TRAVEL AGENCY MANAGER CORPORATE MULTI LOCATION**

•	Andre Moten	Corporate Travel Management	QLD
•	Mariam Alkhal	Carlson Wagonlit Travel	NSW

CATEGORY 17 // YOUNG AGENT OF THE YEAR

Courtney Ashes	helloworld Lane Cove	NSW
 Jemma Longley 	Flight Centre Wagga Wagga	NSW
Klara Illuzzi	Flight Centre Woollahra	NSW
Megan Laureau	helloworld Toowoomba city	QLD
Millicent Rusby	Carlson Wagonlit Travel	SA

CATEGORY 18 // **BEST DOMESTIC AIRLINE**

- Qantas Airways
- Virgin Australia

CATEGORY 19 // **BEST INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE - ONLINE**

- Air New Zealand
- Emirates
- Etihad Airways
- Qantas Airways
- · Singapore Airlines

CATEGORY 20 // **BEST INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE - OFFLINE**

- Finnair
- Lufthansa
- · Swiss International Air lines

CATEGORY 21 // BEST CRUISE OPERATOR - DOMESTIC DEPLOYMENT

- Carnival Cruise Lines
- Celebrity Cruises
- P&O Cruises Australia
- Princess Cruises
- Royal Caribbean International

CATEGORY 22 // **BEST CRUISE OPERATOR - INTERNATIONAL DEPLOYMENT**

- Celebrity Cruises
- Princess Cruises
- · Royal Caribbean International
- Seabourn
- Silversea

CATEGORY 23 // **BEST RIVER CRUISE OPERATOR**

- **Avalon Waterways**
- Scenic Luxury Cruises & ToursUniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection
- Viking Cruises

CATEGORY 24 // **BEST TOUR OPERATOR - DOMESTIC**

- AAT Kings
- APT
- Contiki
- Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours
- Topdeck Travel

CATEGORY 25 // BEST TOUR OPERATOR – INTERNATIONAL

- APT
- Insight Vacations
- Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours Topdeck Travel
- Trafalgar

CATEGORY 26 // **BEST CAR/CAMPERVAN RENTAL OPERATOR**

- Britz Campervan Rentals
- Europcar
- Thrifty Car Rental

CATEGORY 27 // **BEST TOURIST OFFICE - INTERNATIONAL**

- Dubai Tourism
- Singapore Tourism Board
- Tourism Fiii
- Tourism New Zealand
- Visit California

CATEGORY 28 // **BEST SPECIALTY WHOLESALER**

- Asia Escape Holidays Bench Africa
- DriveAway Holidays
- Infinity Cruises Wendy Wu Tours

CATEGORY 29 // **BEST WHOLESALER - AUSTRALIAN PRODUCT**

- Excite Holidays
- Infinity Holidays
- Qantas Holidays & Viva Holidays
- Sunlover Holidays
- TravelCube

CATEGORY 30 // **BEST WHOLESALER - INTERNATIONAL PRODUCT**

- Infinity Holidays
- Intrepid Travel
- Qantas Holidays & Viva Holidays
- TravelCube

CATEGORY 31 // **BEST AGENCY SUPPORT SERVICE**

- Cover-More Travel Insurance
- **Express Ticketing**
- Qantas Industry Centre (QIC)
- Travelport

CATEGORY 32 // **BEST SALES EXECUTIVE - INDUSTRY SUPPLIER**

Elizabeth Hutchison	Air New Zealand	NSW
Kim Knight	Qantas Holidays & Viva Holidays	QLD
Lee Evanson	Insight Vacations	WA
 Richard Waugh 	P&O Cruises	QLD
Zoe Gentle	Contiki	QLD

CATEGORY 33 // YOUNG SALES EXECUTIVE - INDUSTRY SUPPLIER

_			
•	Luke Cousins	Contiki	WA
•	Stephanie Hu	Fantasea	NSW

CATEGORY 34 // **BEST HOTEL/RESORT GROUP**

- AccorHotels
- One&Only Resorts Outrigger Resorts
- Shangri La Hotels and Resorts
- Starwood Hotels & Resorts

CATEGORY 35 // BEST REGISTERED TRAVEL INDUSTRY TRAINING INSTITUTION

- Franklyn Scholar
- TAFE NSW Sydney Travel and Tourism TAFE Western NSW
- The Learning Collaborative (Travel Training Australia)
- William Angliss Institute

CATEGORY 36 // BEST TRAVEL WRITER – CONSUMER

- Andrew Bain Beverley Malzard
- Christine Retschlag
- Julie Miller
- Katrina Lobley

CATEGORY 37 // **BEST TRAVEL AGENT TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION**

New Air Tickets Website roomsXML Custom Designed Group Management System Travel & Sports Australia

tramada® Onyx CenterSource Integration Branded Fares and Ancillaries

CATEGORY 38 // FMIRATES TRAVEL CONSULTANT SCHOLARSHIP

Tramada

Travelport

EMINATES TRAVEL CONSOLIANT SCHOLARSHIP			
James Berechree	Intrepid Travel	VIC	
Lauren Purcell	Phil Hoffmann Travel	SA	
Shannon Threlfall	italktravel Belmont	NSW	
Stefania Lasek	Travel by Design	NSW	
Toby Bradshaw	Flight Centre Manuka	ACT	



HILIP Stephens was just 18 when, in the summer of 1978, he dived into the sea on Sydney's northern beaches and broke his neck. The teenager had misjudged the depth of the water, his injuries catastrophic. After months in hospital, Philip returned home a quadriplegic, confined to a wheelchair.

Six years later he took his first overseas holiday, to Vanuatu. Since then, Philip's globetrotting exploits have taken him to every corner of the globe, from Fiji to Morocco, Cambodia to Jordan, covering 31 countries in the process. And last November, he completed his greatest achievement to date when, with the help of friends, Philip made it to Machu Picchu.

"That took a hell of a lot of planning, it was crazy," he told travelBulletin. "Probably the hardest part of travelling is finding a bathroom in a hotel that is suitable or finding accommodation that offers what they say they offer. It can be very frustrating. There is no consistency, so some international standards would be a good idea."

Philip's story is truly inspirational and testament to his strength of character

> and the dedication of those friends and carers who accompany him.

> > But he is far from alone in living with disabilities while craving to experience what the world has to offer.

So just how accommodating is the travel sector for people like Philip, and those with limited mobility, hearing and sight problems or intellectual difficulties? The picture is a mixed one, with Australia, it seems, lagging behind other parts of the world.

> Former Harvey World Travel and Helloworld agent Bill Forrester, who runs disability tour operator Club Tours and Travel and resource portal Travability, described the domestic market as "patchy".

"So far it has been driven by a few pioneering operators who have accepted accessibility as part of their core development strategy," he said. "At this stage we are well behind other parts of the world in consistency of product and experiences and looking at accessible tourism from a destination-wide approach. We have isolated operators whereas England, Germany, Catalonia, Canada and the US have more of an integrated model.

"Much of the tourism industry regards accessibility as a cost, not an asset."

With an estimated 20% of the Australian population living with some form of disability, experts believe the market is a potentially lucrative one. The most recent data - taken from figures compiled in 2003 - found 11% of people who took overnight domestic trips identified themselves as having a disability, generating \$4.8 billion for the economy.

With an estimated 20% of the Australian population living with some form of disability, experts believe the market is potentially lucrative 9

Yet if the domestic industry got its act together, it could share in a \$8.7b bonanza. That potential is only expected to increase as the population continues to age and the consumer-empowering National Disability Insurance Scheme rolls out nationally.

Meanwhile, Tourism Satellite Account figures, again dating back more than a decade, show the accessible market made up less than 7% of international travel from Australia.

Simon Darcy, a professor at Sydney's University of Technology and a specialist in sport, tourism and diversity management, said the travel and tourism sector had not opened its eyes to the possibilities.

"I've done a lot of work here and overseas and a great number of tourism providers have given absolutely no thought to consumer needs in this area," he told travelBulletin. "It pretty much gets stuck at 'oh, well there are accessible rooms' and that's mainly for people with mobility disability. "They haven't thought about people who have vision impairment or who are deaf or those people with intellectual disabilities and what their holiday experience needs are.

"The industry has taken an adversarial, combative approach rather than an innovative solution-finding approach. If they can't see the opportunity in front of their face, that's not a good indicator of an industry that is willing to learn, grow and develop experiences beyond what they are already offering."

Last year the UN World Tourism Organisation designated accessible tourism as the theme for World Tourism Day. And while there were events across the world, there was nothing to mark the occasion in Australia, said Darcy, himself a wheelchair user.

Peter Negri, managing director of specialist agency/operator Club Mates Travel, said his firm, and his guests, were confronted with barriers of accessibility "every day".

"We are going to Darwin shortly but there is not one wheelchair accessible vehicle you can hire," he said. "I have contacted so many organisations but I am hitting a brick wall everywhere I go."

But it would be unfair to paint an overly negative picture, and an hour-long webinar staged in March by Tourism Australia was a step in the right direction in terms of raising awareness and educating operators.

Furthermore, Live, Work and Play, a two-day accessibility conference organised by the NSW Government, took place last month (May) and included streams dedicated to tourism.

According to Darcy and Forrester, who both presented at Live, Work and Play, there are wonderful local examples of inclusive tourism, from Quicksilver Barrier Reef Tours, whale watching operation Jervis Bay Wild on the New South Wales south coast, and events such as Vivid Sydney which is offering services, facilities and aids for people with disabilities, including audio descriptions for the blind.

One of the common issues raised by disability advocates is a fundamental lack of understanding of people's needs.

Cathy Boyce, co-owner of Port Melbournebased disability specialist agency and operator Leisure Options, said the company had spent many years building a network of suppliers it could rely on.

Among the problems is the lack of any mandatory and consistent standards, she said.

"Every provider will say they are accessible but only half, or less, would be truly accessible," said Boyce, who has a background in nursing. "Accessibility is such a subjective concept and unless you have lived, worked or had a disability, it is hard to understand what people really need.

Continues over page





"We organise group travel and have rented houses which say they are accessible. So in we come with wheelchairs and we find there are steps to get through the front door. They say, 'oh, yes, but it's accessible once you're inside'. That's not very helpful. People don't understand what accessible means.

"We hope one day there will be standards or regulations so providers can earn an accessibility status, similar to the green tick in tourism."

Jervis Bay Wild – one of the companies singled out by Forrester – took action after staff kept turning away people with disabilities. The entire operation has now been designed to accommodate their needs.

"We had many customers who just couldn't participate so one family member would have to stay behind while the others enjoyed a cruise," office manager Elizabeth Abood said. "We told Brendan [Aulsebrook, the director] that we just don't have the facilities and he decided that yes, he would purchase a new vessel. It's been fantastic."

Jervis Bay Wilds' new ship, *Port Venture*, also has a sea crane which enables people with disabilities to be lowered into the boom netting and enjoy an experience previously only accessible to the able bodied.

If domestic travel still has some way to go to become inclusive, international travel comes with additional stress and another set of obstacles, most obviously with flights.

Airlines have hardly covered themselves in glory over the years with too many stories highlighting the shabby treatment of disabled passengers. Yet despite those headlinegrabbing tales, progress is being made.

Last month, Virgin Australia said it had become the first Asia Pacific airline to introduce an in-flight entertainment interface for vision-impaired travellers, while increasing numbers of airlines have adopted the Qantas-inspired Eagle hoists which lift passengers into seats.

Forrester described Qantas as "one of the best" in terms of buying equipment and enhancing its customer service, with most of the European carriers also "pretty good".

"Certain airlines are bad and it is not limited to full service versus discount" he

We hope one day there will be standards so providers can earn an accessibility status...?

said. Of all the industry sectors, cruising has traditionally been regarded as the most accessible for people with disabilities or limited mobility.

Yet while the cruise industry overall does "reasonably well", Forrester pointed the finger at smaller luxury operators as the "notable exception".

"That is really counter intuitive given the age of their client base," he said. "I will lump river cruising into this category and they are the worst of all, just a tad in front of coach touring."

Royal Caribbean Cruises Australia and New Zealand managing director Adam Armstrong said the line had welcomed "thousands of guests with special needs".

Its ships supplied a range of services and aids to cater for all disabilities, he said, including Assisted Listening Systems (ALS) in all main theatres, sign language interpreters, lifts for pools and whirlpools and braille "wherever possible". Guide dogs are also welcome while specially-fitted state rooms provide larger bathrooms and support equipment with wider doors, accessible

balconies and roll-in showers.

"We continue to research and invest in making sure our current fleet and new ships are as accessible as possible for all our guests," Armstrong said, adding that accessible baths feature in junior suites on its Quantum class ships, including *Ovation of the Seas*.

Cathy Boyce, from Leisure Options – who singled out Disneyland as travel's most disabled-friendly company – described cruise ships as "phenomenal" but said tendering is the major issue, with the South Pacific among the problematic destinations.

Armstrong admitted that selecting destinations where ships berth alongside ports would be "more enjoyable". He added it was "currently working with local tourism providers in the South Pacific and New Zealand" to improve its accessible shore excursion options.

New Insight Vacations chief executive Ulla Hefel Bohler, previously director of operations for Insight, Trafalgar, Luxury Gold and Costsaver, told *travelBulletin* that all its brands "embrace diversity" and "welcome guests with special needs and disabilities".

She detailed aids for the hard of hearing which include reading material and Vox Audio Guides while the use of tablets with speech-to-text recognition software is also being trialed.

Yet none of its coaches can accommodate people confined to wheelchairs. "Our coaches do not have fitted ramps or hoists so the only type of disability that makes coach touring generally unsuitable is reduced mobility where the guest is unable to get on and off the coach unaided or with a little assistance," Bohler said. "Guests with reduced mobility need to be able to climb the steps of the coach."

Bohler recommended people needing physical assistance "travel with a companion to get the most out of their holiday". She

added that tour directors reviewed itineraries and offered alternative activities if planned excursions presented a problem for some guests. Europe could often throw up particular issues given that many cities

"Italy is the destination that comes to mind in terms of not being very accessible-friendly. With Venice being particularly difficult with the bridges and boats," she said. "That said, we've had many guests with walking difficulties and also wheelchair users whose dream it was to experience Venice, and they did."

On the flip said, while its national parks can be difficult to navigate, Bohler identified the US as particularly accessible and "disabled-friendly".

And what of adventure tourism? Specialist operators, such as New Zealand-based MakingTrax, build bespoke, individual itineraries, but for mainstream companies, difficulties arise.

Intrepid Group responsible tourism manager Liz Manning said its brands did all they can to meet the needs of travellers with special needs but conceded it was difficult to accommodate someone with mobility issues on scheduled departures.

"They may require more time or assistance. That's obviously on trips which require a high level of physical fitness, but it's also something we need to consider on trips that use a lot of public transport," she said.

"Unfortunately, the infrastructure in many countries does not adequately meet the needs of their citizens or travellers with special needs. Many airlines and airports are not equipped to meet the needs of many travellers, either in boarding or deplaning or during their flight. That may mean we need disabled travellers to have a companion who can assist them.

"We're constantly looking to improve our operations to ensure we're providing our travellers with the best travel experience, and over the next two to three years will be focusing on improving the inclusiveness and accessibility of our trips to keep pace with the changing needs of

Manning admitted that, as an industry "we need to be doing more to make travel accessible to a wide range of individual needs".

Ensuring travel is accessible and inclusive is a complex and sensitive area, without simple and straightforward solutions. According to Forrester it will need leadership from national, state and local tourism bodies to drive awareness, improve product marketing and generally shift mindsets.

The industry perhaps needs the "can do" attitude and philosophy of Philip Stephens who is preparing his next adventure, to Greece. "It's all in the planning," he said. "Nothing is easy, but it's worth the effort."





Accessing the world

BY ANY measure, Luke Johnston is an intrepid traveller. He explored Myanmar before it was popular, travelled in Syria before the war and discovered Cuba before the sanctions were eased.

The past decade has taken him to places like Uruguay, Argentina, China, Lebanon and Jordan, and by October he'll be setting out for Iran.

But as a quadriplegic, he knows how much a wheelchair changes the entire travel process.

"Accommodation is the trickiest thing," Johnston said. "In Burma we stayed in a hotel that was supposedly wheelchair accessible, but when we got there it had 12 stairs. The staff ended up carrying me like I was the Queen of Sheba."

Other hotels failed to offer adequate bathrooms, he said, despite claiming to be wheelchair accessible.

"So they might have the shower over a bath in a supposedly wheelchair-accessible room, which is a massive problem and it happens all the time."

As a result, Johnston said travelling required enormous amounts of preparation and research.

"It takes so many emails - to find out what the bathroom is like, whether there's room to turn the chair, and whether the hallways or doors are too narrow," he said. "I get every hotel to email me pictures."

Airlines mostly catered well to his level of disability, Johnston said, but not without pitfalls, as he discovered in Cuba at a terminal without air bridges.

"In true Cuban style there were about 15 ground-crew helping, all shouting," he said. "They decided to pull me up the stairs to the plane and managed to tip me over the side and onto the tarmac.

"Thankfully I wasn't hurt, but I was mortally embarrassed all the other passengers were waiting to get on and it happened in front of them, it was humiliating."

Despite set-backs, Johnston said he found most tourism businesses helpful, like the villa owners in Bali who cut up old deck chairs to build ramps for him.

"We often go to places where they've never seen wheelchair travellers before which is quite exciting, and the reactions we get from locals are really good mostly," he said. "People come to your aid, there's always someone to help."

AUSTRALIAN ATTRACTIONS TECHNOLOGY **GOES INTERNATIONAL**

London Eye is one of the many attractions

available with the iVenture Card

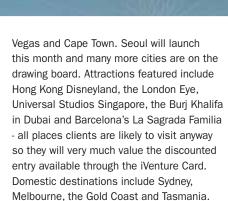
IVENTURE Card, the Australian-founded technology company which provides a simple and cost-effective way for travellers to do activities while abroad, has set its sights on significant expansion - and is also looking to grow its distribution as a fully commissionable product for travel agents. The system was established in Sydney but now offers products in 16 cities across the globe, including four in Australia - with many more in the works.

Billed as "the ultimate attractions pass," the iVenture Card is purchased by travellers either while they're in a destination or prior to departure. Available as a "Flexi" (with access to a set number of activities) or "Unlimited" product, the card can then be used as a prepaid pass to enter a range of attractions at significant discounts to the rack rate, and also in many cases enables users to bypass entrance queues. Unlike other paper-based or booklet 'voucher' schemes there is no payment required when visiting the attraction and no need to locate a particular coupon in order to access the discounts available.

iVenture Card International managing director Joost Timmer (pictured below), told travelBulletin the company's background was in loyalty programs, with the developers having also created systems for major hospitality clients such as Rydges and AccorHotels. The iVenture Card technology involves deployment of a network of acceptance terminals at each participating attraction at a destination, with the iVenture Card itself being a smartcard loaded with the appropriate privileges. Visitors simply swipe the card to validate their entry and they are on their way.

Current international destinations on offer include London, Barcelona, Madrid, Hong Kong & Macau, Singapore, Dubai, Honolulu, Mexico City, San Francisco, Las

Travel agents overseas are also in the company's sights, with the strong array of Australian product in the portfolio likely to appeal to members of Tourism Australia's Aussie Specialist program in markets such as Hong Kong and China 9



There's significant ongoing development of the product under way, with a smartphone app being created which will effectively enable 'e-ticketing' of the iVenture Card, while on the supplier side a tablet can be used to validate entry. The back end of the system is also evolving,

with the company recognising the huge potential of travel agent distribution. Travel agents can purchase the cards for their clients up-front as an extra service, and effectively receive a commission on activities such as city tours, museum visits and even scooter rental while they are travelling.

A new industry portal has been created at iventuretravel.com where travel agents and tour operators can simply register to start selling the iVenture Card. The site allows agents to earn immediate commissions and receive instant confirmation. Timmer said the company already had preferred relationships with a number of Australian travel agency networks including Express Travel Group and Flight Centre, but any agent was able to register independently via the site. Some groups are using the iVenture Card as a value-add for key clients, or as an incentive to promote early booking. Travel agents overseas were also in the company's sights, with the strong array of Australian product in the portfolio likely to appeal to members of Tourism Australia's Aussie Specialist program in markets such as Hong Kong and China, Timmer added.







TRAVELPORT STRONG IN ASIA-PACIFIC

TRAVELPORT last month released its first quarter figures for 2017, with the technology firm's global revenue up 7% to US\$651 million. The brightest star for the company was the Asia Pacific region, where

"commerce revenue" increased a healthy 18% to US\$151 million - almost on par with its revenue from the USA. Other regions grew more slowly, with Europe up 4% to US\$202 million, and while revenue from the

Middle East and Africa rose, total segment numbers in this region were down 3% on the previous corresponding period. Overall earnings (adjusted EBITDA) increased by 9% to US\$169 million during the quarter.

CEO Gordon Wilson said he was "delighted that our leadership positions in airline content and merchandising, hospitality, mobile commerce and commercial payments are translating into greater revenue from existing customers, as well as new business wins across multiple geographies". India, Indonesia, Singapore and Hong Kong performed particularly well, with Wilson adding: "we're really pumping in Asia Pacific". He forecast that in the future the region would overtake the US as the company's major revenue source. Another key contributor to the result was Melbourne-founded payments service eNett International which recorded a 22% increase in net revenue to US\$41 million due to higher volumes from existing customers and new customer wins.

Travelport also announced a new partnership with corporate-focused Indian hotel chain Treebo Hotels, making the group's properties available to Travelport's international business clients and travel agencies across the globe.



The power of the platform

Our Travel Commerce Platform is leading the transformation of the travel industry.





Unexpected Asia

Conferences and corporate events in Asia offer a chance to immerse delegates in a whole new culture as well as a stimulating environment. And as Asian cities become increasingly dominant among world event destinations, a surprising array of activities are emerging that offer a chance to give delegates something they've never experienced before. There's a lot more to the region than bargain shopping and night markets, so here are some examples that highlight Asia's unexpected side.

SINGAPORE TASTES BEST IN THE DARK

Singapore has long been one of the great food capitals of Asia and its array of markets and street foods are legendary. But groups can get a whole new perspective on Singapore's dining scene at Nox – Dine in the Dark, where the sense of sight is stripped away and diners get to focus almost entirely on taste.

> It's the antithesis of other modern restaurants where a huge focus is on visual

> > presentation. At Nox, guests are seated in a pitch-dark dining room and are

> > > served by blind or visually impaired staff who have been specially trained to offer guidance and reassurance to sighted diners. Putting their trust in the hosts, guests are able to explore the cuisine through taste, smell, touch and sound.

The concept is ideal for groups and the experience can be customised for specific needs or themes.

■ For info see www.noxdineinthedark.com

TAIPEI'S FASCINATING MILITARY **HISTORY**

Taiwan is probably not top of mind when it comes to selecting an incentive or meeting destination, but it offers lots of options for organisers and is surprisingly affordable. A new venue on the scene in the capital, Taipei, is the Taiwan Army Club, which has a fascinating history having been built in 1907 during the island's Japanese colonisation.

Later it became the residence of Sun Li-Jen - also known as the "Rommel of the East" who was one of the generals of the Chinese Revolutionary Army involved in the Sino-Japanese War, World War II and the Chinese Civil War.

Now a combined restaurant and art gallery, the Club features a collection of historic photographs, which only exist today because they were secreted during the so-called

"White Terror" period when they were considered subversive.

The Taiwan Army Club (pictured) has capacity for about 150 at a seated dinner with room for presentations. Local DMC Golden Foundation Services Group can organise a range of performances such as traditional Taiwanese musicians or a more modern "technodancing" take on the island's indigenous cultural practices.

■ More info connie@gftours.com.tw.

DISNEY'S NOT JUST FOR KIDS

Hong Kong Disneyland is among the city's best known star attractions, but its corporate offering is less well known. This year the theme park introduced a new team-building activity that shows it's not just an attraction for families.

With the help of an award-winning local chef, corporate groups can now indulge in a cooking class in which they learn the techniques behind classic Hong Kong dishes while creating dim sum inspired by Disney characters.

The two-hour activity provides an excuse to take delegates out of the city centre and into the greenery

> of Lantau Island where they can bond in a fun environment and take home new skills.

> > To mix business with pleasure, the park also offers a conference centre at the Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel, with 1,500m² of flexible event space including 16 meeting rooms and an 876m² pillarfree ballroom.

■ For info see www. disneymeetings.com/hongkong

GO ON SAFARI BY NIGHT

Asia's bustling cities don't usually spring to mind when the topic of going on safari comes up, but a corporate activity in Singapore gives visitors a chance to combine an event with exotic wildlife encounters.

An Evening in the Wild is a group activity offered after dark at Night Safari, the world's first safari park dedicated to nocturnal animals. The park spans 35 hectares of forest and is home to over 2,500 animals of more than 130 different species, including Malayan tigers, Asian elephants, and clouded leopards.

The night includes a tram journey through the safari park where guests can view animals in seven geographic regions, from the Himalayan foothills to the jungles of Southeast Asia, before joining a three-course dinner at a tented camp site. The night ends with reserved seats at a Creatures of the Night Show.

■ For info see eventsales.wrs.com.sg





Taipei Army Club historic photo © Lo Chao-Chun c/ Taiwan

Central News Agency



SINGAPORE TARGETS MICE WITH AIR PARTNERSHIP

SINGAPORE Tourism Board, Changi Airport Group and Singapore Airlines will plough \$32 million into a renewed three-year agreement aimed at enticing more inbound visitors to the city-state, with the MICE sector considered a key source of growth.

Joint marketing efforts will focus on promoting Singapore as a stopover or "twinning" (travel to two locations in one itinerary) destination to travellers.

"Another focus area for the partnership is the broadening of a marketing program to woo business and MICE visitors," the parties said.

Singapore Tourism Board chief executive Lionel Yeo said the collaboration was a prime example of how the organisation partnered with industry players for tourism success.

"The renewal of this partnership reflects our confidence that we can continue to cooperate fruitfully to better serve our visitors and drive tourism outcomes."

The tripartite partnership will be implemented via the updated Singapore MICE



Advantage Programme (SMAP) that launched in March. STB said the joint initiative aimed to provide a "differentiated and seamless Singapore business event experience for MICE partners and visitors.

Among the benefits of SMAP are flight privileges with Singapore Airlines Group, including up to five complimentary Economy class tickets on SQ (subject to a minimum spend on airfares); additional check-in baggage allowance of 10kgs; and "value fares" on Singapore Airlines and Scoot from all major Australian cities.

There are also program benefits at Changi Airport (complimentary welcome desk to greet delegates and shopping/dining vouchers), ground privileges with Uber, premium arrival & departure services at JetQuay and Business Events in Singapore (BeiS) grants and advice on event venues & social activities through STB.

Changi Airport Group's CEO Lee Seow Hiang said the existing arrangement had reaped encouraging results, adding "this second collaboration strengthens all parties' efforts to raise awareness of Singapore as a stopover point and as a destination".

Kerry Hong Kong

SHANGRI-LA Hotels & Resorts has expanded its portfolio of Kerry Hotels, opening the massive 546-room Kerry Hotel Hong Kong, the group's fourth property in the city.

The new-build 16 storey hotel is located on the Kowloon waterfront, overlooking Victoria Harbour, and is home to Hong Kong's largest pillar-less hotel ballroom, along with 17 event spaces.

At 1,756m², the Grand Ballroom accommodates more than 1,000 guests banquet-style, and is equipped with the city's largest LED wall, measuring an impressive 15.4 metres wide by 4.3 metres high.

Complementing the Grand Ballroom is the Hung Hom Ballroom, an adaptive 1,125m² function space. Both venues can integrate indoor and outdoor spaces.



DREAM CRUISES TAKING EVENTS TO SEA

DREAM Cruises is targeting the meetings and incentives market in Asia and the Pacific with its first ship Genting Dream.

Positioning itself as a one-stop shop for MICE events, the line provides a dedicated contact for event organisers and aims to offer a greater return on investment than land-based venues by having all meals, entertainment, and transportation included in the cruise price.

Onboard, the ship has facilities for events of all sizes including its Zodiac Theatre with seating for 999 people and room for performances and presentations. Genting Dream also features function and seminar spaces including Tributes which has seating for 170 people. The space can also be used for cocktail events, which can fit approximately 244 people.

There are also smaller meeting rooms that can fit six people, while for larger cocktail parties the Palm Court at the rear of the ship can fit 495 people.

With cruise ships offering more and more activities to keep passengers occupied at sea, the Genting Dream has mini golf, rock climbing, a ropes course, zip line and water slides that can be utilised for team-building exercises.

Genting Dream offers five-night itineraries from Hong Kong to Japan. From December, the ship will cruise from Singapore offering five-night itineraries to Indonesia or Malaysia and Thailand.





WITH recent increases in flights to Vietnam with Jetstar and new direct flights into Hanoi with Vietnam Airlines, it is becoming increasingly easier for groups to travel to Vietnam for their next conference or event. One of the emerging areas for meetings and events is the city of Nha Trang. Located on the South Central Coast and only a short flight from Hanoi, Danang or Ho Chi Minh City, the area offers plenty of sunshine, kilometres of uninterrupted beach, as well as an array of activities making it an ideal spot for groups.

Amiana on the Bay is the premium destination in Nha Trang for groups. The resort is private and peaceful, located

eight kilometres from the city centre. With 158 rooms and villas, all with garden or ocean views from a terrace or balcony, the accommodation is luxurious. Rooms all feature a unique outdoor sheltered bathroom with hand crafted baths and rain showers.

The Amiana Conference Centre offers stunning ocean views, with five meeting rooms ranging from 72 to 360m² that are able to accommodate up to 400. The team at Amiana can tailor the spaces to most needs, from intimate lunches on the verandah overlooking the bay, to exhibition space, or casual meetings for smaller groups. They can organise an array of

activities for a group on and off site - cooking classes in Bacaro restaurant, wine tasting at the Pool Bar, themed nights for your special event or a visit to one of the local hotspots such as Skylight Rooftop Beach Club and 360 degree skydeck.

Amiana has plenty to offer guests with various beach activities, three pools, a fitness centre and a fabulous spa offering the unique Mud Bath experience exclusive to the Nha Trang region.

The resort offers 10% off for groups with a minimum 10 rooms booking, and for every 15 rooms sold, one room is given free of charge (maximum three free rooms per group).



Taiwan seeks incentives

ERIC Lin, director of the Taiwan Tourism Bureau's International Affairs division, has his sights set firmly on the Australian meetings market, with incentives a key part of the mix to boost Taiwanese visitation from Down Under. Speaking to travelBulletin in Taipei last month. Lin said he had aspirations to make Australia a "mainstream inbound market" for Taiwan, building on already impressive figures which show a 7% annual growth rate. In May Taiwan hosted the Select Travel Group's annual conference, which took place at Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel with about 250 delegates in total.

The three day event included a free city tour taking in key attractions such as the stunning National Palace Museum, a treasure-house of Chinese artefacts; the Taipei 101 skyscraper and the National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial. That just scraped the surface of the destination, with many attendees choosing to add on pre- and post- activities to explore further afield. Lin told travelBulletin he believed it was "not to hard to make this into double digit growth," with numbers increasing threefold to 90,000 annually over the last few years. "We plan to put more promotional resources into the Australian market," he said, with activity overseen by newly appointed regional director Trust H.K. Lin who is based in the Bureau's Singapore office. In particular Taiwan is hoping to boost the number of business events visitors, who spend significantly more than leisure arrivals and also often return for a holiday after their meeting, conference or incentive.

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Singapore's new Starckdesigned ballroom

JW MARRIOTT Singapore South Beach is showcasing its new facilities to the events market, including its two new ultra-modern towers and Philippe Starck-designed ballroom.

Opened late last year in Singapore's art and culture district, the hotel incorporates three heritage buildings with modern additions to offer 634 guest rooms, 47 suites and 17 event spaces. The hotel offers a Spa by JW and nine dining outlets including one by celebrity chef Akira Back of the Iron Chef TV show.

The property's 520m² ballroom is located in the 1930s Drill Hall and has been redesigned by Starck to offer contemporary décor, an LED video wall and space for up to 340 people banquet style.

The hotel is also located alongside the Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Bangkok centre welcomes rooftop bar

THE Centara Grand hotel, part of the Bangkok Convention Centre complex at CentralWorld, has opened a roof-top champagne bar on its 59th floor.

The CRU Champagne Bar gets its name from the French word denoting vineyards of quality and has been created in partnership with well-known champagne house Mumm.

Offering sweeping views of the Bangkok skyline, the bar is reached via a glass elevator and provides a spectacular outdoor setting with ultra-modern architectural elements and a circular bar on a raised platform.

Macao to host annual world tourism forum

THE sixth annual session of the Global Tourism Economy Forum (GTEF) will be held this year in Macao on 16 and 17 October.

The forum will engage prominent leaders in the public and private sectors in discussion on regional collaboration and how tourism stakeholders can break down barriers, find common ground and grow stronger together.

Riding on the opportunity of the inaugural ITB China exhibition held last month in Shanghai, organisers of GTEF promoted their event with a networking luncheon. The meal was aimed at elevating awareness of GTEF in both China's tourism sector and among representatives from travel companies from eastern Europe, promoting the Forum as a one-stop medium for tourism stakeholders to expand their business reach within the region.



AACB VIEW

FEDERAL BUDGET MISSED OPPORTUNITY

LAST month's Federal Budget missed a clear opportunity to back Australia's business events industry by investing in a national convention bid fund.

The bid fund continues to remain a high priority for the business events industry, especially given the latest results of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) country and city rankings, showing that Australia's global position has slipped yet again.

The most recent ICCA statistics confirm that Australia has dropped to 16th place in 2016, down from 15th in 2015, with our share of the global market falling to 1.73%. A decade ago, Australia was consistently among the top 10 most popular countries to host major international association conventions.

Australia is now quickly falling behind its regional competitors. Countries such as China (equal 7th), Japan (equal 7th) and Republic of Korea (13th) are currently ranked ahead of Australia by the number of international meetings held, each having access to additional government assistance.

Within the Asia Pacific & Middle East rankings, cities on the move such as Tokyo (6th), Shanghai (8th) and Kuala Lumpur (9th) have edged out Australia's top performing city, Sydney, in 2016 to 10th by number of events hosted, with Melbourne at 11th.

Convention bureaux play a central role in attracting business events to Australia with the support of industry through the preparation and presentation of bid proposals. However, bidding for international business events has become highly competitive and extremely challenging with the emergence of

government bid funds across Asia and the Middle Fast.

The AACB's latest forward analysis of international business events lost by convention bureaux has increased to 296 events (January 2017), compared to 235 (July 2016). As a result of this lost business, more than \$1 billion in delegate expenditure will now take place in other countries across the next ten years.

Key findings of this analysis suggest that the main reasons for losing international business events relate to Australia being a high cost destination to host an event and superior financial packages offered by competitors.

The AACB has been advocating for a convention bid fund leading up to the 2017/18 federal budget, in partnership with key tourism bodies. Investment in a convention bid fund would secure strategic opportunities that align with national economic priorities by providing modest support to international associations seeking to hold a convention in Australia. Return on investment is guaranteed, as funding would only be granted to successful bids won for Australia.

Countries around the world are using business events as strategic tools to attract trade, investment and global talent. Governments invest in and support the business events sector because they recognise the high yield and long-term benefits stemming from growth in the visitor and knowledge-based economies.

There is enormous scope for growth in the business events industry, and to realise this growth, ongoing investment in international marketing is critical.

business events news

20 Apr Fort Denison up for tender 24 Apr NSW secures startup festival 27 Apr Go-ahead for Taronga plan **01 May** ICESAP acceditation scheme 01 May Blue Mountains 'sculpture' growth

APRIL TO MAY 2017 HEADLINES

04 May Moore Park event proposal 08 May Scenic sets out to lure MICE 11 May Battle of the ICCA rankings 15 May NZ climbs in world rankings 18 May Events plan in Rocks overhaul

CAREER IN FOCUS

ANNA JONES

Co-Owner of Ormina Tours

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

We are a small company so my role covers a lot. My background is in marketing and customer experience so outside of the day to day quoting, I manage all of our marketing channels including social, digital and content marketing. Lately I've also been leading a project to implement a CRM system across Ormina Tours which I'm very excited about.

2. How did you start out in your career? Why the travel industry?

I actually started my career in TV working at NBC and HBO in NY before moving into advertising and then retail marketing. I stumbled into travel a couple years ago and can't imagine a better industry. I've always been passionate about customer experience and in travel, the experience is your product. It holds us to a high standard but the reward of hearing the travel stories from our clients makes it all worth it.

3. Did you complete formal qualifications and how have they helped you in your career?

Funnily enough, I have a degree in TV production and drama. They TV degree definitely helped me when I was working at the networks and on TV shoots for advertising. In my marketing roles, I've had a do a lot of public speaking and I think my background in drama really helps. It taught me how to tell a story and it's amazing how much marketing is just that, storytelling.

4. What do you love about your job?

There is so much! I love working with clients and agents to plan the perfect trip. I truly believe that travel makes us more tolerant and understanding of cultural differences. I'm American and seeing what's happening in



the US right now is scary. I like to think that the more people travel the more educated and less afraid of other cultures they become. I love opening people's eyes to that.

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

I think change is always hard. I've lead some transformational projects across some large brands and I find those projects incredibly challenging but also rewarding. To make them stick, you need to get everyone in the organisation on board, you can just force it down from the top. It's that engagement process that makes them so challenging.

6. What factors are central to a successful career?

Perseverance and resilience. In other words don't give up and don't be afraid to fail. I know people say it all the time but it's true. Your career doesn't happen to you, you have to make it happen and you can't be afraid to put yourself out there even if you might fail. Also never stop learning, things are changing so fast you can't be complacent!

7. Is having a mentor an essential part of getting ahead in a career? Do you have one?

I don't have formal mentor but I try to have a group of peers who I can talk to about challenges and trends in the industry. I have had a lot of people who have influenced me in my career. I've had lots of bosses that taught me great things and I've probably had more who taught me how not to act.

8. What are your principals for doing good business?

Be honest and transparent. I think trust is the most important trait. Agents need to trust that we will provide a high level of service and we are being transparent and open with them. At the end of the day, you want to work with people who are friendly, professional and trustworthy and that's what we strive to be at Ormina.

9. How do you achieve a work/life balance? It's hard! When you love your job, you don't mind working long hours but everyone needs a break. I know that I do better work when

mind working long hours but everyone need a break. I know that I do better work when I have time to clear my head and so I make sure I prioritise downtime. Of course, it doesn't always happen like I plan.

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

Be curious, never stop learning and ask questions. I can't tell you how many times I've been in meetings where people have no idea what's going on but are afraid to ask the obvious question. Just ask the dumb questions, that's how you learn!

I truly believe that travel makes us more tolerant and understanding of cultural differences?

VIDEO CVS

In the February edition of *travelBulletin*, we covered the topic of whether job seeking candidates ought to put a photo of themselves on their CV. In this edition, we take this one step further and speak with leading recruiters as to whether video CVs can help give candidates a leading edge.

FAD or useful marketing tool?

Opinions do vary as to the use of video CV's with some saying it's uncommon in the travel industry and others suggesting

we're likely to see more from the not-socamera-shy members of the millennials and Z generations.

Melissa Schembri, director at C&M

Recruitment told travelBulletin that "the way people are applying for jobs is changing and that any added extra information will advantage the applicant."

However Schembri does concede that video CVs "are not the most common form of application at this stage."

Kristi Gromm marketing manager for inPlace Recruitment believes a younger generation may sooner embrace this concept saying "as younger job seekers enter the market who have grown up in the digital era video CVs could be a great option for them."

Video CVs might not be for everyone but if you're applying for a customer facing role such as in sales, marketing, hospitality or retail, demonstrating you are confident and standing out from the crowd of paper CVs could give you a winning edge.

Top tips for creating a video CV:

- Keep it between 60 to 120 seconds; craft an 'elevator' pitch
- Think about body image, posture and eye contact
- · Dress the part, keep it formal
- Avoid being too scripted and ensure there's nothing to distract you or the viewer





30

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Ghrills at Sea

Cruise ships are amping up the adrenalin and offering guests heart-thumping activities on board. Jasmine O'Donoghue dives into some of the latest thrills taking to the sea.



PACIFIC Dawn is the first in the fleet to feature P&O's waterpark and waterslides - Disco Diver and Super Slider. The rides lay claim to being the longest slides on an Australian ship, both measuring around 80m. One slide is transparent, so spectators can watch as guests shoot through the twists and turns, while the other is multi-coloured with music pumping through it. When Pacific Explorer joins the fleet this month, she will also feature two waterslides, one with LED lights and sound effects and the second with heart-racing twists and turns.

All five of P&O Cruises' ships are fitted with the P&O Edge Adventure Park, providing up to 19 activities. Guests can zoom down the zip line, race to the top of the ship in a cargo net race and abseil down the 10m aft funnel. There's the opportunity to leap and tumble on the Bungee Tramp, practise tight rope walking without the heights on Slackline Surfing and battle it out in a game of Laser Tag. Those who are hungry for heights can walk the plank, scale to the top of the outdoor movie screen, climb the ship's bow, ascend to the purposebuilt crow's nest and complete a three metre high obstacle course.

CARNIVAL Cruise Line's Carnival Horizon, set to debut on 02 April, 2018 in Europe will be first in the fleet to feature the Dr. Seuss WaterWorks. Located on Deck 12, the water park will offer two themed slides. The more adventurous can shoot down more than 137m of twists and turns on The Cat in the Hat enclosed raft ride, while the Fun Things Slide encompasses 65m of all-ages fun with polka dots and special lighting effects. The park will also include a 568L tipping bucket patterned after The Cat's hat, along with a splash zone with dozens of water spray toys. Also set to be on Horizon and already up and running on Carnival Vista is Skyride, an open-air, twintrack bike course suspended high above the ship's top deck.

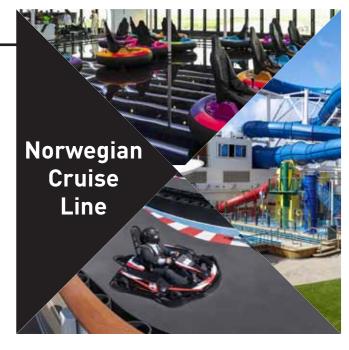
Aussie passengers who don't want to stray too far from home to get their adrenalin rush can ride the steepest and fastest waterslide at sea - Green Thunder - on both Carnival Spirit and Carnival Legend. The top deck water park Carnival WaterWorks also features Carnival's Twister Waterslide and a Splash Zone including mini racing slides and a giant tipping bucket.





ROYAL Caribbean has jam packed Ovation of the Seas with an array of fun activities, including the first skydiving experience at sea. RipCord by iFLY offer thrill seekers the experience of skydiving in a seven-metre-tall glass flight chamber overlooking the FlowRider surf simulator and adjacent to the Rock Climbing Wall. Passengers can get a birds-eye view of their surroundings on North Star, which rises more than 90m above the ocean and rotates over the sides of the ship. The action doesn't stop there, with Ovation home to the largest indoor active space at sea, SeaPlex, which has bumper cars, a circus school with a flying trapeze, roller skating and a full-sized sports court. An ice-skating rink is also available locally on Explorer of the Seas and Voyager of the Seas.

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line's brand new Norwegian Joy comes equipped with a Ferrari branded competitive racetrack. Located on the top deck of the ship, up to 10 passengers at a time can zip around the two-level track in an electric go-cart. Guests staying in The Haven and Concierge Class receive a number of complimentary rides as part of the benefits of their room class. The vessel also features an open-air laser tag course, simulator rides, bumper cars and two multi-story waterslides. Norwegian Joy is Norwegian Cruise Line's first purposebuilt ship to be customised for the Chinese market. The cruise line took delivery of Norwegian Joy on 27 April and the ship then sailed to China. Norwegian Jewel, which will make her debut down under in November, is fitted with a basketball/volleyball/tennis court and a public splash deck.



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INDUSTRY DEMANDS A SOLUTION

SYDNEY'S cruise infrastructure dilemma has come to a head, with Royal Caribbean scaling back the number of ships coming to Australia during the 2018/19 season due to "port congestion".

Unable to secure the slots in Sydney needed to "offer optimal cruise itineraries", Royal Caribbean International will only send three ships to Australia for the 2018/19 season.

During 2016/17 the cruise line based five ships in Australia, but the cruise line was only able to secure enough berths for two ships in Sydney during the peak summer months of January and February 2018.

"Voyager of the Seas will instead operate year-round from Asia, and Radiance of the Seas will undertake four turnarounds during the peak summer months outside of Sydney, in Melbourne and Auckland," the cruise line said in a statement.

"For a number of years now, we have warned that an acute lack of cruise infrastructure in Sydney will constrain the growth of the industry and limit the flow-on effects to the NSW economy. That time has come."

Royal Caribbean also highlighted the cost environment in NSW is "amongst the least competitive in the world for cruise homeporting," noting it hopes to see a fourth ship return to Australia for the 2019/20 season.

In the meantime Carnival Australia's executive chairman Ann Sherry has warned Sydney's cruise infrastructure challenges are "emerging as others' opportunities".

"We are finding ourselves increasingly basing ships in other cities such as Melbourne and Brisbane," Sherry said, declaring "we are nearing crunch point where we need to find a way to unblock the stalemate in Sydney Harbour and find a way of sharing the Garden Island facility between Navy and cruising for the benefit of Sydney".

Weighing in on the issue, the Tourism & Transport Forum called on the NSW and Federal Governments to urgently secure Sydney's cruise infrastructure or risk losing out.

TTF chief executive Margy Osmond said: "if Sydney is not available as a destination for large cruise liners, the whole country will miss out.

"We are now on the verge of a cruise crisis."
A spokesperson for the NSW Minister for
Roads, Maritime and Freight, Melinda Pavey,
said: "Sydney Harbour has been loved to
death with the exponential growth in the
cruise industry around the world".

The spokesperson said the government was "continuing to work with industry to look at solutions for expanding short, medium and longer term capacity".



New itineraries in Scenic river cruise program

SCENIC has released its full 2018 European river cruising brochure, introducing eight new itineraries alongside its existing top sellers.

The company has also released a series of earlybird specials available for bookings made by 30 September or until sold out, including fly free deals and special Business class fares of \$3,995 per person.

New in 2018 are a series of five additional French itineraries ranging from 16 to 31 days, including the 23-day lcons of France which combines a cruise through the celebrated wine region of Bordeaux with a sailing along the Saone and Rhone rivers through

Burgundy and Provence.

Also making a debut next year are two additional Christmas itineraries, one of 11 days on the Danube between Prague and Budapest and the other of 12 days on the Rhine between Amsterdam and Zurich.

Further east, Scenic has added the 18-day Imperial Russia with St Petersburg, combining a cruise on the Volga between Moscow and Volgograd with additional time in St Petersburg.

Scenic's 2018 Hidden Wonders of Europe river cruising program is on sale now – see **www.scenic.com.au**



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CUBA ATTRACTS MORE CRUISE INTEREST

CUBA continues to take the limelight as one of the world's hottest emerging cruising destinations, taking its place in the itineraries of several more cruise lines in recent weeks.

Royal Caribbean Cruises will begin to sail year-round to Cuba from next year with its newly refreshed *Empress of the Seas* sailing 58 cruises of four- and five-night itineraries from January 2018 through March 2019, more than half of which will offer overnight stays in the Cuban capital Havana. *Empress'* Western Caribbean and Havana sailings are now open for booking.

Michael Bayley, president and CEO of Royal Caribbean International said the cruise line had been overwhelmed with the feedback on its Cuba offerings, thus deciding to expand their itineraries.

"Since arriving in Cuba for the first-time last month, we've seen the excitement of our guests when sailing into Havana and the passion they have for the city at sail away," he said.

Azamara Club Cruises is also adding four additional sailings to its existing line up of Cuba voyages. Departing from Miami, the sailings onboard the *Azamara Quest* feature overnights in Havana, as well as visits to two maiden ports of call – Cienfuegos and Santiago de Cuba, beginning January 2018.

The new addition will grow Azamara's Cuban offerings to six, ranging from seven to 11 night cruises. Azamara will offer shore excursions featuring open air cabaret, Tropicana, a Nelson Dominguez art gallery tour, and classic cars in Havana, with more experiences coming soon.

Larry Pimentel, president & CEO of Azamara Club Cruises

said, "Interest in travelling to Cuba from both new and loyal guests is undeniable."

Norwegian Cruise Line's first ship to sail to Cuba, *Norwegian Sky*, made her maiden call in the capital city of Havana last month. The call marks the start of *Norwegian Sky*'s weekly round-trip cruises from Miami to Cuba. The ship will sail a total of 53 four-day voyages to Cuba, with 52 including an overnight stay Havana.





NORWEGIAN SET TO DEBUT IN CHINA

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line's newest ship is set to debut in China this month, marking the company's first major foray into Chinese markets.

The 3,850-passenger *Norwegian Joy* has been crafted especially for Chinese travellers and was delivered by Germany's Meyer Werft shipyards in late April. On arrival in China this month, the ship will embark on an inaugural tour involving a series of one-day events in ports including Qingdao, Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

The ship will be christened on 27 June by the 'King of Chinese Pop' Wang Leehom and will sail from home ports in Shanghai and Tianjin near Beijing, becoming Norwegian's first China-based ship.

Norwegian Joy is the second in the line's Breakaway-Plus class and will take Norwegian's fleet to 25 vessels across its three brands - Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises.

Evergreen rebranding

EVERGREEN Tours recently rebranded with a new look and a new name – Evergreen Cruises & Tours.

According to general manager Angus Crichton, the company made the move to better reflect its range of cruises and tours and has rejigged its logo with an infinity symbol and a central wave element to signal the "importance of our cruising program and link to sister company, Emerald Waterways".

"Ultimately we'll be calling ourselves simply 'Evergreen' in the language we use with guests and agents," Crichton said.

The rebranding coincides with the launch of the 146-page 2018 Europe River Cruise brochure which was released last month. The new look will be rolled out all channels over the next few months.

"Evergreen's fresh new look marks the launch of the full 2018 Europe river cruising brochure," Crichton said.

"On the back of last year's successful France and Portugal program, we've expanded our brochure to feature new river and ocean cruise combinations. We now offer even more choice of premium cruising with the same great Evergreen value," he said.

In 2018, passengers cruising with Evergreen for over 15 days from Budapest to Amsterdam can join an 11-day Baltic cruise with Princess Cruises, or a choice of Holland America sailings covering Norway and the Arctic Circle or Scotland and Iceland.

In addition, passengers sailing from Basel to Amsterdam for eight days can add on a 14-night Britain and Ireland cruise with HAL. In Southern France, Evergreen's eight-day Sensations of Southern France connects with a seven-night MSC cruise.





DANUBE CHRISTMAS MARKETS

CRYSTAL MOZART - 7M24R

To/From Roundtrip Vienna Dates 23 Nov - 03 Dec, 2017 Days 10 days Fares from US\$4,045pp*



DANUBE CHRISTMAS MARKETS

CRYSTAL MOZART - 7M26R

To/From Roundtrip Vienna Dates 13 Dec - 23 Dec. 2017 Days 10 days Fares from US\$4,460pp*



GRAND EUROPE CHRISTMAS MARKETS

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Christchurch \$56m plan

LARGE cruise liners will be able to return to the Christchurch port town of Lyttelton for the first time since the Canterbury earthquakes under a multi-million dollar plan announced last month.

A \$56 million cruise berth will be funded by the Christchurch City Council which is aiming to welcome ships back in time for the 2019/20 cruise season.

New Zealand Tourism Minister Paula Bennett said the cruise industry was valuable to New Zealand tourism with numbers growing by 48% in the past five years.

"Without this long-term solution, there was a risk larger vessels would choose to bypass Lyttelton and Akaroa, impacting the wider Canterbury region," she said.

The proposed cruise ship berth has been designed to accommodate the world's largest cruise ship Oasis of the Seas, which at 225,282 tonnes is 362m long and carries around 5,400 people and 2,394 crew.



APT'S "GAME-CHANGING" NEW SHIP DESIGN

PLANS have been unveiled for *AmaMagna*, APT and partner AmaWaterways' biggest ship yet, which will be launched in 2019.

The vessel will be twice the width of traditional European river ships and in a first for river cruising, will feature an open-water sports platform with zodiacs, canoes and recreational equipment.

 $\label{lem:accommodating 194 guests, AmaMagna will sail Danube \\ it in eraries and offer multiple dining options, more on board activities, \\$

enhanced
evening
entertainment
and a large
heated sundeck
swimming pool
with whirlpool and s

with whirlpool and sky bar.

"From the engine room to

the fine dining areas, AmaWaterways

president Rudi Schreiner and his team have worked extremely hard to ensure the *AmaMagna* will be in a class of its own in terms of amenity and performance, and we believe that now is the time to launch this game-changing style of ship," APT Travel Group managing director Chris Hall said.

APT and AmaWaterways also revealed US based travel and hospitality investment specialist, Certares LP, has joined as an additional partner in the AmaWaterways business.



Untouched Lands • Ocean-view Suites • Butler Service • Expert Expedition Team • Zodiac and Shore Excursions • Complimentary Beverages

Aurora's newbuild vessel

AURORA Expeditions has announced its first brand new, purpose-build expedition vessel will be delivered in time for the 2019/20 Antarctic season.

The 104m ice class 1A vessel will be built by US-based ship builders SunStone Ships Inc and will be "the first in a new series of high-performance vessels designed to make the ocean-going experience as safe and comfortable as possible in the polar regions".

Robert Halfpenny, managing director of Aurora Expeditions, said the ship "is the first to use the patented X-BOW technology which has the ability to pierce waves with much greater stability, making open sea journeys - like Antarctica's notorious Drake Passage more pleasant for passengers."

It will feature a custom-designed platform to cater for kayakers and divers, a mud room, private bathroom facilities, cabin balconies, a 180-degree indoor observation deck, gymnasium, sauna, spa, and plenty of outdoor viewing areas.

Viking reinvigorates Egypt

VIKING Cruises has committed to Egypt, revealing it will launch a newly acquired ship on the Nile in Egypt in March 2018, Viking Ra.

The all-suite, 48-guest Viking Ra will feature three suite stateroom categories, as well as an onboard spa, two jacuzzis and an outdoor pool.

It will operate a new 12-day Egypt itinerary Pharaohs & Pyramids which will include a three-night stay at a hotel in Cairo, a flight to Luxor followed by a seven-day round trip cruise before guests return to Cairo for the final night.

AmaKristina launched

APT has celebrated the newest addition to its fleet, the AmaKristina, christened last month on the Rhine at the town of Lahnstein in Germany.

The ship was launched by its godmother Kristin Karst, co-owner of AmaWaterways and the company's executive vice president. There was a cocktail event and surprise firework display to celebrate the occasion and guests enjoyed a gala dinner ahead of the ship's sailing.

The 156-passenger vessel features signature twin balconies and a sundeck with running track for gym junkies, a heated pool with a swim up bar, and The Chef's Table - an intimate dining experience with handpicked regional wines.



CLIA VIEW

2017 is gearing up to be another bumper year for the cruise industry in this region. As CLIA releases its annual statistics reporting that 2016 was another significant growth year for cruising, the CLIA team continues to develop our online membership portal to make it easier for travel agents to benefit from the incredible growth. These enhancements are designed to enhance the experience of accessing the CLIA members' hub, provide more resources, and make the CLIA training and accreditation program far more accessible for agents to become cruise specialists.

Since the launch of the CLIA Learning Academy we have seen a large increase in the number of consultants accessing our training modules to further their education and gain their CLIA Accreditation. For those of you who have not yet taken up the opportunity to explore the content and resources provided as part of your CLIA Membership, we have produced a short video guide to the academy which takes you through each area of the site, highlighting the learning content available. To watch the videos, sign up as a member, or contact CLIA - visit www.cruising.org.au

For those agents who have recently joined CLIA and are not quite sure how to navigate your way through the CLIA Online Learning Academy and understand all the benefits of your membership, please reach out to us. We will be holding webinars to introduce consultants new to CLIA, or interested in joining CLIA, to the extensive training and resource modules we provide.

A key education resource provided by CLIA is our annual Cruise360 Conference. As the biggest cruise industry trade conference and trade show in the region, Cruise360 attracts

hundreds of travel agents and travel agency owners, as well as cruise lines, ports and destination representatives, industry suppliers and CLIA executive partners.

We're excited to announce some new features for this year's Cruise360 Australasia conference, with the event to include interactive discussions and workshops as well as a range of keynote addresses from international cruise executives. For the first time delegates will have a choice of educational breakout sessions, designed to help boost their business. These workshops will cover topics integral to the success of cruise travel agents, such as marketing to millennial travellers, using social media to grow a business and leveraging personal branding.

We're also proud to announce an outstanding line-up of international speakers, including keynotes by group president of Princess Cruises and Carnival Australia Jan Swartz, Azamara Club Cruises president and CEO Larry Pimentel, Seabourn's senior vice president global sales and marketing Chris Austin, and Carnival Cruise Line's senior vice president commercial port operations and international, Carlos Torres de Navarra.

Popular radio host and business commentator Ross Greenwood will return as MC of Cruise360 2017, providing insight into the impact of cruising within the broader Australian business environment.

Early bird tickets are still available at www.cruising.org.au although spots are filling fast, with interest from travel agents already surpassing 2016 levels. Cruise360 will be held at the new Hyatt Regency Sydney on August 25 2017, followed by an inspection of the latest addition to P&O Cruises' fleet, Pacific Explorer, the next day.

CRUISE

27 Apr Royal reduces Aus ships

27 Apr New details on Eclipse

02 May NZ\$56m Lyttelton berth

04 May Carnival looks to Mel/Bris

04 May Evergreen's rebranding

09 May More P&O ships in Bris

09 May Fiji seeks port upgrades

HEADLINES APRIL AND MAY 2017

11 May Auckland ready to tap into Sydney's port shortfall

11 May Auckland mulls solution

16 May New cruising highs: CLIA

16 May APT AmaMagna set for 2019

18 May Fred Olsen river charter

18 May APT's Russia river return

INDUSTRY IN FOCUS

This group of Aussie agents has just returned from the third and final 'Crail Crusade' hosted by Infinity Holidays, having explored Canada and Alaska over 13 days.









Jacqui Walshe, MD, The Walshe Group; Zelda la Grange, former Presidential Aide to Nelson Mandela, and Trent Malcolm, South African Airways sales manager Queensland attended the recent Office Professional Breakfast in Brissie, sponsored by South African Airways.





On The Go Tours recently hosted this group of Flight Centre agents in China on a specialised version of its Great Wall & Warriors tour to give them an idea of what the operator can offer to their clients.

JUNE 2017



Helloworld Business Travel members gathered on the Gold Coast last month for their annual conference. The American Express Cards team were snapped with John Challis from Serko at the event.



Select Travel Group delegates visited Taipei 101 - once the tallest building in the world - as part of the conference Taipei city tour in Taiwan.







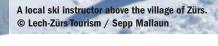


precise planning, forecasting and crisis management, speaking with

United Airlines senior vice president of worldwide sales, Dave Hilfman.

WINTER WONDERLAND

WHITE RING, AUSTRIA



The White Ring ski route in the Austrian Alps offers an awesome day out – and some fine partying afterwards, says Brian Johnston.

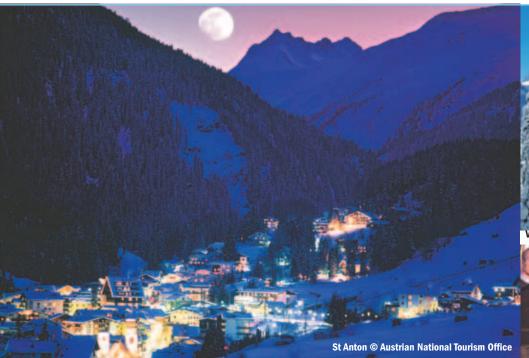
OU can hear the music before you step into Hus No. 8, a blackened chalet in the Austrian resort of Lech. First it's the thumping beat you hear through the oaken door as you make your way through a grove of skis and poles. Then the music as you step in: classic Queen rock that sets bar-goers jiggling as they clink glasses.

Ski jackets and hats lie abandoned on table tops. Hungry skiers wolf down Frisbee-sized schnitzels and waiters haul beer tankards and Schnapps glasses. The concoction of the moment is plum schnapps flavoured with cinnamon and topped with a Matterhorn of whipped cream. It's called Hot Widow.

Welcome to another fine end to a day's skiing in one of Austria's most-admired ski resorts. Lech provides some of Europe's best skiing or snowboarding. The snow is hard to fault, with a base of 150 centimetres topped by 40 centimetres or so of consistent, fresh powder, and a season that lasts from mid-December to the end of March. Runs are particularly suited to intermediate and advanced skiers. You'll also find innumerable Australian connections, from Aussie ski instructors on the slopes to locals who've spent seasons in Mt Buller or Perisher.

You could ski for a week here and never run out of options. What's more, Lech is connected to several other resorts in this alpine region of





for its luxe hotels and quieter, more intimate restaurants. You'll nearly always find good powder hereabouts; the five-kilometre Zürser Täli is one of the best, snow wise. If you stick to the White Ring, however, you'll have to gain altitude again, back up to 2,400 metres on the Zürsersee and Madloch cable cars. The skiing after this is an uninterrupted four-kilometre descent into Zug.

If you want to have some measure of how you're going, the White Ring has its annual race in January that draws top professional skiers from across the world - and guite a few crazy amateurs. The course record is 44 minutes 35 seconds. Confident skiers could probably do it in a couple of hours. Download a free app called The Challenge to record your times, the altitude differences you've experienced, and what lifts you've taken. But why rush? The scenery is awesome, you can enjoy a lingering lunch on the slopes, and make the White Ring last most of the day.

Another couple of lifts will give you enough height from Zug to ski back into Lech following a really nice blue run. The lower slopes can get crowded and snow tends to get slushy towards by mid-afternoon, particularly in spring. No doubt that's why the après ski kicks in early. You could stop off at Oberlech, Lech's car-free satellite village a little higher on the slopes, where café terraces still enjoy the sun.

Most finish the day at the riverside bars in Lech. Those Italians you saw earlier, skiing with such macho cool in designer sunglasses, are now dancing like Sydney drag queens. Ice tinkles in the river, Schnapps provides a warming glow, and another day on the Austrian ski slopes comes to a satisfying end.

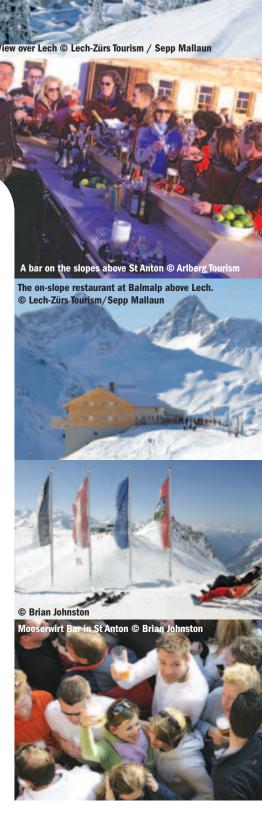
western Austria. Some 80 ski lifts spread across the mountains, linking Lech to quiet, family-oriented Stuben, compact Zürs and St Christoph and St Anton. If you're a party animal, you might want to stay in St Anton: it has an infamous après-ski scene epitomised by the on-slope Mooserwirt Bar, where packed skiers swill from tankards as 1980s pop music sends the surrounding fir trees trembling. The village itself is packed with nightclubs.

The point is that you can choose your preferred village scene and still enjoy the same splendid skiing. To see what the region is all about, don't bother dithering over all the possible runs that snake over ski maps. Instead, take up the challenge of the White Ring, a well-marked and interlinked series of superbly-groomed runs that provides some of the some of the best scenery and skiing in the Austrian Alps.

In a single day, you can ski 22 kilometres of runs and 5,500 metres of descent, and never have to take the same lift - or ski the same run - twice. Better yet, all the runs are beginner or intermediate, allowing just about anyone to tackle the White Ring, while proficient skiers can enjoy fabulous downhill swoops at speed.

The White Ring links Lech, Zürs, Zug, and Oberlech and is all clearly marked by signposts. It has its official start at the top of the Rüfikopf cable car at 2,360 metres, which you can catch right from Lech village. Straight off, you get an exhilarating red run ringed by alpine peaks. Then you're hauled up on the Schüttboden and Trittalp lifts for another glorious run on the superb Hexenboden piste.

This will bring you to the classy village of Zürs, much favoured by romantic couples





ACROSS the ditch, the final touches are being put in place ahead of the opening of for New Zealand's ski season.

An hour out of Queenstown, Cardrona Alpine Resort has installed a \$10 million combined lift of gondola cabins and chairs. The new McDougall's Express "Chondola" will replace the existing McDougall's quad chairlift. The new gondolas hold eight people per cabin and the chairs hold six. This will see uphill capacity expand from 1,000 people per hour to 2,550 an hour.

At the Happy Valley Snow Park, operator Ruapehu Alpine Lifts has invested \$11 million into a project that will see the addition of three new surface lifts. Two of these will feature covers to keep guests dry and sheltered while they move. The addition of these new lifts is expected to eliminate queues and aims to improve guest comfort and safety.

Meanwhile The Remarkables is getting ready to enclose its existing double conveyor lift on the learner's slope with a Slinky-style transparent tube. The Gallery, as it is known, travelled from France and will be assembled in time for the opening to skiers in June. The Gallery allows guests to travel to the top of the slope while being sheltered from the weather, but without missing out on watching the learners sliding down the slope outside.

Most of New Zealand's ski resorts will open by mid-June.

California – ski in the summer

SKIING in the summer might be unconventional, but record snowfall in the United States has meant ski fields such as Lake Tahoe and Mammoth Mountain will remain open until Independence Day on 4 July.

Kristin Rust, international sales, marketing and public relations manager at Mammoth Mountain, said it was great for tourists and business. "In April alone we received 1.5 metres of snow," she said. "It's a great message to send out, that you can do such a novelty thing like ski up until the 4th of July."

Over in North Lake Tahoe, Sarah Winters, leisure sales director at North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, said after the region received 19m of snow this season, there was nothing better than skiing in the morning and paddle-boarding down on Lake Tahoe in the afternoon.

"Usually we're open until the end of May, so it's been several years since we've been open this late and usually it's because we've reopened," Winters said.



Skiing on confidence: Australian ski resorts

THANKS to snowmaking machines, operational days for Australian ski resorts are at an all-time high, despite the decreasing amount of natural snow on the ground. CEO of Australian Ski Areas Association Colin Hackworth said while global warming had seen a reduction in the amount of snow fall, the use of snow making machines had kept the industry thriving.

"The industry believes the number one adaption strategy to climate change is snow making. The resorts can make snow at any temperature and this helps their business, by attracting more clients by having more snow on the ground."

Hackworth said this had given reassurance to many families to be able to book a trip to the ski fields and be confident the slopes would be open, especially at the start and end of the seasons.

"In the past, you'd have to wait and see if there was going to be snow on the ground, now families and visitors who book holidays can do so in advance knowing snow will be waiting for them when they arrive," he said.

Buller Ski Lifts general manager Laurie Blampied said the critical piece for any alpine resort was reliable snow, which is why Mt Buller had invested \$1.6m in the TechnoAlpin Snowfactory, which can produce 220 cubic metres of snow daily, at up to 15°C.

"Forward bookings for this winter are at all time high due to the confidence surrounding our guaranteed snow for opening and new online booking tools making it easier to plan and book a winter holiday," he said.

"Guests are locking in bookings early rather than waiting to see the snow fall," he said. "Thanks to the Snowfactory investment, bookings for June are much stronger than usual."



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ALL GREATURES GREAT & SMALL



Craig Tansley comes face to face with the Earth's most unusual creatures on an eight-day cruise through the Galapagos...

H MY God, look at that," 300 metres away, a humpback whale is breaching clean out of the Pacific. Oblivious to us, or - like all the other animals around here encouraged by our presence, it's putting on quite a show for the 20 passengers and 14 crew on-board the MV Origin. But what's almost as remarkable as the whale show itself, is the fact the person most excited about the display is someone who's seen it all before; every year, in fact, for the past 30. But it says a lot about these islands that local guides still get as excited at the weird and wonderful creatures of the Galapagos as

any first-time visitor.

"Oh, I've been travelling to many other places, sure," naturalist guide Desiree Cruz says to me. "But look at this place, nothing compares. So I've stopped travelling, and I never, ever grow tired of this."

She has a point. It's midway in our seven-night, eight-day sea excursion through the southern and central islands of the Galapagos, and I'm losing count of wildlife interactions. The major difference at the Galapagos Islands is that animals aren't scared one bit of humans – in fact, the only creatures to scuttle away from us so far were the rare pink flamingos we

6 But it says a lot about these islands that local guides still get as excited at the weird and wonderful creatures of the Galapagos as any first-time visitor?

tip-toed up beside in the salt lakes of the island, Floreana, this morning. Everything else comes to play, and to observe us: it's the most remarkable aspect of a most remarkable island group. So far a pod of rare orca has swum right under our 43-metre boat, the nine-metre-long bull coming up right beside our vessel, before going under us and out the other side. As I've snorkeled, inquisitive sea lions come to look at themselves in my mask, admiring their reflections in the lens, before jumping right over the top of me, somersaulting in the air. Huge green turtles don't seem to care either if I follow them around in stunning, secluded bays; blue footed boobies carry out drawn-out, elaborate courtship rituals just a few metres from where I stand, and any time I'm in the sea whole schools of reef sharks - including some fairly big-looking Galapagos sharks I'm assured are timid - swim all

The MV Origin is the most intimate luxury vessel in the Galapagos. Launched early

SOUTH AMERICA

last year, it has just 10 cabins, with a crewto-passenger ratio of almost one-to-one. In eight days, I'm waited on hand-and-foot: after sweaty excursions to shore, there's a waiter with hors d'oeuvres and ice-cold beer and wine waiting by the back deck. It has all the mod-cons that come in handy when you're trying to process everything you've seen by day: a bubbling, boiling Jacuzzi on the back deck, an open bar on the top sundeck, and showers with floor-to-ceiling views lest you miss anything while you're preparing for sunset canapes. We're cruising an eight-day route through the Galapagos that takes us away from any of the crowds you'll see on arrival at San Cristobal's airport. Most days out here there's not even another boat to keep us company.

Even so. I love the solace that comes at dawn on the top deck here just before the sun rises, and it's just me and the fast-fading stars as I look across at a new island we've steamed to during the night. The landscape of the Galapagos is incredibly rugged: sheer ridgelines etched out over millions of years rise up above empty, perfect white sand bays. Most islands are completely uninhabited - and the only way to access them is by boat. The only settlements there are in the Galapagos are mostly quaint fishing villages, where sea lions sprawl in the sun right by footpaths, and on seats at harbours like drunken sailors.

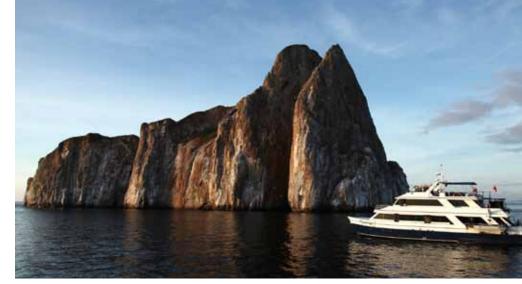
We visit four islands of the Galapagos, arriving at deserted anchorages in the hours just before dawn. After breakfast we travel across smooth blue seas by Zodiac, entering empty bays, finding more wildlife waiting. Our guides explain what's happening around us, though we never have to look far to find the strangest of the Galapagos' creatures. On our first day, we're caught in the middle of a mighty battle between great frigate birds and red-footed boobies, another day we watch a sea lion give birth to her pup as marine iguanas come close to steal the placenta, and one morning a pod of dolphins surf the bow waves of our Zodiac all the way to shore before a group of sea lions circle our vessel, anxious to play.

The Galapagos have been many things through the past 500 years: the haunt of pirates hiding out from the South American mainland, the site of Darwin's discovery of the theory of evolution; though these days they're the bucket list destination of any traveller with a penchant for wildlife holidays. But climbing aboard a vessel like MV Origin allows you to come about as close to the Earth's rarest creatures as you ever could dare... with barely another traveller in sight.











WHETHER it's the plethora of activities available like trekking through Torres del Paine National Park, salsa dancing classes in the capital of Chile, Santiago, basking in the warm weather all year round, sampling art galleries or visiting the vineyards of the Maipo Valley, Chile has something for every traveller.

Foodies can savour the street fare like the Chilean Empanadas – filled with minced meat, onions, raisins, black olives and hard boiled eggs. Another favorite is Completo, a Spanish hot dog with all the trimmings like mayonnaise, tomatoes, onions, pickles and sauerkraut.

It's no surprise then that the South American country has reached sizzling new heights of popularity with the Research Division of the Tourism Department of Chile reporting a 10.8% growth in Aussies visiting the region. Chile welcomed 50,968 Aussies last year. According to Chimu Adventures and the Tourism Authority of Chile, other factors contributing to the influx of Aussies include the "increased air capacity, value for money and reduced misconceptions regarding distance and accessibility." South American airline LATAM and Qantas have both increased their capacity into South America over the last three years and brought competitive deals to Aussies wanting a Latin holiday.

LATAM PREPARES FOR MEL DIRECT

FROM 5 October this year, LATAM airlines will begin nonstop flights from Melbourne to Santiago in Chile, operating three times a week with Boeing 787-9 *Dreamliners*.

The service will make history as LATAM is the first airline group to offer a direct service between the two cities and the journey time of 15 hours is also the airline's longest flight at a distance of more than 11,000km. The aircraft will offer 220 seats in Economy, 54 seats in Space+ and 30 seats in Business.

Enrique Cueto, CEO of LATAM Airlines Group said, "Over recent years, we've seen increasing demand for flights between Latin America and this part of the world – both from business and leisure travellers – and we want to continue supporting the growth of bilateral tourism and commerce.

"With the Melbourne service, we are not only reinforcing LATAM's commitment to Oceania and the Asia-Pacific, but also to



offering unrivalled connectivity to, from and within Latin America."

Australian ambassador to Chile Tim Kane sees the move as an important milestone for the airline group and the state of Victoria, saying "Chile is Australia's gateway to the region, just as Australia is Chile's platform into Asia".

"These non-stop flights will deepen and

broaden Australia's Latin America links, open new markets, expand people-to-people opportunities and enhance Melbourne as a key destination for Latin American travellers to Australia and the Asia-Pacific region."

Currently LATAM transports 190,000 passengers per year between Latin America and Oceania. The airline estimates this will increase by 75,000 annually.

Australis mounts glacier cruises in 2018

EXPEDITION cruise line Australis will introduce its latest ship Ventus Australis on 2 January next year. The state-of-the-art vessel will sail to the Condor glacier in Agostini Fjord at the southern-most tip of South America, travelling between Ushuaia in Argentina and Punta Arenas in Chile.

The ship carries 210 passengers and will offer a four-night 'Patagonian Explorer' itinerary every eight days from January to March 2018, and again from September 2018 until April 2019.

Highlights included guided zodiac tours where guests will see three glaciers - Pia, Giribaldi and Aguila. Another highlight is a chance to see the world's largest flying bird, the Andean condors. At 15kg each, they're a sight to behold and have a wingspan of 3.3m.

Fares for the four-night sailings start at \$1,942 per person twin share. An eight-night package deal is available from \$3,496ppts.





ESCORTED TOURING WITH MARION BUNNIK

MARION Bunnik, founder and product director of Bunnik Tours, will be escorting two small group tours throughout South and Central America in 2018.

"The itineraries that I have chosen venture a little off the beaten tourist trail but take in some of the world's most pristine and breath-taking sights, scenery and wildlife, and venture into small local villages to gain a real insight into each country's culture," Bunnik said.

Her first small group tour will be a 26-day Ultimate Chile & Argentina journey. Guests will depart Australia on 16 January 2018 and arrive in Chile's capital Santiago. The tour includes a visit to the Atacama Desert, the Chilean fjords, thermal hot springs and a night in a luxury treehouse in the Patagonian rainforest. A highlight of this tour is a visit to the Casa de la Mujer Mapuche near Pucon, Chile. Prices start at \$18,815pp, including return international airfares, five flights within South America, air taxes, tipping and transfers.

The 33-day Costa Rica, Nicaragua & the Panama Canal cruise and tour departs Australia on 10 March 2018 and will visit Arenal, what was once Costa Rica's most active volcano. Guests can relax in volcanic thermal springs and journey into Juan Del Sur, Omotepe Island, and enjoy a 15-night cruise on board Island Princess. Prices start at \$15,235pp and include return international airfares, internal flight, air taxes, tipping and transfers.

STH AMERICA'S FIRST LUXURY SLEEPER TRAIN

BELMOND has introduced its Andean Explorer, South America's first luxury sleeper train, travelling between Cusco and Arequipa in Peru.

Joining other rail journeys in Belmond's portfolio including the legendary Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, the new train travels over two days through some of the most spectacular scenery in South America, providing views of snow-capped mountains, pristine lakes and herds of alpacas and llamas.

Its carriages have been designed to reflect Peruvian culture, mixing vibrant colours with natural tones and large picture windows. An observation car offers an outdoor terrace and acts as the social hub of the train, while executive chef Diego Munoz has created a culinary experience for guests with an emphasis on Peru's natural ingredients.



Off the train, guests can take a private tour of Lake Titicaca and lunch on a private beach with views to the glacial peaks of La Paz in Bolivia.

Belmond has also acquired a 20-room hotel in the Arequipa region of Peru's

south, nestled in lush gardens with views across Colca Canyon. Called the Belmond Las Casitas, it also features the Samay Spa which offers views over the canyon and provides treatments involving natural ingredients from the hotel's gardens.

THINGS: NATURAL WONDERS

South America is known for its rich cultures and spectacular landscapes. Here's a roundup of four must-see natural wonders.



Colca Canyon, Peru

(one of deepest canyon's in the world)

Colca Canyon in Peru is 3,400m at its deepest point and runner up to nearby Cotahuasi Canyon as the deepest canyon in the world. Twice as deep as the Grand Canyon in the USA, its highlight is the spectacular viewing point at Cruz Del Condor. If travellers are lucky, they might see the Andean condors (the largest bird in the Americas) soaring above them, though they only come out in the morning and late afternoon. The main village of Chivay is four minutes to Colca Canyon by car.

The Atacama Desert covers northern Chile between the coast and the foot of the Andes, without outlying areas also stretching into Argentina, Bolivia and Peru. It's the driest place on Earth apart from the poles, without any greenery, shade, cities or pollution. Landscape photographers flock to a backdrop that looks like a Martian landscape, while star gazers come to visit the desert's three major international observatories. The closest airport is at the mining town of Calama, accessible via flights from Santiago. From Calama it's a 90-minute transfer to San Pedro de Atacama.

Atacama Desert, Chile

(the world's driest non-polar desert)

Angel falls, Venezuela

(the world's highest uninterrupted waterfall)

Angel Falls in The Canaima National Park in South Eastern Venezuela is the world's highest uninterrupted waterfall cascading an amazing 979m, 19 times higher than Niagara Falls. Its main plunge over the Auyantepui mountain is followed by about 400m of cascades and rapids before a 30m secondary drop. It is located in the Canaima National Park, an adventurer's dream with breath-taking mountains, rivers, lakes and savannahs. The nearest major airport is Cuidad Bolivar, which offers 25-minute flights to the Canaima National Park airstrip.



(the world's largest salt flat)

Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia's south east is known as the world's largest salt flats, containing up to 10 billion tonnes of salt. Photographers and travellers alike go to the salt flats in awe of its desert landscape. In the dry season, from May until Oct, visitors can go on four-wheel-drive tours right onto the plains of salt. The closest city to Salar de Uyuni is Calama in Chile, from where travellers can take a 7-9 hour bus ride, depending on border formalities.











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Amanda Woods catches a ride on Queensland's last sleeper train, journeying from Brisbane to Longreach.

Y BOOK never stood a chance.
After a hearty breakfast
in the Spirit of the Outback's
dining car, I'd returned to my
cosy cabin and hopped back
into bed with plans to do a little reading. But
while my book may have been open, my eyes
were drawn to what was happening outside.

Anthills were starting to rise out of the earth; butterflies, dragonflies, cockatoos and hawks were flying outside my window; a Brahman cow's long floppy ears swung comically around her head as she ran alongside the train; and the occasional kangaroo hopped in the distance.

Then the gentle rocking of the train had its soporific way and as my eyes grew heavy I embraced the sweet surrender of giving in to a mid morning nap.

While it's possible to get from Brisbane

to Longreach in about two hours by plane, I was making my way out to the birthplace of Qantas at a much more leisurely pace. One that allowed me to appreciate just how far our forefathers travelled across our sunburnt country before putting down roots in outback towns like Longreach, Winton and Barcaldine.

While it's possible to get from Brisbane to Longreach in about two hours by plane, I was making my way out...at a much more leisurely pace?

The *Spirit of the Outback* takes around 24 hours to travel the 1,325 kilometres of track to Longreach, first heading north from Brisbane to Rockhampton before going west.

When the old Sunlander train was retired from the Brisbane to Cairns route the Spirit

of the Outback became the only train in Queensland with sleeper carriages and now offers a mix of first class and economy sleeper carriages and economy sitter carriages.

While the sleeper cabins in first class and economy are actually the same, the level of service is not.

Those travelling in first class have exclusive access to the Tuckerbox Restaurant and Shearer's Rest lounge and receive an amenities pack with organic Australian products, a facecloth, eye mask and ear plugs. They can also borrow entertainment tablets, though the movie and TV selection is limited so movie marathon fans may want to have their own device loaded and ready to go.

Over the course of our 24-hour journey we have dinner, breakfast, lunch and an afternoon tea of fluffy scones in the Tuckerbox. Here the restaurant's alcoves are named after the big cattle stations found between Rockhampton and Longreach, and feature the wrought iron cattle brands of Wellshot, Longway, Bowen Downs, Isis Downs, Gracemere, and North Delta.

A look in the tiny kitchen at the end of





the dining car makes me appreciate the food coming our way all the more, with dishes including a bushman's beef salad of grilled sirloin, roasted potatoes, mixed leaves, cherry tomatoes and Spanish onion with a coriander and ginger dressing, followed by sticky toffee pudding with Bundaberg rum ice cream for dessert.

While the restaurant and lounge have been refurnished in the past few years, the sleeper cars are yet to be given the same treatment. They are also very compact. Toilets and showers are at the end of the carriage, and the cabins consist of a washbasin and a seat that can be converted into a bed.

Once that conversion has taken place there is just enough room to stand in front of your little sink. If passenger load allows, as it did on our journey, those in first class can have two adjoining cabins to themselves, and some travellers prefer to purchase a second cabin to guarantee the extra space.

Personally I was happy in my little cocoon, knowing the lounge and dining car were options if I felt the need for more space.

Unlike the Indian Pacific and The Ghan, the Spirit of the Outback does not include long stops for sightseeing along the way. It also has more stops, twenty in all, and is used as an easy way for locals to travel between outback towns to visit family and friends, as well as taking tourists into the outback.

But there is one longer stop to visit a very special tree.

The Tree of Knowledge was the central meeting point for the shearers' strike in 1891, and became a symbol of the struggle that led to the formation of the Australian Labor Party.

The big ghost gum was said to be around 170 years old when someone poisoned it in 2006. Sadly the tree died, but their attempt to get rid of it backfired spectacularly.

The tree was put through a preservation process and now an award winning \$5 million memorial surrounds it, drawing even more attention to its place in Australian history.

After looking up at the tree in front of the Barcaldine train station and thinking about all of the things it had seen, there was time for a short wander down the street or even a quick beer in one of the local pubs before it was all aboard time again.

Longreach was waiting at the end of the line, and our outback adventures were just beginning.







A NEW range of rail tickets designed to simplify the customer experience and save travellers money has been introduced by Scottish rail company ScotRail.

Dubbed Gateway to Scotland, the travel pass suite is comprised of six ticket types, ranging from two to eight day travel options, many of which combine rail with bus and ferry transportation.

Ticket types include the 'Highland Rover' (four days of train, ferry and coach travel over eight consecutive days through the Highlands); 'Edinburgh or Glasgow Days Out' (two days of unlimited off-peak travel within an hour of either city); 'Central Scotland Rover' (three-day unlimited off-peak travel across the Central Belt, Edinburgh and Glasgow); 'Spirit of Scotland' (four days of travel over eight consecutive days or eight days' travel out of 15 consecutive days); along with 'Rail & Sail' and 'Rail & Bus' passes.

While some of the ticket types are existing products, the Gateway to Scotland is the first time the range has been marketed under the moniker.

ScotRail tourism manager Alasdair Smart said: "Whether customers are looking for a two-day City Days Out itinerary to explore stunning remote locations less than one hour's train ride from Glasgow, or an eight-day exploration across the six Great Scenic Railway Journeys of Scotland, there is a pass to suit everyone. All of which offer not only excellent value for money, but guarantee a simple and straight forward travel experience for the client".

■ See www.scotrail.co.uk/tickets

Wine & Dine in the Napa Valley

NAPA Valley Wine Train's newest transformed railcar takes to the track this month offering a fresh wining and dining adventure through the Californian region's vineyards.

Inspired by vintage rail station seating banks, velvety emerald interiors, rich marble tops and sleek metal furnishings, the railcar is utilised on the six-hour Legacy Tour rail trip which includes tastings at Robert Mondavi, Charles Krug and V. Sattui wineries, broken up by a four-course 'Napa-style' meal aboard the Wine Train.

The Legacy Tour departs Napa at 10:15am, returning at 4:10pm and is priced from US\$329 per person.

AGENT KNOW-HOW

Rail Plus' commercial director Ingrid Kocijian gives us the inside scoop on how to sell rail.

How can travel agents improve their product knowledge on selling rail?

At the end of the day we know how many products agents have to know about and that's why we are here at Rail Plus as the rail specialists. So please give us a call and have a chat or email us if you ever need expert advice. If it's European rail they are after then we have three companies across Australia who offer our product – Rail Tickets, Infinity Rail & Rail Plus. Then for our Great Train journeys of the world we will run a Great Train Journeys Rail Expert program for the first time later in 2017 because we know that agents are loving these products and we want to give them the opportunity to improve that knowledge and sell more through our dedicated Rail Plus Great Train Journeys team.

What kind of training is available to Australian agents wanting to sell rail and how can they sign up for it?

By completing one of our many Rail programs we run throughout the year. In 2017 we will run three online educational programs focused around different rail products around the world. In addition we offer webinars on our agent site year round so I would encourage agents to watch these at their leisure. You can also contact your local Rail Plus BDM and arrange a face to face training session where possible.

Any particular routes or trains you would recommend for first time travellers?

Rail is easy for first timers but for a point to point journey you can't go past the bullet trains of Japan with the great value Japan Rail Pass, a trip across the underground tunnel on board Eurostar or the beautiful scenic trains of Switzerland. All will provide a unique train experience that will have you hooked for life.

What makes travelling by rail unique?

It takes you from the middle of one city to the next with ease. No need for navigating foreign roads or getting stuck in traffic. It's a seamless mode of transport that also gives you an amazing journey along the way with scenery, food & drinks all available on trains around the world.







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INDOCHINA



















Vietnam like the locals

Nina Karnikowski discovers how a boutique river cruise is the best way to explore Vietnam likes the locals do.

HE scent of lemongrass, the warm breeze, the swishing of banana palms, the mighty Mekong's waters slipping through your fingers. These are the evocative details that seep back into your mind months after you've returned home from Vietnam.

Since three-quarters of the country's cargo is transported by water and 95 percent of food comes from the Mekong region, an unforgettable way to experience the country is by boutique cruise ship. As you slide along the waters - past fishing trawlers and boats hauling mounds of rice and sand, locals crouching in concentration beneath their coolie hats along the riverbanks, and stilted houses surrounded by lush palms - you'll be offered a rare insight into the everyday life of the Vietnamese. Stepping off will give you a chance to explore vibrant villages, to soak up the local culture, and to devour what is almost inarguably the best food in southeast Asia. And all the while you'll realise that Vietnam, this place of tranquility and innocent charm, still feels like a secret.

MARKETS AND MANSIONS

To really get a feel for Vietnam's agricultural root sand the thrumming pace of life along the Mekong, hop onto a local wooden sampan boat and head to Sa Dec. Small sampan supermarkets gather around the shores of this village, stocking up on produce to hawk along the river. Once you've manoeuvered your way past them and onto dry land, you can explore the produce market lining the main street, where you'll find everything from vibrantly coloured tropical fruit and vegetables, seafood and live frogs, to pigs' legs, live ducks and chickens.

Where the market peters out you'll find the magnificent 1895 colonial villa of Mr

Huyn Thuy Le, the 27-year-old son of a rich Chinese family, with whom the famous writer Marguerite Duras had an affair with in 1929 when she was only 15. The Sino-French designed house is famous in Sa Dec, since it's where steamy scenes from the film version of Duras' celebrated novel The Lover, based on her affair with Le, were shot. Even if you haven't seen the film, the original hand-painted French tiles, mother-of-pearl inlaid doors and intricate interior woodwork make this mansion worth a visit.

6 As you slide along the waters - past fishing trawlers and boats hauling mounds of rice and sand, locals crouching in concentration beneath their coolie hats along the riverbanks, and stilted houses surrounded by lush palms - you'll be offered a rare insight into the everyday life of the Vietnamese 9

SAMPAN SORTIES

As tempting as it is to simply laze on the wooden deck of your cruise ship as you slip along the waterways, more sampan excursions await.

Glide over to Chau Doc, where you'll meet the people of the mostly Muslim Cham ethnic minority, of which there are estimated to be 160,000 living in Vietnam. The Cham are renowned for their handwoven textiles, and here you can not only witness their traditional weaving practices, but also wander through the local village and visit the beautiful green and white local mosque.

Cai Be is where you'll find vast farmlands heaving with tropical fruits including coconuts, durian, jackfruit, rambutan, pomelo and more. Make sure you visit the local floating market, and the stunning riverside Catholic cathedral that flanks it.

Step off your sampan at Cuu Long Village to visit small family sweet-making workshops, where you can watch peanut, black sesame and coconut candies (a local speciality) being made by hand. If you have a belly of steel, you can also try their snake wine and whiskey, which the Vietnamese believe is a potent medicine.

HO CHI MINH CITY

No visit to Vietnam would be complete without a visit to Ho Chi Minh City, formerly called Saigon, with its mind-bogglingly chaotic muddle of cars, bicycles and motorbikes. Start your wanderings through "the Pearl of the Orient" at Ben Thanh Market, where you can flex your haggling skills on vendors selling everything from cotton pyjamas and fans, to fake Adidas tracksuits and cheap watches. Around the corner you'll find what might be the city's most fragrant pho noodle soup at Pho 2000, after which you'll be ready to head over the road to the Saigon Fine Arts Museum. Ho Chi Minh City is known for its elegant French colonial landmarks and this building, along with the General Post Office and the Notre Dame Cathedral, is one of the city's most impressive.

Next you might consider having a cheap massage from one of the dozens of parlours around town. Maybe you'll visit the War Remnants Museum for a sobering reminder of the brutal effects of the Vietnam War. Or, you may finally decide to give into the constant enquiries of the cyclo drivers and ride over to the chic boutiques of Mac Thi Buoi Street.

Whatever you choose, the perfect end to your Saigon day can be found at rooftop restaurant Secret Garden. Surrounded by string lights and potted plants, you'll feast on spring rolls, garlic spinach, spicy tofu and Vietnamese 333 beer. Then all that'll be left to do is head to The Rex hotel's alfresco rooftop bar, an infamous '70s gathering place for war correspondents, for a cheeky night cap as the city lights twinkle like stars below.

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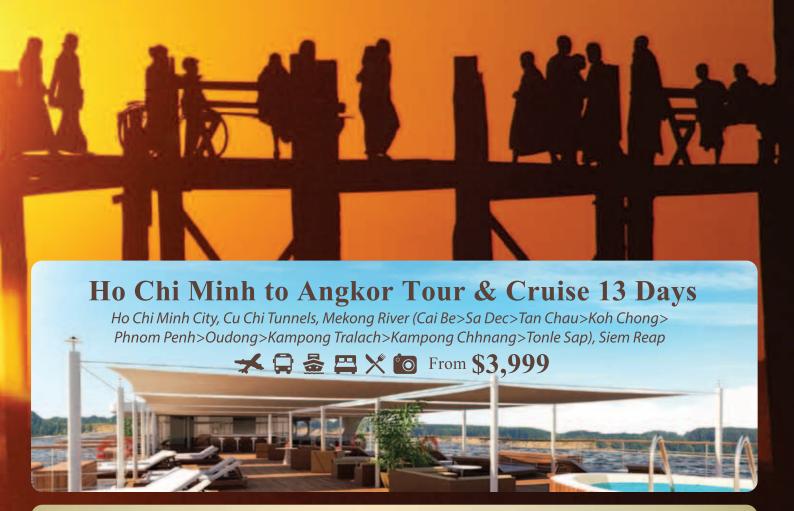


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info@nexusholidays.com.au | www.nexusholidays.com.au Suite 201 Manning Building 451 Pitt Street Sydney NSW 2000 Indochina is a world unto itself. While the name comes from neighbouring civilisations, the Southeast Asian Mainland is far more than the sum of Indian and Chinese traditions.

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MOVENPICK Hotels & Resorts has big plans for Vietnam and will bulk up its presence from one to five hotels in the next three years alone.

Movenpick's vice president sales for Asia, Holger Jakobs said the company has seen a huge lift in the perception of the destination.

"Vietnam really has come off from being this sleepy, secret destination that people would go to if they'd been to five or six other Asian countries, to a destination that someone could travel to for a starting point in experiencing Asia," he told travelBulletin.

Tourism in Vietnam is being spurred by Vietnam Airlines being "very active",

Jakobs said.

"So then all of a sudden things get into motion and right around that time development happens and investors see these opportunities."

The first new addition set to join the longstanding 154-room Movenpick Hotel Hanoi is Movenpick Resort Phu Quoc, slated to open at the end of 2018.

The 250-room property will be home to what Movenpick has affectionately christened a "swiss village", packed into a mini town square complete with a clock tower.

Jakobs said the village would mix a

European beer hall in with a Swiss souvenir shop, restaurants and local retail offerings.

This will be alongside a water park and lagoon-style pool, destination spa 1,000m² convention area, kids club, water sports centre and an adventure and teambuilding activity course.

Movenpick Cam Ranh Resort on Bai Dai Beach is scheduled to welcome guests from Q1 2018, and will span some 20 hectares and feature 250 rooms, 100 residences and 100 villas.

Another hotel in the race to open in Vietnam is Movenpick Hotel Quang Binh, set to open in Q4 2019. It will pack in 219 guest rooms, four food and beverage outlets and private beach access to Nhat Le Beach. The property will also feature a spa, fitness centre, swimming pool, three meeting rooms and a ballroom catering for up to 400 delegates.

The 229-key Movenpick Resort & Spa Quy Nhon will round off the brand's properties in Vietnam up to five when it also opens in Q4 2019, perched on an isolated cliff overlooking a private beach below and the pristine corals of the South China Sea.

The new additions are part of Movenpick's aggressive expansion plans to increase the current 83 hotels in operation to more than 100 properties by 2020.

Jakobs said the company was also in talks with "a couple of investors in Cambodia for Phnom Penh and also Sihanoukville" but "nothing is concrete yet".



AIRLINES are making the most of the recent Aussie interest in Vietnam, with new flights from both Jetstar and Vietnam Airlines taking off in recent months.

In the last year, travellers from Australia to Vietnam have spiked 5.8% to 248,500, and inbound visitors from the Asian nation have grown by 21%.

Jetstar has jumped to capitalise on this growth, introducing direct flights three times a week from Melbourne and four times a week from Sydney to Ho Chi Minh City.

Jetstar CEO Australia and New Zealand, Dean Salter, said "There is enormous potential for Vietnam to become one of the most popular destinations for Australian travellers thanks to its wonderful year-round climate and great beaches, food and culture."

For Qantas owned carrier, the new flights are the next step in expanding its international network, said Salter.

As well as outbound traffic growth, Jetstar also expects to see visitors from Vietnam increasing, with large Vietnamese communities in both Sydney and Melbourne.

Vietnam Airlines too has upped its presence in Australia with the inaugural Hanoi-Sydney flight arriving at the end of March.

Vietnam Airlines general manager Hung Truong told *travelBulletin* the additional route meant the carrier was now operating 17 weekly services to Australia.

The new service has been welcomed by the local Vietnamese community in Sydney, as it supports the strong VFR market. Sydney-Hanoi flights operate three times a week.







IN FLIGHT

Vietnam Airlines

The route

Sydney to Hanoi

The plane

Boeing 787-9

Class

Business Class, seat 2G

The seat

The business class seats are configured 1-2-1 which allows every passenger direct aisle access. For sleeping the seat folds down to create a lie flat bed. No mattress is provided but pillow, blanket and slippers are. There are also no pyjamas but probably not needed as the flight is mostly daytime and only slightly under 9 hours. There are plenty of nooks and crannies to keep personal belongings, with side pockets on one side of the seat and a larger storage space in the armrest, plus an AC power outlet that accepts Australian plugs.

Entertainment

The Lotustar inflight entertainment has a limited number of options, with only 10 'International movies', plus some sports and documentaries. There are a wider variety of Asian movies.

Service and Food

The crew were courteous and polite but not overly attentive. There were plenty of choices in the lunch service with four mains as well as appetizers, soup, salad and dessert. French champagne and French red and white wine were on offer reflecting Vietnam's French heritage. Also available was a cocktail menu featuring signature cocktails created for Vietnam Airlines such as Hello Vietnam, Red River and Saigon Sunlight which was a nice touch.

Lounge

In Sydney business class passengers can use the SkyTeam lounge.



Wild Borneo with Nexus

NEXUS Holidays is promoting its Wildlife Borneo 11-day tour around the third largest island in the world and the biggest in Asia.

Attractions on the tour include stops at Gaya Island, Kinabalu, Selingan Island, Sandakan, Sepilok, Sukau Rainforest, Kinabatangan River and Menanggul River. With Borneo having 6% of the world's biodiversity, there's a good chance to see a shaggy orangutan swinging through emerald-green canopies and the giant carnivorous Rafflesia flower.

Prices for the 11-day tour start at \$2,999pp with three departure dates remaining in 2017.

Agents should also keep an eye out for Jenny Li, the newly appointed sales and reservations manager of Nexus Holiday's Sydney office who will be on the road visiting travel agents in upcoming months.

BARGAIN TOURS FOR HELEN WONG

AFTER knocking up 30 years in the business, Helen Wong's Tours has partnered with Qantas to launch a newly branded program of guided tours with a host of benefits designed for bargain hunters.

The 2017-2018 Bargain Escapes program focuses on China and Japan, and combines three-to-four-star hotel stays with guided sightseeing opportunities and ample free time for travellers to shop, dine and cover other sites.

Founder and managing director Helen Wong said the brand had been added to meet the increasing demand from past customers requesting new products.

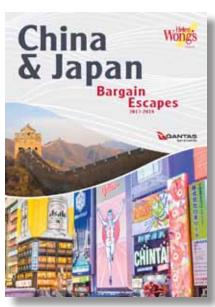
"We have also received many enquiries for shortterm holidays which offer an amazing deal to cater for all ages and budgets and more free time to explore on their own," she said.

Tour packages include guaranteed departures, no seasonal surcharges and the ability to earn Qantas Frequent Flyer points.

In addition to A Taste of China series of tours, Helen Wong's Tours' Bargain Escapes include a nineday China Delights itinerary (from \$1,699pp twin share), 11-day Highlights of Japan (from \$2,999 per



Prices start from \$1,299 per person, twin share for a seven-day A Taste of China tour, including return Qantas airfares from Australia.





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Where in the World?



CURIOUS sculptures are a feature of many major cities around the world, so 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!

Funnies



We love trawling through the Travel Daily Window Seat archives, because we always seem to come across some crackers. Here are some gems from 2001:

A LESSON perhaps for those tempted to take holiday romances beyond final boarding. A British tourist who fell in love with her African tour guide on a visit to Gambia and made headlines when she subsequently married him in a spectacular tribal ceremony says the marriage is over after just 9 months because since the couple set up house in England the husband has just "sat around all day, smoking, drinking and borrowing money from me". Anne Tournay, 50, says hubby Lamin, 30 was "a changed man" after moving from West Africa.

IF YOU thought teaching your nan to use her email was a challenge, imagine teaching a parrot to use theirs. The resident parrot at an historic castle-hotel in Britain has been given his own e-mail so past guests can keep in touch. Chris Swaine, owner of the 12th century Walworth Castle Hotel in Darlington, says Jackson gets so many birthday and Christmas cards each year from children who've stayed there that he's decided to streamline the communication process.

BRAIN TWISTER

Adrian, Betty, Ceiren and Darren are all trapped on an island in the middle of a crocodile infested lake (maybe they should have booked their trip to the Northern Territory with a travel agent!). Luckily they have one crocodile repelling stick that just about protects up to two swimmers.

To get to safety a maximum of two swimmers can be in the water at any one time and they have to be together to benefit from the stick, and must swim at the pace of the slower swimmer.

The shore is 50 metres away and they can not throw the stick back, someone has to swim back with the stick until all four are safely on the shore.

- Adrian can swim the distance in 3 minutes
- Betty can swim the distance in 7 minutes
- Keiran can swim the distance in 13 minutes
- Darren can swim the distance in 17 minutes

How long does the overall rescue take - the answer is not 43 minutes!

HINT: Adrian and Betty swim first

© BrainBashers (www.brainbashers.com)



Total 41 minutes. Adrian and Betty swim to shore returns 7 minutes Kieran and Darren swim to shore 17 minutes returns Adrian 3 minutes 7 minutes Adrian and Betty swim to shore



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