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A night to savour

APT Travel Group recently hosted a special VIP dinner in Perth for its largest-ever group of Diamond and Platinum agents.

The high achievers welcomed a new member into the Million Dollar Club - head to **page nine** for photos from the glam event.

No stress with rail

RAIL is trending for 2025, with Railbookers offering a wide range of itineraries, each well placed to create a dream holiday.

National Sales Manager Craig Owens is also inviting agents to join him for a product update on 05 Mar - see **page 11** for details.

Exclude agents please

EXCLUSIVE

THE Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) has revealed it continues to push hard for the Federal Government to exclude travel agents from any refund obligations imposed by the *Aviation Customer Rights Charter*.

In an update supplied to *Travel Daily*, the industry body said it has made the message clear to government officials at a series of consultations, roundtables, and submissions in recent months.

"We have been firm, agents should be excluded from this scheme," ATIA's Director of Advocacy and Public Policy Ingrid

Fraser said.

"It's crucial that agents aren't faced with the additional red tape and costs of being involved in a scheme where they aren't the responsible party," she added.

The ATIA executive also pointed out that advisors already manage a huge volume of refund requests that eat into their already time-poor schedules.

"Australian travel agents processed over 900,000 refunds last year," Fraser noted.

"That's not just a number - it's nearly a million instances of time spent on hold, managing customer expectations, and helping to rebook clients.

"It is vitally important that agents are not responsible for providing consumer refunds where they are not yet in possession of those funds from the airline," Fraser added.

The scheme was recommended in the Aviation White Paper last year (*TD* 26 Aug 2024), with a draft *Aviation Customer Rights Charter* released in Jan suggesting pax should be able to access a full refund if flights are delayed by just three hours (*TD* 06 Jan).

More from ATIA on **page six**. *AB*

Today's issue of *TD*

Travel Daily today features eight pages of news, including our **Luxury page**, plus a product profile from **Railbookers** and full pages from:

- APT Travel Group
- Crystal Cruises

Bonus 20% comm

AGENTS can earn up to 20% extra commission on selected Crystal Cruises sailings in 2025/26 if booked by 31 Mar.

Eligible itineraries include an 11-night Athens round-trip to the Med, which could earn you an extra \$5,280 - details on **page 10**.



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Breathtaking Mekong

VIEW DEAL

Access a great Tonic

TOURISM marketing firm Tonic Tourism Solutions has inked a partnership with AccessibleOz aimed at positioning Australia as an ideal destination for travellers with disabilities.

The tie-up will harness the specialised knowledge of AccessibleOz to support tourism businesses nationwide to better promote themselves as products geared to disabled travellers.

Key objectives of the partnership include connecting AccessibleOz with the travel trade, developing inclusive marketing campaigns, showcasing Australia's best existing accessible experiences and helping other tourism businesses to create accessible business plans.

The two organisations will also work closely with tourism businesses unable to accept travellers with sensory or mobility impairments to see if a way forward can be found.

Tonic Tourism Solutions said accessible tourism is more than just a compliance issue - it is "about creating a world where travel is a right, not a privilege".



New AKTG sales duo

ABERCROMBIE & Kent Travel Group (AKTG) has expanded its sales roster, with Anoushka Kudav appointed as Sales Director NSW/ New Zealand, joining fellow recent appointee, Victoria/ Tasmania Sales Director Lisa Hunt.

Kudav will join from luxury line Silversea, as revealed by **Travel Daily's** sister title **Cruise Weekly**, sharing the NSW region with incumbent Sales Director Alexa Papoulias, who will also continue to manage the ACT.

Kudav is the latest new AKTG Sales Director, and her hire follows Hunt, who started earlier this month and came from APT Travel Group, where she worked as Business Development Manager for nearly three years.

Vice President Sales for Australia & New Zealand Susan Haberle told **TD** AKTG's new-look sales team is the best she has worked with in her career.

"With the increase of the team, that's really increasing our trade support and our commitment to trade, who are super important to this future journey with us and these expansion plans," she said. "They'll be the one-stop shop for both A&K and Crystal for trade partners," she added.

The expansion of the sales team follows on from the restructure of AKTG's local team, which will see Managing Director Debra Fox move to the UK to also oversee that market (**TD** 04 Feb).

Earlier in the year, Haberle was appointed Vice President Sales

for Australia & New Zealand for both the A&K and Crystal brands, with Tony Archbold to oversee the two in Asia, as Vice President of Sales for the region.

The changes are in line with AKTG's "one company" strategy, which also saw its local regional sales managers' responsibilities updated to sales directors (**TD** 23 Oct 2024).

Haberle said last year was AKTG's biggest on record, which the company last month followed up with its biggest-ever Jan.

"This momentum, the work that has been done the last 12-18 months, is really now starting to come to fruition," she explained to **Travel Daily**.

AKTG's sales are coming in hot across all of the company's product, Fox told **TD**, including to destinations which have taken a hit in recent times, such as the Middle East.

Other highlights have seen AKTG increase its Connoisseur Club membership by 25% for this year, based on 2024 sales.

As with other areas of AKTG's business, the Connoisseur Club will now also include sales for the Crystal brand.

Connoisseur Club membership is not just about sales however, Fox added.

"They need to demonstrate that it's a partnership and that both sides are investing, and so revenue will be one trigger, but it's really the quality and standard of the partnership." *MS*

Qatar is speedy

QATAR Airways has achieved a new milestone with the installation of Starlink on its 30th aircraft, equipping over 50% of its Boeing 777 fleet.

The carrier has accelerated its Starlink rollout, reducing the retrofit by nearly three-quarters of the initial timeline.



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HLO half-year challenge

DWINDLING demand for leisure travel due to cost-of-living increases have been blamed for a decline in Helloworld Travel Limited's 1H financial results (**TD** breaking news).

For the half-year ending 31 Dec 2024, the company posted a 6.9% fall in total transaction value to \$2.1 billion, with overall revenue down 7.6% to \$103.8 million.

Underlying EBITDA closed at \$27.2 million, down 20.2% on the prior corresponding period, with underlying margin also down 4%.

Despite the downturn, Helloworld Travel Limited posted an after-tax profit of \$10.8 million, a 32.4% year-on-year fall.

A market shift towards medium-haul destinations such as Japan, Bali, Thailand and Fiji was cited as

a key factor in the result, coupled with a decrease in customers.

Group investments in home-based network MTA Travel, Phil Hoffmann Travel and the Australiareiser Group were a high point for the company, with profits increasing by 13.6%.

Helloworld Travel Limited CEO Andrew Burnes said the result also reflected reductions in airfares, which pushed flight TTV downwards across the period.

"Despite the short-term challenges, we will continue to leverage our industry knowledge and drive long-term shareholder value across the period ahead."

Burnes said the group is seeing strong forward bookings for the remainder of 2025.

"The business has balance sheet strength, no external bank borrowings and strong liquidity that positions the company for long-term sustainable growth."

Highlights of the half-year included the rollout of the Helloworld Loyalty Shares Program (**TD** 24 Sep 2024), the debut of the Viva Holidays luxury brand Viva Gold and the premiere of the Helloworld TV show. *ML*

Queenstown luxury

A NEW luxury accommodation offering is coming to New Zealand, with the opening of ROKI Collection Queenstown in mid-2025.

Located on the shores of Lake Wakatipu, guests staying at the new hotel will have easy access to the region's adventure and leisure activities, with bespoke excursions on offer like a romantic gourmet lunch in the mountains or a scenic guided hike.

The collection of suites ranges from the 50m² Junior Suite to the 550m² ROKI Suite, each of which offers panoramic views over the mountains and Lake Wakatipu, fireplaces, private bath tubs, and walk-in wardrobes.

Find more luxury news on **p7**.



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Africa comes off the Bench



BENCH Africa has unveiled a raft of updates this week, led by its 2025 brochure which contains a mix of popular and new tours.

The 111-page guide makes it easier than previous versions to check the best time of the year to visit various African destinations - the most common question advisors face - with a convenient weather chart on page one.

There is also a major focus on family safari options this year, following a sharp rise in demand.

Agents can also take advantage of a special rail section, as well as a large feature on luxury lodges and camps, another booking trend that enjoyed a healthy rise in Australian interest last year.

Bench Africa held a VIP event in Sydney last night to launch the brochure, as well as one in Brisbane on Mon night.

At the gathering in Sydney, Head of Trade Relations Andy Kirkman announced the operator will be getting a revamped website for the trade, replete with a more intuitive search bar that can gather results via trip codes.

The innovation will take the burden off travel agents needing to spell difficult African place names correctly.

Advisors will also be able to search via the popular elephant ratings system, enjoy a more image-heavy format, and check out a new experiences page.

The website is tentatively set to launch in late Mar.

Further updates include new aircraft for Kenyan air safaris;

updated 4WD vehicles offering extra space; and new travel style tags to distinguish between small group and independent tours.

Bookings for Africa grew strongly last year, placing Bench on a strong footing for 2025. *AB*

Pictured: The Bench team showing off the new brochure.



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FCTG developing 'disruptive' AI tools

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group (FCTG) is stepping up its investment in artificial intelligence (AI) as it looks to develop disruptive new customer products and enhance its workforce efficiency.

Through the use of AI and a global productive operations workstream, the company is aiming to deliver initial productivity improvements of up to 20% over the next two years.

The efficiency target was outlined in FCTG's financial results for the six months to 31 Dec 2024, in which it reported a \$117 million underlying profit before tax (**TD** breaking news) - a 7% year-on-year improvement.

Group-wide, the result affirmed FCTG's full-year profit before tax guidance of between \$365m-\$405m.

The second quarter was the primary driver of this result, up



14% compared to 2% in Q1, a period the company described as "challenging" as it heads into its peak trading period.

Total transaction value (TTV) for 1H closed at \$11.7 billion, up 3%.

While the company described its leisure businesses as "more productive, more efficient and more profitable than pre-COVID" with a \$5.5 billion revenue contribution, it was still outpaced by corporate travel, which posted a \$6 billion first half TTV.

This was blamed on lower income from supplier overrides and easing airfare deflation, with average fares decreasing 6.5%.

Corporate travel has now grown to 143% of its size during the 1H in 2019 and increased its global market share from 4% to 5%.

Ongoing cost discipline has put FCTG wholesaler Infinity Holidays in the crosshairs, with the brand posting a \$2.5 million loss during the first half, which resulted in a small number of redundancies and redeployments (**TD** 28 Jan).

FCTG CEO Graham 'Skroo' Turner said the 1H was a tale of two quarters.

"Our corporate business - now a materially larger business than pre-COVID - again delivered record 1H TTV and increased profit during a period of consolidation that should ultimately lead to more rapid earnings growth," Turner said.

The FCTG chief said its luxury leisure businesses are together on track to again deliver a profit of more than \$50 million. *ML*

Travel Daily
ON LOCATION

PERTH

Today's issue of *TD* is coming to you from Perth, where *Virtuoso* is holding its highly anticipated Australia & New Zealand Forum.

AFTER day one of the conference, which saw a range of keynote sessions and speed networking, as well as cocktails at COMO the Treasury Postal Hall, day two has a lot to live up to.

Delegates will participate in a range of owner/manager and preferred partner sessions throughout the day before a lunch sponsored by Oceania.

The Forum will be capped off in the evening with the gala dinner and awards sponsored by Viking before delegates begin to head home on Thu.

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- Career growth in a dynamic global company.
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- Generous sales incentives and competitive travel discounts.
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- Retail perks, Employee Assistance Program access, and more.





No insurance? Then don't travel

OPINION

Scott Darlow is the General Manager at Link Travel Group.

Got an opinion?

Let us know in up to 400 words via email to

feedback@traveldaily.com.au



YOU never think it will happen to you until it happens to you.

That is the lasting thought of my 2024/25 family Christmas holiday - a multigenerational trip that had been planned for 18 months for 10 of us to visit some amazing and exotic 'once in a lifetime' places such as Mauritius, Reunion, Madagascar, Seychelles, Maldives and more.

Thankfully we all had comprehensive travel insurance, as I am a firm believer that if you cannot afford travel insurance, you can't afford to travel.

So off we went, and soon after we arrived in Mauritius, it became apparent my father was not well.

Twenty-four hours later, he was unconscious in the back of an ambulance - more a glorified van with room for a stretcher, being driven recklessly at breakneck speed through the dark and narrow streets of Port Louis.

I was in the van with him and of course, we did stop along the way at the hospital's head office, where staff emerged with

a portable EFTPOS machine so I could swipe away a few grand to give us the privilege of continuing to the hospital itself.

My father ended up spending 17 nights in ICU, which meant a host of cancellations and re-planning.

We lost a cruise, had to send six people home due to a lack of accommodation in Mauritius the week of Christmas, and had to cover expenses for the few of us



that remained to care for Dad.

Luckily, my wife had already spoken to our insurer's emergency assistance team, and by the time I arrived at the hospital with Dad, the wheels were already in motion.

Here, I can only say the emergency assistance team at World Travel Protection (WTP) was amazing.

Over the course of the 17 days, I was kept up to date multiple times a day, which was reassuring during such a stressful time.

Dad's care was their absolute priority and thankfully, they made the decision to cancel a planned air ambulance to an emergency centre in Johannesburg because WTP doctors decided he was not stable enough to travel at all.

Hence, he would have to do his recovery dodging the mice that resided in the Port Louis intensive care unit.

That decision was a godsend, and while the hospital was questionable to say the least, the care from the doctors and nurses was very good.

Ultimately, the story had a happy ending when Dad was repatriated back to Australia, complete with a travelling paramedic, all arranged in record time by WTP.

Being in our industry, recently after my return to Australia, I was able to arrange to meet some of the WTP staff in their Brisbane office to thank them all in person.

Chatting to some of the staff (**pictured**), I could really see the passion they have for their jobs and genuine willingness they have to help.

I reassured them they have no idea how positive their effect is when talking to a client any time of the day or night during a high stress occasion.

It also hit me, these men and women are really out of sight and out of mind, but these emergency assistance teams are worth their weight in gold and we should hold them in very high esteem.

While travel insurance is not the sexiest product we sell in travel, it is lucrative and absolutely vital.

As I said at the start, you never think it will happen to you, until it happens to you.



Window Seat

TWO Virgin Australia aircraft will turn into flying nightclubs on Fri this week as the airline hosts its fifth annual Pride Flight in support of Australia's LGBTQA communities.

The two flights - one each from Brisbane and Melbourne to Sydney - will turn into a 'Sky-High Disco' to get the Mardi Gras party started early.

Tickets priced from \$269 one way are now on sale for the two flights - each numbered in honour of key moments in Australia's LGBTQIA+ history.

CLICK HERE for more details.

Virgin flight VA1978 from Brisbane pays tribute to the year the first Sydney Mardi Gras took place, while VA2017 marks the year Australia legalised same-sex marriage.

Each flight will feature DJ sets and drag performances at the departure gate, makeup glam stations and more.

After landing, Pride Flight guests can board a DiDi Disco Bus to an official party at The Beresford Hotel in Surry Hills.

And if you want to keep the party going after Mardi Gras, Ovolo Wollomooloo is hosting a Pride Flight Recovery.

"Pride Flight is more than just a flight - it's a celebration of diversity and inclusion," said Virgin Australia Chief People Officer, Lisa Burquest.

Discover the all new *River Cruise Special Report*



Domestic firmly in favour

HIGH-VALUE domestic holidays will be prioritised in 2025 by the majority of Australians, with cost, flexibility and adventure being key components, a new report from AAT Kings details.

The study of Australian travel preferences in 2025 showed 62.7% of respondents considered cost as the most important factor in domestic travel, with guided tours identified as a preferred option for cultural experiences, outdoor activities and fine dining.

“Travellers are increasingly looking for authentic, curated experiences that offer flexibility and a sense of adventure, while keeping value for money front and centre,” said AAT Kings Chief Executive Ben Hall.

Despite the cost considerations, 41% of Aussies are still planning to spend \$5,000 or more on travel each year, with 62% of those still eager to venture overseas eyeing New Zealand as their destination



of choice.

The survey also reaffirmed the importance of travel agents as a booking intermediary, with 63% of those polled saying they relied on them for trusted advice.

Travel agents ranked just behind search engines as preferred travel research and inspiration sources, well ahead of brochures. *ML*

Envoyage appoints

ENVOYAGE has expanded its sales team with the appointment of Pill Attlee as Business Development Leader and the promotion of Stephanie Beale to Business Improvement Manager.

Attlee joins the Flight Centre business with more than 15 years of industry experience, including roles at Big Red Group and Back-Roads Touring.

Envoyage AU GM Nick Queale said Attlee’s “ability to nurture partnerships and drive results will be instrumental as we continue to expand our reach in market [and] continue our incredible growth trajectory in Australia”.

Meanwhile, Beale’s promotion is “a testament to her consistent demonstrated success in streamlining the brand’s operations”, according to Queale.

QF regional support

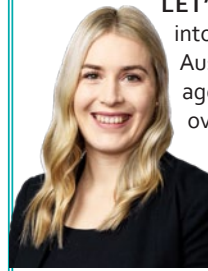
QANTAS is inviting regional community groups around Australia to apply for its Regional Grants program.

Now in its fourth year, the program is offering \$2 million worth of funding for not-for-profit community groups and projects that benefit regional areas.

Organisations are encouraged to apply **HERE** before 10 May, with successful applicants to be announced in Jul.

ATIA UPDATE

from Ingrid Fraser, Director of Advocacy & Public Policy



LET’S put things into perspective: Australian travel agents processed over 900,000 refunds last year. That’s not just a number - it’s nearly a million

instances of time spent on hold, managing customer expectations, and helping rebook clients.

Why mention this? The government is consulting on a draft *Aviation Customer Rights Charter*, which imposes obligations on airlines and airports in relation to consumers - including refund responsibilities.

At the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA), we’re making sure that travel agents and customers aren’t left exposed for airline policies they don’t control.

In every consultation, roundtable, and submission, we’ve been firm: agents should be excluded from the scheme.

Why does this matter? It’s crucial that agents aren’t faced

with the additional red tape and costs of being involved in a scheme where they aren’t the responsible party.

And it is vitally important that agents are not responsible for providing consumer refunds where they are not yet in possession of those funds from the airline.

To switch runways for a moment - a huge thanks to everyone who completed ATIA’s Skills and Workforce Survey.

While there’s still time for some last-minute input, early results suggest things are improving - slowly.

It’s getting a bit easier to fill travel consultant vacancies, but there’s still a major shortage of skilled workers.

With the vast majority looking to recruit this year, there’s no better time to pursue initiatives to ensure the travel industry has access to the talent it needs.

ATIA is pushing hard to secure continued funding for traineeships, maintain access to skilled migration, and advance workforce initiatives announced at Beyond Borders last year.

Big month for Fiji

FIIJI’S tourism enjoyed a strong start to year, with Jan 2025 marking the country’s 17th consecutive month of growth in visitor arrivals.

The destination welcomed 70,794 visitors during the month, representing 100.7% of Jan 2024, pouring in an estimated FJ\$245 million into the economy.

Australia retained its position as the top market, making up 50% of arrivals, while China was up 23.8% and NZ was up 17.5%.

Collette hits up Syd

Collette is inviting Sydney-based travel agents to join them on court for a friendly game of pickleball on 10 Mar at 6pm.

Taking place at Robyn Webster Sports Centre in Tempe Reserve, the Pickleball Championship will also provide an opportunity to meet some of Collette’s executive leadership team visiting from the United States.

There is no entry fee, and registrations can be sent to aumarketing@collette.com.




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THAILAND READY TO RIDE *THE WHITE LOTUS* WAVE

EXCLUSIVE

AS HIT drama *The White Lotus* returns to the small screen, Thailand is ready to welcome new travellers with open arms.

Three luxurious Anantara resorts have been announced as key settings for the fictional hotel, located in Phuket and Koh Samui.

According to Sherly Handjojo, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Marketing Manager, TAT is preparing to ride the pop culture wave sweeping the country.

“By promoting high-end resorts, cultural experiences, eco-tourism, and exclusive travel options, Thailand is set to attract more upscale travellers,” Handjojo said.

“With enhanced infrastructures, a focus on sustainability, and working with our key partners, we’re making sure this buzz lasts for years to come.”



While *The White Lotus* will showcase the idyllic side of Thailand and Australians are familiar with its vibrant food and culture, they also often have misconceptions surrounding overtourism, scams and pollution, Handjojo said.

“Unfortunately, these representations often fail to capture the country’s full diversity, local life, and lesser-known gems, presenting an incomplete picture of the Kingdom,” she emphasised.

For the last few years, TAT has focused on supporting local communities and highlighting lesser-known destinations.

The organisation also aims to more evenly spread out tourist arrivals to ease congestion in busy spots and create new opportunities for local tourism businesses, both big and small.

“The country offers such a wide range of experiences, so there’s so much more to explore beyond just the well-known attractions,” Handjojo said.

“Most importantly, we want to bring the Australian ‘fair go’ spirit into Thailand’s tourism industry, making sure everyone has a chance to benefit and enjoy a fair share of the opportunities.”

Off the back of *The White Lotus*, other regions in Thailand may gain more interest, she added.

These include Krabi, known for its beaches and limestone cliffs (“a great alternative to Phuket”) and picturesque Kanchanaburi, surrounded by forests and rivers.

Chiang Rai offers an authentic northern experience, while Hua Hin is a quieter, more relaxed dupe destination for Pattaya.

TAT will host The Meaningful Travel Experience Trade Meet and Famil on 11-17 Mar, focusing on sustainable tourism. *JHM*

Pictured: Anantara Bophut Koh Samui Resort.

Sofitel in the Nile

SOFITEL has opened a new five-star hotel in Cairo, marking the brand’s largest-ever property.

Nestled along the Nile River, Sofitel Cairo Downtown Nile boasts 615 guest rooms and suites across 24 floors, blending French elegance with Egyptian heritage.

Features include spa-like bathrooms, 24-hour butler service, a fitness centre, five restaurants and bars, and 17 meeting and event spaces.

Marriott expands luxury safari portfolio in Kenya

MARRIOTT International has unveiled plans to open two luxury tented safari camps in Kenya, with the aim of setting a new standard for high-end, luxury hospitality in some of Africa’s most iconic destinations.

Expected to open in Aug 2025, The Ritz-Carlton, Masai Mara Safari Camp will be located within the heart of the Masai Mara National Reserve.

The treetop retreat will offer views of the riverbanks and forest, featuring 20 tented



suites, a stargazing sky deck, curated game drives, and more.

Meanwhile, the JW Marriott Mount Kenya Rhino Reserve Safari Camp will open in early 2026, bringing an immersive wildlife experience within the Solio Game Reserve.

SIA serves for Kiwis

SINGAPORE Airlines has tapped acclaimed New Zealand chef Sid Sahrawat to design a distinctly Kiwi culinary experience for the airline’s first and business class customers departing from New Zealand.

Sahrawat will curate four seasonal menus that spotlight the finest New Zealand ingredients, such as Marlborough Smoked King Salmon and kiwi fruit locally grown in the Bay of Plenty.

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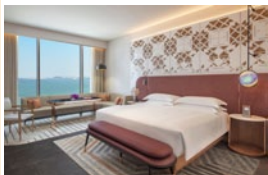
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An extraordinary new bar experience has made its debut at the Treasury Bar at **InterContinental Sydney**. In what is the Southern Hemisphere's oldest working lift bar - built in 1851 - guests enter the lift and enjoy craft micro cocktails and shared plates as it ascends and descends. The lift has been kept carefully preserved throughout the building's life first as a government office, followed by its transformation to a hotel in 1985.



Micro-home operator **Tiny Away** has introduced four new mini-homes for guests to enjoy in various Australian locations. The new properties are The Bunjil in the Yarra Valley; Huntingdon House near Port Macquarie; Hillside Hideout near Cradle Mountain and Nioka Rise near Albury. Each is tucked away in rustic bushland yet still a short drive from townships and local attractions, offering a blend of countryside and urban adventure.



A new luxury offering is now available in Qatar, with Hyatt opening the 312-room **Andaz Doha**. The brand's debut in the Gulf nation is an elegant representation of Qatari culture and celebrates Doha's authenticity through an elegant colour palette of gold, rose gold and bronze, with ornate wooden doorways with handles shaped like Arabian walking sticks. Water-styled carpets inspired by the city's coastline add to the journey of discovery.



Located on the Papagayo Peninsula in Costa Rica is the ultra-secluded **Nekajui, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve**. Across 1,400 acres, guests can enjoy 107 ocean-facing rooms, suites and even three treetop tents. It's the brand's first property in Central and South America and the eighth globally. At the centre of the culinary offering is Puna and its Peruvian cuisine specialising in indigenous ingredients.



Home to the world's highest outdoor infinity pool, **Address Beach Resort Dubai** has unveiled elegant new club rooms and suites, each spacious and offering either views of the Arabian Gulf, Jumeirah Beach or the Burj Al Arab. Guests gain access to the resort's new Executive Lounge, which serves a buffet and premium beverages throughout the day.

East Coast expands in Tas



EAST Coast Car Rentals has announced the launch of a new flagship branch in Hobart, Tasmania as it continues to expand its national footprint.

The new facility will include an extensive and diverse fleet of vehicles for all types of travellers, from compact cars ideal for solo or business trips to larger SUVs for families and adventurers.

"With its stunning coastal drives, iconic destinations like Port Arthur and Freycinet, and easy access to some of Australia's most breathtaking scenery, Hobart is the perfect place to explore by car," explained Ben Whitmore, East Coast Car Rentals Chief Marketing Officer.

"We look forward to continuing to help visitors, and locals alike, discover everything Tasmania has to offer, from epic road trips through the Huon Valley to weekend escapes to Bruny Island.

"This refresh underscores our dedication to offering customers the same high-quality, affordable car rental services they expect from us nationwide, while also strengthening our national presence," Whitmore added.

The new purpose-built car rental

facility is expected to open later this year; until then, the company will continue operating out of its current Cambridge branch. *JM*

TM 2025 conference

TRAVELMANAGERS has revealed the theme of its 2025 conference in Sep: Clarity.

"Last year, we focused on refining our methods and embracing changes that would make us more efficient," said Executive General Manager, Michael Gazal, referring to 2024's theme, which was 'Working smarter'.

"Clarity is about sharpening those efficiencies by learning how to cut through the noise, defining our goals and focusing our energy."

Taking place on 16-18 Sep in Nusa Dua in Bali, the National Conference will feature daily plenary sessions built around six themes, all linked to clarity.

It will also include a supplier trade show and pre-event golf tournament.

The conference will end with TravelManagers' annual gala awards dinner.



APT TRAVEL GROUP

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER PERTH'S BIGGEST VIP CELEBRATION YET!

Our VIP Awards Dinners arrived in Perth, welcoming WA's largest-ever gathering of VIP Diamond and Platinum agents. Held at Sandalford Wines, the night was filled with partnership, appreciation, and plenty of celebration – complete with dancing well into the night. A standout moment was welcoming Paul MacLean (Naturaliste Travel) into the Million Dollar Agent Club for surpassing \$1 million in sales last calendar year. Bicton Travel won Top Travel Agency 2024, while Helloworld Travel Belmont entered the WA Hall of Fame, recognised for their long-standing success. Missed out? Set your sights on 2026 – bigger celebrations await!



Top Diamond and Platinum partners in Western Australia



Diamond agency Bicton Travel receiving the Top Performing Travel Agency WA 2024 award



Paul Maclean and Mary Greaves accepting the Diamond and Top Regional Travel Agency award for Naturaliste Travel



The RAC Travel team toasting to their success



Flight Centre agents celebrating their wins and catching up in style



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For example, book our Athens Roundtrip, August 9-20, 2025, for an extra \$5,280 in addition to standard agency commission.

Everyone benefits:

- **For you:** you'll earn up to 20% extra on top of standard agency commission for selected 2025/2026 sailings – ends March 31, 2025.
- **For your client:** with the Suite Dreams promotion they'll receive a free night in a hotel pre- or post-cruise, and complimentary garment care and dry-cleaning services – ends 28 February, 2025.

But hurry, this opportunity to make your client's trip of a lifetime even sweeter must end soon.

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2025 Rail Travel Trends with Railbookers

Rail travel continues to take centre stage in 2025, offering a relaxed way to explore the world's most stunning landscapes – without the stress of airports, rental cars, or rigid itineraries. This year, Switzerland remains the gold standard, while Italy is fast becoming a top choice for travellers seeking culture, coastline and culinary delights. Honeymoon and special occasion travel are also on the rise, with couples opting for romantic rail journeys that blend luxury, breathtaking scenery and once in a lifetime experiences. With Railbookers, creating these dream holidays for your customers has never been easier.

Italy is trending for 2025 travel and Railbookers has a huge number of itineraries ready to go for your customers to explore. Train travel between Rome, Florence and Venice is a perfect way to soak in the country's history, art, and vibrant piazzas.

For those craving coastal beauty, **The Best of Italy, Cinque Terre, and the Amalfi Coast** offer cliffside escapes that pair beautifully with Mediterranean cruises. With Railbookers handling the details – luxury rail seats, curated hotels, and flexible itineraries – your customers can focus on relaxing, exploring and making unforgettable memories.

Switzerland continues to captivate, with the Glacier Express, Bernina Express, and Golden Pass Line, showcasing the magnificent Alpine Scenery. Railbookers makes booking these trips a breeze offering Rail, Hotels, Sightseeing, Transfers and more. From the snow-capped peaks of Zermatt on the **Scenic Switzerland from Zurich** journey, or extending their adventure by combining a rail journey with a pre- or post-cruise escape, we have an industry-leading range of trips to choose from. One of many popular

journeys to take advantage of is **Zurich to Milan via the Glacier and Bernina Express**, blending Alpine beauty with Italian charm. With options from all major river and ocean ports globally, you'll find suggestions [here](#) on where else your customers can explore either side of their cruise.

Don't miss the opportunity to join Craig Owens, National Sales Manager, for 'Switzerland Made Easy' product update, on March 5th 10:00AM AEST. Learn how Railbookers flexible, high-commission rail holidays make selling Swiss escapes effortless. **Register Now!**

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