

### Today's issue of TD

*Travel Daily* today features five pages of the latest travel industry news, plus a product update from APT.

### Learn about APT

**AGENTS** can learn more about APT's two new European river cruise ships *APT Solara* and *APT Ostara* in today's Product Profile. Designed in Australia, the sleek new ships will debut in 2025. See **page six** for more details.

### SIA self-famil fares

**TO CELEBRATE** the deployment of its widebody Airbus A350-900 to Cairns from 31 Mar, Singapore Airlines is offering Aussie agents access to a range of special Self-Famil Fares.

Agents can enjoy 40% off selected airfares between Cairns and any SIA destination, for travel between 31 Mar-30 Nov 2024. Register **HERE** by 11am 29 Jan.

## Victoria's Turkish delight

**TOURISM** officials across Victoria united in euphoria at the news Turkish Airlines will launch flights from Istanbul to Melbourne beginning from Mar.

The formal announcement confirms what has been one of travel's worst-kept secrets and follows an earlier reveal from a statement to investors earlier this month (**TD** 08 Jan).

Turkish Airlines will initially fly from Istanbul to Melbourne via Singapore three times weekly using a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, landing in the Victorian capital on 16 Mar and marking the sixth continent served by the carrier.

Melbourne Airport Chief of Aviation, Jim Parashos, said he is thrilled to welcome the first European airline to link Australia.

"Istanbul is the only city to straddle two continents and has always been an important trading post, but it is now also one of the most important transit hubs in

the world," Parashos said.

"It's no surprise that Turkish Airlines has chosen Melbourne as its first Australian destination, given we are home to the nation's largest Turkish community and our position as the capital of food, sport and culture."

Victorian Minister for Jobs and Industry, Natalie Hutchins, said the ability to lure a major airline like Turkish Airlines was a huge win for Victoria.

"It shows the strength of our tourism and export markets, whilst boosting local jobs across our state," Minister Hutchins said.

Visit Victoria CEO Brendan McClements said the new flights will be a major boost to tourism.

"It will bolster our efforts to keep building the visitor economy, which reached a record-breaking \$36.9 billion in expenditure in the year ending Sep 2023, up by 39% compared to the year ending Sep 2022." *ML*

## New CLIA Chairman

**ROYAL** Caribbean Group President and CEO, Jason Liberty, has been named CLIA's Global Chair for 2024-25.

Liberty succeeds MSC Cruises' Executive Chairman Pierfrancesco Vago in the role.

The news caps off a massive few days for Liberty, who has just overseen the debut of Royal Caribbean's new mega-ship *Icon of the Seas* - full coverage from the launch on **pages two, three and five**, and in *Cruise Weekly*.

## Kimberley on Coral

**CORAL** Expeditions has released a comprehensive 2024-25 guide to Kimberley cruising, with digital copies available **HERE** or printed versions open to order.

The 18-page program features highlights of the voyage, detailed maps, information on the fleet and first-hand accounts written by expedition leaders and lecturers.

More new brochures on **page 5**.

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## Aussies flocking to Japan

AUSTRALIAN travellers have proven there's no love lost with Japan, with full-year visitor data for 2023 coming close to levels seen prior to the pandemic.

New data released by the Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) late last week counted the overall number of Australian arrivals at 98.6% of pre-pandemic 2019 levels.

The result was particularly remarkable considering the short

time Japanese tourism officials had to market the country after borders reopened in Oct 2022 and vaccinations rules were scrapped in May last year.

Japan closed 2023 with a record month, with Dec seeing Aussie arrivals skyrocket 23% compared to the same month in 2019.

Increased airlift from Australian carriers including Qantas and Virgin Australia were key drivers of the strong results.

Qantas doubled services from Australia to Japan from 14 to 28 per week from Nov, while the new daily flight from Cairns to Tokyo with Virgin Australia is performing strongly.

Jetstar's forthcoming nonstop Sydney to Osaka route is also tipped to drive repeat visitation, with travellers able to easily reach a new part of Japan.

JNTO said it expects the 2023/24 winter ski season to also deliver strong numbers along with the ever-popular cherry blossom season from Mar-Apr.

JNTO Sydney Office Executive Director, Naoki Kitazawa, said the results confirmed what they already knew - Australians truly love Japan.

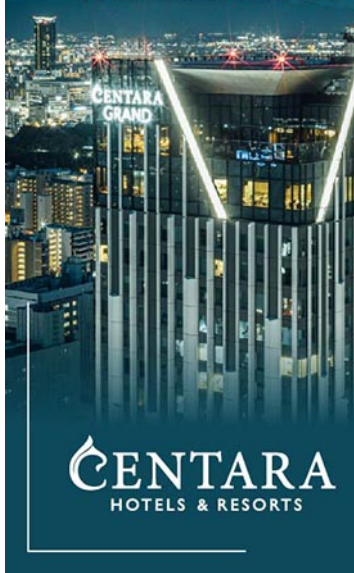
"The pace at which Australians have returned to Japan has heartened us, and we are so pleased to see these numbers bouncing back," Kitazawa said.

"Australians are warmly welcomed in Japan, and we cannot wait to see what this year brings," she added.

On a global scale, Japan welcomed 23 million tourists in 2023 while Dec was a strong month all round, closing at 8% above pre-pandemic levels. ML

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## Syd hotels hit a high

SYDNEY hotels achieved their highest monthly average daily room rate in Dec, according to new data from CoStar.

Overall occupancy for the month was 77.1%, representing a 9.9% gain on Dec 2022, with New Year's Eve seeing the most filled rooms (94%), followed closely by 02 Dec (93.8%).

## WA, India tie-up

DIRECT flights between India and Perth will be a key talking point for Western Australia's Deputy Premier, Rita Saffioti, during her visit to Delhi and Chennai today.

The tourism and trade mission will see Saffioti meet with major Indian airlines to highlight the demand for direct travel between India and WA.

The Deputy Premier will also host Indian travel businesses at a tourism stakeholder event, where she will showcase WA as an attractive holiday destination.

Travel Daily  
ON LOCATION



### AT SEA

Today's issue of TD is coming to you courtesy of Royal Caribbean Group.

THE second day of a special three-day preview cruise aboard Royal Caribbean's *Icon of the Seas* has been action-packed, with the media this morning treated to a news briefing with top executives.

Jason Liberty and Michael Bayley, CEOs of Royal Caribbean Group and RCI respectively, fielded questions from journalists about the selling points and challenges associated with building the largest cruise ship in the world.

For all of the latest news about *Icon*, see today's **Cruise Weekly** and **pages three** and **five** of today's issue.

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## Window Seat

**WHEN** discussing the logistical challenges associated with planning Royal's upcoming nine-month Ultimate World Cruise aboard *Serenade of the Seas*, CEO of International Michael Bayley recently let slip a potential oversight by the cruise line that could cause issues.

"It's phenomenal how much stuff needs to get done, we even had to put a dentist on board as part of our medical team," Bayley explained.

"But one of the things we said to people at a special launch dinner was 'we hope to have planned everything for you on a 274-night sailing and if we haven't please tell us', but the one thing I had to admit we failed to put on board such a long cruise was a marriage counsellor," he sighed.

## Demand for *Icon* is strong

**ROYAL** Caribbean's newest ship *Icon of the Seas* "ticks all of the boxes" for the cruise line's demographic and demand around the world will continue to grow, President and CEO of Royal Caribbean International Michael Bayley (**pictured**) believes.

"We're enormously proud of *Icon of the Seas*, it has been a long journey of seven years and the planning team has been through a lot...but the demand we are seeing has been unbelievable and we are extremely excited by that," Bayley told media aboard the ship.

"The vessel speaks a lot to our company culturally, the way we wake up every day dreaming about how we can do things better...so we feel like all of the new features and spaces that we have created are just right for our market," he added.

While the size of *Icon* has attracted plenty of headlines,



CEO Jason Liberty was keen for travellers and agents to understand that innovation is what's at the heart of the new design and not its proportions.

"Innovation is in our DNA," Liberty said, adding that understanding what cruisers want today and tomorrow is what the line continues to be about. **AB** More details in **Cruise Weekly**.

## Recovery on track

**TOURISM** in Tropical North Queensland is continuing to recover following the reopening over the weekend of the Great Barrier Reef Drive, which links Port Douglas and Daintree.

The coastal route is expected to increase the number of visitors to the region, with the daily ferry service from Cairns and the scenic inland route via Mareeba and Mount Molloy also back online.

## Greener Ayers Rock

**VOYAGES** Indigenous Tourism Australia is celebrating Ayers Rock Resort becoming the first tourism business of 2024 to be ECO Certified by Ecotourism Australia.

The accreditation comes on the back of the installation of an onsite solar generation field, drive-thru recycling centre and wildlife conservation programs.

The mark comes as the property prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary this year.

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## Mind over Matterhorn at STM



**SWITZERLAND** Travel Mart 2024 Winter Edition - the leading trade fair for the country's entire tourism offering - took place last week at Villars-sur-Ollon in the Swiss Vaud Alps.

Courtesy of Switzerland Tourism, the Australian delegation enjoyed amazing winter sports and world-leading Swiss hospitality during pre-familis in iconic ski village destinations including Crans-

Montana, Gstaad and Interlaken.

Travel across the country was exclusively via rail using The Swiss Travel Pass - the easiest and best value way to explore the country by train, bus and boat. *BP*

**Pictured** above with the fabled Matterhorn in the background is Ben Ellison, Sno'n'Ski; Casandra Foister, Skimax; Kevin Looney, Infinity Holidays and Jonathan Hume, International Rail.

### The Chat

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## Luxury Escapes' new agent hub

**AUSTRALIAN** travel agents will get first-time access on Luxury Escapes' new industry booking portal, allowing travellers to book the brand's exclusive deals via their travel agent of choice.

Advisors will be able to enjoy commissionable rates for Luxury Escapes' Limited Time Exclusive offers via the new Agent Hub, which is set to launch in Mar.

"We've always loved the trade and the ability to work with literally thousands of agents across Australia at scale is hugely exciting for us," the company's co-founder & CEO Adam Schab said.

"The launch of our new industry portal allows us to give access to agents to our very best product and importantly, pay agents for the incredible work they do helping customers every single day."

Travel agents can register their interest **HERE**.

## Aman jet journeys

**AMAN** has announced its private jet expeditions for 2024, which include multi-night stays at its properties around the world, in partnership with luxury Asian travel company Remote Lands.

A highlight of the new collection is the 21-day 'The Grandest Tour' from Tokyo to Greece, which will take guests on a journey across seven countries, including Japan, Laos, Thailand, Bhutan, India, Turkey, and Greece.

## Oakwood grows

**THE** Ascott Limited has expanded its Oakwood portfolio by more than 20%, making more than 20 new signings since acquiring the brand in Jul 2022.

Oakwood's presence now extends to 48 cities, including new destinations across Asia.

The brand will soon undergo a refresh to take it beyond serviced apartments, to more city hotels and even full-service resorts.

## COMMERCIAL MANAGER FULL TIME – QUEENSLAND



Viking is looking for an energetic, goal-orientated **Commercial Manager** to join our dynamic sales team on the road and manage the sales strategy development and implementation for Queensland.

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## Clean thinking in Messi call



**ROYAL** Caribbean Group Chief Executive Officer Jason Liberty has admitted he thought the initial proposal for Argentine soccer superstar Lionel Messi to be *Icon of the Seas*' official icon was a prank phone call.

However after some initial reservations about the sincerity of the offer, Liberty said he jumped at the chance for Royal's newest ship to be aligned with someone of Messi's stature in sport and who also possesses similar family values.

"Messi has an incredible presence, is obviously an incredible athlete and is in my opinion the best who has ever played," Liberty said.

"When we connected to discuss the opportunity we had the chance to spend time with him and his family...he really is an incredible human being and his family are just super humble people and focused on family.

"So not only has he gone out there and been the best soccer player in the world but there's actually something above that for him and it's his family."

Commenting on his appointment

as the official icon for *Icon* last month, Messi said the ship is "beyond anything else that's out there for family vacations, with incredible never-before-seen features, all designed for making memories together".

Messi's brand ambassador role followed a recent partnership inked by Royal Caribbean and Messi's football team Inter Miami CF, which has seen the cruise line become the club's official vacation partner. *AB*

## GKI economic boon

**AN ECONOMIC** Impact Assessment Resort by consultancy firm AEC has found tourism to Queensland's Great Keppel Island generates \$90.4 million in Gross Regional Product each year.

The report found the island was responsible for one-quarter of the region's tourism economy.

The island's futures are in line to get even better, with \$30m from the Queensland Government to rejuvenate the island's appeal to investors to build new eco-resorts and infrastructure for tourists and the island's residents.

## BROCHURES

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THIS week's Brochures of the Week is brought to you by **Abercrombie & Kent**.



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### A&K - Tailor-Made Journey 2024

Abercrombie & Kent (A&K) has gone to press with a new brochure showcasing its latest Tailor-Made Journeys for 2024. Designed for travellers who are pursuing a "true luxury experience", the tour operator's offerings cover a vast range of destinations across North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, the Americas, and Asia Pacific. For each tour, the 132-page booklet highlights personal insights, stories and experiences sourced from locals. Understanding that each traveller has their own preferences, A&K emphasises how its Tailor-Made Journey itineraries are fully flexible and customisable.



### Journey Beyond - Australia By Train 2025

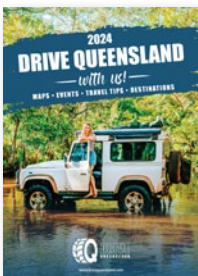
Travellers can immerse themselves in Australia's unique landscapes with Journey Beyond's range of rail journeys for 2025. The tour specialist is offering four different rail experiences that traverse the Land Down Under, including a brand-new, five-day Perth to Sydney itinerary on the Indian Pacific which includes immersive experiences in Kalgoorlie, the Barossa Valley, Broken Hill, and more. For the first time, travellers can enjoy the



new Gold Premium class across all three of Journey Beyond's all-inclusive train journeys, which offers a "new style of travel" and a range of added benefits.

### Drive Queensland - Drive Queensland 2024

Drive Queensland is encouraging road trip enthusiasts to enjoy a self-drive holiday in the Sunshine State with the release of its new brochure. The 40-page guide details popular destinations and routes throughout Queensland, as well as mapping out adventurous journeys in the outback and country regions, along with lesser-known areas of the Gladstone, Capricorn Coast, Mackay Isaac regions, and more. The



brochure also displays the state's vibrant events calendar for 2024, which travellers can use to help decide the timing of their trip.



# APT's new ultra-luxury river ships

In 2025, Australia's most outstanding global tour operator - as declared at the 2023 NTIA awards - will raise the standard of luxury travel with the launch of two brand-new, luxury river ships sailing Europe's Rhine, Main and Danube rivers.

With the plans conceived in Melbourne by the world-renowned, award-winning Hecker Guthrie design team, the APT Solara and APT Ostara will redefine luxury river cruising, thoughtfully designed with the Australian guest in mind.

Each ship will feature six world-class, all-inclusive dining options including the main restaurant, an intimate wine cellar, a relaxing conservatory, a casual dining option, an exclusive aft restaurant and rooftop dining.

In addition, all guests will benefit from complimentary in-suite dining. On the sun deck, guests will find a heated pool, alfresco dining, a bar and a lounge area with gas firepit.

A choice of three expertly designed, well-appointed suite options include Twin Window Suites, Balcony Suites, and Owner's Suites. Plus, guests can be assured of outstanding service and care thanks to one of the highest guest-to-staff ratios on Europe's rivers, with only 154 guests on board serviced by 60 dedicated crew.

The new luxury river ships proudly set a new standard in sustainability, ensuring greater emphasis on saving fuel, energy optimisation, and waste reduction.

The APT Solara is due to set sail from

March 2025, with the APT Ostara setting sail in June 2025. The popular 15-day Magnificent Europe cruise is just one of APT's itineraries to showcase the new fleet. More to be revealed in the coming months on APT's brand-new luxury river ships.

## BOOK NOW FOR 2025

APT's 2025 Europe Pre-Release itineraries are now on sale. For more information and to help your clients be among the first to sail aboard the APT Solara and APT Ostara, visit the **APT website** or contact the APT team today.



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