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Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of the latest travel industry news, including a front cover page from **Norwegian Cruise Line**, our **Sustainability** page, plus a full page from **Silversea**.

We feel blackmailed

EXCLUSIVE

A **MELBOURNE-BASED** travel agency has made allegations against B2B accommodation payment platform Onyx CenterSource for holding back full commissions unless the business becomes a member of its Sure Pay payment service.

Bayview Travel Operations Manager, Tracey Williams, told *Travel Daily* her agency is being railroaded into parting ways with 6% of its hotel booking commissions because Onyx stopped offering deposit options in AUD in Nov last year.

While it's understood the majority of travel agencies in Australia subscribe to Sure Pay, Williams said in 2016, Bayview made the decision to retain the 6% commission and have funds deposited by cheque instead.

However, late last year that changed when Onyx's bank, Citibank, ceased the issuance of

cheques in AUD, shifting to USD. "Given the costs and difficulties involved in cashing USD cheques, this is putting us at a disadvantage and we are therefore not receiving our full commission entitlements," Williams alleged.

Rolled over the course of a year, Bayview estimated the 6% haircut on hotel commissions it would take by signing up to Sure Pay would cost the independent business thousands each year.

When Bayview contacted Onyx, the agency was told a "solution" for non-members was in the works but in the meantime they could have their commissions immediately so long as they sign up to Sure Pay.

"We have no timeline for a solution and the USD cheques are piling up...and depriving us of our income," Williams said.

Onyx was contacted but did not respond in time for deadline. *AB*

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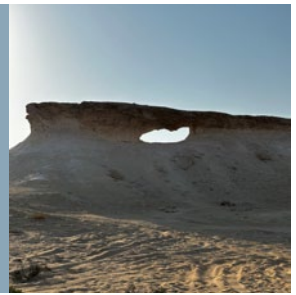
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NOTES:

- Beyond Doha
- Zekreet Peninsula



Virgin checks in with IHG

VIRGIN Australia Business Flyer has signed a new partnership with IHG Hotels and Resort's SME corporate program, IHG Business Edge, which opens a plethora of new perks for mutual members.

Under the partnership, Virgin Australia Business Flyer members can access guaranteed discounts on accommodation at more than 6,000 participating IHG hotels.

Businesses who sign up for IHG Business Edge via a link in their Virgin Australia Business Flyer account can also unlock immediate access to Gold Elite status in the IHG One Rewards loyalty program with the first stay, realising benefits such as late check-out, free wi-fi, no blackouts on reward nights and more.

IHG Business Edge accounts must be linked to an IHG One



Rewards account to be eligible for the immediate Gold Elite boost.

Conversely, IHG Business Edge members will enjoy discounts of up to 6% on eligible Virgin Australia domestic flights and three Velocity points for every dollar spent on IHG hotel stays.

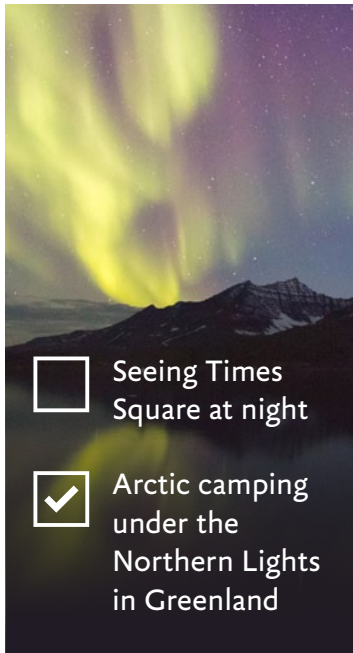
IHG Hotels Vice President Commercial, Japan, Australasia and Pacific, Dean Jones, said the tie-up is a significant move for the industry and SME members.

"In a time when business operating costs are higher than ever, our partnership with Virgin Australia Business Flyer is specifically designed to reward members twice with meaningful perks and savings we know they need, while keeping the programs free to join," Jones said. *ML*

Silversea savings

TIME is running out for your clients to save up to \$6,000 on Silversea's Door to Door All-Inclusive fares, coupled with a reduced 15% deposit, on the line's worldwide sailing collection.

See **page eight** for more details.



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Domestic air stabilising

IMPROVED capacity, lower jet fuel prices and a slight dip in demand contributed to an overall drop in domestic airfares in 2023, according to the first ACCC report under its recent government directive (**TD** 19 Oct 2023).

The newly-resumed *Domestic Airline Competition in Australia* report card from the competition watchdog showed average prices across all fare types fell 13.4%, even adjusting for inflation.

Average revenue per passenger was below pre-pandemic levels, however 'best discount' economy fares tempered the average, coming in higher than Dec 2019.

While the ACCC welcomed the overall direction of airfares, it lamented generally poor service reliability in aviation, with flight cancellation and delays well above long-term averages.

In Dec 2023, the on-time arrival rate was 63.6%, significantly behind the average of 81.1%.

"The persistently high rates of cancellations and delays compared to long-term averages in the second half of last year were clearly disappointing for consumers," said ACCC Chair, Gina Cass-Gottlieb.

By the end of 2023, domestic airline capacity reached 95% of pre-pandemic levels or around six million available seats.

Challenges for the sector include a serious shortage in qualified pilots, many of whom are being lured to work overseas.

The report also highlighted several encouraging factors in domestic aviation, including the growth of Bonza from five routes at launch to 35 routes by year's end, of which 24 were unique.

In addition, flights between the Gold Coast and Melbourne are now Australia's most competitive, with four airlines plying the route, despite only accounting for 4% of overall monthly traffic. *ML*

TTF releases a RAP

SUPPORTING and promoting First Nations tourism has been named a top priority for the Tourism & Transport Forum, with the association unveiling its Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in Sydney today.

The association has launched a new First Nations Tourism Hub designed to help the tourism industry better engage with First Nations people around Australia.

The hub features interviews with tourism champions and resources to improve cultural awareness and respect.

Resources on acknowledging traditional owners, understanding drivers of change, leading organisations and how to start a RAP also feature on the platform.

"We want to create an environment where First Nations people can flourish, by sharing their rich, vibrant and diverse stories, traditions and connection to Country," said TTF Chief Executive Officer, Margy Osmond.

TC boosts the ranks

TRAVELLERS Choice has kicked off 2024 with two new members joining the ranks in NSW and WA, with both new members lauding the group's support network.

Based in the Sydney suburb of Chippendale, Hopperound Cruise & Travel is a relatively new business headed by Allan Hopper.

The network has also been bolstered in its home state of WA with Perth-based Peregrine Travel Centre joining the fray.

Crystalbrook Sam

CRYSTALBROOK Collection is preparing to make its debut into South Australia, after being selected to manage a new \$130 million luxe hotel in Adelaide.

Slated for a 2026 opening, Crystalbrook Sam will comprise 200 rooms across 13 floors, as well as communal spaces, a rooftop Eléme Spa and Bath House, a restaurant and bar with city views, and more.

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Goldman Offloads

THE Goldman Group Joint Managing Director, Anthony Goldman, is the guest on the next episode of the *Offloaded* podcast, hosted by Richard Taylor and Ann Catherine-Jones - [CLICK HERE](#).

Kaptio signs Intrepid

MULTI-DAY reservations and tour management platform Kaptio has signed a partnership with Intrepid Travel to help align its growth with scalable technology.

Built on Salesforce, Kaptio says its product is designed to boost operational efficiency and handle high volume enquiries that each require intricate personalisation.

“By eliminating manual processes...and streamlining routine tasks, we aim to enhance the overall booking and travel experience for our customers and are excited about the potential growth in both existing and new segments,” Intrepid CTO Anu Karunatilaka said.

ACCC sounds Indo alarm

THE competition watchdog has warned the International Air Services Commission (IASC) to carefully weigh up the public benefits before green lighting a planned codeshare between Qantas and Garuda Indonesia.

In a new submission to the IASC last week, the ACCC called on the capacity regulator to consider “the likely future with and without” the codeshare in place, the same test it applies in its own authorisation assessments.

The IASC is currently scrutinising an application by Qantas to vary its capacity allocation on flights between Australia and Indonesia.

This broad allowance covers QF and GA services between all Australian capitals and both Jakarta (**pictured**) and Denpasar.

The ACCC urged the IASC not to remove any impetus for the two carriers to compete on price and service, acknowledging that the only other rival airline, Virgin



Australia, only flies to Bali and is not likely to begin serving Jakarta.

In its letter, the competition regulator warned the IASC that allowing the only two airlines flying between Australia and Jakarta to align could present “anti-competitive detriments”.

“A key competition concern is that Qantas and Garuda are each other’s closest competitor in the Australia - Indonesia air passenger services market and the proposed codeshare arrangement may soften competition between them,” the letter reads.

“This could result in higher fares and reduced competitive pressure to improve service levels, compared to the future without the codeshare.” *ML*



Window Seat

THERE'S never a shortage of weird, wacky and occasionally wonderful things travellers pack in their luggage, with the latest hilarious example coming from Boston Logan Airport in the US.

The well-trained canine team on-hand sniffed out a bag that staff initially thought contained dried fish, but a physical follow-up revealed the items were four mummified monkey bodies.

The unusual luggage came in with a traveller from Paris, who connected from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

After alerting the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, the mummified primates were classified as ‘bushmeat’ and promptly destroyed due to their potential for transmitting germs, including the Ebola virus.

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Paolo toasts Aussie success



EXCLUSIVE

AUSTRALIAN travellers clearly have a developing taste for luxurious Tuscan accommodation, if the rising success of Paolo Kastelec's (pictured) Fontelunga Tuscan Villa's business is a guide.

Speaking with *Travel Daily* while in the country late last week, Kastelec said he makes the trek to Australia every year to meet with key trade partners, with Australia rising to become Fontelunga's number one source market in recent years.

The company's property portfolio includes the Villa Fontelunga hotel, which is set above the Val di Chiana and enjoys panoramic views across the Tuscan countryside, as well as a collection of villas which are located close by to the historic Scannagallo Valley.

"Our luxury product suits quite a lot of the Australian market because they are quite adventurous, they like to travel more than most, and they like the kinds of experiences we offer at our boutique hotel and collection of villas," Kastelec said.

The Italian entrepreneur believes the success of his properties Down Under can be attributed to it being "high-end but also casual", which Kastelec suggested was a combination that mixes very well with the

Australian sensibility.

Another ingredient in the secret sauce, Kastelec believes, is the intimate connection that he and his husband Philip foster with guests during their stay.

"We're very hands on, we're not only the owners but I also change hats during the day and I make amazing cappuccinos and we hold great parties if you care to share a glass of wine with us in the evening to share stories.

"We can also organise sightseeing adventures, have a booking at a restaurant, go to a winery, and after operating in Tuscany for over 25 years, we have plenty of great contacts in the area," he added.

Fontelunga Tuscan Villa is represented by The Hotel Connection in Australia. *AB*

Rail Europe winners

CHLOE Griffiths from Flight Centre Murray Street Mall in WA; Ben Stinziani from Flight Centre Woden in the ACT; and Owen Johnstone Donnet from Scenic Journeys by Rail in NSW have each won a Bucherer watch as part of Rail Europe's latest Swiss Travel Pass incentive.

The winner of the famil spot to Switzerland's rail journeys will be announced at a later date.

To access Rail Europe's agent hub, see [HERE](#).

ATIA UPDATE

from Nina Hedges, Compliance Manager



WHEN working in the travel industry, it's all too easy to fall into a routine and forget the magic and

power of what we do.

Sometimes we all need a little reminder. It was this feeling that I had in mind last week, as I awaited boarding of my flight to my homeland of New Zealand to visit family.

A sense of profound gratitude at travelling again washed over me, a feeling that I'm sure most of you have experienced.

It brought me back to my days managing travel consultants, when I would passionately remind them on a regular basis of the extraordinary nature of our industry. "Get excited, people!" I would say. "We're not selling rubber bands,

we're selling dreams!"

Our industry is more than just a business, it's a conduit for education, enlightenment, and most of all, unity.

And we do that with the utmost diligence to provide people with memories that last forever.

So, I take the opportunity today to prompt our members that it is time to log-in and complete their ATAS renewals, and I also ask us all to take a moment to recognise the bigger picture.

By maintaining ATAS accreditation and supporting ATIA through membership fees, you are upholding standards and investing in the future of our industry, ensuring its resilience and longevity for generations to come.

Let's take pride in your support for Australia's peak travel industry body and remain grateful for the opportunity to be part of an extraordinary industry.

Log in to renew ATAS [HERE](#).

JNTO visits Sydney & Perth



MORE than 220 travel agents connected with over 30 Japanese suppliers and enjoyed the latest updates from The Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) at two educational and networking events held earlier this month in Perth and Sydney.

Both events, which were managed by Linkd Tourism, kicked off with a welcome from the JNTO Executive team followed by a speech from the Consulate

General, with agents then given the opportunity to chat directly with suppliers and destinations during scheduled appointments.

Attendees also enjoyed a special Japanese dance experience, and were given the chance to nab some great prizes, including accommodation, traditional crafts and Japanese spirits. *JM*

Pictured at the Sydney event: Barry Warner, Planetdwellers GM connecting with a supplier.



Green attracts

MOST Australian hospitality businesses recognise the value of sustainability initiatives, according to the *2024 Hospitality Insights and Dining Dynamics* report recently released by Lightspeed Commerce Inc.

The research found that 85% of bar, hotel and restaurant owners around the country believe implementing environmentally friendly initiatives will help to attract more customers.

As a result, hospitality businesses have already introduced a number of greener initiatives, including going paperless (37%), using recyclable cutlery and packaging (36%), serving organic or farm-fresh produce and offering customer incentives for using reusable products (35%).

However, 40% of the venues surveyed said expense was a barrier to implementing these initiatives.

Interestingly, vegan or plant-based dishes were identified by venues as a top priority, while only 13% of consumers said they wanted to see more of these options on the menu.

The Lightspeed report showed that more consumers (34%) were interested in sustainable food sourcing, including either local or seasonal ingredients.

EXPLORE IS CERTIFIABLY SUSTAINABLE

EXPLORE Worldwide has announced its B Corp Certification, demonstrating it meets the highest standard of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.

At the same time, the adventure tour operator has also launched its first Purpose Paper, which outlines its sustainability achievements and targets.

The report shows the company has outperformed its carbon emission reduction target of 7% year-on-year by 0.2%, and has introduced policies like a new low carbon travel incentive for staff - see the full report **HERE**.

Explore's Managing Director Michael Edwards shared "we are completely delighted to have achieved B Corp status today, earlier than we expected, after a long process".

"Explore is a business that's purpose-led in everything it



does - we're continually striving to be better than yesterday and we absolutely want to be held accountable for the goals we set ourselves," he added.

The milestone comes as Explore Worldwide marks the one-year anniversary of its expansion into the Australian and New Zealand market (**TD 09 Jan 2023**).

"As we reflect on this remarkable year of building

our team here in Australia, sustainability has consistently been our guiding principle in everything we do," said Explore Worldwide AU/NZ Regional Director, Ben Ittensohn.

"Attaining B Corp status holds immense significance for our entire team, propelling us into an even more impactful year ahead as a newly certified B Corporation." *JM*

G Adventures to boost The Balkans

G ADVENTURES will soon launch an extended program of trips to Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2025, designed to support local communities and showcase the Balkian nation's culture, nature and heritage.

The program, which includes new and extended tours, was created in collaboration with the US Government's USAID Developing Sustainable Tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina

initiative and the Global Travel & Tourism Resilience Council.

"The Balkans is a special part of the world that is growing in popularity as people move beyond traditional European destinations," said G Adventures VP of Product, Yves Marceau.

"As more travellers start to visit, it's important that tourism develops the right way - a way that supports local people and communities," he added.

Carnival on pace

CARNIVAL Corporation is on track to achieve an overall 18% reduction in greenhouse gas emission intensity on a lower berth capacity basis in 2024, compared to 2019.

This puts it just under its 20% reduction goal initially set for 2030, with Carnival also expecting to soon exceed the International Maritime Organization's 2030 carbon intensity reduction timeline.

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CT Partners take in the view



THE team from CT Partners recently spent a few days with members enjoying the stunning scenery of Christchurch.

Hosted by Emirates and Ponant, the group was treated to business class for the flight across the Tasman, during which the group enjoyed a drink at the A380's signature inflight bar.

While in New Zealand, the group headed to the port of Lyttleton for an inspection of Ponant's *Le Commandant Charcot* to check out what the luxury icebreaker offers guests on its Antarctic expeditions.

Other highlights included a lavish lunch at The George Hotel, hosted by the restaurant's namesake himself, and a day adventure to the French inspired town of Akaroa.

"You have done it again - thanks for a fabulous few days," wrote Judy Tanner from Aurora Travel.

"It was great to see the Ponant product and fabulous to have such a high-level meeting with Rocio from Emirates.

"And how good was the

International Antarctic Exhibition yesterday - definitely a must on any South Island visit." *ML*

The group, **pictured** above, included in the back row from left: Nik Diamataris, Frontier Travel; Claire Winnel, ATPI Travel & Cruise; Melanie Ford, TTFN; Nik Young, Anywhere Travel; Darren Partridge, TAG; Hayley Serebro, FBI Travel; Fiona Stephens, Benalla Travel; Judy Tanner, Aurora Travel; Gabrielle Thackray, Wentworth Travel; Mandy Dwyer, Main Beach Travel and Matt Masson, CT Partners.

Front row: Kristina Sambaher, Ponant; Nicole Boyer, CT Partners; Rocio Fernandez, Emirates; and Hanh Hua, Bay Travel.

Sabre switches up

SABRE Corporation has shuffled its Board of Directors, with Elaine Paul set to join from 16 Feb, while Zane Rowe and Rachel Gonzalez will retire on the same day.

Paul boasts an impressive CV, including CFO stints at Lyft, Amazon Studios, and Hulu.

VN's Banh Mi feast

VIETNAM Airlines will serve up free banh mi and Vietnamese coffee to the first 200 people through the door in a special one-day lunch pop-up in Melbourne taking place on Wed 28 Feb.

In partnership with CBD eatery Banh Mi Stand, the pop-up will offer a special selection of the dish, served alongside Vietnamese iced coffee, celebrating key destinations served by VN,

A Parisian-style banh mi will feature duck confit and orange plum sauce, a Frankfurt version includes pork sausage with crunchy chilli, and London is represented with a British roast beef and onion jam variety.

Doors to the Vietnam Airlines lunch open at 10am.

CLIA taps Brent St

THE vibrant return of the cruise sector is set to be reflected in the high-octane dance moves of Sydney's Brent Street performers, with the performing arts school to return as the headline entertainment at next month's CLIA Cruise Industry Awards for Australasia on 09 Mar.

Quantum sailings

ROYAL Caribbean has announced several new sailings on board *Quantum of the Seas* for Apr 2025, ranging from weekend getaways to 21-night journeys.

The itineraries will visit the Northern Territory, Queensland, Indonesia, Singapore, New Zealand and French Polynesia, starting from \$379pp for a two-night sailing from Brisbane to Sydney, which departs 04 Apr.

For more details, see today's issue of **Cruise Weekly**.

MONEY

WELCOME to Money, TD's Tue feature on what the Australian dollar is doing.

AU\$1 = US\$0.652

THE Australian dollar is up by 0.12% on the greenback this week, but those minor gains aren't expected to yield much value against the other majors.

Recent weak economic data in Australia is hurting the currency, fuelled by a lower than expected demand for its exports and a slowdown in economic growth in China.

China is in a deflationary phase which is tipped to continue for many months.

Wholesale rates this morning.

US	\$0.652
UK	£0.517
NZ	\$1.061
Euro	€0.606
Japan	¥97.50
Thailand	฿23.44
China	¥4.69
South Africa	12.371
Canada	\$0.878
Crude oil	US\$76.93

HA rolls out Starlink

ELON Musk's high-speed wi-fi technology Starlink is being rolled out across Hawaiian Airlines' fleet of A321 and A330 aircraft.

The American carrier will also look to install the satellite-driven internet service on its new flagship 787-9 Dreamliner planes as they get delivered between now and 2027.

HA said Starlink will be a big leap forward for the airline as it covers a larger territory of ocean flying than most carriers.

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