

USA marketing play

BRAND USA has appointed high-profile tourism executive Leah Chandler as its new Chief Marketing Officer, where she will look to advance the body's strategic approach to content creation and partner programs.

Since Jul, Brand USA has expanded efforts to improve global communications, product development, partnerships, and AI innovation, with Chandler charged with taking the renewed push to new levels.

OTAs in the firing line of AI

EXCLUSIVE

THE new Operator 'AI agent' from ChatGPT (**TD** 28 Jan) will be a greater threat to OTAs and not traditional travel advisors, Flight Centre Chief Experience Officer John Morhous believes.

The US-based former FCM Global Technology Leader told **TD** that the simplified interface Operator offers online bookers may threaten OTAs, as they race to harness the technology rather than go head-to-head with it.

"OTAs and other travel retailers who generate sales solely through their website may see it as a threat," Morhous suggested.

"When you use tools like Operator, you speak in natural language and get answers in natural language; you don't have to deal with web page design and user experience, which for most OTAs is geared towards converting a casual browser into a paid customer.

"My best guess as to why leading OTAs like Booking.com and Priceline (US-based) would have partnered with OpenAI for the launch is to demonstrate their supportability of new



technologies like this, and possibly to have early access to ways to better optimise it."

Morhous believes one of the biggest speed bumps Operator will face in booking travel is navigating verification prompts.

"Given how many transactional systems are implementing multi-factor authentication, it is unclear how tools like Operator could handle this autonomously.

"I would think one of the next aspects they will handle will be around authentication brokerage - a secure way for the user to delegate the bot to be able to log into a system as them and complete an action," he said. *MS*

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily features eight pages of news, including a photo page from **Scenic** and our **Corporate Update** plus a full page from **Air Mauritius**.

Tickets for resilience

THE Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) is giving away 10 tickets to its International Women's Day Lunch taking place in Melbourne on 06 Mar.

Industry members can nominate people in the travel sector who have demonstrated exceptional emotional resilience to be in the running for the tickets.

Email cato@cato.travels before 21 Feb and describe your worthy candidate in under 200 words.

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Canada's health check

DESTINATION Canada will measure the impact tourism has on its economy and communities via a new tool that looks beyond traditional metrics, such as visitor spend and overall arrivals.

The new 'Wealth and Wellbeing Index' will look at how tourism benefits local communities and its role in preserving culture, protecting natural assets, driving economic growth and enhancing Canada's global competitiveness.

Using a 'Six E's' framework, the tool looks at economy, employment, enablement, environment, engagement and experience to develop a more



holistic picture of the benefits tourism brings to communities.

Destination Canada said long-term growth in tourism comes from balancing economic gains with more tangible benefits such as employment and infrastructure, with the index to quantify how this drives demand.

"People across the country, from small towns to large cities, are participating in the tourism economy, and with Destination Canada's innovative new tool we will be able to better measure and understand their impact so that we can better support and invest in their work going forward," said Canadian Minister of Tourism, Pascale St-Onge. *ML*

Studying Mauritius

AIR Mauritius is inviting agents to learn more about the Indian Ocean country, its coastlines, local charm and stunning scenery.

The airline has also reduced airfares by 25% - see [page nine](#).

Qantas app update

QANTAS customers are now able to get alerts on ticketing issues with their bookings, thanks to updates recently rolled out on the carrier's mobile app.

The new feature alerts customers to ticketing issues, such as missing passenger information, issues with alternative methods of payment (such as Zip and BPay), and payment issues with credit cards or insufficient Qantas Points.

The app will also now provide customers with simple methods to resolve these issues, including self-service or the Qantas app's click-to-call function, which connects customers directly to the carrier's contact centre and gives agents context of the call.

Learn more about the Qantas app updates [HERE](#).



Travel Daily
ON LOCATION

QATAR

Today's issue of *Travel Daily* is coming to you courtesy of **Qatar Airways**.

VALENTINE'S Day is here with us in Doha.

After an early morning wake-up, travel advisors were able to experience a magical sunrise in the desert, followed by a visit to the Inland Sea.

The afternoon saw the group celebrate this most lovely of days with a "sea of red" on display at the Doha Beach Club, located in the city's West Bay, one of the destination's most popular locations for families.

Tomorrow will see advisors undertake a cultural tour across the city, followed by lunch at Boho, before flying back home.

VIKING EXPLORER SESSIONS

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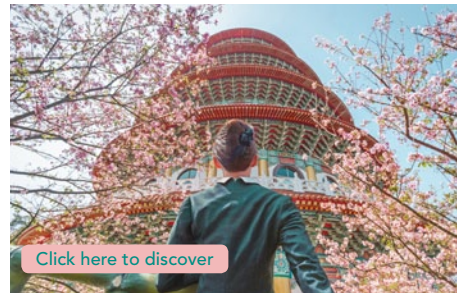
VIKING

44 FREE CLIENT EVENTS

Viking's popular Explorer Sessions are hitting the road, coming to 44 regions across Australia from February to April.

Don't miss this chance to engage your clients and let Viking inspire them to book their next voyage with you.

Sessions fill up fast and registration is necessary.



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Window Seat

THE idea of two-level seating on planes just won't go away, with Spanish start-up Chaise Longue revealing it is in early-stage discussions with Airbus to make the double-decker concept a reality.

Benefits include extra space for passengers, with travellers in the top row to enjoy more head room where overhead lockers normally are, while bottom row guests will have plenty of extra leg room.

That bottom row may be a little scary for the claustrophobics among us.



A capital agent incentive

DESTINATION DC has launched a new travel agent incentive to help advisors become experts in the United States capital city, with spots on a fam trip up for grabs.

The DC Special Agent Academy is helmed by an interactive training program loaded with information on Washington DC's



neighbourhoods, landmarks, cultural festivals, hotels, attractions and unique offerings.

The program features three modules covering 'Essential Details', 'Monuments, Memorials and Museums' and 'There's Only One DC,' with information on what sets the city apart.

Agents in Australia and New Zealand who complete the program by 14 Apr will go into a draw to win a spot on a fam trip departing in May.

On completion of the program, agents will be certified as a Washington DC Special Agent and will gain access to the Destination DC team for extra resources. *ML*

VIP celebrations

TRUTRAVELS has introduced a new travel style called Limited Edition, which explores the world's best celebrations.

The one-off trips take travellers to festive annual gatherings such as the Day of the Dead in Mexico and Holi Festival in India.

Each tour is crafted to deliver more celebrations and less sightseeing, with a focus on visiting sites that locals love.

Bookings for the new tours can be made via Sherpa - [CLICK HERE](#) for more details.

Air NZ promotes

AIR New Zealand has promoted Jeremy O'Brien to the role of interim Chief Commercial Officer until Jul, at which time Scott Wilkinson will take over.

O'Brien (**pictured**) has been with the carrier since 2016, and was most recently in the role of General Manager - Tribe Lead International Airline.

Meanwhile, Wilkinson's recruitment was announced last month (*TD* 22 Jan), and he joins from Qantas, where he was Executive Manager, Digital and Direct Customer Experience.

Wilkinson's move across the ditch follows Qantas appointing several former Air NZ executives in recent years, including CEO - Qantas International & Freight Cam Wallace (*TD* 28 Feb 2023).



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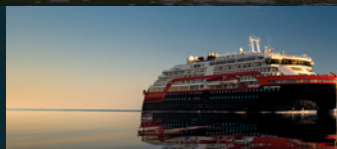
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Travel Daily
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Dogged by delays

VIRGIN Australia says regulatory approval to allow small pets to fly in the passenger cabin is taking longer than expected.

The airline first announced its plans to offer the service nearly a year ago (**TD** 07 Mar 2024), and once the option becomes available, VA will designate two rows on select flights for guests flying with pets.

Animals must weigh no more than 8kg, be at least eight weeks of age, and fit in a soft-sided carrier, such as a small dog or cat.

Pets will also be required to be kept within the confines of their carrier, both on board and in the departure and arrival airport, unless required to be removed by security or to use a relief area.

A pet travel guide will also be issued when the service goes live.

Flying through Qatari history



WITH 80 travel agents and key trade partners landing in Doha courtesy of Qatar Airways, it was always going to be a challenge to create a 'wow' moment for such a large group.

However, the objective was achieved by lunchtime at Jiwan, located on the top floor of the National Museum of Qatar.

The VIPs enjoyed fantastic views of the skyline of Doha, and were also treated to a sumptuous 10-course degustation menu, showcasing local ingredients and culinary stylings.

Visiting the museum after lunch - and to burn off some calories - participants were taken on a journey through the rich Arabian heritage and history of Qatar, from the early pearl industry through to the oil and gas discovery period.

Today, the vibrant modern

city stands as the 'Pearl of the Persian Gulf', a result of massive development efforts on behalf of the Qatari Government.

The museum also features state-of-the-art audio visual and art projections, historical relics and tapestries, all situated within the architectural marvel and modelled on desert rose crystal.

Pictured: One of the groups taking in the view outside the National Museum of Qatar. *SH*

EK ramps up Rome

EMIRATES will reinstate its third daily service between Dubai and Rome from 01 Jun, adding more than 2,500 weekly seats between the two cities.

As the second most popular route for Australians, the additional flights will significantly improve onward connectivity across the Emirates network, particularly from Melbourne and Sydney, and will be operated by a Boeing 777-300ER.

Aircraft servicing the route feature eight private suites in first class, 42 lie-flat seats in business class and 310 spacious seats in economy class.

Emirates' decision follows Cathay Pacific announcing last month it will launch direct flights between Hong Kong and Rome for the first time (**TD** 09 Jan).

The Hong Kong carrier will operate three times a week on in the northern summer.

Sell your way to US

BRAND USA has partnered with Qantas, American Airlines and a host of regional US DMCs to launch the 2026 'Sell Your Way to the USA' travel agent incentive.

Fifteen places are available across five itineraries, which will see three winners paired on five- to six-night self-drive tours.

Participating destinations on the self-guided famils include Anchorage, Dallas Fort Worth, Las Vegas and Reno-Tahoe, Salt Lake City and Washington DC.

Registrations for the incentive open on Mon and run to 12 May - **CLICK HERE** for more information.

Agents can earn a place on one of the famils by selling return airfares to the US with Qantas or American Airlines, with a bonus point for itineraries featuring land product in a host destination.

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Uluru

Oceania sales chief

FORMER US-based Flight Centre Travel Group executive Brennan Qesnele has been appointed Oceania Cruises' new Senior Vice President of Sales.

Qesnele will start in the role on 24 Feb and report directly to President Frank A. Del Rio.

The new recruit for the premium cruise line joins from sister brand Norwegian Cruise Line, where he held the role of VP of Strategic and National Accounts since Jul 2022.

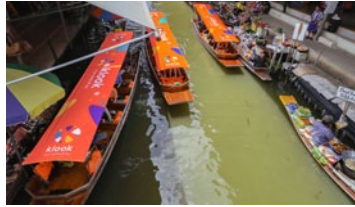
Klook to spend up big

EXPERIENCES and attractions platform Klook has set itself up for long-term growth on the back of a US\$100 million injection from global growth investment vehicle Vitruvian Partners.

The global investor has 10 offices worldwide and focuses on dynamic business models characterised by rapid change in asset-light industries.

Drawing on the new investment, Klook will accelerate its expansion and innovation objectives by broadening its recent AI partnership with Google Cloud.

Through this, the company aims to enhance the customer booking experience, merchant relations and internal productivity.



The company also plans to work closely with tourism boards across the Asia-Pacific region to foster community impact and future-proof the tourism sector.

Klook co-founder and CEO Ethan Lin said the past decade had seen Klook establish itself as the go-to platform for travel experiences in Asia-Pacific.

"With the region set to remain the heartbeat of global tourism, Klook's strong brand, extensive supply network, and deep local expertise position us to deliver even greater value to the next generation of experience-driven travellers across the world." *ML*

VV expands options

VIRGIN Voyages has announced fresh variation of some of its Caribbean itineraries for 2026-27, as well as adding Panama City and of St. Thomas, part of the US Virgin Islands, to its growing list of international ports of call.

Next week, the cruise line will also open bookings for the 17-night voyage through the Panama Canal to Miami - a reverse of the original east-to-west option that went on sale in 2024, and was the line's fastest-ever selling itinerary.

The Richard Branson-owned brand has also ramped its comedy specialty voyages, introducing a five-night US-based 'Comedy Festival' itinerary for 2025, while also bringing back its popular six-night UK edition, headlined by well-known British TV personality Jack Whitehall.

Menu revamps and fresh entertainment offerings, including an interactive 1999-inspired party, are also on the cards for Virgin Voyages' guests.

The Tauck of the town



TAUCK recently celebrated its 100th birthday, hosting more than 700 employees, family members, and special guests at a gala event in Florence, Italy.

Attendees travelled from across 32 countries and assembled in 13 hotels in the Italian city over three days earlier this month to take part in general plenary meetings and focused breakout sessions, daily sightseeing excursions, evening events and an array of volunteer activities.

Guests participated in an afternoon of volunteer work, including an initiative designed to integrate the English language into educational programs offered by the city's museums, and art-themed projects that "upcycle" discarded items and employ marginalised members of the local community.

As part of its 100th anniversary gathering, Tauck also provided a generous grant to help restore the historic Madre Terra floor mosaic in the Duomo's famed

Real-time efficiency

EMIRATES has partnered with Airbus to implement its Skywise Fleet Performance monitoring solution to improve efficiency and cut unplanned maintenance.

The advanced predictive maintenance tool is being rolled out on its Airbus A350 and A380 fleet to improve aircraft dispatch reliability, which will help EK's engineering teams monitor the performance of each aircraft.

Emirates Engineering says it is also exploring ways to use virtual and augmented reality to aid in maintenance tasks and schedules.

MEANWHILE, Emirates will boost its network in Nigeria through a new interline agreement with Air Peace Limited.

The deal will unlock access to 13 new cities in Nigeria for travellers connecting from Dubai to Lagos.

Baptistery of San Giovanni, dating back to around 1200 AD.

"Tauck has thrived - and we continue to thrive - because we have a shared vision and a deep sense of purpose to enhance our guests lives by providing truly meaningful travel experiences," said Tauck Chairman Dan Mahar.

"Although our values are timeless, we still have an incredible thirst to keep exploring and innovating, whether it's new destinations, new modes of travel, or new ways of delivering life-changing experiences to our guests."

"It feels like we're just getting started, and we can't wait for the future," Mahar concluded. *JM*

Quark's new season

QUARK Expeditions has unveiled its Antarctica 2026/27 season, replete with new voyages and experiences on the ice.

The 2026/27 season marks the first of three seasons for Quark offering expeditions on board the 168-passenger *World Voyager*, which has been chartered from Atlas Ocean Voyages.

Departures on this vessel will offer a new-look science program allowing guests to take part in genuine scientific research.

Guests heading off on early season departures will be able to capitalise on ideal conditions to visit smaller and more sheltered parts of Antarctica for activities such as overnight camping.

An early booking bonus has also been released on all Antarctica 2026/27 itineraries booked before 31 May 2025, with up to 15% off if paid in full, a US\$250 adventure credit and earlybird rescheduling flexibility.



Scenic's stars shine in Sydney's sky

MORE than 300 of the travel industry's leading consortia, travel advisors and consultants, attended the Scenic Group's ninth annual Night of Stars event on Sat 08 Feb. The event celebrated the exceptional achievements of Scenic and Emerald Cruises & Tours' valued travel partners from Australia & New Zealand and their record-breaking sales in 2024.

Glen Moroney, founder & Chairman of Scenic Group, extended his congratulations to all national and state category winners via a personal video message.

The evening was highlighted by an extraordinary milestone – a total of 46 Diamond Award winners, an unprecedented achievement in the history of the event.

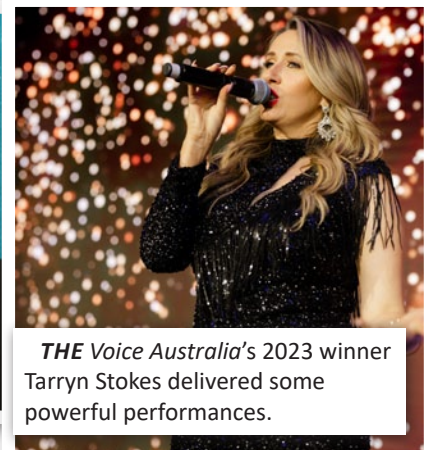
Hosted by TV presenter and personality David Whitehill, the event featured breathtaking performances from by Tarryn Stokes, winner of *The Voice Australia*, adding a shining star to the celebration. The event also underscored the resilience and success of the Scenic Group's travel partners and consultants, in a highly competitive and evolving travel sector.



HIGHEST Sales Home-Based Australia-wide: TravelManagers.



HIGHEST Sales Online Agency Australia-wide: Global Journeys.



THE Voice Australia's 2023 winner Tarryn Stokes delivered some powerful performances.



HIGHEST Agency Sales SA: Phil Hoffmann Travel Glenelg and Highest Sales Multi Location Australia-wide: Phil Hoffmann Travel.



HIGHEST Agency Sales VIC: Geelong Travel and Highest Sales Single Location Australia-wide: Geelong Travel.



HIGHEST Agency Sales WA: Bicton Travel.



HIGHEST Agency Sales ACT: Jamison Travel.



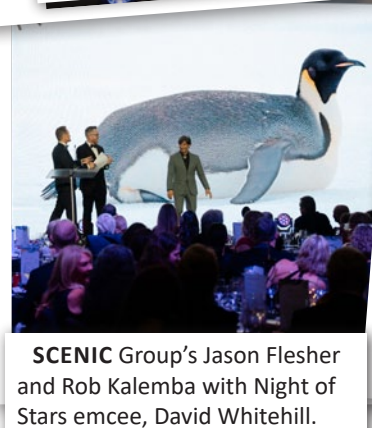
HIGHEST Agency Sales QLD: Helloworld Travel Strathpine.



INTRODUCING Emerald Kaia, which will set sail in 2026.



2024 National Consultant Award Australia: Gada Selim from Helloworld Travel Miranda and Highest Agency Sales NSW: Helloworld Travel Miranda.



SCENIC Group's Jason Flesher and Rob Kalemba with Night of Stars emcee, David Whitehill.

CORPORATE UPDATE

A finger on the Pulse

FOLLOWING a period of strong growth last year, Brisbane-based travel agency Pulse Travel has joined the Association of Travel Management Companies (ATMC).

“We have had an exciting 12 months following the celebration of our 35th anniversary last year, and we look forward to further opportunities this year to grow the business and help improve the travel industry as we join ATMC,” Pulse Travel MD Stan Klinakis (pictured) said.

“Representing more than 3,500 travel managers throughout Australia, the ATMC provides industry leaders with the opportunity to strengthen ties, improve supplier relations and tackle industry challenges.

“This strategic partnership reaffirms Pulse Travel’s dedication to continual improvement, providing the highest level of professionalism and the best customer service for our clients.”



Located in Brisbane and serving clients across the country for over three decades, Pulse Travel primarily handles corporate, leisure and group travel bookings.

The ACTS has been active in advocating on behalf of agents in recent times, co-creating a White Paper on the fragmenting of the corporate travel space (TD 04 Oct 2024), as well as running its first Summit in Sydney last year. *AB*

EK uncorks Moet

EMIRATES will roll out a new business class menu featuring 18 new dishes crafted in partnership with Michelin-starred chef Jean Michel Bardet and champagne brand Moet & Chandon.

Available from May on selected routes, each dish has been paired with an exclusive champagne.

The new menu has spent more than a year in development, with chefs challenged to create refined dishes that can be served at scale.

Dishes include roasted duck with braised aubergine or poached scallops with green melon, both paired with Moet & Chandon Grand Vintage 2016.

MH biz campaign

MALAYSIA Airlines has cut 20% from its business class airfares in a relaunch of its popular ‘Time For’ global campaign, with bookings open until 20 Feb.

Members of MH’s Enrich loyalty program can take a further 5% off, with non-members invited to sign up to unlock the offer.

Travellers in business class can enjoy benefits such as suites with privacy doors, access to lounges and Mercedes terminal transfers.



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Regent reignites luxury in Bali



REGENT Hotels has made its return to Indonesia following its acquisition by IHG Hotels & Resorts in 2018, with the first-phase opening of Regent Bali Canggu, an ultra-luxury beachfront resort set on Bali’s southwestern coast.

The resort will feature the world’s first Regent Spa, as well as a collection of five dining venues led by renowned chefs, and expansive private suites and villas with infinity pools and bespoke amenities - all of which blend Balinese heritage with contemporary luxury.

The property features 150 suites and villas, many offering sea or garden views and direct lagoon access, with the entry-level Studio Suites boasting private balconies and oasis bathrooms complete with hand-carved teak bathtubs and rain showers.

There is also the opulent two bedroom oceanfront penthouse with private pool, which offers generous living space, a fully equipped kitchen and an oversized private terrace - all

overlooking the Indian Ocean.

From late 2025, guests will be able to access the first-ever Regent-branded spa, which will offer an array of scrubs, wraps, and massages, alongside advanced skincare sessions using Kerstin Florian beauty products.

As for dining options, guests can enjoy authentic tapas and reinvented Spanish classics at Sazon, or opt for a modern European menu infused with Asian influences at Cure, set to open later this year.

Rooms at Regent Bali Canggu start at US\$1,208 (A\$1,910) per night excluding taxes and fees. *JM*

TravelPay partners

MEDITERRANEAN specialist wholesaler Prestige Travel Corporation is now listed with TravelPay as a payment partner.

Agents booking accommodation, transfers, ferries and train tickets, day tours and small group or private tours can now utilise TravelPay for remittance.

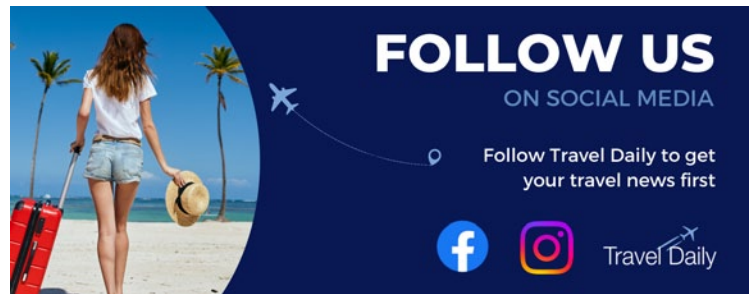
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China Airlines is feeling the love on Valentine's Day, with a range of exclusive discounts now on sale to destinations in Asia and Europe. On sale until 23 Feb, savings of up to 12% are now in market on flights from SYD, BNE and MEL, flying on its Airbus A350. Deals include return to London Heathrow from \$1,641 - **CLICK HERE** for more details.

Save up to \$2,800 twin share on tours and flights with **Trafalgar** in 'The Big Tour Sale' for bookings made by 20 Feb. Utilising an exclusive flight offer from Singapore Airlines, travellers can book some of Trafalgar's most popular itineraries including the 21-day 'Grand European' which visits 11 countries en route from London to Amsterdam including Vienna, Rome and Paris. **CLICK HERE** for more information.

Embark on a South Pacific adventure with **Tahiti Voyages** offering up to 35% off a package at Le Bora Bora by Pearl Resort. Stay in an overwater bungalow for five nights, book-ended by one night at Le Tahiti by Pearl, along with Air Tahiti Nui international flights, domestic flights, airport transfers and breakfast daily, priced from \$5,790. Phone 1300 526 868.

Aurora Expeditions is offering up to 20% off selected voyages during its 2025/26 Antarctic season, in celebration of Ernest Shackleton's birthday. The special applies to the 20-day 'In Shackleton's Footsteps' itinerary round-trip from Ushuaia. For more information, phone 1800 637 688.

For your next Bali adventure, **Trans Nusa** is a new airline flying from Perth to Denpasar and celebrating its launch by offering one-way fares from A\$169 if booked by 28 Feb. Taking off for the first time on 20 Mar, the fare is valid for travel until 25 Oct 2025. The airline is beginning with a thrice-weekly service, rising to daily from 01 Jun. Call 02 9158 8590.

Health and wellness resort brand **Chiva-Som** is celebrating its 30th anniversary with two special offers for Australians travelling in 2025. Guests can take advantage of a 10% discount on Thai Pavilions on stays in May 2025 or from Sep onwards. Separately, a 'Stay 5 Pay 4' offer is also available, with three meals daily also included. Phone 1300 857 037.

Enjoy a serene three-, four- or seven-night Lower Mekong river cruise with **Heritage Line** and get up to 20% off. Special deals are also available on cycling and private shore excursions, with guests enjoying a daily reflexology treatment. **CLICK HERE** for more details.

Malaysia Airlines has released new promotional fares on services from Australia to destinations across its network. Explore Kuala Lumpur from \$879 return, Male from \$1,009 or London from \$1,629.

Aussies can whisk themselves off to Hayman Island in 2025, with **InterContinental Hayman Great Barrier Reef** celebrating the island's 75th anniversary with a series of dedicated events and experiences. A special offer of \$525 per night for up to two people includes luxury accommodation, daily breakfast and more. **CLICK HERE** for details.

Cruise Guru on the screen



CRUISE Guru has partnered with nine major cruise lines for an immersive new cruise-themed TV show on Channel Nine, called *Your Next Cruise*.

The first season of the production will consist of three 30-minute episodes, providing the participating brands with mass exposure to future cruisers.

A number of cruise lines will pitch their value through a storytelling approach, including Ponant; Viking Cruises; Norwegian Cruise Line; Coral Expeditions; Hurtigruten; Princess Cruises; Carnival Cruise Line; Disney Cruise Line; and Azamara Cruises.

Additionally, viewers will be able to access deals to suit all budgets, backed by Cruise Guru's fully integrated live booking experience.

Michael Betteridge, Chief Commercial & Operations Officer at Cruise Guru, said the marketing initiative "demonstrates the benefits of strong partnerships between the cruise lines and their trade distribution".

"As a result of getting access to this free-to-air network, we are tapping into the growing

popularity of cruising in Australia and the desire for more detailed product information as well as great deals."

The first episode will air tomorrow at 1.30pm AEDT, replayed on 9LIFE from 16 Feb.

Marriott multiplies

MARRIOTT International has announced a record-breaking year of growth in Asia Pacific excluding China (APEC), signing 109 deals and adding over 21,000 rooms to its development pipeline in 2024.

The hospitality giant saw accelerated growth across all segments, particularly luxury, with 19% of its 2024 signings in the high-spend market.

Multi-unit agreements and conversion opportunities also played a key role in the company's expansion across the region, representing 36% of 2024 signings - including the launch of Four Points Flex by Sheraton in Japan, as part of a strategic multi-unit agreement with KKR to convert 14 properties across 10 cities in Japan.

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