

## Today's issue of TD

*Travel Daily* today features five pages of news, including our **Corporate Update** page.

## Ponant Kimberley

**PONANT** has launched its 2025 Kimberley season, which will see *Le Jacques-Cartier* return to the region for the second year after her inaugural season there this year, alongside *Le Soled*.

Both vessels will operate 10-night 'Australia's Iconic Kimberley' itineraries between Broome and Darwin, with 18 departures available between May and Sep 2025.

Priced from \$10,170pp, the voyages take in the region's most incredible natural wonders, like the Twin Falls, Ashmore Reef, and Collier Bay - more info [HERE](#).

## Change really Hertz EVs

**IN A** major about-face in fleet policy, rental car company Hertz has decided to shrink the number of EVs it offers travellers in the United States by a third in exchange for gas-powered cars.

The company will sell off a mammoth 20,000 EVs, including from Elon Musk's Tesla manufacturer, only two years after inking a deal to offer customers its models.

Hertz Global Holdings said the reason for the pivot was primarily related to higher expenses due to collision and damage for EVs, as well as broader depreciation issues globally.



The move is at odds with previous ambitions to convert 25% of its fleet to EV by Dec '24.

Last year, Hertz limited the torque and speed on its EVs to experienced users on the platform to make them easier to adapt after certain users had front-end collisions, CEO Stephen Scherr previously admitted.

It is unclear how the move in the US will impact local operations here in Australia, with Hertz Australia less than two years ago introducing the Polestar 2 (pictured) (*TD* 11 Aug 2022) to its fleet for Aussie travellers.

Hertz Australia has been contacted for comment. *AB*

## Booking opens for Aussie-first river ship

**BOOKINGS** are set to open next month for Murray River Paddlesteamers' *Australian Star*, the country's first five-star overnight riverboat.

Fares have now been announced ahead of *Australian Star's* May 2025 launch, from when she will offer year-round, all-inclusive cruises of up to a week on the Murray River.

For more information, head to today's issue of *Cruise Weekly*.

## PNG gets worse

**FOLLOWING** on from yesterday's heightened travel advisory for travellers in PNG (*TD* 11 Jan), the situation has deteriorated rapidly overnight with a formal State of Emergency declared by the nation's govt.

The 14-day edict will look to quell civil disorder, violence, and looting that broke out in Port Moresby yesterday after police went on strike over pay.

"Avoid areas where violence occurs and be alert to personal safety risks, the Australian High Commission continues to operate with heightened security measures," DFAT advised Aussies.

The riots have already left at least 16 PNG citizens dead.

## Lennon back at BPG

**BUSINESS** Publishing Group, the publisher of this masthead, along with *Cruise Weekly* and *Pharmacy Daily*, is thrilled to welcome a new Deputy Editor to its ranks, with highly experienced B2B travel journalist Matt Lennon warming up his fingers to start writing with us from next Tue.

Lennon (pictured with his young daughter Josie) arrives with more than a decade's worth of trade publishing experience, and will work across all BPG products.

He has also informed management that he is an avid Parramatta Eels fan, a fact the BPG team has pledged not to hold against him.



## B737 MAX 9 inquiry

**THE** Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has delivered a letter to Boeing informing the company of its intention to conduct a formal investigation into the safety of its 737 MAX 9 aircraft.

The US air safety body has asked Boeing to respond within 10 business days outlining the root cause of any safety issues, which parts of the planes are affected, any service impacts, as well as the extent of any action needed to prevent future incidents.

"Boeing may have failed to ensure its completed products conformed to its approved design and were in a condition for safe operation in accordance with quality system...procedures," the FAA informed Boeing's quality control department.

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## Breach was much smaller

**INSPIRING** Vacations has pushed back on mainstream media reporting of a data breach of its network (**TD** 09 Jan), clarifying the scale of the incident is “significantly smaller than suggested in a number of recent media reports”.

The Melbourne-based travel company has indicated that all at-risk individuals have now been provided with specific details about the nature of data impacted and what steps are now needed to mitigate any

associated risks presented.

Following an investigation by Inspiring Vacations over the Christmas break, the company determined a dataset containing details of some passports, driver’s licences, visas and COVID certificates was downloaded from an isolated part of the organisation’s systems.

“We were determined to conduct a full and comprehensive investigation into these claims, so that we could provide the best advice and guidance to those who were impacted,” Managing Director Paul Ryan explained.

“We are deeply sorry that this has happened and apologise for any concern or distress that our initial communications in Dec might have caused.

“We were determined to contact all potentially impacted people at the earliest opportunity before investigations allowed us to engage directly with the group who face a risk of data misuse,” Ryan added.

Upon identification, Inspiring Vacations stated the impacted folder was immediately secured and contained, with investigations conducted since confirming no further access to its IT environment.

An update in the investigation has also been provided to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner and other related agencies, the operator said. **AB**

## Banyan branches out

**BANYAN** Tree Group has announced a shift of its name to Banyan Group, while unveiling a pipeline of almost 20 properties which will debut this year.

The brand shift reflects Banyan’s “evolution into a dynamic, multi-brand hospitality powerhouse”, the Group suggested.

Banyan’s first property in Cambodia and Japan will debut this year, with the group opening Angsana Siem Reap and Banyan Tree Higashiyama Kyoto.

Additional brands are set to debut in Vietnam, South Korea, China, Mexico, and more.



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## Mini Rees explores

**AUSSIE** comedian Jimmy Rees may have just landed the best brand ambassador gig of all time, with the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) Oceania hiring the entertainer to front its latest social media campaign in digital form.

Aussies can follow a 3D-printed figurine of Rees to iconic tourist spots, with those interacting with the campaign also in the running to score a trip to Singapore, as well as have miniature figures of their own made and installed around the city in hot spots.



## Bonza parent sought over damages

**THE** majority stake owner of Aussie airline Bonza is facing legal action in the United Kingdom from three aircraft lessors over unpaid fees and damages.

Legal documents filed in the UK High Court show that 777 Partners is being chased for close to A\$45 million over allegations of non-payment, relating to four aircraft that were leased to Bonza’s sister carrier Flair Airlines.

Irish entities Corvus Lights Aviation, Columba Lights Aviation and MAM Aircraft Leasing 4 are all pursuing the case for compensation, accusing 777 Partners of non-payment on the jets, which were used in Canada’s Flair Airlines’ operations.

It is unclear how the legal development may impact Bonza’s local operations, which has previously engaged in a wet lease agreement with Flair to shore up its own local capacity.

Bonza declined to comment on the issue when contacted by **TD**.

## Busy Chrissy at MEL

**MELBOURNE** Airport has experienced its busiest month since the onset of COVID-19, with a total 3,086,049 pax travelling through the gateway in Dec.

It also marked the first time since Jan 2020 that international travellers surpassed the one million mark, with numbers gaining 35% on Dec 2022, while domestic traffic was up 10%.

Melbourne Airport Chief Executive Lorie Argus said the results “reflect the work we have done to bring new services and extra capacity to Melbourne”.

“Despite the current cost-of-living pressures, many families are prioritising travel and any extra capacity we can bring to the market increases competition and choice for travellers.”

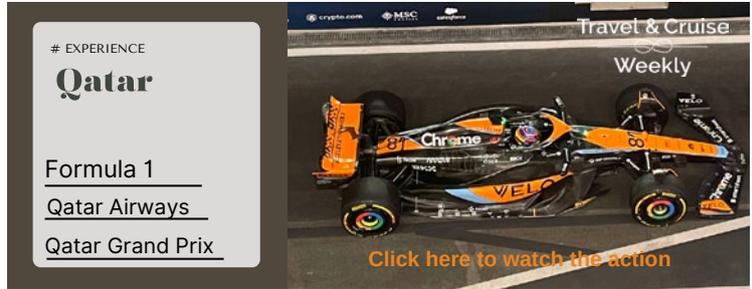


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## Taxi around Rottnest

**TRAVELLERS** visiting Rottnest Island can now take advantage of the new Rottnest Water Taxi, which has launched this week.

Operated by Swan River Seaplanes, the vessel will provide a vital link between Thomson Bay to boat moorings, as well as bays and beaches around the popular WA destination.

Offering on-demand trips around the island, the Gemini RIB boat can fit up to 12 passengers at a time - for more info on the new service, **CLICK HERE**.



## Ovolo gets physical

**OVOLO** Hotels has partnered with fitness app ACERO Drip to launch its latest Friends With Benefits offer.

Guests who book directly and stay at any Ovolo or By Ovolo Hotels across Australia, Hong Kong and Bali between 09 Jan and 30 Jun will enjoy free access to the app to support a health-focused travel experience.

During their stay, guests can access ACERO Drip's range of workout routines, personalised fitness plans, and a content library covering topics like recovery and nutrition - find more information **HERE**.

## Agents get Princess treatment



**A LUCKY** group of Australian travel agents recently had the chance to experience Princess Cruises' *Diamond Princess* ahead of her homeport season Down Under in 2024/25.

Agents from Cruise Guru, Ecrusing Travel, OVC, RAA, Pukekohe Travel, Ignite Travel, Clean Cruising, Cruise1st, Cruise Express and Phil Hoffmann Travel recently boarded the ship for a roundtrip voyage from Yokohama aboard the luxurious vessel.

The seven-night Kyushu and South Korea voyage stopped at iconic destinations including Miyazaki, Busan and Nagasaki, while agents indulged in the luxurious facilities on board *Diamond Princess*, including the exclusive Izumi Japanese Bath.

The 2,670-guest ship, which was refurbished in 2022, will return to Japan in Mar through to Aug,

where she will offer roundtrip sailings from Tokyo, calling to 25 destinations in three countries across 31 itineraries ranging from seven to 23 days.

*Diamond Princess* will then make her way to Australian waters in Sep, where she will offer sailings from Brisbane and Melbourne - for more info, visit [princess.com](http://princess.com) or call Princess Cruises on 13 24 88. *JM*

**Pictured:** David Craven, Princess Cruises; Kathryn Wallace, Cruise1st; Mike Ngyuen, OVC; Larissa Newman, Ignite; Hisano, Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO); Robyn Atkin, Ecrusing; Andrew Garrett, Clean Cruising; Sake Master; Jacqueline Krahnert, RAA; Katrina Tufi, Cruise Guru; Tina Wheelock, Cruise Express; Lisa Wharfe, Pukekohe Travel; and Alicia Milne, Phil Hoffmann Travel.



**HUNDREDS** of Elvis fanatics flooded Sydney's Central Station yesterday to board the 'Blue Suede Express' to the small farming town of Parkes, where around 25,000 fans gather every year for a festival in honour of the rock 'n' roll icon.

Many of the fans donned an Elvis-inspired get-up - think pompadours, fake sideburns, and sequins galore - as they made their way to the "Elvis capital of Australia" in the Central West region of NSW.

The fanfare will continue over five days until 15 Jan, with more than 200 events taking place at venues in and around Parkes, including look-a-like competitions, Elvis poetry, art exhibitions, and plenty of musical tributes.

Recognised as one of the top three festivals and events in Australia, the Parkes Elvis Festival first kicked off in 1993, and is officially endorsed by the estate of Elvis Presley.

The theme for this year's iteration is *Jailhouse Rock*.



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## CORPORATE UPDATE

### Gray Dawes grows in EU

**UNITED** Kingdom-based Gray Dawes Travel has strengthened its global reach with the acquisition of VCK Travel in the Netherlands.

The deal was concluded on 03 Jan, and takes Gray Dawes' turnover to more than £500 million, as well as pushing its employee number to 500-plus.

Gray Dawes and VCK are renowned for their technical innovation, focus on providing complete business travel management solutions with a personal touch.

It is the latest in a string of international acquisitions made by Gray Dawes Travel, which

includes last year's purchase of Australia-based MP Travel, which was subsequently rebranded (**TD** 07 Jul 2023).

"I have long admired the business that (VCK Managing Director) Ed Berrevoets and his team have built," Gray Dawes Chief Executive Officer Suzanne Horner commented.

"This latest chapter in our development - Gray Dawes' 14th acquisition to date - marks such an exciting time for us."

"We've been very successful picking up businesses in the UK and integrating them...now, following our expansion last year into Australia and the United States, we've been doing that internationally." *MS*

### Aussie Open aces business travel

**THE** Australian Open outranks the AFL, the Melbourne Cup, and the Boxing Day Test in corporate attendance, new data from Flight Centre Travel Group's (FCTG) Corporate Traveller has revealed.

New transport and hotel booking data from Corporate Traveller shows the Australian Open attracted 725% more bookings than the Boxing Day Test this year.

There was also 73% more Australian Open bookings compared to the AFL Grand Final this year, and 56% more than the Melbourne Cup.

Australian Open crowds will continue to grow too, the data has revealed, with forecasted bookings at 21% on last year.

### Traveltek promos

**TRAVELTEK** has made key promotions, as it continues its global expansion plans.

Tracy Sharp has been promoted to Global Director of Revenue & Supply, assuming responsibility for global customer onboarding and commercial relationships. It is a key role heading up the team to ensure there is a bridge between sales and development and customers are at the centre of Traveltek's business.

Sharp joined the company four years ago having worked in a senior role at Jetline Travel.

Traveltek has also promoted Sarah Donnelly in a senior project manager role in the Americas.



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### Royalty graces Rydges



**FOUNDER** of sporting and entertainment experience platform FAN+, Rod Harys, gave his investor and travel industry icon Dr Jerry Schwartz the royal treatment over the holiday period. The two took His Excellency Count Nikolai of Monpezat, the eldest grandchild of Denmark's Queen Margrethe II, on a tour

of Dr Schwartz's Rydges Hunter Valley Resort in northern NSW. The larger-than-life hotelier and Harys then treated the Danish royal to a delicious lunch at the resort's Lovedale Bar and Grill, along with a special glass of the royal family's own rose. *JM*  
**Pictured** enjoying a refreshing tippie: His Excellency Count Nikolai of Monpezat, Dr Jerry Schwartz, and Rod Harys.

### AirAsia restructure

**CAPITAL** A Berhad, the parent company of AirAsia X, has revealed plans to sell all of its airline businesses to the Malaysian low-cost carrier, with the aim of boosting operational efficiency.

Once its airline businesses in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Cambodia have been offloaded to AirAsia X, Capital A will continue operating the Teleport logistics unit, including AirAsia Move.

### Russian carriers' plea

**TWO** Siberian airlines have reportedly requested permission from the Russian Government to extend the service life of Soviet-era Antonov aircraft - jets that are more than 50 years old.

The plea arrives as Russian airlines scramble to resource flights amid sanctions on supply in the form of planes, parts, engineers and pilots.



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## Rugby fever takes over Perth



**TOURISM** Western Australia Managing Director Carolyn Turnbull got into the sporting spirit yesterday, attending the pool draw for the third round of the HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series (SVNS) 2024.

The tourism leader joined Western Force icons Matthew Hodgson and Michaela Leonard, as well as Australian Women's Head Coach Tim Walsh, for the draw yesterday morning at HBF Park in Perth.

The DMO has partnered with World Rugby to bring the global tournament to Western Australia, making Perth the only Australian SVNS host city in 2024 and 2025.

The hotly anticipated three-day event kicks off in the WA capital on 26 Jan, and will attract fans around the world, as well as being broadcast in many of the state's key visitor markets, including New Zealand, China, Singapore, the UK and the United States.

"We look forward to welcoming interstate and international visitors to Perth to attend the event and

explore the incredible hospitality and tourism experiences all regions of our dreamlike state have to offer," enthused Turnbull, who is **pictured** (middle) with Hodgson and Leonard. *JM*

## Spain masks up

**SEVERAL** regions in Spain have reintroduced compulsory face mask rules for health facilities and hospitals due to a recent spike in flu and COVID-19 cases, particularly across Valencia, Catalonia, Aragon, and Murcia.

## Solar eclipse sailing

**ALBATROS** Expeditions has announced a special solar eclipse expedition, which is scheduled to depart 10 Aug 2026.

The 13-day voyage aboard *Ocean Albatros* will give guests the rare opportunity to witness the incredible celestial event, while also exploring Greenland's majestic landscapes.

For more info on the upcoming sailing, **CLICK HERE**.

## SPECIALS

Send your special deals to:  
[specials@traveldaily.com.au](mailto:specials@traveldaily.com.au)

The Big Tour Sale by **Trafalgar** caters to travellers who are looking to get away for up to three weeks of holidays. Up to 20% discounts are available on over 100 trips worldwide throughout the year. Take a 10-day retreat to Italy from \$4,803 per person instead of the standard price of \$5,650. Call Trafalgar on 800 954 133 for more information on the sale, or to make a booking.

**Air Vanuatu** is offering an unmissable offer for travel agents, with return airfares beginning from \$500 per person between Brisbane and Port Vila; \$550pp between Sydney and Port Vila; and \$610pp between Melbourne and Port Vila. Available until midnight 16 Jan, the return fares also include 30kg of luggage allowance and an onboard meal. Call 1300 780 737 to book.

Snatch up to AU\$3,000 worth of flight credit on select 2025 and 2026 ocean voyages or up to AU\$4,000 of savings on select 2025 and 2026 expedition voyages with **Viking's** latest Explorer Sale. Sailors can now score the 16-day Malta, Morocco & the Mediterranean round trip from Barcelona with \$3,000 flight credit per couple. Many more deals are available - call on 138 747 for more.

**Pan Pacific Hotels Group** is offering travellers savings of up to 18% on room rates, which include daily breakfast, for bookings made before 25 Feb, valid for stays between 01 Feb and 25 Feb. Pan Pacific Discovery members can earn an exclusive reward with savings that extend to 28%. Register as a member **HERE**, and book a stay with Pan Pacific by **CLICKING HERE**.

Enjoy up to 50% off on select **Oceania Cruises'** 2024 and 2025 sailings. Travellers are invited to choose from the cruise line's vast range of destination-immersive voyages, which includes more than 100 sailings over the next two years. Featured sailings include the 15-day Emirates & Adriatic Gem aboard *Riviera* from Dubai to Trieste, which departs 14 May, and the 24-day Mediterranean Stars aboard *Insignia* from Dubai to Barcelona, which sets sail on 13 May. The offer is valid for bookings made before 29 Feb - call 1300 355 200 to book.

Lock in your next **AAT Kings** tour with a reduced deposit of \$200 per person, while also scoring savings of up to 15% off on select itineraries departing between 01 Apr and 31 Dec. The eligible tours include the five-day Remarkable Adelaide to Kangaroo Island from \$2,520pp, which is now offering savings of up to \$445. More offers are available **HERE**.

**Hurtigruten** is offering savings up to \$750 per person on the 'Follow the Midnight Sun in Norway, Sweden & Finland' voyage. Up to 10 departures are available between Jun and Jul 2024, with prices starting from \$7,598 per person for the 15-day cruise tour. Call on 1300 156 371 to find out more, and to make a booking.