

travelBulletin

FEBRUARY 2017

JAPAN

SOLOMONS

MALAYSIA

ADVENTURE

LITERATURE

TRAVEL

A portrait of Geoff McGearry, an older man with glasses, smiling, wearing a blue sweater over a collared shirt. The background is a plain, light grey color.

Geoff
McGEARY
~ a fortunate life



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Geoff McGeary – a fortunate life

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From the publisher
Bruce Piper

WELCOME to the first *travelBulletin* for 2017. Every year in the Australian travel industry is exciting, and let's hope the forthcoming 12 months will continue to see the sector flourishing. I do believe that despite ongoing disruption to traditional business models, as long as the number of people travelling globally continues its relentless climb, the travel and tourism industry must consequentially prosper.

On that note, however, the most recent figures for short-term arrivals and departures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics may indicate some gathering storm clouds, at least for the outbound travel sector.

While inbound visitation to Australia continues to surge, much to the delight of the domestic industry and Tourism Australia, the November result for departures showed an unwelcome dip, leading to a downturn in the ongoing trend estimate (pictured). The seasonally adjusted figures typically bounce around from month to month, but the trend estimate gives a more accurate long-term picture – and if the December/January period doesn't show its usual strength and reverse the trend, the figures may indicate a hiccup for the Australian travel sector.



However there are many positive indicators for a strong 2017 for the industry – not least of which is the unprecedentedly low cost of airfares. Intense competition between airlines means economy class flights to Europe and North America are incredibly cheap and must surely stimulate demand, while a number of canny operators are making the most of the situation by offering fly free deals. Several companies have made announcements in recent weeks about increasing numbers of guaranteed departures as travellers lock in their itineraries, and the cheap fares are also likely to stimulate last minute bookings. Let's hope the industry can make the most of the situation and that in 12 months' time we can look back on another great year.

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Ian McMahon's perspective

KEEPING US IN THE LOOP

JOHN Borghetti was scarcely six weeks into his job as managing director of Virgin Blue when the airline's reservations system suffered a catastrophic crash. Arriving at Brisbane airport he was appalled by the lack of effort to inform passengers about what was going on. He addressed the crowd over the PA system.

"I didn't really know what to say but I told them the truth," he told Doug Nancarrow, author of his biography, *Game Changer*.

"I said, 'This is who I am. There's been a computer problem. No idea how long it's going to go for. No idea what's caused it. But we are working hard to try and fix it... As soon as I know anything I'll let you know ... I was quite cranky with a few people and I said when things go wrong you've got to tell people what's going on.'"

A few months later, in September 2010, the carrier's new Navitaire system collapsed resulting in around 130 cancelled flights and delaying more than 60,000 passengers. Again, Borghetti was disappointed with the way it was handled by Virgin management, albeit he acknowledged "a vast improvement".

"Things go wrong in airlines all the time and it's a question of how you react... It's all about providing information to the people who are affected," he told Nancarrow.

By August 2013 Borghetti had put his stamp on the airline. Now known as the Virgin Australia Group, it included the recently acquired Tigerair. And when the airline was that month hit by a global Sabre reservations breakdown, Borghetti was pleased that "communications between the airline and affected customers was good," *Game Changer* reported.

So what are we to make of the fiasco over the suspension of Tigerair's Bali services by the Indonesian authorities?

At the time of writing, the situation appeared to be resolved, but reported comments by passengers castigated the carrier for communication failures. The airline was asking passengers to refer to its website rather than phone for information because, apparently, its call centre could not cope.

Above all, the airline refused to say why the Indonesian Government had suspended the flights. But as all other airlines were flying as usual, it seemed unlikely that this was a capricious decision by the Indonesians. One informed guess was that Tigerair may have sold one way fares in breach of the conditions of the charter licence under which it flies to Bali.

But why should we be guessing? In the words of John Borghetti: "When things go wrong you've got to tell people what's going on."

CLIA shuffles the deck

NEWLY appointed Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) Australasia managing director Joel Katz has wasted no time in putting his stamp on the organisation, last month announcing a new structure which has resulted in the departure of long-time CLIA commercial director Brett Jardine. Jardine, who has been part of the organisation since 2007 and guided it through its metamorphosis from the former International Cruise Council into its current form, leaves at the end of February, with chairman Steve Odell saying Jardine had "played an important role in the organisation's transition during a decade of extraordinary growth for the Australian cruise industry".

He said with the expansion of CLIA over recent years Jardine's responsibilities would be spread across several roles, including the appointment of Vera Huntink as Marketing Manager and a new Advocacy Director in the form of Dimity McCredie who joins CLIA from her former role as general counsel with Carnival Australia. CLIA head of training & development, Peter Kollar, will take on additional global responsibilities and become CLIA Head of Training & Development – International. Another new role has also been established to focus on membership engagement, events and CLIA's Executive Partner program.

HLO says goodbye to GSAs

HELLOWORLD confirmed long-time industry speculation just before Christmas when it announced an agreement to sell its airline representation businesses, World Aviation Systems and Global Aviation Services, after more than 40 years as a General Sales

BUSINESS MONITOR

OUTBOUND MARKET

Top 10 destinations, November 2016

Destination	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Oct 16/ Nov 16	Trend Nov 15/ Nov 16
	000	000	000	%	%
New Zealand	112.0	109.6	103.5	-0.2	+3.4
Indonesia	99.9	100.6	90.5	-1.4	+3.2
USA	92.5	93.3	77.8	+1.2	+7.6
India	26.9	25.6	41.4	+0.1	+8.3
Thailand	41.9	42.4	40.4	-1.5	-7.3
China	38.5	38.3	35.7	+1.0	+6.8
Singapore	31.9	31.4	33.8	-0.2	+4.2
UK	47.1	47.2	28.0	-0.3	-9.9
Fiji	30.0	29.7	27.9	+1.1	+0.3
Japan	32.1	32.7	27.3	+1.8	+12.3
All outbound	826.0	813.2	734.5	-0.3	+2.4

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

INBOUND MARKET

Top 10 sources, November 2016

Source	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Oct 16/ Nov 16	Trend Nov 15/ Nov 16
	000	000	000	%	%
New Zealand	113.3	111.2	109.2	-0.2	+3.0
China	105.3	106.4	96.8	+1.1	+8.5
USA	62.5	61.6	67.9	+0.3	+15.3
UK	58.8	57.9	66.9	-0.4	+0.6
Singapore	36.6	36.1	41.9	+0.0	+6.5
Japan	35.3	35.7	38.5	+1.3	+16.3
Malaysia	35.0	33.4	36.3	+0.3	+22.9
South Korea	25.5	25.8	26.5	+1.5	+20.1
India	23.3	23.4	23.6	+1.0	+20.8
Germany	17.7	17.6	18.9	+1.4	+9.2
All inbound	708.9	704.9	720.5	+0.4	+9.9

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

MAIN DOMESTIC ROUTES

Top 10 domestic city pairs at November 2016

City pair	Passengers YE Nov 15 (000)	Passengers YE Nov 16 (000)	% change
Melbourne-Sydney	8,568.9	8,906.4	+3.9
Brisbane-Sydney	4,456.2	4,652.9	+4.4
Brisbane-Melbourne	3,345.7	3,485.7	+4.2
Gold Coast-Sydney	2,612.2	2,703.5	+3.5
Adelaide-Melbourne	2,306.4	2,388.8	+3.6
Melbourne-Perth	2,137.5	2,070.6	-3.1
Gold Coast-Melbourne	1,803.0	1,957.8	+8.6
Adelaide-Sydney	1,826.5	1,873.7	+2.6
Perth-Sydney	1,762.7	1,754.4	-0.5
Hobart-Melbourne	1,483.1	1,546.4	+4.3

Source: BITRE

Agent (GSA). Once a flourishing part of the company's portfolio, the GSA operations had languished more recently as more airlines shifted to self-handling or to other organisations such as the Walshe Group. The businesses had also suffered from several leadership changes in the last year, including the abrupt departure of former GM James Vaile. Helloworld CEO Andrew Burnes said the decision to sell was "in accordance with strategy going forward to focus on the core businesses of Helloworld Limited".

The people behind the purchaser – a newly formed company called World Aviation Holdings Pty Ltd – turn out to be none other than Spiros and Irene Alysandratos, the owners of Consolidated Travel and a range of other travel industry interests, including a 20% stake in Helloworld Limited itself. It's expected the airlines under the WAS/GAS umbrella will become part of Consolidated's Airline Marketing Australia division which currently represents Aeroflot, Air Astana, Air Madagascar, Air Mauritius, Avianca, Bangkok Airways, CSA Czech Airlines, Finnair and SriLankan Airlines. The WAS/GAS portfolio includes Kenya Airways, Egyptair, TAP Portugal, Virgin Atlantic, Air Botswana, Royal Jordanian, Alaska Airlines, Aer Lingus, Ethiopian Airlines, Sichuan Airlines, MIAT Mongolian Airlines and Hong Kong Airlines.

Cover-More sale under way

COVER-MORE Travel Insurance directors have unanimously recommended a takeover offer from Zurich Insurance Company, which values the business at \$741 million. Cover-More shareholders will receive \$1.95 in cash per share, a premium of almost 50% on the trading price in the days before the deal was announced in December. If the scheme is

OVATION SAILS INTO SYDNEY



THE largest cruise ship to sail Australian waters and the fourth largest in the world, *Ovation of the Seas*, cruised into Sydney Harbour in December.

The Royal Caribbean International supercruiser is 348m long, 18 decks high, weighs 168,666 tonnes and boasts capacity for 5,000 guests and 1,500 crew. The long-anticipated arrival was celebrated with gala industry event aboard the vessel.

Pictured at the event are Gavin Smith, Royal Caribbean senior vice president international and Adam Armstrong, managing director ANZ, Royal Caribbean Cruises.

implemented it will end Cover-More's time as a publicly listed entity, just over three years since the business was floated at \$2 per share. Key clients of the business include Flight Centre, although since it floated Cover-More has worked hard to diversify its operations including a significant international expansion.

Cover-More chairman Louis Carroll said the Zurich offer was an attractive outcome for shareholders, reflecting the "strategic value of Cover-More's business including its strong market position, global distribution footprint and its ability to deliver growth into the future". He confirmed that Zurich proposes to operate Cover-More as a separate business and retain the existing management team. The deal is subject to a range of conditions including shareholder and court approval, with

further details expected to be forthcoming this month in the lead-up to a meeting to vote on the proposal, to be held in later March or early April 2017.

CTM expands in Australia, UK

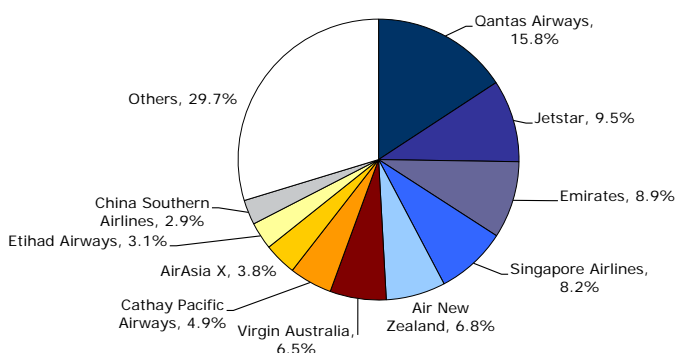
CORPORATE Travel Management (CTM) has continued its relentless growth curve, announcing a \$71 million capital raising in December to fund the acquisition of Tasmania's Andrew Jones Travel and UK-based Redfern Travel, a major TMC based in Bradford in northern England. The majority of the funds will go to the purchase of Redfern Travel, with this deal

Continues over page

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNATIONAL AIR MARKET SHARE

International passengers by major airline – year ended October 2016



Source: BITRE

DOMESTIC AIR MARKET – November 2016

	Nov 15	Nov 16	Growth (%)	Yr to Nov 15	Yr to Nov 16	Growth (%)
Total pax carried	4.95m	5.05m	+2.1	57.38m	58.84m	+2.5
Revenue pax kms (RPK)	5.75bn	5.84bn	+1.5	67.69bn	69.23bn	+2.3
Avail seat kms (ASK)	7.26bn	7.36bn	+1.3	88.54bn	89.05bn	+0.6
Load factor (%)	79.1	79.3	+0.2*	76.5	77.7	+1.3*
Aircraft trips (000)	52.9	53.4	+0.9	634.2	638.5	+0.7

Source: BITRE * Percentage points difference

DOMESTIC ON TIME PERFORMANCE – Nov 2016

	Arrivals on Time		Departures on Time		Cancellations	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Jetstar	4,828	71.7	4,679	69.5	182	2.6
Qantas	7,245	80.9	7,532	84.1	102	1.1
QantasLink	8,498	82.7	8,564	83.3	278	2.6
REX	5,513	84.4	5,657	86.6	37	0.6
Virgin Australia	10,037	83.4	10,362	86.1	219	1.8
All Airlines	38,242	80.8	38,938	82.3	856	1.8

Source: BITRE

Continues from previous page

worth £40 million – about 80% in cash and the remainder in CTM shares. The addition of Redfern to the company's UK/Europe operations will make it a top-seven TMC in the UK, with annualised TTV of about £550 million, and give Corporate Travel Management strong exposure to UK government sector business.

In contrast, the Tasmanian acquisition is much smaller for CTM, while giving the company access to key clients including Tasmanian government departments and some of Australia's largest sporting bodies. Andrew Jones will receive \$5.265 million for his business, including \$1 million in shares.

The deal will have a significant impact on the Magellan Travel Group, which was co-founded by Andrew Jones in 2010. The ASX release about the acquisition confirms that Andrew Jones Travel contributed \$43 million in TTV to the group in 2015/16 – about 5% of Magellan's overall revenues. While Andrew Jones Travel will no longer be part of Magellan after the deal settles on 1st February 2017, Jones himself will remain as chairman. He downplayed the effect on the agency group, saying he was "looking forward to being more able to focus on Magellan's growth and development going forward".

Tiger's Bali stoush

TIGERAIR Australia will be working to rebuild its relationship with Indonesia after last month's public stoush with regulators and ensuing ban on its Bali flights.

A disagreement over the conditions of its operating licence led to the abrupt cancellation of Tigerair's Denpasar flights from Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, throwing

the peak summer holiday plans of thousands of passengers into chaos.

A brief operating window was granted by Indonesian authorities to bring passengers home, after which all services were cancelled.

Tigerair Australia insisted it had been hit with new conditions on its operating agreement, though the Indonesian Director General of Civil Aviation said the low-cost carrier had breached existing requirements by selling one-way fares from Indonesia online.

The dispute appeared to have been resolved at the time *travelBulletin* went to press and flights were set to resume on 03 February, though no word had been given on the terms and duration of the new agreement.

Helloworld's creative counting

HELLOWORLD last month excitedly confirmed significant growth in its network over the last few months, with an ASX announcement touting a total of 2,049 members across its branded, corporate, associate and affiliate models. That was a hefty increase of 383 year-on-year – up an impressive 19%.

Interestingly, for the first time Helloworld separated out agents operating under the 'travel broker' model which now numbers 439 across its MTA and NZ-based Travel Brokers brands. "It's very pleasing to see our network growing on both sides of the Tasman... this is recognition of the strong value proposition Helloworld is providing our franchisees and network members across all parts of our retail leisure and corporate offerings," enthused CEO Andrew Burnes.

However, a quick analysis of the figures reveals that the actual growth is unlikely to be as significant as is being claimed, In particular, the MTA group, which is now 50% owned by Helloworld, constitutes

approximately 350 agents. Prior to the acquisition, MTA was already a Helloworld associate member – meaning 350 of the "new" members now being separately accounted for were part of the network anyway. Nevertheless Helloworld has apparently seen a strong renewal rate among its corporate membership, with Reho Travel, Goldman Travel Group, Orba Travel Brokers, Bayview Travel, Complete Business Travel, Sanford International Travel, Travel & Sports Australia and Eden Travel all re-signing.

Virgin Australia transPacific partnership

VIRGIN Australia and Air Canada plan to enter into a strategic cooperation agreement on flights between Australia and Canada, having signed a new memorandum of understanding (MoU). Phase one of the partnership, to be adopted early this year, will enable Virgin Australia passengers to book flights with the Canadian carrier on sectors from Los Angeles to Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto. The MoU will enable Air Canada pax flying to/from Sydney or Brisbane to connect on VA metal to Adelaide, Canberra, Cairns, Melbourne, Perth and Auckland, as well as from Sydney to Brisbane, Sydney to the Gold Coast and Brisbane-Wellington.

Later stages of the arrangement will see Virgin's code placed on Air Canada flights from Vancouver to Sydney and Brisbane. The pact will also extend to a reciprocal frequent flyer redemption scheme. Air Canada's Director Asia Pacific Lee Poh Kait (PK) told *travelBulletin* in October that "Australia is one area where we feel there could be a more strategic and sustainable relationship, and that is something we hope to hear some good news soon.

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNET AGENCY MARKET SHARES

Dec 2016, compared with Nov 2016

Rank Position	Visits Share	Relative Diff	Rank
Websites	Dec 16	Dec to Nov	Nov 16
Webjet Australia	16.39	-0.57	1
Expedia Australia	11.16	+1.05	2
Skyscanner Australia	8.82	-0.07	3
Wotif.com	8.42	+0.22	4
Flight Centre	6.77	-0.01	5
Velocity Frequent Flyer	3.73	-0.36	6
Lastminute.com.au	2.90	+0.21	8
Luxury Escapes	2.57	-0.26	7
Cheap Flights Aus & NZ	2.20	+0.07	9
I Want That Flight!	1.23	-0.23	10

Source: Hitwise, a division of Connexity

INTERNATIONAL AIR ROUTES

Top 10 city pairs (at October 2016)

City pair	Passengers	Passengers	% of	% change
	YE Oct 15	YE Oct 16	total	15/16
Auckland-Sydney	1,528,343	1,605,277	4.3	+5.0
Singapore-Sydney	1,445,596	1,454,771	3.9	+0.6
Singapore-Melbourne	1,185,371	1,350,135	3.6	+13.9
Auckland-Melbourne	1,136,113	1,176,757	3.2	+3.6
Singapore-Perth	1,039,251	1,123,503	3.0	+8.1
Hong Kong-Sydney	955,309	1,079,032	2.9	+13.0
Auckland-Brisbane	961,545	960,527	2.6	-0.1
Los Angeles-Sydney	906,833	912,719	2.5	+0.6
Denpasar-Perth	886,892	879,598	2.4	-0.8
Kuala Lumpur-Melbourne	837,324	821,507	2.2	-1.9
Top 10 city pairs	10,882,577	11,363,826	30.6	+4.4
Other city pairs	23,560,933	25,821,117	69.4	+9.6
ALL CITY PAIRS	34,443,510	37,184,943	100.0	+8.0

Source: BITRE

SHARE PRICES

at 18 January 2017

Flight Centre (FLT)	\$31.53
Helloworld (HLO)	\$3.70
Webjet (WEB)	\$10.41
Qantas (QAN)	\$3.425
Virgin Australia (VAH)	\$0.222
Ardent Leisure (AAD)	\$2.18
Air New Zealand (AIZ)	\$2.14
Auckland International Airport (AIA)	\$6.44
Sydney Airport (SYD)	\$5.94
Corporate Travel Management (CTD)	\$17.48
Cover-More Insurance (CVO)	\$1.925
Regional Express (REX)	\$0.80
Sealink (SLK)	\$4.60
Mantra Group Limited (MTR)	\$2.87

SOFITEL CELEBRATES THE WENTWORTH'S 50TH



IN AN industry known for high turnover, Sofitel Sydney Wentworth has several staff who are as much an institution as the hotel itself. As it celebrated its 50th anniversary in December, the Wentworth turned the spotlight on long-standing members of its team, many of whom have witnessed decades of Sydney history at the property – from Federal election victory speeches to visits by Hollywood stars like Marlon Brando and Audrey Hepburn. The hotel's general manager Craig Reaume paid tribute to staff including Claude Stein and Shirley Robins, **pictured**, both with many decades' service to their names.

"A significant part of our history is our people, who make this more than bricks and mortar," Reaume said.

The arrangement with Virgin Australia would enable Air Canada to be more competitive in this market against Qantas."

PK suggested the MoU may also span a joint venture involving a sharing of costs and potentially revenue sharing, down the track.

Travel Daily HEADLINES

- 01 Dec** Departure cards demise
- 01 Dec** VA rejigs insurance option
- 02 Dec** Hyatt ups Aus presence
- 02 Dec** McLachlan expands to US
- 05 Dec** Aus-China expand air ties
- 05 Dec** TTC nabs Globus executive
- 06 Dec** CHOICE calls out airlines
- 07 Dec** North Asia drives growth
- 07 Dec** Qantas Routehappy pact
- 08 Dec** Accor takes Banyan stake
- 08 Dec** HLO sells air rep business
- 08 Dec** Govt seeks accom tender
- 09 Dec** EK premium economy coming
- 11 Dec** QF confirms PER-London
- 12 Dec** Badgerys Creek go ahead
- 13 Dec** CCS tick for SQ/LH tie-up
- 14 Dec** CTM grows in UK, Australia
- 15 Dec** Virgin Aus/Air Canada c's
- 15 Dec** ACCC defends FLT action
- 16 Dec** Melb on Ovation's radar
- 16 Dec** QF adds Prem Lounge Entry
- 19 Dec** Etihad upping Serbia links
- 19 Dec** VARA/QQ FIFO deal nixed
- 20 Dec** AAoA insists on fair play
- 20 Dec** Uniworld 'U' youth brand
- 21 Dec** *thl* acquires El Monte RV
- 21 Dec** Fiji Airways announces ADL flights
- 22 Dec** HWFB sures up corp ranks
- 22 Dec** Aus tourism's \$53b boom
- 23 Dec** Tourism NT's new leaders
- 03 Jan** Queen's Wharf handover
- 04 Jan** Automated border plans
- 04 Jan** Norfolk Island 'disaster'
- 05 Jan** Sunshine Coast int'l push
- 06 Jan** Carnival tech breakthrough
- 09 Jan** Seabourn Australia focus
- 10 Jan** Crown Resorts exec rejig
- 11 Jan** Aurora CEO takes helm
- 12 Jan** Tiger blocked from Bali
- 12 Jan** NCLH bolsters presence
- 13 Jan** Tigerair flight reprieve
- 16 Jan** Outbound figures decline
- 17 Jan** Jetstar to Johannesburg?
- 17 Jan** CLIA overhauls exec roles

AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS

International passenger through Australia's major international airports – October 2016

Airport	Passengers YE Oct 15	Passengers YE Oct 16	% of total	% change 16/15
Sydney	13,740,476	14,953,401	40.2	+8.8
Melbourne	8,861,408	9,520,730	25.6	+9.7
Brisbane	5,202,701	5,408,844	14.5	+4.0
Perth	4,182,456	4,336,562	11.7	+3.7
Gold Coast	921,640	1,081,185	2.9	+17.3
Adelaide	888,208	900,657	2.4	+1.4
Cairns	523,429	629,037	1.7	+20.2
Darwin	268,552	267,708	0.7	-0.3
Townsville ^A	6,344	39,139	0.1	516.9
Sunshine Coast [*]	12,261	18,843	0.1	+53.7
Norfolk Island	11,677	10,324	0.0	-11.6
Canberra [#]	n/a	10,200	0.0	n/a
Port Hedland~	4,358	8,313	0.0	90.8
All Airports	34,443,510	37,184,943	100.0	+8.0

^AScheduled services recommenced September 2015 ^{*}Seasonal services only
[#]Scheduled services recommenced September 2016 [~]Scheduled services recommenced April 2015

ATAS ACCREDITED LOCATIONS

at 24 November 2016

New South Wales	989
Victoria	704
Queensland	592
Western Australia	293
South Australia	228
Australian Capital Territory	49
Tasmania	41
Northern Territory	22
TOTAL	2,932

Got something to say?

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

haveyoursay@travelbulletin.com.au



Steve Jones' Say

THE COST OF SERVICE

ONE of the industry debates that crops up from time to time is whether travel agents should charge fees for their services.

It's been a talking point ever since commission cuts began chipping away at travel agents' income, so it's hardly a new conversation. But it remains relevant, and was recently raised again in the digital pages of the trade press.

Some agents, particularly those operating at the luxury or bespoke end of town, have been charging fees for a while now.

Indeed, Virtuoso trains members to introduce and explain the concept of service fees to clients, having been astute enough to realise the service levels and expertise their agents provide are eminently sellable.

But could agents across the board realistically charge fees? I don't think so, not in a transparent way anyway. Anyone can hide fees in a final cost of course - and maybe that's what some agents do - but it's hardly ethical.

Charging a transparent fee can only work if a travel agent adds something truly tangible to the transaction, which means more than processing an order. It means detailed, professional planning, knowing your customer, knowing your product and destinations on more than a superficial level, and demonstrating the ability to create the X factor.

Simply recommending a hotel in Bali based on a famil you went on doesn't cut it as one-to-one service deserving of a fee,

not in my book.

One school of thought reasons that travel agents are no different from lawyers in that both supply professional services. The argument, therefore, is that both should command a fee for services rendered.

The comparison is wishful thinking. That's not meant to belittle the role of agents. Some, clearly, are worth their weight in gold.

But the public simply do not view lawyers

‘Simply recommending a hotel in Bali based on a famil you went on doesn't cut it as one-to-one service deserving of a fee, not in my book’

and travel agents in the same light, and to argue differently is frankly absurd. The overwhelming majority of us would have no hope of navigating our way through the legal system and its unfathomable and intimidating layers of complexity. We don't even try and expect to pay experts to help us.

We approach travel with a completely different mindset. We can and do book travel ourselves, and, in the main, enjoy researching online. Paying for a lawyer is unavoidable, paying for a travel agent is not. That is the thought process of many people.

Linked to this is the fact that talking to a travel agent has traditionally cost us nothing. I attended a conference recently where the CEO of a behavioural advertising agency - which uses science economics to change consumer behaviour - explained that the "perceived difference" between free and five cents is far greater than the difference between five cents and 50 cents. In other words, asking people to pay for something they have always had for free is far harder than increasing an existing price.

Of course service fees are partly designed to protect against consumers who adopt the unpalatable tactic of picking the brains of a consultant with the intention of using that knowledge to book online. Asking for an upfront fee may deter such tyre-kickers.

There is merit in that, yet the risk is obvious. A customer with a genuine interest in booking a trip may be deterred from forking out \$250 for advice they may or may not take, even if it's in the form of a deposit. The result? The loss of a potential booking.

And agents are far from the only ones to be faced with this problem. Virtually every retail sector or service which offers advice is susceptible.

I spent 40 minutes talking to an expert on fridges last week. I am genuinely in the market for a fridge - ours is far too small - but would I have paid \$50 for his advice? Very doubtful. I would have jumped online and done my own research.

Two new Club Med snow resorts

CLUB Med is expanding its winter holiday offerings with the addition of two new "premium snow resorts" in Japan and the French Alps. Both set to open in December this year, the additions are Club Med Tomamu in the Hokkaido region of Japan, and Club Med Samöens in the heart of the Grand Massif ski domain in France.

Both new resorts are expected to be popular with Club Med's Australian

clientele, with Club Med Tomamu offering 341 rooms including triples and suites alongside 21km of world-class powder, ice slides, skating and local open-air onsens. Club Med Samöens features stunning views, all-day dining, an extensive Kids Club and 420 rooms with a chalet-style atmosphere.

Bookings are now open for both new Club Med ski resorts, with early bird savings of up to 30% on offer.



Club Med Samöens

©Tourism Australia

FIELD OF LIGHT EXTENDED

THANKS to its overwhelming success, Bruce Munro's Field of Light installation at Uluru is being extended through until 31 March 2018.

News of the artwork's one year extension was broken in December by Voyages executive general manager of sales, marketing and distribution Ray Stone at special event for media and industry partners at QT Sydney.

"I am delighted to announce the extension as an extraordinary opportunity for guests to enjoy not only the spiritual nature of the destination, but experience it in a

unique and mesmerising way," Stone said.

He said since that since exhibition's launch at the beginning of April 2016, over 100,000 people had come to experience it. The immersive installation is made up of more than 50,000 solar powered lights stretching over an area the size of four football fields in front of Uluru. The spectacle comes to life each night as the outback sun goes down and flickers out with the sunrise.

"The response has been absolutely phenomenal," Stone said.

During his speech, Stone gave a special

thanks to Tourism Australia for its ongoing support, acknowledging the organisation as a major factor in Field of Light's success.

Tourism Australia's managing director John O'Sullivan told *travelBulletin* that he loved Field of Light so much that "they should just make it permanent".

"Domestically and internationally tourism is all about experiences and this is what Field of Light has done, it's combined an icon in Uluru with an amazing experience," he said.

"People are talking about it worldwide," he went on to say.

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HISTORIC AIR SERVICES AGREEMENT PENNED

TRAVEL between Australia and mainland China is set to become both easier and more attractive this year, following the signing of a cooperation agreement between Tourism Australia, the China National Tourist Office (CNTO) and six Chinese airlines.

Top level executives from Air China, China Southern, China Eastern, Hainan Airlines, Sichuan Airlines and Xiamen Air put pen to paper in late December in Sydney, instigating joint promotional activities and special airfares in a bid to increase capacity between China and Australia.

The 'China-Australia Year of Tourism 2017' initiative capitalises on an agreement announced during the month by Federal Minister of Trade, Tourism and Investment Steven Ciobo, which sees a fresh bulk of air capacity between China and Australia expanded to permit uncapped passenger volumes on an unlimited number of flights to major cities in either country.

"Travel between Australia and China is booming," said China Eastern Airlines' general manager Kathy Zhang. "We have seen rapid growth in both Chinese visitors coming to Australia and Australians visiting China and it is one of the key drivers for China Eastern Airlines' international business".

Together, the six airlines operate 1,739 aircraft and have all been given the maximum 7 Star Safety Rating by aviation analysts, AirlineRatings.com.

Commenting on the historic agreement, CNTO director Luo Weijian called it "one of the most significant tourism exchange initiatives ever undertaken between China and another country".

"Designating 2017 as the China-Australia Year of Tourism recognises just how important tourism is, not just in terms of export income, but in cultural exchange between Australia and China".

A series of events to celebrate the China-Australia Year of Tourism has been organised, the first being a gala event held at Sydney's Opera House on 05 February.

The event will be attended by 2,000 tourism stakeholders from both China and Australia with the Chinese Airlines expected to make further announcements about new routes and additional China-Australia capacity.



中 澳 旅 游 年

CHINA-AUSTRALIA YEAR OF TOURISM 2017



AFTA VIEW

Jayson Westbury, chief executive AFTA

A NEW INITIATIVE FOR AFTA

NEWS of the UK travel company All Leisure Group's (ALG) collapse has not kicked off 2017 in the way we would have all liked it. While the circumstances around the true reasons for why this company collapsed may not be known for some time, the fall out and confusion about what happens when an overseas company in which Australian travel agents and Australian consumers have dealings with has posed some serious questions.

ALG was a participant in the ABTA bonding scheme which in part, a little like the TCF did should provide compensation to impacted consumers. Seems simple. However, things may not be as clear for Australian travel agents and consumers.

I think the big problem with these types of schemes is that when things do go wrong, the situation can get murky particularly for those who are not residents of the country in which the scheme operates.

At the time of writing this for *travelBulletin* the full details and outcome of how ABTA would approach the fall out in Australia was not known.

Of a bigger concern – and nothing new with this one – is the impact on the travel agents from this collapse as it relates to Credit Card Chargeback. As everyone in the travel industry is well aware, consumers have a right to place a chargeback on a travel agent when a supplier collapses. This has been the one aspect to the reform agenda that we have been working on that has not yet been resolved.

Fortunately, perhaps not quickly enough, AFTA is working on a solution for travel agents to this problem. As a result of the new Credit Card Surcharging laws passed last year there is an ability for a travel agent (the merchant) to include the cost of protection against chargebacks caused by a supplier.

At this stage in the process I am unable to be specific, but I assure all travel agents we will have a real solution that will be able to be covered by the credit card surcharge rates.

I think it is important at this time to mention this, even though I have not been able to provide details. Rest assured AFTA is well aware of this problem and working on a solution, but like all these reforms they take time to get in place, approved and operational.

In light of the ALG outcome, it would appear that 2017 is the year for this long standing problem for travel agents to be finally resolved.

Of course this will be an AFTA initiative which will mean that the travel agent (merchant) will need to be ATAS accredited and while we have an excellent penetration of travel agents in Australia who have voluntarily taken up ATAS accreditation there are still more that need to consider the importance of this and perhaps this new initiative will be the thing that gets them to join.

So welcome to 2017, a year that should be a good one for the outbound travel industry and hopefully successful for all.

‘As everyone in the travel industry is well aware, consumers have a right to place a chargeback on a travel agent when a supplier collapses’



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HIGH COURT LOSS PUTS PARTNERS IN COMPETITION

THE distinction between a retail partner and a competitor is under closer reflection this year after Flight Centre's High Court loss to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) late in December.

The court's ruling overturns a previous decision by the Federal Court in 2015 in which Flight Centre successfully appealed against an initial ruling in the ACCC's favour.

At issue was the consumer watchdog's allegation that Flight Centre had breached the Trade Practices Act by attempting to influence airlines not to offer lower fares directly to consumers, and whether the agency group and the airlines were legally considered competitors.

"The ACCC has always maintained that they are in competition with one another to sell flights to consumers," said ACCC Chairman Rod Sims.

The High Court agreed, providing a landmark ruling that may have implications for other situations where competing offers are made to consumers by both agents and their principals.

Flight Centre managing director Graham Turner said the company respected the court's decision and was pleased the saga had been resolved, though he was disappointed the matter had progressed as

far as it did.

"Flight Centre has sought to deliver cheaper airfares to the travelling public for more than 30 years, and is not in the business of attempting to make airfares more expensive," Turner said.

"As an agent that provides considerable advice and help to the travelling public and extensive marketing for airlines, FLT asks for appropriate commissions from suppliers and also reasonable access to all deals that they release to the market...this is a logical and natural business request," he said.

Turner pointed to the ACCC's pursuit of the case "without discussion or negotiation" and said it was seemingly at odds with the approach it took with Expedia and Booking.com in which the websites were allowed to continue preventing hotels from offering cheaper rates direct to the public.

"We expect the OTA agreement may now have to be revisited in light of the decision," Turner said.

Days later the Accommodation Association of Australia (AAoA) went further, saying the case should be the basis for the ACCC to throw out the Booking.com and Expedia deal.

"If the High Court has the view that competition laws apply to relationships between operators and their agents in

the aviation industry, then the same must apply in the accommodation industry," the association's chief executive officer Richard Munro said.

"If action isn't taken to rein in the behaviour of online travel agencies, then ultimately consumers will end up paying more for accommodation," he said.



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“If the High Court has the view that competition laws apply to relationships between operators and their agents in the aviation industry, then the same must apply in the accommodation industry”



TOURISM'S SUPER-BOOM

THE tourism industry is zooming ahead, growing at a rate three times faster than the rest of the economy during 2015/16, the latest ABS Tourism Satellite Account reveals.

The industry directly contributed a massive \$52.9 billion to Gross Domestic Product within 12 months, a 7.4% increase on the prior period.

Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment Steven Ciobo said the sector has retained its

“super growth status.

“The Coalition is supporting the tourism industry with a record \$639 million investment in Tourism Australia for offshore marketing,” Ciobo said.

“We are also making substantial improvements to Australia’s visa system, including multiple entry visas and premium processing services.”

The recent National Visitor Survey found domestic tourism is at an all-time high, hitting a record spend of \$59.8 billion for the year ending September 2016.

Aussies took a total of 66.6 million trips in the last year for a holiday or to visit friends and relatives, equating to more than three trips per year per person.

Domestic travellers are also spending

more time away, with the average trip growing 5% over the last three years to 3.7 nights.

Meanwhile, Asian markets including Korea and Japan have joined China in driving an 11.5% growth in Australian inbound tourists, the latest International Visitor Survey revealed.

Arrivals for the year to 30 Sep topped 7.4 million, with overall expenditure increasing 11% to \$38.8 billion.

Visitor growth from China reached 1.1 million people, a 22% leap on the previous year, and spending by Chinese tourists exceeded \$9 billion.

China closed in on top-ranked New Zealand, up 3% to 1.2 million, while Korea surged 29% to 255,000 visitors and Japan jumped 22% to 365,000.



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Badgerys Creek Green Light

AFTER decades of controversy, Sydney’s second international airport at Badgerys Creek has finally been given the green light by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

The Western Sydney Airport, due to open by the mid-2020s, will be built on a 1,800 hectare site about 50 kilometres west of the CBD. Initial plans include a 3.7 kilometre east-west runway, long enough to operate Airbus A380s.

The airport will initially serve up to 5 million passengers a year, growing to 10 million by the mid-2030s, with a second

parallel runway planned for 2050.

The Prime Minister said the project would be a catalyst for investment and industry in Western Sydney, delivering 9,000 new jobs to the area by the early 2030s and 60,000 in the long term.

Qantas CEO Alan Joyce said Sydney needed the second airport at Badgerys Creek to overcome capacity constraints at the existing Kingsford Smith airport.

“Sydney is already full, Kingsford Smith is full, we have called for this capacity for some time,” Joyce said. “It will be great for Sydney, NSW and Australia.”

Since news of the approval, contention has risen over how Western Sydney

Airport should be funded. The private operator of Kingsford Smith, Sydney Airport Corporation, has first right of refusal on the option to build and operate the second airport, but the Federal Government has said it would need to fund the build itself in exchange for a long-term operating lease.

Sydney Airport Corporation said it had been negotiating with the government under the belief that it would pay for the preliminary works at the site or offer a long-term loan.

Disagreement has also emerged over the length of time Sydney Airport will be given to make a decision on the plan, with SAC believing it had nine months to respond and the government saying four.

QANTAS DREAMLINERS TO LA AND HEATHROW

QANTAS will be the first carrier to introduce regular commercial non-stop flights between Australia and Europe, revealing in December plans to launch new daily Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner services between Perth and London Heathrow starting March 2018.

"This is a game-changing route flown by a game-changing aircraft," Qantas Group CEO Alan Joyce said, adding the 14,498km service is "great news" for Western Australia as it will attract more jobs and tourism to the state.

"A direct flight makes travelling to Australia a much more attractive proposition to millions of people. We expect many travellers will start their time in Australia with a visit to Perth before going on to see other parts of the country," Joyce commented.

Joyce said Qantas was confident people from the East Coast and South Australia would support the option to fly domestically to Perth prior to boarding the 17 hour ultra-long haul journey to London.

The new flights will require Qantas' existing domestic terminals in Perth (T3/4) to be upgraded to accommodate international flights, and current overseas services from Perth to Singapore and Auckland will relocate to the same precinct to streamline the journey for connecting passengers.

The route only received the go ahead after Qantas struck a \$14 million arrangement with Perth Airport and the Western Australian Government. Other foreign hubs on QF's radar out of the WA capital using the Dreamliner include Paris, Rome and Frankfurt.

Seats on the London service go on sale in April.

But before the debut of the Perth-London service, Qantas will inaugurate flights using its new carbon-composite 787s to Los Angeles at the end of this year, ex Melbourne.

Commencing 15 December, the Boeing 787 will replace Qantas' ageing workhorse, the 747, operating on a six-weekly basis to LAX.

QF is configuring its 236-seat Dreamliner aircraft with a triple class cabin layout (Business, Premium Economy and Economy).



ACCI VIEW

Steve Whan, manager, Australian Chamber National - Tourism

A GREAT FUTURE AWAITS...

AT A time of sluggish growth across the Australian economy, tourism remains a hero sector, with its strong growth delivering jobs and export earnings.

Amid favourable terms of trade and continued promotion, the visitor economy grew 7.4 per cent in 2015-16, making a \$53 billion contribution to Australia's economy. And with the right policy settings there will be plenty of growth ahead.

Picture what the Australian tourism sector could look like in 2024-25. By then we can expect to welcome 12.3 million visitors

‘The visitor economy could be one of the biggest sources of Australian jobs in the next decade’

(up from 8.3 million this year, and more than double the 5.5 million who arrived in 2006-07). These inbound tourists could between them spend \$67.8 billion (in today's dollars), making tourism close to Australia's single biggest export earner. Factor in

domestic tourist spending, and the visitor economy could be one of the biggest sources of Australian jobs in the next decade.

This growth in visitors will also provide a major boost to government coffers, beyond the \$8 billion in tax already contributed by the sector. These inbound tourists will pay the ticket tax (as the recently increased Passenger Movement Charge ought to be known), as well as paying GST on their spending.

But there are some things that can get in the way of us achieving this growth. For some, like a rising Australian dollar making our country a more costly destination, there is little we can do. For others, we need policy-makers to take action soon.

That's why Australian Chamber – Tourism, the peak body for tourism businesses, urges the Federal Government to recognise the importance of tourism to Australia's economic and social wellbeing when it is preparing the Federal Budget to be delivered in May.

There are some practical and cost-effective policy measures we are asking the Government to put in place:

- An Industry Growth Centre dedicated to tourism. Growth Centres, which are government-backed organisations led by industry experts, are tasked with proposing reforms to red tape, improving engagement between research and industry, strengthening connections with international markets and enhancing management and workforce skills.
- A clear commitment to internationally competitive visa fees.
- A bigger investment in tourism product development and infrastructure, given the substantial increase in tax being contributed by the sector.
- Coordinated action to overcome the widening staff and skills shortage.

The Government is not shy about claiming justified credit for tourism's success. But it remains to be seen if the Government will accept the challenge of putting in place policies that boost our competitiveness and help the industry to resist a potential decline in the terms of trade.



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CRUISE COLLAPSE RAISES COVER QUESTIONS

THE collapse of Britain's All Leisure Group last month has again raised the complex issue of what recourse Australians have when offshore companies go bust.

As the operator of the Swan Hellenic and Voyages of Discovery cruise lines, All Leisure's failure resulted in the cancellation of dozens of departures and left about 13,000 travellers in limbo.

Around 400 people were caught out having already left home, leaving the UK's Civil Aviation Authority to coordinate and pay for their repatriation under the country's Air Travel Organiser's Licence (ATOL) scheme.

Thousands more have had their future plans dashed and will be left to seek refunds via the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA).

But for several hundred Australians caught in the collapse, the path to recompense is less clear.

The UK's protection schemes cover only British residents or those who booked via British travel agents, meaning many of the Australians affected simply join other creditors hoping to recover debts from the group.

Travel insurance is the frontline defence for Australians in the case of overseas failures, but, as local media reported when All Leisure failed, the provisions in different policies vary considerably and some travellers have already been told they won't be covered.

Aussietravelcover was among the first to clarify the situation,

issuing an alert to travel agents to confirm there were provisions under its policies to cover insolvencies. Allianz Global Assistance also said it was able to offer insolvency protection.

Cover-More said it had not received any enquiries or claims from the All Leisure collapse but would review any on a case by case basis.

SureSave confirmed it offered insolvency provisions, covering travellers who had to cancel or rearrange travel due to the collapse of operators including scheduled and publicly available cruise lines.

In some cases travel agencies provide their own protection, such as that offered by Mobile Travel Agents. Its Zero Flight Risk cover is free and protects against the insolvency of approved MTA suppliers.

The national sales director of SureSave, Talbot Henry, said not all travel insurance policies provided the same level of cover, and that it was important to purchase insurance at the time of booking.

"Travellers are increasingly seeking the advice of agents," Henry said. "In our annual independent research in 2016, the SureSave Travel Insurance Index, we discovered that 70% of Australian travellers view travel agents as a 'trusted source of travel safety advice', which was a 15% increase since 2012.

"We encourage agents to ensure that customers read the wording of their travel insurance policy and that they fully understand the level of cover this provides them."

‘Travel insurance is the frontline defence for Australians in the case of overseas failures but... the provisions in different policies vary considerably’

Queen's Wharf Brisbane underway

DESTINATION Brisbane Consortium (DBC) has taken possession of a prime parcel of land in the Queensland capital, destined to be transformed into the \$3 billion Queen's Wharf Brisbane integrated-resort. Located between the current Treasury Casino building and the top of Queen Street Mall – and from the Brisbane River's edge to George Street – the development will consist of over 1,000 additional new premium hotel rooms across five hotel brands, including the Ritz-Carlton and the debut Australian locations for Dorsett and Rosewood. Star Entertainment will also operate two properties within the precinct – a five- and six-star hotel, one of which to be under the Darling brand and another under a yet to be named, VIP moniker.

DBC, comprised of The Star Entertainment Group and China's Chow Tai Fook Enterprises and Far East Consortium, say the Queen's Wharf Brisbane "will revitalise the city's forgotten heritage buildings and deliver striking landmark architecture". Star Entertainment CEO

and managing director Matt Bekier said the handover of the site on 01 January marked a fresh beginning for Brisbane and an exciting future for the Queensland economy. "With an expected opening in

2022, this development will put Brisbane on the map as a tourism, leisure and entertainment destination, attracting an extra 1.39 million visitors to the city each year," Bekier said.





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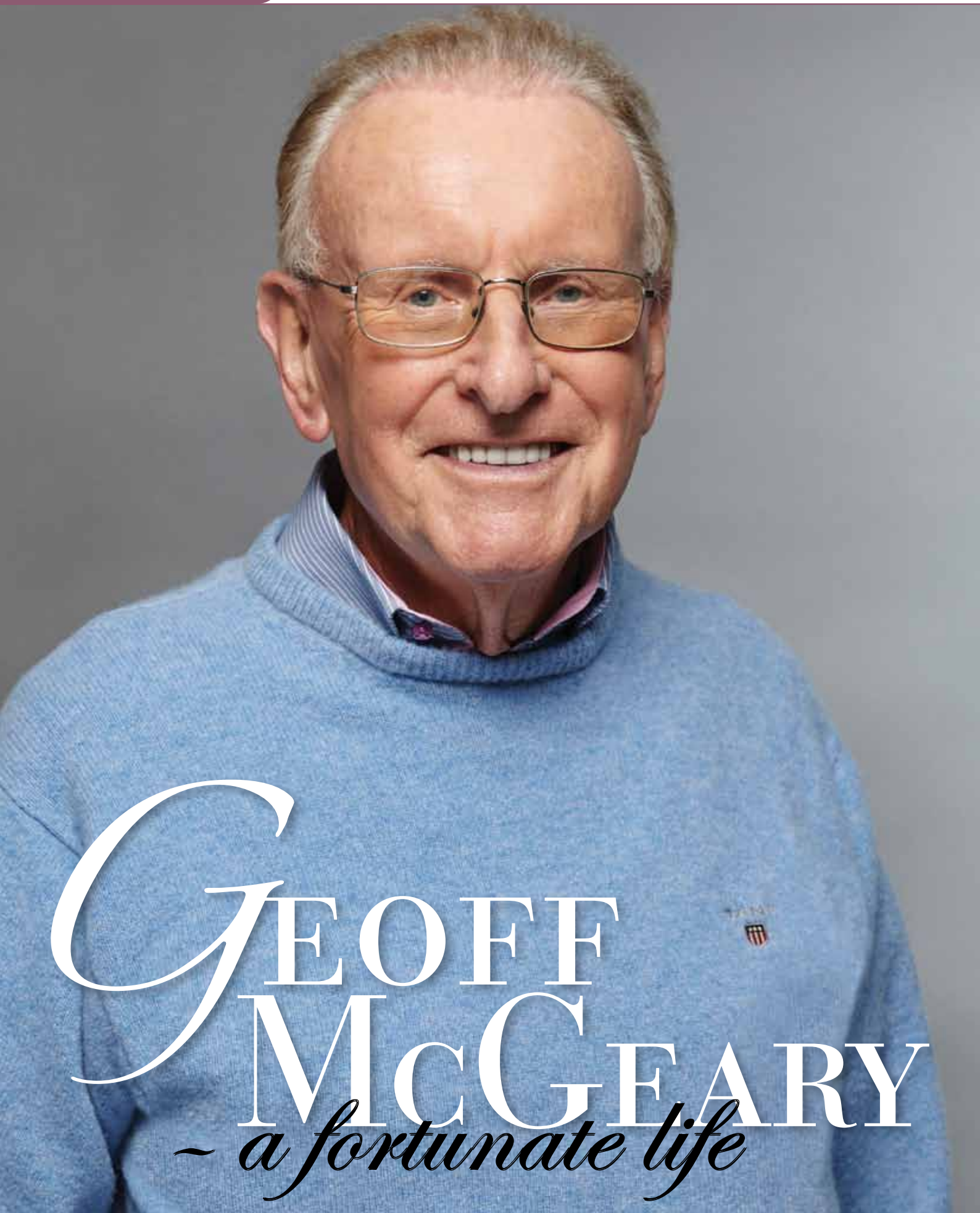
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Geoff
McGeary
- a fortunate life



Early Central Australia tour



Office 1960

‘That was a turning point in my life – I felt everything after that was a bonus. I started to use the term ‘a fortunate life’ – and I think I’ve had one’



Geoff on an early 60's Central Australia tour

APT is one of Australia's biggest travel businesses, and this year celebrates its 90th birthday. Bruce Piper sat down with company patriarch Geoff McGeary to discover some of the secrets of his success.

GEOFF McGeary, who took over day to day operations at McGeary Parlour Coaches, the forerunner to APT, in 1961 at the tender age of just 19, has built a small Melbourne-based bus company into a global tourism powerhouse – and credits an incident in the Australian outback as a key turning point in his career.

One of the many ventures he initiated was outback trips from Melbourne and Sydney to Alice Springs and Darwin – two buses in convoy, with McGeary himself driving one of them. “The roads were very rough – no bitumen, and we broke a lot of springs,” he said. On the day in question, McGeary was in the second vehicle and noticed the suspension on the other bus had collapsed. The buses stopped, and ever a practical bloke, Geoff grabbed a chainsaw from the camping equipment on board and took to a nearby tree limb, cutting it to size so it could sit on top of the axle of the defective vehicle and keep it going. “I jacked the body up, put the log in and used a tow chain to tie it in place,” McGeary said, with the buses then

limping on slowly to Alice Springs.

A short time later, however, he noticed the other bus had dropped again – clearly the chock of wood had been dislodged. “We stopped, I got underneath the wheel arch with a torch to see what was happening, when suddenly it let go and the bus collapsed on top of me. I was very lucky – my head slipped down the side of the tyre and I didn’t break any ribs – but I couldn’t get out. But we had about 80 passengers in the two buses, and they all got hold of the bus and lifted it off me”.

McGeary wasn’t in good shape and it was decided to take him in one of the buses to hospital in Alice Springs, several hours’ drive away.

“But a while later I started to come good, and so I told them to just turn around and go back, so we did,” he matter-of-factly concluded, adding that about six months later he needed a hernia operation which was probably related to the dramatic outback incident.

“That was the only result. In a way it was a turning point in my life – I felt everything after that was a bonus. I started to use the term ‘a fortunate life’ – and I think I’ve had one,” he said.

INNOVATION

While he attributes much of his success to this good fortune, there’s no doubt McGeary’s hands-on approach and willingness to innovate have also been key factors in the rise of APT. When he took over the business from his ailing father he had to get a special

dispensation to be able to drive buses at such a young age – and between doing morning and afternoon school runs he set up a board across the back row of seats where he could do the company paperwork. Constantly reinvesting the profits from the business into new equipment meant APT could look further afield – and in the swinging sixties he came up with the idea of taking people from straight-laced Melbourne to the flesh-pots of NSW to see the musical *Hair*.

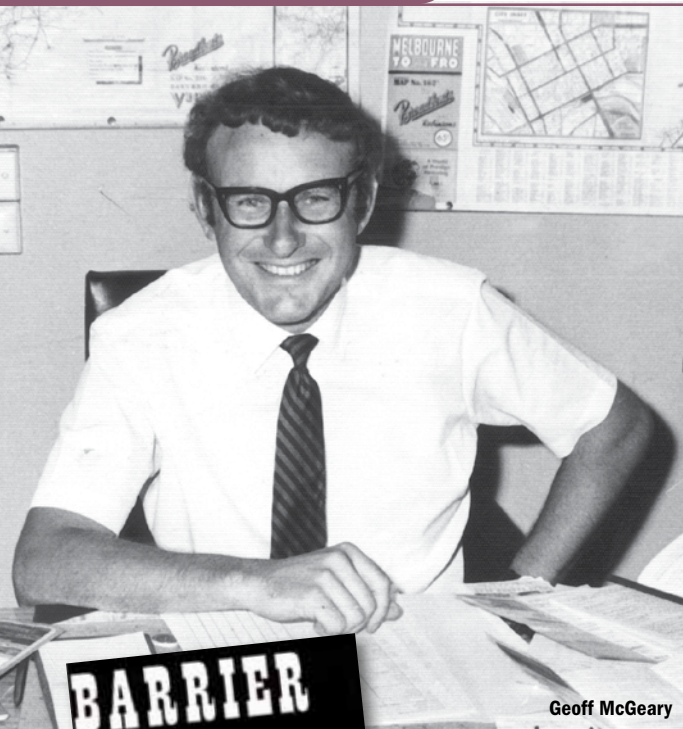
Again he drove the coach himself – and for the first time encountered one-way streets.

“I used to think the people in Sydney were so friendly because they were always waving at me,” he said – as he piloted an Australian Pacific Tours coach in the wrong direction through the Sydney CBD, much to the consternation of locals.

When *Hair* eventually made its way to Melbourne McGeary thought he would have to come up with something completely new – until he realised the Victorian version of the show had been modified to comply with southern sensibilities. McGeary changed the advertising for his Sydney coach trips to say ‘See the REAL *Hair* in Sydney’ and thus managed to extend the demand for his tours by another few months.

McGeary also came up with the concept of ‘Hot Snow Weekends’ where he took two coaches to the Victorian snowfields, offering the carrot of a free ski lesson for those who rented equipment through his company. Unfortunately he was unable to get access

Continues over page



Geoff McGeary



Outback Wilderness Adventures 1970's



to any ski instructors, so as well as running the trips and driving the bus McGeary ended up helping to teach his passengers at Mt Buller and Mt Buffalo how to snowplough too – despite never having experienced the snow himself. The other driver had skied before, and the pair got the passengers to all line up on the slopes and follow the leader, with McGeary bringing up the rear.

Nobody was watching me, fortunately, and after they had all had their quick lesson I took the skis off and walked back down the hill,” he said.

McGeary’s spirit of creative innovation extended to APT’s burgeoning Kimberley operations, meeting an unmet appetite from Australians wanting to explore their own country.

“We built accommodation in North-West Australia because there wasn’t anywhere to stay,” McGeary said. APT now boasts an

enviable portfolio of wilderness lodges and tented camps across the region, along with a major base in Broome and a fleet of about 25 4WD buses – plus a highly experienced crew. Having exclusive access to properties such as Mitchell Falls Wilderness Lodge, the Bungle Bungle Wilderness Lodge and Bell Gorge Wilderness Lodge has meant APT can provide unique itineraries and allow travellers to experience the true Australia. APT’s involvement in the Red Centre has also seen the company pioneer sustainable tourism and maintain enduring partnerships with Indigenous communities.

As the business continued to evolve, McGeary tapped into the incessant thirst from Australians to explore the world. He expanded the business internationally – initially in New Zealand and then further afield – as APT encouraged thousands of Australians, many of them retirees, to head overseas. APT continues to operate its ever-popular tours to Canada and Alaska along with touring operations in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. River cruising proved a highly popular option, and APT rode the wave, initially chartering vessels but eventually becoming an owner-operator, taking a major stake in AmaWaterways which has a fleet of river ships in Europe, Asia and Africa.

“In my lifetime in travel I’ve never come across anything as fantastic as these river ships,” McGeary said, likening the rise of the river cruising segment to the introduction of the Boeing 747 in irrevocably changing the way people travel.



Mitchell Falls Wilderness Lodge, Ungolan Pavillion, opened in 2015

Continues page 22



From humble beginnings to holidays fit for royalty

From our first suburban bus route to our famous all-inclusive luxury Europe River Cruises. APT is and always will be a true pioneer of life-enriching holiday experiences. Over the years, our continued spirit of innovation and love of travel has made us Australia's most awarded and respected cruise and tour operator.

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PARTNERSHIPS

Indeed partnerships have been a key business strategy for McGeary, with APT having significant shareholdings in river cruise, ocean cruise and rail operators across the globe. “I think you could describe me as ‘king of partnerships,’” he said, before downplaying the importance of such a title. Referring to APT’s involvement with AmaWaterways, McGeary said “we knew we could sell river cruises. But it’s a big move to build the ships and own them”. APT’s partnership strategy, in most cases tying up with like-minded family-based businesses, has extended to small ship ocean cruising via Noble Caledonia, specialist luxury operators Captain’s Choice and Botanica, and Russia’s Golden Eagle Luxury Trains. In the end, McGeary said, APT’s partnerships are like much of the tourism business – completely based on trust.

‘Customers trust us and our brands...You can’t kick the tyres, or take it for a test drive. You’re buying a dream.’

“Customers trust us and our brands,” he said. “When buying a holiday, there’s not much you can measure. You can’t kick the tyres, or take it for a test drive. You’re buying a dream. When you spend money on travel you can’t sell it later on and get something back – all you keep are memories, photos and maybe a souvenir teatowel. We’re selling intangibles – the customer has to trust us



The small ship the *Island Sky*, one of a fleet of three, operated by APT

and that extends to the whole experience,” McGeary said. “I also have to trust the people working with me – their ability, and have confidence in our suppliers who have to deliver. Reputation is very hard to build, and you can lose it very quickly,” he added.

THE FUTURE

Where to next for APT? The scale of the business means there’s plenty of interest from the investment community, with ongoing speculation about a sale or public float amid some heady nine-figure valuations.

Financial details for the travel and tourism powerhouse have never been made public, but the 2013 appointment of former Transonic Travel CEO Peter Lacaze as chairman of an overarching APT Group board fuelled the rumours, given his previous experience

in investment banking and public share offerings. However the company has long insisted the governance structure, which also sees Chris Hall overseeing the business as group CEO, simply aims to ensure it maintains its core ethos and family values.

There’s no doubt the future is bright, with APT tapping into the ever-travelling baby-boomer segment. As McGeary told me at the first Cruise360 conference in Sydney some years ago, “We’re all living longer... new stents in the heart, new hips, new knees – I reckon we’re getting these people for ten to 15 years longer than I got the retirees 50 years ago”.

The next big thing, he believes, is small ship expedition cruising, and APT is putting its money where his mouth is via its expanding partnership with Noble Caledonia which will grow to a third vessel this year, offering intimate itineraries to explore places like Antarctica, Japan, the Baltics, the North Sea and the Kimberley coast.

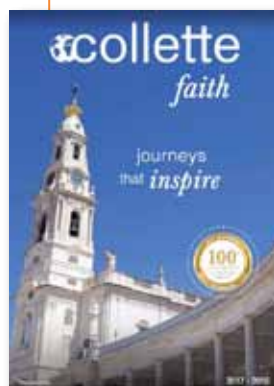
McGeary’s lifetime in the industry has been recognised with an Order of Australia medal awarded in 2014, and he was also named an Australian Tourism Legend at last year’s Australian Tourism Awards. APT continues to win award after award, including in recent years a pool room-full of AFTA National Travel Industry Award trophies for Best International Tour Operator, Best Domestic Tour Operator and Best River Cruise Operator. While McGeary’s son Rob McGeary and daughter Lou Tandy are also directors of the business, Geoff is quick to say he’s in no hurry to retire. “I continue to have a fortunate life, and I want to keep going as long as I am making a worthwhile contribution,” he concluded.



APT’s first river ship, the *AMAdagio*



HOT of the presses is AAT King's brand new 2017-18 short breaks brochure. New to the program is the four-day Uluru Family Shindig itinerary which includes opportunities to take part in an exclusive wildlife conservation project and a dot painting experience with a local Anangu artist. Another fresh offering is the five-day New Zealand Family Shindig trip which introduces families to the country's unique culture as they travel from Auckland to Rotorua.



COLLETTE has unveiled its new Faith brochure which details how to visit and explore some of the world iconic spiritual sites and destinations. Eight itineraries are departing in 2017 and 2018. The brochure provides ideal journeys for travellers wanting to learn about and the history, religion and culture of these symbolic places. Departures include Shrines of Italy, St Patrick's Ireland and a Pilgrimage to Fatima and Lourdes.



THIS 92-pager from Insider Journeys is jam-packed with a range of options to explore Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Highlights include trips to lesser-known cities such as Nha Trang, Ninh Binh, Mai Chau, Ha Giang, Battambang, Mondulkiri, Kratie, Bolaven Plateau, Champasak and Si Phan Don. The brochure also includes a selection of unique accommodation choices and a dedicated section covering luxury Mekong river cruising.



QANTAS Holidays' UK & Europe brochure is filled with accommodation and tours options. New for 2017 is a selection of stopover options including Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and USA. Poland also stars inside this year along with mini stay options in Russia. There are also walking and cycling tours in Europe and Self Drive tours in France, Italy and Spain.



THE latest DriveAway 2017 brochure outlines all the information you need to know before leasing a Peugeot on a European getaway such as delivery and return fees, locations, travel restrictions as well as accessories. There are 10 vehicles to choose from this year ranging from the Peugeot 208 to the Traveller, a popular passenger van.



ITINERARIES stretching into the Himalayas and premium cruising on the Ganges are key features of TravelMarvel's India and Sri Lanka 2018 program. Found within are three Great Rail Journeys itineraries, earlybird offers and river cruise options. Returning in 2018 is the company's popular 16-day Colours of India program which includes Delhi, Agra, Jaipur and a seven-night lower Ganges cruise from Kolkata to Farakka.



FEATURED inside South America Tourism Office's 2017/18 brochure are new independent and escorted small groups to Latin America including Rail Journeys of the Andes, featuring the first ever sleeper train in Latin America by Belmond. Flick through to find a series of luxury tours and a selection of special interest tours such as bird watching, weaving tours and wine tours in the Andean Region.



GREECE & Mediterranean Travel Centre has almost doubled the size of its 2017 brochure from previous year to 44 pages. Look inside for a wide of coach tours and Island hopping, self-drive and tailor made departures. A large section is dedicated to luxury and traditional cruises with itineraries from Split, Dubrovnik and Opatija. Cruise vessels range from traditional to luxurious options featuring private balconies.

CARNIVAL RIDES TECHNOLOGY WAVE

CARNIVAL Corporation took to the global technology stage last month, with CEO Arnold Donald delivering the keynote address at the massive annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas. He took the opportunity to launch the cruise giant's new 'Ocean Medallion' – a wearable device which is claimed to have the potential to revolutionise not just cruising but the entire vacation sector.

The major Carnival technology project was led by John Padgett, who also developed the MagicBand system rolling out at Disney's Florida resorts. The Ocean Medallion incorporates a range of communication technologies including Near Field Communication (NFC) and Bluetooth Low Energy, which combine with thousands of shipboard sensors and a proprietary back-end called the Experience Innovation Operating System or xiOS. That in turn links to a network of screens called the Ocean Compass, with the system also accessible via a range of personal devices such as smartphones, tablets and in-room TVs.

With this infrastructure in place, Carnival expects to completely reimagine the holiday experience. The sky is the limit as more and more smart devices become available, but initial applications include expediting port embarkation and disembarkation, cashless purchases, interactive gaming and entertainment and the ability to order food and beverages and have them delivered to you wherever you are on the ship. There's more too – stateroom doors will automatically open as guests approach, at the same time as the lights and air conditioning are activated – and possibly deactivated when you leave, meaning potential big energy and cost savings for Carnival. Crew members will also be equipped with a 'Crew Compass' to empower personalised guest interactions – for example when passengers arrive at the airport, hosts will be able to provide personalised greetings and guest services.

"With this interactive technology

platform, we are poised to have our global cruise line brands at the vanguard of forever changing the guest experience paradigm — not just in the cruise industry, but in the larger vacation market and potentially other industries," Donald said. "Our focus is on exceeding guest expectations every single day and consistently delivering great experiences, and we do that extremely well. Now we are in prime position to take the guest experience to a level never before considered possible and build on cruising's popularity and value as the fastest-growing segment of the vacation sector."

Carnival isn't the only cruise company using technology to revolutionise the holiday experience. Royal Caribbean offers Near Field Communication-based "WOWbands" on some of its ships to allow smart check-in, activate door locks, make purchases and interact with its "Royal IQ" personal vacation management app. However the underlying xiOS offered by Carnival promises significantly expanded capabilities – which in turn will up the ante for rival operators. While security and privacy may be an issue for some cruisers, Donald noted during his CES address that anyone who is concerned can simply choose not to carry their Medallion around with them.

Carnival's Ocean Medallion, which is personalised with a passenger's name and cruise departure, will debut on *Regal Princess* in November this year, followed by *Royal Princess* and *Caribbean Princess* in 2018, with the complete rollout across the full Princess Cruises fleet planned over "multiple years". Although Carnival claims the xiOS platform is "deployable on any ship regardless of ship age or size," Donald didn't detail whether other Carnival brands such as P&O Australia, Holland America, Carnival Cruise Line or Cunard would eventually receive the technology.

‘With this interactive technology platform, we are poised to have our global cruise line brands at the vanguard of forever changing the guest experience paradigm — not just in the cruise industry, but in the larger vacation market and potentially other industries’

Arnold Donald, CEO, Carnival Corporation



CARBON – DO TOURISTS CARE?

A NEW report from Amadeus and Queensland's Griffith University has highlighted the difference between words and actions when it comes to carbon emissions related to tourism, with a small minority of travellers currently choosing to offset their trips by purchasing 'carbon offsets'. The white paper on Carbon Reporting in Travel and Tourism highlights a range of issues – including a lack of consistency and transparency in so-called carbon calculators, difficulties in purchasing offsets during the booking process, and incomplete knowledge about the impacts of carbon among consumers.

However this may be set to change, with the paper forecasting that increasing pressure from external stakeholders as well as mandatory reporting requirements will see more travel and tourism companies following the lead of a "growing number of highly committed frontrunners". Although a large proportion of travellers are aware of climate change and the impacts of travel, detailed knowledge is often lacking, the report summarises. The fact that tourism companies necessarily operate in a range of jurisdictions each with their own standards and requirements also makes the situation more difficult.

The report compared more than 50 carbon "travel calculators"

and found variations in emission estimates of a whopping 540%. The difference resulted from different (and sometimes dated) underlying data sources, choice of emissions factors, consideration of additional non-CO₂ effects at high altitude, and assumptions about detour and delay factors. But in the end the point may be moot, because the report concludes that tourist demand for low-carbon products, including carbon offsets, is largely of a passive nature. "Travellers are aware of their impacts, but [are] not necessarily willing to make significant changes," the paper says.

There is, however, a "small but consistent" group of consumers dedicated to reducing emissions who do make the most of the available carbon reduction options. The report urges further research into what proportion of the currently less-committed types of travellers would participate in schemes that offer "highly transparent, credible and convenient solutions". Robust and transparent carbon estimations, along with easy-to-use low-carbon options and offsetting programs, have the potential to increase uptake which in turn could "create new social norms, which further encourage broader participation and consideration of carbon-relevant behaviours".

RICH CONTENT OPENS UP REVENUE OPTIONS

THE new generation of rich content technology available to online travel agents can increase their ability to up-sell and boost revenue, according to provider Travelport.

Early adopters of rich content and branding features have reported increased income and a greater willingness from clients to purchase higher fare categories, the company says, thanks largely to the ability to display fares and ancillary products in more detail and greater clarity.

Travelport senior director OTA Asia-Pacific Ming Foong said it was now possible for travel agency websites to display similar information to airlines' own websites, offering content such as video, pictures, detailed descriptions, ancillary items and product-specific branding.

Agencies were no longer limited to basic

GDS information, he said, which limited the consumer's ability to choose specific fare products and understand their limitations.

"Most GDS systems at the moment would serve an economy class as just an economy class, there's very little to provide difference or sell messaging," Foong said.

"Different airlines might offer Economy Flex, Economy Plus or just Pure Economy – these are all different ways airlines are trying to bundle or unbundle different products and a lot of them are branded and have specific names," he said.

"We saw an opportunity to channel that content benefit over to the consumer via the agencies - the agencies want to offer what the airlines are offering via other channels like their own websites."

New Australian online travel agency

Fly365.com last year became the first retailer in the Asia-Pacific region to adopt Travelport's Rich Content and Branding product, giving it access to branded fares and ancillary products from 200 airlines.

The website's owner and chief operating officer Scott Mayne said his company was able to offer flexible fare options and a more transparent view of inclusions in each fare category.

"We've found with the Rich Content and Branding that people are clicking through to a more flexible or higher fare type, which shows they really do understand what they're purchasing," Mayne said.

"I could see the value in the product," he said. "It has proved itself – we're seeing people upgrade and being able to get more out of their airfares."



©Sailaway



©Tourism Australia



AN INCENTIVES GUIDE TO TNQ

Tropical North Queensland is a stunning region for an incentives program, positioned within close proximity to the Great Barrier Reef, the Daintree Rainforest and speckled with an array of brilliant restaurants serving fresh, local cuisine. Jasmine O'Donoghue ventured up north, testing out a few of the top incentives offerings.

THE RAINFOREST

The Daintree, the world's oldest rainforest has a myriad of activities to impress any traveller. For a shot of adrenalin, fly from tree to tree with Jungle Surfing Canopy Tours. This thrilling tour led by fearless guides has a spectacular vista, overlooking where the rainforest meets the reef. Hidden high in the Daintree, there are a few tour operators such as Back Country Bliss who will make a day out of it. For those who like to stay a little closer to the ground, Back Country Bliss also operate a river snorkelling tour where travellers literally drift through the rainforest, keeping an eye out for turtles, eels, water dragons and fish.

THE REEF

The World Heritage Listed Great Barrier Reef is swimming with ships ready to show off the region to groups. Snorkelling or diving from an idyllic coral cay, a pontoon in the middle of the ocean or straight off a boat are just a few of the experiences available. Sailaway Port Douglas offer three products

daily on their five-star luxury catamarans. Their full-day and afternoon tours feature a sailing experience, marine guided snorkel tours, glass bottom boat tours and a guided heritage walk of Low Island. For a shorter experience, the company can charter a Luxury Sunset Sailing which is approximately 1.5 hours in length and departs from the Reef Marina in Port Douglas at 5pm. Sailaway's two vessels are available to be exclusively reserved for a spectacular sunset sailing for up to 84 guests.

THE WILDLIFE

Australian wildlife can be a little hard to spot and some (like the saltwater crocodile), you may not want to simply stumble across. For guaranteed interactions, Hartley's Crocodile Adventures is the place for a truly "Australiana" experience. Watch from a secure boat as giant crocodiles up to five metres in length launch themselves out of the water, or meet and greet snakes and try your hand at feeding the crocs from dry land.

Groups over 100 can explore the park exclusively and interact

with animals in smaller groups led by their own well-humored wildlife keeper. Breakfasts through to dinners can be arranged, with the Hartley's Night Zoo and Hartley's Night Adventures on offer during the evening. Last year's extension of the viewing deck nearby Lilies Restaurant allows the venue to cater for 220 people under the roof, but there is the possibility for up to 500 people.

THE CULTURE

At the entrance to Mossman Gorge lies the eco-tourism visitor and interpretive centre of Mossman Gorge Centre. Dreamtime walks led by Aboriginal guides can be tailored for groups, covering culturally significant sites, enchanting stories and the rich heritage of the landscape. The walks amble through the lush rainforest, over crystal clear rainforest streams, and communicate the relationship the local Kuku Yalanji community have with the landscape.



AIME VIEW

Ian Wainwright, AIME event director
Reed Travel Exhibitions

WHY YOU SHOULD ATTEND AIME'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY SHOW

AS THE largest event of its kind in the Asia-Pacific region, AIME is trusted for bringing local and international event professionals, exhibitors and buyers together under one roof. As I enter my second year as event director of AIME and having attended many previous AIMEs, I know the importance of generating good business contacts and making strong connections in the industry, which is why this year we are focusing on establishing a wider global reach by introducing new technologies, opportunities and exhibitors.

For our 25th year, we are bringing together an even broader range of domestic and global exhibitors including destinations, convention bureaux, hotels and venues, entertainment and attractions, technology providers, airlines, cruise lines, and so many more; giving visitors the chance to network, learn and do business with suppliers from across the globe. All this in one place, over two jam-packed days!

When I joined the AIME team in 2015, I recognised a strong connection between exhibitors and the show, a real collaborative relationship which I have seen continue to grow during my time here, and I'm really proud of the lengths the team go to, to ensure everyone receives maximum return on their time and investment. This year we expect to see over 500 exhibitors filling the show floor,

including bureaux from New Zealand, Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, Turkey, India and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

As we continue to expand our reach through strong connections, I'm pleased to see this year's show attracting new exhibitors. Premiering at the show in February, along with a range of local suppliers, will be Vietnam Airlines, Rocky Mountaineer, Epicure, Elanor Investors Group and Evergrande Group.

Returning once again to the AIME 2017 structure is the very successful Knowledge Program, an all-new line up of the popular Saxton 'Up Close and Personal' Sessions, and the much-loved Welcome Event hosted by the Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB), highlighting Victoria's thriving creative industries.

With significant industry research underway, and results due to be announced during AIME, we will provide an insightful look at the future of business meetings and events, and what attitudes, expectations and global change might have affected the way we do business.

AIME has grown over the past 25 years and in 2017 we will reflect on the industry's past; the people, the places and the events that changed and shaped the industry into what it is today, before looking to the future of the industry; the up and coming leaders, the new technologies, the new event styles and forms of global collaboration.

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CAREER IN FOCUS

EMILY CAI

Founder and director of Onlylux Club



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

Two years ago, I founded Yu Teng, a bespoke travel agency helping Chinese travellers plan their visits to Australia, and this year launched Onlylux Club, a new luxury travel brand and website. I am the founder and director.

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

I came from China to Australia for my study of Master of Advertising and started my marketing career in Melbourne and then moved to Sydney. I have loved travel ever since I was a young child and have always been interested in different people and cultures. I think that's why I decided to travel to Australia for postgraduate study and now work in the travel industry to promote Australia's luxury travel experiences to the Chinese market.

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

I have a degree in marketing and business management, but no formal education in tourism. I think tourism is always changing - especially the new era of Chinese tourists.

‘I have loved travel ever since I was a young child and have always been interested in different people and cultures’

‘I think tourism is always changing - especially the new era of Chinese tourists. It's important to understand Chinese culture...’

It's important to understand Chinese culture, Chinese consumer behaviours and the young, affluent, technology savvy, consumers. My marketing education and Chinese background is certainly beneficial to this.

4. What do you love about your job?

Meeting with interesting people. Every day is a different day. There are so many passionate and inspiring people working in the travel

businesses in Australia and our clients are delightful too. Everyone has their unique stories. Working with them makes every day challenging, interesting and memorable.

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

The need to learn new aspects of my business fast and then employ the right people to do it. For example, Onlylux Club website is a customised platform and I had no IT or programming background. I learned and worked with my developers closely. That's a challenging but a fun experience.

6. What factors were central to your success?

Passion and persistence. These two things drive you to keep learning new things, even working very late at night but still waking up with a smile on your face.

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

No, I don't, but I would like to have one.

8. What are the keys to good business?

Have a good offering that your clients want and then keep telling them about it.

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

China has a big population. The population of over 61 cities in China is more than 1 million. This is not a small niche.

‘Everyone has their unique stories. Working with them makes every day challenging, interesting and memorable’

RESUMÉ TRENDS

By Christian Schweitzer

ONE topic that remains contentious is whether or not to include a photo of you on your resumé.

Depending on whom you choose to listen to, some HR practitioners or recruiters will say it's a no-no whilst others actively encourage it because it's good for personal branding.

So here are a few of the pros and cons to consider as to whether adding a photo on your resumé is right for you.

In a world that's highly visual, we continually link our name to our face – Facebook, dating websites, personal blogs and of course everyone's defacto resumé, LinkedIn. It's becoming the norm and if you don't do it, it invites all sorts of assumptions. What are you hiding? Conventional thinking therefore is why should your resumé be any different?

Though before you go delving into InDesign to place your photo on your resumé, consider this.

There appears to be some concern from some HR practitioners and indeed some employers within highly litigious societies who want to avoid at all costs any potential for

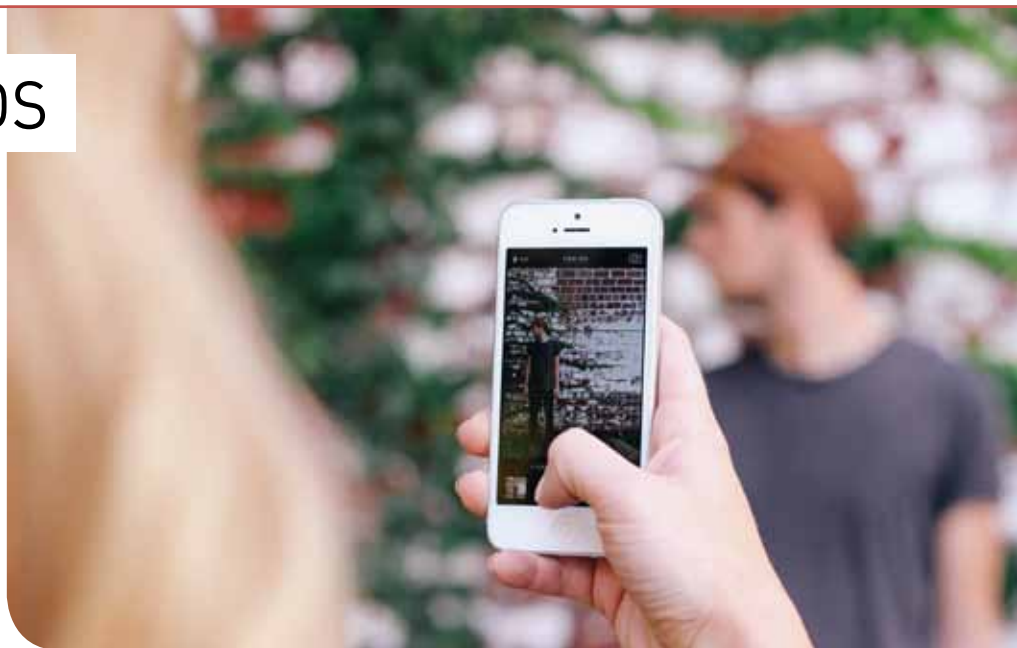
discrimination in hiring practices.

Whether you like it or not, by putting your face on your resumé, you'll be judged. You reveal something about yourself – your gender, ethnicity and perhaps religious affiliation. And whilst there are anti-discrimination laws in place, a photo may be a red flag to an employer and result in your resumé being dismissed.

So where is the future headed?

There's software now available called Prezi that allows you to create an online, visual, story based career presentation, or 'presume', and if that's the direction then we're likely to see more and more photos on resumé.

Ultimately though, the decision should always be based on your personal preference and what you're comfortable with saying about yourself.



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SEABOURN'S SUCCESS STORY



At its launch last month, Seabourn's state-of-the-art *Seabourn Encore* was heralded by the line as the most luxurious cruise ship to take to the seas yet. And it's hard to argue. Guy Dundas explains.

LISTENING to guest feedback preparing to sail aboard *Seabourn Encore's* christening cruise from Singapore in early January, it's obvious the line must be doing something right. With some customers on a waitlist to secure a cabin years in advance, the demand for the ultra-luxury, yet highly intimate, ocean cruise product is abundantly evident.

At a capacity of 600 guests, *Seabourn Encore* ticks all the boxes. A ratio of 1:1.4 guests to staff, bespoke cuisine, unique experiences, a highly elegant, all-suite product, fully stocked mini-bar with preferred choices, no tipping required, and perhaps most importantly, personalised service, are

paramount for the industry-leading Seabourn.

Industry pundits suggest the luxury line has moved away from its true small-ship status, with *Seabourn Encore* carrying about 24% more people compared to its existing fleet of three 450 passenger vessels, *Seabourn Odyssey*, *Sojourn* and *Quest*. While still based on the *Odyssey*-class ship shell, the capacity increase on *Seabourn Encore* was achieved by adding an extra deck and widening the ship, enabling Seabourn to shuffle, expand and fine tune public spaces, ship-wide.

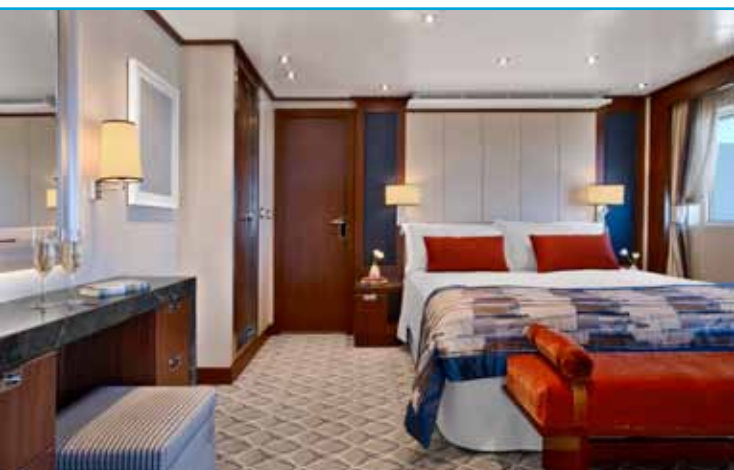
travelBulletin chatted with Seabourn President Rick Meadows in Singapore ahead of the christening ceremony to understand the line's formula for success, and to identify what sets Seabourn apart from other luxury cruise lines.

"It's a whole series of individual attributes that work together as opposed to one single thing," Meadows said. "Service, the culinary experience and the depth and breadth of the destinations that we go to, are all

core pillars of our business. As are the onboard activities that we offer, such as the *Seabourn Conversations*, and our approach to entertainment. All of those activities and areas are very important to who we are."

Crew pride themselves on knowing the names and drink preferences of all guests within hours of stepping aboard a Seabourn ship using customer profiles to provide extraordinary levels of personalised service.

Meadows said collaborations with high-profile specialists in their respective fields ensured Seabourn stood out from the crowd. The Seattle-based company has a partnership with three-star Michelin chef Thomas Keller, debuting *The Grill* by Thomas Keller aboard *Seabourn Encore*. Another alliance involves acclaimed mixologist, Brian Van Flandern who has created a unique cocktail menu that combine fresh produce and botanicals from destinations visited. There's also a pact with musical maestro Tim Rice who has created a new production



show for the line, an arrangement with spa and wellness guru Dr Andrew Weil who has pioneered a fleet-wide mindful living program for guests, as well as a tie-up with Molton Brown for an exclusive collection of Seabourn Signature Scents.

“The inclusiveness of the experience and the fact that the bar is open – from a guest experience, it creates a club-like feeling. You can sit down with another couple and you don’t have to think about who is going to be buying the drinks,” Meadows told *travelBulletin*.

“It’s not just one thing. It is so many things that differentiate the cruise and the brand that make it really unique. We’ve been the leader in ultra-luxury cruising in my view from the very beginning. If you go back to Seabourn’s roots, we’ve been on that journey for nearly 30 years,” he elaborated.

And for *Seabourn Encore* the bar has been raised even further. Six years since its last ship launched, Meadows enlisted highly

acclaimed hospitality designer Adam D. Tihany to “evolve” the design of the ship’s interior from tip to tail. Tihany’s mission, in his own

‘It’s not just one thing. It is so many things that differentiate the cruise and the brand that make it really unique’

Rick Meadows, president
Seabourn

words, was to make the 40,350-tonne ship “sexier” than its fleet-mates, with no sharp corners but retaining much of the same layout so past guests “still felt at home”.

Encore’s layout is stencilled on the Seabourn Odyssey-class of ship, inheriting hallmarks such as Seabourn Square, the

Observation Bar at the bow, the Grand Saloon at the stern and a marina for zodiac and kayaking activities (now on Deck 2). Aside from the feeling of more space throughout, some of the new additions include The Grill by Thomas Keller, a new sushi-themed diner aptly named Sushi and The Retreat – an extravagant, pay-per-use, shaded, rooftop venue featuring a private step-up whirlpool and 15 cabanas, each equipped with sun lounges, HD flat screen televisions, a stocked refrigerator and more.

“We know the *Encore* is going to be a very successful ship. There is no doubt. We’re not only seeing that in consumer demand but we are seeing it in the response from our guests, and there’s only been two voyages so far,” Meadows said.

Seabourn Encore made her maiden visit to Australasian waters in late January, will return in December 2017 offering five 16-day voyages, and is earmarked to return to our waters over the 2018/19 wave season.

NORWEGIAN SETS BIG TARGETS FOR GROWTH

By Jasmine O'Donoghue

"BUILD it and they will come" is the stance Steve Odell, senior vice president & managing director Asia Pacific of Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, is taking on the Australian cruise industry.

"We've proven already there may from time to time be pressure on price but if you put volume in the market, people will come and book it," he told *travelBulletin*.

NCLH is fully embracing Odell's mantra, bulking up its Australian sales team by five in order to scale the business.

Since transitioning to the NCLH Sydney office on 31 March last year, one team has manned both Regent Seven Seas Cruises and Oceania Cruises.

The current VP of Sales for both brands, Lisa Pile, will hand over the responsibility of Regent to a new hire and concentrate on Oceania.

"We've appointed a high-profile sales person...and then we'll have regional BDMs dedicated to Oceania as well as Regent, so it's a big investment in the market," Odell said.

The extra hands are part of the company's ambitious plans to grow the business by 50% this year, on the back of a 30% boost last year.

Odell said the figures "make sense", given that Norwegian Cruise Line will begin homeporting out of Sydney for the first time when *Norwegian Jewel* arrives in November.

Another chunk of the growth will come from the Regent's newbuild, *Regent Explorer*, which



was "pretty much full during 2016."

"We weren't able to sell much of the *Explorer* last year because it was full from the start but it's opened up now and we've actually been heavily promoting that specific ship," Odell explains.

‘We’ve proven already there may from time to time be pressure on price but if you put volume in the market, people will come and book it’

Regent wasn't the only brand to take on another ship in 2016, with Oceania's debut of *Sirena* another booster for NCLH.

Oceania is also pushing hard to increase repeat business to 50% or more by remarketing to past passengers.

"Oceania was already very big in this market and New Zealand so we're really building on that strength," Odell said.

APAC is now the fastest growing market for NCLH and the highest yielding international market.

"The company looks at us in a very positive way because we're not only bringing high prices but we're bringing early booking curve," he explained.

NCLH has its eyes on increasing

deployment, with more Australia and New Zealand cruises tucked into the Regent 2019 program.

"We've got ten ships in the Regent and Oceania fleets and we've got to give variety to the customers so this part of the world has high appeal, so we'll be bringing more for sure."

As for NCL, it's not so simple.

"We would absolutely love to put another ship in Sydney but there's no room left at the Overseas Passenger Terminal to fit the big ships," he said.

Despite Carnival Corporation and Royal Caribbean's rejection of the proposal to turn two ships around at the OPT in one day, Odell said he is not averse to the idea.

"We could do it on a practical basis, it's just the cost of doing it because if you take the current Sydney charges and then layer in out-of-hours, the cost of a Sydney call, which is already one of the highest in the world, would become even higher."

‘We would absolutely love to put another ship in Sydney but there’s no room left at the Overseas Passenger Terminal to fit the big ships’



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WHAT'S NEW IN EXPEDITION CRUISING?

It seems as soon as the ink dries on an order for a newbuild, cruise executives are reaching the ballpoint to sign another. Jasmine O'Donoghue rolls out the expedition ships which will sail into port by 2020.

National Geographic Quest

Lindblad Expeditions

Size: 73m long, 1,800 gross tonnage

Built by: Nichols Brothers, USA

Passengers: 100

Crew: 35

Claim to fame: The first ship in the Lindblad fleet to sail to Alaska, Pacific Northwest and Central America.

Delivery: June 2017

Sailing to: Alaska, Pacific Northwest and Central America.

EXPEDITION landing craft, a remotely operated vehicle, 24 two-person kayaks, a video microscope, hydrophone, and snorkelling gear will be packed into *National Geographic Quest*. The vessel will offer step-out balconies (available in 22 of the 50 cabins), plus six sets of connecting cabins; and a designated mudroom for expedition gear.



Guests can watch wildlife or enjoy an evening cocktail on the open bow and an observation deck or relax in the lounge, bar and on the sundeck. There will also be a spa and fitness centre.



mv Hondius

Oceanwide Expeditions

Size: 107m long, 5,590 gross tonnage

Built by: Brodosplit, Croatia

Passengers: 180

Crew: 76

Claim to fame: The strongest ice-strengthened vessel in the polar regions.

Delivery: May 2019

Sailing to: Polar regions.

HONDIUS has been designed to support exploratory programs and activity-based shore excursions in the Arctic and Antarctica. Rated Polar Class 6, the vessel will have two separate gangways and a platform that can be used for outdoor activities. The ship will have

bow and stern thrusters, allowing it to drift or remain in position during shore excursions and will have flexible power technology to permit low fuel consumption and CO₂ emission. The vessel will offer cabin options from suites and superiors to twin and quadruple cabins while one deck is reserved for an observation lounge, with a separate lecture room.

Two new ships

Hapag-Lloyd

Size: 138m long, 16,100 gross tonnage

Built by: Vard shipyard, Norway

Passengers: 240

Crew: 170

Delivery: The first will launch in April 2019 and the second in October 2019

Sailing to: Both will serve German-speaking markets (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), while one will additionally serve Belgium, Netherlands and the US.

HAPAG-LLOYD'S two five-star expedition vessels will have the Polar Class 6 designation. They will be equipped with a high ratio of balcony cabins, three restaurants and a spa and fitness area. The ships will

feature a water sports marina and on board Zodiacs, which will allow landings in otherwise inaccessible areas.





Le Lapérouse, Le Champlain, Le Bougainville and Le Kerguelen

Ponant

Size: 128m long, approx 10,000 gross tonnage

Built by: Ficantieri, Norway

Passengers: 180

Crew: 110

Delivery: The first two will arrive in time for the April-October 2018 season and the other two for April-October 2019

Sailing to: The first two ships will both be deployed in European waters.

THE vessels will have reinforced hulls for polar navigation, stabilisers, and a modular marina platform from which guests can swim from or engage in activities directly from the ship. Activities on offer will include kayaking, paddle boarding, snorkelling, big-game fishing from the on board speed boats and more. There will also be a fleet of Zodiac

dinghies, scuba facilities and an underwater observation lounge.

Ponant's new ships will each have seven decks, packed with a spa, gymnasium, interior and exterior bars, an infinity glass-ended swimming pool and dining areas. Guests can also expect 24-hour room service and an open bar policy.

Scenic Eclipse

Scenic

Size: 168m long, 17,000 gross tonnage

Built by: Uljanik Group, Croatia

Passengers: 228 (200 in Polar regions)

Crew: 172 (182 in Polar regions)

Claim to fame: The world's first "Discovery Yacht"

Delivery: 31 August 2018

Sailing to: *Scenic Eclipse* will embark on her maiden voyage from Istanbul to Venice before sailing to The Americas; Antarctica; Europe and the Mediterranean; and the Arctic and Norwegian Fjords.

SCENIC Eclipse will feature the highest passenger ship ice class rating, Polar Class 6 (Ice Class 1A Super). It will have a series of flash toys, including two seven-seater helicopters, one seven-seater submarine, a remotely operated underwater vehicle with camera, 12 zodiacs, kayaks and snorkelling and scuba equipment. The vessel has been designed to navigate challenging seas and will be equipped with

zero speed stabiliser fins 50% larger than the standard.

Guests on board the six-star, all-veranda suite *Scenic Eclipse* will be able to choose between six dining venues, relax in the 450m² spa sanctuary, take a dip in an indoor/outdoor swimming pool or jacuzzi, be entertained in a 240-seat theatre or keep active in the gym.



ms Roald Amundsen and ms Nansen

Hurtigruten

Size: 140m long, 20,899 gross tonnage

Built by: Kleven, Norway

Passengers: 530

Claim to fame: World's first expeditionary ships sailing fully electric with sustainable hybrid technology

Delivery: *ms Amundsen* is due in Jul 2018 and *ms Nansen* in summer 2019

Sailing to: The *Roald Amundsen* will venture to the fjords of Chile, the Falkland Islands and Antarctica. *Hurtigruten* is staying tight-lipped on where *Nansen* will sail, but both vessels will be customised for the Norwegian coastal route.

SPECIFICALLY designed for polar waters, the vessels will have strengthened hulls for traversing ice. The ships will feature environmentally sustainable hybrid technology that, combined with the hull construction and effective use of electricity on board, will reduce fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions on the ships by 20%. In total, the two new ships will have a reduced CO₂ emission of 6,400 metric

tons per year compared to traditional ships.

Hurtigruten's new ships will be named after polar explorers. Six out of ten cabins will have their own balcony, while two out of ten will be suites. Guests will be able to soak up the views from large observational platforms or dine in three restaurants. The vessels will feature a pool deck with infinity pools, jacuzzis and bars.



Crystal Endeavor

Crystal Cruises

Size: 183m long, 25,000 gross tonnage

Built by: Lloyd Werft Group

Passengers: 200

Crew: 200

Claim to fame: The largest and most spacious megayacht

Delivery: Mid-2019

Sailing to: The Arctic in the northern summer, then along the coast of the Americas and Europe to the Antarctica during the southern summer.

GUESTS will be able to dive deep or fly high in *Crystal Endeavor's* two seven-person submarines and two helicopters. The ship will come complete with fishing boats, two landing pads, snorkel and scuba equipment, eight electric amphibious zodiacs, jet skis, wave runners, kayaks, paddle boards, a recompression chamber, dive support tender and a multi-person ATV. *Crystal Endeavor* will be also equipped with SEABOB underwater scooters.

Crystal Endeavor will be Crystal Cruises' first-ever expedition megayacht and will be designed for global expedition in Arctic, Antarctic

and tropical conditions. Vast penthouses and villas, a full-service spa, a yoga, pilates, salon and wellness centre; jacuzzis, an infinity pool a 360-degree view in Palm Court and six dining venues all await travellers aboard *Crystal Endeavor*. The megayacht will also feature a 200-seat theatre, numerous lecture rooms, cinema, card room and a computer centre. *Endeavor* will be fitted with the state-of-the-art offshore dynamic positioning technology to allow the megayacht to float atop coral reefs without the use of anchors.

Two additional expedition megayachts will follow in 2020 and 2021.

THE MAJESTY OF THE KIMBERLEY

LAST CHANCE ON 2017 KIMBERLEY EXPEDITION CRUISES



The freshly refurbished *Silver Discoverer* is the perfect platform to experience the thundering waterfalls and plunging gorges of the Kimberley, set to be spectacular viewing after the wettest December on record. An expert team of guides and lecturers and 12 Zodiacs mean all 120 guests can disembark at the same time, to enjoy shore excursions.

Last chance all-inclusive voyages plus a complimentary Bungle Bungle Range flight:
 V9707, 11-nts, 26 March from AU\$13,450pp
 V9708, 10-nts, 6 April from AU\$11,750pp
 V9709, 10-nts, 16 April from AU\$12,550pp

— *Silver Select* —

Select a two-category suite upgrade or 50% savings on a second suite. Book by 28 February 2017.

Uniworld's new brand

UNIWORLD Boutique River Cruise Collection has set its sights on the active traveller aged 18-40, revealing it will dedicate two of its ships to a new U by Uniworld brand.

The *River Baroness* and the *River Ambassador* will undergo extensive renovations to be tailored to U by Uniworld experiences from early 2018.

Uniworld said the brand would "offer immersive, authentic and adventurous experiences for the next generation of river cruisers," sailing along the rivers of Europe and visiting cities such as Amsterdam, Paris and Budapest.

Sales will kick off this year, with The Travel Corporation CEO Brett Tollman saying the company had been able to take full advantage of the expertise within its Contiki and Busabout operations "in order to fully realise this expansion of the Uniworld brand".

Viking Spirit scheduled for Oz

THE brand new *Viking Spirit* will head Down Under during its inaugural season in 2018/19.

Spirit will arrive on a 17-day Bali-Sydney voyage dubbed the Komodo and the Australian Coast, on 16 Dec 2018, operating in the return direction on 10 Mar 2019.

A 15-day Sydney to Auckland (and reverse) cruise will operate between Dec-Feb, with overnight stays in both cities as well as visiting Melbourne, Hobart, Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, Napier and Tauranga.

Viking managing director ANZ, the recently appointed Michelle Black said: "We're thrilled to have *Viking Spirit* based here for summer 18/19.

"Our ships are like no other, contemporary yet classic, spacious yet intimate."

Seabourn ups the ante

FOUR years from concept to hand over, luxury line Seabourn officially christened its newest vessel in six years in early January. *Seabourn Encore* is the fourth ship in Seabourn's fleet, and exudes style, sophistication and class.

At 40,350 tonnes and with a capacity of 600 guests, *Encore* is stencilled on sister-ships *Odyssey*, *Sojourn* and *Quest*, albeit accommodating 142 additional customers. It features an additional deck and has a variety of new or expanded restaurants and living spaces, including The Retreat on the rooftop.

Seabourn Encore was due to arrive in Australian waters in late January and is earmarked for a future season here to capitalise of the high-yield Aussie cruise demand.



CLIA VIEW

Joel Katz, managing director
CLIA Australasia

IT'S an honour to be writing this as the new managing director of CLIA Australasia. 2017 has started extremely well for the Australasian cruise market. The month is set to be one of the region's busiest ever cruise months, with 28 different ships making an extraordinary 46 calls to Sydney alone during February. The wave of activity will continue into March, with 43 calls to the harbour city in just 31 days.

CLIA recently released the 2017 State of the Cruise Industry Outlook, detailing the increased pace of cruise travel interest and significant investment in the industry.

An estimated 25.3 million passengers are expected to sail in 2017, a strong surge from 15.8 million just 10 years' prior. More ships will set sail in 2017 as well. Cruise lines are scheduled to debut 26 new ocean, river and speciality ships in 2017 for a total investment of more than \$6.8 billion in new vessels. From 2017-2026 the industry is expected to introduce a total of 97 new cruise ships totalling an estimated investment of US\$53 billion through 2026.

CLIA has forecasted the top eight cruise travel trends that will have the most impact on the cruise industry this year.

- **New Generation Takes to the Water** – Younger generations - including Millennials and Generation X - will embrace cruise travel more than ever before.
- **Travel Agent Use Increases** – Travel agents will continue to be the matchmakers between travellers and cruise lines in 2017. Today, there are more than 25,000 CLIA-member travel agents globally compared to 12,000 in 2010. CLIA also found that cruisers

report high levels of satisfaction with their travel experience when assisted by an agent.

- **River Cruise Demand Increases** – River cruises offer travellers a unique and intimate travel experience. Due to demand, CLIA members currently deploy 184 river cruise ships with 13 new river cruise ships on order for 2017.
- **More Private Islands** – As more cruise lines introduce private island destinations, travellers are responding and booking these itineraries.
- **New Cruisers taking to the Sea** – Interest in ocean cruising is projected to remain strong in 2017.
- **Drivable Port Locations in Favour** – The cruise industry offers a variety of small and large market port location options. Seven out of ten non-cruisers believe the greatest benefit is cost savings and three quarters of cruisers like the convenience of driving to a cruise ship.
- **Lure of Celeb Chefs** – Cruise travellers are embracing specialty dining and will continue to consider cruise dining experiences based upon celebrity chefs. This year, several cruise lines feature new restaurants and dishes created by famous chefs.
- **Demand for Expedition Cruises** – Adventure travel is growing at a record pace and expedition cruises operators are seeing the impact and expanding. The cruise industry is responsive to global demand. From technological advancements and deployment of new ships to new ports and destinations around the world, the industry continues to respond to the desires of today's travellers.

CRUISE WEEKLY

- 02 Dec** RCI moves to all-inclusive fares
- 06 Dec** Emirates cruise brand launches
- 08 Dec** Cuba approval bonanza
- 15 Dec** *Ovation*'s Sydney debut
- 15 Dec** No newbuild for P&O Oz
- 20 Dec** Uniworld to launch new youth-focused river cruise operation

HEADLINES DECEMBER 2016 & JANUARY 2017

- 22 Dec** Carnival's record profit
- 03 Jan** Orion Antarctic cancellations
- 05 Jan** Swan Hellenic, VOD collapse
- 05 Jan** Carnival's new 'Ocean Medallion'
- 10 Jan** *Seabourn* Syd homeport
- 12 Jan** NCLH Aussie expansion
- 17 Jan** CLIA announces changes

INDUSTRY IN FOCUS



Personal travel managers enjoyed a canoe ride in the UNESCO World Heritage Chitwan National Park as part of their ten-day famil to Nepal hosted by Crooked Compass and flying Malaysian Airlines.



Delegates from Visit Sunshine Coast and Visit Fraser Coast experienced some sub-zero conditions on the recent Tour Europe 2017 trade mission in Germany.

LA Tourism and American Airlines showed these product managers some of the latest and greatest premium hotel offerings in the City of Angels recently.



These lucky Magellan agents were treated to a day out at the Australian Open in Melbourne by Emirates.

TravelCube and Air New Zealand made sure these TravelManagers experienced the best of Houston, Texas, with the group enjoying an NBA clash and visit to NASA.



Swagman Tours' Wayne Hamilton joined other international agents in experiencing the inaugural agent flight from Shinde to Duba in the Okavango Delta.



In preparation for Ignite Travel Group's upcoming MyFiji 'Bula Bonus Sale' these consultants had the tough task of sampling some of the new and exclusive tours on offer in Fiji.



The wonders of Canada were on show for these Infinity Holidays agents recently. The group ziplined across the alps and learnt the art of champagne sabering, as well as experiencing -25° temperatures at Sun Peaks.



Back-Roads Touring and Qatar Airways hosted these Phil Hoffmann top achievers on 'A Winter Wonderland' tour visiting Munich, Salzburg, Vienna and Budapest.



These Singaporean frontline agents attended Sunshine Coast and Fraser Coast regions' first mission in the city recently.

This fresh-faced group is Crystal's new local team. The Sydney office started operations at the beginning of last month, headed up by Karen Christensen.



Australian and Kiwi agents were amongst some of the lucky attendees at the christening of the luxurious Seabourn Encore in Singapore last month.

In full bloom



There's no more inspirational time to visit Japan than during its April cherry blossom season, when the nation celebrates the beauty of nature in an explosion of pink, writes Brian Johnston.

WHEN the first dainty buds appear on the trees in Japan, happiness and anticipation are in the air. As the cherry trees burst into flower, so the Japanese burst into smiles. For a brief week, everyone is at their most relaxed. Ladies don gorgeous kimonos, arrange cherry twigs in vases and browse shops for cherry-matching lipsticks. Men drink too much sake and, cranking up portable karaoke machines in public parks, break out in song. Everywhere, hanami blossom-viewing parties spread out under the trees, continuing into the evening under lanterns and illuminations. Silliness reigns, but seriousness too: expect sedate tea ceremonies and classical music in honour of the blooms.

All across Japan, everyone watches as local television provides updates on the progress of the weather-dependent blossoming. The wave of pink usually hits in mid-April, with the official season declared with the blooming of two trees at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. Soon, parks bring pink romance to Japan's concrete capital, with the prime minister hosting an official hanami in jam-packed Shinjuku Park, and Sumida Park coming alive with a weekend festival, folk dancing and boating along the blossom-lined river. Ueno Park is the place to be in the evening, when lantern-hung trees throw a red glow on the partying and picnicking beneath.

It's also worth taking a half-hour train ride to Yokohama, where the classical Sankei-en Gardens see 2,000 cherry trees erupt in fabulous display. Performances on the koto, a traditional Japanese harp, serenade the spectacle throughout April. Incidentally, Buddha's Birthday on 8 April sees many flower festivals in temple grounds throughout Japan; Kofukuji Temple in Nara is one of the most renowned. Cherry trees aren't the only flowers blooming. Camellia, iris, lotus and mustard flowers are abundant in temple parks, as well as early-blossoming apricot trees.

However, for sakura (cherry-blossom) traditions and cultural celebrations at their best, head to ancient capital Kyoto. Every day in April, Heian Shrine hosts an elaborate tea

ceremony in honour of the blossoms, while at Daigo Temple, a hanami celebration that has been held annually since 1598 features participants in fabulous traditional kimonos. Kobu Kaburenjo Theatre runs a whole range of traditional dances and music, as well as geisha shows.

Kyoto is also without doubt simply the best place in Japan for cherry blossom profusion. Just about all of its many temple grounds and parks have cherry trees, and the walk along the Philosopher's Path, flanking a cherry-shaded canal and leading from temple to temple, is famous. Sprawling Maruyama Park is the epicentre of the most laidback hanami; half the city turns up here to eat and gossip under the spectacular weeping cherries. According to a Japanese proverb, 'Better than the flowers is the food', so bring a store-bought bento box and some seasonal pink confectionary with you and tuck in under the trees, illuminated to magnificent evening effect.

This region is the heartland of old Japan, and there are further cherry displays in the venerable wooden town of Nara nearby, as well as at Mt Yoshino, where World Heritage Buddhist temples lie scattered across a hillside covered in some 30,000 blossoming trees. But don't imagine you'll miss out in the big cities. The Okawa river in Osaka has a four-kilometre stretch of sakura, and Expo '70 Commemorative Park provides 5,000 illuminated trees in what many people say is one of the country's top hanami spots.

While a government building mightn't sound like the best place for some further

pink contemplation, Osaka's Mint Bureau throws open its grounds so that the public can admire some hundred varieties of sakura, many quite rare. From late bloomers to weeping cherries and varieties with frilly flowers or double heads, the Japanese know them all, and argue endlessly about which is the most beautiful.

If you want to be sure of a spectacular display of cherries in Japan, find a castle. Osaka Castle is planted with 4,000 cherry trees, making it another popular city spot for parties. But wherever you are, there should be a castle somewhere nearby, surrounded by picnickers on a spread of fallen pink petals. Sendai, Nagoya and Fukuoka are particularly noted for their fine displays.

Odawara Castle to the south of Tokyo hosts a festival in early April that features a children's parade, open-air tea ceremony and blossom viewing by night. Matsumae Castle is another popular hanami location, with cherry trees not only in its parkland but extending onto the surrounding hillsides. Located on the northern island of Hokkaido, it's one of the last places to catch the blossoms, which don't flower here until into early May.

One of the central motifs of sakura celebrations is the transience of this spectacular floral display, which prompts the Japanese to quote melancholy poems about the fleeting nature of life and beauty. The first buds appear, and little more than 10 days later they're already dropping off the trees and carpeting the ground in a last, fading reminder of glorious flamboyance.



Photos courtesy of Japan National Tourist Organisation

Japan air travel swells

AIRLINE activity into Japan is buzzing on the back of a surge in Aussies heading to the island nation. Last financial year 290,000 more Australians ticked Japan off their list, 50,000 more than the previous year, departure figures show. Qantas has revved up its number of seats on Japanese routes to 6,000 each week, launching its first Melbourne-Tokyo Narita service in December. The airline cited strong demand fuelled by a 20% yearly growth rate of travel between Japan and Australia.

The airline's new route is operated by an upgraded, two-class Airbus A330-300 aircraft and follows the launch of new Sydney-Tokyo Haneda and Brisbane-Tokyo Narita routes in 2015.

Meanwhile, ANA is eyeing new destinations in Australia ahead of the 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020 Olympics in Japan, having achieved load factors above 90% on its Sydney route. The airline's vice president and general manager Oceania, Ryo Sadayuki said sales on the Sydney route had surpassed expectations, giving the airline optimism for future Australian routes. Sadayuki hinted Melbourne and Brisbane were likely destinations for ANA.



A&K'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

THIS year Abercrombie & Kent is running a new 16-day expedition cruise to Japan, Hong Kong and the Ryukyu Islands. Sailing from Osaka, the itinerary island hops south through the East China Sea to the idyllic Ryukyu Islands, followed by Taiwan and Hong Kong. Linger at seven World Heritage sites including ancient forests, Buddhist temples and castles, the journey ventures to secluded wilderness areas only accessible by small ship. Sailing on the all-balcony *L'Austral*, the cruise explores coral reefs, beaches and volcanic islands and is priced from US\$16,995 per person, departing 28 May.



SCENIC'S NEW ADDITION IN 2017

SCENIC has added one new tour in Japan for 2017, the 14-day Japan Unveiled from Fukuoka to Tokyo. The itinerary starts out in Fukuoka, which contains some of Japan's oldest sites such as Shofuku-ji, the oldest Zen Temple in Japan and the sixth century Kushida Shrine located in the ancient section of the city. Guests will then head to Nagasaki which is Japan's historical gateway to the Western world and site of the second atomic bomb.

The next stop is Hiroshima, where guests can see the industrial robots at the Mazda factory, before continuing on to Himeji Castle and then to Kyoto, home to many World Heritage-listed Sites. Next in line is Tokyo and a day trip to Fuji Five Lake. Departures are scheduled for 13 May, 23 Sep and 07 Oct and four more in 2018.

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Photo courtesy of Japan National Tourist Organisation

CHERRY BLOSSOM TOURS IN BLOOM

WENDY Wu Tours has secured highly sought after departure dates for its escorted 2017 group tours during Japan's Cherry Blossom season between March and May.

Traditionally, the prime time to catch Japan's sakura in bloom is from the last week of March until the first week of April. As each tree only flowers for a limited number of days each year around the country, being 'on the move' enables a better opportunity to view

the cherry blossoms in all their glory first-hand.

Spaces on the Asian tour specialist's itineraries in peak season had been sold out since mid-2016, however an extra allocation was made available to Wendy Wu Tours in early December, some of which have already been snapped up.

"This is a huge advantage for agents and customers, many of whom did not realise the popularity of the destination and thus left booking too late for 2017," general manager Australia Andrew Mulholland said.

"Encouraged by previous interest, we believe these dates will sell-out quickly and highly recommend customers secure their place on tours as soon as possible to avoid disappointment".

The 12-day 'Essential Japan' tour on 16 March, has fresh availability, priced at \$9,560 per person twin share. Another of Wendy Wu Tours' 14-day 'Discover Japan' trips on 02 April has limited space available, priced from \$10,960ppts.

Both itineraries include a three-night stay in Tokyo, bullet train journeys and visits to Mt Fuji, Kyoto and Osaka.

Each tour includes return airfares and taxes from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Cairns, Adelaide or Perth, accommodation, all meals, ground transport in Japan and daily sightseeing with expert national escorts.

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Q&A

With bookings to Japan sky-rocketing, *travelBulletin* caught up with personal travel manager Briony Bullard to get the low-down the country and how agents can reap some of the benefits of selling this intriguing destination.



Is there much interest among Australians for travel to Japan?

Australians, as travellers, have had a fascination with Japan for many years. It has become incredibly popular with skiers in the last five years offering some of the best powder around. People are also fascinated with the cultural and historic aspects of the country that provide an insight into this wonderful destination.

Which areas are most popular?

For skiing, Hakuba, Niseko and also Nozawa Onsen. For general tourism on Honshu, the main island, Tokyo, Mt Fuji and Hakone, Kyoto, Takayama and Hiroshima. Hokkaido (the north island) is also gaining popularity as there are now cruises that circle the island allowing travellers to see many different ports. Kyushu in the Southern Island also has some great areas to visit including Beppu and Mt Aso and you can pay a visit to Nagasaki.

What are the must see highlights for first time travellers?

For first time travellers I recommend using Tokyo and Kyoto as a base as there are many places that can be accessed on a day trip using the Japan Rail Pass.

What sort of travellers are visiting Japan?

Japan attracts many age groups and different budget levels. It is suitable for independent travel as well as guided holidays.

Is there any particular time of year that is best or most popular to travel to Japan?

Preferred times to travel are May and October for general tourism. The summer (June to August) is really hot and humid, so I tend to suggest people avoid those months. For cherry blossoms, the guideline is late March in the deep south to mid April in the north, but this is at the mercy of mother nature. Ski season is from December to March. It is wise to avoid Golden Week

which is approximately 29 April to 5 May. This is when most Japanese will travel and it makes for a very busy time.

What should an agent consider when selling Japan?

One of the most important things you need to know is that English is not widely spoken and not widely understood despite many people learning it at school. Rooms are very small in most hotels, please be mindful of this. For clients who like to travel independently, a Japan Rail Pass is a must. If you aren't too savvy with knowledge of the country itself, aren't confident with setting up an FIT itinerary for Japan or your clients aren't keen on negotiating the language barrier then consider offering guided holidays.



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Top Japanese National Parks

Bullet trains, sushi and busy cities are usually the first things that pop in to people's minds when they think of visiting Japan. But as well as being abundant in unique technological inventions, this country is also full of beautiful natural landscapes and scenery. Here are some of the top national parks that we think are worth a visit.

Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park



©JNTO

LOCATED close to Tokyo and containing Japan's tallest mountain, Mt Fuji, this national park is both easy to visit and also stunning. As well as Mt Fuji, the large national park encompasses Hakone, the Izu Peninsula and the Izu Islands. The scenery ranges from mountains and lakes to islands, and visitors can enjoy hot springs and fresh seafood. The Izu Islands are a popular diving spot for many. In the Hakone region, make sure you drop in to the hot springs and Owakudani, which is an active volcanic zone complete with hot rivers and springs and sulfurous fumes, as well as views of Mt Fuji on clear days.

SUNBATHING isn't immediately something you associate with Japan, but that's certainly a popular activity in the Kerama Islands. Of these 36 islands, only four are inhabited, meaning there are plenty of untouched spots to explore. The national park is characterised by its pristine white sand beaches and the clear blue waters of the East China Sea. The islands are rimmed by coral reefs and include world leading dive spots. Depending upon the time of year you visit, you'll also get a chance to do some whale-watching, getting up close with the gentle giants of the sea from January to March.

Kerama Islands National Park



Stephen Oung



©JNTO

Daisetsuzan National Park

DAITSETSUZAN is located on Japan's most northern island, Hokkaido, and is its largest national park. The area is mountainous, and there's plenty of wildlife to spot including brown bears and deer. If you're wanting to get away from it all, Daitsetsuzan is definitely the place to go. There are many hiking tracks throughout the park which are best to tackle between late June through to September. A number of onsens (inns) around the edge of the park make a great base for exploring the park, particularly Asahidake Onsen, which has a ropeway leading to some easy trails around sulfurous vents.



SMALL GROUP TOURING JAPAN

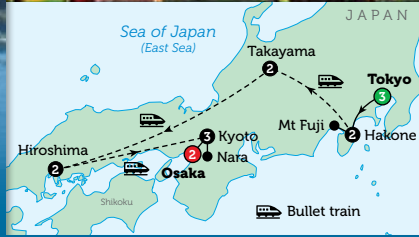


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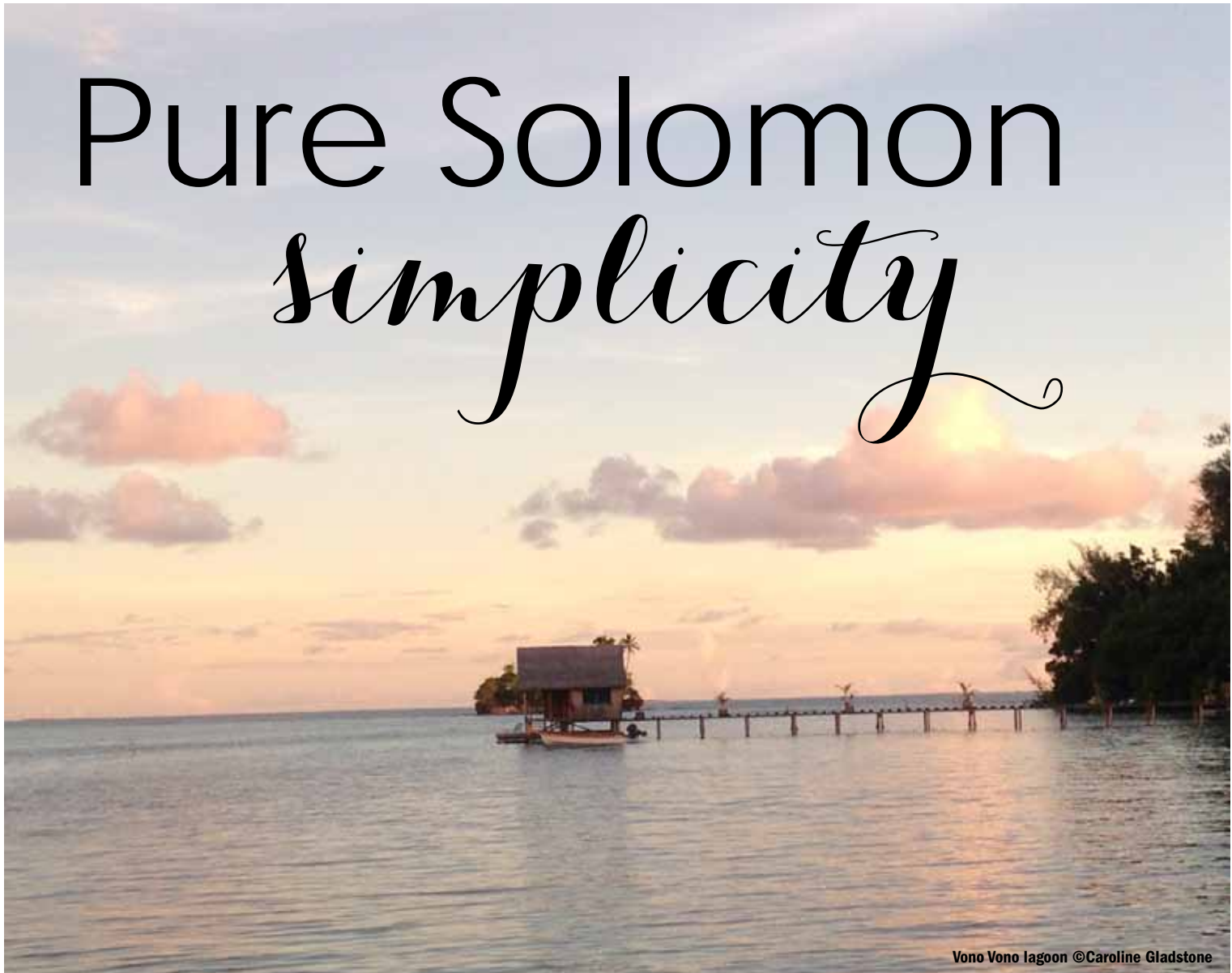
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Pure Solomon *simplicity*



Vono Vono lagoon ©Caroline Gladstone

By Caroline Gladstone

SAERAGI Beach is touted as the most beautiful in the Solomon Islands. A hand-made canvas sign flapping from a thatched hut tells me so. It's hard to argue with that as I crunch across the sand to the shoreline and dive beneath the emerald water, although I dare say there are some pretty gorgeous beaches edging this 990-odd island archipelago.

We arrive by boat and are met by owner Silvia, while eight little children watch on, shyly half-hidden behind palm trees. Silvia, who will also rustle up lunch and book you into one of the two cottages if you wish, says we are welcome to swim and laze about.

The water is deliciously cool and it's a cue for the kids to discard their shyness and join us for a swim. We snorkel, hand the masks over to the kids and play all sorts of games

as the little ones chase us about.

Later when I think of all the experiences I have during a week in the Solomons, from eating lobster on the deck of my resort, to chasing dolphins in a boat and watching sunsets so gorgeous they verge on the spiritual, this is my favourite. When we wave goodbye and the kids resume swinging in a hammock, I kick myself for not having brought anything - some pens, books, a few toys or even lollies - but then realise it's perfect just the way it is.

The Solomon Islands are like that - simple, unspoiled and just right.

Saeragi is on the island of Gizo in the Western Province, one of the nine provinces of the Solomon Islands and itself made up of innumerable islands, big and small, along with a couple of airstrips. And while this region is the most visited in the country beyond the capital Honiara and the main island of Guadalcanal, I rarely see more

than a handful of travellers in any given day. Whizzing about on a boat between islands on the glassy Vono Vono lagoon, we see more dolphins than people.

‘The experience takes me back to a simpler time; a time of my youth. When holidays were happy, no frills affairs when a beach, a good meal and mucking about in boats was sheer heaven’

We're staying a Fatboys Resort, on Mbabanga Island, one of the more



Fatboys Resort Honeymoon bungalow ©Caroline Gladstone



©Caroline Gladstone



©Caroline Gladstone



Oravae Resort ©Caroline Gladstone

established in the region which takes its name from Dickens' 'The Pickwick Papers', where a character Joe the Fatboy liked to eat, drink and fall asleep. The overwater restaurant and bar contains a pool table and hammocks, and a jetty leads to a clutch of bungalows on the shore. From my balcony I have a perfect view of Kennedy Island (named after President Kennedy who heroically swam there in 1943 after his patrol boat was cut in two by a Japanese destroyer) and to the wonderful Kolombaranga Island, shaped like a sleeping woman, behind it.

Life is similarly lazy at Fatboys – there's snorkeling off the jetty, cold beers in the fridge and crayfish on the menu. Boats take surfers to nearby reef breaks, while picnic lunches and sundown drinks are set up on tiny sand spits in the middle of nowhere.

Sanbis Resort, also on Mbabanga Island, is equally soporific with the added

attraction of a wood-fired pizza oven and a day spa offering treats like a lomi-lomi massage. A few clicks down the lagoon is Oravae Cottage where guests can take the entire three bungalows (including a tree house) and sit on the terrace and watch dugongs swim by. These three upmarket establishments, together with a smattering of mum-and-dad clean-and-tidy homestays and a hotel or two in Gizo town (the second largest town after Honiara) is what passes for tourism in the Solomons.

The experience takes me back to a simpler time; a time of my youth. When holidays were happy, no frills affairs when a beach, a good meal and mucking about in boats was sheer heaven.

My short stay is split between the Gizo region and Guadalcanal, the island which not only contains the capital but is etched in history as the location of one of the bloodiest, and decisive, battles of World War II.

From Honiara we drive west to Vilu Beach, from where we take a boat across Iron Bottom Sound to Savo Island. All three locations played a huge part in the Guadalcanal Battle that raged in this otherwise peaceful patch from August 1942 until February 1943. Today Vilu Beach contains an open air museum littered with the relics of the battle - tanks, aircraft parts and even hundreds of Coca Cola bottles, while Iron Bottom Sound is so named for the dozens of sunken battleships that rest beneath its waves, including the *HMAS Canberra*.

All is peaceful on Savo Island where our half-day tour includes a concert of harmonious singing and a tasty lunch of the freshest pineapple, chicken and lobster. After lunch a few of us climb into hammocks, others have a swim and stroll along the beach. This is the Solomon Islands and the living is easy.

VISITOR INCREASE EXPECTED

THE Solomon Islands is expected to see a nine per cent increase in tourism arrivals in 2016 across all markets compared with the previous year once the final figures are recorded.

Around 25,000 international tourists visit the islands annually, with the majority (or 66 per cent) coming from Australia, followed by the US and New Zealand.

Minister for Culture and Tourism Bartholomew Parapolo told *travelBulletin* at a recent travel mart in Honiara that he could not over-emphasise the importance of Australia and New Zealand to the development of tourism in the Solomon Islands.

Several delegates at the travel mart, such as Infinity Holidays executive Deborah Francesca, had never visited the country before and were impressed with the beauty of the Gizo region and keen to include a couple of the better known resorts in their forthcoming produce range.

New upmarket B&Bs and self-contained properties have recently opened in the western province including Evis Resort on the island of Nggatirana, which is a designated



©David Kirkland

15-hectare conservation area, as well as a single suite called the Golden Cowie, designed for honeymooners on a tiny island not far from the well-known Fatboys Resort. Golden Cowie is the latest development by the Kennedy family – two brothers who own various properties in West Province including Fatboys and the Gizo Hotel.

Small resorts, with less than 10 bungalows, and homestays are the backbone of the Solomon Islands' tourism industry. While many may not be in wholesaler brochures most are accessible through the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB) website.

These small thatched resorts dotted on near-deserted lagoons are the reason why the country is still considered a "best kept secret", Minister Parapolo told wholesalers. SIVB chairman Wilson Ne'e said the Solomons had experiences that other countries could not provide and it was time to move out of the mindset that selling the country was a hard task.

Ne'e said he expected 2017 would also reap a similar nine per cent increase, with many visitors due to take part in the in the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Guadalcanal commemorative events planned for August.

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Explore the hidden paradise of the South Pacific archipelago, comprising of a vast group of 922 breathtaking tropical islands. Experience a culture, rich with traditional customs, art, dance and the iconic sound of the panpipe music of 'Are Are'. Communal, clan and family ties remain strong with the existence of the Wantok system. A key part of the culture, Wantok means people from the same language group who are blood relatives and part of the extended family support and assist one another.

Be mesmerized by the village life which remains much as it has been for centuries. Kastom, the Pidgin term for custom, refers to traditional beliefs and land ownership. Despite the predominance of devout Christians, traditional practices are still being followed, especially by those living in the interior of the country's larger islands.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau Head Office
PO Box 321, Mendana Avenue, Honiara, Solomon Islands
call (677) 22442 or email info@sivb.com.sb

www.visitsolomons.com.sb

 Visit Solomon Islands





©Caroline Gladstone

CRUISING FORWARD

THE appeal of the Solomon Islands as a cruise destination continues to grow with 17 individual ship visits scheduled for 2017, which are expected to bring just over 13,000 visitors to the capital Honiara and a handful of small islands.

This year will also see more luxury cruise ships visiting the archipelago including *Crystal Symphony*, a mid-size five-star vessel in the Crystal Cruises fleet, and the boutique ship *Paul Gauguin*, the latter making two separate visits to the islands in May and June.

Last year P&O Cruises made history when its 1,500-passenger *Pacific Eden* became the largest cruise ship to ever visit Gizo, a region in western province set on the Vono Vono lagoon. It was also the first vessel to dock at the new Honiara wharf, during two 10-night cruises that also visited New Guinea.

This year P&O has upped the ante with three scheduled cruises (all round-trips from Cairns in September and October), bringing a total of 4,500 passengers to the region.

Sister line Princess Cruises will be back in 2017, operating three cruises on the 2,000-passenger vessel *Sun Princess*, departing from Sydney and Brisbane, and calling at Honiara.

Carnival Australia, owner of P&O and Princess, said a recent economic impact report it commissioned with the Australian Government and the World Bank found that cruise tourism in the Solomon Islands had the potential to grow five-fold from the \$600,000 it currently generated to around \$3.3 million by the end of 2017.

Both these lines have added Solomon Islands ports to their already-established Papua New Guinea itineraries. But while P&O has devised a range of shore excursions in Gizo and Honiara, Princess has not organised shore excursions for its day-long visit to Honiara. Passengers are given information on the port and can make arrangements for tours with local operators at the wharf.

This year will also see more visits by expedition and small luxury vessels as well as more calls at remote islands. Ponant Cruises' 264-passenger ship *L'Austral* has scheduled two cruises with calls at islands including Mbike (Florida group), Njari (Gizo area) and at Vanikoro in the far-flung Santa Cruz group of islands, where explorer La Perouse was shipwrecked in the late 18th century.

Expedition vessel *Caledonian Sky* will double its presence in the region with two cruises (in February and September), also visiting remote islands including Santa Ana, Vanikoro and nearby Tikopia.

Five-star ship *Silver Discoverer* (Silversea Cruises) will operate three cruises in October. The 120-passenger ship will call at Mbike Island, Utupua and Marova Lagoon on seven and 14-night voyages, two of which are already sold out.

Also new is a cruise chartered by World Expeditions on the 50-passenger ship *Spirit of Enderby* where acclaimed scientist Tim Flannery will lead adventurers on a 14-day voyage in October through the Choiseul, New Georgia and Santa Isabel island groups.

Uncover the secrets of the Solomon Islands

An array of unique experiences exist here, from cultural visits through to marine exploration; dazzling sunsets to romantic getaways - there's something for every style of traveller.

FALL IN LOVE

FOR newlyweds or those just looking for a romantic private island getaway, a stay at the Tavanipupu Island Resort is a paradise just waiting to be uncovered.

Situated in Marau Sound, Tavanipupu Resort is built on the site of a former coconut plantation and is surrounded by a crystal lagoon and vivid tropical foliage.

The private retreat is a 25-minute plane ride away from capital Honiara and features just 10 bungalows, meaning it remains quiet and serene throughout the year.

CLIMB A SEMI EXTINCT VOLCANO

FOR active travellers, a climb up to Kolombangara – an almost perfect cone shaped volcano – comes highly recommended.

Located in the western province, the two-day trek to the summit consists of explorations of the rainforest, birdwatching, river walking, swimming and rugged cloud-forest walks.

The 1,770-metre hike to the summit finishes at the awe-inspiring crater rim, giving walkers the chance to take in the picturesque views.

EMBARK ON A KAYAKING ADVENTURE

GET back to nature and enjoy a calming paddle through crystalline waters at Marovo Lagoon.

This picturesque spot is surrounded by endless beaches and forests, while the still waters make for the perfect location to observe sealife such as turtles, dolphins and rays in their natural habitat.

As the waters are so clear here, many say the experience of kayaking at Marovo is akin to looking straight through a glass bottom boat.

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Marvellous Malaysia



By Nina Karnikowski

CLOSE your eyes, take a deep breath, and let your mind drift to your ideal holiday destination. You see picturesque beaches, right? Rich culture, beautiful architecture, abundant wildlife and drool-worthy food? Well, Peninsular Malaysia just might be your travel dream come true. Start in Penang's capital Georgetown for a taste of old-world Asia, complete with temples, trishaws, colonial bungalows and food that's tasty enough to have earned Penang the title of food capital of the world. Once you've had your cultural fill, head to the 104-island archipelago of Langkawi for deserted beaches, lush wildlife-filled mangrove forests, waterfalls and jaw-dropping vistas.

CULTURAL HIGH

The best place to begin your wanderings in UNESCO World Heritage-listed George Town is on the Street of Harmony, where you'll get a taste of the town's four main cultural influences – European, Chinese, Indian and Malaysian.

The stunning white St George's Anglican Church can be your launch pad, a testament to George Town's colonial roots which holds a memorial to the town's 1786 founder, Captain Francis Light. A five-minute walk away you'll find the Goddess of Mercy Chinese Buddhist temple, its roof and stone pillars carved with

dragons and its courtyard filled with oversized smoking incense sticks. Inside locals pray, offer candles for the wellbeing of their loved ones, read oracle sticks, and take a moment of solitude.

Next up is Little India, where you'll be immediately transported by sari-clad women, stalls selling marigold garlands and spices, and Bollywood music. You'll want to snap a picture of the Sri Maha Mariamman Kovil temple, covered in brightly coloured statues of Hindu gods, then of the 19th century Kapitan Keling Mosque with its Moorish arches, minarets and domes, just a few minutes down the road.

Armenian Street is also worth a visit, to check out the narrow Chinese shophouses and mansions that line the street. Speaking of mansions, don't miss the exquisite indigo-washed 1880s Blue Mansion, with its beautiful antique floor tiles, tropical potted plants, and open-air courtyards.

EAT, DRINK, REPEAT

Eating is a national pastime in Malaysia. Get involved at the nearest hawker market (Sri Weld Food Court is a great one), where you can peruse myriad stalls that each have their own specialty. Choose between char kway teow, nasi lemak (coconut rice wrapped in pandan leaf with a scoop of sambal sauce), asam laksa and more, washed down with a sugary iced milk tea or kopi beng, iced coffee. Oh, and the Ming Xiang Tai pastry shop is the place to go for a dessert of egg tart and chrysanthemum and goji berry tea.

Take a postprandial stroll down the Chew Clan Jetty, built over the sea in the late 18th century when George Town was one of the world's most thriving ports. Here, stilt houses built along the rickety docks have been home to members of the Chew clan for more than a century. Continue meandering through the streets to check out Penang's famous street art, including 52 steel rod caricatures that retell bits of George Town's history,

and colourful murals like the famous "Little Children on a Bicycle".

There's simply no better way to end a day in this vibrant city than by taking the funicular up to Penang Hill lookout for panoramic city views, and perhaps a cheeky drink at the bar. Then, it'll be time to pack your bags and head to the beach for part two of your Malaysian adventure.

A NATURAL BEAUTY

If you want to feel as though you have the entire Andaman Sea to yourself, Sandy Skulls beach is an arc of sugary sand and turquoise water that's all but deserted. Another option is Pantai Cenang beach, where you'll find waves and water sports aplenty including surfing, stand-up paddle boarding and jet skiing.

More pristine beauty awaits at Seven Wells Waterfall, a series of seven connected pools fed by waterfalls on Mount Mat Cincang, where you can paddle or simply while away an afternoon picnicking and soaking up the serenity. And for the very best views of the archipelago, take a 'Sky Cab' up to the Langkawi Sky Bridge. At 708 metres above the ground, it gives visitors 360-degree views of the outlying forest-encrusted Malaysian and Thai islands, and the 550 million-year-old limestone karst mountains that rise majestically around Langkawi.

These karst formations have, along with Langkawi's tangled mangrove forest, gained Langkawi South East Asia's first UNESCO Geopark listing. For the second piece of the puzzle, take a cruise through the mangrove forest along Langkawi's Kilim River, where you'll spy cheeky rhesus macaque monkeys, swooping rusty brahminy kite eagles, vipers, mud skippers and cave-dwelling bats.

The perfect Malaysia farewell, however, just might be a sunset dinner cruise with local water sports company Naam. After weaving through Langkawi's outlying forest-encrusted islands as the sun dips below the horizon, you can head home content in the knowledge that your ideal holiday wish-list is complete.





Borneo International Orchid Show

VISIT Sabah this September for the Borneo International Orchid Show, when orchid enthusiasts and experts from around the world converge on the capital, Kota Kinabalu, to share their love and passion for the alluring blooms. Borneo is famous for its orchids and is home to some of the most rare and spectacular specimens in the world.

Several thousand orchids will be on display for this colourful event. Those who are there for the show will have the chance to meet some of the world's leading orchid experts, listen in on lectures and view incredible displays.

MALAYSIA TOURISM CAMPAIGNS

A beach on Pahang



MALAYSIA'S fresh Visit Pahang, Visit Perak and Visit Beautiful Terengganu tourism campaigns are expected to boost international arrival numbers to the destination this year. It comes as the nation aims to reach its goal of 31.8 million visitors this year.

Malaysia's Tourism and Culture Deputy Minister, Datuk Mas Ermeyati Samsudin said the areas being targeted were lesser known to Australian tourists but were "all appealing destinations in their own right".

Pahang is known for its beautiful mountains, rainforests and beaches, Perak for its Buddhist cave while Terengganu boasts some of Malaysia's most sublime beaches along with the idyllic Perhentian Islands.

SABAH INTERNATIONAL DRAGON BOAT RACE



TO WITNESS a spectacle which pays tribute to Malaysia's multicultural heritage, head to Sabah's capital Kota Kinabalu this May for the fourth Sabah FCAS International Dragon Boat Race.

During the last three years, the race has emerged as one of the main sporting events in Sabah.

Organised in conjunction with the Duan Wu Festival, the two-day event will feature some of the best local and international dragon boat teams from around the world competing to be 'king' for the coming year.

During the race competing teams will drive the multi-coloured boats forward, synchronising their paddling to the rhythm of pounding drums, while racing for the finish line. Each boat is decorated with dragonheads, scaly bodies and elaborate tails that rise out of the sea, making for an awesome sight and a great opportunity to take some impressive holiday snaps.

The event is also a chance to sample a variety of delicious local fare which will be on offer at the stalls lined along Likas Bay. Make sure you take the time to sample traditional sticky rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves known as zonzi dumplings.

A PENANG GETAWAY

By Nathalie Craig

THE Malaysian island of Penang blends tropical beaches with fascinating architecture and delicious hawker food. Its capital George Town was the first British port town along the Straits of Malacca and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Every street is beautifully unique as traditional Chinese temples stand alongside British colonial-era mansions. The city is punctuated with a quirky collection of street art. Much of the work was created by Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic who was commissioned by the city to breathe new life into the Chinese shop-houses.

If it's sandy beaches you're after, take a visit to Batu Ferringhi on Penang's north coast where you will be greeted with powder-white sands and warm, tropical turquoise waters. Here you'll find a stretch of some of Penang's most luxurious hotels including Shangri La and the Hard Rock Hotel. Another attraction in the area is an eight-hectare butterfly sanctuary with more than 4,000 butterflies including exotic species. The sanctuary is also home to an organic tropical fruit farm with guided daily tours.

If you want to get straight to the heart of Malaysian cuisine head to a one of the many local Hawker stalls. You can find them by the roadside or inside purpose built hawker centres. Authentic and delicious, local meals will only set you back a couple of dollars. Locals and tourists alike gather together to feast in these bustling places. Don't miss out on trying the island's favourite stir-fry, char kuey teow, a scrumptious mix of flat rice noodles, dark soy sauce, prawns, fishcakes, clams, bean sprouts, chives and eggs. Other tempting hawker dishes include flaky roti canai bread, the fragrant Malay rice dish nasi lemak and the sweet, icy dessert known as cendol.

The vibrant turtle shaped island just west of the Malaysian peninsula is worthy of an entire trip or can be an interesting add-on to your overall Malaysian journey.



Penang street art



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THE WORLD'S BEST ADVENTURE DESTINATIONS

Sometimes, you feel the urge. It's the need to break free from the everyday, to challenge yourself, to see a part of the world or engage in a certain activity that might have your friends questioning your grip on sanity. Maybe it's spending the night in a yurt in the wilderness of the Mongolian steppe. Maybe it's trekking through the jungle to watch a tribal rite in Papua New Guinea. Maybe it's jumping off a bridge in New Zealand, or viewing the "Big 5" in Botswana. Whatever you choose, there's something thrilling about adventure travel, something that sets it apart from your everyday "fly and flop". And these are the best places in the world to do it, writes Ben Groundwater.



Those surfers who have begun to tire of Australia's increasingly crowded breaks will instantly fall in love with Sumba, an Indonesian island that's big on experience and small on development. There's a rough charm to Sumba, which can be appreciated equally from a beachside bungalow, or from a barreling left-hander that you have pretty much all to yourself. The locals are friendly here and the prices are cheap. What's not to love?

■ **More:** sumba-information.com

Best for surfers: Sumba

If you want to jump off a bridge with an elastic band tied around your ankles, you can do it in New Zealand. If you want to swing across a high gorge, you can do it in New Zealand. If you want to raft a river, or leap out of a plane, or ski down a steep mountain, or hike on a glacier, or pretty much any other activity you can think of that sounds scary or adrenalin fuelled, then look no further: you can do it in New Zealand.

■ **More:** newzealand.com



Image ©Chris McLennan

Best for adrenalin: New Zealand



If you love to explore the great outdoors on foot, then there's perhaps no more spectacular location in which to do it than Patagonia. This is a land of extremes, of towering, jagged mountain peaks, of desolate high plains, and of huge glaciers ever so slowly crumbling into the sea below. A multi-day hiking adventure in Patagonia is one of the world's great experiences – however, do save time for the rest of Chile, which boasts volcanic peaks, rolling wine-country hills, and the high-altitude Atacama.

■ **More:** chile.travel

Best for hikers: Chile



Best for animal lovers: Botswana

There are many African countries in which to view the “Big 5”, but very few that offer the sort of wild experience that Botswana does. Whether you’re in the famous Okavango Delta, with its huge plethora of game, or up north in Chobe National Park, with its population of more than 50,000 elephants, or even hanging out with the meerkats in the Kalahari Desert, the Botswana wildlife viewing experience is one of no fences, no rules, and no safety net.

■ More: botswanaturism.co.bw

Best for skiers: Japan



There is a place where the snow falls so heavily that you almost get sick of it. There is a place where the lift-pass prices are low, where the accommodation is affordable, where the food is good and the people are friendly. That place? Japan. Japan is a wonderland for skiers, thanks to its enormous, reliable snowfalls and the surprisingly low costs involved. Check out popular Niseko resort, but also don’t miss Hakuba on the main island, and Nozawa, which has some of the country’s best hot springs.

■ More: jnto.org.au

You want adventure? Try trekking deep into the jungle in the hills above Rabaul, waiting in a dark clearing in the middle of the night, and then watching as a huge bonfire is set. Suddenly masked figures appear out of the jungle, running through the flames, stamping on embers, kicking burning logs. This is a Baining Fire Dance, and it’s a tribal ritual that intrepid travellers have the chance to witness in PNG. This is a country of hundreds of fascinating cultures that remain largely undiscovered.

■ More: papuanewguinea.travel



Best for culture: PNG

If “adventure” for you means four wheels and a full tank of petrol, then there’s only one country you need to consider: the USA. This is a nation of highways and byways, of busy city streets and empty country roads. It’s a land of arrow-straight tarmac shooting through quiet deserts, and of winding tracks that lead up towards snowy mountaintops. There’s never a dull moment on a US road trip, whether you’re tackling the full Route 66, or just spending a day seeing the sights from the window of a big old American cruiser.

■ More: visit-usa.com



Best for road-trippers: USA

If it’s isolation you crave, then Mongolia is for you. This is a country that’s almost the same size as Queensland, yet with a population of only 3 million – half of whom live in the capital, Ulan Baator. So that’s a whole lot of empty space that’s occupied by little more than a scattering of nomadic families who still live in traditional yurts, or “gers”. To spend a few nights with one of these families on the windswept Mongolian steppe is to truly appreciate the meaning of “alone”.

■ More: visitmongolia.com



Best for getting away from it all: Mongolia

ADVENTURE WORLD USA PROGRAM



AW USA Horse riding Trek

SOFT adventure specialist Adventure World is ramping up its FIT program in North America, this month releasing a new stand-alone USA brochure for 2017/18, complementing the company's long running Canada & Alaska guide.

Managing director Neil Rodgers told *travelBulletin* Adventure World had repeatedly had to turnback requests for trans-border, Deep South, National Parks and New England as it was unable to fulfil demand, until now.

Recruiting former Pinpoint Holidays' USA expert Andrew Hutchinson last April, Rodgers and his Adventure World team have developed a new collection of tailor-made

journeys to lesser explored mainland USA destinations not currently available in this market in the inaugural program.

"The regions that we are focusing on are the Pacific Northwest, the Rockies region, the Southwest & Deep South and New England & the Maritimes. There's no New York in it. There's no Route 66, there's no Florida, there's no Hawaii," Rodgers said.

"The range is focused on wildlife, wilderness, active adventures, photography, culinary, culture and heritage - products and destinations that will appeal to the second or third time USA traveller."

"We've been careful not to be seen as a generalist. The product is so specific to be aligned with Adventure World Canada & Alaska, and now the USA."

Travel consultants will find a tailored collection of FIT itineraries spotlighting Native America, Bison migration safaris, historic wagon trail trips, cross-border journeys between British Columbia and Alberta into Montana and more.

"The benefit for agents is we now have unique procured product in a mainstream reservation platform, where previously hard to access and book content can be held, secured and paid through a locally based wholesaler."

FUN AND EXCITEMENT AT THE GOLDFIELDS JET



HIDDEN within the eastern end of New Zealand's spectacular Kawarau Gorge in central Otago is the Goldfields Jet, a thrilling experience which takes the daring on a fast-paced joy ride through crystal clear waters, whilst dodging jagged cliff faces.

Operating since 1991, the Goldfields Jet experience begins on the lower reaches of the Kawarau River before heading out through the Gorge and into the placid waters of Lake Dunstan, reaching speeds of around 80kms per hour. In total, the thrill ride lasts just over 40 minutes, with the host stopping momentarily between 360 degree spins and adrenaline-inducing skids over rocks to give insightful commentary about the region's rich gold mining history and the miners who flocked there in search of treasure.

The jets are designed to operate smoothly across just inches of water and will also glide effortlessly across obstacles such as protruding rocks and sand bars.

■ To book, visit www.goldfieldsjet.co.nz.

G ADVENTURES UK EXPANSION

CANADIAN adventure travel company G Adventures has come to the rescue to ensure the continued operation of UK based tour operators Travelsphere and Just You following the collapse of parent firm All Leisure Holidays.

The acquisition sees G Adventures take over award-winning Travelsphere and its array of Touring, Ocean Cruising, River Cruise, Short Breaks, Tours by Rail, Festive and Relax & Discover holidays, to destinations including Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania and South America. Travelsphere has been operating for 50 years.

Specialising in solo travel, Just You has a portfolio of Active, City, Escapes, River and Tour itineraries through Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania and South America.

The respective websites of Just You and Travelsphere confirmed "all our holidays will continue to operate as planned".

All Leisure Holidays brands also included Swan Hellenic and Voyages of Discovery, which entered into administration. Now under the ownership of G Adventures, Travelsphere was quick to distance itself from its former sister company. On Facebook, Travelsphere



Swan Hellenic's *Minerva* under the Tower Bridge, London

stated to concerned travellers, "Please be rest assured that we are no longer linked to them and we are now owned by G Adventures. Just You and Travelsphere have not folded and we are trading as usual with no changes".

G Adventures founder Bruce Poon Tip said the businesses were "both leaders in their fields and we are really excited that they have become part of the G Adventures family. We are now able to offer an even wider range of

escorted tours right across the world and to suit all ages".

Further, Poon Tip flagged ongoing development of the brands was planned.

"We will be working hard to ensure that the loyal customers of Just You and Travelsphere continue to enjoy the award-winning tours that both brands organise. The future looks exceptionally bright and we look forward to expanding the range of tours for both," Poon Tip said.

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Anne of Green Gables' house



A traveller walking on the path
between Heididorf and Maienfeld

Doing it by the book

Everyone loves a good story but some stories pull at the heart strings more than others. Some stories resonant so strongly that readers will travel thousands of miles to walk in the author's footsteps. Caroline Gladstone explores this phenomenon.

SOME characters and stories linger on in the hearts of their readers, so much so that they will visit the settings of their adored fictional characters and in some cases even get married there. And if those stories have also been told on the big screen, then expect a huge following.

And so I discover in Prince Edward Island when after eating my share of lobster and poking around the capital Charlottetown, I hit the Anne trail. If you need to ask "Anne who?", then you haven't read *Anne of Green Gables* and fallen for the eternally positive albeit feisty red-headed heroine, Anne Shirley.

Author Lucy Maud Montgomery set her nine books around Cavendish on the north shore of the island (the smallest of Canada's 10 provinces), an area of time-warped bucolic beauty which is as gorgeous as the descriptions on the page. On a spring day I encounter rolling green hills, fields of dandelions and little coves where brightly-coloured fishing boats bob up and down.

My first stop on the 'trail' is Green Gables itself – a beautifully-restored 19th century farmhouse, which was Montgomery's inspiration for the timeless story of a young 11-year-old orphan who is sent to live with brother-and-sister, Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, in such a house. Surrounding Green Gables today are the legendary Haunted Wood and Lovers' Lane where Anne and her fictional friends played in the first decade of the 20th century.

From Cavendish I head to the *Anne of Green Gables* Museum, where Montgomery was married in 1911 and which was built by her uncle, John Campbell, in 1872 and still owned by his family today. I buy a couple of books and luckily a descendant, Pam Campbell, is on hand to sign them. I could have bought a dozen different red-mopped Anne dolls, along with hats, scarves, jams, preserves, raspberry cordial



Anne of Green Gables' house



Idyllic Swiss bucolic setting

and a swag of other memorabilia. However, I happily mooch around the 40-hectare property and its Lake of Shining Waters (another book in the series) to see the spot where devotees, particularly Japanese couples, get married. *Anne of Green Gables* has been translated into 36 languages and spawned movies, TV series and a long-running musical, and quite remarkably has been a compulsory text in Japanese schools for decades.

Across the other side of the world another little orphan heroine attracts busloads of tourists to her fictional home in the Swiss Alps. On a late summer's day our small group gets off the train at Maienfeld and takes the one-kilometre road that winds uphill, through the town's medieval square and past green fields and vineyards to Heididorf (Heidi town). This shrine to Heidi is in fact the former village of Oberrofels, complete with town hall and post-office, which was renamed some 20 years ago as it resembles the setting of the famous children's book. Nowadays an old farm house acts as a wonderful museum, which outlines the story of the six-year-old girl who, in this case, was sent by her aunt to live with her grandfather, a recluse, high in the alpine meadows.

Written by Johanna Spyri in 1881, the story has fans spanning several generations, helped along by at least 13 different movies and television series including the 1937 Hollywood version that starred Shirley Temple. Once again the Japanese (and Koreans) love it; a

‘However, I happily mooch around the 40-hectare property and its Lake of Shining Waters (another book in the [Anne of Green Gables] series) to see the spot where devotees, particularly Japanese couples, get married’

52-episode animated series released in 1974 made sure those who had not read the book certainly knew the story. And young Asian couples also like to wed in the museum or in the fields beneath the towering mountains.

After buying Heidi stamps in the post-office, we lunch at the Heidi alp Oshsenberg restaurant, further up the mountain where a guestbook is full of messages from international travellers, including quite a few Aussies, who have made the pilgrimage to this lovely part of the world.

While these children's stories have struck a deep chord with millions (and created a thriving tourist industry), there are many adult literary trails to follow. Travellers have converged on Stratford-Upon-Avon for centuries to follow the Bard (I once stayed in the Ophelia Suite at the Shakespeare Hotel), while author festivals abound.

The beautiful city of Bath holds a Jane Austen Festival every September, where thousands dressed in Regency clothes parade through the streets and attend balls and other genteel gatherings; Australia even has its own Austen festival – held in Canberra at Easter.

And it's even fun to stumble across a literary town by accident. While visiting friends in Broadstairs, Kent, I learn that Charles Dickens was a regular visitor and wrote *David Copperfield* during his seaside sojourn. And at almost every turn I come across a landmark – the Bleak House B&B, the Old Curiosity Shop tearooms and the Charles Dickens pub, plus there's a week-long festival in his honour every June.



CONTENT IS KEY FOR LITERATURE-BASED TRAVEL TOURS

Jane Austen fans in period costume in Bath, photo courtesy VisitBritain

BOOK worms who are drawn to the real-life homes and towns of their literary heroes or their favourite characters are less fussed about the destination itself and more interested in the content provided on literature-based tours, ASA Cultural Tours' Marketing Manager Sandra Hansen told *travelBulletin*.

"Anyone can take you to Jane Austen's house," Hansen said, but it's the truly memorable moments such as meeting the descendants of a writer or enjoying a dinner in the same spot where Mark Twain once dined that keeps people coming back.

Aside from the content, what also makes a literary tour successful is the depth of the group leader's knowledge on the topic, the private visits on offer and the unique experiences available, she said.

"That being said great writers like Jane Austen and the Bronte Sisters will always draw people to Britain," Hansen admitted.

VisitBritain said literature fans heading to Britain this year would have a lot to look forward to, with a host of events, exhibitions, talks and performances set to be held in celebration of major literary milestones such

as the bicentenary of Jane Austen's death and the 20th year since *Harry Potter* was first published.

‘It’s the truly memorable moments such as meeting the descendants of a writer or enjoying a dinner in the same spot where Mark Twain once dined that keeps people coming back’

Although JK Rowling's cult series was penned in a small café in Edinburgh, the film adaptations put many of Britain's landmarks on the map as 'Potter Pilgrimage sites', VisitBritain said, with many fans likely to head to iconic spots such as

Northumberland's Alnwick Castle (one of the many Hogwarts locations) and the Reptile House at ZSL London Zoo (where Harry first learns he can speak to snakes) to celebrate the anniversary.

The milestone moment also sees a new exhibition launched at the British Library on the 20th of October, giving fans the chance to get up close with rare manuscripts and objects alongside previously unseen material from JK Rowling's private archives.

Neighbouring Ireland is another destination that should be on the bucket lists of all literary fanatics this year, Tourism Ireland said, with Dublin named a UNESCO World City of Literature.

Home to literary greats such as James Joyce, C.S. Lewis, Oscar Wilde and Jonathan Swift, the Emerald Isle hosts several festivals throughout the year including the International Literature Festival Dublin, Bloomsday and the West Cork Literary Festival.

"Wherever or whenever they visit, there is something to delight the avid reader, budding writer or lover of literature," Tourism Ireland said.

A LIFE IN HAMPSHIRE



Jane Austen's house, Chawton, courtesy VisitBritain

THIS year marks the 200th anniversary of the death of beloved British author Jane Austen.

In celebration of her incredible life, the Hampshire Cultural Trust has established a year-long program packed with exhibitions, talks, walks and writing competitions.

A highlight of the celebrations is The Mysterious Miss Austen exhibition which opens on the 13th of May and runs until the 24th of July. Held at The Gallery in the Winchester Discover Centre, the exhibition explores Jane's life, work and her relationship with Hampshire, her birthplace.

The exhibition will see five portraits of Jane housed under the one roof for the first time including two works from the National Portrait Gallery in London and three from private collections – one of which has not been seen in public for more than two decades.

Additionally, fans will also be able to follow in the footsteps of Austen, taking in her home in Chawton and the sights and sounds which first inspired her works *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility*, before paying homage to her at her final resting place in Winchester.

■ The full schedule of events can be found at www.janeausten200.co.uk.

Happy Bloomsday!

EVERY June 16 the city of Dublin gives itself over to celebrate all things James Joycean.

Known as Bloomsday, the annual commemoration sees fans of Joyces' classic novel *Ulysses* follow in the footsteps of the book's beloved protagonist Leopold Bloom.

Live readings, performances and visiting the establishments referenced in the book are all part of the "sacred day", with many choosing to don straw boaters and striped blazers (the era's garb) to get into the spirit.

The city is also home to the James Joyce Centre, a spot dedicated to preserving the author's legacy. The centre runs walking tours of the city based on Joyce's life and work, with private group tours also available for those who book in advance.

"If you're a strict follower of Leopold Bloom's day, though, you need to be in Dublin," Tourism Ireland said.

■ Visit www.jamesjoyce.ie for further details.



Second stop on the Dublin literary pub crawl, photo courtesy Barry Leiba

DUBLIN LITERARY PUB CRAWL

SINK a pint while simultaneously experiencing the sights and sounds which first inspired some of Ireland's greatest writers on the Dublin Literary Pub Crawl.

The guided walking tour explores four of the city's most famous pubs in the company of two actors who perform scenes from the works of some of Ireland's greatest playwrights.

Authors celebrated on the crawl include Oscar Wilde, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw and W.B. Yeats.

The tour concludes at the Duke Pub with a literary quiz, with prizes given out to the winners.



Where in the world?

THERE are many incredible rock formations around the world, particularly in the US. Can you name this distinctive bend and tell us where it is located? If you think you've got it, send your answer to comps@travelbulletin.com.au. If you're the first agent to answer, you'll win yourself a double movie pass to the cinemas. What luck!

Congratulations to our winner of the November Where in the World, Jane Elliott from Spencer Travel. She correctly picked that the statue pictured was the Angel of the North, which stands at the top of a hill near Gateshead in Newcastle Upon Tyne, England

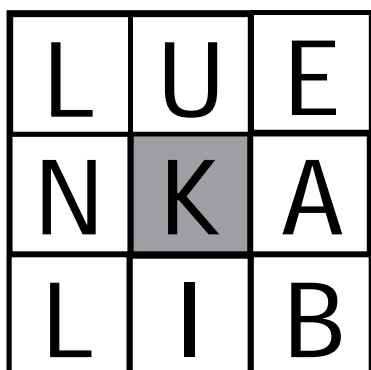
UNSCRAMBLE

HOW many words can you make out of these nine letters? Every word needs to include an 'K', have four letters or more and not be a proper noun. You can only use each letter once. There's also one word that uses all nine letters.

Good - 10 words

Very good - 16 words

Excellent - 24 words



GADGET: TITAN LOCK

LOCKS for your luggage are a dime a dozen these days. We as travellers are much more aware on the possibilities that our luggage may be broken in to and our valuables nicked, or used to traffic drugs without our knowledge, or hide something even more sinister than that. Standing at the luggage carousel virtually every bag has a lock, and it's not uncommon to see bags which look like they've been gladwrapped, to protect their owner's possessions.

Locks have meant that would be criminals have had to become even more crafty, and locks are not even a guarantee of the safety of your valuables.

Enter the Titan Lock.

Developed, owned and made in Australia, these ingenious devices are not like your traditional lock, with a key or combination. Instead, made of plastic and with a special anti-tamper device, the Titan Lock alerts you if there have been any attempts to break in, allowing you to notify customs authorities and police. Although a little fiddley to use the first time, once you have it down pat, you'll never have to worry about your luggage.



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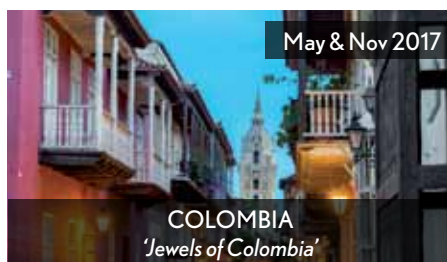
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Experience the breathtaking landscapes of Puglia and Amalfi on foot whilst sampling bountiful cuisine along the way.

11 Days | \$10,995 per person twin share



Discover why Colombia is Latin America's best kept secret when you explore this fascinating country in the company of Bogotá expat, Richard McColl.

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Traverse this vast hinterland of Asia, the rugged and desolate landscapes and once-flourishing oasis cities and trading outposts.

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