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A billion points used

QANTAS Frequent Flyers have used more than one billion points to book international reward seats since the launch of the carrier's Classic Plus Flight Rewards this week (**TD** 08 Apr).

The points transaction is three times the average of a typical Mon, Qantas revealed, adding that London, Singapore, Tokyo, Queenstown, and Los Angeles have been the most popular destinations booked so far.

Aussies support tourism tax

A **NEW** survey published by InsureandGo has revealed that almost two-thirds (60%) of Australian citizens are in favour of introducing a tax to combat the environmental toll visitors are taking on the country.

NSW residents are the most protective of their environment, with 63% wanting a visitor levy,

followed by South Australia (61%), Victoria (59%), Qld (57%) and Western Australia (51%).

The report consulted 1,006 Australians about the validity of tourism taxes, with the research finding younger Australians aged between 18 and 30 are the most eco-conscious, with 73% indicating their support for the implementation of tourism taxes more broadly.

The support for tourism levies dropped slightly for Australians aged between 31 and 50 (62%), and even more when it came to older Aussies (59%).

Just over 10% of Aussies suggested they were willing to pay even more than what most tourist taxes are imposing, while 37% indicated they were against any added levies on holidays.

InsureandGo's survey follows a number of destinations around the world imposing levies on travellers, including Bali and the Netherlands in Amsterdam. **AB**

Eclipse II on the way

SCENIC'S newest addition to its ultra-luxury Discovery Yacht fleet will arrive in Sydney Harbour on 19 Apr, before heading to its Aussie base in Newcastle.

Scenic Eclipse II will take guests on six-star ultra-luxury sailings of Queensland's coastline, the Great Barrier Reef, the Northern Territory & the Kimberley region.

The 228-passenger vessel is hailed by Scenic as taking luxury cruising to a new level, boasting a crew-to-guest ratio of almost one-to-one, butler services for every suite, and two onboard helicopters for flight-seeing excursions and heli-fishing in the Kimberley region.

"With its enhanced ultra-luxury spaces, new culinary experiences and next generation submersible, *Scenic Eclipse II* reflects our commitment to innovation and bringing life-changing experiences to guests," Scenic Group's GM Sales and Marketing APAC, Anthony Laver said.



CATO inks TADA

THE Council of Australia Tour Operators (CATO) has announced the addition of Travel Agent Day Australia (TADA '24) as a new Platinum Partner.

Taking place at Melbourne's Marvel Stadium on 02 Oct, TADA '24 will offer CATO members a chance to participate as exhibitors, with Reviving International Tourism Grant (RITG) Program grantees to use funds for participation fees.

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IndiGo expands

IN A boost for inbound tourism, IndiGo will extend its connections across Australia under its existing codeshare agreement with Qantas (**TD** 31 Oct 2023), SBS has reported.

"Our customers can now fly across major tourist and economic hubs in Australia, from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth to Adelaide, Canberra and Gold Coast," IndiGo said.

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features six pages of the latest news including our **Luxury** page.

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Brazil visa goes live

AUSTRALIAN travellers heading to Brazil will once again need to apply for a visa when entering the country from today.

After multiple delays, in Jan the South American nation finally made the call to go live with visa permits for Aussies (**TD** 08 Jan).

A return to the Goldie era



FCTG Independent has welcomed the return of Belle Goldie’s The Cruise and Travel Store to its network this week. Goldie (**pictured**) is based in Penrith in Sydney’s west and has made the call to come back to the FCTG fold after spending two-and-a-half years with itravel (**TD** 06 Dec 2021).

FCTG said that returning talent such as Goldie underscores its independent arm’s “ongoing commitment to fostering a... dynamic community of the travel industry’s finest professionals”.

Reflecting on her recent move, Goldie said her decision is an opportunity to “return home”.

“The unmatched support, community, and technological resources here provide the perfect foundation for delivering exceptional service to our clients,” Goldie enthused.

“I am thrilled to be back, along with my incredible team, who

are eager to embark on this next chapter of my career with FCTG Independent,” she added.

Outside of running her successful agency, Goldie is also remembered by many for her efforts to rally against the sustained govt cruise ban during the pandemic era by organising protests (**TD** 04 Jan 2022).

Meanwhile, Caleb van Schmal has transitioned from Flight Centre to FCTG Independent.

“FCTG Independent has given me the flexibility to carve out my own path, allowing me to operate on my own terms,” he said.

The dual additions follow Flight Centre Independent unveiling its new principal Envoyage brand to the market in Mar (**TD** 13 Mar).

Envoyage’s branding is designed to provide a “true heart and home for independent travel agents and agencies”.

Agents can learn more about Envoyage **HERE**. **AB**

SAS a falling star

SCANDINAVIAN Airlines has made the decision to swap alliances, this week revealing plans to change from Star Alliance to SkyTeam from 01 Sep.

The move will see SAS develop deals with 19 new airlines and cut alliance ties with Air NZ.

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Royal sings new Anthem in ship swap

ROYAL Caribbean International (RCI) has announced that different ships will be deployed for its 2025-2026 Australian season, with *Anthem of the Seas* (pictured) and *Voyager of the Seas* set to grace our shores.

The decision will see the cruise line change up its previous deployment of two Quantum-class ships - *Quantum of the Seas* and *Ovation of the Seas* - in exchange for one Quantum and one Voyager-class vessel, slightly dialling down passenger capacity.

Anthem's arrival in Nov 2025 will mark her debut in the Australian market, with the ship to be based in Sydney and offer cruisers 24 itineraries.

Sydney sailings will range from three to 18 nights in length, and explore New Zealand, the Australian coast and various islands in the South Pacific.

Meanwhile the older *Voyager of the Seas* vessel will be



homeported in Brisbane from Dec 2025, with passengers able to choose from a range of seven- to nine-night sailings.

Among the 20 itineraries on offer, the new destination of Luganville, Vanuatu will feature in the line up, while returning favourites also include Noumea, New Caledonia and Port Vila.

Compared to previous seasons, the sailings available in Royal's 2025-26 Australian season are shorter in length as part of a plan to offer a "bolder" set of cruises.

"Every kind of holidaymaker can

make memories in more ways than one with a varied line-up, from short getaways to a longer sailing from Asia," Royal's Vice President & Managing Director, Gavin Smith, said.

"New experiences include the show-stopping *We Will Rock You* musical production, ice-skating shows and six exclusive family adventures created by Royal Caribbean and the Wiggly Friends," he added.

More details on the newly opened 2025-2026 Aussie season is available **HERE**. AB

Klook partner review

TRAVEL experiences specialist Klook has confirmed it is currently engaging with World Animal Protection to investigate any possible connection with unethical animal practices.

Responding to a World Animal Protection report accusing Klook and several other travel brands of associations with Taiji dolphin hunting (**TD** 09 Apr), the company told **TD** it is committed to only working with partners who are adhering to ethical practices.

Klook's Senior Sustainability Manager, Rebecca Keiller, said "our approach is to continually work with operators to encourage long-term and sustainable change, which not only takes into consideration animal welfare but also communities directly impacted by the industry."

Keiller also pointed out the World Animal Protection report stated Klook is "active" in reviewing Taiji-linked venue offerings for removal from its site.

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VA pumps gas into loyalty

VIRGIN Australia has become the second Australian carrier this week to make a major loyalty announcement, with VA unveiling a new strategic partnership with utilities supplier AGL Energy.

Under the terms of the new deal, existing Virgin Velocity members and those who make the switch to the 'AGL Velocity Offer' can earn bonus Velocity points through AGL electricity or gas plans.

Customers who sign up to gas and electricity in Vic, NSW, Qld and SA through the new promotion will receive 30,000 Velocity points and 5,000 points after 12 months.

Meanwhile those who activate the offer for electricity services only in the same states will score themselves 20,000 points and 2,500 after the first year.

Slightly lower rewards are available for customers switching to AGL gas services only, earning 10,000 points and 2,500 after the first 12 months - with WA residents able to take advantage of the offer as well because AGL gas services operate in the state.

But the latest tie-up isn't only for new-to-AGL customers, with existing clients also able to activate the 'AGL Velocity Offer' for electricity and/or gas to receive 3,000 points per gas and electricity service.

Velocity Frequent Flyer CEO, Nick Rohrlach, said the announcement marked an "exciting milestone" for the



carrier's loyalty program.

"We know that value continues to be important for Australians amidst the high cost of living, and this partnership opens up more possibilities for our members to stretch their dollar further using Velocity points to redeem on flights, household goods and more," Rohrlach said.

"The addition of AGL to our extensive partner portfolio fills an important gap for members as we continue to grow Velocity to be the best airline loyalty program in the country," he added.

The news follows one of the biggest loyalty overhauls by rival Qantas in its scheme's 35-year history (*TD* 08 Apr). *AB*

Back-Roads returns to the front line

BACK-ROADS Touring has announced the return of its Battlefield tours in 2025.

The tours in France and Belgium allow travellers to walk in the footsteps of ANZAC soldiers and learn about the crucial role they played in the various conflicts of World War I.

Six-day trips lead in from 2,399 per person, while a longer seven-day tour is priced at \$3,499pp.

Tibballs joins InterContinental



HIGH-PROFILE Australian pastry chef and chocolatier Kirsten Tibballs has kicked off a unique culinary residency at InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort & Spa this month.

Known as 'the Queen of Chocolate' on *MasterChef Australia*, Tibballs will bring her distinct style to InterContinental's creations, including bespoke recipes for the Club High Tea and a special dessert experience at Navo - think sticky date tarts, coconut financiers and florentine tarts.

"At InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort & Spa, we are dedicated to providing our guests with unforgettable experiences, and Kirsten Tibballs' residency aligns perfectly with our commitment to culinary innovation," said InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort & Spa GM, Lachlan Walker.

"Her expertise and creativity will elevate our dining offerings, allowing guests to indulge in exceptional treats infused with

the flavours of Fiji.

"We're excited to welcome Kirsten and look forward to sharing her culinary magic with our valued guests."

Earlier this month, Tibballs also set up a live pastry station at the resort's Beach Party, where guests could watch her in action as she plated up a wide range of delicacies, including a macaron hamburger.

She will also offer two training sessions to resort staff, sharing her signature pastry techniques and skills with the team.

"InterContinental Hotels remains my top choice for accommodation, consistently delivering exceptional service, cuisine, and comfort in breathtaking locations," Tibballs enthused.

"I am really looking forward to working in Fiji for the first time, and am eager to collaborate with the remarkable InterContinental team and familiarise myself with the local foods and culture." *JHM*



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Railbookers record

TRAVEL operator Railbookers has announced that it has enjoyed a 46% rise in bookings compared to the same period in the previous year.

To celebrate, Railbookers is now offering a limited time sale, with selected journeys discounted, including the Eastern and Oriental Express; the Ghan; the Indian-Pacific; the Belmond Royal Scotsman and many more.

"We're proud to be the preferred solution for so many travel agents and customers, making their bucket-list luxury rail holidays become a reality," said Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships Jim Marini.

SYD's Summer Club

TRAVELLERS heading to Sydney International Airport can soon treat themselves to a pre-flight pampering experience at La Prairie's Summer Club.

Running from 10 May to 08 Aug, the luxury skincare brand's pop-up experience includes a hand and arm massage, an interactive photo booth and a complimentary product sample.

Visitors can also sample La Prairie's latest innovation, Skin Caviar; The Mist.

SCENIC UNVEILS NEXT GENERATION KAIA

SCENIC Group unveiled its next generation luxury ocean yacht, *Emerald Kaia*, as part of its Emerald Cruises fleet.

"*Emerald Kaia*, with its significant design and amenity enhancements, marks a pivotal expansion for our fleet and builds on the strengths of *Emerald Sakara* and *Emerald Azzurra*, allowing us to offer unmatched superyacht experiences along the world's most captivating coastlines," said Glen Moroney, Founder of Scenic Group.

Setting sail in 2026, the 120m vessel accommodates 128 passengers and features new experiences, including an expanded sky deck that incorporates a new internal sky lounge and private cabanas, offering guests an open-air



experience with panoramic views from the top deck.

There are also now sun lounges and a spa pool at the larger observation deck.

All cabins and suites have a 10% larger floorplan and new connecting balcony suites allow for more privacy between groups.

Emerald Kaia also showcases new dining venues, including Night Market, a new Asian-style

grill concept, as well as a larger terrace for al fresco meals at La Cucina restaurant.

For active travellers, there is also a new dedicated marina lounge with additional watersports, in addition to a reimagined gym with a luxurious outdoor platform.

To relax at the end of the day, guests can enjoy the expanded Elements Spa. *JHM*

Historic Bahamas residence undergoes glamorous hotel transformation

THE wild island of Eleuthera in the Bahamas is set to open its first luxury boutique hotel in Jun, located on a seven-mile stretch of pink-sand beach.

Set in the former residential home of New York socialites in the 1960s and 1970s, the historic property has been lovingly restored to its former glory and is making a return under its original name, the Potlatch Club.

Interestingly, the North-West American Indian term "potlatch" refers to

a ceremonial feast, where possessions are destroyed or given away to display wealth.

This was perhaps the original mission of the glamorous Potlatch Club, which was once the escape of celebrities like silver-screen legend Greta Garbo and musician Paul McCartney, who spent his honeymoon at the venue with his first wife, Linda.

The Potlatch Club features a mix of historic and new whitewashed suites, garden and ocean-facing cottages and villas



with butler services.

Some feature private verandas and terraces, while others sit on shoreline pavilions or lush garden scenery.

The property's original clubhouse is back with its beautiful heritage features, from the chequerboard tiled floors to its striped awnings.

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Amara Hotels & Resorts has rebranded its two flagship Singapore properties, **Amara Singapore** and **Amara Sanctuary Sentosa** (pictured). The latter is set to refresh its suites, villas and shared spaces, with completion slated for mid-2024, while

Amara Singapore has undergone an extensive refurbishment of its 389 rooms, as well as its event venues. The CBD property has also introduced an all-new Lobby Bar.



Guests visiting Sydney CBD's **InterContinental Sydney** can now dine at the property's revitalised restaurant, Pont Dining Room. The venue offers a new food and drinks menu featuring modern Australian flavours and locally-sourced

produce, with an array of seafood dishes and grilled meats available. Guests will also appreciate the refreshed contemporary interiors, with a lighter colour palette, refined wood finishes, and botanicals.



Club Wyndham Perth will receive a makeover of its 21 apartments and common areas later this month. Located in the heart of the WA capital, the boutique hotel will feature new patterned carpets in its rooms, while apartments will be

decorated with new furniture and feature walls. Additionally, when the renovation is completed by early Jul, the refreshed lobby will be characterised by a simpler and more open layout.



Singapore's luxury integrated resort, **Marina Bay Sands**, has begun the final stage of design enhancements for its multi-billion dollar expansion, with construction to begin by Jul 2025 and be completed by Jul 2029. Led by Safdie

Architects, the expansion will include a luxury hotel tower with a sky roof, a 15,000-seat entertainment arena, and additional MICE spaces.



The Adina Apartment Hotel Sydney Town Hall is preparing to undergo a multi-million-dollar transformation, kicking off later this month. The full-scale refurbishment will encompass all 20 guest and public floors of the hotel, from guest

rooms and bathroom through to the lobby and corridors, four versatile conference spaces, pool, and gym, with its reopening slated for Dec.

Tasmania goes off

IN A bid to reel in domestic travellers during the quieter winter months, Tourism Tasmania has launched its largest off season tourism campaign.

Now in its fourth year, the program highlights Tassie as a must-visit winter destination, with more than 500 'wintry' experiences and events from more than 445 businesses set to take place across the state between May and Aug.

Tourism Tasmania Chief Executive Officer, Sarah Clark, said the marketing push "represents a large-scale collaboration with the local tourism industry to collectively create uniquely Tasmanian experiences, reshaping Australians' perception of a winter holiday".

The off season campaign launched this week in key markets around Australia, with advertising across television, billboards, video on demand, social and digital channels.

Discover what's on offer **HERE**.

Volunteer in Hawai'i

THE Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) is making it easier for visitors to engage with volunteer opportunities across the state, with the launch of its new Malama Hawai'i Volunteer Dashboard.

The platform offers travellers direct access to volunteer experiences to take up during their holidays in Hawaii, including opportunities to aid Maui's recovery from last year's wildfires.

Visitors can register via RSVP submission, as well as provide monetary donations directly to the nonprofit organisations - more information **HERE**.



Window Seat

GATHER round ye history buffs, for the southern hemisphere's biggest celebration of medieval Europe is fast approaching.

Abbeystowe in Moreton Bay, Queensland will travel way, way back in time for three days in Jul, transforming into a medieval village for the annual Abbey Medieval Festival.

More than 20,000 visitors are expected to descend on Moreton Bay for the family-friendly event, which will feature jousting tournaments, thrilling combat demonstrations, falconry demonstrations, live entertainment, and mouth-watering medieval cuisine.

"This is a unique and fun opportunity for lovers of medieval culture to immerse themselves in life as it was in the Middle Ages," enthused City of Moreton Bay Mayor, Peter Flannery.

Moreton Bay Region Industry & Tourism CEO Tash Wheeler echoed the sentiment, saying the festival "not only showcases the thrilling world of medieval combat but also emphasises the cultural richness of Abbey Museum and Abbeystowe, making it a must-visit destination in our region".

