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A&K events show

A&K Travel Group is set to embark on its greatest adventure yet, with three events set to be hosted around Australia.

Attendees can meet A&K's local experts who work on the ground in Africa, Europe, and Latin America - see [page nine](#).

Intrepid sells Chimu stake

INTREPID Travel will divest its stake in Chimu Adventures, with the latter declaring it will enter a "new phase of growth" with investment from leading shipping company, Nordic Hamburg.

While Intrepid will no longer have an ownership interest in Chimu, the operator will remain a key distribution partner and continue to offer polar journeys.

Chimu and Intrepid had entered into a three-season charter of *Ocean Endeavour* to Antarctica, with the ship to operate under the Intrepid brand for the third and final time during the

upcoming 2024/25 season.

"We are proud of what Intrepid achieved in Antarctica, but now with our ship lease ending, it is the right time for us to re-evaluate our approach," Intrepid Travel CEO James Thornton said.

Chimu's new investment from Nordic Hamburg is a key step in its long-term plan toward lowering the environmental impact of its operations, along with welcoming lower emissions vessel, *Ocean Nova*, to its fleet in Mar 2026.

"We're thrilled to join forces with Nordic, leveraging their shipping expertise to expand our polar offerings and advance low emission technology in this industry for the future," said Chimu MD, Chad Carey.

The brand is also preparing to expand into the Nth America and European markets. *JM*

HA links to the stars

STARLINK wi-fi is now available on Hawaiian Airlines' entire Airbus fleet, including Sydney-Honolulu flights.

The speedy internet is available free of charge to guests on board all Airbus-operated flights between the islands and the continental US, Asia and Oceania, with the carrier to also install Starlink on its Boeing 787-9 fleet.

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features eight pages of news, including a photo page from [Keith Prowse Travel](#), our [Luxury page](#), plus a cover wrap from [Ponant](#), a Product Update from [TBO](#) and full pages from:

- [Abercrombie & Kent](#)
- [ATIA Beyond Borders](#)

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Infinity links with Seattle

INFINITY Holidays has partnered with Visit Seattle to launch four brand-new itineraries exploring the US city's iconic destinations and experiences.

Available through Helio, the customisable packages are designed to offer something for every traveller, with the ability to add flights, swap hotels, extend the stay with extra days and activities and more.

Some of the experiences on offer include a deep dive into Seattle's culinary scene; a tour of the Boeing Factory; a road trip taking in the city's key attractions; exploring the history of Pioneer Square; and plenty more.

Each of the packages includes three nights at The Edgewater Hotel, a luxury waterfront property in downtown Seattle, including a 'Coffee and Cocktails' itinerary, which features a coffee culture tour and a cocktail tour, priced from \$949pp.

There's also an 'Explore Seattle and surrounds' package, and two sports-focused offerings.

Infinity Holidays' GM, James Whiting, commented, "the USA is always one of our most popular destinations, and we are so happy to be in campaign with Seattle to promote some brand-new adventures available only through Infinity Holidays' agents".

"These packages encompass some of the best experiences and sights that Seattle has to offer, in easy-to-book itineraries with fantastic pricing

and accommodation options included," he added.

Agents can find more details and book the Seattle packages **HERE** and via Helio. *JM*

Visitor numbers up

VISITOR economies around Australia are breaking records, with both New South Wales and Brisbane reaching new heights.

Total visitor expenditure in NSW has reached a new record of \$52.9 billion, the destination management organisations revealed in advance of tomorrow's Tourism Research Australia data.

Both international visitor nights and expenditure have also exceeded pre-pandemic levels, with spending reaching a milestone \$12.2 billion.

New South Wales received 101.6 million domestic and international visitors for the year ending Jun, with the state recording the largest increase nationally for international visitors, nights, and expenditure.

Meanwhile, farther north, Brisbane is recording its own high marks, with visitor spending hitting \$10.7 billion.

Domestic visitor spend rose to \$7.5 billion, up 8.5% year-on-year, while international spending increased to \$3.2 billion, up 10.1% from 2019.

Brisbane also received an unprecedented 50.8 million visitor nights.

ATIA is coming up

TIME is running out for travel industry professionals to secure their spot at ATIA's Beyond Borders 2024 summit.

Find out more about next month's event, which features speakers like FCTG's Graham 'Skroo' Turner, on **page 10**.

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Ruffles exits all duties

LAURA Ruffles has confirmed she has stepped away from all remaining duties with Corporate Travel Management (CTM).

"After 14 incredible years, I feel the time is right for my journey with CTM to come to an end," Ruffles posted on LinkedIn.

"It has been a privilege to work with such an amazing team and be a part of this brilliant company and industry, and I am filled with pride for all we have achieved together," she added.

Ruffles thanked her colleagues for the success she had achieved with the group for close to 15 years, adding she was excited to see their continued achievements as she embarks on a new chapter.

In Mar, Ruffles resigned as CEO of Australia/NZ/Europe, citing a "personal health issue".

A juicy journey in Grapevine



SEVERAL Australian travel agents had the chance earlier this month to experience Grapefest, the annual calendar highlight for Grapevine, Texas.

Hosted by Grapevine Convention & Visitors Bureau, the familsaw Helloworld's Jordan Carpenter, Flight Centre Travel Group's Rob Sexton, and Travel Partners' Pippa Van spend five days attending the wine festival and exploring the destination.

After an arrival welcome dinner at Bonnie & Clyde's Hideout at Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Hotel and Conference Centre, agents set off on a walking tour of Grapevine's Historic Main Street District the next morning.

A visit to historic Nash Farm (pictured); an afternoon at Messina Hof Winery; brisket and ribs at Meat U Anywhere; and a game of pickleball at Chicken N Pickle were just some of the highlights of the trip.

The group's final morning in Grapevine ended on a high note, as they participated in a hands-on wine and food pairing seminar during Grapefest.

"This famil was a perfect introduction for our visiting travel trade VIPs to really get a sense of our destination, meet our local operators and experience some of our incredible bookable experiences," said Heather Egan, Director of Leisure and International Sales at Grapevine Convention & Visitors Bureau. *JM*

Princess widens Japan

PRINCESS Cruises has unveiled its 2026 Japan cruise season, which will see *Diamond Princess* return to offer a longer season from Feb through Nov 2026.

Travellers can choose from 35 itineraries ranging in length from seven to 28 days, taking in Japan's iconic cities, temples and shrines, culture and traditions, natural wonders, and cuisine.

Princess Cruises will deliver 10- and 11-day 'Spring Flowers' cruises in Mar and Apr to all four main islands during the predicted cherry blossom season, as well as a nine- to 14-day circumnavigation of the island of Japan.

Other highlights include the 'Japan Explorer' voyages, which visit some of the country's must-see destinations, such as Mt Fuji, Kyoto, and Hiroshima; longer voyages from 15-28 days; and more late-night stays in six ports.

Air NZ restarts HBA

AIR New Zealand will resume direct flights between Auckland and Hobart from 27 Oct after the route was cancelled earlier this year (*TD* 06 Nov).

The route was axed due to fleet concerns caused by an urgent engine assessment and repair program initiated by manufacturer Pratt & Whitney.

Flights between the two cities will operate three-times weekly using Airbus A320neo aircraft.

Go small in Croatia

UNFORGETTABLE Croatia has unveiled its 2025 small-ship cruising program, with 130 guaranteed departures now available to book.

The cruise line will deploy six vessels across the season between early May to mid-Oct, sailing between Split and Dubrovnik, featuring calls at the medieval town of Trogir and Hvar, alongside Korcula, Vis and the national parks of Mljet and Krka.

The 2025 season includes the new seven-night 'Signature Croatia Hidden Gems' voyage sailing from Split to Opatija, which visits hidden gems such as Sibenik, Zadar and the islands of Losinj, Krk and Rab.

Group bookings of more than 10 pax will receive a 5% discount.

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Viking Venus debut

VIKING will bring another new name to Australia and New Zealand for the 2024/25 cruise season, with *Viking Venus* set to sail local waters for the first time.

Making its first Australian landfall in Darwin on 11 Dec, *Venus* will sail through Sydney Heads on 23 Dec before cruising on its flagship 15-day 'Australia and New Zealand' itinerary.

A highlight of the ship's visit will be the 32-day 'Great Australian Circumnavigation', which will sail round-trip from Sydney on 20 Jan, and includes a stop in Indonesia and 15 included shore excursions.

This sailing will feature visits to six UNESCO World Heritage Sites, an overnight stay in Bali, maiden calls in Albany, Busselton and Geraldton, along with the line's first visit to Perth since 2019.



AI could add US\$28 billion

ALMOST three in four travel businesses are reworking their long-term strategies to incorporate AI in order to remain competitive, believes Sabre SVP Sundar Narasimham.

Speaking during a special virtual event featuring the travel tech giant and Google, Narasimham said generative AI has the power to generate over US\$28 billion in extra revenue for the industry.

Four years into their partnership, Sabre and Google are working to enhance coding and algorithms with enhanced data to deliver personalised experiences similar to what is already commonplace in industries such as in retail.

Sabre is also ramping up its adoption of the Google Cloud Platform and its AI innovations to develop new solutions that can be applied across both the travel booking and operational ecosystems for suppliers.

One such solution is

SabreMosaic, which allows airlines to show travellers optimal fares for a desired journey, while using customer data to suggest ancillaries that will ultimately increase the basket size and value.

Virgin Australia was yesterday revealed to be the AI product's flagship customer (**TD 24 Sep**).

Other prototypes in the testing phase include programs that read customer emails and design personalised itineraries to match; and one which predicts the likelihood of flight cancellations and delays and provides options for travel agents to recommend.

"This is an industry that's gone from having an individual travel agent...to the advent of platforms where you can book it all yourself, to now almost coming full circle where we are using tech to bring back a lot of that personalisation that the consumer craves," said Google Cloud VP of Global Solutions, Carrie Tharp. *ML*

Sailing the Amazon

NATIONAL Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions will run two new itineraries on the Upper Amazon River in Peru in Jan 2026 under charter of a specialist river ship.

The company will deploy the 42-guest *Delfin III* (**pictured**) for a six-day adventure to the mouth of the Amazon River, which will take guests into the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve.

Also on offer is a 10-day combo itinerary which includes an Amazon experience with a shore excursion to Machu Picchu.

Delfin III features 21 glass-encased suites and an observation deck with an open-air whirlpool hot tub.



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Applications close 07 October 2024.





Window Seat

VAPING is a polarising issue but whether you like or hate them, like cigarettes, they have no place on an aircraft.

An Easyjet flight from the Greek island of Heraklion to London Gatwick was forced into an evacuation just prior to take-off after a passenger's bag randomly exploded and started spewing smoke.

The luggage contained not only e-cigarettes but a power bank to boot.

In addition to smoke, a crackling noise was heard as the bag's owner raced down the aisle seeking help.

Videos doing the rounds on social media then show crew deploying the emergency slide, with ground staff helping people at the other end.

A replacement aircraft and crew were then organised to fly pax home later the same day, with the incident leaving behind scorched memories.

Visit Victoria Chair

FORMER Telstra CEO Andrew Penn has been named as the new Chair of Visit Victoria and will step into the role on 30 Sep, replacing Janet Whiting at the end of her five-year term.

A decorated businessman, Penn is a member of the Council of Trustees at the National Gallery of Victoria and was awarded the Creative Partnerships Australia Business Leadership Award in 2020 for fostering relationships between business and the arts.

"Andy is an experienced leader and his expertise will make a significant contribution to Visit Victoria," said Vic Tourism Minister, Steve Dimopoulos.

Host of Channel 9's *Hot Seat*, Eddie McGuire, was also reappointed as a Director for Visit Victoria board for another term.

WTTC names more stars

WESTERN Australia Premier Roger Cook will formally open the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Global Summit, taking place in Perth next month.

Cook will precede a litany of high-profile speakers ranging from global political, social and business trailblazers from across the travel ecosystem.

Speakers at the event will include former US Secretary of State and 2004 Democratic Presidential nominee, John Kerry (**TD** 09 Sep), who will take part in a fireside chat onstage with WTTC President, Julia Simpson.

"This is our first ever major event in the Oceania region, and it will bring together many of the world's most powerful leaders in our sector to discuss and secure its long-term future, which is critical to economies and jobs around the world," Simpson said.

Official government delegations from more than 25 countries will be in attendance, while university



students will also have a chance to pitch sustainable tourism ideas to investors in a *Shark Tank* style elevator pitch format.

Other headliners taking the stage include environmental campaigner and TV personality, Robert Irwin, who will share ideas on how travel can help to protect and celebrate nature.

WTTC recently revealed more big names who will present discussions at the event, including Tourism Western Australia Chair, Di Bain; Trip.com Group CEO, Jane Sun; Tripadvisor President and CEO, Matt Goldberg; Perth Airport CEO, Jason Waters and outgoing CLIA President, Kelly Craighead (**pictured**).

Under the theme of "Ancient Land: New Perspectives," the summit will spotlight Australia's innovation and sustainable growth objectives and act as a setting for major policy initiatives and future networking. *ML*

Solomon visitors up

THE Solomon Islands saw a 7.2% increase in Australian visitors during the first half of 2024, compared to the same period last year.

Aussies made up 33% of the destination's overall visitor intake, which rose 26.5% - its best visitor numbers since 2019, according to Tourism Solomons.

The destination's other key source markets - the US, Fiji and New Zealand - also showed positive growth at 13.2%, 23.6% and 30% respectively.

However, the biggest growth came from Papua New Guinea, which saw an increase of 106.7%.

"While much of our international marketing activity has been concentrated on the traditionally strong Australian and New Zealand markets, our efforts in PNG are really bearing fruit," said Tourism Solomons acting CEO, Dagnal Dereveke.

Ace contract retain

ADELAIDE-BASED Kelsian Group has retained a contract to operate 49 intercity coaches and 16 vans under its US subsidiary Ace Express Coaches.

The contract from the Colorado Department of Transportation, will see Ace Express operate the Bustang and Pegasus brands, which provide intercity coaches and transfers in ski regions.

The statewide contract begins on 01 Nov and runs for one year, with four further one-year extension options also included.

The deal will deliver up to \$38.9 million in revenue in the first year, with the potential to expand services with new state-supplied coaches, Kelsian said.

New CATO partner

ITALIAN custom FIT and group itinerary brand AG Group - Your Gateway to Italy - has been welcomed into the Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) as its newest Sapphire Partner.

The company specialises in tailored itineraries for individual and group travellers, with special expertise in the MICE and luxury segments and aim to provide authentic experiences across the country, with a particular focus on sustainable businesses.

AG Group is also involved in hotel representation, with several luxury properties in its portfolio, many featuring rooftop terraces and Michelin-starred restaurants.

"AG Group continues to thrive as a top player in Italy's B2B tourism industry," commented CATO in a welcome message.

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Keith Prowse Travel races into F1

Wed 25th September 2024

KEITH Prowse Travel hosted over 500 guests at the 2024 Singapore Grand Prix, delivering an unforgettable experience in the heart of one of Formula 1's most iconic races.

Kicking off the weekend racing action with an exclusive client event at the renowned Smoke & Mirrors bar where guests had views of the Padang section of the track, attendees were treated to a special appearance by rising F1 star Jack Doohan, adding an exciting touch to the evening.

Across the three-day Grand Prix and beyond, guests enjoyed an exceptional array of experiences, from premium race views to bespoke hospitality.

Stay tuned - 2025 Singapore Grand Prix packages from Keith Prowse Travel will be available for booking soon.



RISING F1 star Jack Doohan getting up close with Keith Prowse Travel guests at Smoke & Mirrors bar.



JAMES O'Brien hosting a Q&A with Jack Doohan, bringing guests an insider look at life in Formula 1.

DIE-HARD Formula 1 fans enjoying the function before the racing action kicked off.



KPT team with Jack Doohan, including: Keisha Reynolds, Operations Manager; Nisha Bajaj, GM Product; Daniel Morahan, MD; Phil Haines, Head of Marketing; Michaela Oakley, Account Manager and Josh Ellery, Leisure Sales Specialist.



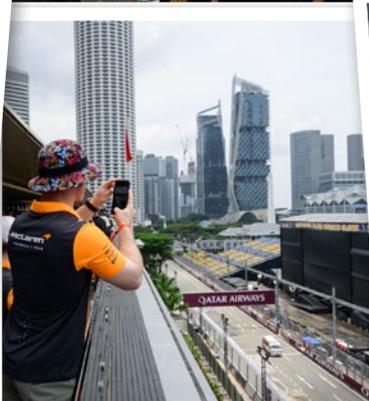
GUESTS enjoying the view over the Padang section of the track.



GUESTS sampling the local Singaporean beers, while overlooking the Lion City.



FORMULA 1 fans enjoying the function before the race action kicked off.



A LOVE of F1 running in the family, with one of many guests bringing their kids to experience the action.

Travel gap widens

YOUNG wealthy travellers are driving higher rates of travel spend, while middle-income earners are pulling back, according to the new *Affluent Traveler* report published by Arival.

The implications of the growing divide could be significant for the experiences sector, the report contends.

The industry may become increasingly reliant on a smaller, more affluent customer base, which could necessitate a strategic shift for many operators, adapting their offerings to cater to the preferences and expectations of affluent travellers.

More research is needed to see if these are cyclical trends or seismic shifts.

FCTG'S LTC APPOINTS HEAD OF MARKETING

STEPHANIE Bleakley has joined the Luxury Travel Collection (LTC) team as Head of Marketing.

Bleakley's career has seen her deliver and market luxury travel events across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, including ILTM Cannes, before returning home to Melbourne, where she will be based with LTC.

She most recently worked for Flight Centre Travel Group's marquee luxury event Luxperience, commencing in 2020, prior to the luxury gathering being acquired by FCTG (TD 15 May 2023).

"Steph has sought out the best creative minds she could find to inspire her and immersed herself in a veritable feast of marketing campaigns and conference and event programs in the worlds of architecture, design, energy and sustainability," LTC commented.



"[She] has always ensured that her personal passion for travel kept pace with her career, citing highlights like sunrise over Angkor Wat, skiing any snow-capped mountain she can find in the Alps & Japan, and exploring the sand-blown canyons of Arizona among

her top five."

The Melbourne native (pictured) is also a passionate follower of what she describes as the 'three Cs': coffee, craft gin, and cheese, and is also a big fan of Aussie Rules team, the Richmond Tigers. MS

Blue Diamond joins

BLUE Diamond Resorts has joined the global Interval Exchange Network.

The resort company's six all-inclusive properties will now be accessible by Interval members, while Prime Travelers Club by BDR members at these six resorts will join Interval.

This will see members gain access to a variety of travel and leisure benefits, such as earning points.

Silversea's new Venetian Society Reunion cruise

SILVERSEA has announced a new Venetian Society Reunion voyage for next year.

The member-selected cruise will sail between Fusina and Athens, travelling with new President Bert Hernandez for the first time.

The cruise aboard *Silver Spirit* will sail from 17 to 29 Oct 2025, offering special onboard events & receptions, enriched entertainment, and curated shore excursions.



Venetian Society members can also attend an exclusive signature event ashore, as well as receiving a 5% saving on the cruise fare, gifts, and more.

CLICK HERE for more information on the cruise.

Ponant chips in

PONANT has elevated its Jan 'Best of New Zealand' expedition with a premium golf experience.

The cruise, departing 16 Jan, will see *Le Jacques-Cartier* passengers explore the landscapes of New Zealand's east coast, and enjoy the chance to play golf at Summerhill Estate Golf Course, Awapuni Links, and Cape Kidnappers Golf Course, at three ports of call.

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A new event space has opened at **Mulia Bali**, set along the shores of Nusa Dua. The Mulia Glass House is ideal for a wide range of events, from corporate meetings and exhibitions, to weddings and social gatherings. Capable of hosting over 100 guests, the elegant venue boasts uninterrupted ocean views, features an adjacent garden space, and is located next to The Mulia, with offers a variety of accommodation options.



Guests at **Elements of Byron** can now enjoy a new rainforest-to-table dining experience this spring. Blending fine-dining with sustainability, the 'Native Menu' experience begins with a foraging tour, with guests exploring the property's 25 hectares of landscape to gather native ingredients. Participants are then treated to a two-course lunch with an entree and a choice between three main dishes, plus a complimentary drink.



Bab Al Shams Desert Resort & Spa, located in Dubai, has unveiled its new Desert Pool Villas. Opening on 01 Oct, the collection includes eight villas, available in one- and two-bedroom configurations and featuring expansive indoor and outdoor living spaces with private pools, sun loungers, outdoor fireplaces, plus spacious living and dining areas. Guests can soak in the desert landscape through expansive windows, and enjoy access to a personal concierge.



SAii Koh Samui Choengmon, a lifestyle resort at Hanuman Bay, is set to transform into an adults-only retreat. From 01 Dec, the property will be renamed to **SAii Koh Samui Villas**, providing a "sophisticated, serene retreat for guests seeking romance and relaxation". Catering to guests aged 12 and above, the resort comprises of 52 private pool villas, an infinity pool, and offers direct beach access.



Nestled in the heart of Tanjong Pagar, **Amara Singapore** has announced the completion of its 11-month phased makeover. Now featuring refreshed spaces and new experiences for guests, the transformation encompasses a redesign of the hotel's guest rooms, public spaces, meeting rooms, ballrooms, and dining venues, offering a blend of modern and traditional aesthetics.

Scarlet Lady to get makeover



VIRGIN Voyages' flagship *Scarlet Lady* will undergo an "epic glow-up" later this year, including more suites, new cabanas, and refreshed dining venues.

The vessel will go into dry dock from 14-28 Nov to receive several cosmetic upgrades before making the 16-night transatlantic journey from Rome to Miami, after which she will offer a series of longer Caribbean voyages.

Following what the cruise line said has been "overwhelming demand" for suites aboard its ships, several of *Scarlet Lady's* Sea Terrace cabins on deck 11 are being converted to create 24 'Seriously Suite' RockStar Quarters - the most popular among VV's suite categories.

Six bookable VIP cabanas will also be introduced on the ship, along with revamped eateries and new dining concepts, including Lucky Lotus by Razzle Dazzle, characterised by a Chinese-inspired menu and craft cocktails.

Guests on board can also enjoy a new couples treatment room in the Redemption Spa, and additional spaces in the ship's

non-smoking casino.

Additionally, *Scarlet Lady* will debut a new mermaid on its bow, which the brand said symbolises "strength and safe passage".

Nicole Huang, VP of Fleet Experience, said "we're listening and giving travellers more of what they've asked for - this includes more suites, luxe new cabanas and fresh, vibey dining concepts - so Sailors can truly live the life of a rockstar". *JM*

Scenic ANZ season

EARLYBIRD offers with savings of up to \$600pp are now in market from Scenic on its 2025/26 Australia and New Zealand Handcrafted Land Journeys.

The season features a range of new Scenic Freechoice and Scenic Enrich experiences, including a Murray River cruise from Echuca to Torrumbarry Weir on board the *PS Australian Star* paddlewheeler.

Scenic has also updated its 'Royal New Zealand' tour with visits to Pancake Rocks and the South Island city of Nelson along with new Maori cultural activities.

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Corporate Travel Management



Wendy Brockbank

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