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VIEW DEAL

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features eight pages of news including our **Luxury page** and a photo page from **Adventure World**.

China relaxes transit

AUSTRALIA is on a list of 54 countries eligible to access extended transit stays in China.

In a bid to stimulate more tourism spend, the Chinese Govt has relaxed its visa-free transit policy effective immediately, extending stays to 10 days from the original six-day limit.

More than 20 ports have also been added to the list, increasing the number of visa-free entry/exit points to 60 across 24 provinces.

Newly added hubs include: Shanxi; Jiangsu; Zhejiang; Fujian; Hainan; and Sichuan.

Vanuatu emergency

THE Government of Vanuatu has declared a seven-day state of emergency following a 7.2 magnitude earthquake which struck the Pacific island nation's capital Port Vila yesterday.

An update from Smartraveller this morning confirmed the quake - and subsequent aftershock this morning - have caused wide infrastructure damage in Port Vila and surrounding regions, including airports, roads and transport services.

Qantas Group has confirmed that Jetstar has scrapped all operations today due to limited details on runway damage.

A scheduled Qantas service on Fri and a Jetstar flight tomorrow may still go ahead, however the company said it will continue to monitor the situation as more information becomes available.

Virgin Australia was also contacted for comment.

Disruptions have also caused itinerary adjustments for cruise lines scheduled to visit Port Vila over the next week, with Carnival telling *Travel Daily* that *Pacific Adventure* and *Pacific Encounter* will no longer make calls over the next week.

Meanwhile, Royal Caribbean has also pulled the trigger on changes, confirming *Quantum of the Seas* will not call at Port Vila today, diverting to Mystery Island in Vanuatu instead.

"Our thoughts go out to all

those affected by the devastating earthquake," a spokesperson for Royal Caribbean said.

Essential communication services such as phone and internet utilities have also been disrupted by the disaster.

The Federal Government has urged Australian travellers caught up in the quake to register with the DFAT crisis registration portal **HERE**, while requests for emergency consular assistance should be directed to the Consular Emergency Centre on 1300 555 135 in Australia or +61 2 6261 3305 outside Australia.

At the time of publishing, reports on the ground suggest 14 people have been killed by the quake, & that number is expected to rise, with hundreds trapped under collapsed buildings.

Despite the acute tragedy unfolding in Port Vila, Chair of the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council, Glen Craig, has called on Aussies not to cancel their trips.

"Most of the properties are still in a position to still host your holiday, and all of the normal resorts and activities will still be open," Craig told *Today*.

"[The damage] is really concentrated among a few buildings in the CBD of Port Vila.

"It is going to be a very intense clean up over the next few days because...so we are telling everyone to keep with us...and let us do the clean up." *AB*

Fiji "amazingly safe"

AUSTRALIAN Travel Industry Association (ATIA) CEO Dean Long has reiterated the safety of Fiji as a destination following a drink poisoning incident at a luxury resort this week (*TD* 16 Dec).

Long told *Today* that Australians should continue with holiday plans and not cancel any trips for what looks to be a "one-off incident where something terrible has happened".

"The Australian Government is already carrying out chemical testing on what happened, so I think it's been a very good response and people can take comfort in that," Long said.

"Fiji remains an amazingly safe destination...and we've seen a magnificent response from the Fijian Government who have reacted quickly," he added.

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Steve Cox exits DNSW

DESTINATION NSW has confirmed the departure of Chief Executive Officer Steve Cox.

The experienced tourism executive finished up his tenure at the end of last month, with a recruitment process now being

undertaken for a replacement, led by the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport.

Reflecting on Cox's time steering NSW's peak tourism marketing body for close to five years, Destination NSW said he had positioned the state as the largest and fastest-growing visitor economy in Australia.

"Steve has led Destination NSW since 2020 and during that time the agency has worked hard to navigate the pandemic," Destination NSW said.

"[During his tenure], Steve launched the 'Feel New' brand campaign, delivered the largest Vivid Sydney in history, secured SXSW Sydney...and rolled out the Aviation Attraction Fund and other programs." *AB*

Time to drive mate

PEER-TO-PEER car share company Drive mate has launched a new station 10 minutes' walk away from Sydney's Domestic Airport, a move it said would "shake up" the car rental industry at Australia's largest hub.

Located at 40 Baxters Road Mascot, Drive mate members can book vehicles from today - even while in the air en route to Sydney using its mobile app - from \$40 a day.

Models on offer include Toyota Corollas, with petrol and insurance costs covered under all hiring models.

"With no need to queue to pick up keys or sign agreements on-site, the process is seamless and will reduce the traditionally-cumbersome waiting times at car hire check-in desks significantly," the company said.



Air NZ's big SAF buy

AIR New Zealand has purchased 30 million litres of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), which will be delivered from the US through to Feb 2026.

The purchase represents 1.6% of the airline's total fuel supply for FY25, meaning the carrier will reach its SAF target for the year - representing a four-times increase compared to FY24.





Meanwhile, the Australian Govt has committed \$14.1 million in funding for two new projects that will focus on developing cleaner aviation fuel options.

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Dine with culinary stars



LUXURY Escapes has announced the latest addition to its Signature Series collection - a new foodie tour led by Australian culinary stars, Gary Mehigan and Matt Preston.

The seven-day gastronomic adventure through Hong Kong and Taiwan marks the fourth collaboration between Luxury Escapes and the former *MasterChef* judges.

"We are proud to lead the way with our celebrity-led tours and offer our customers exclusive access to luxury experiences that are not available anywhere else," said Adam Schwab, Co-Founder & CEO of Luxury Escapes.

"This incredible new Signature Series journey is a unique once-in-a-lifetime experience with two of Australia's culinary experts."

Taking place in Nov 2025, the itinerary will take guests behind the scenes of some of the most iconic food scenes and undiscovered culinary delights across Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Travellers will stay in five-star hotels like Mandarin Oriental in Taipei, and enjoy exclusive dining experiences, including a visit to the renowned Michelin-starred restaurant, The Chairman.

Mehigan (pictured **right** with Preston) shared his excitement about the upcoming tour, declaring it a "food lovers dream".

"If you love the big city lights, fancy restaurants, cool bars, brilliantly delicious street food and discovering some weird and wonderful foodie delights then

you will love this tour."

Tickets for the tour are on sale now, from \$15,499 per person - **CLICK HERE** for details.

Luxury Escapes will announce a new line-up of expert and celebrity-led Signature Series tours in the New Year. *JM*

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QF agrees to pay \$120m

QANTAS and the Transport Workers Union (TWU) have reached a deal that will see the airline pay \$120 million in compensation to ground handlers who were illegally sacked in 2020 (**TD** breaking news yesterday).

The carrier will establish a compensation fund administered by Maurice Blackburn on behalf of the TWU, with compensation payments to be made to more than 1,800 impacted former staff.

Final compensation amounts will cover both economic and non-economic losses, compensation to the TWU, as well as costs incurred managing the distribution of the funds.

The decision follows a court order in Oct for Qantas to pay close to \$170,000 to three sacked workers (**TD** 21 Oct).

On the basis of the outcome of that test case, it was estimated that Qantas faced a potential payout in excess of \$100 million.



Commenting on the settlement, Qantas CEO Vanessa Hudson said it is an “important step” in bringing closure to the workers involved in the sacking.

“We know this has been a difficult period for those affected and are pleased we have been able to work closely with the TWU to expedite this process and resolve it ahead of Christmas,” Hudson said

The fund will be established in early 2025.

Qantas is also facing a penalty hearing in the Federal Court, which could see it slugged with a multi-million-dollar fine. **AB**

Advisors take their Medicine



TRAVELMANAGERS recently teamed up with Viking to treat eight personal travel managers (PTMs) and their partners to an eight-day famil cruise of the Western Mediterranean.

Hosted by Viking’s Nathalie Fagan and Singapore Airlines’ Sarah Lathwell, the Rome-to-Barcelona voyage called in at several popular ports, including Monte Carlo, Livorno, and Marseille, where the PTMs were free to choose from a variety of shore excursions.

A standout moment was a helicopter flight to get a birds-

eye view of Monaco, taking in Rome’s iconic Spanish Steps, and exploring the French Riviera.

“Many of my clients have booked holidays with Viking in the past, and although I already knew it as a fantastic product, until now, I had never experienced it for myself,” PTM Donna Occhipinti shared.

“The whole trip was wonderful, sharing it with a great group made it even more special.” **JM**

Pictured: Ready to set sail on TravelManagers’ exclusive Western Med famil with Viking and Singapore Airlines.



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EK gets in the spirit

EMIRATES is getting into the Christmas spirit by serving up festive treats this Dec for customers travelling on its flights as well as those visiting its international lounges.

The carrier's first and business class lounges around the globe will dish out classics like traditional roasted turkey with jus and cranberry sauce, along with holiday-themed cocktails.

From 14-26 Dec, customers flying in all classes will also be offered hot chocolate, with extra treats like dark chocolate truffles and gingerbread cookies.

Stay with Slojourn

TRAVEL communications brand Slojourn Studio has revealed a new boutique cabin in Western Australia's Margaret River region, personally designed by its co-founder, Tess Wilcox.

The Lande Horne is available for travellers eager to stay in an off-grid location during a visit to the Margaret River.

Surrounded by national parks on the traditional lands of the Wardandi people, Lande Horne has been constructed using locally sourced materials.

Guests can enjoy locally roasted coffee and eggs from chickens on the property, organic bath products and a guide to the region compiled by Wilcox herself.

Lande Horne will open in Apr 2025 following an upgrade project which will see a sauna, ice bath and forest bath installed.

Santa sleighs at Skal Club



IT WAS a very merry night for the Skal Club of Melbourne, which enjoyed an end-of-year celebration at the Rendezvous Hotel on Flinders Street.

Hosted by fellow 'Skalleague' and the hotel's Director of Sales, Solenne Malone-Marty, the night was made extra memorable with the welcoming of two new inductees - Simone Fernon from Sportslink Travel and Chaitanya Rane from Hilton Hotels.

Andrew St Ledger from ALH Hotels took home the 'Skalleague of the Year' award, presented by Sharyn van der Veen of the Click Frenzy Travel event.

There was also a special visit from Santa Claus, who came to collect all the toys generously donated from Skal members for Mission Australia (pictured). JM

Royal Club update

ROYAL Caribbean has revealed more details about its upcoming Royal Beach Club at Paradise Islands in the Bahamas, which is set to open in Dec 2025.

Flagged last year (TD 10 Mar 2023), the club will be spread over 17 acres, and feature pools, three swim-up bars, seven beach bars, more than 40 cabanas, and an array of dining options.

Guests will be able to purchase a day pass offering access to all amenities at Royal Beach Club Paradise Island, with everything included from water taxi rides to food and drink.



Window Seat

A HORRIBLE stench has forced a KLM Royal Dutch Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Mexico City to land early to give passengers some much-needed fresh air.

So, what could have caused such a foul stench?

Around 100 pigs in the plane's cargo hold.

The flight's captain submitted a landing request in Bermuda, relaying to ground control the pigs were emitting a smell so obnoxious the passengers could no longer stand it.

Fliers stayed at a hotel for the night for a breather.

Disney wage deal

THE Walt Disney Company has agreed to pay US\$233 million as part of a wage theft settlement for its employees at Disneyland Park in California.

The company approved the preliminary settlement on Fri, which would see almost US\$180 million go to tens of thousands of workers, who were denied a raise following a local 2018 voter-approved living wage initiative.

The settlement is the largest of its kind in California history, according to an attorney representing the workers.

It could see the wage floor for Disney workers rise to at least US\$20.50 per hour.

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Agents go on the ultimate adventure

THIS year, Adventure World hosted travel advisors on several educational trips to discover authentic, sustainable experiences in exceptional destinations.

Led by the company's destination experts and sales managers, the trips took travel advisors to the Nordics, South America, Africa, North America, and Asia, highlighting both cultural and historical treasures.

Travel advisors experienced the operator's commitment to nature, community, and wildlife through its Make Travel Matter programs.

They explored iconic and lesser-known landmarks, engaged with local communities, and learned about sustainable farming and ethical wildlife observation practices.



ALLYCE Balderston, Adventure World; Zoe Casson, Helloworld Scone; Rachel Henshaw, Pursers Travel; Danielle Jackson, Travel Associates Chirn Park; Rachael Wood, House Of Travel Hornby; Michael Connel, Flight Centre NZ; and Caryn Young, Adventure World at Downtown Anchorage, Alaska.



PATAGONIA - Chilean side.

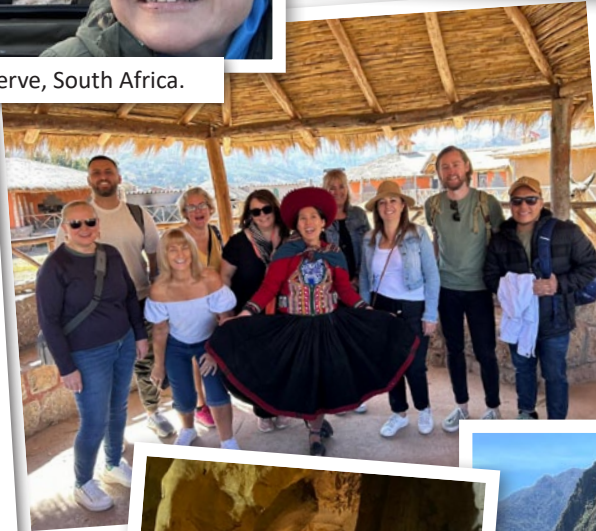


KAPAMA Private Game Reserve, South Africa.



MANA Pools National Park, Zimbabwe - Rachael Collins, Adventure World; Cathy Elliott, Peregrine Travel Centre SA; Tony Boomer, House of Travel Dunedin City NZ; Rebecca Laker, World Travellers; Michael West, Goldman Travel; Shelley Rich, House of Travel NZ; Liz Madsen, Flight Centre Kenmore; and Guide "Trymore".

CHINCHERO, Peru - Thea Bainbridge, Travel Associates Jamison Plaza; Adam Ahmad, Itineraries Travel Consultants; Brenda White, House of Travel Morrinsville; Jennifer Talbot, The Travel Brokers Mt Maunganui; Anita Fanfulla, HLO Tunstall Square; Kirsty McCartney, NZ Travel Brokers; Mary Paronis, HLO Elizabeth; Andrew Eddy and Gustavo Valienete, Adventure World.



HUSAFELL Canyon Baths, Iceland.



MEETING the performers at Haveli Dharampura Delhi.



HIMUYAN Tomb, Delhi.



HOA Cuong Cave, Vietnam.



ENJOYING the stunning views at Machu Picchu, Peru.



Melia unlocks growth

MELIA Hotels International has unveiled plans to expand its luxury portfolio in 2025, with the opening of 15 hotels flagged across key markets.

The Spanish hotel group will open ME by Melia properties in Malta, Lisbon, Malaga, and Marbella, as well as Greece, Albania and China.

Next year will also see the brand boost its presence in Mexico, with ME Guadalajara and ME Sayulita both set to launch in 2025.

The Melia Collection brand is also growing, with two new properties in the pipeline for next year - Residenza Cardinale in Milan, and Ba Vi Mountain near Hanoi in Vietnam, marking the brand's debut in Asia.

Expansion plans for the Paradisus by Melia brand include the renovation and rebranding of the existing Melia Fuerteventura in summer 2025, as well as the opening of Paradisus in Pattaya, Thailand.

Additionally, ZEL, the group's lifestyle brand and joint venture with tennis star Rafael Nadal, will launch in the Caribbean.

Set along the Playa Bavaro, ZEL Punta Cana will celebrate outdoor living with swim-up suites, pools, a beach club, and Mediterranean live cooking stations.

TRAVELMANAGERS ENJOYS LUX SPIKE

EXCLUSIVE

THE luxury market has been a key focus for TravelManagers Australia this year, with the agency network seeing a significant increase in members booking their luxury clients on the Signature hotel and resort amenity programs.

A sales increase of 57% has been achieved in 2024 when compared to 2023.

The company also noted that while the average daily rate has stayed in line with previous years, there has been a significant uptick in the number of luxury hotel bookings.

"Our affiliation with Signature Travel Network has been the driving force behind these numbers due to the introduction of Signature's Hotel Connection booking platform in early 2024,



making the booking process seamless, while connecting our personal travel managers with each hotel's VIP contact," TravelManagers Trade Marketing & PR Executive, Killi Bolton, told **Travel Daily**.

Additionally, luxury cruising has been on the rise since borders reopened, TravelManagers pointed out, with the average age of luxury cruisers dropping significantly compared to 2019.

"We expect luxury cruise to continue to grow with new players coming to the market, like Ritz Carlton Yacht & Crystal Cruise Lines, and new ships

from Explora, Regent Seven Seas Cruises and Silversea, to name just a few," Bolton said.

The network also revealed its top five destinations for luxury hotel bookings based on revenue for 2024, with Sydney taking the crown, followed by Singapore, London, New York and Honolulu.

The company is expecting to see the growth of its luxury sales continue strongly into 2025, based on its forward bookings, as well as the introduction of Signature Travel Networks' first Managing Director for Australia and New Zealand, Lisa Harrison, earlier this year. *JM*

European Waterways raises the culinary bar

EUROPEAN Waterways has enhanced its gourmet culinary experiences for 2025, blending fine dining, cultural immersion, and the art of slow travel.

The luxury cruising company's bespoke dining offerings take place at unique and historic locations, such as a private wine tasting and exclusive lunch in the cellars of Maison Champy, Burgundy's oldest winery.

Guests can also dine with the Baron and Baroness of a 12th-century chateau in France,



and enjoy an exclusive visit to Domaine Laroche, known for producing exceptional chardonnays and pinot noirs.

MD Derek Banks said, "Fine dining aboard our luxury hotel barges has always been a hallmark of the European Waterways way."

Opera in New York

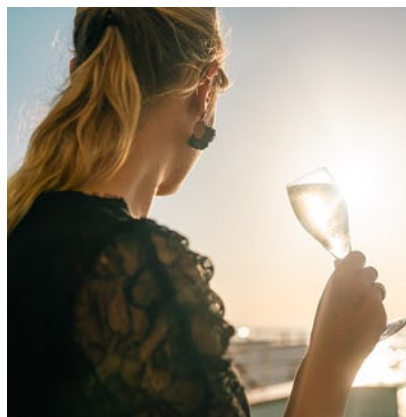
MANDARIN Oriental, New York has launched an exclusive VIP experience with the Metropolitan Opera.

The package includes a two-night minimum stay; two premium tickets for a Metropolitan Opera performance; a three-course dinner for two at the Grand Tier Restaurant inside the Metropolitan Opera House, a copy of the Met's exclusive season book, and more.

Find out the details **HERE**.

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Princess wines & dines agents



THE lucky winners of Princess Cruises' Wine, Dine & Sail competition recently enjoyed the fruits of their labour, partaking in a trade fam on board *Diamond Princess* earlier this month.

Five Australian travel agents from Beyond Destinations, RACT Travel, Flight Centre, Helloworld and Travel Managers joined representatives from the cruise line on a six-night sailing from Melbourne to Brisbane.

The 'Australian Seacation' itinerary began with a two-night pre-stay at the Langham Hotel in Melbourne, followed by a private winery tour at the historic Tahbilk Estate, and a four-night sailing up the coast to Brisbane.

Upon arrival at Tahbilk Estate, the agents enjoyed a private guided tour of the estate, including a VIP look at the underground cellar and vines.

The head chef prepared a grazing style lunch with paired wines at the Tahbilk Estate Restaurant (**pictured**), followed by a guided tour of the wetlands aboard a river boat.

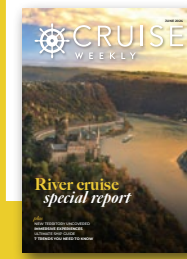
Guests ended the tour by enjoying a tippie from Tahbilk's ranges of wine, including a 2016 '1860' Vine Shiraz. *JM*



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ATIA UPDATE

from Christian Hunter, Chair



AS WE approach the end of 2024, it is an opportunity to reflect on achievements of the past twelve months.

The industry has continued to thrive as demand for travel remains high, despite the country facing ongoing economic challenges.

At an individual business level, staffing remains a major challenge which is not lost on the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA).

In fact, workforce development forms one of the key pillars of ATIA's A30 strategy announced earlier in the year, and the recent addition of 'travel agency manager' to the Core Skills Occupation List, which is a great result of ATIA's ongoing advocacy.

It was a thrill to be part of ATIA's core events, the NTIAs and Beyond Borders, ATIA's first industry conference.

Feedback from the conference was outstanding and the most encouraging commentary

from my perspective, was acknowledgement that ATIA understands members' key challenges and has plans in place to address them.

We have seen change at board level, with new directors appointed at this year's AGM.

In fact, only three of the twelve current directors were part of the board at the start of the pandemic, so there has been significant change over time.

The strength of the board is its united approach in ensuring the industry remains strong, which provides opportunity for every participant regardless of scale.

I thank my fellow directors for their support throughout the year.

I'd also like to recognise our CEO, Dean Long and the fabulous ATIA team for their unrelenting efforts and leadership this year that continue to shape the industry - it is genuinely appreciated.

Finally, thank you for your support of ATIA.

I would like to wish you a safe and very merry Christmas.

Enjoy the celebrations with your nearest and dearest, and importantly, take the opportunity to recharge the batteries for what I'm sure will be an exciting 2025.

S Korean hotels popping

SOUTH Korean hotels are making a dramatic recovery from the pandemic, with occupancy rates in Seoul surging to 80% in 2023 compared to just 30% in 2020, a Canvas8 report has found.

The study looked at how the country's hospitality industry is rapidly evolving to meet new demands for luxury, sustainability, and personalised experiences.

In 2023, over 900,000 tourists visited South Korea in the first two months alone, a 400% increase on the previous year.

The influx is being driven by the popularity of K-pop and the Korean Wave (Hallyu), prompting hotel groups like Amand to expand their presence in S Korea.

Trends include a growing demand for luxury hanok stays in scenic regions like Jeju and Gangwon; a desire for experiences tailored to affluent guests; and an influx of childless couples and solo travellers.

More chains are now installing green energy and embracing local community support. *JM*

ACCOMMODATION

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Atlantis, The Palm, has unveiled its newly renovated Explorers Club, which aims to set a "whole new standard" for kid-friendly luxury travel. The new facility spans almost 1,800m², and has capacity to host up to 400 children up to the age of 12. Children can master cooking skills in the Little Foodies room, or enjoy some tech fun at the Gaming Station. There are also updated facilities for 'little explorers', kids aged under three.



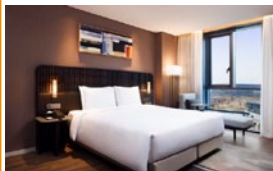
Fusion Resort & Villas Da Nang has introduced its new flagship Maia Spa, offering one of Vietnam's most comprehensive wellness resort experiences. The 2,800m² spa marks the grand opening of the resort, and includes a heated pool, infrared saunas, steam baths, a fully equipped fitness centre, and a dedicated yoga studio. The resort is set against the backdrop of Non Nuoc Beach.



Melia Casa Maya - Cancun has opened on Mexico's Caribbean coast. The new opening offers direct access to a white sand beach on the Caribbean Sea, while the property's all-inclusive gastronomy includes three unique restaurants. Each of the venues is designed to highlight the best of local and international flavours. One of the hotel's main attractions is Splash Island, a family-friendly water park featuring adult and child slides.



Sheraton Bali Kuta Resort has unveiled new transformed public spaces, highlighted by the introduction of &More by Sheraton, a vibrant new entertainment hub. The new venue aims to "redefine" the traditional hotel lobby, offering a dynamic, all-day experience where guests can connect, relax, and enjoy live music, themed nights, and interactive events.



Mercure Ambassador Seoul Magok has opened as the largest hotel in the city's vibrant Gangseo District. The property aims to offer a blend of modern comfort and local charm, pitching at both business and leisure travellers. Guests are placed near a range of cultural attractions, entertainment venues, convention centres, MICE facilities, and corporate offices.

Cocky revives essential skills



ACCESSIBLE tour operator Cocky Guides recently teamed up with the Dave Winner Foundation to empower blind or low-vision Aussies to learn life-saving skills.

After learning of the Foundation's goal to equip one million Australians with life-saving skills through his local surf club, Cocky Guides founder James (Buck) McFarlane reached out to Dave Winner to talk about how he could make CPR inclusive for vision-impaired patients.

"As a patrolling lifesaver, I understand that traditional first aid training is typically rigid, and the accreditation process a barrier for many in the blind and low-vision community," McFarlane explained.

Winner made some simple adaptations to his course, and as a result, three blind or low-vision participants successfully completed the Foundation's free CPR course last week at Coledale RSL near Wollongong.

One participant, Charlie McConnell, said: "Dave and his team delivered the course in a

way that made me feel confident enough to take charge in a situation that requires CPR."

"I really like how Dave described finding the location to commence compressions on a patient and the extra time set aside to get to know a defibrillator by touch."

Cocky Guides now has a goal of supporting more blind and low-vision participants to learn these life-saving skills by joining a free course with the Dave Winner Foundation in 2025. *JM*

Pictured: Dave Winner (right) presents McConnell with his CPR course completion certificate. *JM*

Kakadu permits open

KAKADU National Park has opened permit applications for operators to conduct standard land-based tours, with one-year and three-year options available.

Additionally, operators who already hold a three-year permit are encouraged to check the permit conditions, which have been revised for the 2025 season.

Obtain a permit form **HERE**.