

Virgin Hotel merger

VIRGIN Hotels and Virgin Limited Edition have announced they will come together under a new Virgin Hotels Collection combined brand.

Virgin Limited Edition is the private global collection of unique retreats, hotels and exclusive islands owned by Virgin founder Sir Richard Branson, while Virgin Hotels is the luxury lifestyle hospitality brand of the Virgin Group, with eight properties in cities such as Chicago, Las Vegas, New York City and Edinburgh.

The collective group will be led by current Virgin Hotels CEO James Bermingham from 01 Apr, when long-standing Virgin Limited Edition CEO Jon Brown will step down after more than 24 years heading the brand.

The Virgin Hotels Collection development pipeline includes openings in Glasgow, the Son Bunyola Hotel in Mallorca, Virgin Residences in Miami and Virgin Hotels Denver.

Bench Africa first to market

EXCLUSIVE

BENCH Africa Chairman, Mike Kirkland, believes the company will be the first Africa operator in the Australian market to release a post-COVID brochure, with the new program to launch shortly following extensive development over recent months.

Speaking to *Travel Daily* in Sydney yesterday, Kirkland said Bench is close to returning to profitability, and having endured the pandemic, is rebuilding with an expanded fleet of fully air conditioned luxury vehicles and a new Cessna Caravan aircraft.

He said Bench is seeing strong demand, with key trends including a growth in multigenerational travel as families seek reconnection and time together.

Accordingly, the new brochure will feature a section dedicated to family travel, showcasing properties and experiences that are highly kid-friendly.

Australia's recovery to Africa has lagged behind other markets, with US demand 10 months ahead, meaning some properties already have limited space in key booking periods, Kirkland said.

As well as the development of the new brochure, Bench is rebuilding its local team including the recent appointment of former Adventure World Head of Sales, Andy Kirkman, as Trade Relations Manager along with new res staff and ultimately more BDMs.

Kirkman said the new program will feature QR codes to offer dynamic pricing details to reflect currency fluctuations.

Bench Chairman Kirkland noted that the company is also in good stead with clients, having refunded all customer deposits.

"Every single person has been repaid," he said, adding "my main purpose in life is to have my clients leave saying 'that was the best holiday of my life'."

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features five pages of all the latest news including our **Corporate Update** page.

NTIA heads south

THE National Travel Industry Awards this year will take place in Melbourne (*TD* breaking news), being held in the Vic capital for the first time since 2006.

Just under 17 years ago TV stars Larry Emdur and Kylie Gillies hosted the event which welcomed about 550 travel industry staffers to the Melbourne Grand Hyatt.

This time the event is expected to be even bigger and better, following the standout success of the first post-pandemic NTIAs (*TD* 17 Oct 2022) which gathered over 1,200 travel professionals.

AFTA also confirmed it will shortly release details of the inaugural NTIA Custodians (*TD* 03 Nov 2022) who will oversee the awards program this year.

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Window Seat

IN EXCELLENT news for the travel industry - but not so good for the jewellery sector - comes the results of a new US survey which found an increasing number of couples looking to tie the knot are choosing a holiday over an engagement ring.

The poll of more than 1,400 adults was conducted by Caribbean-based Sandals Resorts, which claimed the results show 72% of couples would prefer to take a trip instead of buy "an extravagant engagement ring".

More than half of the respondents also said they would choose a shared experience with their significant other rather than giving material gifts, according to *USA Today*.

Sandals said the figures showed 37% of those polled would opt for a "luxury all-inclusive beach vacation", while 27% preferred an adventurous getaway.

A culturally immersive holiday was preferred by 26%, while 8% said they would enjoy a spiritual retreat.

New Brazilian boss

THE newly elected Government of Brazil has appointed Marcelo Freixo as the President of Embratur, the Brazilian Tourist Board, with the intention of "recalibrating Brazil's international image abroad as a nation committed to sustainable development and tourism".

Freixo is a politician and former Opposition Leader during the previous Bolsonaro administration, and has already announced an internal restructure of the tourism agency.

"We are going to build a modern, professional and efficient Embratur," he promised.

QF grows India network

THE addition of new Qantas codeshare destinations across India in partnership with IndiGo (**TD** breaking news) reflects the growing potential of Australia-India visitation.

It's the second phase of the codeshare deal with IndiGo, which debuted about six months ago (**TD** 19 Aug 2022) in the lead-up to the launch of QF's new non-stop Sydney-Bengaluru service which started last Sep.

Qantas is flying to Bengaluru four times a week, and also flies four weekly return flights from Melbourne to Delhi.

The expanded IndiGo cooperation brings to 21 the total number of Indian destinations

AY axing GDS fares

FINNAIR has announced from 01 May this year it will remove Finnish domestic itineraries from EDIFACT distribution.

The move means that AY sectors which both start and end in Finland will only be available to customers when purchased either on Finnair direct channels and via NDC-enabled sales outlets.

The change does not impact Finnair international flights, with the carrier saying the move aims to "further accelerate the technology transformation".

Finnair aims to completely phase out legacy EDIFACT fares by the end of 2025, and has introduced surcharges for traditional GDS bookings for itineraries commencing in Europe, as well as Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Israel, Qatar, the UAE and offline markets.

EK Morocco A380s

EMIRATES will resume Airbus A380 services between Dubai and Morocco from mid-Apr, with GDS screens indicating three-class superjumbos replacing Boeing 777-300ERs on the Casablanca route's daily frequencies.

available for connection from Delhi and Bengaluru, with over 250 new flights available for booking after today's update.

Markus Svensson, who recently took over from new Jetstar CEO Stephanie Tully to become QF Chief Customer Officer (**TD** 26 Sep 2022), said the new QF routes to India had "proven to be incredibly popular with our customers".

"The new codeshare flights will allow our customers to enjoy more connections across India from our Delhi and Bengaluru gateways and have their luggage checked straight through to their final destination," he said.

The move also gives QF Frequent Flyers more opportunities to earn points and status credits, Svensson added.

Adventure World links with Virtuoso

THE Travel Corporation's Adventure World brand has joined Virtuoso's Regional Preferred Partner Program, with the move giving the business new opportunities to engage with Virtuoso members and their customers through special events and marketing opportunities.

MD Neil Rodgers said joining the program "further enhances our credentials as a creator of authentic and ethical travel experiences for discerning independent travellers".

Sichuan resuming

SICHUAN Airlines has announced the return of its Australian services, with non-stop Chengdu-Melbourne flights recommencing on 31 Jan.

Initially operating once a week, the carrier will increase to three weekly flights from 21 Feb.

Luxury hotel listed

SYDNEY'S InterContinental Double Bay is on the market, with a rumoured price tag of about \$240 million for the famed 140-room property.

The hotel initially launched as The Ritz-Carlton in 1991, and has been managed by IHG Hotels and Resorts since 2015.

It's being offered with the potential for vacant possession, with the sale following upgrades over the last 12 months, including a new bar and restaurant.

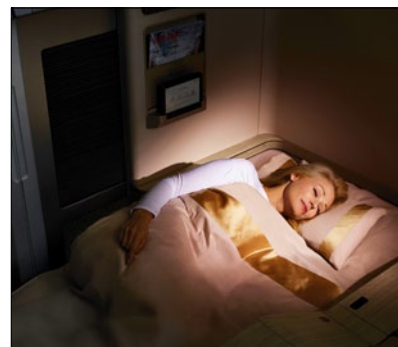
The sales campaign notes the potential for development into a mixed-use project comprising a hotel, apartments and retail.

Flybuys points promo

MEMBERS of the Flybuys loyalty program who join eligible health cover with HCF Australia before 31 Mar will score themselves a share of 10 million bonus Flybuys points.

The amount of points earned will depend on the coverage chosen with HCF, with a maximum 130,000 points up for grabs.

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



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Travel to Korea in the hotel in the sky.

Asiana A380 is now offering the 1st class suite at the business class rate for the return flights to Seoul.

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Collette growth continues



COLLETTE is primed for a rapid post-COVID recovery in the Australian market, with an ever-expanding sales team complemented by strong inbound demand, close supplier relationships and a call centre which now boasts wait times for Aussie agents of under two minutes.

The company is now operating from new shared space offices in Sydney, with technology enabling the team to work remotely from anywhere across the country.

Last night Collette hosted some of its key industry partners at an event to inaugurate the location, introducing the team which now includes experienced cruise and travel industry sales expert Linda Seirsen as BDM for North NSW on her first day with the company.

Other recent additions include Melbourne-based Paula Harrigan who joins Collette's Australia-based product team led by Roger Clulow, working with a range of domestic suppliers on the company's expansive inbound

program to Australia and NZ.

Head of Sales, David Farrar, quipped that "we're delighted that the only reference to contagious now is the energy in the company to deliver superb tours to guests and excellent training and support for our partners".

"There are thousands of guaranteed tours and departures with dates through to May 2024," Farrar enthused, also confirming the addition of new payment options with TravelPay and Mint.

"Collette's pricing includes a 24-hour 'cancel for any reason' waiver, meaning agents can book their clients in complete confidence," Farrar said.

Some of the local team are **pictured** at last night's launch, from left: Paula Harrigan, Roger Clulow, Amanda McCann-Wilson, James Hewlett, Jessica Banovic, Jacquie Roberts, Sheree Hugen, Linda Seirsen, Marianne Santos, David Farrar, Danielle McCre, Kjirsten Trundle, Smantha Tamba, Nicole Silburn and Darren Sinclair.

Hidden Japan/Korea

SCENIC has launched its new 2023/24 Japan & South Korea luxury land journeys collection, featuring itineraries aimed at "uncovering the true oriental wonders of Japan and South Korea, beyond the glittering lights of its modern cities".

New adventures added include the 15-day Japan Unveiled itinerary, offering travellers a discovery of Japan's ancient past, traditions and spiritual heritage through destinations such as Fukuoka through to Honshu Island and Tokyo.

New tours also include a 26-day luxury Mekong and Japan in Focus journey and 10-day Soul of South Korea adventure.

FBI Travel tragedy

FBI Travel has confirmed the shock passing of travel advisor Debbie Grace, who tragically died following a skiing accident in Italy.

Grace was on holiday with her husband David at the time of the incident, and was unable to be saved after being rushed to a hospital in Venice.

She is survived by her daughters Romy and Nicci, with the family requesting friends and colleagues not to call at this stage as they come to terms with the tragedy.

Grace studied psychology and audiology at university and worked for years as a Clinical Audiologist and Tutor at the University of Melbourne, before making the career switch to travel back in 1996.

Accor inks new brand

AUSTRALIA will be home to two of Accor's newest Handwritten Collection hotels, a brand pledging to offer guests a more charming, intimate and stylish hospitality experience.

The Wonil Hotel Perth, Handwritten Collection will open its doors in Feb and be located on the bank of Swan River next to Kings Park, while Hotel Morris, Handwritten Collection in Sydney will launch in the same month, hosted inside an older Italian Renaissance building and offering guests 82 rooms.

Accor hopes to have 110 branded properties open globally over the next few years, with 12 locations already formally committing to the brand across countries like France and Estonia.

Leanne joins HLO

FORMER Tourism Events Queensland senior executive, Leanne Coddington, has been appointed to the board of Helloworld as a Non-Executive Director, effective from 01 Feb.

"Leanne brings an enormous amount of experience and capability across a range of tourism and travel related areas," HLO Chief Executive Officer Andrew Burnes said, adding that part of the motivation for the appointment was to enhance the company's customers experience credentials in corporate and leisure markets.

Coddington is also the Director of the Museum of Brisbane.

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CORPORATE UPDATE

Choosing greener tools

AMERICAN Express Global Business Travel (Amex GBT) has partnered with climate tech company Choose to enhance its sustainability solutions.

The agreement will see Choose's carbon emissions calculations integrated across Amex GBT's travel booking and reporting tools.

Through the collaboration, Amex GBT aims to "increase the

precision and consistency of greenhouse gas emissions data and to build architecture for future carbon compensation".

The new solution will also allow travel managers to select a preferred calculation method and apply that preference across online bookings, mobile apps, and itinerary solutions.

Additionally, travel managers will be able to apply Choose-powered emissions calculations to trips booked since 2019 for tracking, analysing and managing carbon footprints via the Amex GBT reporting tools.

As a result, the integration will make it easier for travellers to see their individual carbon footprint, in turn "helping them to better understand the environmental impact of travel and influence their booking behaviour".

Connexus appoints

ERIC Lau has joined Connexus Travel as the new General Manager, where he will be tasked with driving business growth and positioning the company as one of the region's leading travel management companies.

Lau boasts more than 18 years of experience in the travel and aviation industries, most recently as General Manager, Agency Commerce at Travelexport, where he was responsible for managing the key strategic partnerships in the Greater China region.

His previous experience has also included senior roles at Cathay Holidays and Cathay Pacific Airways.

CWT scores big win

CWT has been selected to manage Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy's global travel and meetings & events program.

CWT will now oversee all global business travel, meetings and events, and hotel solutions for the Siemens Gamesa's global travellers, spanning 50 markets.

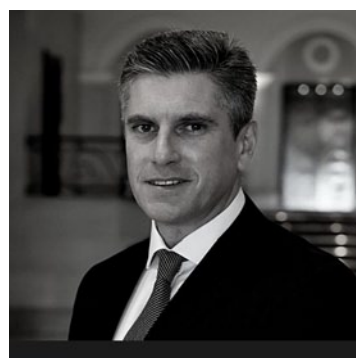
"Our aim is to furnish them with the tools, resources, services and information they need to make their travel and meetings processes both simple and streamlined, enabling them to focus on their main imperative of leading the way for a sustainable future with comprehensive recyclable commercial energy," CWT Chief Customer Officer Nick Vournakis said.

Murphy joins team

CORPORATE travel agency Air New Zealand Tandem Travel has announced Paul Murphy as its new Group Commercial Manager.

Murphy has over 25 years of international sales and technology experience, including his most recent role as Sabre Travel Solutions' Senior Sales Director for the APAC region.

He also worked in Dubai as Vice President of Sales for SITA, where he led the marketing and business strategy for the Middle East, India and Africa region for 14 years, and prior to that he worked as Manager for IT and telecoms at Emirates.



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Aussies brush up on Nordic travel



A NUMBER of Australian representatives were recently invited to one of the most recognisable travel events in Northern Europe, the MAKTA Nordic Travel Fair, which took place in Helsinki earlier this week.

The event was organised by Nordic Travel Fair, Visit Finland and Finnair in a bid to help better educate the travel sector about the array of attractions and travel experiences on offer in the European region.

The event was the first live MATKA since 2020, and among the attendees was The Travel Junction's Kevin Looney, who

said the event would be key to the company developing better Nordic products that map on to its aspirational ethos.

Pictured enjoying the MAKTA in Finland are: Claudia Pallaspuro, Pure Scandinavia; Tracey Fidone, Hawthorn Travel and Cruise; Kevin Looney, The Travel Junction; Dylan Hearne, Top Deck; Tamas Hanyi, Finnair; and Tarja Koivsto, Visit Finland.

Ello, ello, ello Aussie buyers

FIVE representatives from Australia will be part of a series of educational visits in the UK hosted by VisitBritain.

Commencing 28 Jan, the collection of visits will be a mix of three-to-five-day itineraries to destinations across England, Wales, and Scotland, showcasing the latest tourism products to international buyers.

The visits are part of the agency's 'Showcase Britain' event, which gets underway at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London on 26 Jan.

The timing of the series coincides with Australia reclaiming its place as the UK's fifth most valuable source market (*TD* 16 Dec 2022), with inbound visits and spend from Australia to the UK growing significantly between Q1 and Q2 2022.

Japan comes to Syd

THE first Japan Travel Fair is set to bring travel greater inspiration to Sydney from 04-05 Feb.

The free travel event brings together 20 expert Japan travel operators and businesses, who will be on hand to provide Aussie travellers with planning tips and holiday inspiration.

Taking place at the Grand Ballroom-Luna Park, the free event presents an opportunity for travellers to learn more about what Japan has to offer – whether you're a family or solo traveller, a luxury culture seeker, or an adventure-seeking powder hound on Japan's slopes.

For more information about the event, [CLICK HERE](#).



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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

Cruise Traveller is offering savings of \$1,640 on a new triple cruise package to Iceland, Norway and Scotland. The 38-night Fjords, Geysers and Bagpipes journey includes flights and accommodation, and is being offered in conjunction with Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines. The savings apply for bookings made by 31 Mar. Call 1800 507 777 to book.

O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat is offering guests 10% off room rates if they stay three nights, or 15% if they stay five nights at the resort, which is located in Queensland's Scenic Rim. The offer also includes a free daily buffet breakfast. To book, call reservations on 07 5502 4911.

Cruisers can save 20% off on select **European Waterways'** luxury hotel barge sailings in Europe. The deal includes the 09 Apr and 30 Apr departures of *Finesse* in Burgundy and the 02 Apr and 09 Apr departures of *Enchante* on the Canal du Mini - europeanwaterways.com.

Club Med has launched its 2024 Sand & Snow Early Bird Sale, giving adventurers the opportunity to save 30% off stays at its family-friendly Japan snow destinations. The sale includes savings of \$1,099 per adult or \$9,314 for a family, on an all-inclusive package to Club Med's newest Japan resort, Kiroro Peak. Sign into [Club Med Partners](#) for details.

Hotel Vera opens

BALLARAT'S newest boutique enterprise which opened this month, Hotel Vera Ballarat, comprises seven personalised suites, and an award-winning restaurant Underbar.

Opening its doors on 710 Sturt Street, Hotel Vera is housed in a 19th-century mansion in Ballarat Central, and launches to the market following four years of renovation development.

Hotel Vera offers guests stunning accommodation with an emphasis on carefully curated interiors and selected amenities.

Period features such as five-metre ceilings, original fireplaces, and elaborate cornices, are juxtaposed with a chic contemporary aesthetic.

Mates spur on travel

REUNITING with friends and family is the main travel motivator among Aussies for 2023, according to Agoda's International Travel Trends study, which surveyed 10,000 travellers across a dozen countries.

Close to one-third of Aussies plan to travel this year to catch up with loved ones, with travellers from the US and Taiwan also sharing this as their top travel motivator, while in South Korea, Thailand, and Singapore, recharging mentally and physically topped the list.

Adventure was the second top motivator for Australian travellers at 20%, followed by food, arts and culture (17%), wellness (14%) and celebrating a milestone (10%).

Budget strives to be King



AS AN official partner of the Sydney Kings, Aussie car rental company Budget Australia is giving one basketball fan and three of their friends the chance to win the ultimate VIP experience at the Sydney Kings home game on 29 Jan at the Qudos Bank Arena.

The "Budget Ballers" VIP experience includes a private chauffeur to and from the game, which the lucky winners will watch from the best seats in

the stadium, as well as a private butler to serve the group food and drinks while they watch the Sydney Kings go up against the South East Melbourne Phoenix.

Fans can enter the competition **HERE** before 11.59pm tonight.

Pictured: Sydney Kings stars tower over their ride with Budget at Qudos Bank Arena.

Tauck sees premium

TAUCK has revealed its travel trend predictions for 2023, noting luxury and experiential experiences will be at the forefront, with an increasing demand for personalised and exclusive access to destinations and attractions.

The US-based luxury travel brand is also seeing rising interest for European destinations and North America's national parks, and more guests booking Business class air travel.

Korean resumption

KOREAN Air is preparing to restart several European routes in Mar following a three-year pause due to the pandemic.

Starting from 27 Mar, the carrier will resume flights to Prague three times a week, followed by Zurich from 28 Mar, also operating three times a week.

From 24 Apr, flights to Istanbul will resume operation three times a week, with the Incheon-Madrid route coming back online also from April 25, thrice-weekly.

Korean Air added it would continue to restart suspended routes and increase frequencies as travel demand grows.

Got a confidential tip? Contact *Travel Daily* via our secure WhatsApp service on +61 2 8007 6760 or click **HERE**