

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features five pages of the latest travel industry news including our regular **Luxury** feature page, plus a full page from **Infinity Holidays**.

QF Asia chief departs

ONE of Qantas' longest serving executives will depart the airline from 01 Mar to take up a CEO role with the Aussie carrier's affiliated Jetstar Asia brand.

The outgoing Qantas SVP Asia, John Simeone (**pictured**), has been in his latest Qantas role since Apr last year, but has enjoyed a lengthy tenure at the carrier, having started in the networking scheduling department in 1997.

More recently, Simeone has held the roles of Senior VP International Sales and Senior VP Asia and Papua New Guinea.

In his new position, which will see current Jetstar Asia CEO Barathan Pasupathi depart the top job after 12 years, Simeone will focus on building capacity and connectivity out of Changi Airport and sustaining the low fares the carrier is recognised for.



Commenting on Simeone's appointment, outgoing Pasupathi said the Qantas stalwart will bring his positive business track record at The Flying Kangaroo to the Jetstar Asia board.

"I am pleased to hand over the reins to John, who I've had the pleasure of working with closely for a number of years and who I know will excel in the role," Pasupathi said.

When contacted for comment, a spokesperson for Qantas told **Travel Daily** there are currently no updates regarding who will replace Simeone as SVP Asia.

Simeone lives in Singapore and boasts more than 30 years of aviation experience across commercial, operations, network planning, revenue management and sales. **AB**

Infinite opportunity

ONE lucky agent will win a \$1,000 Infinity Holidays travel voucher as part of a new trade promo, while there's also \$250 gift cards up for grabs for the rest of the month - see the **back page**.

Qld wins ART event

AUSTRALIAN Regional Tourism (ART) will host the Australian Regional Tourism Convention in Mackay, Qld from 09 to 11 Oct.

The event is a forum for regional tourism stakeholders to share new insights and network.

Ecuador disruption

DFAT has warned Australian travellers in Ecuador that the South American country has implemented a 60-day nationwide state of emergency and curfew after notorious druglord Fito escaped a maximum security prison over the weekend.

"You must remain indoors between 11pm and 5am and you should carry your ID at all times and follow the instructions of local authorities," DFAT advised.

Travel to and from airports during the curfew period is permitted for passengers travelling on scheduled flights.

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Texas hotel blast

A SUSPECTED gas leak has caused a major explosion at the Sandman Signature Fort Worth Downtown Hotel in Texas, resulting in 21 injuries.

Investigators told local media they are still working to confirm the root cause of the serious incident at the property, which is located close by to the city's convention centre.

Four of the injured remain in a serious condition, while one is reportedly on life support.

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Time to Thai PER again

PERTH has continued its stellar run of beefing up international air capacity, late yesterday announcing that Thai Airways will recommence daily services between Bangkok & Perth in Mar.

The news marks the first return to Perth for the Thailand-based carrier since it scrapped services during the pandemic, and represents a strong incentive for travellers, who can now hop aboard a direct flight between the two cities.

Rival operators such as Singapore Airlines, Scoot, Malindo Air, Malaysia Airlines, and AirAsia all offer Perth-Bangkok flights, however all are



encumbered with stopovers.

Thai Airways will operate the service using a B787-8 aircraft, configured with 22 Business class seats and 234 seats in Economy in a standard 3-3-3 layout, adding around 93,000 extra travellers to Western Australia a year.

Reflecting on the news, WA Acting Tourism Minister Reece Whitby said WA continues to work proudly with Perth Airport to bring back and secure new non-stop flights and strengthen the state's reputation as the "Western Gateway to Australia".

"Securing and recommencing direct aviation services is absolutely vital to driving travellers to our state, injecting visitor spend into our economy, and creating jobs in the tourism and hospitality industries," Whitby enthused.

Thailand is WA's eighth largest trading partner and a significant market for international students.

Tickets for the upcoming Bangkok flights are on sale now.

The news followed an announcement by South African Airways yesterday that it will begin operating services between Johannesburg and Perth from 24 Apr (*TD* 09 Jan). *AB*

WSI adds expertise

THE Australian Government has announced the appointment of three new Non-Executive Directors to the WSA Co Board, established by the Federal Government to help develop the Western Sydney International Airport (WSI).

Timothy Eddy, Donna-Maree Vinci and Ken Kanofski will bring a broad range of expertise to the table, which is on track to begin operations by late 2026.

Federal Transport Minister Catherine King said the recruits are a great investment in the hub and the region's aviation needs.

HND runway reopens

THE runway at Tokyo's Haneda Airport where a crash between a Japan Airlines' aircraft and a cargo plane occurred last week (*TD* 03 Jan) has now reopened.

It is the fourth and final runway to resume normal operations at the hub, after remaining closed due to investigations, debris cleanup, and repair work.

New safety measures, including changes to how orders are sent out from the control tower, are now in place at HND to ensure more thorough surveillance and clearer orders on the runway.

Sabre, IAG pair up

INTERNATIONAL Airlines Group (IAG) and Sabre Corporation have expanded their existing partnership by signing a new multi-year distribution agreement.

The tie-up will allow Sabre-connected travel buyers and agencies to sell traditional EDIFACT content as well as having competitive access to NDC offers from major carrier such as British Airways, Iberia, Aer Lingus and Vueling through the Sabre travel marketplace globally.

UL NDC platform

SRILANKAN Airlines has commenced the global rollout of its New Distribution Capability (NDC) travel agent booking portal called SriLankan Direct Connect.

When completed, the new platform will allow travel advisors in every active market to bypass global distribution systems and take advantage of ancillary services and personalised offers.

A date for Australia is yet to be set but the carrier has overnight confirmed the rollout will happen in stages over the coming months after a global debut in India.

JetBlue new CEO

JETBLUE Airways has revealed that COO and President Joanna Geraghty will succeed Robin Hayes as CEO of the New York-based carrier from 12 Feb.

The outgoing Hayes has indicated he will serve on the board until next month.

Lindblad adds two

LINDBLAD Expeditions-National Geographic has launched two new Antarctica itineraries on board the recently refurbished *National Geographic Explorer*.

Starting from next year, guests can choose a new eight-day tour that flies round-trip across the Drake Passage, or a 10-day journey that crosses the famous passage by ship with an air return from King George Island.

The Antarctica Direct: Fly the Drake Passage expedition offers a hike along penguin highways and kayaking in the icy waters.

Guests who book before 31 Jan will also receive a special \$500 Expedition Credit - **CLICK HERE** for further details.

Alternatively, travellers can opt for the 10-day Antarctica Direct: Sail and Fly the Drake Passage expedition, where they will explore Antarctica by foot, Zodiac, kayak, ship, and even cross-country skis.

Book **HERE** before 31 Jan to score a \$1,000 expedition credit.

EK upgrades Vienna

EMIRATES is set to boost capacity on its Vienna route from 21 Feb until the end of the winter flight schedule (30 Mar).

The carrier is upgrading the Boeing 777-300ER aircraft currently deployed on the route to a three-class A380 plane, which features First class suites and shower spas, as well as an onboard lounge, and globally inspired premium cuisine.

EK Country Manager Austria, Elisabeth Zauner, said the decision highlights "the importance of Vienna as a destination and as a departure point".

"We naturally hope that our flagship will return permanently in the future," she added.

The carrier's Vienna flights have not been operated by an A380 since Aug 2022.



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Window Seat

MOVE over the Hollywood Walk of Fame, there's a new attraction in the country that is clearly sending tourists around the world a little ratty.

Media reports coming out of Chicago are suggesting a major scurry of travellers to come and view what has been imaginatively dubbed 'The Chicago Rat Hole' (pictured).

Local rat experts, or ratsperts, speculate the unusual pavement feature was created when a rodent fell from an above landing on wet concrete more than a decade ago, or around circa 2013.

While locals in Chicago may not longer be enamoured with the rat splat attraction, the same can't be said for tourists flocking to the site in their hundreds for a viewing, spurred on by a tweet from a local comedian last week.

Winslow Dumaine posted a photo of the beloved hole on X, which local newspapers insist is ushering in a new generation of devotees.

The post itself has garnered a staggering 4.7 million views, but perhaps the most compelling sign a tourist monument has made the big time is when tourists start leaving gifts at the site, like the man who recently left a small bouquet of flowers in remembrance of the long-deceased rodent.

Let's hope the authorities never smell a rat and fix up this little gem.



Goldy is open for business



THE Gold Coast is ready to welcome visitors back with open arms, as the region continues its recovery from the severe storms that recently battered the Sunshine State.

Experience Gold Coast CEO John Warn, along with other leaders including the Queensland Minister for Tourism Michael Healy and Tourism and Events Queensland CEO Patricia O'Callaghan (pictured), recently met with impacted operators, including Grant Amor at Gold Coast Motor Museum.

"Our tight-knit tourism industry is strong and has already shown

Frasers powers up

FRASERS Hospitality has announced it will use global financial technology platform Adyen to power payments at its properties in Australia, as well as Singapore, Malaysia, and Europe.

The new tie-up will make the check-in and check-out process faster and more efficient for guests, and also allow them to choose from a wide range of payment options.

"With its innovative solutions, Adyen not only delivers a seamless journey to our guests but also simplifies back-of-house reconciliation for our operational teams," Frasers Hospitality CEO Mark Chan enthused.

remarkable resilience in recent years," a spokesperson for Experience Gold Coast said.

"We will be working hard at Experience Gold Coast to drive visitation with additional marketing allocated to support recovery," the DMO added. *JM*

737s shore up Boeing

TROUBLED aeronautical manufacturer Boeing delivered 100 737 planes during the fourth quarter of 2023.

New figures released by the company show that 737s are make up the bulk of its current order list, well ahead of 787s (23), 767s (15) and 777s (nine).

Over the course of 2023, Boeing delivered close to 400 737 aircraft to carriers, making up the majority of the 528 total orders.

While the orders are healthy for its 737s, the company's MAX models continue to cause headaches, with MAX 9 jets recently grounded by the FAA in the United States after structural flaws were identified with the planes' fuselage (*TD 08 Jan*).



Project H3 revealed

HILTON'S previously flagged extended-stay brand, code named 'Project H3' (*TD 25 May 2023*), has been formally launched under the name of LivSmart Studios by Hilton.

The new brand is designed to appeal to the lower mid-scale traveller seeking extended stays of 20 nights or more.

Features of the brand's properties include spacious studio apartment-style rooms and lobby areas complete with gym and laundry facilities.

Limelight '24 tours

LIMELIGHT Arts Travel has announced its music-focused itineraries for 2024, which includes the popular Wagner's Germany & the Berlin Ring cycle.

There are limited places available on the tour, which features an extended-stay in Berlin and runs from 18 Mar through to 02 Apr.

Other offerings include the Prague Spring Festival itinerary, where guests will enjoy orchestral and chamber performances at the festival, as well as an in-depth exploration of Czechia with performing arts writer Jansson Antmann - see Limelight's full 2024 line-up [HERE](#).

VJ backs a winner

VIETJET has partnered with two Australian tennis tournaments for 2024, as part of a "mission to ignite the fervour for travel, health, and fitness globally".

The Vietnamese carrier will offer tennis aficionados convenient flight options from Vietnam, India, Japan, South Korea, China, and Southeast Asia to Melbourne for the Kooyong Classic, which takes place next week from Wed-Fri as the premier lead-up event to the Australian Open.

The low-cost airline also helped deliver travellers to Sydney and Perth last week for the United Cup, a mixed-team tennis event consisting of players from across 18 countries.

FLIGHT CENTRE BRAND MAKES A BIG SPLASH

LUXURY tour operator Scott Dunn has unveiled its brand-new Explorers Kids Club at Parklane, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa nestled on Limassol's Mediterranean Blue Flag sandy beach in Cyprus.

The brand, which was acquired by Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) a year ago in a \$221 million deal (**TD** 31 Jan 2023), said the new offering is "sure to delight the whole family".

The Explorers Kids Club is set to offer endless entertainment for little travellers aged from four months to 11 years, while giving parents the opportunity to relax.

The new facility features separate club areas for each age group, as well as a huge 3,000m² castle, pirate ship splash



pool, large sandy beach, sports facilities, and a sleep room.

Older kids can indulge in beachside activities as well as the pools and sports facilities,

offering tennis, football and archery lessons, as well as mocktail making and yoga, while younger explorers will enjoy pool time, garden walks, treasure

hunts, baking and more.

Parents will be able to sit back and relax knowing the club's experienced and trained childcare team will ensure their little ones are well taken care of.

Freshly prepared snacks and lunch will be offered to little explorers, while parents can also take advantage of the babysitting service, available on request.

The club will be open all year round from 10am-6pm, with full day and hourly sessions available.

The Explorers Kids Club will begin welcoming families on 18 Mar - find out more **HERE**.

The announcement comes as FCTG continues to expand its luxury leisure division, with Scott Dunn a key part of its growth strategy (**TD** 23 Nov 2023). *JM*

Milan's new palace

MELIA Hotels International (MHI) has announced the opening of Palazzo Cordusio in Milan, marking the group's fourth luxury property in Italy.

Dubbed a "modern palace of open luxury", the new Gran Melia hotel is positioned in one of the city's most iconic squares, within the historic Palazzo Venezia.

There are 84 rooms and suites available, some with private balconies, plus a range of fine dining options, a wellness area complete with a Turkish bath.

LVMH serves up Champagne train journeys

TWO LVMH brands, Veuve Clicquot and Belmond, have teamed up to offer three new luxury rail itineraries.

Taking place 22-25 Apr, the first Solaire Journey begins with a Champagne brunch overlooking Singapore's Marina Bay, before guests board the Eastern & Oriental Express and travel through the jungle to the island of Penang.

The second journey kicks off on 04 Jul with two days of culture and gastronomy in Vienna, followed by a trip on the historic Venice Simplon-

Orient-Express to the home of Veuve Clicquot in the Champagne region of Reims.

Guests will enjoy a guided tour and tastings in the historic vineyards in Verzy and a dinner crafted by Michelin-starred chefs, before the train whisks them back to Paris.

The third offering is a five-night expedition in Oct aboard two luxury Belmond trains, which traverses South America, taking in Cusco, the Sacred Valley, and Peru, while guests feast on sumptuous cuisine and the best Champagnes.

21 Carpenter open

LUXURY-SEEKING travellers have a new place to stay in Singapore, with new boutique hotel 21 Carpenter having officially opened late last month (**TD** 11 Oct 2023).

Once a remittance house, the transformed building now offers 48 contemporary rooms with full-sized windows, plus an intimate Garden Terrace and a rooftop infinity pool and lounge with skyline views of Marina Bay.

Guests can dine at Kee's, the soon-to-launch European-inspired bistro and bar.

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W Brisbane is presenting a new fairytale-themed afternoon tea experience at its Living Room Bar until 24 Apr, in partnership with Queensland Art Gallery and the Gallery of Modern Art. Diners can indulge in the Ever After High Tea with snacks inspired by classic tales, including the Queen of Hearts chocolate and hazelnut cake, Snow White's bittersweet poisoned apple mousse, Princess Midnight's pumpkin surprise.



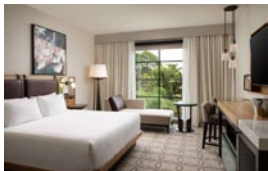
Following the merger between Ascott and C-WELL, the 308-key **Lyf Bugis Singapore** will be unveiled to the public by mid-2024. The property will remain operational throughout the renovation period, and when completed will offer a wide range of amenities including shared spaces, revitalised dining options, and fitness facilities. The hotel will also offer guests services such as tele-health, tele-counselling and travel security advice.



Rosewood Hotel Georgia, located in Downtown Vancouver, Canada, has now closed to undergo an extensive refurbishment, and will reopen in Apr with reimagined accommodations and revived culinary and beverage spaces. The lobby and the 1927 Lobby Lounge, as well as all of the hotel's rooms and the Reflections Terrace, will receive new aesthetics that combine contemporary elements with luxury features.



Located at a prime location in San Francisco, California, the 37-room **SureStay By Best Western San Francisco Marina District** is now officially welcoming guests. Designed for longer stays, each room is furnished with upgraded flat-screen TVs, bedding, linens and flooring, with guests able to enjoy complimentary breakfast, free wi-fi, and an open-air courtyard.



Fifty-one new guest rooms and suites, a private lobby, a meeting space, and a rooftop terrace have been added to the **Epicurean Hotel** in Tampa, Florida, after a US\$21 million renovation. Guests will also notice fresh lush green landscaping, a new original artwork installation of wine and champagne corks, and an extra two floors of parking with an additional 91 spaces.

Skip the rough seas in style



ADVENTURE travel specialist Antarctica21 has announced the opening of a new private club for fly-and-sail expedition guests heading to Antarctica.

Located in the historic centre of Punta Arenas in Chile's Patagonia region, Explorers House provides a gathering space for guests to relax and socialise before and after their expedition.

The 2,000m² building, formerly a warehouse that processed and exported wool in the early 20th century, offers a range of amenities spread over two levels.

In addition to a welcoming reception area, Explorers House also features a well-stocked bar and restaurant that serves regional Chilean cuisine, as well as a coffee station and lounge space for 250 people.

Guests can also browse the library, which contains over 100 books, peruse the gear and gift shop, visit the garden, check out the interactive info screens, and make use of the theatre-style presentation space. *JM*

SeaLink plugs a gap

SEALINK is inviting school leavers to embark on a "transformative gap year adventure", in which they can explore Australia while earning a wage and gaining valuable skills.

The marine transport and tourism operator is highlighting a range of casual, part-time and full-time work options available across destinations such as K'gari, Sydney Harbour, Darwin, Kangaroo Island, Magnetic Island, Gladstone, Murray River, Perth, Rottneest Island, and more.

AC polishes its act

AIR Canada flew around 2.6 million travellers over the year-end holiday period - around 10% more compared to 2022 - on more than 20,000 flights.

The carrier recorded an on-time performance (OTP) of 70%, which is a marked improvement on the 40% it achieved in the same period in 2022, and up on the last pre-pandemic holiday period in 2019, when OTP was 54%.

Additionally, Air Canada racked up a baggage handling success rate of 98.6%, representing a huge 58% drop in the volume of delayed or mishandled bags.

Australia is on sale!

Happy New Year! We know a lot of customers are looking for some last minute getaways for travel this January, so we are kicking off the year with dozens of deals on domestic travel!

From coast to country, city to surf and all the wide red land in between, we have accommodation offers and heaps of great family getaways on offer.

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Don't forget! We are **doubling points** this month for our 2024 EPIC TRIP.

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Gift card giveaway

Christmas isn't the only time for giving – we've got a \$250 gift card to give away every week this month. We've finished the festive season with a few spare gift cards, and we thought there was no better way to kick-start the year than to reward our hard-working agents.

Plus - our the top-selling agent in the month of January will win a \$1,000 Infinity Holidays travel voucher to book your own getaway.

[I want to win!](#)