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NOVEMBER 2017

POLAR TRAVEL

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2018 HOT SPOTS

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COVER STORY 16

Helloworld - onwards and upwards

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From the publisher

Bruce Piper

WHERE did the year go? It's November already, and in many previous years the industry would be in a frenzy of activity as airlines released earlybird fares to capitalise on pent-up demand from bargain seeking prospective travellers in 2018. This year, things seem to have played out differently.

It's not that there's a lack of airfare deals out there – but there certainly seems to be some confusion about what constitutes an earlybird.

Traditionally the deals were released with a fanfare and lots of conditions, offering a range of value-adds and special pricing for those willing to pay a long way in advance for their travel in the following northern summer. This year, so-called “earlybird” deals have been released with booking periods as short as one day, and with availability over the upcoming Australian peak season rather than a longer term travel period.

I suspect we have just about seen the end of traditional earlybird airfares. The proliferation of carriers flying from Australia has seen such strong competition that consumers are inured to the urgency created by earlybird deals. Travellers know that if they miss out on a particular offer, there will be one just as good – or perhaps even better – the next week.

As always, bargain airfares are touted as good for the customer, and let's hope they stimulate demand too. Some of the amazing deals on offer recently have included a \$1,030 return fare from Perth to Istanbul with Qatar Airways, while the US is also hot with Qantas last month offering economy return flights from Sydney to Dallas for just \$1,150.

MEANWHILE Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines last month took the unprecedented step of advising suppliers it would impose a new charge if they wanted to keep dealing with them. Described as a means for the cruise line to “reduce financial exposure and ensure a strong supplier base,” the initiative requires companies to register with commercial information provider Dun & Bradstreet, paying a fee based on their annual sales to the cruise firm levied as a “Debit Memo” from a future invoice.

RCL told *travelBulletin* only twelve suppliers in Australia were affected by the change. Nevertheless the principle of charging suppliers for the privilege of dealing with the company smacks of the type of conduct which attracted the attention of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in its dealings with supermarket giant Coles in 2011.

About 200 suppliers were involved in that case, which saw Coles “demanding payments from suppliers to which it was not entitled”. While this move is not on the same scale, back then the ACCC exacted a hefty \$10m fine from Coles – something Royal Caribbean would want to avoid!

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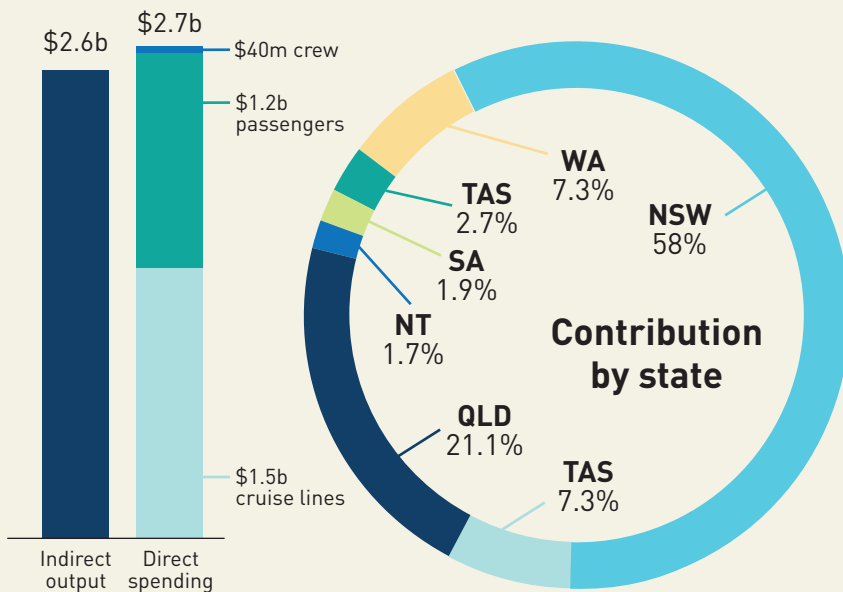
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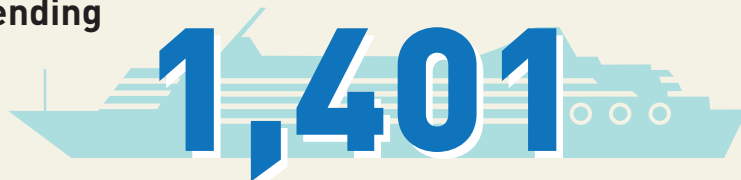
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2016-17 CRUISE ECONOMIC REPORT

\$5.3b total national economic contribution of cruise



Cruise industry spending



AccorHotels acquires Mantra

MANTRA Group has entered into a binding agreement with AccorHotels which will see the French company acquire all of Mantra's shares at a price of \$3.96 each. The company's directors are recommending that shareholders accept the \$1.18 billion takeover offer, which will see the Australian hospitality group become part of the global Accor network. AccorHotels ceo Sebastien Bazin said the deal would underpin the group's long-term growth in the Asia Pacific region. "Mantra's portfolio would offer AccorHotels additional accommodation formats and a strong customer base to implement our successful hotel portfolio in Australia," he said.

Mantra chairman Peter Bush said the AccorHotels offer "recognises the strategic value of our business and our success in becoming a leading accommodation provider". Shareholders will be given the opportunity to vote on the scheme at a meeting expected to be held in the first quarter of next year, with the deal scheduled to be finalised by 31 March 2018. Mantra's portfolio includes 28 Peppers hotels, 75 Mantra properties and 24 operating under the BreakFree brand.

AICS gathers momentum

THE AFTA Insolvency Chargeback Scheme last month added a third key payments provide partnership, with ASX-listed Mint Payments Limited now part of the scheme which enables ATAS accredited travel agencies to handle payments while at the same time providing protection against consumer debit and credit card chargebacks in the event of supplier insolvency.

BUSINESS MONITOR

OUTBOUND MARKET

Top 10 destinations, August 2017

| Destination | Trend | Seasonally Adjusted | Original | Trend Jul 17/ Aug 17 | Trend Aug 16/ Aug 17 |
|--------------|-------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 000 | 000 | 000 | % | % |
| Indonesia | 102.1 | 104.4 | 108.6 | +0.1 | -3.1 |
| New Zealand | 116.5 | 115.0 | 103.7 | -1.3 | +3.5 |
| USA | 91.6 | 91.8 | 87.0 | +0.3 | +2.5 |
| UK | 50.8 | 50.8 | 71.1 | -1.1 | +5.6 |
| Thailand | 49.4 | 48.0 | 47.8 | +0.0 | +7.4 |
| Fiji | 28.7 | 28.6 | 30.4 | +0.2 | -0.9 |
| China | 44.6 | 43.4 | 29.7 | -0.6 | +15.2 |
| Singapore | 31.9 | 31.7 | 26.1 | -1.3 | -0.7 |
| Italy | 19.4 | 19.3 | 24.5 | +0.1 | +15.9 |
| Vietnam | 27.4 | 26.8 | 23.5 | +0.9 | +24.6 |
| All outbound | 878.7 | 878.5 | 863.1 | -0.3 | +5.3 |

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

INBOUND MARKET

Top 10 sources, August 2017

| Source | Trend | Seasonally Adjusted | Original | Trend Jul 17/ Aug 17 | Trend Aug 16/ Aug 17 |
|-------------|-------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 000 | 000 | 000 | % | % |
| China | 125.6 | 126.9 | 116.3 | +2.9 | +22.8 |
| New Zealand | 113.5 | 113.2 | 115.8 | +0.5 | +0.2 |
| Japan | 36.2 | 36.8 | 53.8 | +0.1 | +4.5 |
| USA | 66.1 | 64.6 | 49.9 | -0.5 | +6.8 |
| Malaysia | 39.8 | 46.6 | 44.3 | +4.7 | +15.7 |
| UK | 57.9 | 57.9 | 37.5 | -1.3 | -3.2 |
| Singapore | 38.1 | 39.7 | 36.6 | +0.0 | +4.7 |
| Hong Kong | 24.9 | 26.3 | 27.7 | +1.8 | +19.5 |
| India | 26.0 | 25.7 | 22.8 | +1.3 | +14.1 |
| South Korea | 23.5 | 23.5 | 21.2 | -0.1 | -2.5 |
| All inbound | 756.0 | 764.7 | 702.8 | +0.8 | +7.9 |

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

MAIN DOMESTIC ROUTES

Top 10 domestic city pairs at July 2017

| City pair | Passengers YE Jul 16 (000) | Passengers YE Jul 17 (000) | % change |
|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| Melbourne-Sydney | 8,797.4 | 8,992.0 | +2.2 |
| Brisbane-Sydney | 4,622.0 | 4,700.2 | +1.7 |
| Brisbane-Melbourne | 3,444.5 | 3,511.5 | +1.9 |
| Gold Coast-Sydney | 2,711.7 | 2,716.6 | +0.2 |
| Adelaide-Melbourne | 2,375.8 | 2,414.3 | +1.6 |
| Melbourne-Perth | 2,100.3 | 2,049.1 | -2.4 |
| Gold Coast-Melbourne | 1,908.1 | 2,001.5 | +4.9 |
| Adelaide-Sydney | 1,867.2 | 1,891.2 | +1.3 |
| Perth-Sydney | 1,756.8 | 1,734.8 | -1.2 |
| Hobart-Melbourne | 1,529.8 | 1,610.5 | +5.3 |

Source: BITRE

The expansion of AICS provides further options for ATAS agencies, with Mint already linked to a network of banking partners making it easy to transition to its platform. Mint also currently offers a “seamless integrated payment solution” via systems such as Tramada and TravelPartner, meaning agents can take payments directly from the mid-office, eliminating keying errors and improving reconciliation and efficiencies.

Mint joins First Data and TravelPay as AICS payment providers, with all three firms offering special arrangements and merchant rates for ATAS agencies. The AICS scheme is a non-profit organisation overseen by a board of directors which currently includes AFTA ceo Jayson Westbury, Mike Thompson from Helloworld, Charlie Gow-Gates of Gow-Gates Insurance Brokers, Contiki managing director Katrina Barry, and Kevin Forder from advisory firm Insevo who was appointed on 01 Sep.

Cruise industry continues growth

THE value of Australia’s cruise industry has passed the \$5b mark, reaching \$5.3 billion in 2016/17, the latest report commissioned by Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) Australasia shows. Australia’s cruise industry’s national economic output surged 15.4% for the period, easing on the 27% growth recorded the previous year. Releasing the Cruise Tourism’s Contribution to the Australian Economy 2016-17 at an event in Sydney, CLIA Australasia chairman Steve Odell applauded the “impressive growth rate”.

The study revealed New South Wales remained the dominant state, accounting for 58% of the industry’s economic contribution, but its 6% growth last financial year means

SQ AND LH SEAL THE DEAL



A new joint venture between Singapore Airlines and the Lufthansa Group of carriers has been described as a game-changer, with the metal-neutral revenue sharing alliance significantly expanding options for passengers travelling from Australia to Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Austria. Effective from October 2017 the carriers are offering full combinability of Singapore Airlines, Silkair, Lufthansa, Swiss International Airlines and Austrian Airlines fares, with LH country manager Anil Rodricks saying the pact is hoped to stimulate demand and inspire more travel into the airlines’ home markets within Europe.

Rodricks is **pictured** celebrating the alliance in Sydney with newly appointed Singapore Airlines manager sales planning & development, Tan Chin Yu.

its share has dropped 10% in just two years. The managing director of CLIA Australasia, Joel Katz, highlighted the potential for the cruise industry to contribute “much more” to Australia’s economy.

“With the nation’s cruise gateway at crisis point, the challenge is to ensure strong economic growth for years to come and the only way to make that happen is to find a solution to Sydney’s capacity constraints,” he said.

Queensland was up 14% in 2016/17 on the prior year, to now represent 21% of the

national economic contribution, and Victoria experienced a 12% increase to take a 7% share of the national contribution.

Daydream Island set for rebirth

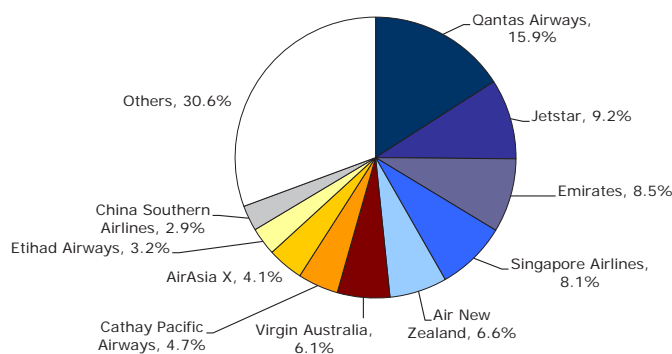
DEMOLITION has begun at Daydream Island Resort and Spa as part of its \$65 million redevelopment, after Cyclone Debbie caused widespread damage to the island. The island

Continues over page

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNATIONAL AIR MARKET SHARE

International passengers by major airline – year ended July 2017



Source: BITRE

DOMESTIC AIR MARKET – July 2017

| | Jul 16 | Jul 17 | Growth (%) | Yr to Jul 16 | Yr to Jul 17 | Growth (%) |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Total pax carried | 5.19m | 5.29m | +2.1 | 58.44m | 59.36m | +1.6 |
| Revenue pax kms (RPK) | 6.22bn | 6.33bn | +0.4 | 68.83bn | 69.57bn | +1.1 |
| Avail seat kms (ASK) | 7.72bn | 7.70bn | +0.6 | 88.76bn | 88.62bn | -0.2 |
| Load factor (%) | 80.6 | 82.2 | +1.6* | 77.5 | 78.5 | +1.0* |
| Aircraft trips (000) | 54.8 | 54.5 | -0.6 | 636.0 | 636.3 | +0.0 |

Source: BITRE * Percentage points difference

DOMESTIC ON TIME PERFORMANCE – September 2017

| | Arrivals on Time | | Departures on Time | | Cancellations | |
|------------------|------------------|------|--------------------|------|---------------|-----|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Jetstar | 5,281 | 73.9 | 5,106 | 71.5 | 156 | 2.1 |
| Qantas | 7,173 | 81.5 | 7,290 | 82.8 | 244 | 2.7 |
| QantasLink | 8,292 | 82.7 | 8,295 | 82.8 | 315 | 3.0 |
| REX | 5,365 | 82.9 | 5,526 | 85.4 | 123 | 1.9 |
| Virgin Australia | 8,750 | 79.1 | 9,074 | 82.0 | 349 | 3.1 |
| All Airlines | 37,092 | 79.3 | 37,668 | 80.6 | 1,302 | 2.7 |

Source: BITRE

Continues from previous page

is plotting its relaunch by relocating its sales and marketing operations from Brisbane to Sydney. The move has seen Jayson Heron named as Daydream's new director of sales and marketing, joining from his previous role at The Star Sydney.

Demolition work will continue until mid-November when rebuilding begins, with the redevelopment of the Whitsundays resort scheduled for completion in October next year. Major works to be undertaken include redevelopment of the arrivals pavilion, reception, main atrium, bar and restaurants, plus the addition of a new Asian-inspired eatery, expansion of conference facilities and upgrades to all room types. In anticipation of the revival, the resort has opened bookings for stays from October 2018 onwards. "We are very pleased to be able to reopen bookings for the resort," Heron said. "The interest level is high, and we look forward to unveiling final details of the redevelopment in the near future."

Carlson Wagonlit Travel to avoid BA fees

CARLSON Wagonlit Travel (CWT) has struck a distribution deal with British Airways and sister carrier Iberia Airlines to avoid the airlines' proposed surcharge on bookings made via global distribution systems. The agreement became effective from the start of November and applies to Carlson Wagonlit's business travel and leisure clients. CWT senior vp of global supplier management Brain Mogler said, "This agreement further strengthens our long-standing partnership with BA and IB and highlights our mutual commitment to the concept of

IRISH EYES ARE SMILING



TOURISM Ireland pulled out all stops last month when it hosted a Sydney event to welcome the first official state visit of Irish president Michael D. Higgins to Australia. Key industry partners gathered at the funky new Calyx venue in the Botanic Gardens for a formal luncheon which also featured some enchanting Irish music. Dignitaries in attendance included several ambassadors as well as Frances Fitzgerald, Ireland's deputy head of government, with the event addressed by Tourism Ireland CEO Niall Gibbons.

Also present was Alison Metcalfe, the recently appointed New York-based Head of North America & Australia/NZ, who told *travelBulletin* Australians stay longer and spend more than visitors from other markets. Ireland is also keen to further develop Dublin as a point of entry for visitors to Europe, with direct flights into the Irish capital from key carriers including Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways along with newcomer Cathay Pacific, which will launch its new HKG-DUB route in June 2018.

new distribution capabilities (NDC) to drive improved product differentiation."

British Airways head of distribution Ian Luck said the agreement between the two parties would provide long term benefits for both. "We are particularly pleased with the strong undertaking CWT has made to work collaboratively with us, GDSs and other

technology partners in delivering NDC content and other benefits to our customers."

British Airways and its parent company, IAG, plan to impose a US\$10 "distribution technology charge" on fares booked via GDS from next month which they say will not apply to bookings via NDC or a yet-to-be-revealed online agent platform.

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNET AGENCY MARKET SHARES

July 2017, compared with June 2017

| Rank Position Websites | Visits Share Jul 17 | Relative Diff Jul to Jun | Rank Jun 17 |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Webjet Australia | 16.16 | -4.98 | 1 |
| Expedia Australia | 11.43 | +1.49 | 2 |
| Skyscanner Australia | 9.03 | -3.87 | 3 |
| Wotif.com | 8.16 | -0.57 | 4 |
| Flight Centre | 6.31 | -2.22 | 5 |
| Velocity Frequent Flyer | 3.76 | -7.80 | 6 |
| Cheap Flights Aus & NZ | 3.01 | +1.96 | 7 |
| Lastminute.com.au | 2.52 | +3.84 | 8 |
| Luxury Escapes | 2.09 | -4.44 | 9 |
| I Want That Flight! | 1.90 | +0.75 | 10 |

Source: Hitwise, a division of Connexity

INTERNATIONAL AIR ROUTES

Top 10 city pairs (at July 2017)

| City pair | Passengers YE Jul 16 | Passengers YE Jul 17 | % of total | % change 17/16 |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------|----------------|
| Auckland-Sydney | 1,590,136 | 1,606,902 | 4.1 | +1.1 |
| Singapore-Sydney | 1,474,775 | 1,462,373 | 3.8 | -0.8 |
| Singapore-Melbourne | 1,318,309 | 1,400,061 | 3.6 | +6.2 |
| Auckland-Melbourne | 1,170,388 | 1,223,248 | 3.2 | +4.5 |
| Singapore-Perth | 1,132,338 | 1,141,735 | 2.9 | +0.8 |
| Hong Kong-Sydney | 1,058,924 | 1,073,896 | 2.8 | +1.4 |
| Auckland-Brisbane | 966,329 | 967,915 | 2.5 | +0.2 |
| Los Angeles-Sydney | 922,560 | 880,996 | 2.3 | -4.5 |
| Denpasar-Perth | 865,452 | 868,574 | 2.2 | +0.4 |
| Kuala Lumpur-Melbourne | 797,791 | 841,892 | 2.2 | +5.5 |
| Top 10 city pairs | 11,297,002 | 11,467,682 | 29.6 | +1.5 |
| Other city pairs | 25,250,158 | 27,327,294 | 70.4 | +8.2 |
| ALL CITY PAIRS | 36,547,160 | 38,794,976 | 100.0 | +6.2 |

Source: BITRE

SHARE PRICES

at 18 October 2017

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|
| Flight Centre (FLT) | \$45.42 |
| Helloworld (HLO) | \$4.55 |
| Webjet (WEB) | \$11.17 |
| Qantas (QAN) | \$6.43 |
| Virgin Australia (VAH) | \$0.19 |
| Ardent Leisure (AAD) | \$1.935 |
| Air New Zealand (AIZ) | \$3.13 |
| Auckland International Airport (AIA) | \$5.65 |
| Sydney Airport (SYD) | \$7.24 |
| Corporate Travel Management (CTD) | \$23.18 |
| Village Roadshow (VRL) | \$3.98 |
| Regional Express (REX) | \$1.64 |
| Sealink (SLK) | \$4.22 |
| Mantra Group Limited (MTR) | \$3.89 |

Viator travel agent platform

TRIPADVISOR offshoot Viator has launched a Travel Agent Platform (TAP) giving agents a new way to directly book tours and activities. The portal provides access to more than 70,000 commissionable tours and attractions including TripAdvisor and Viator's VIP, Exclusive and Skip the Line products.

"While most platforms cater to the end-user or traveller, we've designed TAP specifically for travel agents and their businesses," said Ben Drew, head of growth, Viator. "We'll collect and incorporate feedback from early adopters as we continue to evolve the program and, ultimately, help agents around the world grow their businesses."

Independent agents can join the program without any fees or restrictions to book as an individual, a host agency, or member of host agency and receive direct commission from Viator, without third-party payment distribution. TripAdvisor said TAP offered a "competitive" commission rate and allowed for multiple currencies, along with monthly reporting for performance analysis. Agents will also have access to a resource centre with tips and content, including agent training, product knowledge development and destination guides.

YOLO rebrands for 18-to-Thirtysomethings

G ADVENTURES has taken any ambiguity out of its youth offering by rebranding the product from YOLO to "18-to-Thirtysomethings". The travel company said the name change was enacted to make it clear to travellers what age bracket the tour style was designed for, as well as "to align with a growing segment within the business". Owner and founder

of G Adventures, Brice Poon Tip, said the new title would be "functional, simple and straightforward" and would seek meet a "growing demand for this style of tour".

In line with the refresh, eight new 18-to-Thirtysomethings tours for 2018 covering Japan and Southeast Asia have been released, including the six-day Japan on a Shoestring, priced from \$1,649pp, a 34-day Indonesia Adventure covering Sumatra, Bali and Java from \$4,299pp and an eight-day 'Full Moon Party' trip to Thailand from \$999pp. All tours offer locally-owned accommodation and G Adventures' 'chief experience officers' who the company claims provides an important point of difference to its competitors.

Footloose Tours unveiled

HELLOWORLD'S Insider Journeys has revealed a new touring concept called "Footloose Tours", an additional offering that seeks to provide its clients with a more flexible and immersive travel experience. With a cap of 20 guests per group, FIT travellers are given the freedom to select from a range of day tours and dining options in each destination.

The company says further attention to detail is provided through the deployment of expert local English-speaking guides on the ground in each destination, enabling a more embedded understanding of each new environment. Guides take guests through their hometown and showcase all of the best spots that local knowledge can secure.

Departures will be guaranteed with a minimum of just two passengers, the company said. Destinations currently on offer through Footloose Tours include Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, China, India, Sri Lanka, Japan, Bhutan, Burma and Mongolia.



Travel Daily HEADLINES

- 25 Sep** Trav Choice online move
- 25 Sep** QF, JQ seek 10yr jv tick
- 26 Sep** SAA reduction rationale
- 26 Sep** FCM Connect takes off
- 27 Sep** P&O switches Aust ship
- 27 Sep** QF interactive map first
- 28 Sep** New leadership for Livn
- 28 Sep** "Bali still safe for tourism"
- 29 Sep** PER eyes Asia non-stops
- 29 Sep** Push for Tasman reforms
- 03 Oct** Travel Partners FC content
- 03 Oct** TTC Luxury Gold expands
- 04 Oct** TripAdvisor agent launch
- 04 Oct** JQ aims for biz agencies
- 04 Oct** Logas sells Luxperience
- 05 Oct** Daydream plots relaunch
- 05 Oct** Oz cruising cracks \$5b
- 06 Oct** Excite expands into US
- 06 Oct** AFTA cancels ATAS accreditation of five agencies
- 06 Oct** TA mounts youth pitch
- 09 Oct** Mantra in Accor's sights
- 09 Oct** Princess at home in WA
- 10 Oct** Brand USA re-signs Gate 7
- 10 Oct** AFTA adds Mint to AICS
- 11 Oct** Garden Island endorsed
- 11 Oct** QF, EK revamp Tasman routes
- 12 Oct** AccorHotels takes Mantra
- 12 Oct** IJ launches Footloose Tours
- 13 Oct** Si Hols offers client cashback
- 13 Oct** NSW plots tourism future
- 16 Oct** QF confirms 787 to JFK
- 16 Oct** G Adv rebrands YOLO
- 17 Oct** 3m options for WEB CEO
- 17 Oct** CWT to avoid BA fees
- 18 Oct** VA Sabre branded fares
- 18 Oct** New Westin for Darwin
- 19 Oct** New Virtuoso booking tool
- 19 Oct** Tourism investment boom
- 20 Oct** High hopes for SQ, LH jv
- 20 Oct** Rodriguez joins Ponant

AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS

International passengers through Australia's major international airports - July 2017

| Airport | Passengers YE Jul 16 | Passengers YE Jul 17 | % of total | % change 17/16 |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Sydney | 14,678,326 | 15,636,652 | 40.3 | +6.5 |
| Melbourne | 9,375,853 | 10,000,317 | 25.8 | +6.7 |
| Brisbane | 5,350,408 | 5,618,665 | 14.5 | +5.0 |
| Perth | 4,287,997 | 4,414,460 | 11.4 | +2.9 |
| Gold Coast | 1,039,365 | 1,094,080 | 2.8 | +5.3 |
| Adelaide | 870,697 | 949,972 | 2.4 | +9.1 |
| Cairns | 612,359 | 651,689 | 1.7 | +6.4 |
| Darwin | 260,712 | 282,566 | 0.7 | +8.4 |
| Canberra* | n/a | 70,819 | 0.2 | n/a |
| Townsville^ | 34,476 | 46,223 | 0.1 | +34.1 |
| Sunshine Coast* | 17,329 | 13,485 | 0.0 | -22.2 |
| Norfolk Island | 10,897 | 8,497 | 0.0 | -22.0 |
| Port Hedland~ | 8,741 | 7,551 | 0.0 | -13.6 |
| All Airports | 36,547,160 | 38,794,976 | 100.0 | +6.2 |

*Scheduled services recommenced September 2015 **Seasonal services only
~Scheduled services recommenced September 2016 --Scheduled services recommenced April 2015

ATAS ACCREDITED LOCATIONS

at 20 April 2017

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| New South Wales | 995 |
| Victoria | 718 |
| Queensland | 605 |
| Western Australia | 290 |
| South Australia | 228 |
| Australian Capital Territory | 49 |
| Tasmania | 42 |
| Northern Territory | 22 |
| TOTAL | 2,950 |

Got something to say?

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



Steve Jones' Say

TRAVEL agents have had much to contend with in the digital age. They have faced suppliers pursuing direct to consumer strategies, watched the rise of OTAs and (reluctantly no doubt) learned to live with aggregators. All have relentlessly chipped away at the once-dominant position they held as the go-to travel planner.

Even the largest groups have occasionally looked like rabbits in the headlights. Those that have made moves have had limited success to say the least – as evidenced by Helloworld's ill-fated deal with Orbitz.

Yet not all appear to have endured such teeth-gnashing frustration. Take Travellers Choice. For some time now, the group has been steadily developing a digital strategy that has armed its members with tools to participate in the tech age.

Web solutions through Site Builder, email marketing, and social media and digital marketing support services have all been developed to help agents navigate the digital minefield.

But it's most intriguing initiative has emerged in the shape of a formal commercial deal with online agency TripADeal.

A bricks and mortar agency group in bed with an OTA? For the most part, the traditional end of town and their online competitors have endured extremely uneasy cohabitation in the retail space, each only too happy to point out the foibles of the other.

The deal enables customers to book a TripADeal package through any Travellers Choice store, with bespoke product developed for exclusive sale through the network. It will, Travellers Choice managing director Christian Hunter predicted, generate new business "rather than continually competing to shift customers from one channel to another".

If nothing else, it's a genuinely interesting move and demonstrates a willingness of Travellers Choice, and TripADeal, to experiment.

But will it be mutually beneficial? Will it, as Hunter suggests it might, represent a

pioneering convergence of offline and online distribution channels?

It's possible. I don't see the partnership driving a huge number of bookings for Travellers Choice, but it certainly has the potential to deliver incremental business.

To some extent, it depends how clever the marketing is. If as a consumer you've taken the time and effort to get through to the booking stage on TripADeal, chances are you'll complete the transaction online or contact the OTA's call centre if you're still a little edgy. You'd be unlikely to abort at that stage and visit a physical store.

But if there is strong joint marketing online and in print before the consumer reaches the TripADeal website, it has the potential to drive people in-store.

It will be fascinating to see what eventuates from this partnership. Whatever happens, it's forward-thinking and shows the flexibility and imaginative approach that can be adopted in a complex and dynamic business environment.



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Industry burnt by Monarch collapse

THE collapse of Britain's third largest carrier Monarch Airlines has dealt a double blow to the country's travel industry, still in shock after the high-profile failure of the All Leisure Group and its Swan Hellenic cruise line earlier in the year.

Last month's abrupt cancellation of all Monarch services led to the biggest peace-time repatriation program in Britain's history as the country's Civil Aviation Authority stepped in to bring more than 100,000 people home at the tail end of the European holiday season. A further 900,000 others with forward bookings were also affected, while more than 2,000 staff lost their jobs.

"I am so sorry that thousands now face a cancelled holiday or trip, possible delays getting home and huge inconvenience as a result of our failure," Monarch chief executive Andrew Swaffield said in a statement. "I am truly sorry that it has ended like this."

But a second shock has angered the travel industry as news broke that a large portion of the repatriation cost would be levelled at tour operators who had utilised Monarch.

The total bill – so far covered by the taxpayer – is around £60 million, or more than £500 per passenger. But tour operators are said to be incensed at having reportedly been asked to contribute £250 per passenger as the government attempts to recoup its losses.

The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) chief executive Mark Tanzer criticised the government's handling of the collapse at the organisation's conference last month, saying the industry have been given no choice or opportunity to provide input.

He singled out the decision to fund all passengers' repatriation - regardless of whether their travel had been covered by the UK's Air Tour Operators Licence (ATOL) scheme which provides protection in the case of a travel collapse – and said the government had now set a costly precedent for future collapses.

Tanzer argued the government should either stick to the principle that unprotected travellers wore their own risks, or provide a universal protection scheme funded by a levy.

Credit card providers have also been asked to wear some of the costs.



AFTA VIEW

Jayson Westbury, chief executive AFTA

HOPE FOR NEWGENISS

BY THE time this November Issue of *travelBulletin* is in your hands and you might be reading this, the New Generation of IATA Settlement Systems (NewGenISS) may well have passed the Passenger Agency Conference no.40 (PACConf/40) in Geneva Switzerland. While most people in the industry these days will yawn, if passed it is a step in the right direction and potentially a game changer for the relationship between travel agents and airlines.

NewGenISS has been on the agenda for the past three or more years. Over this time the number of working groups, meetings, discussions, arguments, disagreements, agreements and generally talks have been immense. A change of this magnitude deserves serious consideration and as a person who has been in a front row seat during the entire process I can confirm plenty of serious consideration has been given to this change by the global travel agency community.

However, NewGenISS does bring hope and opportunity for the way agents may be able to settle with airlines, provided airlines have an open mind and think in a modern way to how best to ensure both the travel agent and airline cash flow is considered.

NewGenISS has four basic pillars as the cornerstone of the reform. First, the introduction of three IATA accreditation levels which includes an option for travel agents to settle with airlines directly (such as with a customer's credit card) that does not see the airline extending any credit. The other two options include the current standard form of accreditation (what IATA agents have now) and multi-country accreditation for large multi-national agencies.

Second, the introduction of a new IATA Global Default insurance product for those IATA agents that need to provide a bond via insurance. This new product will compete with the existing insurance and bank guarantees on offer.

Third, the introduction of a credit limit on existing IATA agents, known as Remittance Holding Capacity which will cap the amount of credit offered to an

agent in a billing cycle and restrict the agent's ability to settle to cash. This will require them to use another form of settlement (card or the like) or pre-settle the cash balance owed in some form earlier than the settlement cycle – in the Australian BSP this will be 7 days from February 2018.

‘Agents have been paying other suppliers in a more modern way for years...’

Fourth, the opening up of the BSP to alternative forms of payment known as Transparency in Payments. This will mean that agents, by agreement with a specific airline, may be able to use a credit card in the name of the agent or some other payment form. It also allows more modern forms of payments by customers to be passed through the BSP in the future.

The fourth point in the reform requires a change to resolution 890, known by IATA agents to be the blocker of all blockers. Resolution 890 prevents the use of a credit card issued in the name of the agent. If passed by PACConf/40 it will be modified to allow the bilateral agreement between an agent and an airline to use this type of payment.

Time will tell of course if this will all happen and if airlines can see how this will be good for them. I hope that as the NewGenISS is implemented and the agency and airline community think about the mutual benefits that come from a modern approach to payments.

Agents have been paying other suppliers in a more modern way for years, it is just that it takes time for the IATA machine to catch up. I believe that NewGenISS may deliver that future-proof catch up that is needed in order for the BSP to remain relevant.

We will all have to wait and see what happens this month in Geneva when the airlines cast their votes for how modern they really want the BSP to be going forward. Fingers crossed, they all vote yes.

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UPCHURCH UPBEAT ON AUSTRALIA

IF IT was all about numbers, the Virtuoso network could have doubled its footprint in Australia over the last twelve months, with global CEO Matthew Upchurch telling *travelBulletin* the group knocked back more than 50 applications from Aussie agencies during the period. Visiting Queensland, NSW and Victoria during a trip down under last month for the annual Virtuoso cruise showcase, Upchurch said prospective members were keen to differentiate themselves from their competitors, but needed to show a compelling focus and commitment to the luxury market in order to be a good fit for Virtuoso.

The same “quality not quantity” approach applies to the organisation’s network of travel product, with the hotel offering comprising around 1,200 carefully curated properties across the globe. In an interesting move, Virtuoso has just added a consumer booking engine to its website – but one with a twist, in which the person making the booking must select a Virtuoso consultant during the process. Travellers with existing relationships with Virtuoso will be automatically linked to their current advisor, but the initiative is also likely to provide new leads for the network as upmarket travellers seeking the type of product on offer are connected to a suitable Virtuoso agent.

Upchurch said the booking tool aimed to encourage what he called the “please bother me” factor. He said in some cases Virtuoso clients didn’t book shorter, less complicated trips with their travel advisor because they didn’t want to make a fuss and could easily book it directly. However as with most Virtuoso product, the advisor can offer a range of value adds due to the Virtuoso relationship so the portal enables the best of both worlds – a direct booking experience overseen by the agent to ensure the client is looked after well.

Currently there are about 50 Australian agencies accredited with Virtuoso, operating from 100 locations and with a total of around 1,300 advisors. Regional manager Asia-Pacific Michael Londregan said there were still growth opportunities in Australia, flagging possible expansion into regional areas of the country currently under-represented within the Virtuoso network. Virtuoso will turn over about \$1.3 billion in Australia this year, a healthy increase of 21% year on year.



Virtuoso global CEO, Matthew Upchurch with the company's regional manager Asia-Pacific, Michael Londregan.



MINISTER'S VIEW

Steven Ciobo, Federal Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment

THE last month has been a particularly exciting one for Australia’s tourism industry with the launch of Tourism Australia’s new global youth campaign, showcasing Australia as a memorable and desirable youth destination.

The youth travel sector is crucial to our country’s tourism industry; young travellers make up 25 per cent of all international visitors to Australia and contribute 46 per cent, or \$18.7 billion, of all international visitor spend. The value of these travellers is amplified by the fact that over half of them return to Australia at some point.

They are also a valuable driver of growth in our regional tourism industries as young people typically stay longer, spend more and travel further in their search for unique and exciting experiences, found in abundance across Australia.

Recognising the importance and potential of this sector, the Turnbull Coalition Government committed an additional \$10 million in funding for Tourism Australia (TA) last year to entice more young people to visit Australia.

From this, Aussie News Today was born. Harnessing the power of social media, youth-focused news channel Aussie News Today broadcasts entertaining and quirky Aussie stories to young people in some of our key tourism markets, giving them endless reasons to escape to Australia.

From the best surf breaks to a koala wandering into a supermarket, Aussie News Today brings to life some of the most unique attractions and life-changing experiences that are so keenly sought after by young travellers.

In recent years, advocacy has become central to how TA promotes Australia; the ‘Friends of Australia’ program comprising high profile and respected Australians, harnesses their international profile to promote our country.

That is why three young Aussies – Nick Cummins (aka The Honey Badger), actor and former Home and Away star Lincoln Lewis, and television presenter Teigan Nash – have been announced as Aussie News Today anchors. They will travel around the country to report on the best news from all over Australia.

In addition, eight young people from the United Kingdom and Europe will embark on a road-trip of a lifetime around Australia, posting social content as they go, and I am confident that local tourism businesses will welcome them with open arms when they come to town.

One of the many successes of TA has been its social media strategy, which encourages followers tell their stories. This will be no different for Aussie News Today, so I encourage industry to get on board and submit their own ‘Aussie news’ for the chance to be featured on ANT via @Australia and #AussieNewsToday.

There are a number of ways tourism businesses can get involved in this campaign and I encourage them to follow the Facebook page ‘Aussie News Today’ to find out more.

‘Advocacy has become central to how TA promotes Australia’

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EXCITE CELEBRATES AHEAD OF AMERICAN ASSAULT

EXCITE Holidays has marked its 15th anniversary with news it will make a concerted push into the US market – just the latest stage in an ambitious plan to become a “global behemoth” among wholesalers.

At a celebration in the company’s Sydney headquarters last month, Excite’s founders George Papaioannou and Nicholas Stavropoulos revealed they had signed agreements with several of the larger retail consortia in the US and were ready to make their debut on American soil.

Sales representatives have been engaged on both the east and west coasts of the US, and a launch party is planned in West Hollywood at the end of this month.

It’s a far cry from the days when Papaioannou and Stavropoulos were working alone as a start-up, something they pondered among industry friends at last month’s Sydney bash.

“We were reflecting on a 15-year overnight success,” Stavropoulos said, “because it just feels like it’s gone so fast.”

The duo began in 2002, having decided to establish a travel venture with a foundation in technology. It was the early days of the internet when there were few wholesale booking engines in Australia. It was also a time when printed brochures were associated with huge production costs.

The pair settled on an online model with its reduced costs and scalable potential, drawing on the experience of early adopters overseas and applying it with their own expertise to the Australian market.

“We started with absolutely huge dreams,” Stavropoulos said. “We’ve always been big thinkers.”

“We’re growing extremely rapidly. We own our own technology, and we’re extremely proud of that, and we’re moving into different channels of business and of distribution.”

Having since expanded into New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom and Ireland, Stavropoulos sees the company’s US debut as a natural progression in an initial strategy to cover the world’s major English-speaking markets.

From the US, Excite plans to expand almost immediately into Canada and is also considering markets such as South Africa.

“I believe we’re just getting started. I believe that we’ve spent the last 15 years gaining a little bit of momentum and now the ball’s really rolling down the hill. Things are about to absolutely explode for Excite Holidays,” Stavropoulos said.

“So, it’s really exciting times, but the vision was always a huge behemoth of a global business.”



Excite’s founders George Papaioannou and Nicholas Stavropoulos

QANTAS BEGINS ITS DREAMLINER PITCH

WITH the first of its new Boeing 787-9 *Dreamliners* now operating in Australian airspace, Qantas has begun the task of selling its new flagship in the lead-up to its deployment on long-haul international routes.

The carrier last month celebrated the arrival of the first of eight new *Dreamliners* amid much fanfare at Sydney International Airport. Dubbed Great Southern Land in a national naming competition, the aircraft will initially operate on domestic routes before its deployment on services from Melbourne to Los Angeles from 15 December. As others are delivered, the 787 will launch non-stop Perth to London flights in March.

Qantas chief executive officer Alan Joyce (pictured with the first 787 in Seattle) has already confirmed the new aircraft will be deployed on services from Brisbane to

New York via Los Angeles, and has hinted at other possibilities in the future such as Perth to Paris.

But for now, the national carrier is channelling efforts into a large-scale advertising to introduce the *Dreamliner*. Focussing on the airline’s people, it is a continuation of a series profiling employees such as pilots, engineers and cabin crew.

Qantas Chief Customer Officer Olivia Wirth said the campaign celebrated the dawn of a new era.

“It was important to feature real Qantas people as they offer an authentic passion

and excitement for the arrival of the 787 *Dreamliner*,” Wirth said. “The look on their faces when they see the *Dreamliner* for the first time says it all.”



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INSIGHT VACATIONS GOES FOR GOLD

INSIGHT Vacations' newly minted global managing director Ulla Hefer Bohler made her first sojourn to Australia since the 2000 Sydney Olympics last month, presiding over the lavish formal launch of Luxury Gold as a standalone product range. Top selling agents and industry partners were hosted at an exclusive event at a private home in Sydney's eastern suburbs, evoking the exclusivity and experiential nature of the program. Taking travel to the next level, Luxury Gold comprises a global collection of 42 small group journeys in Europe, Britain, Africa, India, Latin America, North America, Australia and New Zealand which "go above and

beyond expectations," Bohler said.

For clients seeking the ultimate in experiences, the Luxury Gold program also features the Chairman's Collection, personally curated by The Travel Corporation founder and chairman Stanley Tollman. The collection includes specific departures offering a "special extra exclusive experience" such as lunch with an Italian count at his villa in Tuscany, or walking the gardens of Alnwick Castle with The Duchess of Northumberland.

"Our enhanced 2018 Luxury Gold collection aims to make each journey an extraordinary one by bringing an unparalleled

wealth of expertise and insights, accumulated over nearly 100 years as leaders in luxury travel, to experiences that will indulge the senses and open the mind," Bohler said. The rollout of the 2018 Luxury Gold program is being led by long-time Insight Vacations sales manager David Farrar, who has been appointed to the newly created role of Director of Sales Luxury Gold to ensure agents have a dedicated and experienced resource to help them grow their business. "Working closely with our agency partners is an integral part of our story and key to our future success," said Insight managing director Australia, Alexandra O'Connor.



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DOMESTIC DEMAND BODES WELL FOR TOURING

STRONG growth in domestic travel has given AAT Kings a boost in confidence as it introduces its 2018/19 Australia touring program, but the company has warned of capacity issues in several key locations.

The local specialist has introduced new itineraries in Victoria and New Zealand as it responds to demand for “a move south”, extending its range from its traditional heartland in northern and central Australia.

They include a seven-day addition to the company’s “Inspiring Journeys” selection called Victoria’s Hidden Gems, which travels

from Melbourne to Daylesford, the Great Ocean Road and the Grampians National Park.

“It is a great new addition from an itinerary standpoint because we wanted to have a little bit more emphasis on southern Australia,” said AAT Kings managing director Hans Belle.

But while the most recent figures from Tourism Research Australia show strong growth in domestic travel and spending, Belle said AAT Kings had experienced constraints in some of the country’s best-known destinations amid high demand.

“Generally speaking, for all of our central Australian, Northern Territory, and Cairns-related day tours and short breaks, we have been performing very, very well, but we have been a little bit constrained in certain areas because of accommodation,” Belle said.

“If you look in Cairns, which is becoming a really fantastic centre for us, there is a rebuild of some hotels there so there was some capacity constraint.”

A key area of concern had been at Uluru where limited accommodation and the popularity of the Field of Light installation had impacted on touring itineraries.

“Ayers Rock Resort has been incredibly successful this year from an occupancy standpoint, in the lower to mid 90s throughout the year,” Belle said.

“But also we run day tours in Ayers Rock. So when occupancy has been constrained or limited a little bit of our availability, at least we still have been able to provide people with all of the day tours,” he said.



Pictured from left: AAT Kings marketing director Joel Victoria, managing director Hans Belle and The Travel Corporation CEO John Veitch.

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HELLOWORLD TRAVEL ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

It has been almost 18 months since Andrew Burnes, along with wife Cinzia, merged Helloworld with AOT. Steve Jones catches up with Andrew to review how things sit today and his plans for the future.

ALTHOUGH Andrew Burnes rejected the notion at the time, Helloworld was in the doldrums when, 18 months ago, he and wife Cinzia completed the merger of the retail group with their own AOT business.

Helloworld's predicament had been largely self-inflicted. While the wider travel market remained generally strong, Helloworld and its previous incarnations had endured years of upheaval, mismanagement and under-performance, its unstable recent history capped by a \$200 million goodwill write-down just three months before the Burnes' came knocking.

Continues over page

A turnaround was needed.

Surveying events since then, culminating in the encouraging 2017 financial results, the duo appear to have achieved just that.

That's not to say Helloworld is in perfect shape. Only foolhardy or arrogant companies would make such claims. But since taking the business by the scruff of the neck at the start of 2016, the Burnes' have undeniably steered the notoriously rocky company into calmer waters, even if much remains to be done.

Burnes told *travelBulletin* in an emailed Q&A that while Helloworld remains a work in progress, he was pleased with achievements so far, and predicted a "more exciting phase" was on the horizon.

"The FY17 results have taken the business much closer to where it needs to be in terms of final performance, sustainability and having much better engagement with the key stakeholders in our enterprise," he said. "The priorities in FY18 are to continue with recalibrating our cost base to ensure the business is right-sized for its revenues. But we are moving to a more exciting phase where we can look at new developments across our four key divisions that will start to deliver TTV and revenue growth in the medium to long term."

While most of the synergies and cost savings between Helloworld and AOT have now been realised – to the tune of \$18.6 million in 2017 of which \$11m came through job cuts – it's clear the drive for greater efficiencies across the wider business will continue.

Helloworld itself, described by Burnes as an "amalgam of a range of travel businesses put together over a number of years", still has "unrealised synergies" across its four operating divisions that management will look to unlock in the year ahead.

In addition, in remarks which underline the unfinished nature of the task, there remain "obvious areas of improvement", he said.

"Most particularly in retail where we are working very hard on the brand and getting our advertising and marketing sorted out together with our technologies," Burnes explained. "Technology to drive productivity and yield is a really big challenge and will be something we are investing in for the next 100 years. But we do need to improve, in the short term, our online site, helloworld.com.au, which is now totally aligned with our agent's businesses and provides a better integrated booking solution for our agencies.

"The wholesale business also has systems issues which can always be improved while our corporate business needs to take full advantage of some of the new technology our partners have or are developing in the next 12 months."

Expanding on its digital strategy, which emerged from the ashes of its ill-advised and costly liaison with Orbitz, Burnes said Helloworld is not alone in playing catch-up in an environment where advancements in technology come thick and fast.

"I am not sure if any company is where it needs to be in terms of digital strategy right now. Every morning when I pick up the paper and read the technology section there is some new thinking around how businesses' digital strategy needs to either have evolved or be evolving. But there is no question we need to make significant improvements in the functionality of helloworld.com.au and the functionality of our agency tool, Resworld.

‘I am not sure if any company is where it needs to be in terms of digital strategy right now’

"This is something we will never stop investing in and the strategy will continue to evolve as the digital economy evolves. But certainly within the course of this financial year we need to start rolling out our agency White Label sites and apps with bookable content."

That, Burnes said, will enable Helloworld to complete the first stage of its "clicks and bricks" strategy and offer customers what he called a "whole of travel service".

With Helloworld on a firmer financial footing, thoughts have begun to turn to the future with greater optimism and ambition. In its annual report, chairman Garry Hounsell wrote how the company is "poised to build on recent successes by identifying and harnessing opportunities".

One opportunity it already grabbed was the 50% acquisition of MTA, a business that Burnes said has, so far at least, met all expectations and one he duly predicted will continue to grow as the home working sector develops.

Burnes told *travelBulletin* further expansion prospects exist both organically and through acquisition, and flagged a desire to explore beyond Australia's shores to generate greater profitability.

"In our particular area of expertise, namely distribution and sales, we see both green field opportunities to develop services and enhance the existing services we provide as well as potential bolt on acquisitions that would enhance various parts of Helloworld's operations here in Australia, in New Zealand

and overseas," he said. "Obviously, when you look at the annual report you can see the very heavy emphasis we have on Australia for profitability and we would like to improve our profitability in New Zealand and also grow our 'rest of world' portfolio to get stronger representation from our ROW businesses in both our TTV, revenue and profit."

One of Burnes's stated intentions when he took control of Helloworld was to develop more in-house product for its retailers to sell. To that end, a new China program and Canada brochure was launched, along with an upmarket Qantas Holidays Maldives program and a greater selection of Australian product.

Other destination gaps will be filled "where we can be relevant", he said.

Burnes was non-committal when asked whether Helloworld was keen to pursue a more aggressive vertically integrated model and drive greater support for in-house wholesalers.

Yet it would be surprising if that was not the case, given its portfolio of brands. And there is evidence of tension between Helloworld and preferred third party suppliers, with agents frustrated at the direct-selling antics adopted by some partners.

"Helloworld has a great reputation for supporting long term preferred supplier partners and we are very keen to continue with that support," Burnes insisted. "Having said that, the remarketing of some of our current preferred suppliers does cause us, and our agency members concern. We are very keen to work with our preferred suppliers to ensure that the integrity of the customer relationship is maintained between the traveller and our agency member.

"One of the things that our in-house wholesale businesses do not do is remarket back to customers... and that is obviously a plus for those in-house wholesale brands."

He declined to name those suppliers causing concern or whether Helloworld would consider removing their preferred status.

Whatever transpires, Burnes said a strong stable of preferred partners will be maintained "to ensure that ultimately travellers have choice and our agencies have the options they need to put together the best possible experience for their customers".

Among Helloworld's Achilles heels dating back to the 2013 launch has been the on-going struggle to convince agents to buy into the vision. Even now – four years on – only around 350 stores are fully branded, with a further 300 associate locations adopting a co-branded model. There can be no doubt that relatively small number has

mutated the brand's marketing activity and hampered its overall development.

Notwithstanding the many business agents that Burnes said were leveraging the Helloworld Travel brand, he conceded he was "certainly keen to see more fully branded agencies in the network".

"I believe that ultimately they get the greatest benefit from our extensive marketing efforts."

Those marketing efforts earlier this year saw the addition of 'Travel' to the Helloworld name, and the nostalgic return of a familiar strapline. The Travel Professionals and its associated jingle last aired when the fondly remembered Harvey World Travel still populated our towns and cities.

While the HWT brand itself is consigned to history – prematurely as it was – Burnes admitted it still has residual value.

Explaining the rationale behind the brand refresh, he said: "It was not blindingly obvious to everyone that Helloworld was actually a travel company so it seemed helpful to add the 'travel' extension. And with the reputation of our travel agents, adding in the 'travel professionals' strapline was a natural evolution.

"Then we had a think about jingles and given how well known the HWT jingle was, and following on from some comprehensive research about how

people viewed the jingle today, we decided to roll that out again. I cannot tell you how warmly it has been received in the marketplace."

It has, it seems, helped Helloworld resonate with the public. Unprompted awareness now stands at 22%, second only to Flight Centre according to Burnes, while prompted awareness has reached 60%.

"Both of these numbers are significantly higher than our previous results in 2015 and 2016 [but] obviously we are not content with where that currently sits and we are looking for a significant improvement in both of those numbers and also a shift in 'First Choice'," he said.

"What is very pleasing in our latest research is that our customer satisfaction levels are the highest of any of the retail brands and again that is a credit to the agents who make up the Helloworld network."

Some of those agents have become

shareholders in the network courtesy of the Helloworld Members Loyalty Bonus Scheme, a share give-away designed to both instill and reward loyalty.

Furthermore, Helloworld struck equity swap deals with Hunter Travel Group, its largest multi-location member, and QLD based Cooney Investments, the operator of two Helloworld shops in Mackay and Mount Pleasant, along with Hosted Journeys Group Travel.

Talks are underway with other franchisees over similar arrangements.

"The rationale is quite simple," Burnes explained. "These are great businesses, very well run and Helloworld was very happy to take a minority equity stake in these businesses to further cement our partnership with them.

"I have said to all of our agencies in Australia that we are interested in taking a minority equity position in their businesses. We have a number of discussions going on at present with various members of the network that will hopefully come to

fruition over this financial year and next."

Turning to the travel retail sector as a whole, Burnes insisted the future was bright. He suggested

the uncertain nature of the world coupled with the "almost incomprehensible" array of travel options available to consumers played into the hands of traditional consultants.

Being able to rely on a travel agent to advise, book and manage travel is becoming increasingly valuable, and even "trendy", he said.

"Our own brand research showed that 46% of people who had booked online or direct in the last year were likely or very likely to book with a travel agent in future," Burnes declared. "We are seeing not only our more traditional demographic grow but we are starting to see an increasing number of millennials utilising the services from our agency members. So I think there are many opportunities out there for us to build on that and to convince consumers that the service their agent brings is something to be valued."

He said the value agents provide should be more actively promoted both by the retail industry, and the Australian Federation of Travel Agents.

"I think all of the travel agency networks have some role to play in this as does AFTA because unquestionably the service that travel agents provide is increasingly valued by our customers.

"That service involves a lot more than just providing a cheap ticket or hotel room. We need to keep sight of that and explain our core value proposition to consumers."

He declined to elaborate on how the industry should go about that task.

While stressing he was more positive about opportunities than worried about threats, Burnes also warned against the industry's penchant for "racing itself to the bottom".

"Some of the irrational behaviours we see from some of the airlines and some land and cruise suppliers in this space is bewildering," he said. "Having said that, it has always been thus."

Returning to his day-to-day job of managing Helloworld, Burnes said he was "thrilled" to be at the helm, and was enjoying discussions with shareholders, brokers and analysts about the firm's performance.

“I have said to all our agencies in Australia that we are interested in taking a minority equity position in their businesses”

The positive nature of Helloworld's trajectory has no doubt aided that enjoyment. His predecessors faced with less-than-delighted invested parties may not have found such conversations quite so cordial, and the public market can be a fickle, ruthless place.

For the moment though, all is progressing smoothly for Burnes and Helloworld.

So when will Helloworld be the finished article? Never, is the answer.

"Business is evolutionary and I do not ever expect us to get to the "finished article" scenario you mention and there will always be things to improve within the business," Burnes said. "But I said from the outset I thought it was a two-year project to get this business to fundamentally where it needed to be. We have got six months of that left and it will be onwards and upwards from there."

WIN-WIN ON AIR WITH EASTERN EUROTOURS

TRAVEL agents are now able to access higher commissions on airfares and achieve better prices for their clients through a new technology initiative launched this month by Queensland-based Eastern Eurotours. Managing director Chip Popescu previewed the system for *travelBulletin*, saying it will assist consultants to capture bookings they may otherwise lose to online players, and at the same time also boost their own income. “We are really excited to launch this,” he said.

The website at agentflights.com.au has just gone live, collating content from a range of airlines and allowing easy comparisons of the best fares and availability. Popescu said the company had leveraged its buying power for wholesale fares and also negotiated unique pricing with consolidators, with enhanced volume-based commissions passed straight onto the agent. “Basically it includes all airlines servicing Australia, and

while the commission varies, it amounts to 3-5% extra for the agents,” Popescu said.

The only catch, he said, was that the bargain fares must be linked with a minimal purchase of land content from Eastern Eurotours in order to qualify for the wholesale rates – but in most cases this isn’t an issue for a travel agent client who is planning a trip. The amount of land content required varies

depending on the airline and seasonality. “We are passing on all of our buying power to the agent,” he said. “It means agents can secure a booking and still make money, without having to drop their price to match with an OTA”.

Agentflights.com.au is just one of several technology initiatives being undertaken by Eastern Eurotours. Another key development has been the recent launch of the company’s TravelRez hotel portal, which aggregates prices and availability from 48 suppliers to offer agents the best deals available. Created in partnership with Innstant Travel, TravelRez combines Eastern Eurotours’ directly contracted rates with inventory from other major bedbanks such as GTA and Hotelbeds.

Popescu said about 1,000 agents across Australia are already signed up with TravelRez. “The pricing is very sharp,” he said, with inbuilt agent commissions worth up to 13%. The agent login for TravelRez is available from the Eastern Eurotours website at www.easterneurotours.com.au. Popescu said the two new tools would “allow agents to combat the internet, keep their clients and make additional commission”.



VA ADOPTS SABRE BRANDED FARES

VIRGIN Australia is now offering enhanced ancillary availability via Sabre Branded Fares, with the system allowing agents and OTAs to offer full visibility of VA products beyond basic fare rules. Ann Elliott, recently appointed as the airline’s general manager of corporate and industry sales, said the implementation of Sabre Branded Fares was recognition that many travellers today look at overall value than just the price alone. “While we continue to offer increased benefits across our fares, we also need to be able to cater to specific traveller demands. With Sabre Branded Fares we can ensure that each traveller gets the most from flying with us,” she said.

Sabre Branded Fares allow carriers to package additional features and benefits with their flights such as lounge access,

baggage, additional loyalty points and more, according to Sabre vice president of air commerce Asia Pacific, Rakesh Narayanan. He said the Virgin Australia products, along with those of other carriers which had adopted Sabre Branded Fares, were now visible to more than 425,000 travel agents and OTAs utilising the Sabre travel marketplace. Agents using the Sabre Red Workspace can easily see the included ancillaries with each fare, while travellers using Sabre-connected OTAs also have access to the same branded fares and information displayed on the individual airlines’ websites. “We are going to see extraordinary levels of personalisation take off within the travel industry, and creative fare branding can be a great differentiator,” Narayanan said.

BLOCKCHAIN'S TRAVEL POTENTIAL

AMADEUS has highlighted so-called "blockchain" technology as one of the potential disruptors of the global travel sector, last month releasing a new paper on the internet-based value exchange system. Dubbed "Blockchain: harnessing its potential in travel," the document features an overview of the technology along with contributions from blockchain startups Civic and Loyal. It identifies four potential travel industry opportunities for blockchain, which has "tremendous promise to change the way we can 'exchange value' digitally," Amadeus said.

Possible applications include simplified and more secure passenger identification, improved baggage tracking, more user-friendly loyalty schemes, and simplified

payments between travel agencies and airlines. Blockchain's key uses thus far have been based around internet currencies such as Bitcoin, but Amadeus notes that the same principles could apply to exchanges of travel information, loyalty points or baggage tracking details.

"This paper is designed to help shine a light on the many different areas of the travel industry where blockchain is beginning to have an impact, in addition to providing a window into the wider development of the blockchain industry itself," said Amadeus head of innovation & ventures, Katherine Grass. "We hope this paper contributes to a greater understanding of blockchain's potential, and helps inspire the industry-wide

collaboration necessary to bring these business cases to life". The paper is available online at www.amadeus.com/blockchain-whitepaper.

Webjet is another player which has recognised the possibilities afforded by Blockchain, with the company announcing a pilot scheme in partnership with Microsoft to develop an innovative travel industry payments system. Launched twelve months ago, Webjet noted that its Blockchain project had the potential to revolutionise the \$100 billion wholesale hotel room sector which in some cases sees five or more transactions taking place through the distribution chain for each booking – creating significant leakage.



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PERTH RED HOT FOR EVENTS

PERTH is shaping up as a red-hot business events destination as a string of new hotels come online in the next few years.

Latest figures show that Perth's hotel inventory will grow by nearly 25% by 2019 as the city welcome's another 1,400 hotel rooms to its existing stock of 6,300 rooms.

Spotless state manager WA and Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre (PCEC) general manager Nigel Keen said that only four years ago Perth had suffered a shortage of accommodation, which led to sky-high prices for those travelling to city.

"It made it hard for business events to get a hold of room blocks at hotels and of course to secure competitive rates," Keen said. Now the city is seeing an influx of big international hotel chains, making Perth more attractive as a destination for events.

Big name giants such as the Ritz-Carlton Aloft, Westin, Doubletree and InterContinental will open properties in Perth in the next year or two. The Ritz-Carlton Perth has chosen the city as its debutant city in Australia. In the past year, Crown Perth opened its doors of a 500-luxury hotel room facility with a conference centre that caters for up to 3,000 delegates.

The hotel boom has translated well for the Perth Convention Bureau, which is currently ahead of its annual target for the year to date. The bureau says the inbound Asia market is performing very strongly for the city

off the back of the city's transformation.

Perth Convention Bureau executive director for shareholder relations Tracey Cinavas-Prosser said the string of new hotels meant there was more choice and competitive rates for delegates and event planners.

‘The hotel boom has translated well for the Perth Convention Bureau, which is currently ahead of its annual target for the year to date’

"In fact, rates are some of the most competitive in the country," she said. "With several new or refurbished hotels in Perth now operating, buyers are also enjoying premium product at highly competitive rates."

The boom in accommodation is also providing the city with a string of new secondary venues for business events. The Westin Perth will open in April 2018 offering almost 1,200m² of function space.

The brand new 60,000-seater Perth Stadium, which will be used for Cricket and AFL mostly, will also cater for the

conference sector. Opening January 2018, the stadium can accommodate events from six to 2,000 guests and will offer a series of function rooms suitable for conferences, exhibitions, launches, cocktail functions and gala balls.

Cinavas-Prosser said the Elizabeth Quay development would be another destination for unique events. "Spaces range in size from 900m² to 7,000m²," she said. "Public open spaces are also being activated through festivals and events, such as WA Beer and Beef Festival, Fringe and Perth Wildcats Fun day."

Keen said that the Spotless Group had recently invested the future of the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre until around 2038 and it will continue to grow the facility.

"We've invested millions of private money into the facility by upgrading all the facilities, equipment, and experience of the venue – the wi-fi is on par with the east coast – and down to infrastructure such as cafés and bars."

The launch of non-stop Qantas flights from London to Perth starting in March would give the business events community in Perth a new weapon, Keen said. "Direct flights will allow for us to push a new market," he said. "We're considering opportunities with the launch of direct flight to capitalise on them, but it is an advantage now that you can fly non-stop in comfort with time being so precious these days."



Elizabeth Quay, Tourism Australia



Luxperience sold to Diversified Communications

US-owned company Diversified Communications Australia has acquired Luxperience, after owner Helen Logas sold the event for an undisclosed sum. Luxperience was created in 2012 with the aim of connecting elite travel buyers and corporate meeting organisers from around the globe with some of the world's unique travel experiences. Logas said the show had formed a major part of her life for the past six years. "I'm so proud of my team's efforts in establishing it as a must-attend event in the calendars of the global visionaries of the travel industry." The new owners, Diversified Communications will retain most of the Luxperience team. The 2018 event will take place in Sydney on 16-18 September.

Melbourne records fifth year of growth

MELBOURNE Convention Bureau (MCB) has posted its fifth straight year of growth, and exceeded all targets by 17% in the previous financial year. The international events sector in Melbourne contributed 70% of the \$321 million in economic contribution made by business events to Victoria's economy. Victoria's corporate meetings and incentive business was significantly bolstered with the MCB securing 158 events, which will deliver over \$55 million to the state. Victorian Minister for Tourism and Major Events John Eren said events contributed \$9.8 billion and 65,000 jobs every year to the state.

Growth in bid losses outpaces bid wins

THE Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) has reported that 396 international business events are set to come to Australia over coming years, a 3% increase from its January 2017 report. However, lost business has grown at a faster rate of 7%, rising to 316 events in the same period. AACB CEO Andrew Hiebl said the increase was a concern. "This lost business equates to more than \$1 billion in direct delegate spend which will now take place in competing countries," Hiebl said. He believed one of the reasons Australia is losing conferences was due to the country's isolation from the rest of the world, executive influence and cost factors. "If Australia is to secure even more international business events, strong consideration should be given to the establishment of a dedicated national convention bid fund," Hiebl said.



AACB VIEW

Andrew Hiebl, chief executive officer
Association of Australian Convention Bureaux

AACB PRESIDENTIAL BATON HANDOVER

LAST month, a new era began for the Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) as the presidential baton was passed on, seeing Karen Bolinger, CEO of the Melbourne Convention Bureau elected as President.

The presidential handover took place at the AACB Annual Conference, as Lyn Lewis-Smith, CEO of Business Events Sydney ended her second 2-year term at the helm.

Lyn reflected on her time as president and what the AACB has achieved over that time. "It has been an honour to be AACB President over the last four years, and I'm immensely proud of what we've achieved together over that time. Particularly, the progress we have made engaging government and industry in the value and importance of business events, and the vital impact they have on the Australian economy", she said.

However, thinking about what more could have been done, Lyn says she's disappointed that greater financial backing couldn't be secured for the industry with national bid fund.

"...there is always more to do, and more people to engage. So, we must keep banging the drum and take the message out to the wider community. Because business events benefit everyone and we want everyone in Australia to be an advocate for them," she said.

Looking ahead, Karen Bolinger says she's prepared for a productive year, with one of the first actions being to revisit the strategic plan and the future model of the business events industry in Australia.

"AACB has a powerful voice in advocating for industry, stakeholders and

partners who benefit from the sector, as well as influencing government to raise the profile of this vital economic driver for Australia. I plan to continue the great work that has already been achieved and delivering new initiatives established in the 2017/18 strategic plan."

Karen addressed AACB delegates at the conference, challenging them to think ahead to the business events industry past 2050, leading to the important question of how we shape and create the future of the industry to meet the needs of the new generation of conference attendees.

"Distortion and disruption are words used regularly; still, I challenge the business events world to move out of its comfort zone and adapt with new technology...

"We must challenge the norm and seek opportunities to grow this sector; let's have an entrepreneurial approach to our businesses and think like a future delegate. Our customers and our industry must revolutionise how we do business and lead the way to not move incrementally but in a substantive agile manner that determines our future today and not wait for it to pass us by".

I look forward to working closely with the new executive team that has been elected.



Damien Kitto, Andrew Hiebl, Karen Bolinger, and Michael Matthews



business events news

- 25 Sep** cievents expands Asia team
- 25 Sep** Optimism for events
- 28 Sep** AACB pushes visa overhaul
- 28 Sep** Fiji showcases Marriott Int'l
- 05 Oct** Luxperience sold to US firm
- 05 Oct** Melbourne up 17%

HEADLINES SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2017

- 09 Oct** Vegas back on track for IMEX
- 09 Oct** Adelaide \$24m boost
- 12 Oct** Tasmania's boom season
- 12 Oct** Sydney big event coup
- 16 Oct** IMEX America a hit for Vegas
- 16 Oct** Strong 2018 for events

CAREER IN FOCUS

VANESSA BUDAH Head of PR, The Travel Corporation

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

I'm the Head of PR for The Travel Corporation (TTC) and have been in the role for 11 months. I manage a team of three and look after 15 travel brands in Australia including AAT Kings, Adventure World, Busabout, Contiki, Insight Vacations, Inspiring Journeys, Luxury Gold, Trafalgar, Uniworld, U by Uniworld, Red Carnation Hotels, and our sustainability foundation, TreadRight. I work closely with the MDs, marketing and various stakeholders to ensure our brands make a positive impact with trade and consumers.

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

I was an associate producer for Olympics.com during the 2000 Sydney Olympics, after this experience I realised I had a knack for writing, event management and networking – I then switched my studies from Bachelor of Multimedia to focus on Public Relations and then later secured a job at Channel Nine, before eventually going out on my own. Over the years I launched big brands such as Under Armour and GoPro. GoPro enabled me to make a segue into travel media as I was training them on how to capture content and edit videos.

Working for TTC is my first introduction into the travel industry, having said that, many moons ago when I was at university I took a gap year and did 'Work Experience USA' which enabled me to work in the USA on a J1 visa – that's when I caught the travel bug and realised how much of a better human I had become through my travels across the US and then later the UK, Europe and Asia. I was so inspired, I felt the responsibility to



tell everyone they must travel and live life. So I took it upon myself to give presentations at numerous universities on the benefits, and then volunteer my time at STA Travel and sign up students for a J1 visa. For years I wondered why I didn't enter the travel industry, so the fact I found my way from volunteering at STA to eventually my position at TTC, I did a complete circle, I guess you could say I found my way and was 'destined' for travel.

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

I studied Business and Public Relations at RMIT University in Melbourne. Formal qualifications are needed to get a foot in the door from a junior level, but ultimately it's a candidate's practical skills, attitude and contacts that work in your favour to help progress your career. After all, PR is not only about what you know, but who you know.

4. What do you love about your job?

I'm fortunate that I enjoy going to work, engaging with my team, and working with

the brains behind the outstanding family of brands. It goes without saying, I love that I have the opportunity to travel for work! In my first few months I booked a trip to Europe to experience the brands like a guest – In three weeks I covered 11 cities and four different TTC guided holiday brands – It really made the difference as I was able to speak from the heart and developed an appreciation from an operations standpoint – so much work goes into these trips behind the scenes, but to the guest it's a seamless experience and service.

5. Did you have a mentor, and if so, how did you find them?

I haven't had a mentor as such, but I've always had someone I looked up to throughout my career, whether it be a boss, senior colleague or a friend I admire. It's not so much I go looking for them, it's rather, I know what I need to grow and develop so I'm aware of the traits that I can learn from. Being new to the travel industry, I'm fortunate to have such an inspiring team to work alongside such as John Veitch (CEO, TTC Australia) and the MDs and heads of marketing. I'm like a sponge taking in as much as I can about the travel industry and really respect their knowledge and experience.

6. What are the keys to good business?

Support, trust, drive, strong leadership, a good strategy, appreciation of your team (you're only as good as your team!) and open communication in all your dealings.

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

Stay focussed on your goals - sometimes you need to be bold and go for what you want, other times you need to have an open mind and be aware of opportunities that may present themselves. And read the trade publications to keep on top of what is going on in travel, this is especially important to those that may be new to the industry!

SKILLS TO PAY THE BILLS

MARKETING, sales and presentation skills were the top three areas that staff seek to develop in the next 12 months as revealed in *travelBulletin* and *Travel Daily's* annual salary & employment survey for 2017.

The survey, conducted by industry specialist Stollznow Research polled close to 1,200 participants across the travel industry and also showed preferences for the development of computing and software skills, customer service and business operations ahead of accounting, conflict resolution and human resource management.

Only 16% of respondents to the survey declared no intention for skills improvement over the year ahead.

When viewed by industry sector, the data indicates those within travel retail that sales, customer service and accounting are the skills earmarked for development.

In wholesale, marketing was the clear preference, with 41% of respondents looking to boost their skills in this area and for aviation it was presentation skills that topped respondents' preferences.

Those working in the cruise industry saw

the need to develop both marketing and business operations skills.

Marketing was also the clear preference when looking at levels of seniority.

48% of respondents that listed themselves as chairman, CEO, managing director, director, general manager and senior management that had chalked up 11 to 20 years of service all expressed the need to develop more marketing related skills.

Maxine Wiggs, director at Resource-Hub is seeing a spike in demand with clients tending to outsource training and development,

particularly around the field of marketing.

"I regularly see travel businesses struggling to navigate, for example, the contemporary landscape of content marketing. So it doesn't surprise me to see Senior and Middle Management, in particular, looking for those skills."

"When you look at those areas of development, it's a fair representation of where our industry is headed," Wiggs added.

Full results and a written report are available for purchase by emailing research@traveldaily.com.au or by calling 1300 799 220.



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Cruising's big summer season



The 2017/18 summer cruise season is shaping up to be one of the biggest yet. Jasmine O'Donoghue presents the highlights.

THE Australian cruise industry is heating up for the peak 2017/18 cruise season, with this summer bringing a range of exciting new developments.

Close to 60 cruise ships will sail in Australian waters, making more than 1,200 port calls around the country and a number of ships will grace Australian shores for the first time, including Viking Ocean Cruises' new ship *Viking Orion*, Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian*

Jewel and Oceania Cruises' *Regatta*.

Cruise lines will also venture to new destinations, with maiden port calls scheduled ranging from Thursday Island in Queensland to Wineglass Bay in Tasmania, with CLIA member lines making close to a total of 50 maiden calls to coastal towns and cities.

Key highlights of the season to look out for are:



The arrival of Oceania Cruises' Regatta

On 15 December Oceania Cruises' *Regatta* will arrive in Tasmania's Burnie, marking the ship's inaugural Australian visit. The vessel will sail into Sydney Harbour on 20 Dec from Auckland before embarking on a 34-day circumnavigation cruise, calling in at the likes of Brisbane, Fraser Island, Cairns, Darwin and Esperance. She will then embark on a 13-day Sydney to Auckland cruise before journeying to Bali. *Regatta* is the flagship of the fleet and features four open-seating restaurants and eight bars and lounges.

Crystal to Papua New Guinea

Crystal Cruises has announced its first-ever voyage to Papua New Guinea, which will sail from Sydney on 17 February on *Crystal Serenity*. The 23-day voyage will sail up the east coast of Australia, stopping by the Whitsunday Islands, Cairns and Cooktown before arriving in the island nation of Papua New Guinea, where it will stop at Alotau and Kitava. After a couple of stops in the Solomon Islands it will then call at Rabaul before continuing to the Philippines. On 17 Feb, Crystal will have both *Crystal Serenity* and *Crystal Symphony* in Sydney Harbour, with *Symphony* to depart down under via a New Zealand cruise.



Celebrity's sampler returns

When Celebrity Cruises' *Celebrity Solstice* arrived on 20 October for her sixth season in Australia, the ship operated her first two-night sampler cruise for Aussie travellers in three seasons. During the season the cruise line will offer 17 sailings ranging from two to 18 nights, 32 ports during the season. This season Celebrity Cruises is offering more opportunity to explore destinations at night, with overnight calls to Cairns, Sydney and Melbourne. *Solstice* is also operating two new Queensland cruises, calling on Cairns and Port Douglas.



Norwegian Jewel's inaugural Australian season

Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian Jewel* will begin its first Australian and New Zealand season in November. Sailing into Sydney Harbour for the first time on 12 November, the 2,376-passenger ship will embark on a five-day Taste of Tasmania cruise the same evening. The ship will pack in nine sailings around Australia and New Zealand through to February 2018 before heading to Singapore. Highlights include a nine-day voyage taking in regional gems such as Eden, Kangaroo Island and Tasmania's Burnie. The ship boasts seven specialty dining venues, nine complimentary restaurants, and 15 bars and lounges, a poolside bar and "The Haven by Norwegian", where the ship's top accommodation is located, along with a sundeck reserved for the exclusive use of guests of The Haven.



Azamara's biggest year down under

Azamara Club Cruises' *Azamara Journey* will return via the west coast for the first time in January 2018, calling to Perth (Fremantle) Exmouth, Bunbury, Albany, Esperance in West Australia and Kangaroo Island and Adelaide in South Australia for the first time. Highlights include Azamara's new country intensive voyages, starting with an Australian Explorer Cruise. *Journey* will end her Aussie season with a first for the line, kicking off the 102-night World Journey in Sydney – which will call to 60 ports in 29 countries. In the calendar year of 2018, both *Azamara Journey* and *Azamara Quest* will visit Australia, with *Quest* returning in December 2018.

Seabourn Encore's Aussie encore

Seabourn Cruises' *Seabourn Encore* will spend her second season in Australian waters this year, after making her debut in Feb, at the time claiming the title of the youngest cruise ship to visit Sydney. During her time down under she will sail New Zealand and South Pacific cruises, including the 16-day Australia & New Zealand and 34-day New Zealand & Coral Sea Jewels. The ship is also scheduled to return again in 2018/19 season.



Princess' expanded "Across the Ditch"

Phase two of Princess Cruises' Across the Ditch program is being rolled out on trans-Tasman cruises this summer, introducing 50 new shore excursions and a refreshed menu. This year's edition is designed to "further immerse guests in NZ culture and cuisine" and will offer more opportunities for guests to learn about Maori heritage and participate in traditional customs. A new menu will tie in local delicacies such as a traditional Hangi dinner, New Zealand lamb and pavlova, complemented by New Zealand beers. New shore excursions include a Piha bush and beach eco tour in Auckland, a Te Puia Thermal Reserve, Maori arts and Agrodome tour in Tauranga and Mt Sunday.

© Tourism NZ

CARNIVAL REALIGNS AUSTRALIAN OPERATIONS

CARNIVAL Australia has unveiled a “strategic realignment” of its Australian business which will see Princess Cruises’ *Golden Princess* join the P&O Cruises brand in 2020.

The vessel will be the first in P&O Cruises’ local fleet to be equipped with Ocean Medallion technology, the new electronic device that guests will be able to wear as a wristband, pendant or clip and use to personalise their experience.

The device tracks guests through their cruise, streamlining the boarding process, acting as a room key and allowing guests to order their favourite drink and have it delivered to wherever they are on board.

Using the technology through a smartphone app or on one of the ship’s

tablet-style touchscreens, passengers will also be able to view their plans, make dinner reservations, book excursions and on board activities, message or track travel companions and find their way around the vessel.

While the addition of the 2,600-passenger *Golden Princess* brings Ocean Medallion to P&O Cruises, it also represents a change of plans in P&O’s fleet renewal program.

Initially P&O Cruises was slated to receive a newbuild ship for its Australian fleet in 2019, though this was deferred in December and substituted with a plan to introduce *Carnival Splendor* at the end of 2019.

Carnival Australia says *Carnival Splendor*

will now remain in Carnival Cruise Line’s global fleet.

With the transfer of *Golden Princess* to P&O’s Australian fleet, Princess Cruises will now deploy the larger 3,000+ passenger *Ruby Princess* to serve guests in Australia alongside *Majestic Princess*.

Carnival Australia executive chairman Ann Sherry said the realignment was to ensure the business was at the cutting edge of guest expectations and had solid foundations.

As part of the shakeup, Carnival Australia also announced it would increase its Australian operations to two ships full time in 2020, with detailed deployment to be announced in May 2018.



Golden Princess will join P&O Cruises in 2020

CUNARD WELCOMES FOURTH SHIP

CUNARD Line has revealed it will be welcoming a brand new ship to its fleet in 2022, marking the first time since 1998 that the cruise liner will operate four ships in service at the same time.

The yet-to-be named ship will have the capacity to accommodate 3,000 passengers and will join the *Queen Mary 2*, *Queen Victoria* and *Queen Elizabeth* in the Cunard family when operational.

Simon Palethorpe, senior vice president for Cunard, said the new addition will aid in the company’s ability to improve passenger satisfaction as well as its global reach.

“Cunard offers unrivalled luxury ocean experiences and the new ship firmly underpins our plans to continue our growth across

international markets,” Palethorpe said.

In line with this growth, Cunard recently spent \$200m refurbishing both the *Queen Mary 2* and *Queen Victoria* to help consolidate its position in the global market.

The job to build the ship has gone to Fincantieri S.p.A., Italy, following a memorandum of agreement with Cunard’s parent company, Carnival Corporation & plc.

Further details will be rolled out progressively from 2018, right through to when the ship sets sail for the first time in 2022, however it has been revealed that the new ship will sport the brand’s iconic red funnels.

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Azamara acquires third ship

AZAMARA Club Cruises will increase its fleet by 50% following the purchase of P&O Cruises UK's *Adonia*, which will join the line in March 2018.

Larry Pimentel, Azamara's CEO and president, said the acquisition will allow the brand to visit "even more regions of the world".

The ship was originally a sister ship for the now *Azamara Quest* and *Azamara Journey*, which were all built as "R" class ships for the now defunct Renaissance Cruises.

When *Adonia* is delivered to Azamara in Mar 2018, it will mark the first time that the three 30,277GRT vessels have sailed together under the same brand since Renaissance Cruises went bust.

U by Uniworld to Asia

AHEAD of the launch of the new youth-focussed brand from Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection, U by Uniworld, the brand has announced it will expand into Asia.

Making the big reveal during a preview sailing of U by Uniworld in France, CEO Ellen Bettridge said an Asia program would be coming soon, with a new ship to set sail on the Mekong.

The line said it is looking to double its fleet to four ships, but was staying tight lipped on the location of a fourth ship.

Bookable sailings on U by Uniworld's first two ships, *The A* and *The B*, will begin in Europe in April.

Princess to homeport in Fremantle

PRINCESS Cruises has confirmed it will be homeporting its 2,000-guest *Sun Princess* ship in Fremantle in October and early November next year, following news of the West Australian Government's commitment to fix issue at Broome Port.

Tidal access to Broome Port has been a source of frustration for cruise liners, limiting their ability to dock for a reasonable amount of time for passengers to enjoy the city.

For this reason, the state government has pledged to fix the port's deficiencies allowing all-tidal access when completed.

In the meantime, Princess Cruises will offer a series of five cruises from Fremantle next year which will be combine a mix of short breaks and longer itineraries.



CLIA VIEW

Joel Katz, managing director
CLIA Australasia

THE VALUE OF OZ'S CRUISE INDUSTRY

WITH so many travel agents generating an increased percentage of their revenue from cruise, it's imperative that the growth of the industry is not inhibited. Many travel agents are small business owners, and the success of the industry has a direct impact on your business.

CLIA recently released our report on the Economic Contribution of Cruise Tourism to the Australian Economy 2016-17, and this report reveals an industry with strong growth potential that generates significant national and regional economic activity, quantifying the industry's economic output and contribution, and providing vital insight into what's driving the growth in economic value, from creating thousands of jobs to the economic benefits that flow to businesses and communities far beyond the ships and ports.

The findings provide compelling evidence of the value of the cruise industry and how crucial its continued growth is to the economy. With a record number of cruise ships making a record number of visits to Australian ports, the value of the cruise industry to the Australian economy has surged by 15.4 per cent in 2016-17 to reach \$5.3 billion.

Each cruise ship visit delivers a big economic boost from port charges, to fuel and, most importantly, local supplies like Australian meat, dairy, wine and fresh fruit and vegetables. In addition, the visitor economy, including travel agents, hotels, car-hire, and airlines, benefits from the activity of the cruise industry.

Local demand for cruising continues to grow with a record 1.3 million Australians

now cruising. Australia is the fifth largest source market for cruise passengers in the world, and with the equivalent of 5.3 per cent of the Australian population taking a cruise, we have the number one market penetration rate in the world.

While this is all good news for your business, and while just about every area of the CLIA report shows positive signs, the cruise industry is warning that infrastructure constraints in Sydney threatens further growth of the industry, resulting in economic benefits not being fully realised for Australia.

Australia is one of the world's most appealing cruise destinations for global cruise lines and Sydney is a big drawcard but there is no more room for large cruise ships in the harbour during the peak cruising season. Sydney is our cruise gateway and unless we can accommodate more ships here, we will see less international ship visits as well as the prospect of less homeported ships – which as the report demonstrates, would have a massive flow on effect to local economies across a range of sectors.

While New South Wales remains the dominant cruise state, accounting for 58 per cent of the industry's economic contribution, its 6 per cent growth last financial year means its share has dropped 10 per cent in just two years due to Sydney reaching capacity.

With the nation's cruise gateway at crisis point, the challenge is to ensure strong economic growth for years to come and the only way to make that happen is to find a solution to Sydney's capacity constraints.

CRUISE WEEKLY

- 26 Sep** Cunard to grow fleet to four
- 26 Sep** Princess expands NZ
- 28 Sep** A Princess to grace P&O Cruises
- 28 Sep** Azamara reunites R class
- 03 Oct** Fincantieri plots Australian move
- 03 Oct** Carnival \$500m write-off

HEADLINES SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2017

- 05 Oct** Cruising continues to accelerate
- 05 Oct** Aus well placed: CLIA
- 10 Oct** *Sun Princess* to homeport in WA
- 10 Oct** Viking renames *Spirit*
- 12 Oct** Govt ponders Sydney cruise plan
- 12 Oct** Celebrity invests in Aus

INDUSTRY IN FOCUS



MW Tours hosted this group of smiling agents on a famil to Palawan & Manila, exploring the pristine and stunning islands of El Nido in the Philippines.



Natalie Rooker from the American Embassy; Andy Jack of FCM Travel Solutions; and Georgina Grey, director of sales and marketing of AccorHotels were all present at the CAPA-ACTE New Zealand Aviation & Corporate Travel Summit.



These agents explored India with Insider Journeys recently, visiting Old Delhi, the Taj Mahal and spotting Bengal tigers.



Broome, Kimberley and Beyond hosted six agents to the Top End recently and had an amazing time air boating and quad biking at Bamurru Plains Wilderness Lodge in the NT.



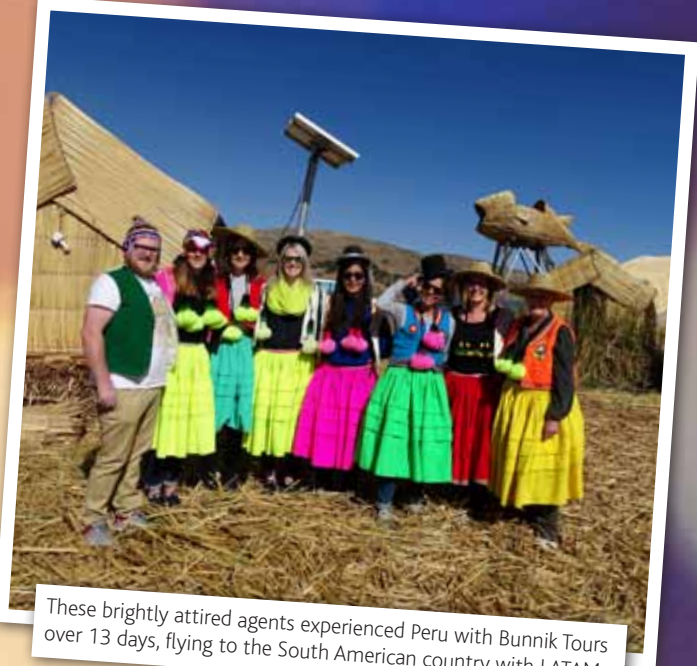
Silversea's Amber Wilson and Anthony Goldman from the Goldman Group were snapped at the launch of Silversea's Couture Collection of itineraries.



Mantra Group's Rising Stars - a group of 21 team members - teamed up with OzHarvest for a "Cooking for a Cause" class as part of the company's development week.



Back-Roads Touring and Qatar Airways took these Express Travel Groups to Ireland to experience the Emerald Isle's south.



These brightly attired agents experienced Peru with Bunnik Tours over 13 days, flying to the South American country with LATAM.



On The Go Tours took this bunch of Flight Centre agents on a famil through the exotic nation of Jordan, including a visit to the famous rock cut city of Petra.

Mantra Group recently hosted key corporate, entertainment and PCO clients for a conferencing and events famil on the Gold Coast and in northern NSW.



Alison O'Loughlan from Adventure World (centre) took home a backpack of goodies from the Travel Oregon and Travel Portland event help in Sydney recently.

Pictured here conquering Europe's highest suspension bridge on Mt Titlis are just some of the agents who were treated to a Switzerland famil by completing the e-learning Switzerland Tourism Academy.



ON THIN ICE

By Kerry van der Jagt

THE lone male draws closer, the midnight sun illuminating every strand of his cream-coloured hair. Water droplets pour from his claws as he strides across the ice, the flattened floes shuddering in his wake. Like a stealth bomber, he's locked onto his target.

Yet still she sleeps. Thin and exhausted from days of hunting she lies tucked on the ice, two button-nosed cubs pressed to her sides. Around her, cracks spread like branching veins, cleaving the pack ice and leaving her floating on a glacé island.

From our position on the bow of *National Geographic Explorer* we grip the railing, each of us silently willing the sleeping princess to waken. But she's an ice carving, hewn from snow and oblivious to the danger approaching.

THE FAR NORTH

It's day three of our circumnavigation of Arctic Svalbard, and we are well above 80 degrees north as the drama unfolds. Just minutes earlier I'd been asleep in my cabin when the excited voice of Captain Kruess came over the intercom – "We have polar bears!" With 24 hours of daylight we'd been warned to be ready at anytime. "You've paid a lot of money for this trip," he'd joked. "You can sleep on the plane on the way home."

It's midnight under a platinum sky when I step onto the bow, the moan of ice the only sound as Lindblad's expedition leader Adam Cropp hands me his binoculars, his other hand pointing in the direction of the sleeping mother bear. Adjusting the focus I take in the teddy bear ears, the pads of her paws and the black noses of her cubs, a flood of tears my only reply. Adam looks across and grins. He's seen it before.

The reverie is broken by the arrival of the male, a phantom flying across the ice, his appearance charging the air like that moment between lightning and thunder. Then, in the magical way of timing and chance our ship swings on her axis, intercepting the male and alerting the female, who leads her cubs in a sprint to the water. With a collective

sigh, the universe, passengers and crew can breathe again.

EXPEDITION CRUISING

A three-hour charter flight from Norway's capital city Oslo brings us to Longyearbyen, the administrative centre of the archipelago of Svalbard. It's mid-afternoon when our excited group of passengers, naturalists, National Geographic photographers and ice experts board the 148-passenger *National Geographic Explorer* for Lindblad Expeditions' 10-day 'Land of the Ice Bears' itinerary.

‘It's midnight under a platinum sky when I step onto the bow, the moan of ice the only sound as Lindblad's expedition leader Adam Cropp hands me his binoculars, his other hand pointing in the direction of the sleeping mother bear’

Since 2004, Lindblad Expeditions has partnered with National Geographic, creating an eco-based alliance based on exploration and conservation. Part of Lindblad Expeditions' fleet, *National Geographic Explorer* offers a small-ship experience, with advanced navigation equipment, excellent maneuverability and a raft of tools for exploration such as zodiacs, kayaks, remotely operated underwater vehicles and hydrophones.

Accommodating 148 guests in 81 cabins, including 13 cabins with private balconies, six spacious suites and 14 cabins designed for solo travellers, the sturdy exterior belies its comfortable underbelly. My spacious cabin boasts a queen-sized bed, two large windows,

elegant bathroom, work desk, flat panel TV and plenty of storage. There's a spa and fitness centre for those inclined and a Global Gallery stocked with artworks and gifts.

THE ORCHESTRA OF THE ICE

Leaving Longyearbyen in a clockwise direction our first stop is Krossfjorden, where we skim across sea ice in zodiacs before going ashore at Stephen's Garden. On a beach hike with Adam we see a pod of beluga whales – as plump as cannelloni beans – laugh at the antics of Arctic foxes, and watch walrus fighting with their toothpick tusks. Amid the glaciers my ears begin to tune to the orchestra of the ice – the 'white thunder' of glaciers calving, the tinkle of ice crystals falling, the crunch of plates colliding.

"This disappearing beauty is a powerful statement that can touch anyone who takes the time to listen," says Lera Auerbach, a Soviet-Russian-born composer and concert pianist. Auerbach is travelling with Lindblad to collect data for her next big project – ARCTICA: a symphonic journey – a multi-faceted performance of music and art. "Scientists can tell us the sea ice is disappearing," she says. "But it's through music, art and literature that we can make a human connection. And once we are emotionally invested, we will fight to save it."

Cruising on the whim of the ice we push further north – kayaking through a slushy in Hornsunf Fjord, riding zodiacs through a blizzard of birds, hiking through a narrow canyon at Diskobukta, and watching polar bears gamboling like Labradors.

Nights are for canapés and cocktails, and four-course dinners designed in collaboration with chef Serge Dansereau of Sydney's ever-popular Bathers' Pavillion. Evenings are for talks; by National Geographic photographer Richard Reid, ice expert Emeritus Fellow Andrew Clarke and Bud Lehnhausen, a polar expedition leader with Lindblad for 30 years.

That is, until the stars and planets align, and the call goes up – "Polar bears ahoy!" And you know, once again, that sleep will have to wait.



© Lindblad Expeditions



© Kerry van der Jagt



© Lindblad Expeditions



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© Lindblad Expeditions



© Kerry van der Jagt

MAGICAL WAYS TO SEE THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

THE magnificence of the Northern Lights has earned the attraction a place on bucket lists around the world, but there's more than one way to view this spectacular phenomenon.

Through the ceiling of a glass igloo:

The Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort, located in Finland, boasts a collection of impressive glass igloos allowing guests the opportunity to admire the Northern Lights snuggled up under the stars. The resort is set amidst stunning Lapland scenery and also offers kelo-glass igloos, which combine the warmth of a cosy log chalet with the views of a glass igloo. The more adventurous can stay in a snow igloo, which stays between a chilly -3°C and -6°C.

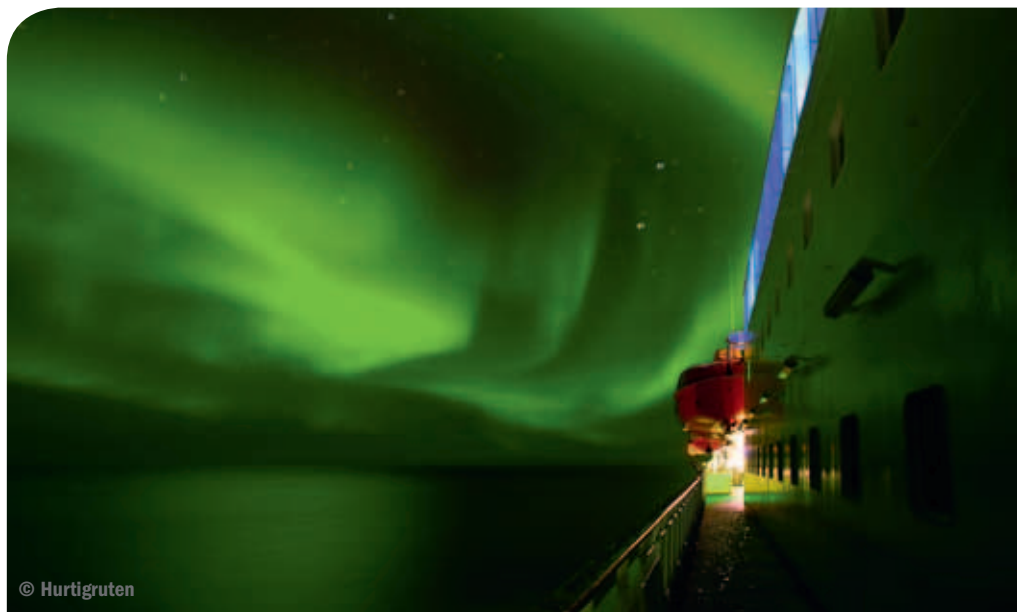
While kicking back on a cruise:

A range of cruise lines sail the arctic circle during prime northern lights viewing months. For the best of both land and sea, Hurtigruten and Bentours operate a 15-day Follow The Lights escorted tour. The popular offering includes a relaxing six-night voyage with Hurtigruten along the coast of Norway, a visit to a husky dog farm, a traditional reindeer farm and to "the home of Santa Claus", Rovaniemi. Prices for this tour start from \$5,995 per person.

While exploring Iceland's landscapes:

Iceland provides an abundance of dramatic fjords, mountains, volcanoes, geysers and waterfalls. Subject to weather conditions, travellers may be lucky enough to capture the breathtaking moment when these elements collide and the lights dance across the sky

to a brilliant backdrop. Abercrombie & Kent operates a 10-day Iceland & the Northern Lights journey from Reykjavik. The tour ventures to Hella and Hofn, weaving in a hike through an ice tunnel into the body of a glacier with geothermal lakes, volcanic craters, lava fields and hot springs. The tour is priced at \$10,995ppts for a 04 March 2018 departure.



© Hurtigruten

PEREGRINE'S NEW ADDITIONS

PEREGRINE Adventures will introduce a new journey to "the Galapagos of the Poles" during the 2018/19 Antarctic season.

Visiting the Falklands and South Georgia, the 18-day trip ventures to South Georgia to witness the destination's abundant wildlife, including king and macaroni penguins and petrels, albatross and burrowing seabirds.

The penguin-spotting opportunities continue at the Falkland's main islands - East Falkland and West Falkland - where magellanic, gentoo and rockhopper penguin colonies thrive.

A total of 10 different itineraries to Antarctica are being offered in Peregrine Adventures' 2018/19 Antarctica program, including the first photography-themed departures to the South Shetland Islands and Antarctic Peninsula and a deep exploration across the Antarctic Circle.

The 11-day voyage to the Antarctic Peninsula will offer travellers the chance to hone their camera skills with the help of photography experts, workshops and lectures.

All Peregrine Antarctic voyages are on specially-equipped small expedition vessels and are led by seasoned expedition teams, including scientists, naturalists and researchers.

Eclipse for agents

SEVENTEEN agents will have the opportunity to experience a cruise on board *Scenic Eclipse* firsthand with a new incentive from Scenic.

The agents will join the seven-night Southern America Coastline Cruise which travels from Guayaquil in Ecuador down to Valparaiso in Chile departing 16 November next year.

Ten of the spots will be taken by agents from Australia and New Zealand who make the highest deposited sales across all Scenic product between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2018.

The other seven agents will be the top sellers of *Scenic Eclipse*, one from each Australian state (with NT and SA combined for the incentive).

Scenic will keep the trade informed on who is in the running for the spots in monthly updates.

Published in collaboration
with Silversea


SILVERSEA TAKES NEW LEVELS OF LUXURY TO ANTARCTICA

SILVERSEA Cruises is set to explore the frozen wilderness of Antarctica in style this summer, having completed extensive refurbishments to its expedition vessels *Silver Cloud* and *Silver Explorer*.

The remodelled ships are capable of exploring some of the most remote regions on Earth and have been elevated to new levels of luxury as part of Silversea's US\$170 million fleet-wide refurbishment program.

Silversea's two ice class expedition ships, the 200-guest *Silver Cloud* and 148-guest *Silver Explorer* are designed to showcase the awe-inspiring scenery of the icy south with panoramic public spaces and broad decks.

Together they will reveal the abundant wildlife, dramatic scenery, towering icebergs and the surreal stillness of the white continent, with the personalised services of a white-gloved butler to welcome guests after a day of exploring.

From November through to February, the ships will offer a mix of itineraries ranging from 10 to 23 days, departing from the Argentinian gateway of Ushuaia in the wildly remote region of Tierra del Fuego.

Setting out across the Drake Passage, they combine the stunning frozen landscapes of the Antarctic Peninsula with other remote destinations including South Georgia, the South Shetland Islands, the South Sandwich Islands and the Falklands.

All-inclusive multi-day shore excursions are offered with a team of expert expedition leaders to bring each destination to life, while a fleet of 16-18 Zodiacs allows for up-close encounters with both the extraordinary wildlife and stunning scenery.

On board are teams of experts including marine biologists, geologists, ornithologists and other professionals, each chosen for their expertise in the regions visited. With

“The remodelled ships are capable of exploring some of the most remote regions on earth and have been elevated to new levels of luxury as part of Silversea’s US\$170 million fleet-wide refurbishment program”

an expedition team of between 18 and 21 experts on each voyage, Silversea lays claim to the highest guest-to-expedition team ratio in expedition cruising.

As part of their new looks, *Silver Cloud* and *Silver Explorer* have been given a revitalised atmosphere throughout, achieved through updated colour schemes, new upholstery and luxurious furniture and fixtures.

Public areas have undergone a complete transformation, including their restaurants, observation lounges, theatres and bars.

The ships' elegant suites are the largest in expedition cruising and most offer private verandas. Amenities include walk-in wardrobes, down duvets, flat-screen TVs and complimentary wi-fi.

Silversea Cruises managing director, Asia Pacific, Amber Wilson, said the line was delighted to welcome guests on board following the extensive refurbishments.

“The refreshed look and feel provides the perfect surroundings for guests to discover our exciting range of destinations including voyages to the Antarctic,” she said.

■ See more at www.silversea.com



BUNNIK EXPLORES CANADA AND GREENLAND



ONE of the founders of Bunnik Tours, Marion Bunnik, is gearing up for a bumper 2018 as she prepares to escort a departure on 24 August 2018 to Canada's Northwest Passage and West Greenland. Bunnik's trek to Greenland will be in conjunction with One Ocean Expeditions.

The avid polar traveller will commence her tour from Edmonton, Alberta's provincial capital city, before flying to Cambridge Bay in Nunavut aboard a charter flight. Once in Cambridge the tour group will sail to Kangerlussuaq in Greenland where the trip concludes.

Along the voyage, the group will chart a course into the Northwest Passage to Conningham Bay, a known hotspot for polar bears who come to feast on Beluga whales. The ship will navigate the narrow passage of Bellot Strait and the historic site of Fort Ross on its way to Beechey Island.

At the conclusion on the trip, travellers will take a charter flight to Ottawa where they either continue on a post-tour or fly home to Australia. In Marion's case, she'll go on to escort a tour to Ontario and Quebec. The 13-day Canada's Northwest Passage and West Greenland tour is priced from US\$11,395 per person.

Embedding in an icy environment

ADVENTURE World has placed an emphasis on even "less explored" regions with its latest 2018/19 dedicated Canada, Alaska & High Arctic brochure.

Catering for the experienced northern traveller, the latest portfolio attempts to traverse even more immersive experiences that, according to Adventure World's managing director Neil Rodgers, "tends to include aspects of exploring indigenous culture".

One marquee attraction in the itinerary is a list of floating lodge options that will well and truly make travellers feel embedded in the cold and icy environment, if not a little wobbly when they get back to land.

The 'Great Alaskan Grizzly Encounter' is another new feature of the arctic trip, one that sees tourists jump aboard a restored crab fishing boat to observe grizzlies in the wild along the Katmai Coast.

For those returning travellers who want something more physically demanding, a suite of land-based trips in Greenland has been added for the first time, allowing tourists with an appetite for ice walks the opportunity to head out on foot and trek to a boutique basecamp.

Additional experiences also include what Adventure World calls the 'Arctic Big Five Safari', which include the spotting of buffalo, moose, black bears, belugas and polar bears.



QUARK VENTURE BACK TO SNOW HILL

QUARK Expeditions will return to Snow Hill in 2018, a destination off the east coast of the Antarctic Peninsula which is billed as one of the hardest to reach on Earth.

Situated at the bottom of the world, Snow Hill is home to the elusive emperor penguin colony off the coast of Snow Hill Island and the tours visit the colony early in the season while the chicks are still young and can be spotted grouped together in communal daycares.

Extreme weather and ice conditions means the journey involves sailing aboard Kapitan Khebnikov, one of the world's most powerful icebreakers, followed by a helicopter ride and a final trek on foot.

Quark conducted its first ground visit in 2004 and the last expedition was successfully completed eight years ago.

The area is capped in snow and ice almost all year round and the chance to visit is limited.

"Emperor penguins are geographically inaccessible birds and the window of opportunity for successful sightings is extremely narrow," explained Malcolm Ellis, senior vice president of operations, Quark Expeditions.

"Our goal is to offer the most authentic

experiences, and we believe that this expedition allows travellers to really capture the spirit of polar exploration at its best," added Andrew White, president, Quark Expeditions.

The relaunched trip is offering four 14-day Legendary Snow Hill: March to the Emperor Penguins voyage departures in 2018 and is priced from \$24,985pp.



WILD Earth Travel has launched its 2018/19 Worldwide small ship cruise brochure. With a large range of ships and cruises available to destinations all over the globe, such as Croatia, The Galapagos, Alaska, USA rivers, South East Asia to name a few, the small cruise ship specialist boasts over 1,600 itineraries. They also feature exclusive itineraries to Iceland, Scotland, Alaska, and around the Mediterranean.



QANTAS Holidays has recently released its new Arabian Peninsula 2018 brochure highlighting new touring activities in Dubai from hot air ballooning to taking in the acclaimed theatre production La Perle by Dragone. Other exciting attractions include a heritage dinner safari across the Dubai Desert and an exciting Abu Dhabi city tour. A new Qatar chapter is also included this time around which features accommodation options such as the Four Seasons Hotel Doha and The Ritz Carlton, Doha.



THE opportunity to explore New Zealand by cruise and coach is here with the launch of Grand Pacific Tours' 2018/19 itineraries for cruise and coach holidays. A fully escorted 27-day trip is on offer, featuring a 16-night ocean cruise onboard the *Celebrity Solstice* sailing from Fremantle, before embarking on a 10-day coach tour spanning both the north and south islands of New Zealand. Pre-paid attractions include visiting the Sky Tower and a Hobbiton Movie Set Tour.



TWELVE brand-new tours have been added by Bunnik Tours, including to the less well-known destinations of Northern Sri Lanka and Northern Japan. With a cap of 20 on all tour groups to maximise the quality of the experience, new features have been added including a culinary tour called 'Flavours of Sri Lanka'. Journeys from Colombo to Beijing, Kyoto and Brunei are all featured inside the latest brochure, with a number of festivals also on the tourist trail such as the Kandy Festival and the Sapporo Snow Festival.



AFTER a successful 2017 season, TravelMarvel has packed more offerings into its 2018 brochure with a range of Jordan journeys now included in its latest round of itineraries. With a focus on ancient discovery, tours include sailing down The River Nile, exploring the ancient Pyramids and wandering the time-honoured streets of Jordan's capital Amman. Also on offer will be the opportunity to discover the fascinating city of Petra, a site teeming with impressive rock-cut architecture and archaeological sites.



EUROPEAN Waterways has released its 2018/19 brochure featuring cruises on its fleet of 17 barges, including the new 12-passenger *Spirit of Scotland* on the Caledonian Canal. The 96-page program covers nine European countries including the UK, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg and Ireland. All barges accommodate between six and 20 passengers. Theme cruises will also be on offer including a wine tour in France, or the opportunity to play some of the great golf courses of the UK.



GUIDED by an expert Expedition Team, APT is offering adventurers the chance to explore the world's most remote regions via luxury small ship cruising in its latest APT Small Ships Antarctica, Arctic & Northern Europe brochure for 2019. Whether it's the thrilling Zodiac rides in Antarctica, taking in some polar bear spotting in the Arctic or sailing through the majestic fjords of Norway, the latest tour packages offer something those who want a more immersive experience in an intimate tour setting.



AAT Kings is showcasing the amazing stories of Indigenous people in its Australia brochure for 2018/19, helping to tell the fascinating stories of the Anangu people, the original owners of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta and surrounding lands. Guided tours are available across most Australian states and territories, with a 15-day outback adventure offered in the NT, a 13-day trip in taking in the east coast islands and rainforest in Queensland and a 21-day tour of the Kimberley in WA to name just a few.



A TASTE OF ITALY

Emilia-Romagna is a region of slow food, fast cars and beautiful small cities, yet is curiously overlooked by many visitors to Italy, writes Brian Johnston.

ALBINELLI covered market in central Modena is perfumed with fresh flowers and fat tomatoes still on the vine. You can sit at a bar counter and have a glass of violet-coloured Lambrusco wine and nibble on a platter of pecorino cheese as you watch locals cannily checking the glossiness of the market's eggplants, and making sure young courgettes have their blossoms still attached as proof of their freshness. Housewives stock up on purple-striped borlotti beans, platters of candied orange peel and hanks of melt-in-your-mouth ham shaved off the bone. On some days, you might well be the only foreigner in a hubbub of everyday Italian activity.

Modena is just one of the towns of Emilia-Romagna, a region wedged between the Veneto and Tuscany, which somehow manages to avoid the tsunami of tourists that threatens to overwhelm more famous

Italian destinations. If you're after a friendlier, more everyday yet still gorgeously beautiful Italy, Emilia-Romagna effortlessly delivers. Even better, it has possibly Italy's best food. Osteria Francescana restaurant in Modena is regularly cited as one of the world's top restaurants and has three Michelin stars, but you can eat like a king in covered markets and gelato shops, too. One of Italy's richest agricultural regions, Emilia-Romagna produces some of the country's most famous foods, including balsamic vinegar, lip-smacking Parma ham and Parmesan cheese.

Bring your appetite with you. You can visit over 20 museums devoted to one food or another, such as salami, olive oil and Lambrusco wine, as well as visit cellar and factory doors. At Acetaia Leonardi, an old family producer of balsamic vinegar outside Modena, you can learn about the manufacturing process, inspect the ageing barrels and taste thick, sweet vinegar 150 years old. Outside Parma, visit Antica Corte Pallavicina, where quality culatello Parma hams hang from cellar ceiling and can be enjoyed on a tasting plate in a sunny courtyard. Then head to a Parmesan manufacturer, where you'll see local milk transformed inside copper cauldrons and

brine-floating moulds into Parmesano Reggiano. A tasting demonstrates how the cheese has different colour, texture and taste depending on its age: bland and creamy when young, dark, grainy and potent as it ages.

The food scene surely culminates in Bologna, the deli-dense capital of Italy nicknamed 'La Grassa' (the fat). It provided



the world with tortellini (eaten here in broth) and spaghetti Bolognese – though in its original, much better local form known as tagliatelle al ragù. Every cobblestone square features café tables where you can sit under flamboyant church or palace facades while the fragrance of coffee floats and sun glints off ice-cream bowls. The city's espressos are dark, strong and knocked back in a single gulp from tiny cups, while gelato comes in interesting contemporary flavours such as candied fennel or caramelised strawberry. Alleyways off Piazza Maggiore, in contrast, have shaded wine bars tucked in among vegetable stalls and fishmongers: the place to prowl, sniff and taste your way around the region's produce.

‘Bring your appetite with you. You can visit over 20 museums devoted to one food or another, such as salami, olive oil and Lambrusco wine’

It isn't all about food. Bologna is a city of red-brick medieval towers and colonnaded squares, and home to Europe's oldest university, founded in 1088. Its big student population provides a youthful vibe that contrasts with some of Italy's more staid, middle-aged main tourist cities. The scruffy, graffiti-covered university district is graced with centuries of architecture and crammed with bookstores, laundrettes and bars. Don't miss the fabulous multi-tiered 1637



All photos unless captioned otherwise © Brian Johnston

university Anatomical Theatre and the university's Museo di Palazzo Poggi, with its eclectic displays of optics and palaeontology.

Bologna's famous Fountain of Neptune provided the inspiration for the trident logo of Emilia-Romagna company Maserati. Lamborghini and Ducati motorcycles are also manufactured here. Enzo Ferrari Museum, built around the Ferrari founder's Modena home, relates his life and has a notable car collection. Outside town, sleek Museo Ferrari takes a look at another notable Emilia-Romagna motorcar, with some fabulous historical Ferrari models on display and the chance to climb into a Formula One simulator. It's a great reminder that Italy isn't just about dead popes and ancient Romans – or even food – but provides a glimpse into the country's dynamic present and famous design icons.

The car industry helps make Emilia-Romagna one of Italy's wealthiest regions and bequeaths it a fine gastronomic scene and polished town centres. Both Modena and Parma were also former independent duchies with pan-European connections, whose diminutive size belies their historical importance. Each has significant architectural and artistic treasures, yet a fraction of the tourist hordes that plague Florence or Venice; Parma also has a rich musical heritage and is associated with composer Giuseppe Verdi.

Parma's cathedral, baptistry and Farnese Theatre are all Renaissance masterpieces, while Modena favours a light, playful form of local baroque architecture centred on its Palazzo Ducale. On the coast, Ravenna served as the capital of the Western Roman Empire and is crammed with early Christian art, most notably its stunning mosaic work in green and blue and gold. There are plenty of reasons to linger longer in Emilia-Romagna, so tuck in.



© Comune di Bologna



© Regione Emilia-Romagna



GLOBUS PUTS ITS FOCUS ON ITALY

THE Globus family of brands has turned the spotlight on Italy and the Mediterranean in its 2018 range of European tours, introducing a string of new itineraries from Portugal to Greece.

Of 18 new tours being introduced next year across the Globus, Cosmos and Monograms brands, more than a dozen focus on Mediterranean countries including five new options in Italy.

Globus family of brands national marketing manager Chris Fundell said Italy had been “a clear choice” when it came to developing new product, particularly for repeat visitors.

“Italy has been part of our Globus and Cosmos itineraries for many years but these

new options allow our guests to explore both the must-see areas such as Rome, Florence and Venice, but also go beyond this and experience the sights, sounds and tastes of rural Italy,” Fundell said.

“Our new Italy journeys venture down the south of Italy, not as commonly explored, right into the ‘heel of the boot’ and even into beautiful Sicily,” he said.

Among new Globus tours are the nine-day Hidden Treasures of Southern Italy which travels between Naples and Sorrento via unspoilt regions of Italy’s southern heel, and a 10-day The Sicilian which takes travellers on a circuit of Sicily from Palermo to Syracuse.

New itineraries in the Cosmos range include Gourmet Tuscany, an eight-day focus on Italy’s most famous culinary region based in the town of Montecatini, as well as an 11-day journey from Venice into the Balkan countries called Venice, Slovenia, Croatia & Montenegro.

Meanwhile, the Monograms range of city-stays and semi-independent holidays has introduced a new seven-day option in Portugal called Lisbon and Oporto, and a 13-day Spain and Portugal holiday based in Barcelona, Madrid, Lisbon and Oporto.

A 10% early booking discount is available on select Globus tours until 28 November.

Air deal boosts Italy options

QANTAS has introduced new codeshare services to Italy, Cyprus and Malta as a result of new air services agreements negotiated by the Australian Government.

From the end of last month, the Qantas code was added to daily Emirates services between Dubai and Bologna (Italy), Larnaca (Cyprus) and Malta, marking the first expansion of services since the new air deals were announced in July.

Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Darren Chester the new arrangements were part of the Government’s plan to expand Australia’s aviation footprint in the region.

“In settling revised air services arrangements with Italy, the Australian Government has delivered on an outcome long sought by the Australian aviation industry,” Chester said.

“Australian airlines now have the ability to significantly expand existing code share operations to Italy, as well as an opportunity to start weekly freight services between the two countries.

Chester said travel between Australia and Italy had been growing strongly for several years and that it was important for Australian airlines to share in that growth.

“More than half a million people travelled between Australia and Italy last year, so the benefit for our trade and tourism industries is obvious,” he said.



LINKING THE GREAT IBERIAN CITIES

TRAFALGAR has combined the most popular cities of Spain and Portugal in a new nine-day itinerary, released with the operator’s 2018 Europe program.

The Great Cities of Iberia begins in Barcelona before travelling to Madrid, Seville and Lisbon, offering a chance to visit some of the most spectacular landscapes of the Iberian Peninsula along the way.

Across the border in Portugal, the tour ends among the winding cobblestone streets of Lisbon where guests can explore quaint hillside neighbourhoods and landmark sites like the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Hieronymite Monastery.

Trafalgar has also added new City Explorers next year, including a five-night Madrid Explorer that allows visitors to get to know the city at a leisurely pace.

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MELIÀ PRO REWARDS

MED SAILING DESTINATIONS

Sparkling azure waters, ancient architecture and fantastic food, the Mediterranean has it all. Why not suggest your clients experience this region through the age old transport of sailing? The best time is between March and November, when the breezes are lighter and the temperatures warmer. Here are three of our top picks.



DALMATIAN ISLANDS

You could spend plenty of time exploring Croatia's Dalmatian Islands, with 79 islands parallel to the country's coast, along with countless other islets. They're a mixed bunch of sleepy towns, ancient architecture and unspoiled bays. Hvar is one of the larger islands and has a large port by the same name offering a great spot to drop anchor, with chic bars, boutique accommodation and architecture that compares with that of famous Dubrovnik's (minus the crowds).

AMALFI COAST

One of the most photographed coastlines in the world, Italy's Amalfi Coast definitely should be top of the list for those looking for a sailing adventure in the Mediterranean. Enjoy the convenience of sailing, staying up nice and close to picturesque cities and avoiding the narrow roads and traffic that link the small towns clinging to the cliffs along this stretch of coast. The most spectacular views are between Salerno and Amalfi.



IONIAN ISLANDS

When you think sailing in the Mediterranean, most people imagine the iconic Greek islands such as Santorini, but the Ionian Islands to the west of Greece's mainland are a must visit, with some of the best beaches in the country. These islands lush and green compared to their rockier southern cousins. Corfu, the most popular island in the chain is very developed, but you don't need to go far to find quieter spots such as on Kelfalonia, Ithiki and Lefkada.

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TOP NINE NORTH ISLAND EXPERIENCES

Craig Tansley reveals the best experiences to try in New Zealand's North Island – from volcano skiing to wine tasting, and everything in between...

RIDE NEW ZEALAND'S ONLY SKIABLE VOLCANO

While the Queenstown region receives most publicity for its ski mountains, the North Island is actually home to the country's two largest ski resorts – and you can ski both on the same pass. What's more, these two resorts – Turoa and Whakapapa – receive the most snowfall of any New Zealand resort. And you'll be skiing within a World-Heritage-listed national park, with some of the most stunning alpine scenery in New Zealand.



GO WINE TASTING AT HAWKES BAY

Hawkes Bay is New Zealand's warmest and driest region – which makes it ideal for touring through the country's oldest (and second largest) wine region. And you'll get to sample far more than the country's famous Sauvignon Blanc – because of its climate, the region is most famous for its big reds, like Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. There's 72 wineries here, you can take a bicycle wine tour (there's 200 kilometres of bike trails) between them. The region's also a foodie hotspot.



SURF ONE OF THE WORLD'S LONGEST WAVES

While New Zealand doesn't strike you as a surfer's paradise, it's home to one of the world's most iconic waves. The town of Raglan on the west coast was etched into surfing folklore when the stars of *The Endless Summer* surfed here making their film in 1966. The wave can break down the line for nearly a kilometre. Raglan itself is also worth a stay – it's home to one of the country's best regional live music scenes.



SAIL AUCKLAND'S HARBOUR

Climb aboard a former America's Cup racing yacht on one of the world's most famous harbours. Known as the City Of Sails, some of the America's Cup best skippers of all time honed their expertise tackling the waters of Auckland's Waitemata Harbour. There's a variety of sailing trips on offer, some which will take you further out into the Hauraki Gulf where you'll see whales and dolphins.





BEACHCOMB ON GREAT BARRIER ISLAND

It's not far from Auckland but travelling to Great Barrier Island feels like you're going back in time. Seventy percent of the island is conservation land and some locals still live subsistently off the crayfish, scallops, kingfish and mussels the island's famous for. Not long ago there was no electricity on the island, but now you'll find some of the country's most charming lodges, like the eclectic Earthsong Lodge.

CHASE THE SUN IN THE BAY OF ISLANDS

They call this part of New Zealand "the winterless north". While most of us think of tall, white-capped mountains when we think of NZ, the Bay Of Islands is a boat lover's Mecca – there's 144 islands here all within a protected marine park, that's home to NZ's best beaches. It's also a big game fishing hot-spot, and you can base yourself in an old whaling town built in the 1840s that was once the capital (Russell).



PLAY SOME OF THE WORLD'S BEST GOLF COURSES

Queenstown attracts most of the plaudits for its golf courses, but New Zealand's three best courses are all found on the North Island. Cape Kidnappers, built on top of towering cliffs on a lonely headland by Hawkes Bay is the world's 16th best course. While Kauri Cliffs in the Bay Of Islands forces golfers to hit across 200-metre-high drop-offs to the Pacific below (it's rated 49th). But all over the North Island, you'll find stunning courses, including Jack Nicklaus's The Kinloch Club just outside Lake Taupo.

EAT AND DRINK ON WAIHEKE

Just a 35 minute ferry ride from Auckland's CBD, you'll feel like you've been transported to the rolling hills of Tuscany on Waiheke Island with its vineyards and olive groves. But these tasting rooms offer far more than Tuscany can: sweeping views from award-winning restaurants right out over the Pacific Ocean. Not only is Waiheke Island a food and wine lover's paradise, there's a huge collection (for such a small island) of galleries and craft boutiques.



EASE SORE MUSCLES ALONG THE RIM OF FIRE

From as far back as the 1870s, Rotorua has been known as the wellness capital of NZ. The town lies within the Pacific Rim Of Fire, and is a geothermal hot-spot, with natural hot springs and mud pools right by the side of the road – many of them free-of-charge for visitors to soak in. It's also home to an impressive range of wellness centres and day spas, which all use the natural geothermal properties of the area for treatments.



All images courtesy New Zealand

Clean Air NZ

AIR New Zealand was very busy pushing its green credentials last month, making several significant environmental announcements aimed at reducing its carbon footprint and operational costs.

The airline's desire to be proactive with its sustainability policy was underscored when it appointed two leading figures in the space, British ecological Professor Tim Jackson and carbon emissions specialist Dr Suzi Kerr to Air New Zealand's Sustainability Advisory Panel in October.

"Professor Jackson is at the forefront of research into sustainable economies... and international emissions expert Dr Suzi Kerr will share her expertise as we work toward our industry target of carbon neutral growth from 2020," Air New Zealand chief executive officer Christopher Luxon said.

In line with this push, Air New Zealand is currently trialling the electrical refuelling of its onboard systems at the gate instead of deploying conventional refuelling methods. The carrier was pleased to report that in the first month of the experiment an estimated 188,000 litres of gas was saved in addition to a 4,500-tonne reduction in carbon emissions as a result.

Other recent initiatives have included a joint trial with Virgin Australia to source aviation biofuel locally and the appointment of a sustainable coffee supplier to service its flights.

HOTEL DEVELOPMENT IN FULL SWING

NEW Zealand continues to drive forward with its hotel construction boom, recently announcing several major property developments across Auckland and Queenstown. The latest round of expansion in the sector has been fuelled by ongoing growth in NZ tourism more broadly, increasing 44% over the past 10 years and pressing a need for greater accommodation infrastructure.

The newest kid on the block when it swings open the doors from 1 December will be the 69-room QT Queenstown. Noted for its quirky and artistic nature, QT Hotels & Resorts will bring a fusion of modernity and nature to the forefront, presenting guests with contemporary-styled interiors blended with views across Lake Wakatipu.

Meanwhile, Auckland has witnessed the most hotel bustle with the MSocial, Grand Mercure and SO Sofitel brands all bringing new offerings to the city. Millennium Hotels and Resorts soft-launched its M Social brand to the market only last month, revamping the old Copthorne on the corner of Viaduct Harbour and Quay Street. The 190-room hotel arrives with a distinct technology focus and will be officially unveiled through a grand opening this December.

AccorHotels is leading the charge in



QT Queenstown

Auckland however, with two big projects on the run. The SO Sofitel luxury brand is due to launch in Q1, 2018, and will offer an innovative and playful aesthetic along with the brand's trademark French-style luxury influence. The 130-room property will be situated in the heart of the city's central business district, neighbouring the Britomart precinct and waterfront. Just around the corner on Queen Street, a 24-month, multimillion dollar transformation of AccorHotels' Grand Mercure Auckland was completed this year. Renovations have resulted in a new open-air eatery on ground level called The Lane, offering retro bike hire along with donuts and coffees during the day, before turning into a stylish cocktail bar at night.

SHE'LL BE RIGHT UP NORTH MATE

THE Northland Region in New Zealand has been singled out for an experimental marketing push by Tourism New Zealand to determine if Australian travellers can be influenced to visit less-frequented tourist spots.

The pilot marketing program focused exclusively on attracting Victorians and yielded some pleasing results for the tourism body.

"It is fantastic to see that with specific, targeted partnership activity we can direct consumers into our less-visited regions, helping more regions to benefit from tourism," said Tourism New Zealand chief executive, Stephen England-Hall.

"Tourism also provides significant employment in New Zealand, with one in ten people employed in the industry...for some

communities like Northland, this is essential."

The campaign was run in conjunction with Northland Inc, Facebook, Flight Centre and Air New Zealand.

Following the positive nature of the results, Tourism New Zealand is now planning to run two more campaigns, one more promoting Northland and another for the South Island.





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ROMANTIC RAIL

Taking the Venice Simplon Orient Express to Berlin



As a train lover whenever I hear the words 'Venice Simplon Orient Express' it lights up a special part of my brain. For most of my life that part dreamt of taking the ultimate romance of rail journey. These days it lights up with memories of the legendary train's inaugural trip to Berlin, writes Amanda Woods.

I WASN'T the only one to dream of taking the Venice Simplon Orient Express (VSOE, as she is also known) to Berlin. 25 years after he first had the idea when he worked as a steward on the train, last year the VSOE's general manager Pascal Deyrolle turned his idea into a reality. Now Berlin is a permanent fixture on the train's calendar and next year she will travel from London to Berlin on 21 June, returning Berlin to London on 23 June, with both journeys going via Paris.

As all VSOE journeys from London do, ours began at London's Victoria Station on another train, the Belmond British Pullman.

Just as the VSOE carriages have been rescued from backyards and train graveyards and lovingly restored, so too have the British Pullman cars. As well as their physical beauty with detailed mosaics and marquetry each one has a tale to tell including the Cygnus car that once transported royalty and heads of state, and was part of Sir Winston Churchill's

funeral train in 1965, the last time a steam locomotive was used in a state funeral.

As we rolled through the English countryside, we sipped bellinis and discovered what adding caviar can do to a brunch of crumpets with salmon and eggs. Then after transferring to luxury coaches for the Channel Tunnel crossing to Calais we saw the VSOE for the first time, waiting for us in all her blue and gold glory.

A luxury time capsule on the tracks, the train's journey back to life started when American entrepreneur James B. Sherwood bought a couple of the original carriages at auction in Monte Carlo in 1977.

He then became inspired to find more of the cars and now we can journey on cars steeped in history, including Sleeping Car 3309 which spent ten days stuck in a snowdrift in 1929, inspiring Agatha Christie to write *Murder on the Orient Express* which became the classic film that has just been remade by Kenneth Branagh and Ridley Scott.



Images courtesy of Amanda Woods

For some, the authenticity of the original sleeper cars from the 1920s and '30s is a bit too compact for comfort, but knowing this is how people travelled all those years ago made the journey all the more special for this train lover.

We may not have had showers on board, and the toilets may have been at the end of the carriage, but we had beautiful washbasins with Lalique glass to freshen up with in our cabins and I adored the detailed marquetry and other features from days gone by.

While no showers for our one night journey is one thing, longer VSOE journeys stop at hotels every second night so guests can have full bathroom access along the way.

Next year showers will appear on the VSOE for the first time, but not in the traditional carriages. Instead Belmond is introducing three private 'Grand Suites' with double beds, a living area, and private bathrooms with showers. The Grand Suites will stay true to the train's 1920s art deco style and will take

‘You can slip away to the restaurant cars to have a pot of tea or glass of champagne while writing postcards to put into the onboard mailbox...’

to the rails for the first time in March 2018.

Our journey to Berlin was among the first to experience another new feature on the train. The 3764 Bar Car was added last year with space for a piano and a small band, comfortable spots for lounging and a small bar with an impressive cocktail and caviar menu.

It's a stylish and welcome new addition but the three most beautiful cars on the train in my eyes remain the distinctive restaurant

cars from the 1920s: the Côte d'Azur with stunning Lalique glass panels, L'Oriental with Chinese style black lacquer, and Etoile du Nord with exquisite marquetry.

As well as being used for meals, you can slip away to the restaurant cars to have a pot of tea or glass of champagne while writing postcards to put into the onboard mailbox, or to simply soak in the beauty both inside and outside the train.

Our last morning through the German countryside took us along the Rhine where we watched castles, charming houses and vineyards go by, and as we looked out people were stopping to look back and wave.

As we pulled into Berlin Hauptbahnhof I was excited to be back in one of my favourite cities but far from ready to say goodbye.

I had always thought that the VSOE would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience but I'm now hoping I'm wrong and that one day I'll have a chance to do it again. And next time I'll make it on the longest journey possible.

RAIL EUROPE TO SHARE TECH WITH SILVERRAIL

RAIL Europe has announced a new joint partnership across Europe with travel technology company SilverRail to share tech and data capabilities.

The new agreement will see SilverRail provide a connectivity and transaction processing layer to all of Rail Europe's train operator's fares and seat inventory via its technology platform, SilverCore. This will enable Rail Europe and Voyages-SNCF.com to gather the knowledge of their customers'

needs and focus on building better distribution engines and sales interface across its channels.

Rail Europe chief executive officer Fabrice Morel said the company looked forward to working with SilverRail to overhaul its systems.

"This will enable our own resources to leverage their unmatched market expertise and focus solely on designing the best experience for selling rail, both for travellers and travel intermediaries around the world".

MEANWHILE, Rail Europe is giving agents the chance to secure 20% off select Eurail passes that can be booked up to 11 months in advance. The 'Eurail Off-Peak Sale' runs until 27 December and offers 20% off the Eurail Global Pass, Eurail Select Two, Three and Four Country passes, and Eurail One Country Pass (including the Eurail Greek Islands Pass). The discount is valid across all fare categories, with no travel restrictions in place.



INTERNATIONAL Rail's new "Luxury Travel Collection" program has received strong interest from clients and agents according to Jonathan Hume, the company's managing director.

Hume said there was strong interest for Belmond Trains in the UK and Ireland and the Rocky Mountaineer in Canada, which was due to agents receiving greater education.

"Although these types of products generally take a while to gather momentum, we have seen a significant increase in enquiries and bookings for both our European and Canadian luxury train packages since the creation of our luxury collection program," Hume said, adding that trains in Africa were also starting to gain interest. Early trends indicate that the clientele of the luxury rail product was widespread, with good interest from the high-end cruising market.

"You've got the well-off retiree market, which fits in with the high-end cruising market, but you've also got people who want the experience, those people who want to

tick a particular train journey off their bucket list, regardless of the cost," said Hume. He added the Rocky Mountaineer product was more diverse with families, retirees and even people on their honeymoons.

A traditional seller of point-to-point rail in Europe, Hume said the company had been surprised in recent times by the demand coming out of Europe.

"We were a bit concerned with the recent unrest coming out of Europe, but we haven't seen any negative effect in that region," he said.

"I think what you're seeing is a lot of redirecting in Europe from those put off by the recent events in Europe. We've seen Scandinavia and Russia lift as well as Spain."

Hume also believes Asia is an emerging market for International Rail.

"With the fast trains coming out of China, fully independent travellers are becoming more confident in taking the train in China compared to before."

Virgin Trains launches Seatfrog auction app

VIRGIN Trains in the UK has worked with travel tech company Seatfrog to launch an app that allows passengers to upgrade from Standard to First class by placing bids in an auction on select routes.

The app works by selecting to upgrade immediately or taking part with other passengers in an auction. Upgrades start from £5 and bidding is open from 2.5 hours to 30 minutes before the train departs.

If successful, Seatfrog issues a new ticket via the app, which the customer presents when boarding along with the original ticket. The app covers select Mon-Fri services on routes from London to Leeds and Edinburgh.

The free application can be downloaded from the Apple and Android app stores.



LONGEST RAIL JOURNEYS



The Trans-Siberian: Moscow to Vladivostok (Russia)

Frequency: Daily

Distance: 9,289km

Scheduled running time: 144 hours – 6 days

The grand-daddy of them all, the legendary Trans-Siberian rail journey spans seven timezones and takes six days as it departs from Moscow on its journey to the far eastern Russian port city of Vladivostok. The scenery includes the Ural Mountains and Lake Baikal, the largest freshwater lake in the world. Popular alternatives to the route include the Trans-Mongolian to Beijing and even an option from Moscow to Pyongyang in North Korea.

The Canadian: Toronto to Vancouver (Canada)

Frequency: Three services weekly during peak season and two times in off peak

Distance: 4,466km

Scheduled running time: 80 hours approx.

Travelling three-quarters across the world's second-largest country, The Canadian is an epic journey that sets out from Toronto's Union Station. The train crosses amazing scenery as it passes through the Prairies and the Rocky Mountains before it hits the coast and Vancouver. The ride is further enhanced by sleeper cars and the chance of seeing moose, deer and even bears from the windows.



© VIA Rail



© Great Southern Rail

Indian Pacific: Sydney to Perth (Australia)

Frequency: Three times a week

Distance: 4,352km

Scheduled running time: 65 hours

Spanning the entire continent of Australia, the Indian Pacific explores the vast wilderness of our sunburnt country. The sheer distance is most apparent as it crosses the Nullabor and the longest stretch of straight railway track in the world, when passengers will not see a bend for 478km. The route includes stops in Broken Hill, Adelaide, Port Augusta and Kalgoorlie.

California Zephyr: Emeryville (San Francisco) to Chicago

Frequency: Daily

Distance: 3,924 km

Scheduled running time: 51 hours 20 minutes

Taking in a little more than two days, one of the longest train journeys in the United States takes in everything America has to offer. From the beaches in California, the journey passes by the Colorado River, the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada range as it makes steam through eight states to America's third largest city, Chicago.



© Amtrak

2018 HOT SPOTS

From jungles to mountains, more and more of the world is open for travel. Here are our picks for where to send your clients before the crowds hit. Written by Nina Karnikowski.



ETH- IO- PIA

The outdated images of a nation struggling with famine and war are fading in Ethiopia. With new airline links, new highways, and an airline terminal and light rail in Addis Ababa making it more accessible than ever, travellers are discovering how remarkable this African nation truly is. The home of coffee, the Queen of Sheba and the planet's oldest known ancestor, Ethiopia is where you come for the ancient monolithic rock-cut churches of Lalibela, trekking in the Simien Mountains amongst wallia ibex, gelada monkeys and Ethiopian wolves, the Ethio-jazz scene of Addis Ababa and more. Get off the tourist trail next year and visit the ancient, UNESCO-listed walled town of Harar, where you'll find 368 alleys squeezed into just one square kilometer filled with colourful buildings and centuries-old mosques and, if you're adventurous, the lowest, driest and hottest place on the African continent, the volcano-pocked Danakil Depression.

In a year when sustainability in travel is said to be on the rise like never before, all eyes will be on Costa Rica in 2018, one of the world's most sustainable and eco-friendly tourism destinations. The peaceful green heart of Central America, Costa Rica is where it's at for deserted beaches with world-class surfing and diving, lush rainforests scribbled with hiking trails, prolific wildlife including toucans, sloths, caimans and dolphins, active volcanoes, powerful waterfalls and more. Dance the night away to reggae in Puerto Viejo, canoe down the jungle-fringed canals of Tortuguero national park, surf at Mal País and Santa Teresa or, simply slow down and sink into the pura vida (pure life).

COS- TA RICA



IS- RA- EL

Travellers are only just starting to realise that Israel is so much more than a pilgrimage destination or a conflict zone, and that it's a place worthy of putting on the bucket list in 2018. As you traverse this tiny country that's 367 times smaller than Australia, you'll have the opportunity to float in the hyper-saline waters of the Dead Sea, hike through valleys of golden stone in the Negev Desert, visit Mediterranean towns like Akko dating back to the time of the Crusaders, and party all night long in one of our planet's most buzzing cities, Tel Aviv. There's also the ancient city of Jerusalem, one of earth's most holy places and a pilgrimage point for Jews, Christians and Muslims, the pristine nature reserves of the Galilee region up north, an incredible culinary scene that extends well beyond tahini and hummus, and so much more.

The 2015 earthquakes caused devastation in Nepal, but what is most striking from a traveller's perspective is not how much was lost, but how much remains. As travellers head back to this land of snowy peaks, medieval towns and monasteries in 2018, they will be helping the local culture and people bounce back from what has been a tough few years. Whether you come for the Himalayan hiking through the rugged trails of Everest or the Annapurnas, a safari in the rhinoceros haven of Chitwan National Park, or a cultural pilgrimage through the medieval city squares of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, Nepal is a destination you can't help but be transformed by. Staying a few nights in one of the country's many monasteries, experiencing a nightly aarti spiritual ceremony, or spending the night in a local's home will help you enter into the sacred heart of the country.

NEPAL



NEW ZEALAND

With travellers becoming ever-more adventurous, tourism numbers to New Zealand, the real-life version of Middle Earth, are set to keep on growing next year. Dotted with magnificent forests, mountains, lakes and beaches, bold travelers can do everything from kayaking, hiking and cycling here, to the more extreme white water rafting, bungee jumping, or zip lining. New Zealand also offers a thriving indigenous Maori culture and some of the world's best cities, including Auckland and dreamy Waiheke Island, the global adventure capital of Queenstown, and windy Wellington, dubbed "the coolest little capital in the world" with its vibrant arts, music and sustainable food scene. First-time visitors could start with a road trip from Christchurch to Queenstown, stopping off for hiking, kayaking and hot spring adventures in picturesque towns like Aoraki Mount Cook, Lake Tekapo and Lake Wanaka.

The Gulf's undiscovered gem has never been more ready for visitors, with a rich Bedouin culture, stunning landscapes from the mountains and majestic deserts to the pristine coasts, and some of the world's most opulent hotels (think Anantara's Al Jabal Al Akhdar) just waiting to welcome travellers. Whether you take a sunset stroll along the muttrah corniche, Muscat's vibrant seafront area lined with 19th-century merchants' houses and colourful minarets, meet Bedouin tribes in the Wahiba Sands desert where you can also hike, quad bike and camel ride, or take a dip with dolphins in the beaches along Salalah in the south, you'll find what you're looking for in Oman in 2018.

OMAN



CRUISE HOT SPOTS

The booming cruise sector is opening up new destinations all over the world, some remote and others simply overlooked until now. Here are some to watch:

This most contentious of Caribbean countries has been on the next-big-thing list for a long time, but the past year has seen an explosion in the number of cruise lines offering visits to Cuba's shores. The beautifully weathered capital of Havana and several other colourful Cuban ports are now easily accessible from world cruising's epicentre in Florida, only a cigar's throw away. A relaxation of US travel bans during the Obama era raised hopes for routine tourism in Cuba, and although President Trump has sought to wind back the measures of his predecessor, cruising seems to have escaped any new restrictions. Most major cruise lines now offer Cuba visits – look out for itineraries offering overnight stays in Havana and multiple ports around the Cuban coast.

CUBA



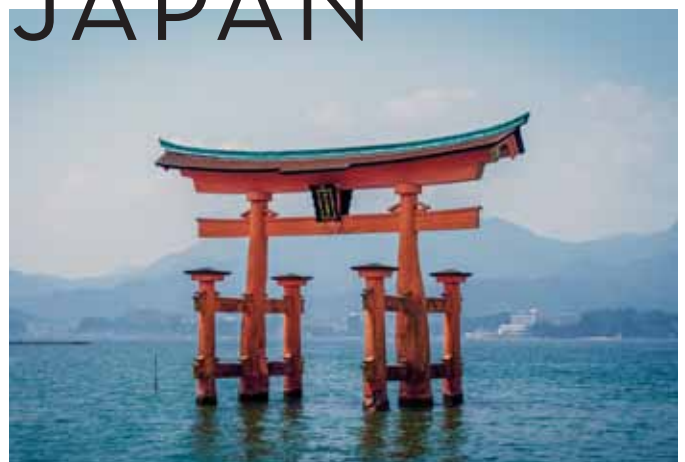
THE KIMBERLEY

The distances involved in exploring the Kimberley by land are immense and much of the most spectacular scenery is secluded around its intricate coastline, making this an ideal region to explore by sea. Earthy red landscapes meet vivid turquoise waters in a surreal clash of colours, while natural wonders like King George Falls now sit alongside many of Australia's most iconic postcard sights. This area has been a favourite for expedition cruises for some time and much of the coast is only accessible to smaller vessels, but a commitment from the West Australian Government last month to dredge the Port of Broome means larger ships will soon make regular calls.



JAPAN

Favourable exchange rates and cheaper airfares have helped fuel impressive tourism growth in what was once considered an expensive destination, so it's only natural that the cruise sector should turn its attention to Japan. As a compact island nation, its key cities like Tokyo and Osaka are ideal to visit on cruise itineraries, while inland points like the former imperial capital of Kyoto are easily reached on shore excursions or aboard bullet trains. Though it's known for its temples and high-energy cities, Japan is also home to beach destinations like the Okinawa Islands where azure lagoons and coral reefs make for classic cruise backdrops. Several major lines include Japan on world cruise itineraries or seasonal visits, and regular circuits now operate from other Asian ports like Shanghai and Hong Kong.



‘What was once familiar only through the pages of National Geographic has more recently become accessible through small ship operators and hardy explorer vessels’

THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Sailing among Ecuador's Galapagos Islands has been the ambition of adventurers everywhere since the day Charles Darwin first set eyes on a tortoise and pondered its greater meaning. These islands might be the very origin of expedition cruising, with their remote location, ruggedly beautiful landscapes and intense concentration of wildlife. What was once familiar only through the pages of National Geographic has more recently become accessible through small ship operators and hardy explorer vessels. But now, with the rise of luxury expedition cruising and increasing visits by mainstream cruise operators, the islands of the Galapagos have become a reality in an evolution Darwin could never have foreseen.



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CAN YOU HACKETT?

ADVENTURE tourism in New Zealand is about to get a whole lot more intense with prominent bungy operator AJ Hackett planning a new thrill ride for next year carrying the working title, "Nevis Thriller". While the purveyors of adrenaline-inducing entertainment are not broadcasting too many details just yet, the new attraction is set to incorporate elements of bungy, flight and unprecedented speed. Given the nature of its code name, the assumption is that the new ride will be terrifying tourists in the skies far above the serene Nevis River and joining the suite of rides the company already has in operation at the location.

Beyond the new top-secret project, AJ Hackett is also preparing to celebrate the 29th birthday of its Kawarau Bridge Bungy



Kawarau Bridge ©AJ Hackett Bungy

ride on 12 November of this year. The attraction, referred to as the World Home of Bungy by most daredevils, costs NZ\$205 per adult (approx A\$185) which includes transport, a certificate and a congratulatory

t-shirt to prove you had the guts to go through with the jump. Last year the Kawarau Bridge Bungy convinced 42,000 tourists to jump off its bridge and recorded 450,000 visitors to the site in the same period.

TO THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS AND BEYOND



JAPAN'S cherry blossom season has become the top-shelf drawcard in a nation already rich in aesthetic tradition, but initiatives to extend tourism into quieter periods and locations are gaining traction.

Nexus Holidays has partnered with All Nippon Airways to offer a 10-day cherry blossom tour in March and April next year. Visiting key blossom sites in several locations, it travels to Osaka, Nara, Kyoto, Nagoya, Hakone, Mount Fuji and Tokyo, priced from \$2,799 per person twin share including flights ex Sydney or Melbourne.

The company also offers regular tours to the always-popular destinations like Tokyo, Mount Fuji, Osaka and Kyoto, but says booming interest in Japan is driving demand for destinations beyond the big ticket cities.

Nexus offers an Authentic Japan tour suitable for repeat travellers or those who would like to explore the country's natural attractions such as the Kurobe Alpine Route, or the wild snow monkeys which bathe in the hot springs of Jigoku Valley.

It also takes travellers to a traditional

onsen to loosen their muscles at a traditional hot spring resort, and experience traditional tatami beds overnight. They visit Shirakawago, a World Heritage site where gassho-style houses (with steeply-pitched A-frame roofs), stand together in a natural setting. It is priced from \$4,399 per person twin share including flights from Sydney or Melbourne.

Also on offer are tour-cruise packages in Japan, while in the near future Nexus plans launch a Grand Tour product, taking travellers from Kyushu and Shikoku in the south to Hokkaido in the north.



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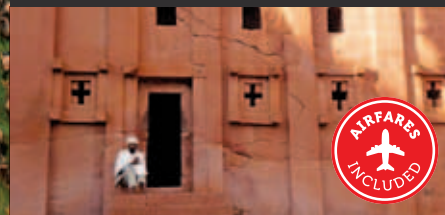
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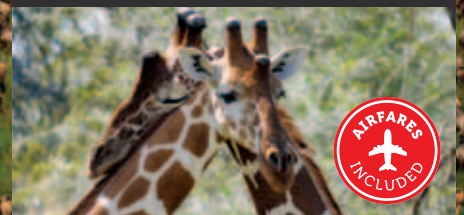
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SILVERSEA UNCOVERS HIDDEN GEMS AMONG ITS NEWEST DESTINATIONS

Published in collaboration with Silversea

SILVERSEA Cruises will introduce dozens of new destinations in its 2018 season of luxury journeys, from out-of-the-way villages among the islands of the Mediterranean to the spectacular palaces and temples of Asia.

With its fleet of nine intimate, all-suite vessels, the line will explore virtually every corner of the globe next year, connecting the great port cities of the world with some of the most spectacular landscapes on earth.

Among destinations never visited by Silversea before are ports across southern Europe including in Spain, Italy, Croatia and Greece. Others are scattered across northern waters in Sweden, Norway and Finland, not to mention a few hidden gems in Ireland and Scotland.

Further afield, the line will make maiden visits to ports in India, Oman and Canada – and that’s before you even get to the dozens of remote locations added in Silversea’s expedition cruise program, exploring unspoilt wilderness regions from the Arctic north to the frozen south.

With its heart in the Mediterranean, emerging destinations around southern Europe feature prominently in Silversea’s 2018 cruise program.

Among them is the hot-spot of Croatia, where Silversea will make its first visit to the town of Opatija aboard its *Silver Muse* and *Silver Shadow*, both sailing from Venice in the northern summer.

Historically a fashionable destination for European aristocracy, Opatija is in demand again today - with palatial structures watching



out over the sparkling Adriatic and a border of lush green mountains rising from behind the town. It joins better-known destinations along the Croatian coast in Silversea’s program, including the perfectly preserved town of Korcula and the spectacular walled city of Dubrovnik.

Across the sea in Italy is another new gem, the coastal town of Santa Maria di Leuca. Situated at the very tip of the Salento peninsula – the heel on Italy’s boot – it occupies an ancient strategic position where the Ionian and Adriatic seas meet.

The town’s ordered line of palms and towering lighthouse watch over a coastline riddled with caves, cliffs and grottos, making it a fascinating area to explore. Santa Maria di Leuca will feature for the first time in a July itinerary operated by *Silver Muse*, sailing from Monte Carlo.

Other new points around the Mediterranean include Almeria and La Savina in Spain, Ithaca and Spetses in Greece, Piran

in Slovenia and Otranto in Italy.

Meanwhile in northern France, Silversea will next year make its first visit to the historic city of Rouen, a stunning gateway to the region of Normandy. Located on the banks of the Seine, it is famous as the site where St Joan of Arc was burned at the stake, but is also a strikingly beautiful medieval city where narrow cobbled streets are lined with half-timbered houses.

The artist Claude Monet visited many times to paint Rouen’s towering cathedral, and Silversea guests will be able to follow in his footsteps in September, sailing from Copenhagen aboard *Silver Wind*.

Other new additions in Europe include Glengariff in Ireland, Borgholm and Sundsvall in Sweden, Bronnoysund in Norway, and the picture-perfect village of Tobermory in Scotland.

Silversea has also just released its 2019 program of ultra-luxury cruises, with dozens more new ports.

■ For more details see www.silversea.com



Opatija, Croatia



Cliffs of Moher, Ireland



Cinque Terre, Italy

OMAN IN THE WORLD SPOTLIGHT

OMAN'S status as a tourism destination to watch will get a boost next month when it hosts the World Tourism Conference.

The event will involve delegates from more than 150 countries from all around the world as well as from the Sultanate, focusing on 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism.

To cater to its rising tourist numbers,

Oman's Ministry of Tourism has committed to training 800 new guides by 2020.

An official told Times of Oman, "These tour guides will be trained to help promote human resources in the tourism sector and to strengthen the capacity of professional tour guides," adding that Oman needed "more professional, responsible and ethical professional

tourism guides" to meet strong growth.

The opening of the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre in 2016 has been another crucial step in growing the Sultanate's tourism industry. The centre will host the World Tourism Conference next month and has already staged 101 events in its first year, with more than 750,000 visitors making use of its 22,000m² of exhibition space.



Muttrah Corniche, Muscat, Oman ©Andrew Moore

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VSSL FLASK FLASHLIGHT

THIS multi-tool flask offers all the essential products you need for a camping adventure. There's a powerful LED torch, a compass, a bottle opener, two collapsible stainless steel shot cups and room for 300mL of your favourite tipple. Basically everything to make that hike through the wilderness that little bit more fun and ensure you don't get lost in the dark.

The flask itself has been infused/lined with glass to preserve the taste and quality of your beverage with no metallic taste, toxins or chemicals.

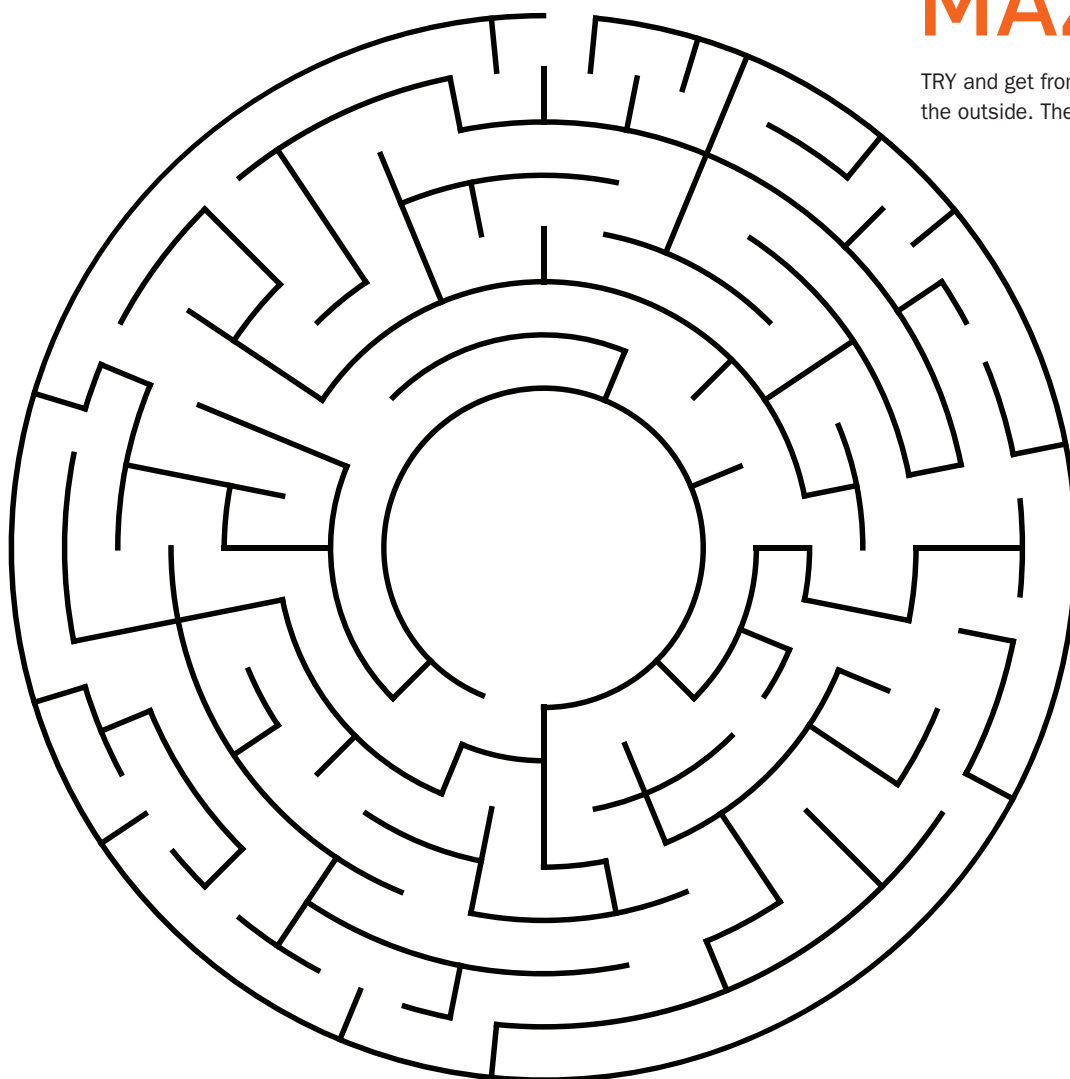
The VSSL Flask comes in two colours: green and silver, though it's not designed for concealment so we don't suggest purchasing it to smuggle some booze into a festival. It's simple design instead makes it perfectly portable.

The torch has a static mode and SOS mode and can illuminate a large area with it's flood beam light. It will also last for 40 hours of continuous operation (and batteries come included).

You can purchase it through Amazon from US\$72.50.

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