

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today has seven pages of news.

US leading searches

TOURISTS hailing from the United States have conducted the highest number of Expedia searches for trips to Australia in recent weeks.

Americans were followed by the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, and New Zealand as popular source markets planning holidays Down Under, all key nations that were recently targeted by a global marketing push created by the Federal Government (TD 14 Feb).

The five countries account for roughly 60% of all international searches for travel into Australia, with the fastest growth noted by Brits and Canadians.

Expedia also revealed that searches for Aussie trips had grown by 35% week-on-week over the last month, with the most popular destinations being Sydney, Melbourne, the Sunshine Coast, Cairns & the Whitsundays.

Hong Kong extends

HONG Kong has opted to extend the suspension on flights from Australia until 20 Apr, citing COVID concerns which remain a "serious risk" to the destination's healthcare system.

Passengers who have been in Australia for more than two hours within 14 days before arrival are not permitted to board a flight to Hong Kong.

Russian conflict fallout

EXCLUSIVE

SOME travel operators have already started to take evasive action in the wake of an escalating military conflict taking place in Ukraine, with bookings for APT and Travelmarvel Russia river cruise programs in 2022 put on hold until further notice.

The APT Travel Group cited concerns over the security, safety and wellbeing of its guests and employees in making its decision.

"The company is contacting impacted guests in the coming week and our thoughts are with those in the region," APT told *Travel Daily*.

MEANWHILE Viking has confirmed it has cancelled all 2022 departures for its Kiev, Black Sea & Bucharest itineraries.

"The safety and security of our guests and crew is always our top priority and given recent events and the developing conflict in Ukraine, we have made this difficult decision," a spokesperson for the line said.

"Our team is actively monitoring the situation and is in close contact with our field offices in

the region and we are currently evaluating itineraries that call in Russia in 2022, which will require modifications," Viking added.

Norwegian Cruise Line has also flagged plans to enact contingency plans for sailings in the region if the conflict continues to deteriorate and become unsafe to proceed with cruises - see today's *Cruise Weekly* for further information.

The decisions follow a DFAT advisory for Australians travelling home from Russia to confirm transport services are still going ahead after a large number of disruptions in the area.

Airspace ditched

THE unfurling military conflict in Ukraine has led the Ukrainian Government to close its airspace to all civilian flights, stating there is a "high risk" to safety for any aircraft in the area.

The limited communiqué added it would inform the aviation sector about future changes but could not provide additional details at this time.

The warning to airlines follows several commercial planes undertaking redirected flight path changes to avoid the area, with most electing to fly south of the conflict zone, including Qantas flights to Europe.

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Window Seat

G ADVENTURES founder Bruce Poon Tip recently recalled his last trip to Australia during an online webinar this week, conveying to attendees his confusion about our country's obsession with toilet paper.

The trip was back in early 2020 at the start of the pandemic, a time which created a national rush on FMCGs, including loo roll, a phenomenon that Poon Tip is still thoroughly confused by.

"For some reason everyone was infatuated with toilet paper and I remember going to all of these TV & radio stations and they were all giving me rolls of toilet paper as a joke, so now I tell people when things go bad in Australia, they buy toilet paper," he concluded.

Rex's suspension bites

REX Airlines has posted a \$36.7 million loss after tax for the six months to 31 Dec 2021, a far cry from the \$9.9 million after tax net profit it made in the previous corresponding period.

The sharp fall in returns was attributed in large part to the temporary suspension of its network for the majority of the reporting period, which was enacted in response to various travel restrictions and border closures in place across the country at the time.

Total group revenue also dipped by close to 7% during the half when compared to the same period last year, with the airline raking in \$116.5 million, a number helped along by a growing passenger revenue which eclipsed last year's result by 60% to nudge \$68.7 million.

A larger amount of operating costs also nibbled away at the bottom line for Rex, with more

flights and increasing fuel prices meaning the airline paid more than double the amount in the six-month period (\$15.9 million), while "other costs & expenses" also grew by 35.9% to more than \$146 million.

Looking forward, the carrier said it was expecting the first six months of 2022 to perform better than the previous half, citing fewer travel restrictions as a key driver, and also flagging a move to expand its 737-800NG fleet at the earliest opportunity when the market allows for the demand.

While referencing rivals Virgin Australia and Qantas, Rex made no reference to upcoming player Bonza in its report, which will potentially apply pressure to all three major domestic carriers.

MEANWHILE Qantas boss Alan Joyce today labelled his airline "the little Aussie battler", with the words seen by some as a counter to Bonza's okker branding.

Hamilton on time

PASSENGERS flying to Hamilton Island in Jan 2022 were among the happiest in the country, with flights to the island's airport topping the list of most on-time airports for arrivals, the latest figures from BITRE show.

Close to 97% of flights touched down on schedule, with Albury, Darwin, Coffs Harbour, Karratha and Dubbo all performing well during the month as well.

When it came to departures, Gladstone Airport came out on top with close to 95% of planes taking off on time, followed by Karratha and Wagga Wagga.

In terms of cancelled flights, Rex Airlines performed the best with only 2.8% of flights scrapped, well below the next best Qantas (11.5%), Virgin Australia (14.4%) and Jetstar, which had the most cancelled services with 14.8%.

Rex was also the most on-time airline in Jan, with close to 90% of the airline's routes running to schedule.



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Read about 5 key issues facing travel businesses, the industry says enough is enough, Journey Beyond on a new track and more in the February issue of *travelBulletin*.

travelBulletin

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Booking patterns return

EXCLUSIVE

G ADVENTURES founder Bruce Poon Tip has revealed booking trends in Australia are finally tracking toward normality.

Speaking during a webinar hosted exclusively for Australians this week, Poon Tip suggested the primary indicator for G's return to business as usual was not volume, but lead time.

"We're seeing now people returning to those advanced booking numbers," he explained.

"People were booking trips for next spring, like eight-nine month booking window, which is easy for us to say we're getting bookings, it's helpful for us to get our business restarted.

"But in the last couple of weeks, we're seeing people booking for the next four months, four-and-a-half months, and that's back to pre-pandemic numbers."

It is clear Australians are ready

to go anywhere, as Poon Tip revealed a number of non-traditional destinations rounded out our top choices of late.

"Peru, Turkey, Morocco, are big destinations for us, Nepal and South Africa are rounding out the top five," he enthused.

When reflecting on the past 24 months, Poon Tip said G has become a specialist in dealing with govt situations, and local mandates & restrictions, in order to know what's best for pax, and what kind of expenditure to level at each destination.

"We have to be responsive to borders opening, government regulations, quarantine, on-arrival testing - all those things we have to share with our customers," he explained.

"[These variables] depend how much we can invest in going to this country.

"We're spending so much time on that type of operation."

Vivid biz program

VIVID Sydney has announced its Local Business Program, designed to support the local community and inspire audiences to dine, shop, stay, and take tourism experiences in the city.

Program participants are encouraged to host Vivid-inspired experiences, tours or menus that are in-turn promoted to a large and engaged online audience in the lead-up to the event.

Business owners can also access LED screens, window decals, and posters to display their interpretation of "what Vivid Sydney means to them".

The Program is available to businesses in and around key festival locations including Barangaroo, Central Station, Circular Quay, Darling Harbour, Haymarket, The Rocks, Walsh Bay, and other downtown areas.

Applications are open until 15 Mar via the Vivid website - **CLICK HERE** for more details.

QR signs Travelport

QATAR Airways and Travelport have deepened their relationship with a comprehensive agreement encompassing content, NDC distribution and more.

The agreement will underpin Qatar's omni-channel, advanced retailing strategy, and will include merchandising solutions for the first time, delivered via the next-generation Travelport+ platform.

In addition to extending a long-standing distribution agreement that delivers Qatar's content to Travelport-connected agencies globally, the accord will also see the dealing of NDC content, and the use of Rich Content and Branding solution of descriptions of fare and ancillaries.

By enabling agencies to shop and book dynamic and personalised offers, this will enable Qatar to provide differentiated value propositions closely tailored to micro-segments of customers.

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A project of significance

WESTERN Australia's bid to resurrect the state's battered tourism economy has seen the state government spruiking a new \$27 million redevelopment plan for the Nedlands Baths site.

The government is hoping the latest plan, headed up by Sevens Group Australia, will see the destination located on the Swan River transformed into a major tourist attraction.

The redevelopment proposal includes a two-storey boutique hotel, a large function centre, restaurants, cafes, a bar, public amenities, as well as a protected marina, with more than 100 tourism and construction jobs expected to be generated.

"The multi-million redevelopment of the historic Nedlands Baths shows confidence in the future of tourism in Western Australia, with the site to become an iconic attraction for visitors from around the world,"

WA Tourism Minister Roger Cook proclaimed this week.

"The development of tourism attractions such as this will help showcase Perth and Western Australia as a must-visit destination, as we prepare to welcome the return of visitors from around the world."

The WA Government also labelled the proposed tourist attraction "a project of state significance", meaning it will receive direct support from Tourism WA's Tourism Attractions Case Management team which assists projects that will have a significant impact to tourism and the WA economy.

The news follows a decision by Premier Mark McGowan to open borders on 03 Mar, at which time booster shots would have reached 70% among citizens.

A community consultation process will now canvass locals, business stakeholders & tourists.

Conscious findings

CONSCIOUS travel is defining Asia-Pacific's tourism rebound, according to a new Economist Impact study.

Almost nine-in-10 (87%) travellers in the Asia-Pacific region say sustainable tourism is important to them - but doesn't necessarily refer to just the physical environment, the Airbnb-led study cautioned.

In fact, more travellers say social (47%) and economic (41%) aspects of sustainable travel are more important to them, ahead of environmental (32%), cultural (31%) and community (21.5%) considerations.

Travellers want to positively benefit locals, both economically and socially, and connect more deeply with local cultures and communities, the study found.

This shifting traveller behaviour is resulting in a growing preference for domestic tourism, travel to rural destinations and less crowded locations.

SITA appoints CEO

SITA has appointed David Lavorel to take charge as its new Chief Executive Officer.

Lavorel takes the reins as airlines and airports look to tech to support their recovery.

Over the past 20 years at SITA, Lavorel has served in a range of senior roles, most recently as Chief Executive Officer of Airports & Borders.

AC expands US

AIR Canada is affirming its market leadership by expanding its North American network this northern summer by launching seven new routes.

As AC's recovery accelerates, the airline is launching routes to Atlanta and Detroit from its Montreal hub, Salt Lake City from Toronto, and Austin from Vancouver.

Additionally, the carrier said it would restore 41 other North American routes.

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Hilton opens Orchard

HILTON Hotels & Resorts has debuted its largest hotel in the Asia-Pacific region, with the opening of Hilton Singapore Orchard (**pictured**).

Located at the heart of the famous Orchard Road, the 1,080-room property will aim to set a new benchmark of hospitality for Singapore's upscale shopping district with a vibrant blend of contemporary design, innovative dining experiences and extensive meeting spaces.

Hilton Orchard features modern contemporary design that pays homage to Singapore's rich colonial and agricultural history.



Apollo claws back gains

DESPITE a number of first-half highlights and continued recovery for Apollo Tourism & Leisure, the company has still recorded a statutory net loss after tax of \$2.2 million for the period.

The figure was a much-needed improvement on the \$7.5 million lost in the prior corresponding period, with Apollo's underlying net loss after tax improving even further, from \$7.5 million in H1 FY21 to \$1.6 million for H1 FY22.

Apollo's reduction in revenue of 11.6% to \$141.6 million, which largely contributed to its posting of a H1 loss, was attributable to holding back fleet sales in the Northern Hemisphere, the company said, in response to new vehicle supply concerns.

The first half did however see an improved EBIT for all regions except the draconian New Zealand market, with Apollo's recovery momentum impacted by the outbreak of different variants.

Apollo said future rental activity is expected to ramp up with international borders reopening and negligible travel restrictions in most markets.

The company also noted that strong RV sales margins are expected to propel profits, as orders begin to exceed supply capacity globally.

In line with this broader trend, Apollo said it had accelerated its fleet sales in Australia, as well as in the New Zealand market, to capitalise on burgeoning demand.

Apollo added it is confident that it has significant liquidity to manage itself through the leaner pandemic recovery period, independent of the proposed merger with New Zealand's Tourism Holdings (**TD 10 Dec**), which last month was the subject of an informal merger review from the The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (**TD 28 Jan**).

Indo requirements

AUSTRALIANS will be required to spend 14 days in Singapore in order to access the upcoming Vaccinated Travel Lane between the city-state and Indonesia's Batam and Bintan Islands.

Formally launching today, the VTL arrangement will operate via the sea.

Aeroflot grounded

AEROFLOT has been banned from flying to the United Kingdom, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the ban in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and the country's Civil Aviation Authority said it had suspended Aeroflot's foreign carrier permit.

"This means that Aeroflot will not be permitted to operate flights to the United Kingdom until further notice," the Civil Aviation Authority said.

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CORPORATE UPDATE

FCM signs student plan

FLIGHT Centre's FCM brand has partnered with the NSW Government to extend its travel management pilot arrangement that has seen the phased return of fully vaccinated international students to the state.

The initial trial, which was greenlighted by the Federal Government in late 2021, saw the first chartered flights bringing international students to NSW successfully arrive on 06 and 24 Dec 2021, with the NSW Government this week acknowledging the important role the travel company had played in making the student arrival program a success.

"It has been fantastic to welcome the first cohorts of international students back to NSW and we are delighted to have the support of FCM across this critical project," NSW Minister for Enterprise, Investment and Trade Stuart Ayres said.

"Their experience has been invaluable in navigating the many challenges of this highly complex initiative," he added.

FCM General Manager Melissa Elf saluted the hard work and creative thinking her team had to undertake to make the travel scheme a reality.

"Eighteen months ago, this

New player enters

FINTECH business Ramp has expanded into the travel space, launching Ramp for Travel to help business travellers book from anywhere and provide businesses an unprecedented level of insight and control over their travel.

Ramp plans to use AI-assisted software to "completely automate companies' expense reporting", doing things like automatically collecting receipts and categorising all travel-related expenses," the company's founder Eric Glyman said.

For more details about the product, see [HERE](#).

product and this service simply didn't exist, and I have to commend the likes of Jamison Warren and Tim Hunt in my team for building something worthy of a partnership like this," Elf said.

"The team looked at the problem we had and came up with an incredibly creative solution, spending literally thousands of hours with no guarantee of a successful outcome, and this partnership really is a testament to them - it is a genuine privilege for us to be making this announcement."

Multiple education partners have signed on to the travel program including Charles Sturt University, Macquarie University, Southern Cross University, The University of New England, The University of Newcastle, and The University of Sydney.

Observing trends

LARGER companies are seeing less choice in the corporate travel market and are now seeking alternative options, Flight Centre revealed in its six-monthly financial presentation released yesterday (**TD** 24 Feb).

The company also observed the competitive landscape in business travel had seen legacy TMCs struggling to adapt to the needs of client and SME customers frustrated at limitations in technology-only companies.

In terms of customer focus, Flight Centre said it was working to provide high safety and compliance appeal in its products to prevent any sales leakage, as well as cater to a growing appetite for greater services with many corporate travel programs shifting from direct channels to managed travel options.

The company also stated that as businesses continue to place a greater emphasis on sustainability they are requiring more support from travel intermediaries to ensure programs are efficient.

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Travel Daily



An historic first meeting



THE Accommodation Association and Tourism Accommodation Australia got together in an informal capacity this week to discuss a merger of operations that is expected to be completed by the end of 2022.

Board members from both organisations attended the Sydney meeting (**pictured**), with significant progress already being made in meeting regulations and steps required for the amalgamation.

The Accommodation Association and Tourism Accommodation Australia continue to work closely from a council, board

and team perspective, which has already seen a number of joint events take place, the sharing of existing resources such as the Accommodation Association's employment program resources on the Hub, and giving TAA's National Industrial Relations team the opportunity for all members to participate in state awards.

"Everything we do needs to deliver for our current and potential members as we continue the recovery from two of the most challenging years our Sector has ever faced," Tourism Accommodation Australia Chair Martin Ferguson said.

Travel Daily
Events

PRESENTS

AN EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW

with publisher Bruce Piper and Entire Travel Group directors Brad McDonnell and Greg McCallum



THURSDAY MARCH 3RD, 12:00 AEDT

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Corsica in style

DOMAINE de Murtoli has appointed luxury hotel & resort spokesperson Lea Segulier to represent it in the Aussie market.

The five-star hotel is located on the southern tip of Corsica, set on 6,000 acres between sawtooth mountain ridges.

Domaine de Murtoli offers luxurious accommodation in opulently appointed shepherd houses and landlord mansions built in the 17th century.

Dining includes La Table de la Plage, built entirely of driftwood and offering the best of the Mediterranean, or La Table de la Ferme, a Michelin-starred restaurant highlighting the products from local producers.

New Nile river ship

INTERNATIONAL Karma Group has made its first Egyptian acquisition, the elegantly styled 55-cabin *Karma Karnak*, which is set to cruise the Nile River.

Making her debut after the heat of the Egyptian summer in Oct, *Karma Karnak* offers guests the chance to immerse themselves in the heart of Egypt, and its gathering of world-famous landmarks, including the Valley of the Kings, Karnak, Luxor, the Tomb of Tutankhamun, and more.

Karma Karnak's spacious cabins are decorated in traditional wood, and furnished with twin beds, air-conditioning, and en suites.

The ship also features a collection of bars & restaurants.

Plaza adds a second in Helsinki



THE second Plaza Premium Lounge at Helsinki Airport has opened to the public (pictured), strengthening the company's presence in Europe and supporting its global rollout plans.

Located within the landside area in the new Terminal 2, offering travellers distinctive Finnish services such as a relaxing sauna experience, the only one of its kind available at the airport, as well as a wellness centre providing hair and beauty treatments and massage facilities.

Further amenities include private meeting and sleeping pods for business and leisure guests, private elevator access for VIP members, as well as its ALWAYS Meet & Assist service, designed to deliver travellers a "dedicated, tailor-made" stay, featuring personal baggage handling and porter services at every entry and departure point of the airport.

Guests also have access to a wide range of digitalised dining services, such as Smart Order, a contactless food ordering system accessible via smart mobile devices.

Guests choose from a wide range of breakfast and dining options from a gamut of cuisines from Asian dishes, to European continental meals.

"We are excited to open our second Plaza Premium Lounge in Helsinki, and continue to grow our footprint in Finland and Europe," Plaza Premium's Regional General Manager, Europe, Middle East and Africa Okan Kufeci said.

"Travel has been reviving, we observe the increasing demands in travel in the region so we are glad to extend our award-winning services and expertise, to further extend 360° world-class airport hospitality services & facilities in Europe," he added.

TRAVEL SPECIALS



WELCOME to Travel Specials, *Travel Daily's* Friday feature. If your firm has released a travel special you'd like to make the industry aware of, send the details to specials@traveldaily.com.au

Savings of up to US\$6,000 per couple are available through **Cruise Traveller** on selected all-inclusive expeditions to Alaska next year with American Queen Voyages. Deals are valid for bookings by the end of next month, with guests paying no deposit until 30 Jun. Call Cruise Traveller on 1800 507 777.

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