

## Today's issue of TD

*Travel Daily* today features seven pages of news including our **Corporate Update** and a feature for **Int'l Women's Day**.

## Celebrating women

**TODAY** is International Women's Day and to mark this important occasion on the calendar, *Travel Daily* has dedicated an entire page to initiatives undertaken in travel to improve outcomes for women.

While there is clearly more work to do to close the gap between men and women on a range of important criteria, it is also heartening to see how some brands in the travel sector have taken up the challenge to achieve this as fast as possible.

See **page five** for more updates.

## Travel missing the point

**TRAVELLERS** are being blinded with amenities and losing focus on truly seeing destinations as the primary reason for travel claims G Adventures founder, Bruce Poon Tip.

Speaking this morning on stage at the 'A Force For Good' event in Sydney, Poon Tip said the industry has become lost amid distractions relating to amenities and the endless quest for growth and the "promise of infinite profits".

"We're travelling to the 40 poorest countries in the world and the most in-need citizens on the planet, and we're buying luxury holidays," Poon Tip said.

"But the business model doesn't work if the local people aren't benefiting from people being in their country," he claimed.

The G Adventures Founder and champion of community tourism said that this quest for consistent and strong shareholder returns leads to aggressive discounting and turns into aggressive buying, which places pressure on small communities who rely on tourism as their livelihood.

Poon Tip referred to a study by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) which found that on a global average of every \$100 spent on tourism in a country,

only \$10 of that spend stays in a country's local economy.

"That's not a sustainable model," Poon Tip said.

"We're missing an opportunity to be a transformational industry.

"Imagine that we're in an industry where we're taking people to the poorest countries in the world, and by changing our business model slightly and making sure local people benefit, we can transform lives."

Poon Tip said tourism has mixed up the difference between 'comfort' and 'comfort zones', with some hotels abandoning the relevance of destination in favour of amenities to make people comfortable, such as by offering consistent experiences regardless of where in the world they are.

"You want [your customers] to be comfortable, you want to offer comfort, but when you offer it to a point where it's not taking people out of their comfort zone, you're robbing them of experience, you're robbing them of the ability to learn from a destination." ML

## QR unveils AI crew

**QATAR** Airways is claiming to be the first carrier in the world to develop holographic cabin crew.

Showcased at ITB Berlin 2024 this week, the virtual flight attendant, labelled Sama, is powered by AI and has been interacting with attendees of the tourism trade fair in Germany.

Qatar is confident Sama will continue to learn and develop over time to improve responses to passenger queries, at this stage being capable of delivering real-time answers about destinations, Qatar services and travel tips.

"This is a monumental point in spearheading the successful synergy between technology and human connection - not only for Qatar Airways, but also for the industry at large," Vice President Marketing, Babar Rahman, said.

## Big role for Small

**INTREPID** Travel has appointed Simon Small to the role of Key Partnerships Manager, ANZ.

Small will be charged with looking after the Qld and NSW markets, with a particular focus on Flight Centre relationships.

"I'm looking forward to growing the brand and helping it achieve its goal of becoming a billion-dollar company...I can't wait to share the brand with as many people as possible," he said.

The new recruit arrives with three years of experience working at Flight Centre as a Team Leader and Travel Consultant, and he will work remotely based in Brisbane.

## QF the third most distrusted brand

**THE** only travel brand to feature in Roy Morgan's latest brand distrust report was Qantas, with the carrier finishing third in the undesired top 10 ranking for the 12 months to Dec 2023.

The airline only managed to beat Optus and Facebook's parent company Meta home in the list, with both companies enduring well-documented headlines relating to privacy issues around customer data.

It is a major fall from grace for Qantas, which until the last couple of years, used to feature regularly in Roy Morgan's top 20 most trusted brands list.

Bunnings was ranked the most trusted brand in the country, followed by Woolworths.



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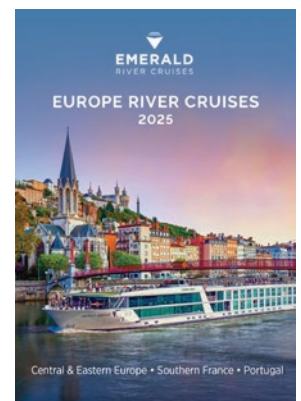
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## Govt on board with cruise

THE rebounding cruise sector was docked front and centre for key government officials on board Celebrity Cruises' *Celebrity Edge* vessel at Circular Quay this week.

Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) joined the Australian Cruise Association and Celebrity to host the quarterly National Visitor Economy Stakeholder Forum, where CLIA Australasia Managing Director, Joel Katz, highlighted once again how important the industry is to the country's economy.

"The resurgent cruise industry is worth \$5.63 billion to the Australian economy and supports the equivalent of 18,000 Australian jobs - bringing renewal to dozens of tourism destinations around the country," Katz said.

"Cruising has been the star performer in Australia's tourism recovery and the current summer season is among the most successful we've ever had in this



part of the world," he added.

While CLIA and the ACA have been vocal in sending the message to government that cruising is key to the economy, the forum this week provided a rare opportunity to deliver the message first-hand.

**Pictured:** Tim Jones, Celebrity Cruises VP & MD of Australia & APAC; Samantha Palmer, General Manager of Austrade's Visitor Economy and Client Programs Division; Joel Katz, CLIA Managing Director in Australasia; Jill Abel, Australian Cruise Association Chief Executive Officer; and Mikaela Wangmann, Tourism Advisor to the Minister for Trade and Tourism Don Farrell. AB

## EY enjoys a big '23

ETIHAD Airways has announced a AED1.4 billion (A\$580 million) operating result for last year, with the carrier conveying around 40% more passengers than in 2022.

Pax revenue increased by AED4 billion (A\$1.65 billion) to AED16.7 billion (A\$6.87 billion), with Etihad carrying 14 million fliers, up from 10 million on the previous year.

Total revenue reached AED20.3 billion (A\$8.35 billion), compared to AED18.3 billion (A\$7.53 billion) in 2022, on an overall load factor of 86%, compared to 82% the year prior.

Non-fiscal highlights included the launch of 15 new destinations, such as Lisbon, Copenhagen, Kolkata and Osaka, and adding 14 aircraft (four of which were A380s), to support a roughly 30% growth in available seat kilometres.

Etihad also revealed it hired more than 2,300 new employees last year.

## Qantas unlikely to throw pax a bone

WHILE Virgin Australia this week unveiled a plan to allow pets to fly with passengers under select conditions (TD 07 Mar), don't expect Qantas to follow suit any time soon.

When contacted by *Yahoo News* for a response, both Qantas and subsidiary Jetstar declined to comment on whether there would be changes to pet policies.

At the very least, Qantas is making sure not to let the cat out of the bag regarding any changes.

## An Ovation for Aus

ROYAL Caribbean International has announced a new *Ovation of the Seas* sailing from Sydney to Singapore in Apr 2025, with pax able to book on a 13-night adventure with ports of call including Cairns and Darwin.

The cruise, which also visits Benoa, is available from \$1,380 per person for an interior cabin.

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## Rail Europe adds iryo

SPAIN'S high-speed train services iryo will be added to the Rail Europe portfolio from 15 Apr.

Initially flagged by *Travel Daily* last month (TD 06 Feb), Rail Europe CEO, Bjorn Bender, said the addition of iryo would empower travellers to explore more of Spain's rich history.

Spain has witnessed big changes take place in its rail networks in recent years, with several new operators creating stronger competition and spurring on greater innovation from legacy rail providers like Renfe.

## BNK upgrades

A TWENTY million-dollar upgrade of Ballina-Byron Gateway Airport has been unveiled.

Works will include an improved runway surface, a new approach slope indicator system, and the installation of energy-efficient LED lights on the runway.

The upgraded airstrip will help support the growth of jobs in the region, as well as local businesses and the tourism sector.

"Each year, our busy regional airport supports about 635,000 commercial passengers - this is expected to increase to over 900,000 by 2040," Ballina Byron Gateway Airport Manager, Julie Stewart, said.

"Our airport is a key gateway for visitors to the beautiful Northern Rivers region, but the airport is also essential to support emergency service aircraft during regional disasters," she added.

## Swift accessibility moves



AMONG more than 80,000 screaming Taylor Swift fans at the songstress's recent run of Sydney concerts was TravelManagers' PTM Melanie Whyte, whose mission to see the show was a little different to most.

As a Certified Autism Travel Professional, Whyte (pictured) put her skills to the test to make the show as safe and enjoyable as possible for her autistic daughter.

To do this, Whyte worked closely with staff at Accor Stadium to ensure her seats had a great view while still being partially shielded from potentially triggering lights.

Whyte's pledge to unlock all the joys of travel for families of neurodiverse children is a passion project and one made more

possible through the supportive culture of TravelManagers.

"When PTMs heard I was arranging accommodation and transfers for this trip, within twenty minutes, I had received phenomenal offers of support from colleagues across the greater Sydney area as well as from TravelManagers' National Partnership Office (NPO) team," Whyte beamed.

"Kids with autism deserve to see the beauty of this world as much as anyone else; they learn so much through travel."

After more than three hours of singing and dancing, Whyte said she hoped her efforts will inspire a greater number of families with neurodiverse kids to see the world together. *ML*

## Indonesia advice

TRAVELLERS heading to Indonesia next week are being advised by DFAT of transport disruptions during the Balinese New Year (Nyepi) on 11 Mar.

Ngurah Rai Int'l Airport will suspend operations from 6am on 11 Mar to 6am on 12 Mar.



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## Emirates air to sea

**CRUISE** travellers departing and arriving at Port Rashid in Dubai with German line TUI Cruises will enjoy seamless connection to Dubai Int'l Airport thanks to a renewed partnership.

Signed at ITB Berlin this week, the deal will see Emirates provide dedicated support teams to help cruise travellers move between DXB Airport and the cruise port.

In addition, Emirates will schedule European flight options convenient to travellers arriving on board a TUI ship.

The partnership will also see both companies develop and market a range of luxury cruise and tour packages that showcase the best of Dubai's luxe offerings.



## Virginia bullish on Aussies

**EXCLUSIVE**

**A LOVE** of oysters, wine, and adventure trekking are just some of reasons why the US state of Virginia is confident of luring back Aussie travellers in greater numbers this year.

Speaking with *Travel Daily* while in Australia this week, Christi Braginton, Associate Director, Global Media Relations and Marketing for Virginia Tourism, said that while Australia is a relatively small market at this stage, the tourism profile of Aussies suggest they are in the sweet spot for future visitation.

The state's tourism push currently highlights the outdoors as a major campaign pillar, with road trips in the mountains, nature walks, and wine tours making up the top tier appeal.

While Virginia's tourism body is yet to receive any formal statistics for 2023, 2022 figures show Aussie numbers to the state were

significantly impacted by the sluggish pandemic recovery.

Just over 8,800 Aussies made a trip to the state in 2022, well down on the close-to 14,000 who visited in 2019.

Despite the drop, Braginton said Aussies are a really important development market, and one that it will continue to pay closer attention to moving forward.

"Australia has definitely been a top 10 market going into the pandemic and it was steadily rising, but with the pandemic hitting hard the numbers definitely dropped more than we would have wanted," she said.

In total, Virginia received 443,000 overseas (excluding Canada and Mexico) visitors in total, representing a total spend of US\$1.1 billion.

The United Kingdom is the number one visitor market for Virginia, followed by Germany and France. *AB*



## Window Seat

**GREAT** Britain does a great job selling its tourism experiences but maybe it's doing too good of a job hyping some up.

According to new research by flight booking website Wingie, Warwick Castle, near Birmingham, has been labelled the world's most overrated tourist attraction.

Wingie studied TripAdvisor reviews for the top 50 tourist attractions in each country, with reviews of the 956-year-old castle most often featuring the words "disappointing", "expensive" & "not worth it".

Two other UK landmarks also appeared in the top 10, along with Elvis Presley's Graceland, a Hong Kong cable car ride and Kampong Phluk, a floating village in Cambodia.

## EXPERIENCE TASMANIA'S OFF SEASON AND WIN A SELF FAMIL

Tourism Tasmania invites Tassie Specialists to join them this March and April on a journey around the Apple Isle for The Off Season Webinar Series; sharing a taste of what Tasmania has to offer over the cooler months.

During the interactive webinars, participants will meet Tasmanian tourism operators, build their Tassie knowledge and have questions answered by local experts.

Webinar participants will be in the running for one of many \$2,000 Tasmanian self famil vouchers as well as an assorted Tasmanian tasting experiences.

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## Insight Women Only Tours

EXCLUSIVE

**INSIGHT** Vacations has launched a collection of Women Only tours, which feature nine itineraries for 2025 and take in destinations across Italy, Scotland, Portugal, Scandinavia, Egypt, India, and the USA.

The range aims to cater to the rising number of women who want to travel with like-minded women and forge new friendships, TTC MD Toni Ambler told **TD**.

## G empowers women

**TO CELEBRATE** International Women's Day today, G Adventures and its non-profit partner, Planeterra, have announced five new women's empowerment community tourism projects.

The initiatives include the Ban Ou Community Tourism Project in Luang Prabang, Laos, which will offer travellers experiences such as making Laos rice noodles and learning traditional weaving.

Travellers can now experience the new women's empowerment projects on various G Adventures trips, such as the 14-day Thailand and Laos Adventure.

## Intrepid Sri Lanka

**INTREPID** Travel is on a mission to support female empowerment through training and career development in the traditionally male dominated Sri Lankan tourism sector.

The operator has partnered with the Market Development Facility (MDF), an Australian Govt-funded program that promotes sustainable economic development, to help build capacity for female suppliers to become trip leaders.

With the goal of boosting Intrepid's female representation in Sri Lanka by 40-50% by 2025, the initiative will also support 10 scholarship candidates for the National Tour Guide License test.

The trips are geared towards the 50-plus demographic, who are seeking a "bit of comfort, but at the same time want to have an adventure and explore amazing destinations with other women".

That is why, in addition to top-selling destinations like the US, the tours allow travellers to explore more adventurous places like Peru, Morocco and Egypt with the "group support of 24 other women", Ambler explained.

"We really just wanted to highlight that we're going to... make it more a part of our product offering moving forward to celebrate female travellers and support them in the ways in which they want to travel," she added.

Ambler also revealed to **TD** that TTC will look to grow the Women Only offering to other parts of the world, as well expand it into the group's other brands, including Trafalgar and Contiki. *JM*

## Females flying high

**QANTAS** and Jetstar are highlighting the important role women play in the aviation industry on International Women's Day today, by operating three domestic flights with all-female teams.

From the pilots, cabin crew, engineers and airport ground team, to the dispatch coordinator, duty & load controller in the QF & JQ operations centres, the flights will be run entirely by women.

"It's really important to us that we get more gender diversity into all of our operational roles," Qantas Group Chief People Officer Catherine Walsh said.

In similar fashion, Virgin Australia operated its own special all-female flight today, with the country's first female pilot of a major airline, Deborah Lawrie, at the helm.

The flight departed MEL and arrived in BNE this morning, with around 50 female aviation students able to network with the operating crew upon arrival.

## Let us "seize" the day: Taylor



**TO MARK** International Women's Day, travel leaders have come together in Sydney for the highly anticipated A Force for Good event this morning.

Guests in Sydney will hear from a great line-up of speakers including Hurtigruten Norway CEO Hedda Felin; Amadeus Managing Director Kaylene Shuttlewood; Ponant General Manager of Sales and Marketing Deb Corbett; Uniworld Managing Director Alice Ager and more.

It will be followed by an exclusive afterparty on board *The Jackson* as it sails across Sydney Harbour this evening.

A Force for Good will also take place in Auckland on 11 Mar and feature inspiring speakers such as MSC Cruises Managing Director Lisa Teiotu; Lindblad Vice President North America Lesa Bain; Air New Zealand Chief People Officer Nikki Dines; Qantas Regional Manager Alex O'Connor; and Adventure World General Manager Caryn Young.

Founder Helene Taylor first launched A Force for Good in 2017 to support women in the tourism, travel and hospitality sectors and offer them the opportunity to network and share their experiences and ideas with one another in a key forum.

"When we embarked on this

initiative in 2017, the industry landscape revealed a stark reality - only 10% of senior leadership positions were held by women, despite comprising 70% of the workforce," Taylor told **TD**.

She added that in the last few years, more companies have begun demonstrating a stronger commitment to fostering change in the industry.

"However, while we celebrate these strides, there remains unfinished business; achieving true equality demands concerted efforts at every level, from directorship to the boardroom.

"We must continue to pave the way for future generations of leaders and steadfastly pursue pay parity to ensure fairness and opportunity for all."

Taylor encouraged companies to be inspired by TTC, where pay parity has now been achieved at 4.4%, while also suggested that ongoing training for female leaders will be crucial to encourage continuous learning, development and knowledge sharing in the travel sector.

"Let us seize this opportunity to drive meaningful change and create a more inclusive and equitable workplace for all," Taylor declared.

**Travel Daily** is a media sponsor of A Force for Good. *JH-M*

**CORPORATE UPDATE**

# AI to reshape biz travel

**WITH** business travel spending set to outpace pre-pandemic levels for the first time this year, Amadeus' latest *Business Travel Trends 2024* looked at several trends that are expected to shake up the sector in the near-future.

Produced in collaboration with Globetrender, the report starts by examining the impact of AI on corporate travel, focusing on the rise of AI personal assistants, which are pegged to "revolutionise self-booked trips".

Corporate travellers are expected to increasingly rely on these intelligent, 24/7 generative AI assistants, using them for everything from processing complex travel bookings to suggesting itineraries aligned with their business' policy.

Amadeus has also predicted a surge in nature-focused company retreats, with the once-niche market expected to surpass US\$500b by 2030 - spurred by a desire for camaraderie-building activities like white water rafting, archery workshops, and camping.

The report goes on to identify 'objective stacking' as another major trend, where businesses will cut back on single-purpose trips in favour of squeezing the most out of every trip.

Amadeus attributes this to increased pressure on employees to justify work trips, in light of company sustainability mandates, as well as higher travel costs.

The sector will also see the rise of 'blended itineraries',

which according to Amadeus, will "go beyond simple 'bleisure' trips" by "placing the employee experience at the heart", while a shift towards automated expenses and 'power networking' were also detailed in the report. *JM*

## Women are cautious

**THE** majority (88%) of female business travellers in Australia take safety precautions to enhance their security when travelling alone, according to a new study from World Travel Protection (WTP).

The findings of the survey of 500 Aussie corporate travellers, timed to coincide with International Women's Day today, show that the most common safety precautions include informing family or work of their whereabouts (39%).

Most respondents (63%) said they feel that travelling as a woman is less safe than travelling as a man, and more women (44%) express concern about the risk of sexual assault than men (29%).

"When making plans for travellers who identify as women, it's important to think about the social rules and safety of the destination they're visiting," said Kate Fitzpatrick, WTA's Regional Security Director EMEA.

Fitzpatrick added that it was encouraging to see 58% of women agree their employers are taking steps to ensure their safety while travelling.

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# Platinum's double act

**CORPORATE** and events travel company, Platinum Travel Group, has expanded its senior sales team in Western Australia with two new senior hires.

The company has welcomed Laura Lotter and Georgina Butterwood as new Perth-based National Business Managers.

In their new roles, Lotter and Butterwood will oversee sales, account management and supplier negotiations for Platinum's growing client roster.

Platinum Travel Group Chief Executive Officer, Andy Buerckner, said the company's new additions embody the core values of its client-focused execution and strong partnership support.

"Our people foster a supportive and collaborative culture that has consistently enhanced our customer experience.

"We are truly humbled to welcome Georgina and Laura to our team," Buerckner added.



The team expansion comes at a time of significant growth for Platinum Travel Group, which has seen a 30% jump in TTV and head count just this year so far.

Buerckner is pictured above second from right, flanked by Lotter, Butterwood and Platinum Travel's MD Sarah Szubanski. *ML*

## Biz class tax hike

**AUSSIES** travelling to the UK will have to fork out a \$435 'flight tax' on premium economy, business class and first class fares on their flight home, thanks to the latest increase to Britain's Air Passenger Duty (APD).

The UK Government said the hike, which takes effect in Apr 2025, is a "one-off adjustment" for non-economy pax to account for high inflation in recent years, and will be in addition to the APD's annual incremental rise on 01 Apr 2024, which will lift the tax to \$390 for long-haul international flights.

All premium economy, business class and first class travellers departing the United Kingdom on flights of over 5,500 miles will be slugged with the extra cost from 01 Apr 2025.

## NJE jets to Musgrave

**NATIONAL** Jet Express (NJE) has kicked off flights between Perth and the new West Musgrave Airport, located in remote Western Australia, using its Embraer E190 aircraft.

The service marks the third new airport for the Rex Group carrier in the past month, joining Gruyere and Gladstone on the NJE route network, and comes after the airline took delivery of its seventh E190 earlier this week.



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Holidaymakers can score return airfares to Noumea from \$529 from Sydney with **Aircalin's** Discover New Caledonia sale, which ends 28 Mar. Departures from MEL start from \$559, and BNE from \$579. Valid for selected travel dates throughout the year, the idyllic beaches and culture of New Caledonia await, with flight times no more than 3.5 hours from any eastern city. Call Aircalin on 9264 4866 to book.

**Wendy Wu Tours** is offering up to 50% off selected 2024 and 2025 tour departures to Japan, China, Southeast Asia, and India, with companions flying free. Available until 30 Apr, travellers can enjoy savings up to \$700 and \$650 per person on 2025 and 2024 departures respectively. Some of the popular tours including 'Japan Uncovered', 'Majestic Yangtze', 'Vietnam at a Glance', and more are included in the offer - for more details, contact WWT on 1300 727 998.

Jet off to Manila for as low as \$189 each way from Melbourne and \$199 from Sydney with **Cebu Pacific**. Valid for travel periods between 01 Aug and 30 Sep this year, bookings are available until the end of Mar. The airline is also offering up to 28% off on its GO Easy and Go Flexi bundles for the same period. Book your seats [HERE](#).

**On Foot Holidays** is back again offering keen walking holidaymakers another amazing offer, and this time, hikers will receive a free dinner feast in a castle high above the Rhine if they book by 31 Aug. Included in the self-guided 'Castles of the Rhine' walking adventure in Germany is an extravagant four-course dinner in one of the country's grandest castle hotels. The price of the tour starts from £1,245 per person (A\$2,061), twin-share - learn more about the itinerary [HERE](#).

Travellers can get their Polar expedition adventure off to an amazing start with up to A\$2,200 per person in air credit, coupled with savings of up to \$7,830pp on selected **Aurora Expeditions** departures in its 2024 Arctic and 2024/25 Antarctic seasons. To take up the offer, quote 'ADVDELA24' when enquiring, with a huge range of itineraries eligible for the deal. Learn more [HERE](#).

**Captain Cook Cruises Fiji** has launched a limited time early bird savings offer on its voyages to Tonga and Samoa departing in Aug 2024 and Mar 2025. Sailors are invited to explore some of the South Pacific's most remote corners and uninhabited islands aboard the newly refurbished *MS Caledonian Sky* with savings of 20%, plus a \$2,000 travel credit per person when they book before 31 Mar. Call 02 9126 8160 to learn more.

Savour the midnight sun with **Hurtigruten's** latest offering, with savings of up to \$1,300 now available on selected Svalbard Express voyages. The expedition line is also slashing up to \$750 from its 'Follow the Midnight Sun' expedition when travellers make their booking by 31 Mar. Learn more by calling 1300 151 392.

## TIME Qld ready for a big year



**INDUSTRY** mentors, mentees, recent graduates and alumni of the Travel Industry Mentor Experience (TIME) came together in Brisbane last week for the city's first networking occasion of 2024.

Attendees heard from guest speaker Cherie Canning, who shared how she turned learnings from a 17-year career in travel into her current leadership and personal development business, Luminare Leadership.

Canning spoke about the role mentors have played in her own personal and professional growth,

### Solomon competes

**SOLOMON** Airlines has reduced its Saver category international fees, with fares between Australia and the island nation now priced from \$125.

The carrier has also announced no change or cancellation fees for its Flex category fares, as well as 40kg checked baggage allowance.

The changes, which the airline said have been implemented to bolster its competitiveness, apply to tickets issued from 01 Mar.

along with some entertaining anecdotes including how she once found herself on stage with Thor himself - Chris Hemsworth.

TIME Queensland State Representative, Jacqui Tufala, said it was "a fantastic evening".

"Great to see familiar faces supporting the program and some new industry colleagues showing interest," Tufala said.

"We have an exciting year of TIME networking events planned and we look forward to seeing more Queenslanders accelerate their travel and tourism career."

The evening was sponsored by Flight Centre, Finnair and TTC (reps are [pictured](#)).

### Green eggs & cruise

**IN HONOUR** of Dr Seuss' birthday, Carnival Cruise Line will host Seuss-themed breakfasts on board Australian-ported ships *Carnival Luminosa* and *Carnival Splendor* during Apr.

Guests will enjoy, you guessed it, green eggs and ham for breakfast with famous Seuss characters Thing and Thing 2.