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TK rushing to MEL

TURKISH Airlines has brought forward the planned launch date on its new Melbourne route (TD 22 Jan) by two weeks to 01 Mar.

As previously reported, the route will debut with a Boeing 777-300ER before switching on 06 Mar to a 787-9 Dreamliner.

Int'l hotel bookings double

INTERNATIONAL hotel bookings as a percentage of all reservations made by Australians doubled in 2023 compared to the previous year, according to a new trends report from SiteMinder.

The hotel management software company found that 16% of hotel rooms in Australia were booked by international travellers, up from 8% last year.

The study also revealed that Australians are planning further ahead for hotel bookings, with the average lead time for a booking rising to 37 days last year from 32 days in 2019.

Prices for hotel rooms in Australia were also found to be increasing at a slower pace than the rest of the world, with rates last year rising by 4% compared to 2022, while in contrast the global average spiked by 11% over the same period.

Booking.com and Expedia Group were the two most popular booking sources for hotel stays, while Hostelworld moved back into Australia's top 12 for the first time in four years in line with a rise in deal-hunting travellers. **AB**

For more updates from SiteMinder's financial performance, see **page three**.

New Ama Aus team

AMAWATERWAYS has opened its new Australian office under the guidance of local Managing Director Australia and New Zealand, Steve Richards.

With a local call centre set to take its first calls this quarter, the European river cruise giant will be a prominent presence with a team of experienced Regional Sales Managers around Australia.

The team will include Brisbane-based former Holland America Line and Seabourn rep, Christine Oliver, joined by Kim Vaughan for the Vic/Tas/SA region and Kylie Chapman, who will handle NSW/ACT and NZ.

For the full story, see today's edition of *Cruise Weekly*.

HKTB CNY incentive

AGENTS have the chance to win one of two packed Chinese New Year themed hampers in a new incentive launched by Hong Kong Tourism Board, in partnership with Travel Agent Finder.

To enter, **CLICK HERE** to visit Travel Agent Finders' new Hong Kong Destination Blog to learn more about Hong Kong, where you can complete an entry form.

The blog features helpful tips and travel inspiration for those planning a visit to the city.

Entries for the hamper giveaway close on 10 Feb.

G'Day El Questro

ESCAPE into the rugged outback without leaving luxury behind at G'day Group's El Questro Homestead, with savings of nearly \$4,500 available on a three-night stay complete with your very own private chef.

For more info, see **cover page**.

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Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features six pages of industry news including our **Sustainability** page, plus a front cover wrap from **G'Day Group**.

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Adopt AI or perish: WTTC

ARTIFICIAL intelligence has the potential to streamline operations, improve customer experiences, and optimise pricing strategies in travel and tourism if adopted effectively, according to a new report from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

The global body stated that travel businesses must embody a greater “sense of urgency” to adopt AI technologies as the rate of digital transformation more broadly moves faster than any previous phase in history.

While the report, commissioned in partnership with Microsoft, highlighted the many benefits of AI, travel and tourism were found to be lagging behind other sectors in the adoption of the tech, with the study pointing to



a shortage of AI-skilled workers and limited AI infrastructure as primary reasons for the shortfall.

WTTC’s study also suggested a lack of formal AI strategies were causing a sluggish rate of adoption, as well as a tendency to be reactive rather than proactive in integrating AI.

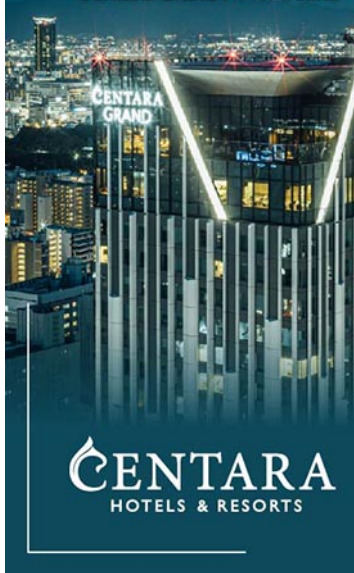
Prescriptions put forward for travel businesses by the WTTC include a need for more executives to champion AI across all departments, a heavier investment in onboarding AI specialists, and improved industry collaboration at every phase of the travel booking cycle to ensure maximum consumer benefits.

Travel companies still recovering from COVID were also advised to start with smaller AI investments at first such as data management, which can be scaled up later on.

Meanwhile the study also highlights AI’s capabilities to predict future travel demand patterns and provide valuable insights for travel and tourism stakeholders - more on [p5](#). *AB*

THE PLACE TO BE IN OSAKA

Centara Grand Hotel Osaka



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HOTELS & RESORTS

Skytrans purchased

QUEENSLAND regional airline Skytrans has been acquired by global ACMI (Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance and Insurance) provider, Avia Solutions Group.

Bought via a share purchase agreement, the deal is expected to close in Mar pending fulfilment of specific transaction conditions.

Avia Solutions Group CEO Jonas Janukenas said the company’s strategic objective is to expand into markets with the opposite seasonality to Europe.

In addition to Australia, the company plans to acquire seven more airlines in markets including Brazil, Thailand and Indonesia.

NYC ADL showcase

ADELAIDE-BASED travel agents eager to learn more about the sights, sounds and tastes of New York City are invited to an upcoming showcase event.

Hosted by New York City Tourism + Conventions and The Walshe Group, the lunchtime event will feature presentations, networking and a chance to win some fantastic prizes.

The event takes place 26 Feb at Level 2, The Gallery, 20 Waymouth Street, Adelaide from 11am-1pm - [CLICK HERE](#) for info on how to secure your spot.

MH ready for neo

MALAYSIA Airlines will bring 12 new aircraft online in 2024, with the first of 20 Airbus A330neos arriving in the third quarter.

Four of the new Airbus aircraft will be delivered this year along with eight Boeing 737-8 to bolster its short-haul network growth.

On top of operational efficiency, the new A330neo will improve MH’s environmental credentials through a 25% cut in emissions.

MEANWHILE, Malaysia Airlines has connected its NDC ancillary content for agents connected to the Sabre Travel Marketplace.

Agents can now access the carrier’s full suite of NDC content on top of traditional fare options.

Qantas agency

THE poor operating performance of Qantas in recent months has seen the airline call in management consultancy firm McKinsey to help arrest its sliding on-time results.

Reports suggest the firm has been inked on a 12-week contract to reform Qantas’ overall reliability, and follows Boston Consulting Group being brought in to help with customer service.

Monaco manager

TOURISM Garden has announced Claire Neil as the new Regional Manager Australia & New Zealand for Visit Monaco.

Neil boasts 20 years’ experience in tourism marketing working for DMOs and wholesale companies, including Atout France.



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Qantas global sale

QANTAS has released more than half a million discounted seats across most of its international network, including Paris, London, and New York.

Coinciding with the end of school holidays, the International Red Tail sale offers fares starting from \$529 return for economy and \$999 return for business.

The cheaper tickets are available from most Aussie capitals for travel periods between Feb and Dec this year, and include checked baggage and seat selection.

Take advantage of the sale before 05 Feb, **HERE**.

Switch off at Coffs

MORE than three-quarters of Aussie workers struggle to switch off from work-related messages and notifications while on holiday, new research from Coffs Harbour Airport has revealed.

A survey of over 1,000 Australians showed that 83% suffer from a "digital itch", admitting they sneak a peek at emails and messages when on holiday with loved ones.

The research also looked at travellers' goals for 2024, and found a third (37%) aim to switch off from work during their time off, and six in 10 want to spend more time outdoors in nature.

The survey is part of a push to highlight Coffs Harbour as an attractive holiday spot, positioning it as "the perfect place for Aussies to switch off".

Karnikowski to inspire at IWD



THE Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) has revealed Australian travel writer Nina Karnikowski as the keynote speaker for its annual International Women's Day (IWD) luncheon, which will take place in Brisbane on 07 Mar.

Karnikowski, whose career spans

over a decade, has authored several books, including her memoir *The Mindful Traveller*, and through her writing offers "a perspective on the positive impact that conscientious travel can influence on the world".

Themed 'Our Rising Stars', the event will also feature a panel discussion between aspirational future female leaders from within the CATO membership, with a focus on celebrating and empowering emerging talent in the travel industry.

Tickets to the lunch are expected to sell out quickly, **HERE**. JM

Entire's new brox

ENTIRE Travel Group has published its first Group Journeys brochure to showcase its new escorted European group touring 2024/25 program (**TD** 13 Jul 2023).

The 82-page, full-colour guide features 33 itineraries and nine destinations, as well as highlighting each tour's competitive "per day" pricing.

Travel agents can enter the tour codes found in the brochure directly into the search engine on Entire's website to retrieve full itinerary details - order the brochure **HERE**.

SiteMinder growth

ACCOMMODATION platform SiteMinder has increased its subscription revenue by 23.8% to \$60.3 million during the first half of the 23/24 financial year when compared to the previous corresponding period.

Transaction revenue also grew by 36.5% to \$21.4 million during the same period, fuelled partly by the addition of 2,500 new properties during H1.

In its financial update, the company also revealed plans to develop two new capabilities, Dynamic Revenue Plus and Channels Plus, which when buoyed by further AI integration will offer a smarter level of automation on its platforms.

Delivery dates for the new capabilities are flagged for the middle of this year.



Window Seat

WILDLIFE encounters are a great way to make your trip more memorable, but one tourist in Thailand recently decided to take this to the extreme, getting a little too close for comfort.

The Sri Lankan traveller was filmed riding around the Thai resort town of Pattaya in a white Bentley last week, and sitting beside him was a rather unusual companion - a lion cub, of all things.

Donning a yellow collar, the large feline appeared relaxed as it was seen cruising down the streets of Pattaya in the luxe car.

The unusual sight was caught on video and naturally racked up more than 2.6 million views on social media, attracting the scrutiny of authorities and prompting an investigation.

Police managed to track down the owner of the lion cub, who turned out to be a Thai woman.

Although she incredibly had a license to keep the feline, she was not permitted to take it to a different location without approval from local authorities.

It's understood the woman had "loaned" the cub to her friend, and as a result, she was charged under the *Wild Animal Conservation and Protection Act 2019* and could face a fine of up to US\$2,800 and a year in jail.

Apparently it is perfectly legal to own exotic animals like lions in Thailand, as long as they are registered - and as long as you can cough up the US\$14,000 it will cost to buy one.



The Chat with Jenny

Travel Daily

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Digital IPC long overdue

AUSTRALIA needs to follow the lead of New Zealand and invest in digitising the Incoming Passenger Card as a priority in the upcoming Federal Budget, with the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) ready to ramp up lobbying efforts.

Phasing out the onerous paper card that each person arriving in Australia must present to border officials is one of the key targets identified by the association in its

push to modernise and enhance the overall traveller experience.

“As the peak body for Australia’s travel businesses and the \$69 billion travel industry, ATIA hopes Government will listen to our calls for action on these measures,” said ATIA Chief Executive Officer, Dean Long.

In a wide-ranging Pre-Budget submission seen by **TD**, ATIA has also identified the Tourist Refund Scheme as another pain point where new efficiencies can be found if properly funded.

The scheme, which allows travellers to claim a GST refund on goods being taken outside Australia, remains a clunky and paper-laden process despite minor improvements introduced in recent years such as the ability to enter invoice details online.

Another target for ATIA in its 2024/25 Budget is ensuring the government does not view the Passenger Movement Charge (PMC) as an easy cash grab to shore up its balance sheet.

With the Government’s \$10 hike to the PMC taking effect from Jul this year (**TD** 10 May 2023), ATIA is increasing efforts to ensure the \$1.3 billion generated by the “tourism tax” will be spent on border security “as per the original intention”.

Long said extra funds generated by the increased PMC can be spent on improving resources for border agencies at Australia’s 60-plus seaports to support the booming cruise market. *ML*

Viking’s new cruise

BOOKINGS are now open on Viking’s new ‘Rhine and Main Explorer’ river cruise itinerary, which begins sailing from Apr.

The 11-day itinerary sails between Basel and Nuremberg, traversing the border between Switzerland, France and Germany.

Guests will enjoy nine tours along the way, enchanting castles and UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Walking on Flinders

GREAT Walks of Australia has added its first new itinerary to the collection in nearly seven years in the form of a six-day, 42km hike on Tasmania’s Flinders Island.

Run by Tasmanian Expeditions, the Flinders Island Walking Adventure - rated as an ‘easy to moderate’ trek accessed via a scenic flight from Launceston - takes in sweeping coastal vistas and is the 13th walk to join the Tourism Australia collection.

ATIA UPDATE

from Dean Long, CEO



WE HAVE

launched into 2024 with two comprehensive submissions to the Federal Government.

Our aim is clear: to secure a

prosperous future for all our members by advocating for measures that address the immediate needs of the travel industry and lay the groundwork for long-term success.

As you read in **Travel Daily** yesterday, our pre-Budget submission asks for dedicated resources and support for all our member types in the upcoming Federal Budget, including:

- Investment and training in cybersecurity including through the re-introduction of the Technology Investment Boost and the permanent extension of the Skills Training Boost.
- Government backing of traineeships of no less than 30% in wage subsidies across two years and reinstatement of the fixed monetary completion incentive of \$2,500 to employers and \$5,000 to trainees.
- Expansion of the passport application and renewal process to all ATAS businesses.
- Supporting CLIA Australasia

in the joint call to increase investment in Australia’s 60-plus seaports including border agencies to support the rapidly growing cruise market.

We also undertook a significant review of the costs that flow through to the greater travel and tourism industry with the continuation of the clearly outdated 80/20 rule, which is in desperate need of reform.

Let’s be clear. Everyone in the travel industry wants airlines to be successful.

But for that to be the case, we need to see reform to rebalance the financial costs from decisions made to cancel flights.

It is currently unfair that consumers, agents, tour operators and the greater travel industry bear the burden of these outdated rules.

These submissions are a testament to ATIA’s dedication to Australia’s \$69 billion travel industry and the pivotal role our members play.

This includes managing a significant share of the nation’s air and cruise bookings to providing indispensable travel advice.

It’s going to be an even bigger and better year and the ATIA team is so excited at what lies ahead in terms of working together with our members to make 2024 a success.



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Mandates go too far: Clark

SUSTAINABLE fuel mandates are “not the way to do it”, Emirates President Tim Clark stated recently in an interview with *Sky News*.

“We need to face reality,” he urged, pointing out that there is not enough SAF being produced.

“This stick approach in my view is not the way to get us across the line with regards to SAF,” he added.

Instead, Clark suggested nuclear energy as a more viable option for the future.

CX stands for SAF

CATHAY Pacific has strengthened its commitment to the decarbonisation of the aviation industry as co-initiator of the new Hong Kong Sustainable Aviation Fuel Coalition (HKSAFC).

Launched yesterday, the coalition aims to promote SAF uptake in Hong Kong by conducting whitepaper research on its development, engaging with stakeholders and the Govt, and raising public awareness of SAF’s benefits and challenges.

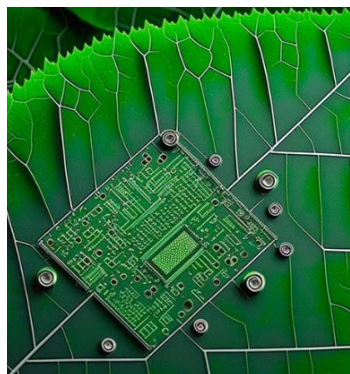
CX joins 12 other founding partners from across the SAF value chain, including the Airport Authority Hong Kong.

TRAVEL SECTOR MUST ADDRESS AI GAPS

FOR the travel and tourism sectors to achieve key sustainability targets while still incorporating AI into business processes, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) is calling on governments around the globe to better assess the impact of the new smart technology.

The recommendation was contained within WTTC’s new *Artificial Intelligence in Action* study, with the body highlighting key measurement gaps in the travel sector when it comes to forming important environmental policies for AI.

These include: the establishment of measurement standards for sustainable AI, expanding data collection on the environmental impact of AI, identifying specific AI



impacts, looking beyond energy use and emissions as the core environmental impact, and to improve transparency and equity of computing power policymakers to make AI part of the solution to slated sustainability challenges.

The study also suggested that action should be taken now beyond the macro level, with

travel companies encouraged to take steps as soon as possible.

“One practical way that travel and tourism businesses can minimise their emissions when using AI with their own datasets is to practice responsible data management,” WTTC stated in the report.

“Inefficient data storage practices can generate unnecessary energy and water consumption when the data is stored in cloud-based data centres...so by adopting responsible data management practices such as data minimisation, efficient data storage and data disposal, organisations can make a meaningful difference to their carbon emissions and decrease AI environmental footprint.” *AB*

Saudi makes big ecotourism stride

SAUDI Arabia has welcomed Zardun, a new eco-focused sanctuary resort in NEOM, the sustainable region currently being developed in the Kingdom’s northwest.

Designed to blend into its natural surroundings, the new destination overlooks the Gulf of Aqaba and will comprise of three distinct and luxurious boutique hotels, offering a total of 100 rooms and suites with sea and valley views.

Zardun will also feature a state-of-the-art experience

centre with a 360-degree observational deck, and offer several sports and leisure pursuits, including trekking, mountain biking, rock climbing, stargazing, yoga and more.

Guests will also be able to partake in educational and field programs on nature protection, conservation and re-wilding.

With the aim of offering “the ultimate premium ecotourism experience”, the resort will facilitate the re-introduction and nurturing of native animals, tree and plant species.

EcoZip Kaikoura

ECOZIP Adventures has announced the opening of its newest location on New Zealand’s South Island.

Set on a 3,000-acre farm near the coastal town of Kaikoura, the eco-adventure experience includes five ziplines ranging between 250-620m in length, with visitors to be accompanied by two expert local guides.

The thrilling experience offers a bird’s eye view of South Bay and the Seaward Kaikoura ranges.

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*T&C's apply. Greenland \$15,999 from price based on 'East Greenland & Svalbard' APMAGRE2406, 1/9/24 departure. Return flights ex. SYD, MEL, BNE or AKL. All-inclusive packages are fixed and may not be altered. Offer available until 31 March 2024 or until sold out. Hurtigruten Expeditions has a dynamic pricing system, prices are valid as of 24/01/2024, when the prices were pulled. Visit website for full details.

MONEY

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

AU\$1 = US\$0.661

LOWER demand for the US Treasury has dragged down the greenback against the global market overnight, enabling the Aussie to round up slight gains over a volatile week.

Meanwhile, the China Evergrande Group has been ordered to be liquidated under a Hong Kong court order, which could affect China's demand for Australian exports despite a limited presence in Australia.

Wholesale rates this morning.

US	\$0.661
UK	£0.520
NZ	\$1.078
Euro	€0.610
Japan	¥97.48
Thailand	฿23.43
China	¥4.732
South Africa	12.43
Canada	\$0.887
Crude oil	US\$83.55

AS resumes MAX 9

ALASKA Airlines' 737 MAX 9 fleet is now back in action after the carrier completed the final inspections on its first group of the beleaguered aircraft.

The airline said it expects to finish inspecting all 65 of its 737 MAX 9 planes by the end of next week (**TD** 15 Jan).

The update comes after the FAA approved a detailed inspection and maintenance process for all 171 of Boeing's MAX 9s with plug doors to return to flying.

Game, set & match for Stuba



STUBA'S Head of Sales for the APAC region, Rebecca Day, hosted key industry figures and some of Stuba's top-performing partners at the Australian Open tennis tournament last week.

The lucky group enjoyed a delicious dinner of fire-grilled seafood and meats at Rockpool Bar & Grill in the heart of Melbourne, before settling in to watch the women's semi-finals at the Rod Laver Arena.

The thrilling twilight tennis sessions saw Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff go head to head, with Sabalenka later going on to win the finals, while Zheng Qinwen claimed victory over Dayana Yastremska in a nail-biting match. *JM*

Pictured: Greg McCallum, Entire Travel Group; Joe Araullo, House of Travel; and Grant Campbell, TravelManagers.

Tauck back to Cuba

TAUCK is set to return to Cuba for the first time in four years with its seven-day 'Cuba: A Cultural Odyssey' itinerary, which has been updated and enhanced.

The journey begins with an overnight stay at the Hyatt Regency Coral Gables in Florida, before guests fly to Havana, where they will stay for five nights at the Grand Aston La Habana.

The initial six departures have already sold out, with 2025 departures to operate from Jan-Apr, and Oct-Dec.

Tauck will also launch new itineraries this year in Namibia and Italy, including an epic safari.

Limelight '24 opens

LIMELIGHT Arts Travel has opened up bookings for several of its tours in the second half of 2024, including the 15-day 'Essential Sicily' itinerary.

Priced from \$10,950pp, the tour showcases the best of Sicily's 3,000-year heritage, with long stays in Siracusa and Palermo, plus visits to Catania and Caltagirone.

Travellers can now also secure their spot on the 13-night 'Music in Venice' journey, which departs 18 Sep, and the 12-night 'Kyoto & Tokyo' tour, which includes long stays in two of Japan's most popular cities.

For more information or to make a booking, **CLICK HERE**.

Finnair cans flights

FINNAIR is expected to cancel around 550 flights this week due to a labour union strike against the Finnish Government, set to take place 01-02 Feb.

The oneworld carrier stated, "the political strike will have a significant impact on Helsinki Airport's operations and on Finnair's flight operations".

Customers who are affected will be offered alternative services, Finnair said, with the flight cancellations to be implemented in its systems one flight at a time, starting from today.

The strike follows a string of protests by Finnish labour unions in recent months.

Unpleasant flying

TWO-THIRDS of travellers have endured an unpleasant experience during a flight, according to new research from comparison site, Finder.

The survey of 1,063 Australians, which Finder equated to 13 million people, found the most common complaint, cited by 44% of respondents, was a screaming child, while 40% said somebody kicking their seat affected them.

Other annoyances on the list included hogging the armrest or having a smelly person alongside.

Among the surveyed pool, 75% of Gen Z reported an unpleasant experience, leading the way over 65% of millennials and 59% from the Baby Boomer generation.

Finder Insurance expert Gary Ross Hunter said a bad plane trip could be "hectic" but that a travel checklist with items such as noise cancelling headphones, a pillow and adequate insurance can make travelling a little easier.