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SYD slots to face audit

THE Federal Government's reforms for Sydney Airport's slot management scheme (TD breaking news) will boost competition and improve the experience for more than 40 million passengers annually, Sydney Airport believes.

The comments follow the govt ordering regular audits, starting from this year, on slot usage at the hub to crack down on anti-competitive behaviour.

Government reforms will also look to modernise the compliance regime to include penalties that address anti-

competitive practices, along with strengthened enforcement tools to monitor airlines more closely & take legal action where necessary.

Under the changes, airlines operating regional NSW services will be able to apply to use any slot during reduced peak period hours, while a new 'recovery period' will also be implemented after severe disruptions to temporarily allow up to 85 movements per hour. AB

NCL's value at sea

AGENTS can earn more commission with Norwegian Cruise Line, with the line offering exceptional value and more inclusions - for more details, see today's cover page.

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features eight pages of the latest news including a cover wrap from Norwegian Cruise Line, a photo page from Hotel Connection, our Luxury feature page, plus a full page from Ponant.

Air NZ wants inquiry

AIR New Zealand has lodged a request with Commerce Minister Andrew Bayly in NZ seeking an inquiry into alleged overspending by Auckland Airport.

The carrier believes it will be forced to foot the bill through increased aeronautical charges, which is forecast to rise from NZ\$9 per domestic passenger to NZ\$46 by 2032.

Auckland Airport has rejected a need for added regulation.

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Window Seat

THERE'S a bad smell in the noses of NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) officials, who are warning travellers arriving from Europe and Asia to check their bags for stowaway brown stink bugs.

A prudent traveller recently returned from Asia captured and froze the stink bug before alerting DPI authorities, who are now checking to ensure the pest didn't escape or start a nest outside the home.

Stink bugs, unsurprisingly, give off a pungent odour when disturbed and are about the size of a five-cent coin.

NSW has already eradicated the pest once before but is now warning Sydney residents to be on alert, as the bug feeds on 300 different species of fruit and vegetable crops and can pose a serious threat.

Demand fuels HLO rally

HELLOWORLD'S continued financial rebound from the pandemic (**TD** breaking news) is the result of a growing need for travel advisor expertise, Chief Executive Officer Andrew Burnes told investors this morning.

The business laid out a healthy suite of figures for the six months to 31 Dec, headlined by a surging TTV result which rose by \$994 million to \$2.2 billion.

Further highlights included

an after-tax profit lift of 900%, growing from \$1.6 million posted in the same period last year to \$16 million, as well as a 53.4% increase in revenue to \$112.3m.

Meanwhile underlying EBITDA also grew from \$15.6 million to \$34 million, and shareholders benefited from a significant rise in earnings per share, which shot up from 0.9 cents to 10.1 cents, delivering a final fully franked dividend of five cents per share.

The retail arm of Helloworld was buoyed by a higher demand for travel while cruise was called out as a key driver of TTV in the company's wholesale division as more operators arrive in Oz.

Helloworld reaffirmed an underlying EBITDA guidance of between \$64-72 million for FY24 despite noting lower revenue margins, which dropped from 5.9% to 4.9% from 2022 to 2023, while a strong liquidity was also heralded as a good springboard for the next year. **AB**

QF doubles down

QANTAS is offering its loyalty members the chance to earn double Status Credits or double Frequent Flyer Points when booking flights by 27 Feb.

The promo applies to services taking off between 28 Feb 2024 and 14 Feb 2025.

Qantas Business Rewards members can also register separately for the Double Points offer to benefit their businesses.

Ponant Europe offer

TRAVELLERS can enjoy savings on Ponant's extended European savings, including the 15-night Antalya to Venice Grand Voyage, which is now priced from \$11,996pp - down from the original price of \$13,310pp.

The itinerary departs 17 May 2025 and visits five countries, including Greece, Turkiye, Italy and Croatia - see the **last page** for more information.

Anne loves Australia

CUNARD has launched its Voyage Collection for Sep 2025 through to Jan 2027, featuring more than 300 new voyages for its fleet, including a visit to Australia by its most recent ship, *Queen Anne*.

For more details on the season, see today's **Cruise Weekly**.

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AQV ceases ops

AMERICAN Queen Voyages has ceased all operations, *Travel Daily* can confirm.

The Hornblower Group-owned cruise line, which also owns Australian-based Journey Beyond, has also axed all future sailings.

The news follows agency groups such as Virtuoso suspending sales of AQV due to commission issues.

A few tickets left

THERE are only a few tickets remaining for those who want to attend the A Force for Good event in Sydney on 08 Mar.

The window to purchase a seat closes on Mon - more info [HERE](#).

QF's busy new Chairman

DECORATED transport and business executive, John Mullen, will become the new Chairman of Qantas upon the retirement later this year of incumbent and embattled leader, Richard Goyder (*TD* breaking news).

Qantas becomes the latest blue-chip organisation on Mullen's directorial CV, alongside existing duties as Chairman at logistics giant, Brambles, and Treasury Wine Estates.

Mullen's corporate history also saw him last year wrap up a 15-year career as a Non-Executive Director and Chairman at Telstra.

Mullen will officially join the

Qantas Board as a Non-Executive Director and Chairman-Elect on 01 Jul before being ratified by shareholders at the Qantas Annual General Meeting in Oct.

In its announcement, Qantas said Mullen “expects to reduce his existing professional commitments over time”.

Other accolades on Mullen's CV include leading transport and logistics company Asciano Limited prior to its 2016 takeover, and Global CEO of DHL Express prior to relocating back to Australia.

In his final months as Chairman, Richard Goyder welcomed Mullen to the organisation.

“Careful management of the board renewal process has been an important part of guiding Qantas through this intense period, and the selection of a new Chair reflects a new chapter.”

The latest Board moves by Qantas continues a process of ongoing renewal stretching back to last year, with retiring Directors Maxine Brenner and Jacqueline Hay to be superseded on 01 Mar by Dr Nora Scheinkestel.

Scheinkestel is an Associate Professor at Melbourne Business School and is already known to Mullen as a fellow Non-Executive Director at Brambles, along with being on the Boards of Westpac and Origin Energy.

Goyder added he was confident recent progress made by Qantas toward better customer outcomes would continue with such high-calibre Board members. *ML*

Lounge idea doubts

WHILE it has been reported in recent days that Qantas is looking to implement a subscription model for its lounges, the carrier has told *TD* the idea has no guarantee of going ahead.

The proposal is the result of a recent customer survey and is only under consideration.

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Hrdlicka disembarks VA

VIRGIN Australia's Board of Directors will begin a global search for a new Chief Executive Officer, after Jayne Hrdlicka announced her intention to depart the airline after four years (*TD* breaking news yesterday).

Hrdlicka's decision comes as the carrier continues apace on its phased long-term transformation program, with a much-vaunted IPO set to take flight this year along with margin expansion.

Speaking about her decision, Hrdlicka heaped praise on the executive team and staff.

"We have exceptional people throughout our great airline who will continue delivering award-winning service to travellers throughout Australia and strong returns to our shareholders," Hrdlicka said.

"I am very proud of what the Virgin Australia team have accomplished together since the depths of administration and the



COVID-19 pandemic."

Hrdlicka was appointed to lead Virgin Australia in 2020 as the airline emerged from voluntary administration under the ownership of Bain Capital.

At the same time, the industry leader fought to guide Virgin through the devastating COVID-19 pandemic and back into the sky, reactivating much of the fleet and hiring thousands of new staff.

This work came as Virgin shifted its market presence to a value-driven mid-tier carrier, which ultimately stemmed the financial bleeding and return the carrier to profitability in the 2022/23 FY. *ML*

Australia to feed the dragon



TRADITIONAL Chinese dance performances welcomed guests last night at Four Seasons Hotel Sydney as the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office spruiked the ongoing tourism recovery of the destination.

With many Australian dignitaries in attendance among the 400-strong crowd, local Director for the HK Trade Office in Australia, Trista Lim (*pictured*), talked up the positive prospects of travel between Australia and the Chinese territory over the course of the year ahead.

In 2023, Hong Kong saw 34 million arrivals recorded from source markets globally, with



Australia seen as a major market of investment, Lim said.

"Hong Kong is the only city that can capitalise on having both China and international appeal and we will continue to grow our visitor market," Lim added.

She outlined the importance of leisure, business and student education travel between Australia and Hong Kong, promoting the Asian island as having diverse visitor appeal and more than 1,800 events planned this year alone. *AB*



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Globus partners

GLOBUS family of brands (GFOB) has signed on Holiday Tours & Travel Group (HTT) as its distributor for Asia (excluding Hong Kong), a deal which will be effective from 01 Mar.

Singapore-based HTT will represent the GFOB portfolio in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea and the Philippines, while Hong Kong will continue to be represented by its existing GSA as an independent market.

"It's an exciting time of growth at GFOB, with our marketing activity driving record results and new product launching in 2024/25, so we are focused on expanding our footprint and customer base in the Asia Pacific region," said GFOB Managing Director Asia Pacific, Gai Tyrrell.

GFOB also revealed that it is looking for a new regional marketing manager in Singapore to work directly with its Australian-based marketing team.

GFOB's brands include luxury cruising operator Avalon Waterways and escorted coach touring operators Globus and Cosmos. *JH-M*

Pictured: Tyrrell with Holiday Tours & Travel Group Managing Director, Duncan Choo, welcoming the announcement in Kuala Lumpur this week.



CTM eyes five-year double

CORPORATE Travel (CTM) Management has unveiled a five-year plan to double its FY24 profit organically, irrespective of any acquisitions made in the period (**TD** breaking news).

Key to this objective are targets to chalk up new client wins totalling \$1 billion in FY25, rising to \$1.6 billion by FY29 - an annual rise of around 3%.

In that five-year period, CTM said it is anticipating new activity to offset client losses while still maintaining its average company-wide retention rate of 97%, which it has managed to do since first listing on the ASX in 2010.

CTM estimates the corporate travel market's post-COVID recovery to now be complete at 75% of pre-pandemic spend, with average annual gains of 3% in client activity expected.

Based on this market recovery, CTM is anticipating "large-scale industry consolidation", with many targets burdened with debt and likely open to discussion on how to better manage travel requirements, which it said it is "actively pursuing".

In Australia, CTM reported its best half-year in terms of new client wins since the pandemic on the back of customer feedback complimenting its value proposition against its peers.

Performance saw a 1% revenue gain, with CTM citing additional costs associated with the rollout out of new systems to support its Whole of Australian Government



account which began this month.

The company has started 2024 strongly though, with revenue for Jan up 11% on the same month last year.

"The key metrics required to execute the plan (client wins, retention, automation project execution, revenue/FTE) are already being met or exceeded in FY23 and FY24," said CTM Managing Director, Jamie Pherous.

Other ANZ regional highlights included a strong performance by its new Sleep Space hotel search engine, which CTM said provides expanded hotel choice, increases attachment uptake and enhances supplier engagement.

Plans are now in place to expand Sleep Space across the ANZ region before rolling out the program globally over two years.

These set-up initiatives are expected to see the region return to a much stronger financial performance when full-year results are released in Aug.

Elsewhere in the world, Europe was the clear leader pushing overall EBITDA, with revenue up 118% for the half-year and underlying EBITDA up 271%. *ML*

Saddle up in Qld

OUTBACK Queensland Tourism Association (OQTA) has published a brand-new *Outback Traveller's Guide* for 2024, spotlighting 34 new experiences across the Sunny State's vast landscapes.

The 110-page publication highlights plenty of new things to do in remote Queensland, including the 'Wellness Way' hot springs trail, a virtual rodeo roundup at Julia Creek, the St George region fishing loop, and a tour of the old mining town of Mary Kathleen.

OQTA Chief Executive, Denise Brown, said "Outback Queensland continues to be a beacon for intrepid travellers seeking authentic experiences and unforgettable moments".

"As travellers flip through the pages of the 2024 Traveller's Guide, they'll be lassoed into a world of endless possibilities and untold adventures, each waiting to be discovered and cherished."

Check out the guide **HERE**.



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The Hotel Connection showcases European allure

THE two-week roadshow around Australia hosted by The Hotel Connection showcased some of the best of European luxury including: Filippo Curinga from I.D.I Italy, France & Morocco; Paolo Kastelec from Fontelunga Tuscan Collection; Doug Greenwood from Cheval Residences London Edinburgh & Dubai; Reyes Faulo from The Grand Hotel Central Barcelona; Julian Pearl from Unforgettable Croatia & Greece; and Sarah Whitty representing The Londoner & Edwardian Hotels.

The events received an amazing turn out from luxury agents in Adelaide, Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Melbourne and Sydney, representing a strong excitement in luxury outbound travel.

For more details, contact sarah@thehotelconnection.com.au.

THE Hotel Connections' European presenters.



GUESTS were offered some mouth-watering oysters.



JUDY Gillard & Emily Loughnan from Bayview Travel with Rob Mackie from Y Travel and Julian Pearl.



HANNAH Bennett from Savenio, Jan Smith from Enhance Travel and Jan Chappell from TravelManagers.

KATHERINE Laing from The Hotel Connection with Allure's Kellie Anderson, Lisa Connelly and Louis Teng from Connelly & Turner Travel Associates.



THE final supper hosted by Fay Cohen from Wentworth Travel.



PHIL Hoffmann and Sarah Whitty in Adelaide.



THE Travel Associates team enjoying some of the fun.

Gabrielli reimagined

STARHOTELS has offered a sneak peak into its five-star Hotel Gabrielli in Venice, which will re-open in early 2025 following a massive transformation.

Situated on Riva degli Schiavoni within a historical 13th-century palazzo and its six surrounding buildings, the hotel will be redesigned to “bring back to life the typical Venetian experience with a contemporary touch”.

The number of rooms will be reduced from 120 to 73 to allow more living space, while the property will also gain a Mediterranean restaurant on the ground floor, spa, rooftop terrace, and Venetian garden.

Crystal recalibrates

CRYSTAL has announced some adjustments to its sailing schedule in light of the current volatile situation in the Red Sea.

The luxury cruise line has cancelled its 2024 cruise from Mumbai to Piraeus (Athens) on *Crystal Symphony*, which was due to sail 27 Mar - 13 Apr.

It will also re-route several segments on the 2024 World Cruise on *Crystal Serenity* to avoid the area, however the length of the voyage will remain the same.

SAIL AN UNFORGETTABLE CROATIA

THE luxury cruise product offered by Unforgettable Croatia & Greece is “just the right kind of experience” for Australian travellers, Head of Client Services for the brand, Julian Pearl, has informed **Travel Daily**.

Speaking while meeting with key trade partners in Australia courtesy of The Hotel Connection, Pearl said the cruise line makes an effort to travel to all major Australian cities every year, given the rising demand for its experiences in recent years.

“Our cruises are a great fit for a big partner market like Australia and travel agents really love us as well because we really do represent an easy sell for them,” Pearl explained.

“Charges for a week on one of our ships lead in from about \$2,600 and that includes food, a spot on board a luxury small cruise ship and all of the



excursions are also included in the booking.”

Agents can expect to earn between 12-15% commissions for Adriatic or Cyclades bookings with Unforgettable Croatia & Greece, with the rate peaking during special promotion periods.

“I’ve been in travel for going on 28 years and I love this product, I myself have been on

board several times and it takes passengers along the Dalmatian coastline from Split to Dubrovnik and really suits people who have never been to Croatia before, because we represent one of the best ways to start.”

Pearl added that the target market are people who like nature, history, winetasting and being sociable. **AB**

LTC’s Luxury Product Showcase ready to launch

THE Luxury Travel Collection’s (LTC) Luxury Product Showcase will kick off this Fri with a Partner and PR Breakfast Presentation at The Langham Gold Coast.

Delegates will enjoy breakout sessions and presentations over two days, before wrapping up on Sat night with a polar-themed gala dinner hosted by platinum partner Ponant.

LTC will then host a Luxury

Travel & Cruise Event, which is geared towards discerning consumers, on Sun at the Gold Coast Convention & Exhibition Centre from 10am-3pm.

The consumer showcase will feature more than 50 of LTC’s luxury travel partners, including tour operators, boutique hotels, cruise lines, and more, giving travellers the chance to score exclusive offers and chat to experienced advisors.

UK’s five-star Prince

FOR the third consecutive year, luxury UK hotel The Prince Akatoki London has been rated five stars in the 2024 Forbes Travel Guide - a coveted award earned through an independent inspection process.

The Japanese inspired property is operated by Seibu Prince Hotels and Resorts which recently rebranded (**TD** 12 Feb).

PONANT GRAND VOYAGES

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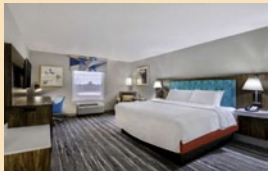
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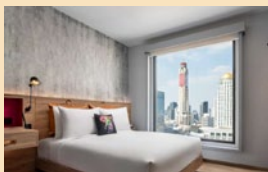
The **Royal Park Hotel Iconic Nagoya** has opened within Nagoya's historic Chunichi Building as the newest Mitsubishi Estate Hotels & Resorts Co property. Located across the seventh and 24th to 32nd floors, the 246 guestrooms offer breathtaking views of the Japanese city's landscape, including Nagoya Castle, Mirai Tower, Oasis 21, and much more. Guests can enjoy an array of amenities, including a rooftop dining venue and a tea room.



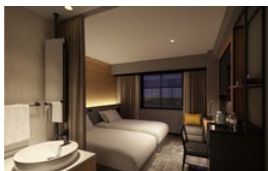
In a bid to lift modern comfort for upcoming guests, **Hampton Inn & Suites Jackson** in Tennessee, US, has announced the completion of its renovation project, resulting in a fresh seating area, redesigned front desk, revamped lobby and a revitalised breakfast area. All rooms have also been updated with new furniture and smart TVs, while guests can also enjoy new equipment at the fitness centre.



Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski Dresden in Germany has reopened after a year-long renovation. The 211-room urban getaway has been redesigned under the motto of 'history retold', now offering new aesthetics, hand-picked furniture and carefully selected artwork in all of its rooms and suites, as well as the new 'Private Dining Room' at the Das Palais restaurant, which serves local specialities and international classics.



Moxy Hotels has debuted in Thailand with the opening of **Moxy Bangkok Ratchaprasong**, bringing in youthful energy and an upbeat spirit in the heart of the city. The property offers 504 sleek guestrooms, and is positioned close to an abundance of facilities, including a world-class shopping centre, dining venues, and more.



Best Western Plus Hotel Nagoya Sakae will welcome guests back on 13 Mar after a renovation and rebrand. All 143 rooms will boast a new look, equipped with modern amenities and each bathroom featuring "power showers". There is also an onsite restaurant serving daily breakfast. The property used sustainable and allergy-friendly building materials in the revamp.

THL's \$100m profit goals

TOURISM Holdings Limited, which specialises in motorhome rentals and attractions, said it is on track to deliver record results for the financial year, according to interim forecast released today.

The company reported a 58% jump in net profit to \$39.7 million but anticipates its full-year net profit after tax to close at around \$75 million, with rental yields continuing to outperform expectations by either growing or remaining stable in all markets.

The results have spurred THL to set a high bar for ongoing growth, with the company aiming for a new net profit after-tax of \$100 million in the next three years.

From a fleet growth perspective, THL's inventory closed at 7,366 vehicles - up 15% year-on-year.

The company will now pay a 100% imputed, 25% franked shareholder interim dividend of 4.5 cents in early Apr.

THL Chief Executive Grant Webster said the outperformance of motorhome rentals were balancing against ongoing volatility in vehicle sales.

"Our rentals businesses in each market have delivered positive results, supported by strong rental yields that saw good growth in most markets." *ML*

Thailand visa deal?

AUSTRALIA and Thailand are exploring the possibility of introducing a mutual visa exemption scheme for travel between the two nations.

The proposal was raised during a recent meeting between the Governor-General of Australia, David Hurley, and Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, during Hurley's four-day visit to promote relations between the two countries.

MEANWHILE, Thai Airways has placed an order for 45 Boeing widebody jets in a bid to boost its fleet size after bankruptcy restructuring (*TD* 27 Nov 2023).

The airline will finance the order through leasing and hire-purchase contracts, CEO Chai Eamsiri revealed, after the country's Transport Minister voiced concern over whether the new fleet would affect the carrier's financial status.

Thai Airways is expected to announce more details of the order later this week at the Singapore Airshow, and expects to receive the planes between 2027 and 2033.

ALL for meetings

MEETING planners can earn double ALL loyalty points plus a chance to win a major prize of a trip to Paris or the Maldives in a new MICE campaign by Accor.

Launched this week at AIME in Melbourne, the new 'We must start meeting like this' promotion also offers meeting planners a chance to win a \$1,000 gift card each month for bookings made until the end of Sep 2024.

The major prize consists of return flights to either Paris or Male with a five night stay at Sofitel Paris Le Faubourg or Mövenpick Resort Kuredhivaru.

To enter the draw, register for the campaign - **CLICK HERE** - and book an event or meeting at any of Accor's 400+ participating hotels, with a minimum spend of \$5,000, before 30 Sep 2024.



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Antalya to Venice Grand Voyage

16 ports of call visiting 5 countries, including Turkey, Greece, Italy & Croatia.

Starting from AU\$13,310 pp

GRAND VOYAGE PRICE:

From AU\$11,996pp

in a Deluxe Stateroom, Deck 3*

17 May to 1 June 2025	Aboard <i>L'Austral</i>	15 nights
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Lisbon to Antalya Grand Voyage

28 ports of call visiting 7 countries, including Portugal, Morocco, Italy & Greece.

Starting from AU\$27,050 pp

GRAND VOYAGE PRICE:

From AU\$23,822pp

in a Deluxe Stateroom, Deck 3*

18 April to 17 May 2025	Aboard <i>L'Austral</i>	29 nights
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Helsinki to Lisbon Grand Voyage

24 Ports of call visiting 12 countries, including Finland, Netherlands, UK, France, Spain & Portugal.

Starting from AU\$27,672 pp

GRAND VOYAGE PRICE:

From AU\$25,105pp

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13 August to 8 Sept 2025	Aboard <i>Le Lapérouse</i>	26 nights
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*Terms and conditions: Antalya to Venice Grand Voyage combines cruise AU170525 and AU240525; Lisbon to Antalya Grand Voyage combines cruise AU180425, AU260425 and AU070525; Helsinki to Lisbon Grand Voyage combines cruise ER130825, ER200825 and ER300825; Offer price is based on Deluxe stateroom on Deck 3; Price is subject to change without notice at any time; First cruise is inclusive of any applicable Ponant Bonus discount rate at time of publication and is subject to change; Second cruise attracts back to back 20% discount; third cruise attracts back-to-back 30% discount excluding port charges and taxes; Standard payment and cancellation conditions apply; Offers are available for travellers departing from Australia and New Zealand; All pricing and savings amounts are in Australian Dollars (AUD). Information and price is correct as of 24 January 2024 but may fluctuate due to changes in surcharges, taxes or currency; A strictly limited number of offers are available on selected itineraries and departure dates in selected suites/staterooms/cabins/room categories; Offers are subject to availability, not combinable unless specified, available on new bookings only and may be withdrawn at any time; Terms and conditions may apply; Your booking contract is with Compagnie Du Ponant Pty Ltd (Ponant) and incorporates all the terms and conditions shown on au.ponant.com.au unless specified in these conditions; Ponant recommends that you read and understand your contract and ask Ponant or your travel agent if you require any clarification. Visit au.ponant.au for full terms and conditions. Photograph: © Studio PONANT - Nicolas Matheus.