

travelBulletin

DECEMBER 2017/JANUARY 2018

20/20
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DECEMBER 2017/JANUARY 2018



2017
WHERE DID
IT GO?!

FOOD & WINE **USA** HOTELS & APARTMENTS **PHILIPPINES** LUXURY

**BONUS US\$300
ONBOARD CREDIT**

**SOUTH AFRICA,
INDIA & SOUTHEAST ASIA**

6 CRUISE TOURS & 5 GRAND VOYAGES

**2018/19 ITINERARIES
OUT NOW**



Boutique small ship
cruising



Transfers between overseas
airport, hotel and ship



On-board Gratuities
and Port Charges



Expert Guest
Speakers



Dedicated solo
cabins and fares



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ANCIENT CIVILISATIONS**

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Highlights Visits to the Acropolis, Mycenae and Epidaurus
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Christmas & New Year celebrations on board ship
Visit the Taj Mahal
Old Goa on the Malabar Coast
The palaces of the Raj in historic Cochin
Barbecue on a 'desert island' in the tropical Maldives
Pinnawala elephant sanctuary in Sri Lanka
The sacred sites of ancient Trincomalee
Phuket and the stunning Phi Phi islands in Thailand

Inclusions • Free return economy airfare from Australia* to Athens,
returning from Singapore • 24 included tours • 3 night pre-cruise hotel
stay in Athens • Cruise aboard Aegean Odyssey
2 night post-cruise hotel stay in Singapore

Standard Outside Cabin from **\$21,595*** per person
twin share



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3 days in Yangon, formerly Rangoon, in Burma
The British legacy of the Andaman Islands
Pinnawala elephant sanctuary in Sri Lanka
Barbeque on a 'desert island' in the tropical Maldives
The beauty of the Seychelles coral reef
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returning from Capetown • 21 included tours
2 night pre-cruise hotel stay in Singapore
Cruise aboard Aegean Odyssey

Standard Outside Cabin from **\$20,750*** per person
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*TERMS & CONDITIONS: All fares shown are Australian Dollars, per person, based on twin occupancy and including all bonus saving discount. Fares include pre and/or post hotel stays as detailed for each itinerary, gratuities & port taxes (correct as of 20 November 2017). Valid for new bookings only. All Fly Free offers are capacity controlled and can be withdrawn or modified at any time without notice and is subject to availability. Airfare is economy class and based on specific airlines, routing and class. Valid for flights to/from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide & Perth. Pre & post hotel accommodation & transfers from airport/port/hotel offered on dates specified on itinerary only, ask for details. Cancelled bookings are subject to cancellation penalties as per the terms and conditions. Prices based on payment by cash or cheque only. Travel agent service fees not included. Voyages to Antiquity reserve the right to change, correct errors, withdraw from sale any or all fares, itineraries, excursions & fees. For full terms & conditions visit www.voyagestoantiquity.com.au or visit your local preferred Travel Agent.



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From the publisher

Bruce Piper

IN these days of electronic news it is unusual for a print publication to be the first to break a major story, but we're going to make an exception with this issue of *travelBulletin*. It's been talked about for months, and isn't a revelation to many industry insiders, but I can hereby confirm that APT Travel Group is now the two-thirds majority owner of Cruiseeco.

Whispers have been circulating for some time about a shift in the Cruiseeco shareholdings following the recent retirement of co-founder Steve Lloyd, who was CEO of the organisation. Lloyd established Cruiseeco in July 2000 alongside Phil Hoffmann from Phil Hoffmann Travel and Kevin Dale of National Network Travel, who has also recently sold his agency.

After receiving several tip-offs about the change we looked into it, with ASIC records indicating the deal was done at the end of March 2017. At that time APT Travel Group (ATG) managing director Chris Hall was appointed as a director of Cruiseeco Pty Ltd, along with ATG finance director Ross Kemp.

Interestingly, a share transfer at the same time saw APT's holding company Cruise Investments Pty Ltd increase its Cruiseeco shareholding from 50.5% to 67% – so APT was already the majority owner of the consortium. In fact Cruise Investments has held its stake in Cruiseeco since July 2005, further investigations revealed. Cruise Investments Pty Ltd in turn is 75% owned by Australian Pacific Touring Pty Ltd, with the remainder held by a company associated with Phil Asker, founder of Croydon Travel and Captain's Choice – which is also part the APT Travel Group family.

Hoffmann and Dale each retain a 16.5% stake in Cruiseeco, and both are currently directors of the company alongside Asker, Kemp and Hall.

So what does it all mean for Cruiseeco? Potentially nothing. As an existing long-term shareholder, clearly APT has not wielded its might to change the product mix in favour of its own cruises. What is more interesting is that the involvement of APT has not been made public previously, with recent statements – including the appointment in July of Amanda McLelland as Lloyd's replacement – coming solely from Hoffmann and Dale.

In fact, having the strength of APT underpinning Cruiseeco should provide confidence for members and suppliers – so why not make it public?

MEANWHILE we hope you enjoy our annual 'Year in Review' cover story in this edition. 2017 has seen lots of change and it's been great to look at some of the big developments over the last 12 months. As always we appreciate your ongoing support. Thanks to our loyal readers *travelBulletin* continues to go from strength to strength, and we look forward to seeing what 2018 holds for us all!

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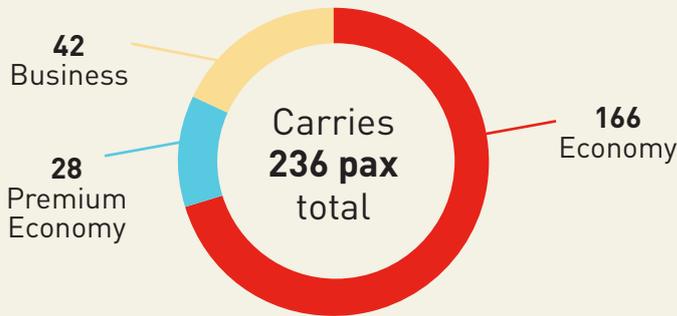
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QANTAS DREAMLINER



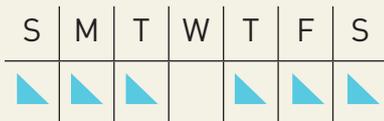
MEL-LAX

PER-LHR

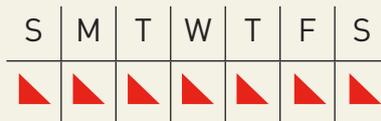
12,772

14,498

total distance of route (km)



QF95/96 = Six times weekly



QF9/10 = Daily

Frequency

14

approximate flight time (hours)

17

15 DEC 2017

24 MAR 2018

launch date

Qatar buys into Cathay

QATAR Airways has moved on from its failed bid to take a stake in American Airlines, having announced a purchase of almost 10% of Cathay Pacific.

The transaction was completed last month and involved Qatar taking 378 million shares in the Hong-Kong based airline. The acquisition represents 9.61% of Cathay shares and cost close to HK\$5 billion (about A\$840 million). "Qatar Airways is very pleased to complete its financial investment in Cathay Pacific," said the airline's CEO Akbar Al Baker. "Cathay Pacific is a fellow oneworld member and is one of the strongest airlines in the world, respected throughout the industry and with massive potential for the future," he said.

Cathay becomes the fourth oneworld airline in which Qatar has an investment. The Middle Eastern carrier already has a 20% stake in International Airlines Group (IAG) – the parent company of British Airways and Iberia – and 10% of LATAM Airlines Group. Qatar also holds 49% of unaligned Italian carrier Meridiana. But its bid to take an investment in oneworld founder American Airlines was thwarted in August and withdrawn in response to US hostility towards the move.

ACCC pricks Red Balloon

ONLINE activity provider Red Balloon has become the first major casualty of the Federal Government's new credit card surcharge rules, copping a \$43,200 fine for four excessive charges. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) said Red Balloon had overcharged four consumers between March and June.

BUSINESS MONITOR

OUTBOUND MARKET

Top 10 destinations, September 2017

Destination	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Aug 17/ Sep 17	Trend Sep 16/ Sep 17
	000	000	000	%	%
Indonesia	100.8	99.2	106.2	+0.1	-3.2
New Zealand	116.4	119.0	101.6	-0.7	+1.9
USA	91.9	92.0	98.8	+0.3	+2.3
UK	51.4	52.7	74.6	-0.3	+5.3
Thailand	49.9	50.4	47.3	+0.3	+9.3
China	46.0	46.6	45.3	+1.2	+17.4
Singapore	31.7	31.8	34.3	-0.8	-3.3
Fiji	28.4	28.3	32.8	-0.4	-3.3
Italy	18.4	17.8	30.4	-1.4	+11.4
Japan	33.8	34.3	24.7	+0.0	+11.7
All outbound	884.7	892.9	946.0	+0.2	+5.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

INBOUND MARKET

Top 10 sources, September 2017

Source	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Aug 17/ Sep 17	Trend Sep 16/ Sep 17
	000	000	000	%	%
New Zealand	112.6	111.3	123.8	+0.0	-0.7
China	123.0	117.9	97.3	+0.9	+19.4
USA	65.5	66.1	49.4	-0.7	+5.2
UK	56.9	56.4	41.2	-0.8	-5.3
Japan	35.7	35.5	34.1	-0.5	+2.0
Singapore	37.9	37.2	34.1	+0.2	+4.7
Malaysia	37.1	32.0	31.9	+1.3	+6.2
South Korea	26.5	30.0	26.2	+3.2	+8.9
India	27.2	27.9	24.1	+2.2	+18.6
Hong Kong	25.1	24.7	19.8	+1.4	+19.5
All inbound	752.5	744.6	663.5	+0.4	+6.7

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

MAIN DOMESTIC ROUTES

Top 10 domestic city pairs at September 2017

City pair	Passengers YE Sep 16 (000)	Passengers YE Sep 17 (000)	% change
Melbourne-Sydney	8,866.1	8,999.5	+1.5
Brisbane-Sydney	4,645.7	4,708.2	+1.3
Brisbane-Melbourne	3,478.6	3,517.3	+1.1
Gold Coast-Sydney	2,713.6	2,714.3	+0.0
Adelaide-Melbourne	2,378.1	2,426.0	+2.0
Melbourne-Perth	2,093.2	2,038.1	-2.6
Gold Coast-Melbourne	1,931.3	2,000.4	+3.6
Adelaide-Sydney	1,873.6	1,887.3	+0.7
Perth-Sydney	1,759.4	1,722.0	-2.1
Hobart-Melbourne	1,540.0	1,614.8	+4.9

Source: BITRE

New rules introduced earlier this year mean businesses can only pass on to consumers the actual cost of accepting a payment via credit card, including merchant fees and other charges. In the case of travel agents using the AFTA Insurance Chargeback Service (AICS), there are also provisions to charge an allowance for “forward delivery risk” to cover supplier failure. “I think this is a real reminder to all in the travel industry that the ACCC and the Government are serious about these new laws,” said AFTA chief executive Jayson Westbury.

MEANWHILE, AirAsia has been hit with a \$500,000 bill after being caught out overcharging travellers on its flights between Darwin and Denpasar. The carrier has been forced to repay almost 10,000 customers after concerns raised by the ACCC over the incorrect application of the Australian Passenger Movement Charge (PMC) on children’s fares, affecting flyers aged 2-12 between December 2010 and September this year.

HelloWorld tips new records

HELLOWORLD Travel is on track to achieve earnings of \$63-67 million this financial year, surging beyond the record pre-tax earnings of \$55.2 million posted during 2016/17. At the group’s annual general meeting last month, CEO Andrew Burnes reaffirmed previous earnings guidance and said the company was continuing to focus on lifting revenue and margins. His upbeat message has been reflected on the stock exchange, where HelloWorld Travel shares made a surge during November to hit a high of \$5. Shares had risen more than 40% during the previous six months.

“It’s cool to have a travel agent again, to assist people to have much richer travel

AVIS REWARDS INNOVATION



THE longstanding Avis Travel Agent Scholarship this year focused on the theme of innovation, directly tackling the phenomena of digital disruption affecting most travel companies and recognising agents who have creatively changed the way they do business. Nakita Byrne from TravelManagers ultimately claimed the prestigious scholarship on the night, impressing the judging panel with her ability to harness social media to more effectively engage with clients, increase endorsements and improve brand awareness. **Pictured** is scholarship winner Nakita Byrne; nominee Amber Halleday; senior vice president of global travel and partnership sales for Avis Budget Group Kaye Ceille; nominee Brigitte Kempf and nominee Kim Mason.

experiences,” Burnes told the AGM. He said the company was working to “future proof” its agents and the business through investment in technology, training and new product development, while at the same time increasing brand profile. “Unrealised synergies” in the business offer potential for further cost reductions, Burnes said, while expansion prospects are likely to come from organic growth and new acquisitions. HelloWorld membership has grown to 2,015, an increase of 349 from 30 June last year,

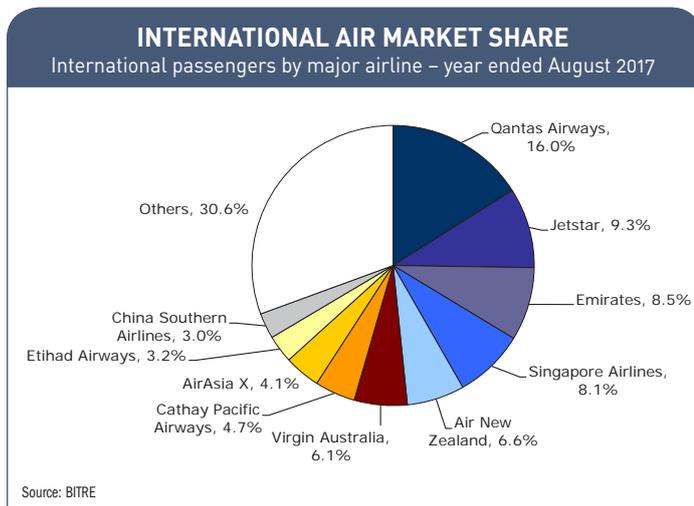
although an update in January put the overall figure at 2,049.

Seven network enters travel arena

THE Seven network will attempt to secure a foothold in travel retailing through its new 7Travel online venture, launched last month on the *Sunrise* morning television program.

Continues over page

BUSINESS MONITOR



DOMESTIC AIR MARKET – September 2017

	Sep 16	Sep 17	Growth (%)	Yr to Sep 16	Yr to Sep 17	Growth (%)
Total pax carried	5.06m	5.07m	+0.2	58.73m	59.52m	+1.3
Revenue pax kms (RPK)	6.00bn	5.96bn	-0.7	69.10bn	69.62bn	+0.8
Avail seat kms (ASK)	7.64bn	7.41bn	-3.0	88.95bn	88.33bn	0.7
Load factor (%)	78.6	80.4	+1.8*	77.7	78.8	+1.1*
Aircraft trips (000)	55.0	53.2	-3.2	642.2	639.3	-0.4

Source: BITRE *Percentage points difference

DOMESTIC ON TIME PERFORMANCE – October 2017

	Arrivals on Time		Departures on Time		Cancellations	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Jetstar	5,631	77.1	5,401	74.0	51	0.7
Qantas	7,600	83.1	7,650	83.6	184	2.0
QantasLink	8,083	79.8	8,143	80.4	500	4.7
REX	5,016	77.6	5,187	80.2	134	2.0
Virgin Australia	9,243	79.5	9,480	81.5	187	1.6
All Airlines	37,977	79.0	38,341	79.7	1,139	2.3

Source: BITRE

Continues from previous page

With the backing of several founding partners including Carnival Cruise Line and Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia, the broadcaster has created a website it claims will become the “go-to” platform for Australians wanting to plan and book their travel. Seven says the new website “closes the loop” between the network’s advertisers and audiences.

“Seven West Media has the largest combined audience across TV, digital, social and print across Australia,” said Seven’s chief revenue officer Kurt Burnette. “With our research and insights highlighting that we hold a high proportion of travel intenders, we will use this enormous scale and influence to inspire through advertising, editorial, integration and influencers using the unmatched power of travel storytelling and content to enable every part of the travel industry.” Other founding ‘marketing partners’ in the initiative include Tourism and Events Queensland, Destination Gold Coast, New Caledonia Tourism and the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

Aussies turn to China

IT APPEARS that Aussie tourists have turned their travel attention to the Chinese market with recently released Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures suggesting the number of people making the trip to China increased in Sep 2017 by 17.4% on the same period last year. Noteworthy travel trends between Australia and China were reflected going the other way too, with more than 97,300 Chinese tourists entering Australia in Sep, a 12.74% increase from the 86,300 travellers who made the trip down under in the same period last year.

Other major travel trends emerging from the latest round of reporting showed a slight increase in the number of visitors coming into Australia overall, with 647,000 entering in September, constituting a 2.55% lift on September 2016. Inbound travellers from New Zealand also dropped in the same period to 123,800, down from 133,600 last year. Although this represented less Kiwis than the corresponding month last year, the figures were still a rise on the preceding month of Aug which came in at 115,800.

Webjet raises the bar

LISTED online travel agency Webjet has flagged a whopping 50% increase in total transaction value to \$3 billion for FY2018, underpinned by its recent acquisition of UK-based accommodation aggregator JacTravel. CEO John Gucsic also declared his intentions for the business to significantly outperform both the general B2B and B2C markets.

A presentation to analysts confirmed the carrier was seeing exceptionally strong growth in air bookings, which have surged 20.7% – six times the increase in short-term resident departures, according to the ABS.

Webjet’s performance has also been underpinned by increases in higher margin products such as packages, deals and ancillary products. Packages TTV is up 40%, while the tour-focused Exclusives contracted range is up 42%. Travel insurance sales have jumped 25% and car hire bookings are up 60%, Gucsic revealed.

Interestingly, Webjet has also changed tack on B2C accommodation, with hotel only sales down 19% after a strategic decision to no longer actively promote the company’s standalone hotel offering.

Singapore Airlines splurges on refurb

SINGAPORE Airlines has splashed out on its A380 fleet, spending more than \$1.1b on a major upgrade of its cabins across all travel classes. The airline says the makeover will “redefine premium air travel”, providing a raft of new features.

The flagship Suites first class product is stunning, with a comfortable armchair and a completely separate bed. The A380 will feature just six suites – half the number of the current configuration with the same overall footprint, meaning the individual studios are enormous.

SQ’s new business class seats have moved away from the ‘flip over’ design which debuted with the A380, while there are also new premium economy and economy class seats reflecting all the latest technology.

Singapore Airlines’ KrisWorld inflight entertainment also takes a leap forward, with travellers able to link to their individual loyalty program profile – meaning when they catch their next flight the system knows what they were watching and allows them to resume viewing, even on a different aircraft.

SQ CEO Goh Choon Phong said the refit demonstrated the airline’s “confidence in the future of premium full-service air travel”.

Flight Centre contraction

FLIGHT Centre is biting the bullet with the rollout of its new Sabre reservations system, with CEO Graham Turner confirming that during the training period staff numbers are expected to decline as departing employees are not replaced.

Speaking at the Flight Centre annual general meeting last month, Turner also

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNET AGENCY MARKET SHARES

October 2017, compared with September 2017

Rank Position Websites	Visits Share Oct 17	Relative Diff Oct to Sep	Rank Sep 17
Webjet Australia	13.61	-13.57	1
Expedia Australia	11.05	-1.13	2
Skyscanner Australia	8.66	-5.95	3
Wotif.com	8.43	-3.40	4
Flight Centre	6.21	-7.89	5
Velocity Frequent Flyer	3.48	+3.03	6
Lastminute.com.au	2.66	-0.78	7
Google Flights Australia	2.60	+43.86	10
Luxury Escapes	2.46	+12.37	9
Cheap Flights Aus & NZ	2.26	+2.64	8

Source: Hitwise, a division of Connexity

INTERNATIONAL AIR ROUTES

Top 10 city pairs (at August 2017)

City pair	Passengers YE Aug 16	Passengers YE Aug 17	% of total	% change 17/16
Auckland-Sydney	1,592,525	1,603,404	4.1	+0.7
Singapore-Sydney	1,472,178	1,459,410	3.7	-0.9
Singapore-Melbourne	1,325,702	1,402,998	3.6	+5.8
Auckland-Melbourne	1,171,164	1,223,872	3.1	+4.5
Singapore-Perth	1,127,883	1,142,642	2.9	+1.3
Hong Kong-Sydney	1,065,749	1,073,963	2.8	+0.8
Auckland-Brisbane	962,191	968,049	2.5	+0.6
Los Angeles-Sydney	919,196	886,969	2.3	-3.5
Denpasar-Perth	869,800	864,837	2.2	-0.6
Kuala Lumpur-Melbourne	803,605	846,007	2.2	+5.3
Top 10 city pairs	11,309,993	11,472,151	29.4	+1.4
Other city pairs	25,249,224	27,513,268	70.6	+8.2
ALL CITY PAIRS	36,739,217	38,985,419	100.0	+6.1

Source: BITRE

SHARE PRICES

at 21 November 2017

Flight Centre (FLT)	\$47.63
Helloworld (HLO)	\$4.89
Webjet (WEB)	\$11.69
Qantas (QAN)	\$5.815
Virgin Australia (VAH)	\$0.27
Ardent Leisure (AAD)	\$1.802
Air New Zealand (AIZ)	\$2.81
Auckland International Airport (AIA)	\$5.56
Sydney Airport (SYD)	\$7.385
Corporate Travel Management (CTD)	\$21.75
Village Roadshow (VRL)	\$3.85
Regional Express (REX)	\$1.56
Sealink (SLK)	\$4.16
Mantra Group Limited (MTR)	\$3.91

JOIN THE THANKSGIVING SPIRIT



THE United States has launched into the holiday season with customary flair, beginning with Thanksgiving late last month. Gate 7, which holds more than a dozen US accounts including Brand USA, marked the event with a celebratory lunch.

Hosting guests from across the travel industry, Gate 7 director of business development Tristan Freedman took the Thanksgiving opportunity to express his gratitude to the Australian trade.

“We value the partnerships we have in this incredible industry where we get to do some pretty incredible things,” he said.

Pictured from left are Gate 7 managing director Jo Palmer and some of her team including Penny Brand, Sarah Thornton, Tristan Freedman and Danielle Tuffield, together with Universal Studios senior manager of sales Marie Mulhearn, third from right.

Travel Daily HEADLINES

- 23 Oct** Ireland touts DUB as hub
- 23 Oct** Lindblad's fresh releases
- 24 Oct** Goldman grows into Qld
- 24 Oct** Luxury Escapes into Asia
- 25 Oct** IATA's world air tech plan
- 25 Oct** SKAL aims for renewal
- 26 Oct** NZ flying 787s to Adelaide
- 26 Oct** Qantas revenue boost
- 27 Oct** Savenio plots agent hubs
- 27 Oct** SYD debut for SQ cabins
- 30 Oct** QF offers Uber bookings
- 30 Oct** SriLankan's MEL debut
- 31 Oct** Helloworld "new phase"
- 31 Oct** Virgin Samoa knock-back
- 01 Nov** Airbnb pro 180-day cap
- 01 Nov** Sherry joins NAB board
- 02 Nov** Quest makes UK move
- 02 Nov** Backing for Uluru ban
- 03 Nov** SIA's \$1.1 billion new cabins
- 03 Nov** Samoan PM slams Virgin
- 06 Nov** Qatar buys into Cathay
- 06 Nov** AirAsia to refund \$500k+
- 07 Nov** Tianjin Airlines confirms SYD
- 07 Nov** CIT adds Canada & Alaska
- 08 Nov** VA reports sales growth
- 08 Nov** Tourism's "wake-up call"
- 09 Nov** Flight Centre contraction
- 09 Nov** AF/KLM to add GDS levy
- 10 Nov** WoAG car rental tender
- 10 Nov** Setback for UK growth
- 13 Nov** ATAC hits \$200m mark
- 13 Nov** Emirates opts for B787s
- 14 Nov** 2017 Avis award winner
- 14 Nov** WA signs Chinese giant
- 15 Nov** Bon Voyage seals TV deal
- 15 Nov** Imagine buys Holiday Planet
- 16 Nov** Marriage tourism boost
- 16 Nov** Anderson leaves Hawaii
- 17 Nov** HLO shares hit new high
- 17 Nov** China departures growing
- 20 Nov** TC reveals data vision
- 20 Nov** New SYD route for HU

flagged the closure of underperforming stores in Australia but said after the first half distraction of the Sabre implementation "improvement is expected" once the new systems are fully deployed.

While some shops will close, overall staff numbers are expected to remain flat as other channels expand, mainly large flagship stores and specialist sectors.

Turner flagged negotiations with landlords to improve shop locations, and confirmed changes in FLT's international operations including the closure of leisure businesses in Singapore, Canada, the UAE and the USA.

Flight Centre's investment in Travel Partners will also help reduce costs, with the independent contractor model having lower expenses than traditional shops, Turner said.

AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS

International passengers through Australia's major international airports – August 2017

Airport	Passengers YE Aug 16	Passengers YE Aug 17	% of total	% change 17/16
Sydney	14,768,193	15,726,844	40.3	+6.5
Melbourne	9,423,782	10,061,876	25.8	+6.8
Brisbane	5,360,231	5,642,585	14.5	+5.3
Perth	4,294,064	4,419,426	11.3	+2.9
Gold Coast	1,060,339	1,088,146	2.8	+2.6
Adelaide	879,245	953,683	2.4	+8.5
Cairns	616,335	657,565	1.7	+6.7
Darwin	262,538	281,436	0.7	+7.2
Canberra [~]	n/a	77,372	0.2	n/a
Townsville [^]	37,885	47,418	0.1	+25.2
Sunshine Coast [*]	17,386	13,472	0.0	-22.5
Norfolk Island	10,556	7,926	0.0	-24.9
Port Hedland [~]	8,663	7,670	0.0	-11.5
All Airports	36,739,217	38,985,419	100.0	+6.1

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

ATAS ACCREDITED LOCATIONS

at 21 November 2017

New South Wales	963
Victoria	710
Queensland	607
Western Australia	292
South Australia	224
Australian Capital Territory	52
Tasmania	40
Northern Territory	16
TOTAL	2,904

Got something to say?

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

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CRYSTAL SHINES ON THE RHINE

CRYSTAL River Cruises CEO Walter Littlejohn is living his dream job. Having decided at the age of 14 that he wanted to have a career in cruising, he's now in charge of what is arguably the most exciting new operation in Europe, with the deep pockets of Crystal River Cruises owner Genting Hong Kong allowing him to achieve what other lines can only dream of.

Crystal River Cruises is just one arm of the burgeoning Crystal empire, which is built on the foundation of ocean ships *Crystal Symphony* and *Crystal Serenity*. Created with the aim of providing more holiday experiences for Crystal's longstanding discerning clientele, the new river operation currently has three ships, with two more newbuilds on the way in 2018. The fleet includes *Crystal Mozart* – a double-wide vessel which cruises on the lower Danube which launched under the Crystal brand in 2016 after a major refurbishment. This year the company added *Crystal Bach* and *Crystal Mahler*, smaller "Rhine-class" newbuilds which carry just 110 passengers along with 68 crew, and next year two more identical ships will join the line-up to give a total complement of five river ships.

Littlejohn told *travelBulletin* the company aims to redefine the river cruising sector. Every cabin has a panoramic floor-to-ceiling window which electronically slides open vertically to connect passengers to the river. "We don't have any 'swan view' cabins," he said, while all guests receive full service from dedicated butlers. Crystal has made pains to keep control of every aspect of

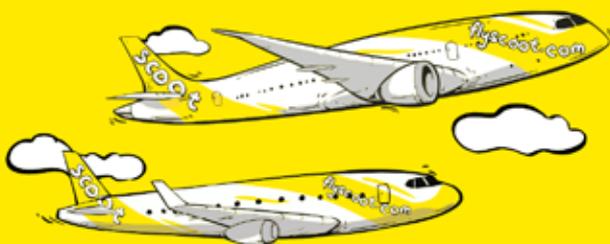
its operations, with all crew and hotel staff employed by the company rather than through subcontractors. There's a real gym and guest laundry on board, and the galley is five times the size of those on competitor vessels, Littlejohn said. The fully inclusive experience features daily shore excursions, top shelf beverages and fabulous on-board cuisine, while every voyage also includes a free on-shore restaurant experience in a Michelin-starred eatery in one of the ports visited.

Travel agents are key to Crystal's strategy

– and Littlejohn has deep insight into the needs of the travel trade having owned his own agency for 14 years so he truly understands the sector. He's also previously worked at AmaWaterways and Expedia so has a good grasp on the wider travel industry. Interestingly, while Crystal aimed to provide a new option for its rusted-on ocean clientele, there has been strong interest from cruisers new to the Crystal brand, with expectations that they will in turn want to experience the product on the larger ocean vessels.



Crystal River Cruises CEO Walter Littlejohn



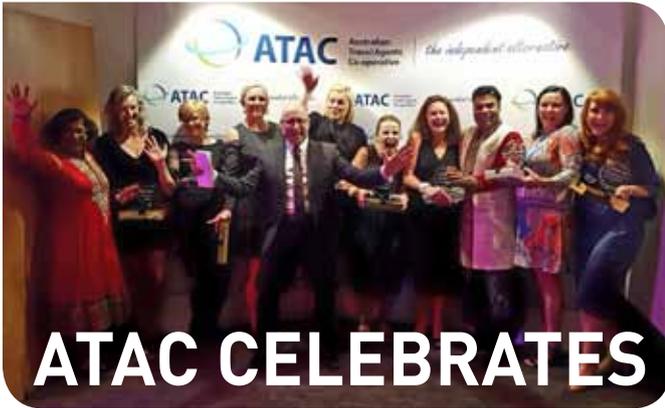
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THE Australian Travel Agents Co-operative (ATAC) held its annual general meeting, conference and gala dinner in Hobart last month at the Grand Chancellor Hotel with much cause for celebration.

A record \$200 million in turnover was achieved for the financial year 2016/17 as well as 19 new members joining the buying group, swelling its ranks by just over 20% to now comprise 100 members.

The group also welcomed its first member to join from Perth since changes were made in state law to the administration of co-operatives.

travelBulletin was the sole media to attend the conference, ATAC's biggest to date, and spoke with their chairman Ken Morgan and general manager Michelle Emerton about the 'quiet achievers' of the industry.

Both executives were keen to express ambitions for the group to grow by utilising an appealing proposition that no fees are charged to members and that 100% of profits are directed back to each member.

"The only time we've got our hands in our members' pockets is to put money in rather than take it out. We don't charge any fees to belong," said Morgan.

According to the executives, such a proposition comes as a welcome relief to many new members with Morgan adding "we get members who come from where they were charged significant fees and they really appreciate that they now get a direct

deposit into their bank. They're amazed."

The conference dubbed 'Future Focus' provided members with a number of workshops designed to boost their email marketing and social media skills as well as networking sessions with preferred suppliers.

"We're very conscious about working with preferred suppliers at our conferences, rather than

‘We’ve got all the big preferred suppliers but also we’ve got many niche operators too so ATAC members have a wider selection of partners they can use’

Michelle Emerton
General manager, ATAC

just taking from them", said Emerton adding that "we've got all the big preferred suppliers but also we've got many niche operators too so ATAC members have a wider selection of partners they can use."

It wasn't all work, with members treated to a tour and dinner at the historic Cascade Brewery along with a lavish gala dinner where 10 members won flights plus a tour of India courtesy of Consolidated Travel and Total Holiday Options.

The 2018 ATAC conference will take place in Singapore from 2 – 4 November.



AFTA VIEW

Jayson Westbury, chief executive AFTA

WHAT a year the travel industry has had in 2017! With the continued growth in outbound passenger numbers up some 4.4% year on year and the strong desire by Aussies to go on an overseas holiday, 2017 has been a ripper.

2018 is shaping up to be another good year with a continued high degree of intention to travel and strong signs of solid consumer sentiment. I hope that this will be the case and that everyone in the travel value chain will get a reasonable share of the success.

For AFTA, 2017 has been a building year for sure, with the successful introduction of the AFTA Insolvency Chargeback Scheme (AICS). We've seen immediate and strong support by travel agents who see the value of the scheme and the long awaited resolution to the long standing problem of supplier failure and credit card chargebacks.

Next year the scheme is bound to really take hold across the industry as agents find the true value of the protection, and settle on new ways of approaching their credit card merchant facilities. AICS now has a wide range of payment providers who have different products and services on offer, so this provides a range of choice for different travel agents to consider what is best for their business.

It is an exciting time for Australian travel agents as the problem of credit card chargebacks resulting from supplier collapse is alive and well in every market across the globe. We in Australia have found a simple, cost effective, affordable and industry-owned way to address this challenge.

In addition to the introduction of the AICS scheme, ATAS has continued to kick goals and deliver value to travel agents right across the country. With ever increasing numbers of travel businesses wanting to be a part of the scheme and the continued push to market the value of travel agents across a wide range of media outlets at a national level it remains a key focus for what AFTA does and stands for.

Distribution of travel products is not easy and it takes a network of professional members like those who are with AFTA and ATAS accredited to fully realise the value that this strong movement can provide.

Consumers want to continue to enjoy choice. Travel is best purchased by being able to access comparisons and product range and travel agents are without question best placed to deliver this to consumers regardless of the format or path that the consumer may choose to connect.

‘I remain very confident that the role of the travel agent will continue for decades’

The modern Australian travel agent is going to be adapting to these changes over the years ahead and I remain very confident that the role of the travel agent will continue for decades and AFTA will remain in the thick of the conversations of the day to ensure the future of travel agents.

From where I sit it is already looking very bright and successful. I look forward to 2018 as I believe it will be a good year for the travel industry and I hope no matter where you may sit in the travel value chain, you will also have a fantastic 2018.

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JAPAN

Mt. Fuji with red pagoda in autumn, Fujiyoshida, Japan.

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David Padman, HLO; Steve Jacobs, MC; Elise Archer, Tasmanian Arts Minister; Julie Primmer, HLO, Emma Terry, Tourism Tasmania; Peter Rawley, Intrepid.

FRONTLINERS GOES OFF

HELLOWORLD Travel held its annual Frontliners Forum conference and gala awards dinner in Hobart last month with 600 delegates in tow. The large delegation was made up of top-selling associate and branded Helloworld travel agents, as well as key industry partners such as Qantas, Intrepid Travel and The Travel Corporation.

Held at Wrest Point, the conference was held under the theme of “You are the difference”, highlighting what agents do for Helloworld Travel and the tourism sector. Tasmanian Arts Minister Elise Archer thanked the agents gathered in Hobart for their role in attracting a record number of visitors to the Apple Isle last year.

“You are very important to us, you will attract visitors to this state,” Archer said.

Helloworld Travel executive director and head of wholesale and inbound Cinzia Burnes said the inhouse wholesale team really made the difference.

“Without you we wouldn’t exist. We just wouldn’t have a business if it wasn’t for you. You are making big difference in what we do,” she said.

Burnes confirmed that the inhouse wholesale call centre had added 15 new staff members to its books.

“All the new staff will be on the phones in the next couple of weeks,” she said, adding it was hoped the new additions would reduce

the wait time on the 96,630 calls they receive every 100 days. She added that currently 88% of all calls were answered in 15 minutes, but hoped to see that percentage rise with the new additions.

Burnes added that the new Ready Rooms was under construction and would be launched soon.

“It’s going to have all the bells and whistles that you the agents have been asking

for.” She added that Ready Rooms had slowly been adding new features over the last few months to improve the user experience.

The travel company unveiled plans for “strategic marketing messages” for consumers in 2018.

Helloworld Travel chief executive officer and managing director Andrew Burnes also announced to agents that they would return to more traditional forms of advertising.

“We will allocate some of our marketing budget to tell people why book with a Helloworld Travel agent,” he said.

Next year’s Helloworld Frontliners will be held 08-11 November in Fiji.



Andrew Burnes, HLO, with Scott McGlynn - Branded Consultant of the Year, Helloworld Travel Winston Hills NSW, and Julie Primmer, HLO.



AUSCHAMBER VIEW

John Hart, executive chair
Australian Chamber – Tourism

TIME TO RESET THE CRYSTAL BALL ON TOURISM

I WILL have the pleasure of sitting on the newly formed Ministerial Committee looking at tourism Beyond 2020.

With several years to run on the existing 2020 strategy, credit must go to the Federal Government, and Minister Steve Ciobo, for the focus on Beyond 2020 and looking into the next decade.

A decade ago when we looked at the 2020 targets, many in the industry thought they were too ambitious, and yet we reached them early.

Observing the pace of change and the level of disruption the Australian tourism industry is facing today, the task of looking off into the next decade is daunting to say the least.

Ten years ago, when 2020 was the topic of conversation, Facebook was just rolling out, Airbnb and Uber were virtually non-existent and the NBN was being debated as an election commitment by then PM aspirant Kevin Rudd. Yes, I guess we can say a lot has changed in the last ten years.

Australian tourism, like the visitor economy around the world, is deeply embedded in the transport, hospitality and retail structures in the economy.

Of all the sectors experiencing rapid change, transport and retail are certainly two that stand

out. On the transport side, the advent, almost certainly in this period, of driverless cars will change tourism, starting with the reduction in the cost of connected transport and access to vast areas of the countryside.

If, by 2030, advances in technology will allow us to see the sensational view from the top of the harbor or experience sea life even better than at an aquarium, why visit these attractions? The answer must lie in the experience. Technology may be able to replace the senses of sight and sound but immersive taste, touch and smell activate a real experience.

The retail proposition is also changing dramatically. The move to online sales means that the retail experience too must shift to being experiential in order to compete. If shoppers are to be lured out into a retail environment, there has to be something worth seeing and feeling.

As we get closer to the end of this decade, it is time to reset the crystal ball and set our sights on the next big win for our nation – future tourism.

“Observing the pace of change and the level of disruption the Australian tourism industry is facing today, the task of looking off into the next decade is daunting to say the least.”

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TRAVEL AGENT AFFILIATE PROGRAM

TRAVELLERS CHOICE MARKS 40 WITH DATA VISION

TRAVELLERS Choice marked its 40th anniversary in style last month, drawing a record attendance to its annual conference held in its hometown of Perth.

Taking the stage in the city's new landmark Crown Towers, the group celebrated its humble origins as a small West Australian buyers' cooperative and outlined a "20/20 Vision" for the years ahead.

More than 160 members came to join the festivities, representing almost 100 agencies in a group that now numbers around 120 independent businesses – a far cry from the original six stores that united in the 1970s to maximise their collective airfare purchasing power.

And just as the scale and nature of the business has changed, so too have the issues it has on the table.

‘We are in an era where data is king and the more you know about your customers...the better positioned you will be to provide them with really relevant and targeted marketing’

Christian Hunter, managing director, Travellers Choice

In a conference dominated by the increasingly familiar themes of disruption, technology and artificial intelligence, Travellers Choice managing director Christian Hunter announced the pursuit of data and intelligence would become a critical focus over coming years.

“We are in an era where data is king and the more you know about your customers, their likes and preferences, their families, hobbies, their travel plans and bucket list items, the better positioned you will be to provide them with really relevant and targeted marketing,” Hunter said.

“We need to be more strategic about what we promote and who we promote it to. Having a deep understanding of your customers can really assist this and research shows that targeted advertising has a much greater response rate, so we need to embrace the concept of data.”

Citing as a leading example the Woolworths loyalty card – and its ability to deliver the supermarket group vast and detailed information on its customers' buying

trends – Hunter said his ultimate aim was to achieve rich, real-time sales information. This would allow more intelligent, predictive marketing strategies, rather than responsive activity often based on months-old data.

“Imagine the scenario where we are able to operate like a genuinely integrated system, where we have access to real-time sales information, where customer databases are so detailed we can drill down to the fine detail and produce marketing activity that can predict and shape the market,” he said.

“That is where I would like to see the group get to in the future and where I think we need to be in our continual drive to add more value to members' businesses.”

A key disadvantage in this quest was the decentralised nature of Travellers Choice, Hunter said. Members weren't required to compile onerous sales reports, meaning the group was heavily reliant on data provided by suppliers to gain sales insight.

This could be overcome, Hunter said, and predicted that a combination of new technology and better systems created in partnership with suppliers would in coming years

make significant advances in the quality of available data.

In the meantime, Travellers Choice announced several other initiatives designed to provide better support for members. One is the new TC Mail platform, an email marketing system that allows members to generate more targeted campaigns.

The system has been designed to allow users to more easily segment their databases based on customers' past



travels and current interests. They can tailor campaigns for each segment and either mount their own activities or hand the process over to the Travellers Choice head office marketing team at no cost.

“A lot of members either don't have the time or the resources to be able to do that themselves, to I think this is a great opportunity for them to be able to free themselves and allow somebody else to do it for them...and just focus on the enquires that come as a result.”

The introduction of TC Mail follows other initiatives including the expansion of the extranet platform TC Hub, the launch of a Facebook-based member network called TC Connect, and the recently announced partnership with online package provider TripADeal which aims to give Travellers Choice members an avenue to compete with web-based retailers.

All of which gives Hunter an upbeat view of the decades ahead as the group moves beyond its 40th anniversary year.

“I think we've got a great story, I think we've got a great culture and I think we've got a lot to offer,” he said. “There's a lot of opportunity out there for us to really grow our membership and grow our footprint.”



Pictured (left to right): Robyn Mitchell, Justin Michael, Christian Hunter and Nicola Strudwick

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ETG's Tom Manwaring with Wendy Wu



EXPRESS TRAVEL GROUP SOARS IN 2017

LAST month's Independent Travel Group conference in Kuala Lumpur saw Tom Manwaring, CEO of Express Travel Group, reveal an exceptional year in which the organisation's Total Transaction Value surged 42% compared to 2016. Air passenger numbers were up 25%, with sales of land, cruise and ancillary products accelerating a hefty 81%. Manwaring didn't confirm the overall TTV figure, but based on previous revelations the company must have well and truly exceeded \$1 billion in revenue.

The Express Travel Group has three key brands – the Asia-focused Select Travel Group, the Independent Travel Group, and the branded italktravel franchise, with the diversified model demonstrating the evolution of the market. In 2016 52% of revenue came from Select, coming down to 46% in 2017 as growth accelerated in the Independent Travel Group and italktravel divisions. There are now 362 Independent Travel Group/italktravel members out of a total complement of 742, with overall member numbers increasing by 94 agencies in the last year.

Growth has been significant across a range of categories, with stunning acceleration in sales of small group touring, adventure touring and FIT arrangements. Ocean cruising sales through Express surged 79% while river is up 88%, and there was also a strong performance in travel insurance, rail, accommodation and coach touring. A significant number of the newly joined members were in attendance at the conference including Dean Heke from italktravel & cruise Blue Mountains, Tatyana Vanegas of italktravel & cruise Brighton, Garry Hegarty from italktravel Mitcham and Ainsley Hardie of italktravel Highfields. There were also new members from Tasmania and the ACT – the first in each jurisdiction, giving the group a national presence.

The growth has seen ETG focus on the ongoing delivery of tools to help members' businesses. Key initiatives in the last year have been

providing "absolute improvement and clarity of reward payments," according to executive general manager Ari Magoutis, who outlined a strict quarterly timetable for remittance of supplier overrides to members. The Express Fares ticketing platform now features tax inclusive pricing, while there is ongoing evolution of the company's unique Book Safe Agent insolvency coverage product, which will see significant price reductions as it integrates with AFTA's AICS scheme to provide full protection against supplier collapse.

Magoutis also provided a sneak peek at new developments including Express Docs, an automatic itinerary generation tool which

collates reservation information with destination details from ArrivalGuides. A new partnership with email provider Genesys aims to make marketing simpler for members by integrating with the in-house Express Marketing platform, while ETG is also working on Express Payments, a new gateway being developed in partnership with the National Australia Bank which will include a merchant software platform, the ability for agents to pay suppliers and also for clients to pay for their travel online 24/7.

Education was a key focus of the conference, with preferred suppliers showcasing their wares in a product market and speed-dating training sessions. But of course, as well as getting down to business there was plenty of networking. Major sponsor The Travel Corporation treated everyone to a Malaysian-inspired welcome function on the opening night, which was followed by a gala awards dinner to wrap up the weekend. A highlight was an inspirational presentation by Wendy Wu Tours founder Wendy Wu, who shared the secrets of her success and her bold plans for the future of the business. There was also knowledge sharing within the group, as Garry McLaughlin from last year's top agency winner First Class Travel presented a highly acclaimed session giving insights into how he inspires his team to achieve great things.

“Manwaring didn't confirm the overall TTV figure, but based on previous revelations the company must have well and truly exceeded \$1 billion in revenue”

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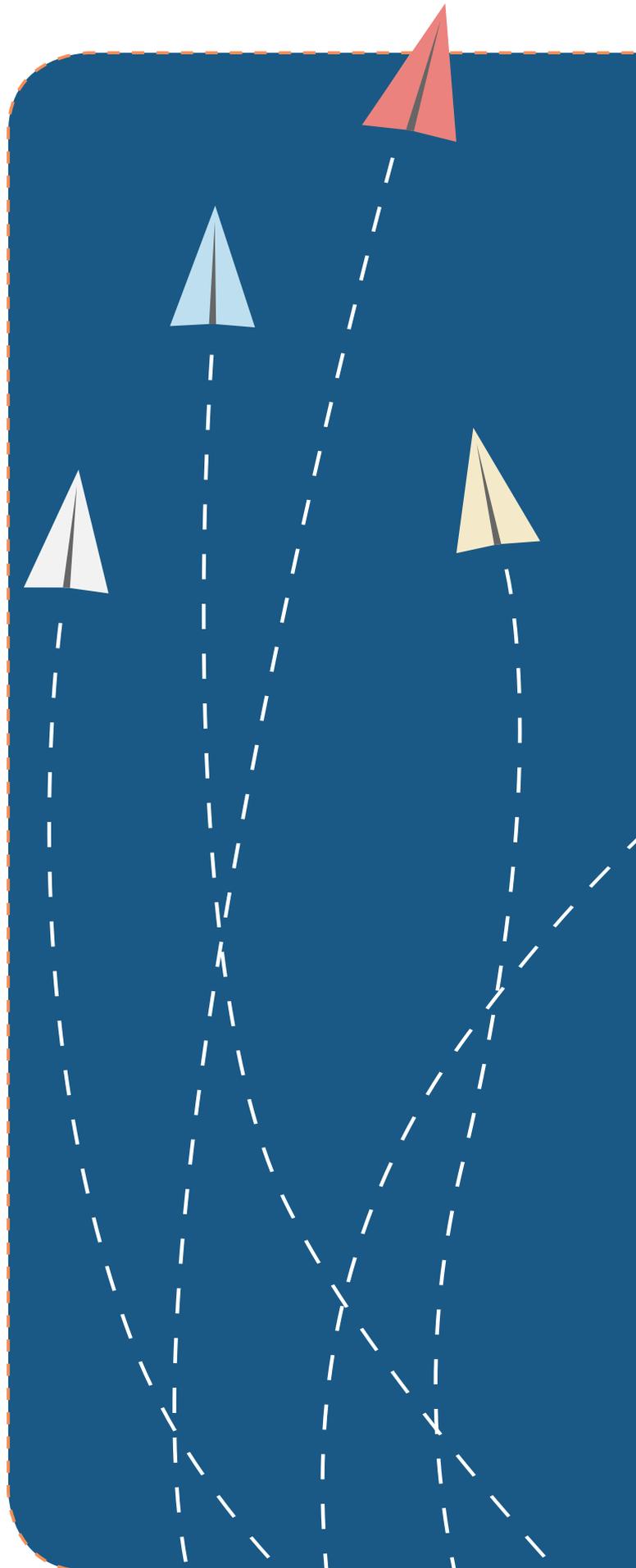
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2017 WHERE DID IT GO?!

2017 has been a year of changes in the Australian travel and tourism sector, with the ongoing proliferation of new technologies continuing to impact travel agencies, airlines, cruise operators, wholesalers and suppliers. Bruce Piper looks at how innovation has affected the industry – in both good and bad ways – during the year that was.



WITH the end of the year fast approaching it seems that 2017 has passed in the blink of an eye. Life moves quickly in travel, and with so much going on it's good to take a breather and reflect on the last twelve months which have seen a plenty of highs and lows.

"If you're not constantly moving forward, then – without a doubt – you're moving backwards". That's a quote from US politician Bill Owens, speaking about technology and the economy, but it certainly also applies to the Australian travel industry if the events of the last year are any indication. Disruptive innovation is all around us, and while that can be a frightening prospect, the opportunities created by new technology are being grabbed with both hands by many travel businesses.

An intriguing development over the last year has been the rise of formal partnerships between traditional travel suppliers and some of the major online disruptors currently shaking up the tourism landscape.

‘An intriguing development over the last year has been the rise of formal partnerships between traditional travel suppliers and some of the major online disruptors’

The most recent of these has been the alliance between Qantas and Uber, which has seen tight integration between the Qantas smartphone app and the ride-sharing platform. Qantas frequent flyers can earn points on Uber trips booked to and from the airport at each end of their trips, with Qantas thus taking more control of the whole customer journey.

Airbnb is also being embraced by some in the industry – again Qantas has a deal which allows frequent flyers to earn points on Airbnb bookings, while a number of TMCs including Flight Centre's corporate arm FCM Travel are also evolving their policies to allow customers to utilise Airbnb accommodation.

These are some of the bigger examples of

how the industry is embracing innovation – but there are plenty of other instances right across the travel and tourism sector.

TRAVEL AGENT INNOVATION

Innovation in the travel agency sector during 2017 has been defined in many cases by acquisitions, as larger companies seek to move into areas where nimbler startups have established a foothold. Flight Centre and Helloworld have both been among the purchasers of small operations which are being bolted on to give them additional capabilities, while other groups have also been innovating in a multitude of ways.

Flight Centre in particular was an avaricious acquirer, most notably with the \$3 million purchase of



Travel Partners from founder

Jeff Hakim, as well as the NZ-based TravelManagers network – unrelated to the Australian group of the same name. The deals expanded Flight Centre's home-based agency footprint, with independently contracted home-based consultants providing a new, lower-cost distribution model. Flight Centre CEO Graham Turner noted the deal also provided new career opportunities for existing staff.

However this innovation wasn't so good for some 200 casual Flight Centre employees who were already working within the group as home-based agents. In the weeks preceding the announcement of the Travel Partners acquisition they were forced to choose between signing up for a sub-contractor agreement, or an employee arrangement with an extremely high – some would say unattainable – sales target. The move was interpreted by some as Flight Centre seeking to clean up its industrial relations slate by wiping out its casual travel consultant workforce, who were previously on questionable employment contracts that were effectively "commission-only".

Helloworld Travel's minority acquisitions of some of its member agencies – notably the Hunter Travel Group and Helloworld Mackay owner Cooney Investments, were not so much ways for the group to innovate, as to shore up its network and ensure these top performers have their interests clearly aligned with the overall group. HLO already has a significant presence in the home-based agency sector with its 2016 acquisition

of MTA Travel. Indeed the major branding developments within Helloworld this year could be seen as the opposite of innovation, with the reintroduction of the former Harvey World Travel "The Travel Professionals" tagline definitely a 'back to the future' initiative.

Helloworld's new tagline wasn't the only industry introduction which saw the pendulum swinging the other way. Savenio announced the development of so-called "agent hubs" where individual members can come together in an office environment to manage their own clientele – kind of like a new wave bricks-and-mortar agency. Travel deals website Luxury Escapes launched its own retail presence in the Melbourne CBD. And online rival Bon Voyage – an offshoot of Catch Group's Scoopon Travel – announced a major prime time TV promotion including celebrity endorsement through Aussie favourite Jennifer Hawkins.

Flight Centre looked to get in on the action generated by "flash sites" such as Luxury Escapes and Bon Voyage with its 2016 49% acquisition of Ignite Travel Group. Over the last year that has seen Escape Travel and Flight Centre branded stores offering a range of My Holiday Centre deals, seeing these offers made available in the retail space. In the same genre, an intriguing innovation was the new alliance between Travellers Choice and TripADeal offering the consumers the opportunity to purchase "affordable, bucket list holiday packages" compiled by the deals site but available through their local Travellers Choice store. Travellers Choice managing director Christian Hunter described the move as "a new business model in which offline and online enterprises combine their respective strengths to generate new business, rather than continually competing to shift customers from one channel to another".

AIRLINE INNOVATION

The recent disproportionate hoopla around the introduction of the new Qantas Boeing 787 long-haul aircraft amazed some in the industry, who noted that the *Dreamliner* has in fact already been in service since 2007.

Indeed Qantas offshoot Jetstar has been operating 787s since 2013 so it is hardly a world first for QF. What is new, however is the aspiration of Qantas to operate non-stop between Australia and the UK, with

Continues over page

Continues from previous page

Perth-London 787-9 services to kick off early in 2018. This innovation, which has also seen significant investment in the ultra long-haul passenger experience, has in turn led to a range of major changes in the relationship between Qantas and its key alliance partner Emirates. In particular, a significant backflip and blow for the UAE has been the decision by QF to once again operate its flights from Australia's east coast to the UK via Singapore rather than Dubai. The change to the flagship "kangaroo route" returns Singapore's Changi Airport to its former key stopover status in the minds of Australians, with the move also assisting Qantas in bedding down its burgeoning Asia network strategy.

Qantas and Emirates also innovated on the Tasman, where Emirates had long been offering full service A380 flights at bargain basement prices as a way of increasing aircraft utilisation. It has now become more efficient for EK to leave its Auckland-bound superjumbos on the ground in Sydney and Melbourne during the day, while Qantas is adjusting its Tasman schedules to pick up the slack in a great example of how immunity from competition laws allows carriers to optimise their operations. Emirates is making the most of the change by adjusting its flight times out of Sydney to provide more convenient departure schedules and connections over Dubai for its Australian clients.

Qantas and Emirates weren't the only airlines to introduce new concepts over the last year. Air New Zealand continued its aggressive Americas strategy with the introduction of wide-bodied 787 flights between Adelaide and Auckland. Complementing 787 services ex Perth, the move expanded NZ's premium one-stop offering to Canada, the USA and Argentina which has proved compelling for passengers, backed by its popular "Dave the Goose" TV promotion.

Virgin Australia's international innovation in the last 12 months has seen the carrier launch non-stop flights from Melbourne to Hong Kong, after withdrawing flights from Sydney to Abu Dhabi and cancelling a short-lived plan for Perth-Abu Dhabi services. The VA Hong Kong strategy has been complemented by a wide-ranging deal with airlines operated by one of its major shareholders, China's HNA Group, which are now feeding their Chinese passengers into

the Virgin Australia domestic network.

Most recently we have also seen significant investment by Singapore Airlines in its new A380 cabin experience, with revamps of its groundbreaking First Suites, Business Class, Premium Economy and Economy cabins to feature later this month on the key Sydney-Singapore route.

Innovation isn't always good for airlines, as has been evidenced by the demise of Etihad Airways' global strategy over the last 12 months. Former EY CEO James Hogan spent up big on stakes in overseas carriers, most notably airberlin and Alitalia, both of which failed in spectacular fashion once Etihad saw the writing on the wall and pulled the pin on further investment.

‘Innovation isn't always good for airlines, as has been evidenced by the demise of Etihad Airways' global strategy over the last 12 months’

The collapses continue to resonate through Etihad's formerly premium product positioning, which has already seen the withdrawal of chauffeur services (apart from within the UAE) and even pyjamas for business class passengers, leading some to contemplate what else is being cut behind the scenes.

And finally on the airline side travel agents and technology suppliers have witnessed the most unwelcome innovation of additional fees for GDS bookings introduced by Lufthansa, British Airways and the Air France/KLM group. The carriers insist this won't penalise agents who book through alternative, direct methods, but in some cases these new interfaces haven't been clearly defined and for smaller travel agencies developing software to connect with these systems is likely to prove unaffordable – and unnecessary, given the GDS option is working well already.

CRUISE INNOVATION

A fast-growing sector is often a strong driver of innovation and that has certainly proved to

be the case with the cruise industry. In ocean cruising over the last year we have seen major technology-focused announcements from both Carnival Corporation and its rival Royal Caribbean. Carnival has touted its new “Ocean Medallion” system – announced by CEO Arnold Donald during the massive Las Vegas Consumer Electronics Show – as being able to offer unparalleled opportunities for cruise personalisation, as passengers use their personal gizmo to do everything from access their room through to order drinks, set the temperature in their cabin and make onboard purchases. Similarly Royal Caribbean recently gave a sneak peek at its vision for the future of cruising which includes customer recognition through tech-enabled “WOWbands” along with facial recognition to check you in – and ensure waiters always bring you your favourite cocktail.

River cruising is also seeing lots of new developments – not least by APT and its sister operation AmaWaterways which this year announced the new *AmaMagna* – a cruise ship twice as wide as any others in their fleet which is set to launch in 2019. While the width means the *AmaMagna* isn't able to sail the full length of the Amsterdam-Budapest route, the larger ship promises a host of innovations made possible by its bigger footprint, such as new dining options, more on board activities, and of course more passengers with a total of 196 guests.

Crystal Cruises is also bedding down its fledgling river cruise operations, which offer a significantly enhanced experience with just 110 passengers served by 68 crew on its four “Rhine-class” vessels and similar ratios on its *Crystal Mozart* which interestingly is also on an extra-wide platform, similar to *AmaMagna*. The brand new Crystal ships feature butler-service for all passengers, amazing window technology which bridges the gap between the cabin and the river, no entry-level “swan view” cabins at all, and exceptional all-inclusive beverages, dining and shore excursions including a Michelin restaurant meal on every cruise.

The Travel Corporation has also boldly targeted a new river cruise demographic with its youth-focused U by Uniworld operation. Cleverly allowing for the refit of its older Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection vessels, U by Uniworld promises on-board DJs, bunk beds, parties, mixology classes and more in an attempt to grab the Contiki crowd

– along with a purely social media marketing strategy which heavily targets direct bookings.

AFTA INNOVATION

2017 unfortunately saw several travel industry collapses, with the year starting out with the unfortunate demise of the UK-based All Leisure Group, which operated cruise lines including Swan Hellenic and Voyages of Discovery. While consumer protection arrangements in the UK ensured British customers were repatriated and compensated, no such coverage applied to Australian agents or consumers. AFTA CEO Jayson Westbury worked diligently behind the scenes to broker a win-win solution which saw more than \$1 million repaid to Australian agents hit by credit card chargebacks.

‘Later in the year AFTA rolled out a more permanent solution to supplier collapses, with its highly innovative AFTA Insolvency Chargeback Scheme (AICS)’

Later in the year AFTA rolled out a more permanent solution to supplier collapses, with its highly innovative AFTA Insolvency Chargeback Scheme (AICS). Taking the opportunity afforded by the new rules around credit card surcharging, Westbury and his team successfully defined the concept of “forward delivery risk” which allowed AICS to add a minuscule additional surcharge to credit card processing for participating travel agents. That in turn means agents using AICS are now protected against credit card chargebacks in the event of supplier collapse – truly a significant shift in the risk landscape for people operating travel businesses in Australia.

CONCLUSION

We've only scratched the surface of industry innovation this year. There's been the Phil Hoffmann deal with Ensemble Travel, while the Magellan Travel Group signed a significant agreement with Signature

Travel. Many other airlines have launched new routes into Australia, including literally dozens of Chinese carriers. Cruise companies have grown further in the local market, including the development of new offices by Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings and Crystal Cruises, and new river players such as Riviera Cruises. Wholesalers are also embracing technology – witness the recent launch of agentflights.com.au by Eastern Europe Travel Centre, which provides an online booking engine for wholesale fares to help agents capture bookings and boost yield. We finally saw the demise of departure cards as the Australian Bureau of Statistics changed the way it handles departure and arrival data – and there's likely to be lots more happening in this space, with developments such as facial recognition set to revolutionise the airport experience in coming years.

Looking forward to 2018, some parts of the industry will be hoping for a better year – not least the domestic sector in Queensland which endured the double whammy of Cyclone Debbie and the Dreamworld tragedy that continues to significantly impact theme park visitor numbers. The cyclone closed Daydream Island and Hayman Island for more than a year and also saw the end of the relationship between One&Only and Hayman – but both resorts are expected to emerge better and brighter. In another sign of a swinging pendulum, state tourism boards are once again starting to engage the travel industry, with a number of cooperative campaigns promoting interstate packages through some of the major industry groups appearing in recent months.

It's an oft-repeated misnomer that the Chinese symbol for “danger” also means “opportunity”. The same could apply in reverse – that the massive opportunities afforded by technology and innovation will also be dangerous for parts of the industry – particularly those which aren't able to adapt their business models to the brave new world. By all accounts much of the travel sector is embracing the digital economy, so it is exciting to look forward to the year to come and see how the foundations laid during 2017 will bear fruit for the travel sector. There's definitely no doubt we are experiencing what is well described in another Chinese curse – “May you live in interesting times”.

Amadeus airport tech for Maldives

AMADEUS has deployed its airport solutions suite to assist operations at Velana International Airport in the Maldives, which currently serves flights from 35 carriers and more than 2.6 million passengers each year. Formerly known as Male International Airport, the name change signifies new beginnings for the facility, with the technology upgrade set to help manage the increasing flow of visitors to the Maldives.

Velana has recently deployed Amadeus Airport Operational Database to “host, manage and disseminate complex

flight-related information”. This system provides complete visibility of flight schedules up to a year in advance, to accurately forecast passenger and baggage demand. Also new to Velana is Amadeus Airport Fixed Resource Management Solution, which helps the airport determine the best resource allocation against its flight schedule.

Maldives Airport Company managing director Adil Moosa said “we have been growing steadily over the past decade as tourism has come to the fore, and we really see the value in Amadeus’ technology to

help us manage and automate our airport operations. It’s also great that it was accessible to a smaller airport like Velana,” he added, saying the company was already seeing cost savings, reduced delays and healthier profit margins.

Sarah Samuel, Amadeus Head of Airport IT Sales Asia Pacific said the company’s scalable technology fitted perfectly with Velana’s plans for future growth. She said Amadeus was currently working with the airport to implement more solutions through its “journey of digital transformation”.

SABRE BIG DATA FOR HONG KONG AIRLINES

HONG Kong Airlines has confirmed that it is now purchasing Sabre MIDT Network Plus data, as part of ongoing global aspirations which will see the carrier launch flights to Los Angeles this month, its first destination in North America. Under the data purchase deal, Hong Kong Airlines will be provided with data from Sabre travel agents worldwide, for all traveller origins and destinations where Hong Kong Airlines operates at least one segment of the traveller journey.

Part of Sabre’s AirVision Market Intelligence suite, MIDT (Market Information Data Tapes) enables carriers to analyse the market and traffic flows. The data provided also includes information on preceding and

follow-on segments for the routes, helping the airline better understand passenger traffic patterns with the aim of developing its network to meet market demand, provide passengers with what they want and maximise revenues. MIDT provides access to both historical bookings and data up to 11 months in advance, which Sabre said enables airlines to measure the impact of new pricing, marketing or sales initiatives. “Analysts get a clear view of the developing trends along with the advanced knowledge of industry threats,” the company said.

Rakesh Narayanan, Sabre’s vice president of Air Commerce, said “through our sophisticated business intelligence

tools, we are helping customers unlock deeper data-driven insights and adapt to changing market influences and trends. Hong Kong Airlines recognises the value of Sabre’s big data and intends to use the insights in their business decision-making, making improvements to marketing, revenue management, network and operational decisions.”

Hong Kong Airlines said it hopes to further expand its mainland US network after the Los Angeles debut. Assistant director Wayne Wang said “as a market leader globally with deep knowledge of North America, we are confident Sabre will provide us with critical insights that can help us with making the right informed decisions”.

BLOCKCHAIN EXPERIMENTS FOR AIR NZ

AIR New Zealand is the latest travel industry participant to announce that it's looking at the possible impacts that "blockchain" technology could have on its business. Blockchain, best known as the technological basis for internet currencies like Bitcoin, also has wide applications wherever transactions need to be stored, verified and processed, and the carrier is partnering with Swiss travel platform Winding Tree which is said to be a "decentralised alternative to the current travel distribution landscape".

Air NZ chief digital officer Avi Golan said blockchain is being used globally to build "encrypted, shared platforms, providing a secure and efficient way to track the exchange of goods or information". He said blockchain applications currently under consideration by Air NZ include cargo and baggage tracking, retail, distribution and loyalty program opportunities. "With its built-in efficiency and security, blockchain has the potential to trigger huge innovation in travel, paving the way for new business models and collaboration," he said.

Golan said that while Air NZ was still exploring its benefits, blockchain may be able to offer a streamlined way to retail airfares and ancillary products alongside its current channels. "In removing complexity from the sales chain, customers benefit from reduced transactional costs, and airlines benefit from swift and secure sharing

of information," he added.

Winding Tree, which has also recently announced a partnership with Lufthansa, aims to provide a business-to-business marketplace powering blockchain-based travel booking transactions. The company's founder and CEO, Maksim Izmaylov, said "we are very excited to be partnering with Air New Zealand, as it's an important step in bringing blockchain technology to the travel industry and creating opportunity for innovation". He said the availability of a business-to-business marketplace system powering blockchain-based travel booking transactions meant that startups and companies would be able to gain direct access to travel service providers' offerings.

Air New Zealand said the Winding Tree partnership reinforces the airline's "global reputation for innovation and embracing new and emerging technology. Recent

Air NZ innovations include its artificial intelligence-backed chatbot Oscar which helps customers with online queries, and the carrier's experiment with "social robot" Chip, who assisted customers with check-in at Sydney Airport earlier this year. Other travel companies looking at blockchain technology include Webjet, which is undertaking a project to see whether it can use such systems to verify the multiple transactions often involved in wholesale hotel bookings.

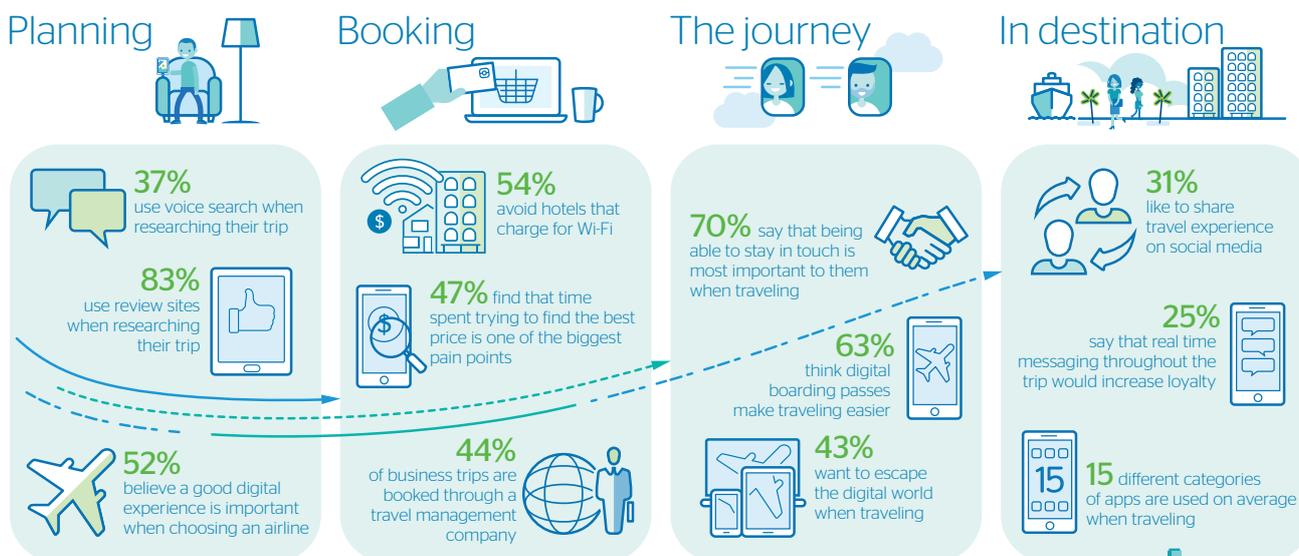
“With its built-in efficiency and security, blockchain has the potential to trigger huge innovation in travel, paving the way for new business models and collaboration”

Avi Golan,
Chief digital officer, Air New Zealand

A snapshot of Australian travelers' digital habits



Travelport's Digital Traveler Research Now Available



Travelport's 'The Global Digital Traveler Research' was an online survey utilizing Toluna Research's* sample of travelers in August 2017. The research covered 19 countries globally and was restricted to people who had taken at least one return flight last year. In total, there were 11,000 respondents from the 19 countries.

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*Toluna Research: www.toluna-group.com

Want to know more? Download the full research report by visiting www.travelport.com/gdtr

DARWIN FLYING HIGH

DARWIN is on a high after a string of successful events converged on the city in 2017.

So far this season, the city has played host to over 110 events at the Darwin Convention Centre. Twenty-four conferences held at the centre brought 7,000 delegates to the Top End.

Large conferences included the Rotary Zone 8 Institute Conference, which had an attendance of 450 delegates, 460 attended the Australian and New Zealand Society of Nephrology Annual Scientific Meeting and 360 descended on Darwin for the Australian Association of Special Education National Conference.

Other conferences the Darwin waterfront precinct venue hosted included Trucking Australia, Nuffield Australia and the Australian Lawyers Alliance Annual National Conference.

Outside of business events, the centre had seven exhibitions in portfolio that saw 21,000 people walk through its door.

Valerie Smith, executive director of the NT Convention Bureau said the Territory's industry strengths in mining, energy, health and agribusiness made it an attractive place for those sectors to host their conference, due to availability of expert speakers, interesting technical tours and local support.

Looking ahead, 2018 is set to be another action-packed year for Darwin, with several hundred delegates expected to make the trip to the convention centre for the 50th Annual Convention and Exhibition of the Australian Pipelines and Gas Association in September. The centre is also putting the final touches to a number of other conferences and events that are expected to contribute to the growth of the Top End's events portfolio. In the coming years, the centre is expected to play host to the 2019 Regional Australia Asia Chambers Forum in Darwin and the 2021 World Federation of Neuroscience Nurses Quadrennial Congress.



DEVELOPING THE NORTHERN TERRITORY FOR EVENTS

LAST year, business events contributed more than \$35 million in delegate expenditure to the Northern Territory economy.

The NT is rolling out the red carpet for the lucrative sector, with a string a new hotels, developments and incentives to grow their share of the pie.

At the forefront is Marriott International's plan to construct a \$200 million hotel in Darwin's waterfront precinct. The Westin Darwin, scheduled to open in 2020 will be an eight-storey 240-room hotel and will offer easy access for delegates to the nearby Darwin Convention Centre. The property itself will be a significant meetings venue with more than 1,100m² in conference and events space for groups of all sizes. There will also be three restaurants and a bar within the property.

Before delegates even leave the Darwin International Airport, meeting planners are being enticed with the new Wirraway



Wirraway Business Centre

Business Centre, a conference facility located on the mezzanine floor of the international arrivals area in the terminal. The NT Convention Bureau said the facility covered more than 1,000m² and had a theatre-style conference room. For smaller groups, there is a 25-seat conference boardroom with video conferencing capabilities. Smaller meeting rooms are also available to rent by the hour, day or week.

A 1,500km drive south of Darwin, at Uluru, new incentive options are coming online for MICE groups. The Longitude 131° luxury

lodge re-opened in August, following a multi-million dollar refurbishment with a new Dune Pavillion providing views of Uluru through floor-to-ceiling glass windows. The venue is being positioned as a great spot for sunset drinks and canapes for business events.

Voyages Ayers Rock Resort recently launched a fine dining concept for incentives or small corporate groups at the rock. Called Mayu Wiru, the dinner experience for 16 guests combines a gourmet menu served at the Sails in the Desert resort, which is then followed by a viewing of the Field of Light.



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VENUE



top end
EXPERIENCE



outstanding
DINING

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A PLACE LIKE NO OTHER



SYDNEY BACK IN TOP FORM

BUSINESS Events Sydney (BESydney) is back in form, having posted its best result since the Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre was demolished three years ago to make way for the city's newest flagship venue, ICC Sydney.

The convention bureau secured events worth more than \$228 million during 2016/17. At its recent annual general meeting, BESydney announced that it had secured 93 events in the previous financial year, which are projected to bring 68,300 delegates to the city.

The result marks a third consecutive year of growth and advances on the 88 events secured during the previous year, which were worth a combined \$232 million.

In the 2016/17 financial year, the harbour city hosted 85 business events that were secured by BESydney, which involved 41,400 delegates and contributed more than \$170 million to the local economy.

BESydney CEO Lyn Lewis-Smith said the organisation's strategy and "dogged focus over the past few challenging years without a convention centre" had brought success for the city.

NSW Minister for Tourism and Major Events Adam Marshall said the future of the lucrative business events industry in Sydney was "stronger than ever before", with all of New South Wales riding high since the opening ICC Sydney in December 2016.



Sunshine Coast after a bigger slice of the pie

THE Sunshine Coast has launched its own dedicated Business Events Assistance Program in a bid to attract a greater share of the national MICE market. The program offers financial support for local businesses to attract conferences, meetings and exhibitions to the region.

Sunshine Coast councillor Jason O'Pray said the program would support the community to attract "high yielding national and international business events to the region".

Expressions of interest are now open for the Business Events Assistance Program, with applications sought from businesses targeting events of 200 delegates or more for a minimum of two nights. Events must also attract 75% of delegates from outside the Sunshine Coast and must occur entirely within the Sunshine Coast Council area.

MEA REVAMPS AWARDS PROGRAM

MEETINGS and Events Australia (MEA) has overhauled its National Awards Program after undertaking a far-reaching review of the event in consultation with a diverse group of stakeholders.

Consequently, more than 16 of the categories have been updated to reflect a refreshed approach to the awards.

Many new honours have been added including an Innovation Award, a Social Legacy Award, an award for Unique Event Venue with Accommodation, Creative Design, Education and Training.

Chair of the Awards Review Working Group, Alana Hay, suggests the new format moving forward will better "reflect the meetings and events industry, the breadth of the MEA membership and the depth of innovation and creativity that is required to deliver exceptional meetings, events and experiences".

"This is your opportunity to reflect on your work, showcase your expertise and celebrate outstanding success with the best of the best



from all sectors of the industry," she said.

Outside of the awards themselves, the submission process has also been streamlined under the review, with a two-part process now simplified into a single submission requirement.

The qualifying period for the first year of the revamped program is from 01 October 2016 to 31 December 2017 to transition

from the previous scheme, while from 2018 the Awards will cover events held within each calendar year.

State finalists and winners will be announced in April at State Awards events to be held across the country, while the winners of the National Awards will be presented in May at the gala dinner on the last night of the 2018 MEA Conference in Adelaide.



AIME allows day buyers

THE Asia-Pacific Incentives and Meetings Expo (AIME) will allow domestic day buyers to be a part of the official buyer program for the first time in the event's history. The change will allow domestic buyers to participate in AIME on their day of choice, with no mandatory events to be a part of their schedule so they are free to choose their program. AIME said it would provide exhibitors with further opportunities to gain more leads and business. AIME project manager Angela Sciacca said it would provide the "ultimate flexibility, with no mandatory sessions" for buyers to make the most of their time at the event.

Brisbane introduces conference fund

BRISBANE has launched a new initiative to discover up-and-coming industry and research leaders while showcasing the destination as a desirable location for business events. The Lord Mayor's Convention Trailblazer Grant program will award a share of \$25,000 per year to the Queensland capital's most passionate and capable professionals or researchers and enlist their help to attract valuable industry conferences to Brisbane. Launched by Brisbane Lord Mayor Graham Quirk, the program will help grow the city's international conference portfolio. "Bringing major conferences to Brisbane puts a spotlight on our industries and areas of expertise while attracting the world's brightest minds," Quirk said. The program will award up to five grants a year, and up to a maximum value of \$5,000 each. Applications close 28 January.

FoodByUs into MICE sector

THE former Menulog founders have expanded their FoodByUs company with the goal of disrupting the \$23.1 billion business events sector in Australia. FoodByUs will offer a new food marketplace that will provide a "one stop shop" for organisers to source high-quality, fresh and locally produced food from a range of wholesalers. The company said it would offer a seamless online ordering system with easy logistics including delivery. FoodByUs cofounder & MD Ben Lipschitz said, "FoodByUs' new B2B marketplace offers both organisers and wholesale suppliers a smart distribution solution, without the traditionally high markup fees."

The company said its technology would allow organisers to place one-off and recurring orders. FoodByUs is available for business events in Sydney, Melbourne & Brisbane.



AACB VIEW

Karen Bolinger, president
Association of Australian Convention Bureaux

INDUSTRY research plays a vital role in advocacy and continually improving our performance. Business events is the only sector of the tourism industry that provides a long-term pipeline of confirmed future business, allowing governments, as well as tourism and future industry sectors to plan well in advance and maximise the economic benefits.

The AACB's latest publication of its Forward Calendar of International Business Events, a vision of convention bureau bid performance from July 2017, is a great example of this work; and as I take up my role as president of the association, I plan to continue and build on the

great work that we have already achieved in research-led advocacy and raising the profile of this vital economic driver.

AACB members have worked to attract almost 400 international business events to Australia across the next decade, bringing in the equivalent of 460 Airbus A380s full of international delegates who will go on to spend over \$800m on home soil. This outcome is predominantly driven by the strength of our professional bid delivery, financial support put forward by state and local governments, along with the fact that Australia is a safe and desirable destination to hold an event.

International business events attract high yielding visitors, spending, on average, 70% more per day and 21% more over the course of their trip compared to other international visitors (Deloitte Access Economics), therefore are highly sought after.

Although the report shows a 3% growth

in the number of international business events secured for the future, we can't overlook the 7% increase in the number of bids lost. Over 300 events are now set to take place in competing countries, equating to a staggering loss of more than \$1b in direct delegate spend.

Key reasons why organisers choose competing destinations are Australia's

geographic isolation from the rest of the world, the cost factors associated with this and competing financial packages offered by other countries.

The timing of the Hon Steven Ciobo's (Minister for Trade, Tourism

and Investment) visit to IMEX America in October was important, as Australia's international rankings continue to drop, falling to 16th in 2016 from the top 10 a decade ago. At IMEX he could see, first hand, the highly competitive nature of our industry and the potential strategic trade and investment opportunities for Australia provided by international business events.

If Australia is to secure even more international business events, strong consideration should be given to the establishment of a dedicated national bid fund, an initiative which other countries now have in place. We are seeking co-investment from the Federal Government to attract these events to Australia, recognising the strategic value of business events in attracting trade, investment and global talent, and the long-term benefits accrued from growth in the visitor and knowledge-based economies.

‘Business events is the only sector of the tourism industry that provides a long-term pipeline of confirmed future business’



business events news

- 23 Oct** MCEC offers hotels online
- 26 Oct** MEA revamps awards night
- 30 Oct** BESydney defies shutdown
- 02 Nov** Food disruptor into events
- 06 Nov** AACB eyes int'l innovation

HEADLINES OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2017

- 09 Nov** Sunshine Coast mounts events push
- 13 Nov** IMEX to hold women's event
- 16 Nov** Dubai ready for global crowd
- 20 Nov** Record PCOA conference
- 23 Nov** Canberra to welcome 4,000

CAREER IN FOCUS

MICHELLE SCOTT

Director of Sales & Marketing,
Fiji Marriott Resort Momi Bay



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

I've been at Fiji Marriott Resort Momi Bay since February, 2017, coming on board just before the resort's opening in April, 2017. My role is varied; achieving the hotel's sales and revenue goals, ensuring the team deliver our brand promise and the hotel is positioned correctly in the market, ensuring it has the right buzz around it – we recently hosted the *Bachelorette 2017* finale.

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

I started working in a small hotel in Newcastle, NSW when I was 17, working my way from the restaurant, to front office and into events. I left the industry briefly, however I returned after only a few months; travel and tourism is an important part of my lifestyle, so having the ability to work and travel is perfect for me.

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

I studied a Diploma of Hospitality Management and an Advanced Diploma of International Hotel Management. Most recently I completed a Digital Marketing Diploma to enhance my skills; marketing is a rapidly changing space. For me, the tourism industry is one where you can work your way up, however formal education sets you apart and gives you good grounding and business acumen.

4. What do you love about your job?

It's challenging but also very rewarding. One of Marriott International's mottos is that

‘Hotels are a competitive environment and you need to position yourself with a resilient mind and positive attitude’

‘success is never final’, and I love being part of a team that continues to strive for results.

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

Some of the greatest and ongoing challenges I've experienced are external factors that lead to fewer people travelling – the 2008 GFC and September 11 are two examples. It's these times where you still have to balance what's happening in the world with business priorities and looking after the staff that are employed at the hotel. It definitely makes you stronger, smarter and more resilient!

6. What factors were central to your success?

I think my persistence and positivity have been key. Hotels are a competitive environment and you need to position yourself with a resilient mind and positive attitude. A strong network and mentors also help too.

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

I never had a formal mentor. However, over my time with Marriott International, I have worked with some fantastic leaders that have become a strong influence during my career. They've helped me to ask different questions and develop innovative ways of doing things; it's great to benchmark yourself and have a rounded view.

8. What are the keys to good business?

I think it's about how you do business, and being able to make personal connections with your clients, suppliers and stakeholders. Having good people around you and a team you can trust is vital. So is mentorship and training, to elevate and empower your team.

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

My three pieces of advice are: know that saying no is ok; you can't be everything to everyone. Be proud of and enjoy what you do; otherwise it's going to be hard to do your job. And constantly look for inspiration; be open to new ideas.

‘Over my time with Marriott International, I have worked with some fantastic leaders that have become a strong influence during my career’

ANDREW JONES'S TOP 10 TIPS

THE Magellan Travel Group annual conference which took place in September this year saw affable Founder and Chairman Andrew Jones share with the 300 strong audience lessons learned on his more than 20 years running Tasmania's most successful travel agency.

From humble origins Jones developed 10 tips that many in the audience and indeed the broader travel agent community could use to help steer and manage the challenges and opportunities through running a business.

His first insight was to encourage diversification in business activities in pursuit of new revenue streams, changing customer expectations, competition and to mitigate risk.

Secondly, he underscored the need to manage people professionally and encouraged problem solving quickly to reduce any impact on your business.

His third point urged business owners to think outside the square when hiring staff, to ensure the right talent is brought into your organisation that create value.

Investment in retaining top staff through offering up equity in the business was Andrew's fourth tip, having practiced this with his general manager having a percentage of his business. Jones's fifth point urged the building of a top management team to help strengthen the business as it grows.

Empowerment of staff through the provision of autonomy to make decisions was his sixth pointer which he saw as vital to service delivery and created the right culture for the business.

Network and build relationships and embrace some entrepreneurial flair by taking risks to stay ahead of the game was his seventh and eight tips.

He rounded out his top ten with the recommendation to make suitable acquisitions when opportunities presented and to embrace growth by "having a crack" in pursuit of attaining "your end game."

Sage advice from one of the industry's most successful small business entrepreneurs.



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CARNIVAL LOOKS BACK ON FIVE YEARS IN AUS



Jasmine O'Donoghue talks to Carnival Cruise Line's vice president and general manager Australia Jennifer Vandekreeke on the line marking five years of sailing down under this year.

JENNIFER Vandekreeke has stood proudly at the helm of Carnival Cruise Line since it first started sailing out of the country and was responsible for establishing the brand in the Australasian market.

When she first set foot in Australia to examine if the market was right for Carnival Cruise Line, there were two things which stood out.

"Carnival and Australia were meant for each other", she said, admitting her second impression was "I need to move here".

"I'm just so overwhelmed and grateful for

the support that we've seen from our guests and our travel agent partners and honestly, from the media as well," Vandekreeke said.

"I think it's just been really positive and they've understood who we are and what we're about and they've really embraced it in a way that I did not think was going to happen.

In true Carnival family-fun style, the brand has decided to claim an entire "birthday year", with "all sorts of little things" planned over the course of the year.

"We're all about having fun and nothing's more fun than a birthday party," Vandekreeke said.

Carnival kicked off its birthday year with the world's longest conga line at sea.

The festivities arrived in Australia on board *Carnival Spirit*, where over 1,500 passengers hauled themselves out of bed for some "conga-ing" on the top deck at sunrise on 17 October – five years to the day from when the ship first arrived in 2012.

Since entering the Australian market Carnival has always aimed to be very clear about who it is for.

"We're free spirited, family friendly fun, that's who we are, that's what we do and you really see it through every single step of the

product,” Vandekreeke said.

“We are who we are, and I wasn’t going to make any big changes to the product when we came here because I do think there’s a great fit between Carnival and Australia.”

Before Carnival first deployed *Carnival Spirit* down under, it made several modifications to “Aussify” the vessel.

‘We are who we are, and I wasn’t going to make any big changes to the product when we came here because I do think there’s a great fit between Carnival and Australia’

The Green Thunder waterslide and a children’s play area were added, along with the adults-only open-air deck Serenity, local cuisine, beer and wine, a cruise director from Sydney, Australian comedians in the comedy club and Aussie dollars as the onboard currency.

“One of the big things we missed is Australians won’t lay out in the sun,” Vandekreeke explained.

“We actually took 500 lounge chairs off the ship, we were used to American guests who would lay three along.”

As lounge chairs were progressively swapped out, Carnival learned the Aussies who weren’t sitting around sunning themselves instead threw themselves into every activity on offer – from bingo, to Harry Potter trivia and a paper aeroplane making competition.

Vandekreeke admitted one challenge Carnival faced was that “Australians won’t whine”.

“Everybody would seem like they were perfectly happy on board and if things weren’t the way they wanted, Aussies would just power through and make the best of it,” she said, adding that because of this, it took around six months to get guest satisfaction scores to the same as in the US.

Fast forward to 2016 and both local ships were ranked number one in the entire Carnival Cruise Line fleet.

The executive has witnessed the Australian cruise industry boom, and with it, an increased level of sophistication in agents’ and guests’ understanding of the expanded

cruise options.

“There is a cruise line for every type of experience,” she stated.

“The next frontier for all of us that we’re all working on is helping guests personalise the type of experience they want to have on board so that it’s the right experience for them.”

Vandekreeke highlighted the arrival of *Legend* as a really big moment, along with Hamish and Andy’s “people’s cruise” in 2016.

She pinpointed one of her biggest challenges was explaining Australians to her American counterparts, for example why people don’t have time to book a cruise during Melbourne Cup week, or why teriyaki or chicken schnitzel is a must on a sushi menu.

Carnival Cruise Line recently announced it would increase its deployment to two ships sailing full time in Australia in 2020, a move Vandekreeke said was in response to strong demand.

The decision on which two ships would be announced in May, but she said it was comfortable to say *Carnival Spirit* would be staying in this market.

Vandekreeke also highlighted *Legend* would enter drydock in May, after which she said there wouldn’t be as much of a difference between the two ships.

Vandekreeke all but ruled out sending one of the two LNG ships Carnival has on order down under any time soon, noting they were

significantly larger ships and the impact on the guest experience of sending 5,200 guests to the likes of the Isle of Pines or Mystery Island.

“We’re going to these absolutely stunning, beautiful, pristine destinations and you need to think really carefully about the guest experience where you are one of thousands and thousands of people on that island and whether that’s the type of guest experience that people want,” she said.

Looking forward, Vandekreeke’s goal for Carnival is clear.

“We just want to be Australia’s favourite cruise brand. We will always continue to work really hard to ensure that the guest experience that we’re providing on board is the perfect fit for our guests.”

‘The next frontier for all of us that we’re all working on is helping guests personalise the type of experience they want to have on board so that it’s the right experience for them’



RCL digital push

ROYAL Caribbean Cruises has announced it will be pushing forward with a raft of new technological innovations designed to enhance every aspect of its business.

A major part of the digital strategy will be aimed at improving guest experience by eliminating unnecessary wait times and improving the convenience of core services.

"We are harnessing a range of technologies to enhance...every minute of our guests' vacations, and every inch of the ships we build," RCL's chairman and CEO Richard D. Fain said.

Specific benefits to passengers include being able to board ships in minutes, ordering a range of services through an intuitive app and the integration of virtual and augmented reality installations designed to optimise the enjoyment of existing facilities.

QLD greenlights terminal

THE Government of Queensland has granted Brisbane International Cruise Terminal the go ahead to construct its proposed \$158m facility at Luggage Point.

The impressive development plan is set to include a 9,300m² space spanning two levels with gangways incorporated to facilitate passenger access.

Preliminary preparations will commence next month with formal construction scheduled to begin in about a year's time.

The ACCC recently announced it will not grant interim authorisation to the proposed licence agreement between Port of Brisbane and Carnival but will revisit the request in 2020.

Imagine explores Holiday Planet

IMAGINE Cruising has purchased Perth-based travel company Holiday Planet, paving the way for the cruise company to expand its operations nationally.

Until recently, Imagine Cruising only had an active presence in the NSW, SA, Vic and Qld markets, however through the acquisition the company plans to strengthen its market position and expand its reach.

"Alan and his team here at Holiday Planet are very experienced and we will bring some more innovation, flair and product," Shanks told *travelBulletin*.

Holiday Planet offers products across Cruise Planet, Holiday Planet, Flight Planet and Seniors Planet.



CLIA VIEW

Joel Katz, managing director
CLIA Australasia

ANOTHER BUMPER YEAR OF CRUISING

AS WE approach the end of another year, we are once again witnessing a procession of cruise ships of every size and description visiting our coastal towns and cities. Close to 60 cruise ships will sail in Australian waters, carrying out more than 1200 port calls around the country, reflecting the continuing growth of popularity in cruises for Australian travellers.

Australia will welcome a number of ships making their maiden voyages to our shores this season; including two new CLIA member ships, Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian Jewel*, and Oceania Cruises' *Regatta*. Australians have shown that they are keen to experience the best that cruising has to offer, and there really is a ship for everyone with more and more lines sending their ships south for the summer.

Globally, the new year brings more choice than ever before, as we see cruise lines introduce many cutting-edge designs to reimagine the cruise experience. Many cruise lines are expanding their offerings with new spaces and features to make the ships even more exceptional. We have rarely seen such a close focus on the design aspects of ocean and river ships as we are now seeing.

And it's not just design concepts but also new onboard innovation that is thriving in 2018, with a focus on wearable and mobile devices that will introduce facial technology, unlock staterooms, and locate family and friends on board.

New restaurants, spas, entertainment and now with the bonus of new technology, all make a cruise the best choice for your customers when choosing a holiday.

ASIA RIVER CRUISE CONFERENCE & DESTINATION FORUM

CLIA is delighted to announce the inaugural CLIA River Cruise Conference and Destination Forum for travel agents this coming April. The conference will take place in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, followed by a cruise on the Mekong River.

Conference sessions which will focus on identifying potential river cruise customers and learning more about the wide variety of experiences offered on a river cruise holiday, particularly around the cruise holiday choices in Asia.

The CLIA Asia River Cruise Conference & Destination Forum is available to CLIA member travel agents only. Registration for this unique experience is based on a first come, first serve basis, and delegates will receive a total of 60 CLIA points for attending.

TICKETS ON SALE FOR THE 17TH ANNUAL CRUISE INDUSTRY NIGHT OF NIGHTS – 24 FEB 2018

The annual CLIA Cruise Industry Awards is the biggest night on the cruise calendar. It's a chance for our member agents, cruise lines and partners to don their finest and celebrate a big year of cruise with their peers, while also acknowledging all the hard work that goes into making our industry a great success.

A total of 20 awards will be presented including Cruise Agency of the Year, Online Agency of the Year, Homebased/Mobile Agent of the Year, Cruise Consultant of the Year, the Rising Star award and the latest entrant to the CLIA Hall of Fame, as nominated by CLIA members.

CRUISE WEEKLY

- 26 Oct** \$158m BNE terminal go ahead
- 31 Oct** Carnival mulls deployment details
- 31 Oct** Ponant opens '19 sales
- 02 Nov** Carnival priority for BNE terminal
- 02 Nov** Virgin Voyages' big reveal
- 07 Nov** Viking launches agent portal

HEADLINES OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2017

- 09 Nov** RCL fleetwide tech overhaul
- 09 Nov** Lindblad grows fleet
- 14 Nov** NCL eyes more Australian growth
- 16 Nov** Imagine buys Holiday Planet
- 21 Nov** Celebrity's newbuild for Galapagos
- 23 Nov** CLIA launches River Cruise Conf

ASIA-PACIFIC GETAWAYS



PACIFIC SOJOURN

17-DAY GETAWAY

OCY180130-17 | CRYSTAL SERENITY

To/From Honolulu to Sydney

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Days 17 days

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Fares from US\$8,901pp* (B1)



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Days 13 days

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INDUSTRY IN FOCUS



These four personal travel managers explored Spain and Portugal, courtesy of Wild Earth Travel, onboard Variety Cruises' *Panorama II*.



G Adventures took these 10 Express Travel Group agents on a family around Cambodia recently. The group flew to the nation with Thai Airways and then experienced the 9-day Cambodia Experience itinerary.

Excite Holidays and Santa Monica Travel & Tourism got agents pumped about the beachside destination recently at an event where they enjoyed a post-work 80's Retroflow Yoga session at Andrew Boy Charlton Pool in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney.



Crooked Compass hosted these MTA agents on a family to Tanzania, experiencing the Culture and Craters tour. They're pictured with the hadzabe hunter gatherer tribe who they went hunting and foraging with.

These top selling Helloworld agents were treated to a behind the scenes with United Airlines including a VIP tour of the Boeing factory in Seattle, and the airline's flight training centre in Denver.



Rail Plus took this team of Magellan travel agents to experience the impressive new TGV high-speed line between Paris and Bordeaux and enjoy some of France's best wineries.





These agents were only half of the contingent that Bunnik Tours recently took to Egypt on their mega famil. The group are pictured at the southern Egyptian city of Aswan.



The Maxim's Travel team touched down in Buenos Aires, Argentina, last month for their annual staff conference. As part of the adventure, the team took a day trip to Iquazu Falls.



The team from Bon Voyage recently hosted key industry suppliers at an exclusive reception to celebrate the company's new brand ambassador partnership with Aussie supermodel Jennifer Hawkins.



The Trilogy Group roadshow was underway last month, with the team representing Hobbiton Movie Set, Te Puia and Discover Waitomo meeting with more than 1,000 wholesalers and agent partners.



MW Tours and Philippine Airlines treated 15 agents on a famil to Manila and Cebu. The group are pictured relaxing on the beach in Oslob.



Helloworld Travel staff took on the Tough Mudder challenge on the outskirts of Melbourne recently, hitting the 9km course filled with mud and obstacles, testing out their teamwork and toughness.

Thai Temptation

Bangkok's street food provides a wonderful culinary adventure at a bargain price, with the added bonus of unbeatable neighbourhood atmosphere, writes Brian Johnston. Tuck in, and enjoy.

AT A market stall, an old man in a virulent green T-shirt is making coffee, using what looks like an old sock as a filter. He squeezes the coffee out in long dramatic spouts into an old tin mug, adding a good dash of condensed milk. He hoots with pleasure as I squat like a Lilliputian on a rickety stool, knees up around my ears as I slurp. Not many foreigners loiter on this street corner, and he seems as amused by me as I am by him.

Market stalls in every direction are crammed with ziggurats of tropical fruit and racks of roast duck, sliced up in front of customers and served with chilli sauce. Silver glints from the earlobes of wrinkle-faced grandmothers, and kids spin wooden tops under trestle tables.

Whether it's just for a coffee or a whole meal, Bangkok is one of the best cities on Earth for street food. A visit gets you in among the ordinary life of the throbbing city and will transform your tastebuds: flavours explode here in ways different from the food in Thai restaurants in Australia. Tuck into spicy salads, coconut curries, stuffed dumplings, spring rolls, satay sticks and rice cakes. Slurp up noodles, the cheapest, most satisfying meal you're ever likely to enjoy. Thais eat noodles endlessly: for lunch, as a snack, as a late-night filler.

There's just about every food imaginable, really, and some you mightn't have imagined at all, such as insects. Don't believe the

‘Market stalls in every direction are crammed with ziggurats of tropical fruit and racks of roast duck...’

adage that these delicacies (especially favoured by the Isan people of north-eastern Thailand) taste like chicken, unless your chicken normally comes with crunchy exoskeleton. If your courage fails, stick to more enjoyable Isan favourites such as sticky rice dipped in chilli sauce; green papaya salad with dried shrimp; or skewers of barbecued chicken.

Surawong, Sathorn, Silom and Charoen Krung roads are good places for street

‘A visit gets you in among the ordinary life of the throbbing city and will transform your tastebuds: flavours explode here in ways different from the food in Thai restaurants in Australia’

food, as is the area around transport hub Victory Monument and Chinatown's Yaowarat Road. However, the government has recently declared that street vendors will have to move on from the sides of Bangkok's main thoroughfares. The well-known Soi Sukhumvit 38 street stalls have already been shut down, and Yaowarat Road appears to be in the firing line.

Still, street vendors will simply move on elsewhere, and street markets will stay put. Apart from more permanent markets, night markets often appear near major intersections and bus stations towards late afternoon. These are congregations of moveable handcarts, trundled into position and soon heating up as woks flare. Wander about, choose what you want, and then squat on a tiny plastic stool – Thais think it bad manners to eat while walking about – and tuck into your roasted chicken basted in herbs and honey (kai yang), or a hundred other dishes.

The name 'night market' is no misnomer, since many keep going until the wee hours

of the morning: just the spot if you wake up in the middle of the night with jetlag and a craving for banana fritters in sweetened coconut cream. You'll find night markets in just about any neighbourhood, so ask your hotel concierge where the nearest one is located.

Chatuchak Market (commonly called JJ Market) has abundant food stalls, as well as a huge food hall across the road with outstanding temptations. The market also sells everything from songbirds to stuffed toys and Buddha statues in a dazzling kaleidoscope of 9,000-odd stands. It's touristy, but an easy introduction to the street food scene. At Pratunam Market, you can pick up cheap clothes in the afternoon and Thai and Chinese food at night. Suan Lum Ratchada night bazaar near Lat Phrao MRT subway station is also terrific, and entertains with kick-boxing shows and cabarets too.

Still got the munchies? Try snackers' paradise Wang Lang Market and the pleasantly old-fashioned Nang Loeng Market, especially good in the morning. Or simply head to the gates of any of the city's universities, such as Ramkhamhaeng or Chulalongkorn universities, where you'll find budget eats from dozens of types of khao gaeng (rice and curry) to grilled mackerel or duck noodle soup.

Wherever you might be, leave some appetite to round off your culinary explorations with a light dessert or some fresh fruit, which comes in amazing varieties. There are two-dozen kinds of banana alone, and you can delight your tastebuds with an investigation of starfruit, mangosteen, rambutan and custard apple, whose lumpy green skin conceals pearly flesh. Fruit is often cut up and served in plastic bags, with a wooden skewer to spear the pieces. Thais often dip the fruit in salt or powdered chilli, not a combination to every visitor's taste.

Otherwise, desserts include coconut custard cooked in a miniature pumpkin (sang kaya), or variations on sticky rice and coconut cream (most famously with mango) wrapped up in neat banana-leaf parcels. Sticky rice cakes are often filled with black bean or banana. Life is sweet indeed on the streets of Bangkok – especially if you're a food lover.



All photos © Tourist Authority of Thailand unless specified



© Brian Johnston

THE RISE OF FOOD AND WINE TRAVEL

TOUR companies are lining up to cash in on Australia's growing foodie culture as operators adapt to meet the demand.

The increase appears to work its way up from millennial travellers with accommodation booking platform agoda reporting that 64% of the age group rate food and dining as their most popular activity when holidaying.

Agoda global director of brand and communications Andrew Edwards said Aussies' passion for international cuisine was driving them to experience more of the origins of their food.

Similarly, Contiki revealed earlier this year that young Australians would spend 35% of their travel expenses on food while other Australian age groups spent 29%.

Contiki Australia managing director Katrina Barry said the millennial trends led to Contiki adapting its program to meet the rise in food travel.

"We found out that there was such an appetite for the USA and Canada, so we wanted to enhance our product offering to cater for this demand," Barry said, adding that this led to Contiki bringing its MUNCH itinerary to the Americas.

Likewise, sister brand Insight Vacations reported that 60% of its customers would prefer a gourmet foodie experience in Paris to

visiting the Eiffel Tower.

Intrepid Travel also saw a 20% growth in bookings year-on-year since it launched its Real Food Adventures product five years ago.



Intrepid brand & product manager food Cara Brown said the program had expanded from six trips to more than 30 itineraries around the world.

"The highest increase in bookings is from the 30-39-year-old age group, between

30-40% year-on-year," Brown said.

The Travel Corporation recently launched a partnership with VizEat to allow its guests to connect with local hosts to experience regional cuisine in their homes, from Barcelona to Paris and Rome. Insight Vacations said the introduction was designed to capitalise on authentic cuisine becoming a top priority for many travellers.

Other brands such as AAT Kings are also tuning into this trend, with their Inspiring Journeys program including tours such as the Victoria's Hidden Gems, where guests can indulge at the acclaimed Wickens restaurant, with its extensive wine cellar, holding the largest privately-owned collection of Bordeaux and Burgundy in the Southern Hemisphere.

Brown said the Middle East was emerging as a hot destination for food with Iran, Israel and Jordan becoming more popular.

"Three other destinations to watch for food adventures are Armenia, Georgia and Taiwan," she said.

Brown said travellers were becoming more in tune with sustainability in travel and food.

"I think we will see a greater demand from travellers to learn about a destination's local sustainable food practice," she said.

INTREPID OFFERS A WIDER MENU

INTREPID Travel is expanding its menu in 2018 to offer food adventures in more than 25 countries including two new foodie tours in the Middle East.

The new Real Food Adventures brochure offers travellers the ability to eat their heart out across Europe, Asia, the Americas, the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East, with more than 30 itineraries available.

Intrepid will offer its first dedicated food trips to Iran and Jordan in 2018. The 10-day Iran itinerary runs from Tehran and visits Shiraz, Esfahan and Yazd from May to November 2018. Travellers will sample Persian cuisine such as street kebabs and dine in a

local family's home.

Intrepid Travel regional director Brett Mitchell said the tour operator was keen to show travellers why Iran, Jordan and Israel should be on their radar as emerging foodie hotspots.

"There's something great about discovering a culture through its local cuisine, whether that might be eating a felafel on the streets of Amman or learning how to use the desert of Wadi Rum to roast Bedouin feasts underground," he said.

Intrepid will also offer foodie trips to South Korea, India, Japan, Peru and will launch an epic 101-day gastronomic adventure across nine countries.

Guy Grossi to lead food tour

THE Leading Hotels of the World has teamed up with Australian chef and media personality Guy Grossi, who will lead an expedition across Italy's gastronomic regions.

The tours, taking place in 2018, will allow travellers to cook with Guy Grossi and other notable chefs.

The 10-day Culinary Journey offering will be run twice in May and August. Guests will have the luxury of enjoying superb fine dining and will visit beautiful vineyards with fresh produce from the regions of Grosseto, Florence, Bologna and Milan.

Travellers will also sample and cook traditional cuisine and discover some of Grossi's favourite Italian dishes. Prices for the tour start at \$19,995 ppts.



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You Must Try...

One of the great delights of travelling is sampling the local cuisine. When you tell your friends or colleagues you are going to a particular place someone will inevitably say 'you must try'. So here are our 'must tries' for those visiting New York and New England.

New England

The New England coast of the USA is renowned for its lobster and every coastal town you pass through has a 'lobster shack' where you can try the local catch. But a 'Lobster Roll' is the 'must try' in this region. It's what it says it is: a bread roll filled with a great chunk of lobster, served with either mayo or butter and sometimes a side of potato chips. Doesn't sound that exciting really! Many claim to have the 'best' but the one place that has repeatedly won awards for the best is 'The Clam Shack' in Kennebunkport, Maine. Expectations were high when we tried it, and it did not disappoint, filled with a delicious chunk of soft juicy tail and claw on a super soft bread roll. But be prepared to queue and then wait for this US\$19 'must try'.



New York

There are plenty of 'must tries' for New York, but the one that always comes up is New York style pizza. And boy are there plenty of recommendations for the 'best' pizza in New York. Many Facebook posts will suggest a variety of different pizza joints, but we decided to ask a local. Joe's Pizza in Greenwich Village has been named as best pizza by numerous publications over the years and has been serving New York slice since 1975. This no frills pizza joint is dotted with photos of all the celebs who have frequented the tiny place over the years. Definitely a must try.

Boston

You might think it's the Boston cream pie that is the 'must try' in this city, but it's not. It's the cannoli! On a weekend in Boston, expect to see people everywhere in the city carrying around a 'Mikes Pastry' box. This Italian bakery located in Boston's historic North End is famous for its cannoli, with over a dozen varieties to choose from. On the weekend expect to queue for a while to get a taste and bring greenbacks as it's cash only.





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PUT NANTUCKET ON YOUR BUCKET (LIST)

writes Jenny Piper



MOST Aussies have probably never heard of Nantucket, but they may be familiar with its neighbouring island of Martha's Vineyard, due to its Kennedy connection. Nantucket is located about 50km off the coast of Massachusetts and is the 'summer colony' for the well-heeled.

The spit of sand is home to about 10,000 residents year round but swells to over 50,000

during the summer months due its popularity as a summer vacation and tourist destination. With an array of natural features from beautiful beaches to bird watching, as well as plenty of activities such as fishing, surfing and golf, it's no wonder visitors keep returning.

The island has a rich history as well, which is part of the charm for tourists. First inhabited by the Wampanoag people, Nantucket was settled by the British who arrived in the 1600's. The island is famous

for its more than 100 years as the 'Whaling capital of the world'. The island is all about the 'whale' which features prominently in every aspect of the town. Nantucket has some of the best preserved 18th and 19th century architecture in the nation and the historical societies have worked to maintain the integrity of the 'Nantucket' style in all new constructions, giving the island a unique character which is part of its appeal for visitors.

THINGS TO DO

In summer it's all about the beaches, there are 10 main public ones around the island, which can be reached by car, bike or the local shuttle bus service. The largest continuous stretch of beach is out at Great Point, located about 19km out of town at the northern most tip of the island. The Great Point lighthouse is one of three iconic lighthouses on the Island and is part of the Coskata-Coatue Wildlife refuge, a great place for birdwatchers, picnickers and surfers. Rent a jeep to take you out there, as it can only be accessed by 4WD.

Hire a bike to explore the island – with over 40 kilometres of bike paths that criss-cross the island, it's a great way to get out of town and see some of the natural beauty. Cycle across the island to Sianscot for lunch; on the way you pass moors, cranberry bogs and the Sankaty Head Lighthouse. A round trip ride is about 25km. Most bike rental stores will also deliver the bicycle to your accommodation.

For a bit of culture there is a plethora of museums and art galleries. With a rich history as an artist's enclave there are numerous galleries to meander through, with nautical and landscape paintings, abstracts and sculpture from many of the local artists. There are a number of museums devoted to the various past times of the island over the years. The Whaling Museum is a fascinating place to visit and discover the central part that whaling had in shaping the Island and its culture. Or take a walking tour visiting various historic sites such as the Old Mill dating back to 1746.

Wander around the cobbled streets of the historic old town - with its many shops and restaurants you can while away many hours. Nantucket prides itself on its culinary experience – with a multitude of dining options most of which feature local produce, especially seafood and of course, lobster! Or visit Cisco Brewers to sample the local brew.

ACCOMMODATION

There is a variety of options of where to stay on the Island. In Nantucket town there are plenty of old whaling merchants homes which have been converted into Inns and B&Bs. There is also an array of hotels and resorts. Or at any of the islands various beaches are small villages with cottages available for rent. But with home values among the highest in the USA (one grand estate on the Island is for sale for a mere \$42 million!), accommodation is also pricey particularly in peak summer season. Better rates can be had in autumn and spring but many of the islands restaurants and shops close down after the summer season.

Nantucket is a unique place to visit and well worth the effort to get there. See how the other half live, appreciate the quaint and pretty architecture, see the windswept beauty of the Atlantic coast. But be prepared for crowds in summer and a big credit card bill.



Need to know

WHERE TO STAY

The Nantucket Inn is located a few kilometres out of town so is an affordable option for visitors. An island favourite, the rooms are clean and comfortable and as they say – “the courtyards are green, the pool is wet, and Mom’s breakfast is hot and ready”.

A shuttle service for guests runs all day into town, with an increased frequency at night and the staff are friendly and helpful. For more info www.nantucketinn.net

GETTING THERE

Travel to Nantucket is by Air or Sea only. The Steamship Authority provides daily one and two hour ferries for passengers and vehicles from Hyannisport (on Cape Cod MA). The one hour high speed ferry is for passengers only and leaves on a regular schedule docking close to town.



DREAMLINER BATTLE ACROSS PACIFIC SKIES

COMPETITION is heating up on trans-Pacific air routes as the major carriers introduce new services and upgraded aircraft between Australia and the United States.

Qantas will be the first to steal the limelight this month when the first of its much-hyped Boeing 787-9 *Dreamliner* aircraft makes its international debut on services between Melbourne and Los Angeles.

The new Qantas flagship has been operating domestic services since its delivery in October, and will replace the carrier's aging Boeing 747s on the route from 15 Dec.

"We've taken delivery of hundreds of aircraft in our 98-year history but only a few of them have been game-changers like this one," Qantas Group chief executive officer Alan Joyce said of his latest purchase. "It gives us a combination of flying range and passenger comfort that

will change how people travel."

Though it becomes the highest-profile *Dreamliner* operator across the Pacific, Qantas is by no means the first. American Airlines introduced its Boeing 787-9 planes on the Sydney-Los Angeles route at the end of October, replacing its 777 services.

It followed United Airlines which introduced its *Dreamliners* to Australian flights last year, initially on flights from San Francisco and Los Angeles to Sydney, followed by services from Los Angeles to Melbourne.

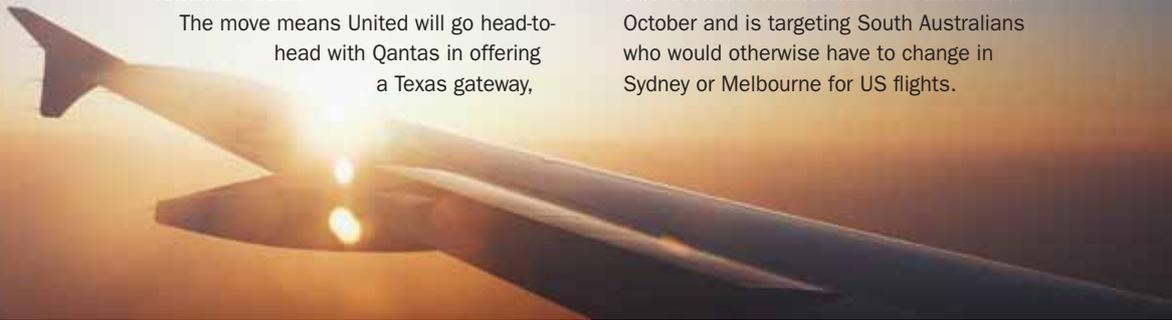
It will go one step further in January when it launches daily 787 flights from Sydney to Houston, allowing it to offer a greater choice of connections through its Texan hub and a swifter journey to key destinations in America's east.

The move means United will go head-to-head with Qantas in offering a Texas gateway,

mimicking the Flying Kangaroo's existing route from Sydney to Dallas.

"We are delighted to provide travellers from Sydney with unparalleled easy access to the US and beyond through this new route launch," said Alison Espley, United's managing director of Japan and Pacific Sales. "United carefully planned this route with the convenience and comfort of our customers in mind so that we may provide them with a premier inflight service."

Meanwhile Air New Zealand is positioning its own *Dreamliner* services as an alternative to direct flights between Australia and the US. Having this year upped its marketing to attract Australians on its services via New Zealand, the kiwi carrier launched direct 787 services from Adelaide to Auckland in October and is targeting South Australians who would otherwise have to change in Sydney or Melbourne for US flights.



Gate 7 retains Brand USA

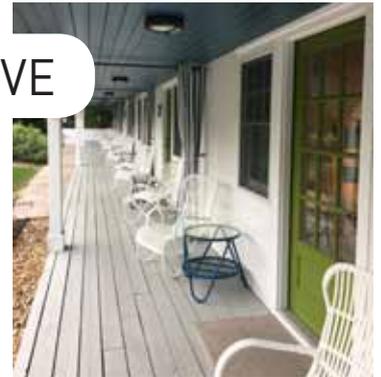
TOURISM marketing agency, Gate 7, will continue to represent the national marketing organisation for the United States, Brand USA.

Gate 7 has signed a contract after a competitive pitch process for the Australian and New Zealand marketing activity for the organisation.

"The opportunity to promote the depth and breadth of America since launching Brand USA in Australia and New Zealand five years ago has been incredible," said Jo Palmer, managing director, Gate 7.

"The Australia and New Zealand markets are primed to increase visitation, spend and market share for the United States," she continued, adding "the two countries combined make for one of the top international market sets for inbound long haul visitation".

THE LODGE ON THE COVE



NESTLED on Maine's 800km of coastline is the quaint coastal village of Kennebunkport. Famous for its beaches, and home to the Bush family compound, this is a great place to visit while in New England. A quirky place to stay is 'The Lodge on the Cove', a family friendly hotel nestled in a secluded cove only 5 minutes stroll from downtown. This refurbished motel/motor lodge has a fabulous eclectic décor with a mix of vintage and contemporary furnishings. Guest rooms are casually hip and spacious. The resort has plenty to keep the family happy - a club house with board games and ping pong, a large and comfy guest lounge, pool, as well as a poolside bar and restaurant with live music. And if guests wish to explore farther afield, there are complimentary bikes for them. The hotel is part of the Kennebunkport Resort Collection which offers a range of luxury and boutique hotels, inns and resorts in Kennebunkport. For more info www.kennebunkportresortcollection.com



American Airlines 

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EAT YOUR WAY THROUGH BROOKLYN

INCREASINGLY travellers are looking to experience authentic local food in the destinations they travel to. In New York, you can eat your way through the tree lined streets on Brownstone Brooklyn food tour by Urban Adventures. A local guide will walk you through the streets of this borough, sampling the local fare as you go.

The tour starts at Stinky Bklyn, a specialty cheese shop stocking locally made products. Down the street is 61 Local, a community run venue where Brooklynites can gather to eat and drink. The historic brownstone houses that Brooklyn is famous for lead to a couple of bakeries. While enjoying all the local delicacies, learn about the neighbourhood's rich history and changing character from the owners and workers who have prompted this transformation.

There is such a strong mix of old school cuisine and daring new culinary entrepreneurs working alongside each other to serve this community. Shelsky's Appetizing & Delicatessen is a Jewish store serving cuisine in a contemporary way, whereas Damascus Bakery is the oldest Middle Eastern bakery in NYC. Traditional and Italian eateries have long been a staple of the neighbourhood, but new takes on old classics are beginning to appear, such as Brooklyn Pharmacy where the tour finishes just streets away from the Brooklyn Bridge.



New York State makes Aussie push

THE New York State Division of Tourism will make an active push into the Australian market, having appointed GTI Tourism to help drive its sales and marketing activities locally.

In line with the appointment, New York State is keen to distinguish itself from other major tourist attractions in the US.

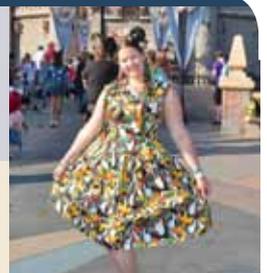
"It is important that we build our representation in the Australian market...not only as a complement to New York City, but as a standalone destination as well," said Markly Wilson, director of international marketing at New York State Division of Tourism.

The region boasts many attractions the tourist body feels would appeal to the sensibility of Aussie tourists such as its food, wine, outdoor adventuring and winter sports.

GTI's promotion of New York State is in addition to the work of NYC & Co in promoting New York City. NYC & Co is represented in Australia by the Walshe Group.

Q&A

When it comes to the US of A, many travellers are happy to go it alone booking their holidays. *travelBulletin* spoke to Personal Travel Manager Amber Boseley who gave us her top tips how to give that added value for your clients.



Is there much interest from Australians for travel to USA?

Absolutely! It's a great, safe destination for couples, families and single travellers and is such a diverse environment that it makes a perfect holiday destination for all Australians.

Which destinations are most popular?

They would be what I call 'the big 5' – Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Grand Canyon, San Francisco and New York City.

What sort of experiences are travellers to the US looking for?

I work with a lot of families so Disneyland is the most popular, requested experience. Flights over the Grand Canyon are also,

not surprisingly, very popular. Requests for tickets to TV Show tapings in both LA & NYC are always high on clients must do lists along with TV and movie sights tours.

Is there a particular time of year that is best for visiting the US?

My favourite recommendation is always September to October – generally, the weather is mild and depending where clients are visiting it can be quite similar to Australia's weather at that time.

What should an agent consider when selling the US?

For those independent travellers who like to DIY sightsee, make sure you check out the public transport options for their locations.

A lot of major cities don't have the great options we're used to – both Los Angeles and Orlando are notoriously difficult to navigate via public transport. When you point this out to clients, with a few examples, it makes a great upsell to tours, hop-on hop-off tourist bus passes or car hire.

Is touring or FIT more popular?

Definitely FIT – I find that Australians are very comfortable travelling to the USA as there are no language barriers. Most clients, while a little nervous with driving on the opposite side of the road, are comfortable driving a car and having that extra flexibility you don't get with a tour.

Nexus Holidays

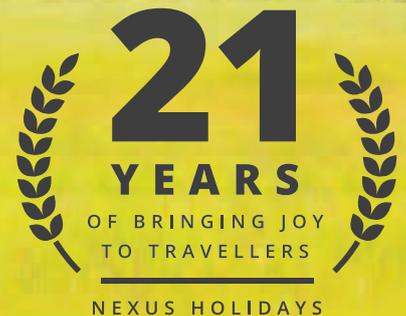


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CALIFORNIA'S WINE RECOVERY

THE Sonoma and Napa Valley wine regions are continuing to recover after a series of fires ravaged Northern California in October. The fires destroyed thousands of homes and resulted in the deaths of more than a dozen people.

But despite causing devastation to an area of 99,148 hectares and destroying more than 8,900 buildings, fewer than 10 of the region's 1,200 wineries were heavily damaged according to Visit California. Most

tasting rooms have reopened with more coming back online as the weeks pass.

Popular attractions such as The Napa Valley Wine Train are open. Visit Napa Valley president & chief executive officer Clay Gregory said tourists should come back to California's wine country.

"Now is the perfect time to experience the #NapaValleySpirit for yourself," he said.

Visit California president & CEO Caroline Beteta said travellers should not cancel

their trip to the region.

"Wine country residents need your business now more than ever," she said.

Visit California has also launched a marketing campaign to counteract the damage done to the region's image and to assure that Northern California wine country is open for business. A digital campaign will commence in early 2018 to promote the northern spring tourist season and will target key domestic and international markets.



IN FLIGHT

Delta Air Lines - SYD-LAX

The route

Sydney to Los Angeles.

The plane

Boeing 777-200

The seat

Delta One (Delta's Business class product) features a fully flat-bed seat arranged in a herringbone configuration which gives every premium passenger direct aisle access. When it's time for a snooze Delta offers trademarked Westin Heavenly In-Flight Bedding, with the crew offering turn-down service and complimentary PJs, as well as a variety of collectible TUMI amenity kits in miniature suitcases. There's a large table for work or dining, in-seat power and USB ports for every seat. The business class seats are comfortable, but could do with a few more storage nooks and crannies for personal effects and gadgets.

Entertainment

The Delta business class product includes noise-cancelling headsets and

an adjustable screen, with a wide array of entertainment including new release movies and TV shows as well as plenty of favourites. The screen folds away into the seat divider, meaning it can't be used during taxi, takeoff and landing. Those who need to remain connected can purchase internet access, which is supplied in partnership with Gogo and can also be utilised on Delta US domestic services for a seamless offering.

Service and food

Delta offers "chef-curated meals" along with a good selection of beer and spirits, plus a wine list curated by in-house Master Sommelier Andrea Robinson. Seasonal specialties and old favourites are on offer, with the journey including a meal at the start and end of the 13 hour-odd sector, as well as an optional mid-flight snack. A hint – save room for dessert, with Delta offering a delightful selection on a trolley which is rolled down the aisle allowing you to pick just what you want, including your own toppings for an ice-cream sundae if you have a sweet tooth.

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NEW

By Caroline Gladstone

ONE are the cookie-cutter hotels of yore. Today a plethora of properties with innovative and quirky designs, be they re-imagined heritage sites or fanciful themed hotels, are there for the choosing.

Here's a look at a few on the horizon.

A new luxury hotel and a rebranded icon will open in south-east Queensland in time for the Commonwealth Games, which begin on the Gold Coast on April 4.

The former Jupiter's Casino and Resort, the 1980's pyramid-shaped structure on man-made Broadbeach Island, has recently been rebranded **The Star Gold Coast** and is set to unveil a 17-storey tower housing 'six-star' accommodation. Operated by the Star Entertainment group, owners of the Sydney casino, the \$345 million complex is touted as the most luxurious digs to grace the coast since the opulent Palazzo Versace opened in 2000 in time for the Olympics.

W Hotels is also making big claims, boasting its new riverside property to be revealed in March is the most lavish to open in the Queensland capital for two decades. Situated at Southbank, the 312-room **W Brisbane**, marks the return of



W Brisbane Hotel with its iconic W logo



W Brisbane Atrium



The Star Gold Coast



The Star Gold Coast - Atrium



Western Perth

HOTELS

the exclusive brand to Australia; W Hotels operated the heritage-listed Finger Wharf hotel at Woolloomooloo for a handful of years before they exited the scene in 2007. Famed for funky looks and hip inclusions, W Brisbane will sport a dramatic misshapen chrome atrium skylight and a courtyard pool area where morning smoothies and Aussie BBQ lunches will be served along with a refreshing dip.

Across the continent, Perth is witnessing a hotel boom with 15 new hotels, offering 2,300 beds, scheduled to open in the next four years.

The most exclusive is expected to be the **Westin Perth**, the first in the renowned chain. Located in the revitalised east end, in a newly-created precinct called Hibernian Place, the hotel is a combination of ground level heritage buildings, including the old Perth Post Office and historic Hibernian Hall, and a 28-level tower comprising 368 rooms and an infinity pool.

The quirky **QT brand** continues to expand, with the opening of a 184-room hotel in Perth early next year and another across the Tasman in Queenstown. Stunning views of Lake Wakatipu and the Remarkables, along with the hotel's eccentric sense of style, will be the drawcards of **QT Queenstown**, whose 69 rooms will feature the acclaimed QT gel bed (which promises 'body conforming comfort'), Nespresso machines and seductive free-standing bathtubs.

Horse-lovers and punters should love the equine-themed hotel to open at the new \$140 million Riverside Stables complex next to Sydney's Warwick Farm Racecourse in March.

Developed by the Inglis thoroughbred horse sales company, **The William Inglis Hotel**, branded a MGallery by Sofitel, will have 144 rooms and suites each named and themed after a champion racehorse sold by the family during its 122-year history. The large complex will also house 800 horse stables, built to replace those at the family's Randwick Newmarket sales yard that was sold a few years ago, and a microbrewery.

Sport lovers of a different kind are expected to flock to another themed hotel half way around the world in the football and music mecca of Liverpool. While best known for the Beatles, the northern English city is home to two rival football clubs – Liverpool and Everton. The **Dixie Dean Hotel**, named after legendary Everton centre forward Ralph William 'Dixie' Dean is under construction in the late 19th century Jerome and Carlisle Buildings in a precinct to be christened the Football Quarter. It will include plenty of Dixie and Everton memorabilia, and be conveniently located across the road from the Shankly Hotel, another themed property named after famous Liverpool club manager, Bill Shankly.

Speaking of themes, the just-opened **Titanic in Belfast**, may make a few travellers uneasy, however, it is bound to appeal to maritime types and fans of the 1997 hit disaster movie turned love story. Built at the former Harland & Wolff shipyards, which not only designed the ill-fated *Titanic* but also the transatlantic passenger liners *Olympic* and *Britannic*, it is part of a complex that includes the fascinating *Titanic* Experience museum, one of Northern Ireland's most visited attractions.

If sunken ships don't appeal, how about a luxury tented safari camp



where guests have the option to zip-line through the rainforest from their arrival point deep in the Cambodian jungle to their check-in desk? This experience is on offer at the 16-tent **Shinta Mani Wild** eco-resort, scheduled to open in late 2018 in the newly-designated Cardamom National Park, two hours north of the capital Phnom Penh. Each tent is built on a platform above a fast-flowing river on the edge of a vast wilderness sanctuary, home to Asian elephants, tigers and gibbons. Expect a very exclusive experience with guided excursions in luxury jeeps and boats and a price tag of around \$US1,500 a night.



ACCORHOTELS ACQUIRES MANTRA GROUP

ACCORHOTELS has continued its growth trajectory and entered into a \$1.2 billion deal to acquire all of the shares in Australia's Mantra Hotels Group Limited. The strategic move is part of a plan to use the two companies' geographic footprint and distribution and systems to "form a favourable base from which AccorHotels can expand further in the region".

Sebastien Bazin, chairman and chief executive officer of AccorHotels, said the operation would underpin the company's long-term growth in the Asia Pacific region.

"Mantra's portfolio would offer AccorHotels additional accommodation formats and a strong customer base to complement our successful hotel portfolio in Australia," he said.

The transaction will see Mantra shareholders receive A\$3.96 cash per share from AccorHotels and is expected to be completed on or around March 2018.

Mantra chairman Peter Bush said the offer represented "an attractive proposition" for Mantra and its shareholders.

"AccorHotels is one of the world's leading

hotel operators and we trust that our business will be in good hands," he said.

"Mantra's strong expertise in apartments, in particular, and our presence in resort locations are very complementary to the AccorHotels operations in Australia and New Zealand. The combined business will be an important part of Australia's strong and growing tourism market and its customers will benefit from the market leading expertise of both groups."

Mantra is one of Australia's largest hotel and resort marketers and operators, boasting 127 properties and over 20,000 rooms in hotels, resorts and serviced apartments across Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Hawaii.

Its properties range from luxury accommodation and coastal resorts to serviced apartments, all of which fall under the key brands of Peppers, Mantra and BreakFree.

AccorHotels' presence stretches across 95 countries and includes over 4,100 hotels, resorts and residences, as well over 3,000 private homes.

Curio to Sydney



CURIO by Hilton will debut in Australia with the brand inking a management deal with M&L Hospitality for the West Hotel Sydney, Curio Collection by Hilton.

The 182-room new-build hotel will open in December at 65 Sussex Street, featuring four suites, a restaurant and bar, a fully equipped gym and a private meeting/dining room.

Located close to the Barangaroo precinct, the hotel has access to local landmarks as well as various shopping, dining and commercial areas. It will feature a strong botanic theme throughout – from the open-air central garden atrium and the white waratah flower motif in the lobby to the seasonal arrangements and installations created in partnership with a Sydney florist.

QUEST MOVES INTO UK

QUEST Apartment Hotels plans to replicate its Australasian roll-out in the UK, having announced plans to develop its first property in Europe.

The company revealed it would open a 100-room property in the city of Liverpool in early 2019 in a £10 million redevelopment of a commercial office building.

"There are very few Australian hospitality companies that have successfully established their brand overseas," said Quest founder and chairman Paul Constantinou. "We spent many years in the UK before undertaking this development, to ensure we understood the market and could confidently, and aggressively roll-out the brand."

The property will be located on Church Street, along one of the city's biggest retail strips.



Quest Liverpool City Centre

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PHILIPPINES

Asia with a different flavour

By Emma Lovell

AN EXOTIC getaway in Asia to experience a different culture, food and night-life scene is high on many people's radar. But it seems to be the same few destinations that get the majority of the tourists. The island haven of the Philippines is everything you love about Asia, but with its own unique and fascinating flavour. I want to share with you just some of the highlights of this paradise and why you should be adding it to the top of your travel list.

Manila is the capital of the Philippines and a great start for your cultural introduction to this interesting country. Manila is both modern and vibrant with great food and

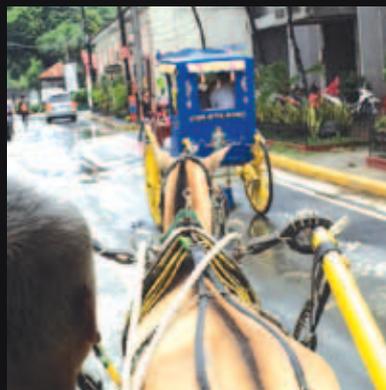
entertainment, while also being respectful and proud of its cultural history and origins. A highlight of Manila is the people. They will charm you with their friendly and welcoming demeanor, making any sightseeing experience easy and pleasant.

To get an insight into the past, take the walking tour of the historic walled old city, Intramuros, within the city of Manila itself. It dates back to the 16th century and is the site of the original colonial Spanish Citadel. You can enjoy your time there with donkey cart tours, walks through beautifully manicured gardens and richly historic buildings. There are several museums for those who want to know more, or you can simply enjoy taking in the sights.

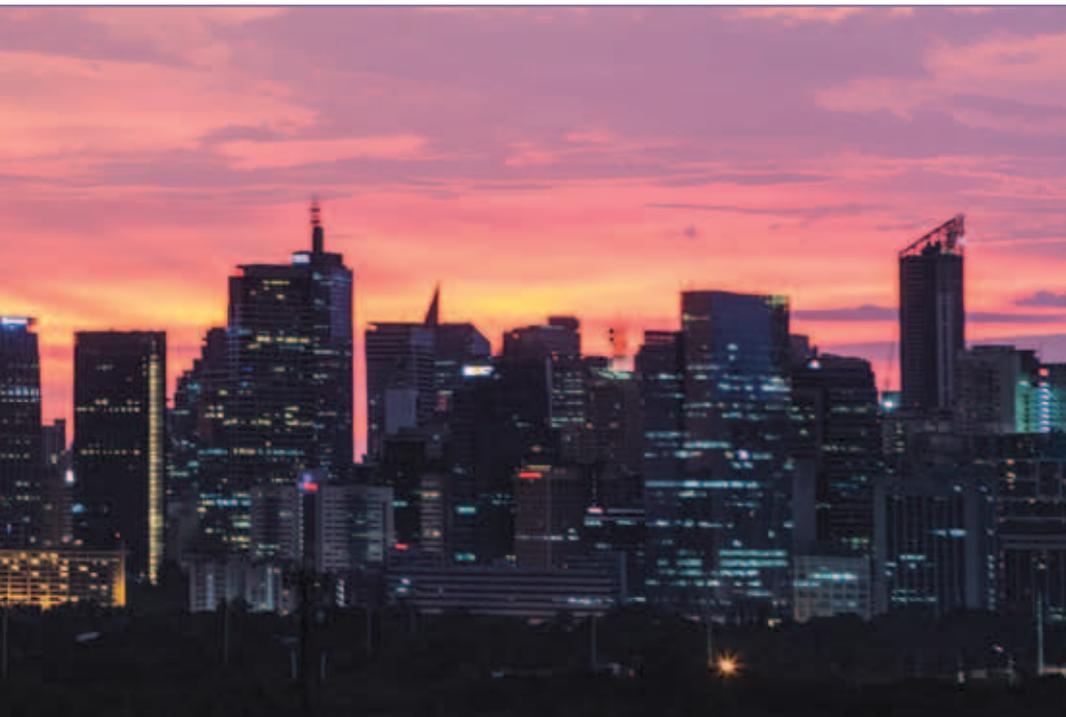
For some truly delicious and unique flavours, make sure to try a few Filipino food



Boracay Pucka Shell Beach



El Nido - view from accommodation



Manila at night

favourites. Try the sweet and tangy marinated and grilled pork barbecue skewers, you'll find them being cooked to tender perfection on many street corners. You also must try PFC, Philippines Fried Chicken – this stuff gives the Colonel a run for his money. Offering flavours such as garlic soy, hot chilli and original, the crispy batter and tender chicken combo will have you calling for seconds. As with many Asian cultures, nothing goes to waste and

‘Philippines is not just an island. It’s a country made up of 7,461 islands’

that’s how the dish ‘Sisig’ came to be. Made from off cuts of pork, it has a crunchy and chewy texture which may not be for everyone, but partnered with an ice cold beer, you’ll be experiencing life like a local.

Something Manila is quietly famous for is its exceptional singers and their almost perfect covers of popular artists and bands. You’ll just love singing along. Whether it’s a spot of karaoke, picking up some CD’s to take home or just enjoying the show, you’ll love the music scene in Manila.

The perfect day trip from Manila has to be to the ‘double volcano’ area. Sitting on the Pacific Ring of Fire, the Taal Lake hosts two volcanoes in one. The outer, or larger volcano, is a huge lake and the smaller volcano sits in the lake like an island. There are a number of ways to enjoy this incredible wonder of nature including hiking, horse riding and boating. You can also indulge in a tasty meal here from

one of the many food vendors on the island. Tour companies are running regular day trips to this popular attraction.

The Philippines is not just an island, it’s a country made up of 7,461 islands. So of course, your trip to this beautiful destination is not complete without an island getaway. With far too many to choose from, I’ve narrowed it down to Boracay and El Nido.

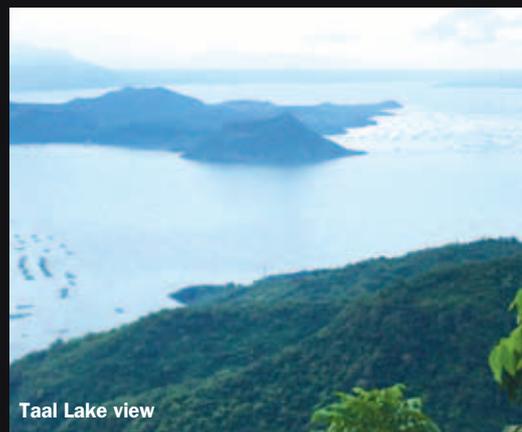
Boracay is blessed with beautiful beaches. In fact, it was named the World’s Best Island in 2016. If you’re up for a party, this is the place for you! There is incredible night-life on offer and a lively party scene. Restaurants line the beach, music pumps from the bars and fire shows will thrill and delight you. For a unique experience, stay out of town as it’s easy to walk in and you might experience some unexpected views you just can’t get in the centre.

For a more tranquil and relaxing break, El Nido is perfect. Its charm is in the quaint little streets with few restaurants and shops. However, to discover the treasures of this island take a boat tour. Travel to a variety of movie-like paradise locations which are almost too beautiful to be real. Local tour companies will drop you off to these natural gems to enjoy and explore. Swim, walk and take small boat rides to unseen hidden beaches, lagoons and more in this tropical oasis. Note that the travel time to El Nido (a flight from Palawan and a 6-hour bus or van ride) can be long, but the scenery and glimpse into village life along the way is well worth it.

Whether you love the vibe of the islands or the sights and sounds of city life, you’ll be mesmerised by the diversity of the Philippines!



El Nido



Taal Lake view



The Grand Hotel, Manila



Karaoke bus, Manila



Boracay Puka Shell Beach



AUSSIE MARKET ON SOLID GROUND

AUSSIE tourists are increasingly choosing the Philippines as their destination of choice for a holiday, according to the Philippines Department of Tourism Australia and New Zealand.

One significant factor in the upturn is the geographical convenience for travellers seeking a quick escape from the city.

“From the east coast of Australia, the Philippines is only an eight-hour flight to Manila,” said Norjamin Delos Reyes, tourism attache from the Philippines Department of Tourism Australia and New Zealand.

The Australian market remains the fifth largest for the Philippines, with more than 150,077 from our shores making their way over between Jan and Jul this year. But proximity alone has not been the driver for tourism growth, with the many tropical island destinations such as

Boracay, Cebu, Palawan and Bohol spurring holiday interest from Aussies – particularly younger travellers.

“We have seen an increase of millennials travelling to the Philippines,” Reyes said.

“Surfing is also becoming a popular activity in the Philippines, as a matter of fact, two Aussie social media influencers were just in Siargao in September to cover the Cloud 9 Surfing Cup.”

Looking forward, the Philippines Department of Tourism Australia and New Zealand will move to consolidate the recent gains made in Australia by ensuring it engages effectively with the country’s local travel market. The tourism agency hosts annual roadshows and seminars for agents in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Darwin and hosts regular group agent familiarisations. This year they are taking 60 participants on a mega famil to Manila, Cebu, Boracay, Coron and Bohol.



Credit: Ray in Manila

Vigan, Philippines

Philippines’ lesser known wonder

THERE is plenty of media exposure for major tourist attractions in the Philippines, whether it be the burgeoning island resorts of Boracay or Palawan, or the history and culture of bustling Manila. However the diversity of the country means that many attractions in the Philippines often go unnoticed.

One of those gems is the City of Vigan, a province of Ilocos Sur that was officially recognised as one of the New7Wonder Cities of the World in 2015. Facing the South China Sea on the western coast of Luzon, Vigan is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that boasts many intact historical structures, is paved in cobblestone streets and has a unique architectural style that melds traditional Asian design with a European flavour.

GETTING INTO THE FESTIVE SPIRIT

CONTRIBUTING to the Philippines’ growing tourism industry is the vast array of cultural festivals the country is home to each year.

One of the biggest of these events on the calendar is the Sinulog Festival, taking place on the third weekend of January in Cebu. The religiously-motivated celebration bears witness to a rich mixture of traditional dancing, drumming, pageantry and sports on display. A grand street parade is the centrepiece, with participants taking to public spaces to dance in brightly-coloured costumes in step with a percussion of native instruments. The reason for such an extravagant palette of dramatic locomotive colour traces its origins back to a religious statue, the Rajah Humabon, which was presented as a gift to the people from Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1521.

Taking place on 15 May each year is



Sinulog

arguably the most visually-dazzling event of the year, The Pahiyas Festival. Carried out in honour of San Isidro Labrador, the patron

saint of farmers, private homes are decked out in a blaze of colour by the locals in Lucban, Quezon, who transform their houses into a festive artwork that dominate the landscape during the two-day harvest festival. A combination of fruit, flowers and rice wafers crafted into the shape of leaves are used to create the elaborate displays.

Further along in the year, the Masskara Festival takes place in October and showcases a fascinating array of giant masks, colourful outfits and festive dancing on the streets of Bacolod City. The origins of the festival stem from a period of national sadness in the early 1980s, when the inter-island vessel *MV Don Juan* collided with the tanker *Tacloban City* and sank, losing more than 700 lives. The Masskara Festival was orchestrated by the government to improve the national mood of the people and it has become an institution ever since.

Sumilon Island, Cebu

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ISLAND TOURISM DRIVES HOTEL BOOM

TESTAMENT to the Philippines' growing allure as an attractive tourist destination is the swathe of hotels & resorts that are set to open over the next 12 months. The focus for development has primarily been on the idyllic tropical islands the country possesses in abundance.

The Dream Hotel Group has recently made its first foray into the Philippines by approving the development of the 220-room **Dream Carabao Island** hotel. Located on the white sandy beaches of Carabao Island, the new property is slated to open in 2020. The most striking features likely to entice travellers are set to include more than 100 ocean view villas, a raft of dining and nightlife venues onsite, and a 1672m² wellness spa and fitness centre.

The 192-room **Crimson Resort & Spa Boracay** will officially open its doors this Dec and is offering prospective tourists an ultra-luxury experience in a secluded beach hideaway, Station Zero. The area is so tucked away that it can only be accessed via a 20-minute boat ride from the Caticlan Jetty.

Dusit Cebu, Mactan Island Cebu will be available for business and leisure travellers from the fourth quarter of 2018 and is



Crimson Hotel Boracay



Dream Carabao Island



Dusit Cebu, Mactan Island

set to feature 271 guest rooms, a range of restaurants, luxury spas and more than 1,200m² of meeting space. The resort will aim to embody a Thai-inspired aesthetic

and will capitalise on a major upturn in tourist numbers to Mactan, which has seen arrivals to the island grow by 12% in 2017 in comparison to the previous year.



Cebu Island

Cebu rides tourism wave

THE last 12 months have proved a fruitful year for the Philippine islands of Boracay, Cebu and Palawan, with the three destinations topping 'The Best Islands in the World' list this year in the respected travel magazine *Condé Nast's Reader's Choice Awards*. The accolade is in step with a strong tourism performance from the islands in 2017.

Reacting directly to the news was Cebu Airlines who announced an increase in its daily frequency between Sydney and Manila from 01 December to 31 January.

The move secures Cebu's capacity dominance on the route, offering the most number of seats on the increasingly popular Sydney-Manila trip and operating five nonstop weekly services.

TOURISM THE KEY TO PHILIPPINES' FUTURE

THE International Air Transport Association (IATA) is lobbying the Philippine Government to implement smarter policies in relation to its tourism industry.

Citing an imperative to improve airport infrastructure and keep aviation taxes to a minimum, IATA believes that without these changes the Philippines will struggle to keep pace with the growing demand for tourism to the country and ultimately lose out on much-needed economic investment.

"Aviation is vital to the Philippines... international links keep businesses connected

and brings in tourists," said Alexandre de Juniac, IATA's director general and CEO.

"The social and economic benefits of air transport are at risk if the key issues of airport infrastructure, excessive regulation and taxation are not addressed."

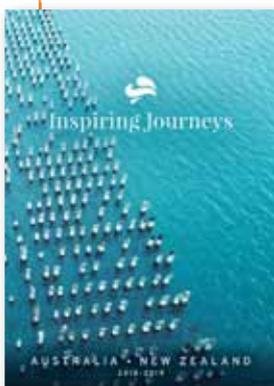
Specifically, the IATA is asking the government to address deficiencies at Ninoy Aquino International Airport which was originally constructed to handle 30 million passengers, however, is currently beyond capacity at 40 million due to a growing tourist trade.

The issues, said IATA, can be fixed through a 10-year development project that will expand the airport's runway and terminal capacity.

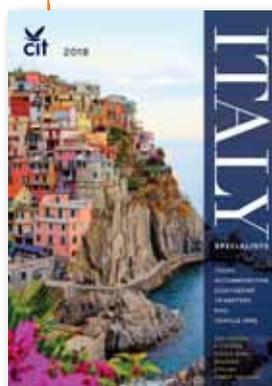
The other area under the spotlight is a proposed 'Green Fee' that the Philippine Government is considering implementing.

The Philippines should "avoid implementing a tourism tax" and instead focus on nurturing investment in the industry and "encourage people to visit," claimed de Juniac.

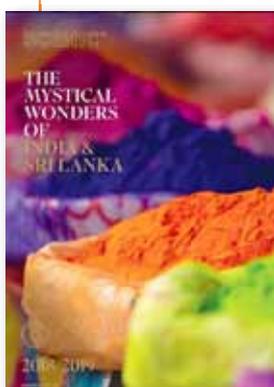
"The extra tourist dollars you attract will pay for the investments and make a greater economic contribution."



FEATURING eight unique itineraries across Australia and New Zealand, the new 2018/2019 Inspiring Journeys brochure provides guests the opportunity to rekindle their passion for travel through immersive, boutique experiences. The portfolio offers journeys ranging from five to 22 days, with a maximum group size of 20 people. Itineraries include the seven-day Victoria's Hidden Gems journey, which takes guests from the laneways of Melbourne to the coastal hotspots such as the 12 Apostles.



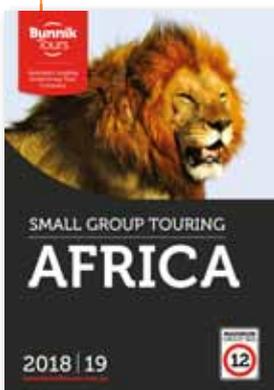
THE 2018 Italy program from CIT is packed with city packages, hotel, apartment and villa stays, escorted tours, walking, cycling and food & wine tours. The brochure covers the entire country from walking tours in Umbria, Dolomites and Piedmont to small-group tours in Tuscany, the Amalfi Coast & Sicily. Food and wine tours as well as cooking tours are on the plate also. CIT is also offering self-guided and guided cycling tours around Italy.



BIG early bird offers are being thrown out there to travellers with Scenic's new brochure for India and Sri Lanka tours when booked before 31 Mar, 2018. Seven itineraries are in the program, ranging in length from 12 to 27 days, across both the north and south of India and Sri Lanka. In Delhi, travellers can experience a sound and light show at the World Heritage-listed Khajuraho Temples, while in Sri Lanka, Scenic travellers can visit a tea factory in Hatton.



THE latest brochure from Qantas Holidays features a range of new destinations including Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City. The big-ticket items in the new itinerary include a selection of wildlife experiences such as the Northern Lights and bear viewing. Also included is a selection of Alaskan Cruising to offer a taste of cruising in this amazingly wild region. An exciting addition to the brochure is a selection of Wildlife & Unique experiences such as Northern Lights and bear viewing.



BUNNIK Tours has expanded its Africa program with several new itineraries including trip to Ethiopia and Zambia for the first time. The 17-day Highlights of Ethiopia tour starts in Addis Ababa and ventures to Bahir Dar, Gondar, Lalibela and Lake Chamo. Also in the brochure is a 16-day adventure departing Cape Town, before travelling through the Cape Winelands, Victoria Falls and Zambia, where guests can take part in a famous Zambian walking safari.



EASTERN Eurotours' new 96-page covers 31 countries across the continent from some of Europe's best and most known destinations to some more hidden corners. The 2018 product includes tours to Germany, Italy, Greece, Lithuania, Croatia and The Netherlands. The brochure highlights two of the key attributes of Europe: food and culture. In a unique twist, the brochure also features a popular dish from each of countries included on the program.



TAUCK has put together an action-packed product to the USA and Canada in 2018. Three new itineraries to the offerings are the Mythic West: Montana, Yellowstone & the Tetons, Canadian Rockies, Whistler & Victoria and Tauck Washington DC Event. On select dates, Tauck is offering a historic train ride to the Grand Canyon on an alternate three-day routing of its America's Canyonlands and Red Rocks and Painted Canyons. A number of tours feature stays at national and state parks across the US and Canada.



A range of fresh focusses and travel styles have been packed into Abercrombie & Kent's latest release. In India, there's a new two-week private journey covering from north to south of the country and a private journey has been introduced in Sri Lanka. One&Only Reethi Rah and Como Cocoa Island in the Maldives have been added to the offering, along with a two-week navigation through Japan on *L'Austral*. A five-day extension in Sa Pa, Vietnam, has also made its debut, along with new stopovers in Bangkok and Hong Kong.

LUXE THE JAPANESE WAY

Impeccable service and exclusive experiences define luxury in the new Japan, writes Kristie Kellahan.



Japanese chef, Tokyo

NO discussion of luxury in Japan would be complete without mention of the incredible culinary scene. It sometimes seems that to live is to eat in a nation where fabulous food is everywhere, from traditional family-run ryokan inns to brightly coloured department store basement food halls. It is a culture experienced as much through the taste of fresh squid at the fish markets as it is the sight of pink cherry blossoms bursting into spring loveliness.

After award-winning documentary *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* turned seasoned chef Jiro Ono into an international superstar, his restaurant in Tokyo was booked out months in advance. Diners were willing to wait that long for a 20-course meal – Jiro chooses

the dishes – costing almost 500 dollars and lasting not much more than 15 minutes.

For many widely travelled foodies, it was money well spent. In addition to delicious morsels of fatty tuna and perfectly cooked rice, the thing diners were willing to hand over money for was an exclusive, unforgettable experience of extraordinary care and craftsmanship. Such memorable experiences have a ‘brag factor’ not always correlated to such a high price tag.

Japanese columnist, TV host and author of books on luxury travel, Mr Takanori Nakamura is also the chairman of the World’s 50 Best Restaurants. He says gastronomy is the clincher for attracting luxury tourism business, and he says that Japan does it better than many other destinations. Top of his list of restaurants worth travelling to Japan for are Den, Ryugin, Quintessence and Florilege Tokyo.

‘Amazing, luxurious ‘show off’ foodie experiences drive tourism here to Japan as to other parts of the world’

“There is a big movement of people choosing an international destination because of one or two restaurants they want to visit, and then building the rest of the itinerary from there,” he says. “Look at the popularity of Noma Tokyo: over 40 days, 2,000 seats at the table were available, for which there were 62,000 requests from diners willing to pay 70,000 yen [more than A\$800] per person. Amazing, luxurious ‘show off’ foodie experiences drive tourism here to Japan as to other parts of the world.”

Earlier this year I attended ILTM Japan,



Sukiyabashi Jiro – lean tuna



Tokyo



Conrad Hotel Concierge

the leading luxury travel showcase for an unrivalled collection of high-end Japanese travel experiences. In speaking with tour operators, hoteliers, restaurateurs and experience curators, pictures emerged of a country where the manner of doing things is as important as the experience itself.

With record numbers of travellers heading to Japan, and even more expected as Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics approaches, many new luxury hotels are opening, including the Four Seasons and the Ritz-Carlton in Kyoto. There's a push to make foreign visitors travel more easily, with 'foreigner-friendly' taxi stands springing up and more English-language proficiency training for service professionals.

There is a huge opportunity for savvy local operators in Japan to showcase truly unique cultural experiences. Guests of Luxurique, a hospitality management company in Japan specialising in high-end hospitality for the

MICE market, can benefit from the founder's impeccable connections to experience such only-in-Japan moments as a private swordsmanship class with a samurai warrior or a masterclass on Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement. Family travellers are also well catered for, with bespoke itineraries created for the littlest samurai right through to multi-generational adventures.

It's true that luxury in Japan has a different face than in other, showier parts of the world. You'll have to look a bit harder to find 24-carat gold-dusted cappuccinos or super-bling penthouse suites. VIPs checking in at a hotel's front desk will be greeted by a line of impeccably courteous staff, not a fireworks display. What is considered luxurious in the land of the rising sun tends to be more about exceptional, intuitive service than ostentatious consumption.

On a recent stay at Hotel Chinzanso

Tokyo, a beautiful, sprawling property with a top-notch spa, I joined Andre Sol, Director of Guest Services, for breakfast. As we chatted, I mentioned that my business cards had been lost in transit. As I would be attending ILTM Japan the next day, I asked Andre where I could find a printer that might be persuaded to make some up overnight. Business cards are an essential part of interacting on a professional basis in Japan and it would not have been the done thing to show up at a networking event without them.

By the time we had finished breakfast, Andre had arranged for a local printer to design and print 200 individualised cards for me, bearing all my essential details in a swish font. They were ready for collection within the hour, at a very reasonable cost of just 25 dollars. It's exactly this kind of attentive, personalised, can-do service that makes every guest in Japan feel like a VIP.

A DESERT REINVENTION FOR LONGITUDE 131

ULURU'S luxury desert camp Longitude 131 has added a new Dune Pavilion as part of an extensive renovation, creating a new flagship suite in the style of a contemporary outback homestead.

Perched upon the red-sand landscape, it is the first accommodation to offer views of both Uluru and Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) and has extensive living areas, private decks, a double outdoor daybed beside a fireplace and its own plunge pool.

The new addition is one of several new

enhancements unveiled at the property in August, including the expansion and redevelopment of the central Dune House and the remodelling of the pool area.

Longitude 131 has also added a new Dune Top outdoor venue, which boasts spectacular views from the highest point on the property and has been designed for sunset drinks, canapés and intimate private dining, set upon a dune-top with a plunge pool.

The property has also added the Spa Kinara (meaning 'moon'), with two

retreats (or wiltja) and a menu of signature treatments using the Australian LI'TYA range of locally sourced beauty products.

The redesign is the result of a collaboration between Baillie Lodges and Max Pritchard Gunner architects, the creators of sister property Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island. It includes ceramics and artworks commissioned from nearby Indigenous communities, including more than 500 hand-painted tiles by 19 artists from the Ernabella Arts Community.



RAFFLES TO CLOSE AHEAD OF REBIRTH

SINGAPORE'S time-honoured Raffles hotel will close this month for the final stage of a major redevelopment that will introduce three new suite categories, additional event facilities and a luxury spa.

The works represent the third and biggest stage in a project that began in February and is aimed at enhancing the property's 130-year heritage while lifting it to new levels of luxury.

When it reopens in the second half of 2018, the hotel will have increased its suite count from 103 to 115 and added new Residence Suites, Promenade Suites and Studio Suites. The Residence Suites include one and two-bedroom options and will be located in the Raffles Arcade. Each will carry the name of old local cinemas including the Alhambra, the Diamond and the Odeon.

In the hotel's Main Building will be two new Promenade Suites named after Lady Mountbatten – the Countess of Burma and wife of Lord Louis Mountbatten – and Lady Sophia, the wife of Singapore's modern founder Sir Stamford Raffles.



The new Studio Suites will also be in the Main Building, encircled by the colonial charm of the Grand Lobby.

"We are pleased to share these updates, designed to keep Raffles Singapore relevant and distinctive to our guests while providing a new level of excitement with sublime experiences," said Raffles Singapore general

manager Christian Westfeld. "At the same time, careful consideration has been taken to ensure we retain the ambience and what is unique to Raffles Singapore."

Other changes include the creation of a new Jubilee Ballroom for up to 300 people in what was previously the Jubilee Hall. All other event spaces will also be refreshed.



WALDORF ASTORIA FOR LONDON ARCH

ONE of London's most prominent landmarks is set to be reborn as a luxury hotel after a recent agreement between Prime Investors Capital and Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts.

Admiralty Arch, an elaborate Edwardian monument spanning The Mall at the edge of Trafalgar Square, will carry the Waldorf Astoria name when it opens in 2022 after an extensive restoration.

Commissioned by King Edward VII in memory of Queen Victoria, the building first opened in 1910 and was originally a residence for the head of the British navy. It faces Buckingham Palace and has served as a headquarters for wartime intelligence efforts and an office for Winston Churchill.

In its new incarnation as Admiralty Arch Waldorf Astoria, it will offer 96 guest rooms and suites, as well as three restaurants.

Plans include a rooftop bar with sweeping views across London's skyline, private meetings and event spaces, and a luxury spa.

"This agreement marries the timeless elegance of Waldorf Astoria with the historic grandeur of one of London's great monuments," said Christopher Nassetta, the president and chief executive officer of the hotel brand's parent, Hilton.

"Projects of this calibre are rare, and Admiralty Arch Waldorf Astoria will provide a truly unforgettable hospitality experience when it opens to guests."

Prime Investors Capital outbid 28 institutional bidders from around the world to acquire a 250-year lease of the arch in 2015. As well as the hotel, it will also develop a series of private residences and a private members club within the arch.

Crystal takes to the skies with new AirCruises



CRYSTAL Cruises has made the leap from sea to air with the debut of Crystal Skye, an 88-seat Boeing 777 charter aircraft billed as one of the most luxurious in the skies.

Operating under the banner of Crystal AirCruises, the custom-fitted plane embarked on its first journey in October, taking a small group of guests on a trip from Hong Kong to Fiji and Tahiti. It will make its first call in Australia this summer on a charter timed with Sydney's New Year's Eve celebrations before heading across the dateline so its guests can celebrate again in Hawaii.

Claimed to offer features "rarely found in even the most luxurious private jets", the plane has the highest crew to passenger ratio of any twin-aisle aircraft and a non-stop range of more than 19 hours. Its Crystal Exclusive Class seats are designed for maximum personal space and ergonomic comfort, and convert to 180-degree lie-flat beds, while an expansive lounge with stand-up bar has been added to foster friendly camaraderie among guests.

Cuisine will be prepared by an executive chef in two state-of-the-art galleys, and will be paired with wines from the Crystal SkyeCellar.

"Our goal for this program was to create a luxurious interior showcasing the elegant brand Crystal has established with their cruise ships, yachts, and riverboats," said Bret Neely, executive vice president of Greenpoint Technologies, which collaborated with Crystal to create the aircraft's interior.

Syd Sofitel heralds a luxury hotel boom

THE October debut of Sofitel Sydney Darling Harbour has given the city its first new internationally branded five-star hotel since before the 2000 Olympics, signally the start of a boom in luxury developments in the harbour city.

A succession of high-end hotels is in the pipeline, including a \$500 million "six-star" Ritz-Carlton adjoining The Star hotel-casino site in Pyrmont, and the towering Crown Sydney being developed at Barangaroo by James Packer at a cost of \$2 billion. Singapore's Pontiac Group is also planning a \$300 million redevelopment of a landmark pair of heritage buildings on Bridge Street in the city centre known as "the sandstones".

At the opening of the Sofitel, NSW Tourism Minister Adam Marshall said the state had experienced record tourism growth, triggering a huge investment in Sydney's accommodation sector.

"The accommodation sector plays a key part in our visitor economy and I congratulate AccorHotels on this wonderful new asset, and with another 4,800 new Sydney hotel beds in the pipeline between now and 2024 I look forward to seeing even more investment in our city," he said.

Funnies Flashback

We love trawling through the **Travel Daily Window Seat archives**. Here are some gems from 2003:

THOUSANDS of New York rail commuters were stranded Fri after a passenger got his hand stuck in a train lavatory while trying to retrieve a mobile phone.

Rescue crews had to dismantle the toilet with Edwin Gallart's arm still in the u-bend.

His train was held at Grand Central Station during the operation, causing severe delays across the system.

THE travel industry is facing more competition for the discretionary dollar than it may realise.

A survey by a British medical insurance organisation has found that holidays are the first items to be sacrificed to pay for cosmetic surgery.

And 64% of women who said they've had a nip and tuck in the past 2 years reckoned it was better than a trip away.



Alex Lee's winning entry to the Aircalin competition

ON YOUR HORSE

CONGRATULATIONS are in order for a couple of our recent competition winners.

In the August issue of *travelBulletin*, Philippine Airlines, along with The Peninsula Manila and Henann Regency Resort and Spa Boracay gave readers the chance to win an island getaway to the Philippines, with their most creative photo entry. Melissa Wheeler from Scenic snatched up this great trip.

September's issue included another idyllic island prize, this time with a French flavour. Aircalin and New Caledonia Tourism offered readers the chance to win a trip to New Caledonia by taking a creative photo of yourself with something typically New Caledonian. Alex Lee from Travel and Cruise Bright managed to cram horse-riding in snorkelling gear while enjoying a French baguette and champagne all into her photo and was a very worthy winner in our eyes!

Congratulations again to our winners, and a big thank you to our sponsors who provided these incredible prizes!



NEED A BIT OF JUICE?

TECH firm Cygnett has launched a new option for those of us who always seem to be caught short when it comes to battery life. The new Cygnett ChargeUp Pro Power Bank has a 45 watt USB-C output which allows multiple recharges of phones, tablets and even laptops.

Retailing for about \$170, it features 20,000 mAh Lithium Polymer battery technology and in-built LED displays so you know when it's time to recharge.

Heavy social media users will love the fact that it has capacity to charge a mobile phone a whopping ten times, and dual inbuilt USB ports meaning multiple devices can be charged at once.

See cygnett.com/AU.



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