



Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features nine pages of the latest travel industry news including our **Luxury** page, an **ATG photo** page and a full page from **Inspiring Vacations**.

Ponant opens '25/26

PONANT has opened bookings on its 2025-26 Antarctica Summer season, with 40 departures across eight itineraries on offer from Oct 2025 to Mar 2026.

The sailings feature the Antarctic Peninsula, the Falklands, South Georgia, the Ross Sea, Chilean fjords and the Valdes Peninsula, with daily shore excursions including snowshoe hikes, polar diving also on offer.

Learn more about the latest Antarctica voyages [HERE](#).

Ruffles steps down

ONLY eight months into her stint as Corporate Travel Management's (CTM) CEO of Australia/NZ/Europe and Asia, Laura Ruffles has stepped down from the position due to a "personal health issue" (**TD** breaking news yesterday).

The decision was made with immediate effect, and has created a management restructure that will see all regional CEOs for the moment report directly to MD Jamie Pherous.

However, Ruffles is not completely severing ties with CTM, with the experienced executive remaining on board to lead a customer-facing technology initiative, in line with a five-year product strategy.

"I would like to thank and acknowledge Laura's significant



contribution as an Executive Director and senior leader over many years and I am pleased she will remain involved with CTM in a pivotal role that provides the flexibility she needs at this time," Pherous said.

Ruffles arrived in the CEO role following a global restructure in Jul last year (**TD** 17 Jul 2023), which saw her promoted from Chief Operating Officer.

ATIA confirmed to *Travel Daily* that Ruffles will be remaining on its board. **AB**

Akorn gets Love

ABERCROMBIE & Kent (A&K) has announced Chris Love as new Head of Cruise for its destination management company network, Akorn Australia & New Zealand.

Bringing a wealth of industry experience, Love will take over from Anthony Brent, who will become Director of Cruise for USA & Canada beginning 06 May.

A&K has confirmed that Brent will remain in Australia until mid-Apr to show Love the ropes, allowing him to familiarise himself with all facets of Akorn's operations before the 2023/24 season Down Under wraps up.

APT's Last Chance

ADVENTURERS can take a further \$1,000 per couple off APT's existing deals on worldwide trips of 10 days or more in 2024, as part of its Last Chance sale.

Additionally, TravelMarvel has announced its Final Call 2024 sale, allowing customers to save an additional \$600 per couple on any tour of 10 days or more departing this year.

Both sales end 26 Mar.

It's okay to mention iFLY's Flights Club

TRAVEL rewards advisor iFLYflat has unveiled The Flights Club, its newest service described as "the ultimate club for business owners who love lying flat".

In what the Aussie company dubs an industry-first, The Flights Club combines tailored points earning strategies with personalised points flight bookings into a single and seamless travel solution.

Club members will be able to save between \$5,000-\$10,000 per flight by using points over cash fares, and can take advantage of one-on-one advice, travel planning sessions, and more.

There are three membership tiers available - find out more information [HERE](#).

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Graham departs FCTG

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group (FCTG) has confirmed the departure of Sue Graham (pictured), the Global Head of Product for its Independent division (**TD** breaking news).

Graham's exit follows the completion of her one-year contract, during which time she led the division's rapid growth.

A search is now underway for her replacement, with the role open to candidates in Sydney, Brisbane or New York City.

"It's been a great privilege working in this unique business alongside an exceptional team," Graham enthused.

FCTG Global Managing Director, Danielle Galloway, shared, "it has been an absolute honour to have Sue Graham on our team for the last year...she has been a driving force behind building a powerful product strategy."

"It's an exciting time for a new Global Head of Product to join



our independent business, with some incredible initiatives already in progress and many more on the horizon," she added.

At the same time, FCTG also announced several new preferred supplier contracts for Envoyage, the new principal brand for its Independent division (**TD** 27 Feb).

Addicted to Maldives; Titan Travel; Tasmanian Vacations; Beyond Travel; Railbookers; MW Tours; and Explore Worldwide have all signed new contracts with Envoyage in Australia. *JM*

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Qantas' Asia sale

AUSSIE travellers can take advantage of discounted airfares to popular Asian destinations, thanks to Qantas' latest sale.

The promotion includes Tokyo, Seoul, Singapore, and Hong Kong, with economy sale fares starting from \$639 return until 18 Mar.

Airbnb bans cameras

AIRBNB is set to introduce a worldwide prohibition on owners using security cameras inside rental properties from 01 May.

The decision follows protests from guests who claimed surveillance cameras were in use in common areas and not properly communicated at the time of booking.

Airbnb said the move would simplify rules on security cameras and prioritise guest privacy.

The updated policy also bans outdoor cameras that point inside properties, however doorbell cameras will still be allowed.

ON LOCATION

BANGKOK

Today's issue of **TD** is coming to you in collaboration with **Virtuoso**, which is hosting **Travel Daily** in Bangkok for the **Virtuoso Forum**.

DAY two of the 2024 Virtuoso Forum is expected to be highlighted by a keynote presentation from futurist business advisor, Bernard Salt. Salt earned headlines in 2017 for stating Millennials should eat less smashed avocado if they wanted to own a home.

More workshops and networking will take place before the conference concludes with a gala dinner and awards hosted at the Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok.

More news on **p4** and **p8**.

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Amadeus purchases payment partner

AMADEUS has significantly bolstered its payments credentials with the acquisition of the Spanish-based Voxel B2B transaction platform.

Purchased to augment the capability of its own payments arm Outpayce, Amadeus said Voxel's tech will enable travel sellers and other key trade partners to access a wider range of payment services.

One key goal of the purchase will be to increase automation so that travel agents can enjoy a more seamless invoice experience when dealing with partners like tour operators, TMCs, hotel aggregators, and hotels.

On the corporate travel front, Amadeus said it was also confident Voxel will be able to enhance customers experience by further automating travel purchases, from reservations to expense management.

Link's awesome foursome

LINK Travel Group's membership ranks are continuing to swell, with the invitation-only group yesterday confirming four new agencies are set to join (**TD** breaking news yesterday).

The latest members include Mettrex Travel in Melbourne, which will join Link's ever-growing collective on 01 Apr.

Another three - fellow Melbourne agency Lexus Travel, along with Sydney's Maxims Travel and Solve Travel Management, will all be onboarded by 01 Jul in time for the new financial year.

The suite of new members has also seen Maxims Travel Managing Director, Chris Goddard, become the newest member of Link's Advisory Board.

Link Travel Group was founded in May 2022 and is a joint-venture with Flight Centre Travel Group, The Goldman Group and Spencer Group of Companies.

The collective has been steadily



building momentum in its less-than two years of life, with the newest additions taking the group to 20 members operating 26 physical agency locations.

Other recent additions to the group include Adelaide's Complex Travel (**TD** 04 Jul 2023) and WA sports travel specialist Travel & Sports Australia (**TD** 05 Dec 2023).

Link Travel Group General Manager, Scott Darlow, told **TD** he was delighted to welcome the four high-performing agencies and that more were on the way.

"[Yesterday's] announcement is the first stage of our growth plan which we unveiled to our preferred partners in Nov last year," Darlow said. *ML*

Coffee and cruising

RIVIERA Travel and Virgin Voyages are hosting their BYO Coffee Cluster 30-minute webinar series tomorrow.

Toni Wythes from Travel the World will share Riviera Travel's curated range of river cruises winding through Europe, while Virgin Voyages' Pam Nielsen will discuss the cruise line's adult-only luxury holidays through the Mediterranean and the Caribbean for the 2024/25 season.

Register to attend [HERE](#).

Captain Cook deals

CAPTAIN Cook Cruises Fiji has announced earlybird savings on its voyages to Tonga and Samoa on board small ship *MS Caledonian Sky*.

For bookings made by 31 Mar, travellers can save 20%, plus enjoy a \$2,000 travel credit pp on 14-night sailings departing in Aug this year and in Mar 2025.

More details available [HERE](#).

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Two luxe days in Bangkok

MORE than 200 industry professionals descended on Bangkok yesterday for the start of the 2024 Virtuoso Australia & New Zealand Forum under the theme, 'Together for Tomorrow'.

Hosted at the Four Seasons Hotel at Chao Phraya River, the forum is set to run over two days with a significant array of speakers and professional development sessions.

The opening day saw outgoing General Manager Australia and New Zealand for Virtuoso (**TD** 23 Feb), Fiona Dalton, kick things off with a few words, while incoming GM, Greg Treasure, also talked up the luxury event before a raft of workshops & network sessions.

"It's day seven for me in the role but having had a week with the team in the Sydney office last week, a couple of things became abundantly clear," Treasure said.

"Firstly, what an extraordinarily energetic and talented team we have on the ground, and



the collaboration and support they get from the corresponding functions in the US.

"The other thing was that no matter who I spoke to, the amount of consistent feedback around the quality of our members and the spirit of collaboration...with our partners is just tremendous," he added.

Dalton added that the week will be about building on our past, celebrating past successes and shaping the collective future.

"We cannot rest on our laurels," Dalton warned.

"We are living in a rapidly changing world filled with challenges and opportunities such that today's decisions will profoundly impact our collective tomorrow," she added. *DF*

USA education sesh

VISIT USA's monthly webinar series is kicking off on 19 Mar, offering travel sellers an update on what's new in the country, including details on events, webinars and agent activities.

The sessions will include a 30-minute presentation plus a live Q&A component.

Two time slots are available, at 8.30am or 12pm AEDT - for more details and to register, see **HERE**.

JQ is Un-Bali-vable

JETSTAR Holidays has announced its biggest Bali sale yet, with four-night packages starting from \$420 per person from Darwin, and with more than 120 hotels to choose from.

The packages include return starter fares, accommodation, 20kg of checked luggage and standard seat selection, with some also including daily breakfast, cocktails, and spa treatments.

The 'Un-Bali-vable' sale ends 11.59pm AEDT 19 Mar, **HERE**.

A Swift hotel boost

TAYLOR Swift helped boost both Sydney's and Melbourne's hotel industries, with both cities seeing their highest average daily rate (ADR) in Feb for any month on record, according to preliminary data from CoStar.

Melbourne posted its highest occupancy and ADR levels on Sat 17 Feb at 91.8% and \$459.10, respectively, while Sydney's ADR levels hit \$527.52 on Sat 24 Feb, during the four days Swift was performing in the Harbour City.

Sullivan to report

THE Don't Forget Travel Group's Director Andrew Sullivan has scored himself a multi-country trip to Europe after taking out Rail Europe's 'Travel Advisor Reporter' competition (**TD** 22 Feb).

The Adelaide-based advisor, who is no stranger to video creation on his social feeds, will have the honour of documenting the benefits of travelling on the Eurail Global Pass.

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MEL busier than ever

MELBOURNE Airport welcomed more than 900,000 international passengers last month, setting a new Feb record and surpassing 2019 pre-pandemic levels by 2%.

Overall, a total of 2,859,942 travellers passed through the airport's gates over the four weeks - just 7,301 fewer than the Feb record set in 2019.

Those figures were boosted by scores of fans heading to Melbourne to see global music sensations Taylor Swift, Pink and Blink 182, not to mention the extra day of travel provided by the leap year.

Melbourne Airport CEO, Lorie Argus, said the strong international figures highlighted the need for further investment in airport infrastructure.

"We've already started work to upgrade our international facilities, including a \$500 million investment in a new state-of-the-art baggage system and a refresh of the arrivals hall," she said.

Aussies are going solo

TWO-THIRDS of Australians are planning to take a holiday on their own this year, new figures in Amex's 2024 *Global Travel Trends Report* has revealed.

Of the Aussies planning solo trips, 29% said they were looking to treat themselves with added extras on their next solitary journey, while 27% indicated they desperately needed a break from "the chaos of day-to-day life".

In some encouraging news for the cruise sector, the report suggested that hopping on a cruise ship was being increasingly viewed as a cost-effective way to take solo adventures.

One of the most attractive aspects of cruising for single travellers was the all-inclusive nature of many cruise brands, with 13% of respondents flagging resorts and cruises as great ways to travel alone overseas while not breaking the bank.

The Amex report also showed



that Aussies will spend an average of \$9,131 on leisure travel this year, while three-quarters of those surveyed said three trips were on the cards for 2024.

In terms of the major drivers for holidays, Aussies are pursuing bucket list dreams (31%) and events such as sporting fixtures and concerts (19%) above any other category.

One-third said they were keen to travel internationally for a big sporting/cultural event, with the upcoming Olympic Games taking Paris to the top of the list (24%), followed by New York (32%) and Miami (15%). *AB*

Yukon's heavy metal

TOURISM Yukon is turning up the volume in its new destination marketing campaign, enlisting local heavy metal musicians to highlight the Canadian Province's high-octane outdoor adventures.

Marketing for the upcoming winter features an original metal song performed on a frozen lake, overlaid with footage of outdoor activities in the Yukon region, including snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, dog sledding, ice fishing, snowmobiling and more.

Boeing 777x delay?

EMIRATES may not receive delivery of its Boeing 777Xs until 2026, the airline's boss Tim Clark suggested while speaking at the UK Aviation Club recently.

He cited the planemaker's safety issues as the reasons, however Boeing remains insistent that the twin-engine jets - which were originally supposed to launch in 2020 - will be ready by 2025.

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BNE plates up local

A BRAND-NEW 360° restaurant and bar, 'Local', has opened at Brisbane Airport to offer classic comfort eats, fresh seafood and salads made with produce sourced from sustainable and ethically-minded suppliers.

Designed to look and feel like a Queensland beer garden, the venue offers wine, craft beer and regional spirits from the state's local producers, distillers and brewers, as well as freshly made sandwiches and sweets.

BNE GM, Commercial, Martin Ryan, said the new venue "brings travellers the opportunity to enjoy a beautiful meal and refresh with a local beverage in a relaxed environment, whilst experiencing the warmth of Queensland hospitality right up until they board their plane".

'Local', which is operated by SSP, joins a slate of newly opened venues in the airport's domestic terminal, including McDonald's, MICA, and Soul Origin.

Le Roux skippers new role



HERITAGE Expeditions new Sales Manager Australia, Chris Le Roux, has already cast off to host 11 agents on an expedition famil.

Based in Queensland and working alongside Heritage Expeditions Head of Global Sales, Robert Halfpenny, Le Roux has been charged with growing the profile of the small-ship cruise company in Australia.

The first of three agent groups were welcomed on board the 140-guest *Heritage Adventurer* for part of the line's 15-day 'Best of New Zealand' itinerary.

Pictured back row: Philip van Dueren, Top Ten Treks; Lisa Dodds, itravel; Chris Le Roux, Heritage Expeditions; Leanne Johnston, TravelManagers; Karen Ridge, Mildura Travel and Cruise; Allan Hopper, Hopperound Cruise & Travel; and Maria Whitehead, Harbour City Travel.

Front row: Gang Du, Meichen Travel NZ; Alison Sharp, TravelManagers NZ; Lauren Jenkins, MTA Travel; Monica Stevens, Peregrine Travel and Torri Jarvis, Flight Centre. *ML*



Window Seat

IF YOU think you've got a 'cool' hairstyle, then you clearly haven't met the participants in Yukon's annual Hair Freezing Contest.

It's far from a historic tradition, having only begun in 2011, but now draws tourists from far and wide, eager to try in pursuit of a big cash prize.

Taking place at Eclipse Nordic Hot Springs in Whitehorse, the wintertime contest sees participants soak their hair in the hot springs before shaping it and letting it freeze in the -20°C temperatures.

Judges then assess each entry and vote on the most hilarious style photographed.

There's little chance of hypothermia, with participants kept warm in hot springs.

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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ATG celebrates its VIP partners across Australia

THROUGHOUT Feb and Mar, APT Travel Group (ATG) hosted VIP dinners across major cities in Australia.

These exclusive events celebrated the outstanding achievements of its VIP partners, demonstrating ATG's ongoing commitment to fostering strong relationships within the travel industry.

In addition to recognising excellence in service and collaboration, these events also shone a spotlight on exceptional consultants, 'Rising Star' agencies and 'Hall of Fame' agencies, further affirming ATG's commitment to acknowledging excellence at every level.

Each evening began with an opportunity for networking, followed by an exclusive session offering travel sellers valuable business insights.

However, the highlight of the evening was the celebration of the agents themselves, whose contributions have played a pivotal role in ATG's continued success.

ATG would like to thank all those who attended and it looks forward to further strengthening the relationships with its VIP Partners.



SCOTT Ellis, Georgie Symonds and Rosy Centrella from ATG with Phil Hoffmann Travel, Hyde Park's Jenny Reeves.



THE Sydney venue on full display.



TENNEIL Lawson, ATG with Emma Atchison and Tegan Shaw from Helloworld Travel, Leopold.



THE ATG Team ready to celebrate with their agents in Brisbane.



ATG'S Jo Ellies and Donna Jones with Michelle and Tim Hartland from Champagne Travel, Mandurah.



THE teams from ATG and Hunter Travel Group.



SCOTT Ellis, ATG; Angela Kaluzyn and Lesley Smart, Going Global Narellan; and Rob McGeary, ATG.



ATG'S Scott Ellis, Jo Ellies and Donna Jones with Bicton Travel's Carole Smethurst, Alisha Stedman and David Armstrong.

Aman eyes Dubai

AMAN is poised to open a new property in the United Arab Emirates, nestled on a private section of Dubai's Jumeirah Beach.

The ultra-luxury, all-suite resort will offer panoramic views of the sea and city skyline, as well as a limited number of Aman branded residences, a massive spa area, several restaurants, and a premium Aman Club.

Aman Dubai is currently in the development phase.



Luxe Bighorn ranch

RANCHLANDS has opened a new luxury guest ranch in the Bighorn Mountains of northern Wyoming, in the US.

The 80,000-acre Paintrock Canyon Ranch allows guests to immerse themselves in ranch life, and provides all the comforts of home in large, safari-style tents.

Guests can explore surrounding areas on horseback, fly fish, and hike, as well as enjoy meals prepared by a private chef.

The season runs from May-Sep - find out more [HERE](#).

CHAMPION YOURSELF AND WIN: LONDREGAN

TRAVEL advisors have been urged to be bold and promote themselves better to turbocharge their luxury sales.

In a professional development session on having a luxury strategy, Virtuoso SVP of Global Operations, Michael Londregan, insisted that the time was now for advisors to start pushing their services more and being outward about the benefits of using a trusted travel advisor.

"I have to tell you, I worry that you guys are too damn subtle," he told delegates at the workshop.

"You're too damn good at what you do and you don't let people know what you do."

Londregan suggested that US advisors were a prime example of a group of industry professionals that are great at marketing



themselves and how they provide services that are above and beyond the expected.

"I think about the thousands and thousands of hours of expertise and excellence that you all have and I worry like hell that we are not getting the full value out of that because we are not actually letting [clients] know

how much value you are adding."

He continued by saying the value equation was not "the experience equals some products I bought - it's the experience equals the products I bought and the service and knowledge and expertise that the advisor provides them".

Londregan was adamant that advisors had to get better at shining a light on the "phenomenal" work that they do, citing the simple example of referrals as an area of business that could stand to be significantly boosted by changing the narrative around having a trusted travel advisor.

"If you really want to take full advantage, you have to do a full-on campaign about the value you add," he exerted. *DF*

Scenic takes delivery of latest submersible so pax can dive deeper on *Eclipse II*

SCENIC has taken delivery of its second-generation Neptune submersible, which will take guests up to 100m below the surface on expeditions in the South Pacific and Oceania.

Following successful sea trials and safety certification, Scenic's new Triton 660/9 AVA submersible (pictured) will soon be available for guests to book on board *Scenic Eclipse II*.

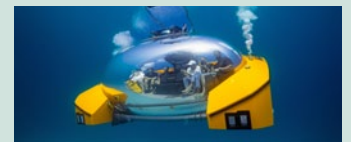
Named Scenic Neptune II, the submersible has been designed to maximise viewing with 270° wraparound windows.

Scenic Director of Discovery Operations, Jason Flesher, said the new Triton submarine will make guests feel like they are "merging with the water".

"The clarity of the acrylic hull once submerged is such that you feel at one with the water," Flesher observed.

"Encountering the marine life of the South Pacific and Australia's Great Barrier Reef within Neptune II will create memories to last a lifetime."

Scenic Eclipse II has set sail on a 39-day repositioning voyage



across the Pacific Ocean from Valparaiso to Sydney, where it will make its maiden entrance to Sydney Harbour on 20 Apr.

Its arrival will mark the first time one of Scenic's ultra-luxury expedition yachts has visited Australia since the company first launched its expedition cruising style on sister ship, *Scenic Eclipse*, in 2019. *ML*

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Sunset Resort, Rarotonga on the Cook Islands has upgraded its second swimming pool, which now has new decking and paving, improved lighting for evenings, as well as extended shaded seating and sunbathing areas. The four-star resort is also in the process of modifying two Poolside Garden Studios to become fully accessible rooms. By mid-2024, the property - which is adults-only (15+ years) - will have a total of four accessible rooms.

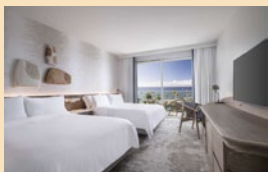


JW Marriott Gold Coast Resort & Spa's signature restaurant, Critique, has this week unveiled a new menu in partnership with fish provedore Umar Nguyen. In a bid to showcase the most unique sustainable seafood from Australian seas, the venue

has curated a new six-course meal featuring some of the most underused produce. The menu starts with a Rocky Point Aquacultura Cobia, which is rich in buttery flavours, as the entree.



Enjoy a different kind of stay in NSW in the outback of **Gilgooma**. The unique farm is owned and operated by three generations of farmers, with the property now transformed into an agritourism venture for unforgettable experiences. Guests can enjoy an authentic camping experience as they unwind amongst the beauty of the Australian bush, with unpowered campsites, limited powered sites, and cozy cabin accommodations all on offer.



The Westin Maui Resort & Spa, Kaanapali has unveiled the newly transformed Kukahi Tower, formerly known as the Ocean Tower, signalling the completion of its multi-year, US\$160 million renovation. The tower features simple and elegant rooms with ocean views, as well as Hana Hou, a 3,048m² venue for guests to gather and enjoy arcade games, a bar and lounge, and more.



After a US\$6 million renovation and rebrand, **Delta Hotels by Marriott Jacksonville Deerwood** has reopened its doors to welcome guests. The property now offers 166 refurbished guestrooms, a modernised lobby, a refreshed dining district, as well as a coffee shop, a fitness centre with views of the newly renovated swimming pool, and upgraded meeting spaces.

Popular for Easter

AUSSIE travellers are clinging on to every remaining minute of the warm autumn weather, with beach destinations proving hugely popular for the upcoming Easter holidays.

According to a Booking.com study, the Gold Coast was named the top Australian destination being sought by travellers for the Easter break, with Sydney next on the list for its annual Royal Easter Show extravaganza.

Four separate regions of Bali appeared in the top ten list, with Seminyak (#3), Ubud (#4), Canggu (#5) and Legian (#10) dominating the survey's international list.

Similar Easter booking data from Webjet confirmed the popularity of Bali, with the OTA recording a 43% jump in demand for the Indonesian hotspot.

New Zealand appeared four times in the remainder of the list, with Auckland (#2), Christchurch (#3), Queenstown (#4) and Wellington (#8) all ranking highly.

Currumbin eco-park

THE Queensland Government will invest \$45 million into the development of a 148-hectare eco-park on the Gold Coast which will become home to new hiking trails and a wildlife rehab centre.

An activation plan has been released detailing the project, which will include a koala fodder and eucalypt plantation managed by Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary.

The proposal aims to protect native animals and bushland while building on the Gold Coast's established tourism reputation as a new destination for visitors, with hopes of creating "a world of new eco-adventures".

Air Tahiti recruits

AIR Tahiti Nui is currently recruiting for a Marketing and Sales Manager to join its Auckland-based team, which looks after the Australian and New Zealand markets.

The French Polynesian carrier, which offers direct flights between Tahiti and Auckland, Los Angeles, Seattle, Paris, and Tokyo, has been mulling direct Australian flights but is yet to make the call due to plane capacity constraints (**TD** 02 Nov 2023).

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