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QF ups South Africa

THE International Air Services Commission (IASC) has agreed to issue Qantas three frequencies per week to operate services between Perth, Australia and Johannesburg, South Africa.

The agreement is active for five years from 22 Jul.

Rail Online lures investor

EXCLUSIVE

RAIL Online is set to expand its operations across key markets like Australasia and Europe after receiving a significant cash boost from a United Arab Emirates-based venture capital firm.

Dale Ventures has acquired a 20% stake in the rail-focused online travel agent for \$2.5 million, with the injection of funding set to open up more growth opportunities in target regions, including its first foray into the North American market.

Rail Online CEO James Dunne said the backing of Dale Ventures would support the company's objective to become "the world's most frequently used travel app for rail and public transport".

"With the rapid advancement of digital ticketing in the rail sector, it's time for a new player and we're it," Dunne said.

Currently, Rail Online offers travellers international rail passes

throughout Europe and point-to-point rail journeys across the UK, but soon journeys will also be added in North America.

Dale Ventures CEO Dale Wood observed that Rail Online is leading the innovation in a key growth segment of travel.

"Digital ticketing is poised for major innovation, and the Rail Online team are ahead of their time," Wood said.

"I am thrilled to be able to support their venture as they move toward making cheap, climate-conscious rail travel a reality for millions."

Rail Online was founded in Feb this year by former Rail Europe Australasia executives, James Dunne, Lachlan McCallum and Kew Muthalif (TD 09 Feb).

Today's issue of TD
Travel Daily today features five pages of news.

Dalton on board

VIRTUOSO General Manager for Australia & New Zealand, Fiona Dalton, has joined the board of Destination Sydney Surrounds North.

The tourism body promotes the visitor economy of areas like Port Stephens and the upper Hunter.

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FCTG positive on future

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group (FCTG) believes it is well placed to deal with the “inevitable challenges for the industry over the next six to 12 months”, this morning confirming a significant improvement in its expected 21/22 result (**TD** breaking news).

Based on preliminary figures, the company expects to record an “underlying EBITDA loss” of between \$180m and \$190m - a material improvement on the prior year’s \$338m loss result.

The recovery has exceeded previous expectations, and Flight Centre is likely to report a healthy fourth quarter profit as part of its full year results.

TTV has topped \$10 billion following the recent acceleration in demand, with several businesses tracking near or above pre-COVID trading levels.

CEO Graham Turner said the company was gaining market share globally in the corporate

sector with high customer retention rates and a “multi-billion dollar pipeline of new accounts”, while FCTG’s leisure brands and sales channels “are resonating with customers in what is now a more complex travel environment”.

He particularly highlighted positive returns on investment in new growth models, including rapid growth in the independent agent channel and signs of recovery in complementary brands like Travel Money.

“In Flight Centre brand, our leisure customer offering will soon be bolstered by the addition of omni-channel capabilities, which will allow customers to move seamlessly between sales channels for the first time.

“Omni-channel capability will allow us to reach more customers and present exciting new deals, flights and holidays that are bookable instantly,” Turner said.

Scenic committed to cyber recovery

SCENIC Group Founder and CEO Glen Moroney has written to the company’s trade partners, apologising for recent customer service challenges which are the result of a cyber attack earlier this year (**TD** 28 Feb).

Moroney confirmed the digital assault came with a ransom demand which he “took the decision not to pay as I believe it just incentivises these criminals to keep hacking other businesses”.

The attack forced a total system rebuild, but fortunately “all guest data was secure with no leaks”.

The nine-week recovery period led to a huge backlog, which on top of COVID absenteeism and unprecedented levels of flight rescheduling & cancellation, has led to a blow-out in wait times.

He said Scenic had now employed a large number of extra res staff globally, assuring agents “we will soon be back to normal”.



Window Seat

IT’S not just air travel facing disruption at the moment, with passengers on an overnight train from Glasgow to London last week waking the next day to find it hadn’t even left the station.

The Caledonian Sleeper service “just sat here all night”, according to traveller Jim Metcalfe, who said “in 15 years of using this train, and through many bizarre twists and turns, this has to be the strangest yet”.

The operator of the overnight service apologised for the last -minute cancellation after pax had boarded and fallen asleep.

“This was due to a fault identified on the line, late in the evening, related to the extreme temperatures causing problems across the network, which were outside of our control.”

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Travel & Cruise Weekly

NSW links deal with SIA

THE NSW Government's \$60 million Aviation Attraction Fund has kicked another goal, with the state inking a Memorandum of Understanding with Singapore Airlines to drive visitation from a host of major source markets.

The terms of the agreement will see SIA and Destination NSW collaborate on marketing activities in Singapore, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, Germany and France, as well as a range of famil programs.

Singapore Airlines is a major driver of tourism revenue for NSW, with the carrier currently operating four daily flights to Sydney, estimated to be worth around \$230 million in visitor expenditure through to Jul 2023.

"In 2019, NSW welcomed more than 126,000 Singaporean visitors, who stayed more than

one million nights," NSW Minister for Tourism Stuart Ayres said.

"Our airports are the gateway to our state, so supporting the return of airlines to them through the Aviation Attraction Fund is key to achieving our goal of NSW being the premier visitor economy of the Asia Pacific."

SIA Executive VP Commercial, Lee Lik Hsin, said Australia remained a vital destination for its growing international network.

"This year marks 55 years since Singapore Airlines' first flight into Australia, and this partnership reflects our long-standing commitment to keeping the country connected to the world and bringing travel to new heights," Hsin said.

NSW's Aviation Attraction Fund landed new Bamboo Airways services in Mar (TD 01 Mar).

Agents on the case

TRAVEL agents are doing what they can to raise awareness among travellers of the steps needed to keep foot-and-mouth disease out of Australia, AFTA CEO Dean Long has declared.

For its part, AFTA has shared the Australian Government's Factsheet, *Keep Australia foot-and-mouth disease free*, with members for clients travelling to Indonesia, and is also promoting the messaging on social media.

Key reminders for travellers include: not bringing meat, dairy or animal products into the country, ensuring shoes and clothing used near animals or in rural areas are cleaned properly, and declaring any travel in rural areas or near farm animals in the incoming passenger declaration.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese reaffirmed that travel to Indonesia will remain open, with Long adding any closure would be "a very blunt measure" with major economic consequences.

Hunter Travel jobs

THE Hunter Travel Group is seeking to recruit a number of roles across locations such as Newcastle, Canberra, Melbourne and Hobart.

Positions include business and leisure travel managers, as well as payroll executives, see **page four** for more details.

Back in Bangkok

WIDE Eyed Tours & Travel has reopened its office in Bangkok after being closed for more than two years during the pandemic.

"We have made it through the rough ride and with the support of our loyal agents and clients we are now able to settle into one of the biggest travel hubs in the world," the company's Australian owner Travis Fennell said.

The operator offers travellers personalised tours of Southeast Asia, such as Cambodia and Thailand, with the Bangkok office originally opening in 15 Jan 2019.



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Verve gets the gig

TOURISM Whitsundays has announced the appointment of Sydney-based PR communications agency, Verve Communications, to work with its in-house marketing and PR team to help promote the destination in Australian and global markets.

CEO of Tourism Whitsundays, Rick Hamilton, said the Verve team, headed up by Founder and Director Prue MacSween, will bring “unparalleled experience and success in tourism marketing” to the table, as well as “excellent” media and industry contacts needed for growth.

G Adv hits the water

G ADVENTURES has announced that its first custom-built catamaran, *Reina Silvia Voyager*, will join its fleet of vessels in the Galapagos this northern hemisphere summer.

The 103-foot catamaran will operate four itineraries ranging from eight to 10 days, and can cater for up to 16 travellers at a time, with eight twin-share cabins and two solo cabins.

The vessel will also feature a third deck with lounge chairs for sunbathing, a cocktail bar, grill station, and outdoor jacuzzi.

MH pax in the box seat



MALAYSIA Airlines has unveiled the first look at its newly refreshed B737-800 NG aircraft interiors, offering passengers more comfortable seating (pictured), updated in-flight entertainment, and refurbished interior decor that pays more homage to Malaysian identity.

Central to the new look are the more ergonomically designed seats, featuring lightweight upholstered leather equipped with more device holders and outlets than previous designs.

The carrier is also spruiking the debut of its next-generation wireless in-flight entertainment called MHstudio, allowing passengers the autonomy to stream content and peruse a

range of entertainment options, from TV programs, movies, podcasts, music, reading materials and online shopping

The refreshed cabins, which commenced their refurbishment process last year, are scheduled to take to the skies by end of month, and will be progressively rolled out to domestic and int'l destinations as more of the 38 refurbished aircraft are refitted with the new design.

“This demonstrates Malaysia Airlines’ commitment to adapt to changing consumer needs and in improving overall customer experience in the post pandemic era,” MH Group Chief Marketing & Customer Experience Officer Lau Yin May said.

Airlines get cosier

AIR Canada and United Airlines have expanded their alliance to offer more flights throughout the day and more access to each airline’s seat inventory to customers travelling between Canada and the US.

As well as connecting customers to 38 codeshare destinations in the US and eight in Canada, the new joint business agreement will also allow shared reward benefits between the MileagePlus and Aeroplan loyalty programs.

The partnership will see the airlines grow their total capacities by selling seats on each other’s trans-border flights and sharing revenue on routes between hub markets, where permitted by regulatory authorities and antitrust requirements, as well as allowing the two carriers to work closely together to achieve sustainability objectives.

“This agreement marks a new phase in our evolving relationship that will speed the recovery from the pandemic and strengthen both carriers,” Air Canada Senior Vice President of Network Planning & Revenue Management Mark Galardo said, adding it will “enable us to optimise our hubs and schedules”.

WE WANT YOU ON OUR TEAM!

With a network of 38 stores in most states, the Hunter Travel Group (HTG) is one of the largest family and privately owned travel groups in Australia and we’re excited to be adding to our amazing teams with roles available right now in Business Travel, Leisure Travel, Finance, Administration and Information Technology in our **Newcastle, Maroochydore, Canberra, Melbourne, Hobart** and **Perth** locations.

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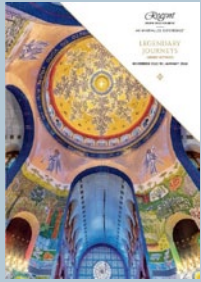
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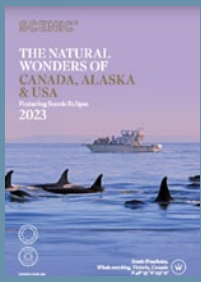
BROCHURES

WELCOME to Brochures of the Week, *Travel Daily's* Monday feature. If your firm is releasing a new brochure you'd like to make the industry aware of, send a brief description summarising its features and itineraries, including a PDF of the front cover, and contact details to brochures@traveldaily.com.au.



RSSC - 2024-2025 Legendary Journeys

Regent Seven Seas Cruises is showcasing its four new Grand Voyages for 2024-2025 in its latest brochure, which includes itineraries across Northern Europe, the Mediterranean, Asia and Africa. Guests can join the 83-night Grand Arctic Adventure to Barcelona, a 79-night Lisbon roundtrip through Northern Europe and the Mediterranean for the Grand European Sojourn voyage, a 63-night itinerary from Tokyo to Sydney on *Seven Seas Explorer's* Grand Asia Exploration, and a 70-night voyage from Auckland to Athens on the Grand Spice Route Quest.



Scenic - 2023 Natural Wonders

Scenic has recently published its 2023 Natural Wonders of Canada, Alaska and USA brochure, featuring over 20 journeys, a range of new immersive Scenic Freechoice experiences, and Scenic Eclipse luxury voyages. The brochure features five new itineraries, including the 15-day Eastern Canada & USA Explorer, which takes guests through some of North America's most iconic locations, like Quebec City and Washington DC.

Guests on this journey will also get to enjoy a Broadway Show in New York City and cruise to the base of the Niagara Falls.

Airport price hike knocked back

THE International Air Transport Association (IATA) has commended the Irish Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) on its decision to challenge Dublin Airport's "outrageous" proposal to hike average prices by 68%.

However, the regulator's revised average price cap proposal is still around 11% above 2022 levels, IATA Director General Willie Walsh said, highlighting that the association predicts traffic to and from Ireland will recover in 2023 "well ahead of CAR's prediction".

"If the airport is unable to service demand because it has not prepared properly, the CAR must ensure the airport is not rewarded for its failures," Walsh argued, mentioning the delays at Dublin Airport this summer.

Jetstar Group fumes

JETSTAR Group has hit back at Changi Airport Group (SIN) for announcing it would relocate the carrier's operations to Terminal 4 (T4) when it reopens in Sep, saying no agreement had been reached prior to the announcement.

The Qantas-owned company predominately operates from Terminal 1 at Changi Airport, and said it has "no intention" of moving to T4, adding that it was "extremely disappointed" at the way SIN had made the announcement.

In response, SIN said it already explained to Jetstar the reasons behind the terminal relocation, and reiterated that the move was the "best solution to optimise" the airport's tight capacity across its four terminals.

AF to Lapland

AIR France has announced more services to Lapland as part of its winter schedule, including the launch of the Paris-Charles de Gaulle - Kittila, Finland and Paris-Charles de Gaulle - Tromso, Norway routes from 10 Dec.

The French carrier is also set to increase frequencies to Rovaniemi, Finland, with up to one daily flight during the Christmas and New Year period, and will also resume the Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe - Montreal, Canada route, which it launched in winter of last year.

Wizzing to Maldives

WIZZ Air Abu Dhabi is preparing to introduce two new routes to its network, including four-times weekly flights to the Maldives from 04 Oct, and daily flights to Kuwait City in the Persian Gulf, from 30 Oct.

The new services will be operated by the ultra-low-fare airline's newest Airbus 321 Neo aircraft, which is expected to join its national fleet later this year.

Tickets are on sale now, at wizzair.com, with fares starting from \$40 for Kuwait and \$126 for Maldives.



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