



Sweeter incentives

THE first 70 agents to register for Aussie Specialist's virtual Easter Chocolate Tasting before 10 Mar, will receive a special box of chocolates from the Yass Valley to enjoy during the training.

The online session will take place on Mon 03 Apr at 1pm AEST, and will cover the art of chocolate-making, plus tourism experiences in the Yass Valley - **CLICK HERE** to register.

USA famil option

BRAND USA is offering 50 agents from Australia and New Zealand a spot on its MegaFam, with five exciting itineraries showcasing the mainland of the country from east to west.

The famil includes a grand finale in Hawaii, where the whole group will come together to enjoy more sightseeing experiences and swap their MegaFam stories - more details will be announced shortly - see **page eight** for details.

CATO: "We got it wrong"

THE Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) has backflipped on the sponsorship arrangements for its upcoming International Women's Day event, this morning announcing the withdrawal of Visit Saudi's backing for the lunch.

Yesterday CATO confirmed that Visit Saudi would be the major sponsor (**TD** breaking news), with the announcement resulting in a huge amount of furious feedback from across the industry.

This morning the association has acknowledged "industry concerns about the sponsorship of this particular event".

"We accept misreading this situation, despite our best intentions, and apologise for any distress this matter has caused our industry colleagues and our board," a statement noted.

"Many of us are aware that Saudi Arabia has been undergoing a series of dramatic changes and reforms as it opens up to

international tourism...part of these reforms have included significant advances in the rights and opportunities for Saudi women," CATO said.

"In taking on this sponsorship, CATO had hoped to highlight these changes and, through the power of tourism, ensure that Saudi Arabia continues on this path...we have always firmly believed that tourism, and CATO members through the product they create, plays a vital role in opening up the world, creating change and fostering understanding between cultures."

The CATO IWD event will still proceed next week, with the organisation saying it remains committed to showcasing some of the "incredible female leaders from within the CATO membership" as well as guest speaker, **TD's** own Hoda Alzubaidi, with replacement sponsors to be announced later today.

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of news including **Business Events News** and a photo page from **Journey Beyond**, plus full pages from:

- Brand USA
- Entire Travel Group

APT Kimberley '24

APT has launched its full range of Kimberley and Outback tours and cruises for 2024, offering savings of up to \$5,600 per couple for combined Kimberley Cruise and land journeys, up to \$4,600 per couple on Kimberley Small Ship Luxury Expedition cruises, and more - **CLICK HERE**.

Entire benefits galore

ENTIRE Travel Group is highlighting the benefits it offers to travel advisors, including protected agent commission, agent-branded quotes for clients, peace of mind booking plan and much more - see **page nine**.

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NSW nature fund

THE NSW Government has announced it will provide dollar-for-dollar matched grants from \$100,000 up to \$250,000 to fund new nature-based projects across tours, attractions and new accommodation.

The latest \$3.5 million scheme aims to support the creation and enhancement of tourism experiences and ultimately boost the state's visitor economy.

"This program allows tourism operators to expand or improve their business by creating a new nature experience, build viewing platforms, establishing infrastructure such as walkways or glamping accommodation, which will significantly drive visitation and inject more money into the local economy," NSW Minister for Tourism Ben Franklin said, adding that reconnecting tourists to nature will be a key differentiator for NSW when compared to other Aussie states and territories.

Airport now up to code

SYDNEY'S highly-anticipated Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport has provisionally secured its three-letter code more than three years ahead of opening.

The major hub's airport code has been confirmed as WSI, a moniker typically only allocated to airports by IATA within 12 months of launching, which in the view of WSI Airport Chair Paul O'Sullivan, reflects the strong confidence that the international airline industry peak body has in the airport's progress.

"Western Sydney is truly Sydney's cultural heartland and with WSI now confirmed as one of our most important global identifiers, our role connecting the world to Sydney via this exciting and diverse region is clear," he said.

"Bag tags, booking websites and airline apps around the world will now feature WSI, as the airport

continues to act as a driving force in the region's renaissance, now with a code that puts Western Sydney on the global stage."

Both Qantas Group and Virgin Australia provided written submissions to IATA asking for early adoption of the WSI code.

"We've had enormous levels of interest from airlines, not only from our Australian MoU airline partners, but from airlines around the world that are excited for what new aviation capacity, 24/7 operations and a modern, digitally enabled airport means, including for Sydney's brand as a global city," O'Sullivan enthused.

"Over the next couple of years, we'll be excited to let our future passengers across Sydney know which airlines will take them to which destinations from WSI."

WSI is on track to open int'l and domestic services in late 2026, with airlines joining the hub to be named over the next 24 months.

Window Seat

JUST because you're comedied royalty, that doesn't mean you can't be a gentleman in the air.

That's certainly the case for actor Martin Short, who according to musician Chance the Rapper, generously offered to swap seats with his seven-year-old daughter Kensli.

However there was some slight awkwardness at first, with Chance telling people a "kind old man" offered to switch seats so he could sit next to his child, only realising much later the man was in fact the great Martin Short.



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All three for free!


OCEANIA Cruises has launched its All 3 Amenities for Free promotion this week, running through to 31 Mar.

The complimentary bonuses provide passengers with free shore excursions, house beverage packages and shipboard credit, and applies to voyages booked this month for sailings departing in 2023 and 2024 - access the toolkit for the campaign [HERE](#).

COMMERCIAL MANAGER - ANZ

VisitBritain ANZ is seeking a Sydney based full time Commercial Manager who understands the tourism industry and Australia travel distribution landscape to drive growth in incremental visitation and visitor spend to Great Britain.

For an information pack and to apply for the role, please contact luka.skarbek@visitbritain.org

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FIND OUT MORE



AFTA catches up with Albo



LAST night AFTA continued its ongoing advocacy efforts, taking part in the annual Prime Minister and Ministry Dinner at Sydney's Doltone House, Pyrmont.

AFTA said it was a great opportunity for the Federation to personally thank Skills and Training Minister Brendan O'Connor for the addition of "Travel Consultants" to the

Federal Government's Skills Priority List (**TD 07 Feb**).

The gathering coincidentally came on the eve of birthdays today for O'Connor, Treasurer Jim Chalmers and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who's **pictured** with AFTA alternate Director, Matt Masson from CT Partners and AFTA Interim Head of Advocacy, LJ Loch.

FC appoints NSM

FIONA Batten has been appointed to the role of National Sales Manager for Independent Brands at Flight Centre, joining from Event Travel Management, where she was Director of Operations in Australia & NZ.

Batten has also previously held the roles of COO at Travel Beyond Group, General Manager of Australia for cievents, and GM of Group Sales for Qantas.

Cycling for good

THE Intrepid Foundation is calling on agents to join the Buffalo Bicycle Ride on 02 Apr to raise funds for World Bicycle Relief, an organisation that delivers locally assembled Buffalo Bicycles for people in need.

Intrepid has set a goal of raising \$10k through the Agents Riding for Good push, with supporters who donate more than \$215 to go into the draw to win an Intrepid Cycling trip - more **HERE**.

VA eyes expansion

VIRGIN Australia has ambitions of growing its int'l capacity by 50% before 30 Jun 2024, fuelled by an increasing strength of the inbound Chinese market.

The prediction was made by the airline's commercial chief Dave Emerson at the Aviation Festival Asia, which took place in Singapore earlier this week.

Emerson also pointed out that demand to and from Japan will likely play a major part in its broader growth plans, alongside an increasing focus on launching new services in the carrier's Pacific Islands network.

MEANWHILE Virgin Australia has applied to the International Air Services Commission to renew 360 seats per week and 180 seats per week respectively on the Indonesia route, for a period of five years.

VA has requested that all existing conditions be retained.

The closing date for making an application is 16 Mar.



FLY YOUR WAY

From the 3rd of March 2023, Fiji Airways will offer customers the option to customise how they travel based on their needs with four categories, **Lite, Value, Comfort, and Plus**.

All categories will include meals, beverages, inflight entertainment and a carry-on bag, with increasing value add-ons from Lite to Plus, such as checked baggage, ticket change and cancellation flexibility, seat selection and boarding priority.



VISIT FIJIAIRWAYS.COM

HK drops mask rule

VISITORS to Hong Kong are no longer required to wear masks indoors and outdoors as of 01 Mar, with the govt scrapping the mandate after nearly 1,000 days.

The announcement comes as the city prepares to host a number of 'mega events' over the coming month, including the Clockenflap Music and Arts Festival, which kicked off today.

Vanuatu impacted

ALL domestic and international flights to Vanuatu have been suspended as Tropical Cyclone Judy makes landfall.

The major storm cell has reportedly created wide-spread damage already, with heavy thunderstorms, rain and winds also creating the potential for flash flooding in low-lying and coastal areas.

Travellers in the destination are encouraged to monitor local news reports via Radio Vanuatu - VBTC.

Flight Centre shoots for sponsorship



FLIGHT Centre has signed on as a major sponsor for Netball Australia, the Origin Australian Diamonds and the Suncorp Super Netball League as part of a new three-year partnership that will service the commercial travel needs for netballers at all levels.

"We are thrilled to have Flight Centre join as a key partner and we are looking forward to working together to play netball nationally and internationally," Netball Australia Chief Executive

Officer Kelly Ryan said.

"Between the upcoming seventh season of the Suncorp Super Netball League and the Origin Australian Diamonds preparations for the 2023 Netball World Cup in South Africa, it is a truly exciting time for Flight Centre to support netball."

Pictured: L-R The Origin Australian Diamond players, Gretel Bueta, Donnell Wallam and Ruby Bakewell-Doran alongside the FCTC's personnel.

Safari local rep

DESERT and Delta Safaris has announced the appointment of Sydney-based agency Ynot Concepts to showcase its product range across Australia and New Zealand, overseeing its sales, marketing and PR.

The safari operator's portfolio encompasses Botswana's most historic and iconic lodges, including Chobe Game Lodge, Camp Moremi, Leroo La Tau, Camp Okavango, Xugana Island Lodge, and more.

Murray pay partner

MURRAY River Paddlesteamers has appointed TravelPay B2B as an official payment partner.

The company's cruise product is now live on the TravelPay B2B portal, with Murray River Paddlesteamers owner Craig Burgess stating the "choice was obvious" to link with TravelPay B2B, citing an increased focus on working with travel agents.

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Journey Beyond launches 2024 season

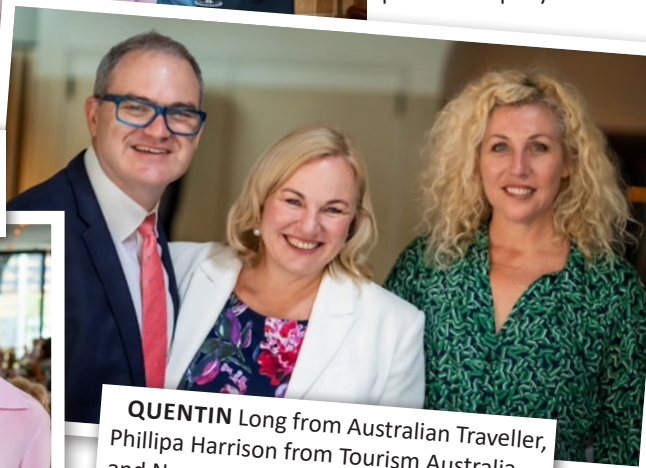
JOURNEY Beyond pulled out all stops last week when it debuted its 2024 program, hosting industry partners at a celebratory event at Sydney's Shell House. Guests were treated to Aussie canapes, flowing Champagne and a fabulous meal to commemorate the launch of the group's biggest season ever, with CEO Chris Tallent updating attendees on a host of innovations right across the now 14-brand portfolio.

The full 2024 season is open for bookings across all Journey Beyond Rail holidays, with the launch accompanied by a major new "Australia by Train" campaign ([CLICK HERE](#)), while other announcements included the opening of a new luxe overnight Jetwave Pearl experience offered by Horizontal Falls Seaplane Adventures. Outback Spirit launched its full program of tours for 2024 which are now all-inclusive, along with some special earlybird offers.

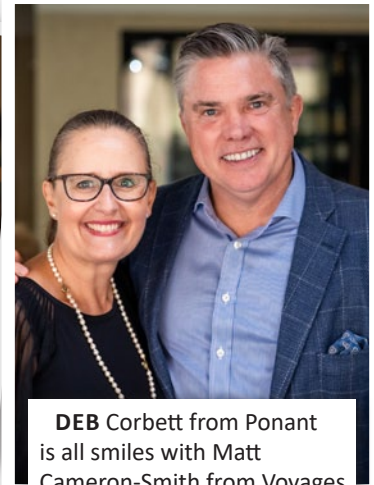
Other big news was the addition of American Queen Voyages to the Journey Beyond portfolio as the group's first ever offering outside of Australia, with Tallent now heading up the international Overnight Division of Journey Beyond's parent company Hornblower Group.



THE Journey Beyond team of Alicia Triggs, Chris Tallent, Giselle Whiteaker, Luke Walker, Justine Lally and David Donald.



QUENTIN Long from Australian Traveller, Phillipa Harrison from Tourism Australia, and News Corp's Kerrie McCallum.



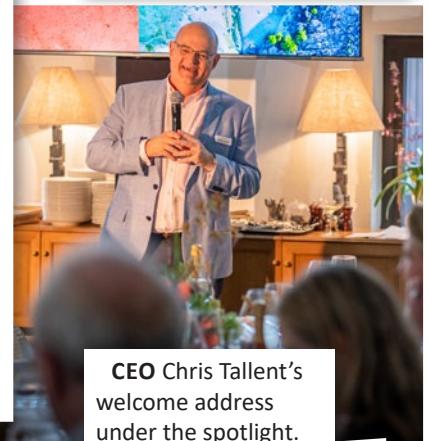
DEB Corbett from Ponant is all smiles with Matt Cameron-Smith from Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia.



LIZ Glover from News Corp Australia with *Travel Daily's* Bruce Piper and Journey Beyond Marketing Manager Justine Lally.



SOME of the Journey Beyond Rail Crew holding up the event's merchandise and a gift bag.



CEO Chris Tallent's welcome address under the spotlight.



BRETT Massingham from Hamilton Island chats with other attendees.



PONANT'S Sarina Bratton sharing a moment with Australian Traveller's Quentin Long.



ALICIA Triggs details all the Journey Beyond brand updates.



ALICIA Triggs with Josh Landy from Luxury Escapes.



THE 2024 Australia by Train Brochure on display.



BEIA mentor program returns

BUSINESS Events Industry Aotearoa (BEIA) has marked the launch of its 10th BE Mentored Program with a one-day meet-up in Auckland earlier this week.

The six-month program has attracted the largest group since it debuted in 2014, with 25 mentor/mentee pairings taking part.

With access to a personal support system, mentees will build connections within the industry and broaden their experience, with more than six training sessions to take place between Mar and Aug.

“With New Zealand in high demand on the world stage, it is more important than ever to be nurturing and developing our business events talent,” BEIA Chief Executive Lisa Hopkins said.

\$1.5M BOOST FOR REGIONAL EVENTS

EVENT planners across Australia who are looking to organise events in regional NSW can benefit from a new funding pool announced by the NSW Government.

The 2023-2024 Regional Event Fund is now open, offering grants from \$20,000 to \$50,000 to support regional events and festivals, with the wider goal of attracting visitation and providing an economic boost for regional destinations across NSW.

“We are committed to supporting our talented events industry,” Minister for Tourism Ben Franklin said.

“They are the beating heart of our visitor economy, injecting huge amounts of money into our regional communities.

“Whether your event is yet to get off the ground, or you are looking to expand event capacity, this program is about helping fund events that attract visitors and provide an economic boost



to regional NSW.”

He also emphasised the important role the fund plays in the state government’s long-term economic plan to reinvigorate NSW’s events sector, adding “I encourage all event organisers to apply and take advantage of this exciting initiative”.

The fund will offer three streams of funding, including the Incubator Event Fund, which offers grants of up to \$20,000 to events that are in their first or second year of operation.

Grants of \$20,000 and triennial grants of \$30,000 are available for marketing activities aimed at attracting visitors from outside their immediate region, as part of the Flagship Event Fund.

Lastly, the Event Development Fund offers grants of up to \$50,000 to support strategic growth initiatives to events that have completed their third year of triennial Flagship Event funding.

Event organisers can find out more and apply for funding **HERE** now until Wed 29 Mar.

Parrtjima returns

THE 2023 program for Parrtjima - A Festival in Light has been unveiled, with the free 10-night Aboriginal event to take place in the Red Centre in Apr.

Some of Australia’s most prominent Aboriginal identities will participate in the ‘In Conversation’ talks program - to find out more, **CLICK HERE**.

Last year, the festival generated \$14.7m in visitor spend and almost 35,000 visitor nights.

GC lands international neural conference

THE first-ever International Joint Conference on Neural networks (IJCNN) will be held in Queensland, at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre (**pictured**).

The event will see over 500 professionals convene over six days to discuss computational neuroscience, neuro-engineering and more.

“The Gold Coast is making



waves in the engineering and science industries and we’re excited to host the IJCNN in Jun,” Destination Gold Coast’s Head of Business Events Selina Sinclair said.

Victoria BE fund

BUSINESS Events Victoria is reminding event organisers to get their applications in for the National Business Event Program before tomorrow.

Funding of up to \$40,000 per applicant is available to help offset costs for hosting business events held in regional Victoria and Melbourne between 01 Jul to 31 Dec - **CLICK HERE** for info.

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APPOINTMENTS

WELCOME to Industry Appointments, *Travel Daily's* Thursday feature which has the latest job appointments from across the industry. If you have just appointed someone to a new position and would like to update the industry email appointments@traveldaily.com.au.

Rail Europe ANZ has welcomed **Grant Robertson** to become its second Key Account Manager for the region. Robertson will provide support in services and training, bringing with him a strong background in travel with previous stints at SIA, Air NZ, and Hertz.

Seabourn has announced **Natayla Leahy** will be succeeding Josh Leibowitz as the President of the luxury cruising brand. Leahy has been with the Holland America Group for seven years, and will now report to Gus Antorcha, President of Holland America Line, to help lead the growth of the company.

Brooke Wilson will be joining **TravelManagers Australia** as its Business Partnership Manager NSW. Prior to taking a hiatus from the travel industry, she had a stint as the Business Development Manager at Wendy Wu Tours Australia.

Sabre has announced the appointment of **Kurt Ekert** as its new CEO, succeeding Sean Menke who has become the company's Executive Chair. Ekert joined as President in Jan last year and has overseen all aspects of Sabre's business and technology operations. The transition is to recognise Ekert's ability to reorganise, implement and execute plans as the leader of the business.

BA Avios change

BRITISH Airways Executive Club Members now have the option to pay with loyalty currency Avios when booking a holiday package with British Airways Holidays.

Additionally, Avios can be used instead of cash to make booking deposits, with members able to pay any remaining balance with cash in as many or few instalments as they like.

Club members will also continue to earn Double Tier points with British Airways Holidays when they book flights and hotel, or flights and car hire, for five nights or more and travel before 31 Dec.

After choosing their preferred package, customers will be able to select one of up to nine different Avios payment options.

Fremantle breaks out

THE Fremantle Prison has completed conservation works after receiving a \$3.16m fund by the WA and Federal Govts.

Upgrades to entice a greater volume of tourists include repairs to original elements of each area, access improvements, and the installation of new interpretative signage on the site.

Access changes include a universal access platform lift, which has been installed in the Commissariat, allowing visitors using mobility and ambulant devices to access the basement level for the first time.

The prison is now in a better position to host concerts and events, with many already locked in for 2023.

Bonza on the global stage



BONZA took part in a keynote panel at Aviation Festival Asia in Singapore yesterday, giving Australia a voice in the global discussion around how the low-cost flight segment is evolving.

The independent airline's CCO Carly Povey shared insights from Bonza's recent launch, including its app-first approach and focus on technology, talking alongside CEOs from HK Express, Northern Pacific Airways and flyadeal.

"The opportunity for Bonza in Australia is to make air travel affordable for the many and not the few," Povey (**pictured**) said.

She went on to describe technology as the "cornerstone" of Bonza's sustainability focus, highlighting the carrier's paperless pledge as well as its high-tech and fuel-efficient fleet of Boeing 737-MAX, which allows Bonza to pass on low-cost fares to Aussie flyers.

Povey also revealed Bonza is currently putting together its broader sustainability strategy.

Discover Tassie app

TOURISM Tasmania has announced plans to launch its Discover Tasmania app in Apr to help visitors find things to do, places to see, as well as key tourism events and services.

Following the app's launch, tourism industry operators will be given access to a webinar and toolkit, which will include information on how to promote the app to customers.

Agents can register **HERE** for the briefing webinar on 06 Mar at 11-11.45am AEDT to learn more about the app, including its features and benefits.

No rabies, more worries mate

NEW regulations have been enforced from this week for Australians returning abroad to provide proof their pets have been vaccinated against rabies within the last 12 months.

Previously, the rule only applied to a 24-month window, with some travellers already expressing fears the new rules will create a travel backlog due to limited vet appointments available.



50 lucky agents across Australia and New Zealand will win a spot on the Brand USA MegaFam.

Experience one of five exciting itineraries showcasing East to West of the U.S. mainland. For the final two nights, the entire group will come together for a grand finale in Hawai'i for further sightseeing and a chance to share their MegaFam stories and experiences.

Stay tuned for further announcements on destinations and experiences within the destinations.

[Register here](#)





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