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Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features six pages of the latest news including our **Sustainability** page, plus a full page from **Aurora Expeditions**.

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TAG debuts in New Zealand

TAG (The Appointment Group) has entered the New Zealand market this week, announcing the acquisition of Kiwi travel and entertainment specialist Sound Travels for an undisclosed sum.

TAG, which also has an office in Australia and others around the globe, said the purchase will be managed through a phased approach which will initially see its newest asset run as a separate business unit, "Powered by TAG."

During the onboarding period, TAG said it would work on identifying synergies and areas of improvement for both brands, before formally folding Sound Travels into the TAG global events and entertainment divisions.

Sydney-based TAG Managing Director APAC, Shane Barr (pictured), said TAG had been



looking to break into the NZ market, and that Sound Travels represented the perfect fit.

"Our deliberate expansion into New Zealand not only fortifies our worldwide footprint but also reaffirms our dedication to providing unparalleled services in the travel and events industry," Barr enthused.

"Sound Travels already boasts an impressive clientele and this acquisition will provide them support across TAG's 19 global offices," he added.

Sound Travels has enjoyed impressive growth since its founding in 2001, initially focusing on organising travel logistics for the entertainment industry, before making further forays into luxury holiday travel.

Reflecting on the purchase, Sound Travels MD Paula Pram said joining forces with TAG will open up "exciting opportunities for growth and innovation", allowing the business to continue its "journey of creating world-class service to our clients".

High-profile credits on the Kiwi company's resume include tours by Robbie Williams and Coldplay, as well as the travel needs for filming *Z For Zacariah* starring Australia's Margot Robbie. *AB*

The Entire soiree

ENTIRE Travel Group will host a series of showcase events next month that will offer travel agents a chance to score more than \$50,000 in prizes.

The three-hour Travel Showcase & Soiree sessions are scheduled to take place in Brisbane (13 Feb), Melbourne (14 Feb) and Sydney (15 Feb), with Entire reps to provide interactive product and destination workshops to help agents increase their sales.

Once the more serious education component is completed, attendees can live to the beats of a DJ and be in the running to win holidays and culinary journeys.

Entire said it intends for the Travel Showcase & Soiree to become an annual fixture.

Learn about Vic & win

AGENTS who tune in to Tourism Australia's latest Aussie Specialist webinar at 12pm (AEDT) on 25 Jan can win a range of prizes.

Incentives to learn more about Melbourne and regional Victoria with TA's Daniel Wright and Visit Victoria's Makida Kebede could win a night at Rydges Melbourne, a \$100 voucher for Alba Thermal Springs and Spa, or one of six bottles of Helen and Joey Estate wine - register to attend **HERE**.

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Centara Grand Hotel Osaka

Indonesia still at the top

INDONESIA has maintained its supremacy as the top destination for Australian travellers, with the latest figures from the ABS showing the Asian nation saw the most visitors in Nov.

The report showed that 117,750 Aussies took a trip to Indonesia, fuelled largely by a love affair with Bali (**pictured**), keeping the destination ahead of New Zealand, which was nipping at the heels of our northern neighbour with 104,160 visits.

Third spot went to the United States with 59,270, followed by Japan (53,830), Thailand (46,470), the United Kingdom (39,280), India (37,820) and China (36,480).

Japan continues to be one of the most impressive improvers following the COVID shutdown, eclipsing the same month in 2022 by a whopping 38,300 visits.

The recovering Chinese market also continues to be another big recovery story, with the major Asian destination one of the latest in the world to resume tourism following the worst of the pandemic.

ABS numbers show that while China is yet to reclaim the high ranking it enjoyed in 2019, which stood at around 52,000 trips a month, Aussie travellers are starting to rekindle their trust in



the market month-on-month.

Overall, outbound travel is sitting 3.4% off the pace of pre-COVID levels recorded in Nov 2019, with a total 820,760 Australians embarking on short-term trips.

The result represented an increase of 208,650 compared with the corresponding month of the previous year.

Meanwhile on the inbound tourism front, Kiwis were the leading source market with 116,350 visits, followed by the United States (61,660), the United Kingdom (57,860), China (45,880), Singapore (37,750), India (37,700), South Korea (31,250) and Japan (31,050).

Overall, Australia saw 663,760 short-term arrivals in Nov, an annual increase of 158,520 trips.

JAL is going private



JAPAN Airlines (JAL) has unveiled more details about what life will be like aboard its Airbus A350-1000 aircraft when the jets join the carrier's fleet later this month, including new enclosed private suites (**pictured**) for its First and Business class pax.

Addressing local media yesterday at Tokyo's Haneda Airport, a JAL spokesperson provided a sneak peek of its specially designed private cabin, replete with closing doors and a 4K super high-definition screen.

The carrier has been vocal about upgrading the experience of its premium guests on international flights, with the new A350-1000s viewed as an opportunity to lift its premium cabin appeal.

Japan Airlines took delivery of its first A350-1000 in Toulouse, France late last month, and is now preparing for its first flights on the well-subscribed Tokyo Haneda-New York JFK route.

Configuration of the planes will see passengers offered six seats in First class, 54 in Business, 24 in Premium Economy class and 155 in Economy class. *AB*



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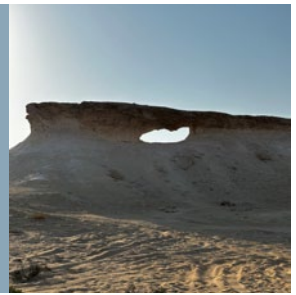
TRAVELLERS
CHOICE

Mauritius impacted

PLAISANCE Airport in Mauritius remains closed while Tropical Cyclone Belal continues to cause havoc in the Indian Ocean island nation, which has so far included strong winds, heavy rainfall and flash flooding.

A Class Three cyclone warning remains in place, DFAT has advised, while a nationwide curfew is likely to lift later today.

- Beyond Doha
- Zekreet Peninsula



Agent rail incentive

INTERNATIONAL Rail has launched a new agent incentive in collaboration with Eurail, offering Australian and Kiwi advisors prizes for sales above \$1,000.

Gifts on offer include a \$100 Wish gift card for Aussie agents, while Kiwi sellers will earn themselves \$100 Visa gift cards, with the incentive to run for as long as it takes for 60 gift cards to be handed out to its best sellers.

“There is a multitude of Eurail passes that agents can offer their clients, covering all types of travellers, budgets and destinations,” International Rail’s Head of Product, Marketing and Innovation Jason Tarabo said, adding the promotion had been timed with the peak selling season for Aussie travellers planning summer European trips.



Is time up for TikTok?

ALLEGATIONS of privacy breaches regarding personal data on social media platform TikTok has led several Australian tourism bodies to dump their use of the part Chinese-owned platform.

Tourism NT, Tourism Tasmania and Tourism Queensland have all reportedly inactivated their TikTok accounts in light of accusations that the ByteDance-owned brand has been using its pixel tracking tool to improperly harvest data such as internet browsing history and personal user details.

Shadow Cyber Security Minister James Paterson said that while the dumping of TikTok by several tourism organisations was welcome news, he blasted a number of Aussie companies who have so far refused to heed the warning of Aussie experts.

“I am disappointed that some companies, including Woolworths and Sportsbet, continue to use



it despite the legal risk and despite the warnings from the Information Commissioner,” Paterson said.

Virgin Australia and Qantas are at least two local airlines unlikely to be impacted by the allegations, with the former confirming to **TD** this morning that it does not use TikTok’s Pixel tool or the platform for any ads or paid campaigns.

Qantas delivered a similar response, stating zero impact on its social presence because it has only ever used TikTok to share in-house organic content, as opposed to paid ads using the offending TikTok pixel.

TikTok has repeatedly denied breaching any privacy laws. **AB**

Globus NY discounts

GLOBUS and **Cosmos** are kicking off the new year with discounts on some of the brands’ most popular bucket list tours.

Travellers can take advantage of savings on a range of Globus tours until the end of next month, leading in from \$2,799ppts.

Examples include reductions on the ‘Introduction to Ireland’ adventure, offering discounts of \$100 per person on a tour of some of the country’s “best sights, scenery, and accents” across seven days.

The promotion also applies to 20 Cosmos tours, which are now available for \$2,000 per person, as well as ‘The Lisbon, Seville, & Madrid’ tour covering Spain and Portugal in nine days, exploring some of Iberia’s must-see sights, including the Plaza de Espana and Belem Tower.

CLICK HERE for more information on the Globus tours promo and **CLICK HERE** for more on Cosmos savings.

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IHG pivots to Crowne in SA

A **STRONGER** than anticipated demand from corporate and premium leisure guests has seen IHG Hotels & Resorts undertake a dramatic pivot in South Australia.

The hotelier had previously flagged the opening of the 130-room Holiday Inn & Suites Mawson Lakes by the end of last year (**TD** 04 May 2022), however the development has been rebranded this week to the more upmarket Crowne Plaza offering.

IHG has also flagged a new opening date for the newly named Crowne Plaza Mawson Lakes in the second half of this year, with the property to feature an extra 25 rooms than originally planned, now totalling 155.

The South Australian project in the north of Adelaide is the result of a partnership between IHG and property development and design companies Pelligra Group and ONE7.

"We are delighted that Ross



[Pelligra] and the Pelligra team envision such a positive outlook for the premium travel segment in Australia, leading them to invest in elevating this asset to the premium sector," IHG Hotels & Resorts Australasia & Pacific MD Matt Tripolone said.

"This move brings exceptional iterations of the Crowne Plaza brand to Adelaide."

The pipeline is healthy for the Crowne Plaza brand in Australia, with Crowne Plaza Melbourne Carlton and Crowne Plaza Shell Cove Marina to open this year, while the Crowne Plaza Geelong has been flagged for 2026. **AB**

Pictured: A render of how the upcoming Crowne Plaza Mawson Lakes will look when completed.

MSC to woo Kiwis

MSC Cruises has bolstered its sales team across the Tasman this week, appointing Alka Thapar to the role of Business Development Manager for New Zealand.

Thapar brings with her a wealth of experience in the travel sector across blue chip brands such as Princess Cruises, Rail Plus, Air NZ, Globus and Hawaiian Airlines.

Her remit includes both nurturing existing partnerships and helping to raise the profile of the cruise brand with Kiwi agents and travellers.

Korean health check

DFAT is advising Australian travellers to South Korea that they "may" be required to register on the Korean Q-code quarantine registration system prior to arrival, after scrapping the system in Jul last year.

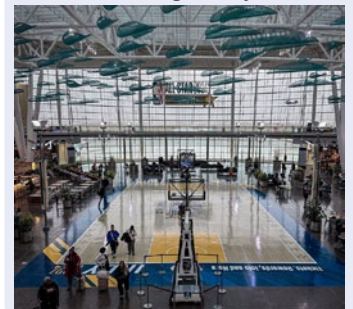
The government also suggested Aussies may need to complete a health questionnaire on arrival.



Window Seat

A **FULL-LENGTH** basketball court has been installed in the middle of Indianapolis International Airport (**pictured**) to welcome fans to next month's highly anticipated NBA All-Star Weekend, which is set to be held in the city.

Passengers will unfortunately not be able to play on the court, but they will be able to walk on it, and take photos while they wait for their flight - rejected!



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AIRLINE BODY CRITICAL OF AIRPORT COLLABORATION

AUSTRALIA'S peak airline advocacy body says it is "disappointed" in the lack of interest from airports in working collaboratively on the issue of Sustainable Aviation Fuel and the broader push for net zero.

In its submission to the *Aviation Green Paper*, Airlines for Australia and New Zealand (A4ANZ) said "perpetuating myths" and overstating integration challenges was distracting from constructive conversations on SAF policy and preventing genuine progress.

The A4ANZ submission criticised airports for highlighting issues such as fuel blending infrastructure duplication despite a broad agreement that blending should take place either at the refinery level, or at terminals.

A third option of blending fuel



on-site at airports is considered the least desirable option.

"Given that SAF requires blending with conventional jet fuel - in the short- and medium-term at least - it will be critically important to explore how existing refineries and fuel producers can work with industry to provide

into-wing solutions for airlines to facilitate the utilisation of SAF," the submission reads.

A4ANZ said that because SAF is currently chemically identical to existing fossil jet fuels, duplicating blending infrastructure on-site at an airport is unnecessary.

Irrespective of the final blending

point, A4ANZ said significant government investment must be coupled with supportive policy and financial incentives to make adoption of SAF financially viable for airlines.

The recently released *Aviation Green Paper* highlighted that SAF carried a cost of up to six times that of conventional jet fuel, with airlines unable to absorb this.

Europe's World Economic Forum recently cited government mandates alone as insufficient to unlock investments in the SAF supply chain.

This was despite some airlines in France attempting to recoup costs from travellers via a levy built in airfares, despite a general understanding this alone would be insufficient to recoup costs associated with the uptake. *ML*

Riders on the sun

ARDENT Leisure's Dreamworld theme park is now home to the largest photovoltaic system at any Australian theme park, thanks to a new deal with Origin Energy.

The system is expected to generate 708kW of solar-powered electricity for Dreamworld, which equates to more than a fifth of its annual power usage.

Solar power is expected to reduce Dreamworld's carbon emissions by 21% per year.

Cathay welcomes new SAF partners

CATHAY Pacific has joined forces with like-minded organisations to promote the use of sustainable aviation fuel.

The carrier is welcoming three new partners into its Corporate Sustainable Aviation Fuel Programme, including its first non-govt organisation, the Business Environment Council.

Cathay Pacific's Corporate Sustainable Aviation Fuel Programme is also welcoming two cargo customers to the initiative, Dimerco Express Group and Yusen Logistics.

The three organisations will join Cathay in promoting the wider adoption of renewable energy by the aviation industry, to decarbonise business travel.

"We have received strong support from our corporate and cargo customers since the launch of our Corporate SAF Programme," Cathay Group Chief Executive Officer Ronald Lam enthusiastically reported.

"We have also established new SAF deals in the broader Asia region to convey a clear message to the supply chain".

Amadeus joins

AMADEUS is set to bring travel technology expertise to the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, as the first technology company to join the industry body.

The Spanish multinational said it sees great potential to work alongside and connect with hospitality industry stakeholders and contribute on the journey to the Alliance's goal of net positive hospitality.

The membership comprises 27 hotel companies.



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Check out which destinations are trending **HERE**

Travel & Cruise
Weekly

What's all the fuss in Buss?



HILTON Garden Inn Busselton (pictured) has opened in the north of Western Australia's Margaret River region.

The highly anticipated 112-room hotel is located on the shore of Geographe Bay, and is just a few minutes' walk from the Busselton Jetty and the centre of town.

It features a heated outdoor pool, a 24-hour fitness centre, multiple events spaces, as well as an on-site restaurant.

The hotel was scheduled to open two years ago but was delayed (**TD** 22 Dec 2022).

It has joined other Hilton properties in the state, including DoubleTree by Hilton Perth Northbridge and Parmelia Hilton Perth, DoubleTree by Hilton Perth Waterfront, and Hilton Garden Inn Albany.

The opening continues a tourism boom for Busselton, following the recent launch of an underwater sculpture trail at the end of the famous Jetty.

Sydney is also set to join Melbourne with a direct Jetstar

Airways service to the region, which will launch in Mar (**TD** 16 Nov). *MS*

APT serves up 11

APT will once again promote itself during the Australian Open, with the tour operator entering its 11th consecutive year as a sponsor of the tennis tournament.

The tour operator's logo will prominently feature on the Nine Network's broadcast, during its "set highlights" and "squeezebacks", which will be complemented by television commercials, TV billboards, and extended video content.

The sponsorship will be aligned with APT's 'Discover the New' campaign, which urges travellers to explore new experiences and "go beyond the expected" with the tour operator.

Chief Marketing Officer Jason Shugg said the campaign "encourages inspiration and excitement".

Azul stays loyal to EK

EMIRATES and Brazil's Azul Linhas Aereas Brasileiras S.A have launched a reciprocal loyalty program this week, allowing each of the airline's frequent flyers to earn and redeem miles across their joint network.

The latest tie-up arrives after the carriers launched a codeshare partnership in 2021 (**TD** 19 Aug 2021) to enhance connectivity from eight cities in Brazil to Emirates' network via Sao Paulo.

Cheshire's new grin

THE Cheshire Cat Boutique Motel in Palm Beach on the Gold Coast is preparing to reopen after undergoing a "luxé nostalgia" refurbishment.

The new-look property offers seven fully appointed queen rooms, each with a unique style, as well as a two-bedroom bungalow with a kitchen and living space.

One of the highlights of the motel is the pool deck, 'Le Plunge', which is lined with greenery and cacti, Tuscan-rendered concrete surrounds and a terracotta tiled circular plunge pool.

Viking China access

VIKING has announced three new voyages, ranging from 10 to 20 days, which offer guests exclusive access to China in 2024.

The itineraries will run from Sep to Nov on *Viking Yi Dun* (formerly *Viking Sun*), including a 15-day Classic China & the Coast sailing, which includes an opportunity to see the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Terra Cotta Warriors and other iconic landmarks.

Find out more about the new journeys **HERE**.

MONEY

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

AU\$1 = US\$0.666

THE Australian dollar is lower against most majors this week after the currency reacted adversely against the People's Bank of China's introduction of new liquidity policies which saw the nation hold its medium-term lending rate, instead of an expected cut.

The disappointment has led market pundits to suggest the Aussie may have already peaked this week, but will likely continue to rally this year.

Wholesale rates this morning.

US	\$0.666
UK	£0.523
NZ	\$1.074
Euro	€0.608
Japan	¥97.09
Thailand	฿23.27
China	¥4.743
South Africa	12.44
Canada	\$0.894
Crude oil	US\$78.29

Sail Croatia trio

SAIL Croatia has expanded its yacht fleet this week following strong demand for its Private Yacht Tours.

The United Kingdom-based cruise line will welcome two new luxury catamarans and a brand-new yacht in time for the start of the summer season, in addition to its previously announced new luxury cruise ship.

The three new vessels will offer travellers a series of seven-night private yacht tours.

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