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## Tour Amigo lands \$2m

**BRISBANE-BASED** Tour Amigo has secured US\$2 million in seed funding led by Singaporean investor Wavemaker Partners to further develop reservation and operations software solutions for tour operators & travel agencies. Funds will also be used to expand in North America.

## Link OnTrack with tickets

**MEMBERS** of Link Travel Group will enjoy improved efficiency and reduce associated agent debit memo costs through a new partnership with Montreal-based travel tech partner Magnatech.

The pact will see Link members gain access to Magnatech's

OnTrackplus solution, which works to automate the tracking of unused air tickets.

The program also works to automate manual credit tracking, eliminating errors and simplifying visibility on open, exchanged, refunded and expired air tickets.

Link Travel Group member Goldman Travel has reported success since implementing OnTrackplus into its own agency operations, stating the tool has saved valuable resources and enabled group-wide adoption. "This partnership with Magnatech for OnTrackplus is another way we deliver exceptional value to our group of agencies," said Link Travel Group GM, Scott Darlow. *ML*

## NZ hikes tourist levy

**THE** New Zealand Government will almost triple the International Visitor Levy (IVL) from Oct, a move tourism officials say will inject more funds back into key conservation projects.

Thankfully, Australian travellers will be exempt from the increased impost on tourists, which will be hiked to NZ\$100 (A\$92) from NZ\$35 (A\$32), as will a handful of Pacific Island nations.

"Increasing the IVL means we can continue to grow international tourism to support economic growth," NZ Tourism Minister Matt Doocey said.

The decision follows comments from Air NZ CEO Greg Foran this week, who told *The Australian* that the NZ Govt must consider lowering visa charges if the country wants tourism to rebound at a faster rate.

Foran also argued that NZ's decision to increase visa and other border fees in recent years is stifling the visitor economy.

Air NZ's latest financial figures were badly impacted by a drop in tourism, particularly in H2 of the year (*TD* 29 Aug).

## CX flight impacts

**CATHAY** Pacific has announced the cancellation of 24 return flights operating up until the end of tomorrow while it carries out a fleet-wide inspection of its 48 A350 aircraft, after an engine component failure was identified on one of the planes today.

There are no flights currently cancelled in Australia and New Zealand, *TD* can confirm.

## Beyond border insight

**ATIA** will host The Beyond Borders 2024 Travel Summit to be held on 25 Oct in Sydney, a must-attend event that will discuss the future of the travel industry through the eyes of its most high-profile leaders.

See the **back page** for details and the full list of speakers.

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## QTIC boss will step down

**BRETT** Fraser, CEO of the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC), has announced his resignation after two-and-a-half years at the helm.

Fraser (**pictured**) played a key role in rebuilding Queensland's tourism industry after COVID-19, driving key policy changes and advocating for QTIC's members and more than 64,000 tourism, hospitality, and events businesses.

"I want to extend my deepest thanks to Brett for his remarkable guidance and unwavering commitment to Queensland's tourism industry," QTIC Chair Elsa D'Alessio said.

"Thanks to Brett, QTIC has become stronger and holds a more influential voice within government and industry."

Reflecting on his time with the council, Fraser said, "I'm incredibly proud of what the QTIC team has accomplished, particularly in refocusing the



organisation post-pandemic".

He added he was "confident that QTIC is well-positioned for continued success".

Fraser will remain in his role until 15 Nov, overseeing key initiatives like the delivery of Tourism Week, including the Destination IQ and DestinationQ Forums, and the Queensland Tourism Awards Gala Ceremony.

"We look forward to building on the strong foundation Brett has laid and on continuing to drive our industry forward," D'Alessio said, revealing QTIC has already begun recruiting for Fraser's successor, with an announcement expected by mid-Nov. *JM*

## Visit the Dutch much?

**AUSTRALIA** has made the list of 191 countries that the Netherlands Government has overnight sanctioned for visa-free travel for its citizens and international visitors.

The new policy is effective immediately and has propelled the Dutch passport toward the top of the Henley Passport Index.

Changes are expected to unleash a surge in outbound travel from the Netherlands, which could be a welcome boost for Australia's recovering tourism sector, while outbound travel from Australia will also be incentivised to grow.



## NTIA writer's gong

**WITH** all the finalists for the travel and trade categories now announced for the National Travel Industry Awards (NTIA) (**TD** 20 Aug), submissions are now open for the Most Outstanding Travel Journalist Award.

The accolade recognises journalists who have made significant contributions to the travel industry through content that educates consumers on the value of travel professionals.

"In response to the evolving media landscape, this year's Most Outstanding Travel Journalist Award will also consider analytical pieces that explore the issues, challenges and opportunities within the travel sector," ATIA CEO Dean Long said.

"This evolution reflects the broader scope of work that travel journalists now engage in, from traditional travel stories to more in-depth, issue-based reporting."

The deadline for submissions closes on 15 Sep - details **HERE**.



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## Zippering into more

**TREETOPS** Adventure has reopened its Zipcoaster ride on the Central Coast, stretching 500m between trees and 15m above the ground.

The company has also added two adult high ropes courses with aerial challenges - see more [HERE](#).

## Agents stake in domestic

**TRAVEL** agent expertise is being called upon for domestic travel in higher volumes, acting as a key source of information in more than 50% of planned holidays, a new survey has revealed.

The study by AAT Kings of 400 consumers aged 45 and above found 70% were prioritising a domestic trip in the next year, with a notable increase in the number of those eager to take a



guided holiday for their next trip.

The lack of organisational hassle and budgeting along with increased safety and expertise of tour organisers were cited as major influences into the swing towards a guided holiday.

Search engines (60%) and escorted tour brochures (39%) were also identified as primary sources of information in the holiday planning phase.

The survey also found that despite cost-of-living pressures, 41% of respondents are still prepared to part with \$5,000 or more on their annual holiday. *ML*

## Thailand eyes ETA

**THAILAND** will look to implement the pilot phase of a new Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system by Dec this year, which will require all visitors by air, sea or land to obtain approval prior to entry.

Confirmation of the new entry authorisation was detailed in a recently published report by Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, flagging the full adoption of the system by Jun 2025.

The ETA will need to be completed every time a traveller crosses the Thai border, and will be free of charge.

ETA holders will also be able to use the automated gates at immigration checkpoints using the QR code obtained through the ETA, and only holders of diplomatic passports, UN Laissez- Passer and Border Pass users will be exempt from the requirement.

Aussie travellers staying up to 60 days in Thailand do not need a visa for now.

## Avani to Lion City

**SINGAPORE** will welcome the Avani Hotels and Resorts lifestyle brand for the first time via a new 13-storey development coming to the Tanjong Pagar district.

The 200-room Avani Singapore will be a short walk to the CBD and Chinatown and 200 metres to the Tanjong Pagar MRT Station.

Avani Singapore is on track to open in Q1 of 2027, with parent company Minor Hotels aiming to expand the brand from its current global footprint of 42 properties to 100 by the end of 2026.

## Walkabout in Italy

**SHOWCASING** traditional Italy, On Foot Holidays has launched a new, week-long hiking route in the Cilento National Park in Campania, south of Rome.

Aussies and Kiwis can book for 2025 at 2024 prices, if they do so before 30 Sep - see more [HERE](#).



## Travel warning downgrade for Egypt

DFAT has lowered its overall travel warning for Australian travel to Egypt, changing the threat level to 'exercise a high degree of caution' from 'reconsider' your need to visit.

The decision is welcome news for many operators who boast Egypt as a major market, placing the north African country - famed for its Pyramids - on the same advisory footing as Germany, the UK, France, India and Indonesia.

Bunnik Tours, which operates small group tours to Egypt, has labelled the advisory development as "long overdue".

"This change in advisory finally brings Australia's advice in line with that of the UK Foreign Office," Bunnik Tours Joint-CEO Dennis Bunnik said.

"I, together with my industry colleagues, have been requesting this review for some time and it is great to see it finally happen.

The timing of the Federal



Government's change will provide a much-needed injection in confidence to Australia's outbound travel economy, with Aussie bookings to Egypt tipped to surge in coming months during the lead-up to the high season, which runs from 01 Oct to early May next year.

Dennis Bunnik, who has made more than 30 trips to Egypt over his career, said that visiting countries that have a history of instability makes it even more important to plan trips with a reputable operator like Bunnik.

He was one of the very few Australian travel managers in Egypt during the 2011 Arab Spring, where he personally helped to evacuate Australian travellers back to safety.

Bunnik also pointed out the importance of maintaining the tourism economy in countries like Egypt, which are heavily reliant on visitation.

"The tourism industry plays a vital role within the Egyptian economy and is a key driver for jobs across all levels of society," he said.

"[The downgraded advisory] is a massive boost for the people of Egypt and for every Australian who has ever dreamt of visiting Egypt - now is their time."

While the advice has been lowered overall, travellers are still advised not to visit areas 40km of the Libyan border or to the Governorate of North Sinai, including the Taba-Suez Road. AB

## Join the Aranui club

ARANUI Cruises has announced the launch of Tiki Club, its new loyalty program, as part of the French Polynesian cruise line's ongoing 40th anniversary celebrations (TD 04 Jun).

Available to any adult guest sailing on *Aranui 5* from 2025, the program features four tiers of membership and rewards.

Bronze members will enjoy a 5% discount on their next cruise and a 20% discount on all onboard expenses, while progressing to Silver will see these discounts rise to 7.5% and 30%, respectively.

Gold unlocks a 10% discount on the next cruise and 40% off all onboard expenses, while this increases to 12.5% and 50% respectively when members reach Pearl status.

Repeat guests make up around 5% of the cruise line's passengers on any given sailing, with that number increasing to 20% on its Discovery cruises.

See Aranui's itineraries [HERE](#).

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## FCTG on the Douro

**EIGHTEEN** senior leaders from Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG), along with their travelling companions, were invited to experience Avalon Waterways' newest ship, *Avalon Alegria*, on a sailing down the Douro River.

Hosted by Globus family of brands sales leaders, the group - which included FCTG chief Graham (Skroo) Turner - experienced the new ship and itinerary first-hand whilst tasting the local flavours and soaking up the beauty of the Douro Valley.

"What a way to wind down post our FCTG global gathering, from the time we arrived in Porto to being welcomed aboard the *Avalon Alegria*, we felt spoilt," said Brent Novak, GM at Flight Centre Brand Australia.

Avalon's all-new eight-day cruise 'Vida Portugal: Vineyards & Villages along the Douro' features visits to ancient Amarante in the picturesque Minho region and the sandstone architecture in Salamanca Spain, as well as bike rides from Porto to the sea.

Advisors can book their clients on 2025 departures now, with a saving of up to \$1,600 per couple until 09 Nov 2024 - check out the itinerary [HERE](#).



## Wanderlust in Washington



**LINKD** Tourism's Strategic Director, Michael Cassis, recently hosted a product and marketing manager famil through the state of Washington, made possible by partners Hawaiian Airlines, Visit Seattle, the Port of Seattle, and State of Washington Tourism.

The group, which included key representatives from Flight Centre, itravel, eCruising, and Rediscover Travel Group, began their adventure in Seattle, where they explored iconic landmarks such as Chihuly Garden & Glass, the Space Needle, and the Museum of Pop Culture.

They also had the chance to experience one of Seattle's home-grown bands - The Foo Fighters - live in concert at T-Mobile Park.

After crossing on a Washington State ferry to nearby Bainbridge Island, the group traversed Olympic National Park, home

to mountain peaks and pristine lakes, beaches, and rainforests.

They then explored the Mt Rainier National Park and the urban centres of Tacoma, where the popular movie *10 Things I Hate About You* was filmed.

The group also stepped back in time during visits to the Museum of Flight and LeMay's America's Car Museum.

The trip ended on a high note, with the group overnighing in Hawaii, where they explored some of Waikiki's Aqua-Aston Hospitality hotel offerings, including Ilikai Hotel & Luxury Suites by Aqua, as well as enjoying a champagne toast at the ultra-luxury property ESPACIO - The Jewel of Waikiki. *JM*

**Pictured:** The group ready to check out the automobiles of bygone eras at LeMay's America's Car Museum in Tacoma.



## Window Seat

**AUSTRALIAN** gold medallist sisters, Jess and Noemie Fox, recently paid a visit to Wild Life Sydney Zoo in Darling Harbour to meet an endangered 10-month-old koala joey, who has been named Fox after them.

The heart-warming introduction was a timely one, given that Sep is 'Save The Koala Month', an annual worldwide event dedicated to raising awareness about the marsupials and their habitat.

"Meeting Fox, the adorable koala named in our honour, has been a highlight for us post-Paris," enthused Jess and Noemie Fox (**pictured**).

"We are so excited to have the opportunity to see him in person and hope our visit encourages more support for koala conservation."

Guests can get up close to the zoo's six resident koalas with the Breakfast with the Koalas Experience, which includes a zookeeper-led guided tour, hot buffet breakfast and take-home photo - more info [HERE](#).



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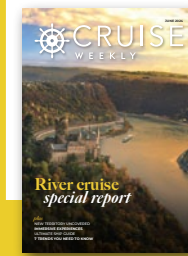
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### COMAC milestone

**THE** Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC) has this week delivered its first C919 narrowbody aircraft to Air China and China Southern Airlines, with the model aiming to be a major challenger to the dominance of Airbus' and Boeing's A320 and B737. China Eastern Airlines became the debut customer of COMAC planes last year, and has since completed over 3,600 flights and carried around 400,000 passengers on five scheduled routes across 10,000 flying hours.

COMAC is currently pursuing certifications from the United States and the European Union, with EU certification reportedly expected in 2025, according to the *South China Morning Post*.

COMAC is also understood to be developing a wide-body airliner design, the C929, however its joint efforts to create the plane with Russia has fallen through, and now China must go it alone.

### Air NZ finds its Seoul

**THREE** direct flights per week between Auckland and Seoul will take off from 28 Oct, running until 29 Mar 2025, Air New Zealand has confirmed.

The seasonal route was flagged earlier this year (**TD** 19 Apr) as part of a wider network update.

New Zealand Prime Minister and former NZ boss, Christopher Luxon, said Korea was a critical trade market for Aotearoa, with 70,000 visitors for the year to Jun.

## SYD pinpoints slot abuse

**SYDNEY** Airport is urging the government to examine and test the impact of its slot reform agenda before introducing a scheme forcing airlines to pay compensation to passengers for cancellations or major delays.

In a submission to the Airline Passenger Protections (Pay on Delay) Bill, Sydney Airport pointed to data showing airlines applying for more slots than they need and strategically cancelling flights on high frequency routes.

SYD said Australia's major domestic airlines hold 72% of all slots available at the airport, increasing each year despite demand remaining unchanged.

The evidence supports a report published earlier this year by the Australian Travel Industry Association, based on a study of more than two decades of flight data by former Qantas economist, Dr Tony Webber.

SYD said more recently, flight cancellations on popular routes were "unnecessarily high" with airlines in control of the situation.

Recent government punctuality reports showed nearly one in every 10 flights between Sydney and Melbourne were cancelled in Jul 2024, making it the highest cancellation rate nationwide.

One month earlier, only eight days in Jun were affected by weather or air traffic control staff issues, yet 67% of cancellations on the route occurred during the other 22 days, when there were no weather or staffing problems.



SYD said there was no cost to airlines to apply for a slot, with retention criteria easy to meet.

The submission calls for the World Airport Slot Guidelines, on which Sydney's 80/20 'use it or lose it' rule is based, to be revised in line with today's operating environment, which has seen SYD aircraft and passenger movement levels spike 158% on 1988 levels.

"There would be limited industries, if any, where a service provider's ability to cancel one in five services would be deemed an acceptable standard of customer service," the submission reads.

"SYD believes it is imperative to implement the announced slot reforms before consideration of a consumer compensation scheme that is designed to curb cancellations." *ML*

### Trio buys in Phuket

**HOSPITALITY** real estate investment firm Trio Capital has made its first acquisition in Thailand, purchasing Hilton Garden Inn Phuket Bang Tao.

The recently-built hotel is a short walk to Boat Avenue and features 177 rooms, a restaurant and bar, and dual rooftop pools.

### Essendon Fields GM

**HYATT** Place Melbourne Essendon Fields has welcomed Scott Williams as its new General Manager, who brings more than 25 years experience to the role.

Hyatt said Williams also has a track record of leading luxury brands across many continents.

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**Brisbane 11 September**, The Warehouse, Fortitude Valley

**Sydney 12 September**, Docksider Cockle Bay Room, Cockle Bay Wharf

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## AFFLUENT PAX SPEND ON ACTIVITIES

**HIGH** net worth travellers are prioritising day tours, activities and experiences in their travel bookings, and making up a disproportionate share of the market, a new study has found.

According to travel experiences think tank Arival, travellers earning \$150,000 and above are the main driving force behind the tours and attractions sector.

These visitors account for 50% of total spend on day tours and more than 40% on activities and attraction tickets like theme parks, despite only making up 21% of the total marketplace.

Arival CEO and co-founder, Douglas Quinby said airlines, hotels, destinations and travel experience operators must pay close attention to this segment of the travel population.

"Increasingly these travellers are choosing where to go and where



to stay, based on the experiences they wish to pursue.

"Every travel organisation from accommodations and transportation to destinations and travel sellers of all shapes and sizes must start thinking experiences first," Quinby said.

The report found affluent travellers are more likely to plan and book their travel experiences well in advance, often ahead of

other elements such as hotels, with 60% booking these more than four weeks in advance.

At either end of the market, both older and younger affluent travellers say availability of their desired attractions and activities will be a prime motivating factor in choosing their destination.

Younger affluent travellers are also prioritising social media as inspiration for their activities. *ML*

### APT plans its Poles

A **10-NIGHT** flexible expedition to Antarctica on *Seabourn Venture* headlines APT's new 2026 itineraries to the frozen continent.

Guests will be escorted by an expert team leading daily Zodiac landings to reveal the continent's frozen structures, wildlife and historic sites.

The fully chartered voyage is the key component on a 14-night itinerary, bookended by a pair of two-night stays in Buenos Aires and a visit to Tierra del Fuego National Park in Ushuaia.

Travellers can also extend their trip on *Seabourn Venture* with add-ons in Peru, Argentina, Brazil or Chile, or include a three-night Galapagos Islands expedition on *MC Hermes*.

### Ilma sets sail for Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection

**THE** Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection's second superyacht *Ilma* has departed Monte Carlo on its maiden seven-night voyage bound for Rome.

At 240 metres in length, *Ilma* features 224 private suites catering to 448 guests, with private terraces, and a sweeping pool deck overlooking the sea.

Five dining venues feature on the new ship, including fine Italian at Seta su Ilma by Fabio



Trabocchi and The Beach House by Michael Mina, both of whom are Michelin-starred chefs.

*Ilma* also features seven bars, a signature wine vault and The Ritz-Carlton Spa with 11 rooms.

### Langham Customs

**LANGHAM** Hospitality Group will open a new luxury hotel alongside Bangkok's old Customs House heritage building, opening in 2026.

Located in the Bang Rak District alongside the Chao Praya River, The Langham, Customs House Bangkok will feature 78 rooms and suites.

The development will also see a former post office featuring lavish amenities restored to its former glory.

### The spirits of Emirates

**EMIRATES** has expanded its range of available spirits, beers, wine and champagne on board with 10 new selections.

The new range includes Stoli Elit 18 Vodka from Latvia for first class travellers, with Cuban Eminent Reserva 7 Year Old Rum added to the A380 lounge.

Smirnoff Vodka No. 21 Red from Russia and Bombay Sapphire Gin from the UK are now available for passengers in economy class.

Baileys Original Irish Cream has been added to all classes.



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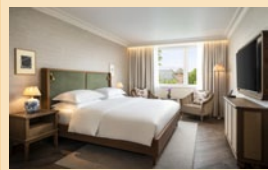
**Club Wyndham Coffs Harbour** has unveiled the results of its \$3.2 million upgrade. The resort's 60 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments have been updated with new carpets, shower screens, furnishings, and artwork, with a striking colour palette of bright pink and orange, and pastel green and blue. Guests will also notice new vinyl flooring, redesigned kitchens for improved functionality, USB-C power outlets and enhanced lighting.



Marking a milestone in its ongoing transformation, **Pan Pacific Perth** has completed work on 392 rooms and suites in its main tower. Offering enhanced comfort and additional spaciousness, the accommodations now also boast sleep-enhancing features, personalised in-room wellness programs, and the 'Guest Experience Concierge'. The hotel's grand relaunch is fast approaching, with the lobby and final touches nearing completion.



**Fiji Gateway Hotel**, located across the road from Nadi International Airport, is expanding its offering with the construction of a new two-storey accommodation building. Commencing this month, the project will add 47 new guest rooms and suites by Oct 2025. There will be 44 Deluxe Rooms featuring a King bed and a fold-out sofa, while the three two-bedroom suites will offer two Queen beds, providing ample space for families.



Hyatt Hotels Corporation has announced today the opening of **Brunfels Hotel** in the heart of Mainz's old town in Germany. The boutique property is just steps away from iconic attractions including the Romanesque Mainz Cathedral, the Gutenberg Museum and the Marktplatz square. The five-storey hotel has 127 rooms with botanical bathroom amenities, heated floors, and a free mini-bar.



**Banyan Tree Higashiyama Kyoto** has opened its doors in Japan, combining the signature Banyan Tree experience with the charm of Kyoto's cultural heritage. The property features 52 luxurious rooms, a rooftop bar with panoramic views of the city, and a spa offering holistic treatments. Guests can dine at the onsite restaurant, Ryozen, which offers a traditional kaiseki menu.

## Voyaging into a new future



**THE** National Indigenous Training Academy (NITA), delivered by Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia, has now seen more than 700 young Indigenous Australians complete the program since its launch in 2011.

The latest graduation ceremony took place at Ayers Rock Resort, Uluru over the weekend, with 26 proud trainees receiving their Level III certification in Hospitality after completing traineeships at Ayers Rock Resort and Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre in Qld.

The ceremony marked one of the program's largest-ever cohorts, according to Voyages Chief Executive Officer Matt Cameron-Smith.

"We're so incredibly proud of each and every NITA graduate who has worked so hard for their qualifications," he shared.

The event was attended by the graduates and their families; senior Anangu community members (Traditional Owners of Uluru); Federal Minister for Trade & Tourism, Don Farrell; Voyages board members, as well

as senior executives from Voyages and its parent organisation, the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC).

Minister Farrell this week extended his congratulations to the graduates.

"The talent and skills of the graduates is a testament to the hard-working staff who prepare their students for a career in Australia's thriving tourism and hospitality sector," he said.

**MEANWHILE**, Voyages' cultural storytelling experience, Wintjiri Wiru, was named 'Oceania's Leading Tourist Attraction' at the World Travel Awards 2024 in Manila last night, beating out the likes of Bondi Beach and Sydney Opera House.

Ayers Rock Resort itself - which is operated by Voyages - also secured the title of Oceania's Responsible Tourism Award.

Cameron-Smith said that receiving the accolades was an incredible honour. *JM*

**Pictured:** NITA Graduates at 2024 ceremony at Ayers Rock Resort, Uluru.



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