

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of news, including a native page from **Tourism Ireland** and our **Corporate Update**, plus full pages from:

- Air Mauritius
- Crystal Cruises

Escape to Mauritius

TRAVELLERS can take advantage of up to 25% savings on Air Mauritius flights for travel from now until 31 Aug 2025. The sale ends 03 Feb - see **page eight** for all the details.

Crystal gets sweeter

CRYSTAL Cruises is offering a 10% bonus commission on eligible sailings for its Suite Dreams upgrade. Find out what the offer includes by heading to the **back page**.

A sharper impression



ROB Sharp has been appointed the permanent CEO of Airservices Australia after a global search. The former CEO of Tigerair has been serving in the interim CEO position for the high-profile aviation body since Jul last year, and his extensive experience in the sector has earned him the nod to assume the role officially. His resume also includes a tenure as Secretary of Transport for New South Wales.

Airservices Australia is responsible for managing 11% of the world's airspace and delivering aviation rescue firefighting services at airports across the country.

The government body is also responsible for consultation and local engagement with communities, airports and industry stakeholders around the country on operation and aircraft noise matters.

Armstrong exits Contiki

EXCLUSIVE

THE Travel Corporation (TTC) has confirmed the departure of Contiki Holidays global Chief Executive Officer Adam Armstrong (**pictured**), as revealed by *Travel Daily* this morning (**TD** breaking news).

Armstrong has served as Contiki's CEO since 2020, with TTC extending its gratitude for his "leadership, dedication, and contributions to Contiki's growth over the past five years".

"His efforts have been instrumental in shaping the brand's direction and recovery post COVID," a spokesperson for the company said.

TTC also confirmed its Tour Brands portfolio is undertaking a strategic review to enhance its efficiency, following its parent



company's acquisition by Apollo Global Management (**TD** 18 Nov).

This period will see Melissa DaSilva serve as interim Chief Executive Officer of the Tour Brands portfolio.

"Leading such an iconic, legendary brand has been an incredible honour and would not have been possible without my epic team of Contiki rockstars who have consistently 'delivered the magic' to our young travellers," Armstrong said. *MS*

Accor boosts booking

ACCOR has enhanced its Travel Pros Leisure Groups Online platform, which now offers a streamlined booking process for leisure B2B clients.

The platform now delivers a wider range of features, including more transparent pricing, TripAdvisor reviews integration, an interactive map, enhanced room selection, and more.

Away for Aust Day

TRAVEL Daily will be taking a break to enjoy the public holiday on Mon, but we will return with all the latest industry news on Tue.

We wish all our readers a safe and happy long weekend.

Search goes on for VB

AUSTRALIA is no closer to installing a new Country Manager for VisitBritain to replace the departed Maria Sykes (**TD** 20 Dec 2024), Chief Executive Officer Patricia Yates has confirmed.

"There are absolutely plans to replace her but we have to go through a process," Yates told *TD*.

Yates explained the organisation was "really sorry to have lost Maria" and that Australia continues to be a major market, but finding a replacement is still some time away.

More on VisitBritain on **p2**.

Richard to host soirees



ENTIRE Travel Group (ETG) has announced Richard Taylor, ATIA's Director of Membership Experience, as MC for its annual 'Travel Showcase & Soirees'.

Around 900 agents are expected to attend the four-hour events at the Sofitel Melbourne (11 Feb), The Fullerton Hotel Sydney (12 Feb) and Rydges South Bank Brisbane (13 Feb).

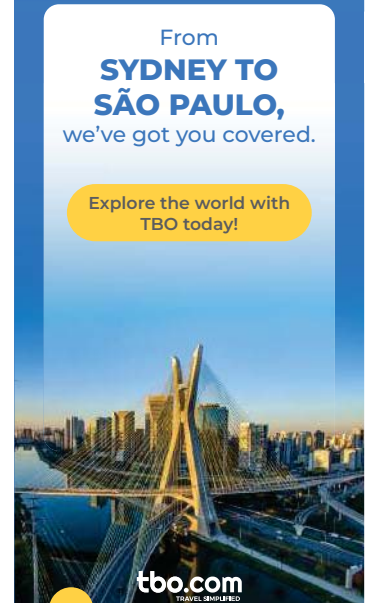
Time is running out for agents to secure a ticket to the showcases in Sydney and Brisbane, with the Melbourne event already sold out - register **HERE**, or email events@entiretravel.com.au to join the Melbourne event waitlist.



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VIEW DEAL

Yates softens ETA worries

EXCLUSIVE

VISITBRITAIN CEO Patricia Yates believes Britain's overall appeal will not be affected by the UK Government's proposed move to hike the price of its new Electronic Travel Authority (ETA).

Speaking to *Travel Daily* at the Showcase Britain trade event in London, Yates said it was more important that the ETA is easy to obtain rather than its price.

"The most important thing is to get something that's really light-touch and that people can apply for easily," said Yates (**pictured**).

The VisitBritain boss deflected concerns by numerous global bodies including IATA, the World Travel and Tourism Council and UKInbound (**TD 20 Jan**) that the UK is an expensive destination.

"We have to remember it's a competitive world, we're competing for visitors and to be honest, we're never going to be a cheap destination," Yates said.

"So what we have to make sure is that our experiences are really first-class and that we give people more than they expect and experiences they can't have anywhere else in the world."

Yates added that she can see strong growth from the Australia market, with an "enormous connectivity" between the two nations, and that the UK offers a balance of the familiar with the "new and exciting" as well.

Quizzed on whether Britain can rely on well-established VFR markets in Australia as opposed



to attracting holidaymakers with no family links to the UK, Yates said there is no shortage of modern culture acting as strong drawcards for the country.

"We've got film, we've got fashion, we've got music...you can go around amazing buildings like [Hampton Court Palace] but you can also go to Glastonbury, so that mix of old and new London is a huge draw." *ML*

Viking unveils prize

VIKING has announced the reward on offer for its top-performing Aussie travel advisors as part of its Viking Platinum Club 2025 trade incentive.

The top 10 advisors selling new bookings in 2025 will earn themselves a 15-day 'Viking Homelands' ocean voyage.

Departing Bergen in Norway on 04 May 2026 and arriving in Stockholm, Sweden on 18 May, the reward sailing will take place aboard its new *Viking Vela* ship.

Winning agents will be able to invite a plus-one, receive a complimentary stateroom upgrade, access Viking's Silver Spirits beverage package, and get US\$300 of shipboard credit, and many other perks.

LA is ready for our help



A DELEGATION of California's top destination marketing leaders and travel industry executives have landed in Australia for a week-long business development trip, with a view to strengthening relationships with key players in Australia's tourism industry.

The visit, first flagged by **TD** last week (**TD 20 Jan**), which aims to drive visitation and spending across the state, comes at a particularly important time, as Los Angeles begins its recovery from the recent wildfires.

The group will share accurate and up-to-date travel information with local trade, and discuss how visitation from Australia and New Zealand can help drive recovery.

"The past couple of weeks have showcased what the California spirit is all about: resilience, strength and communities that rally together when times get tough," said Ryan Becker, Visit California's SVP of Communications and Strategy.

"With your support, we can rise stronger and help businesses and residents that need tourism now more than ever."

Over the course of nine networking events and meetings in Sydney and Melbourne, the delegation will connect with nearly 100 Australian and NZ trade and media partners.

Additionally, Visit California has partnered with Australian-born, California-based celebrity chef Curtis Stone to bring his new Beverly Hills culinary concept, The Pie Room, to Melbourne.

The Fed Square pop-up event will hand out free pies to visitors, along with the chance to win a holiday package to California.

Get all the latest info **HERE**.

MEANWHILE, another fire erupted in Southern California yesterday, near the Lake Castaic area of northern Los Angeles County, prompting new evacuation orders. *JM*

Pictured: Dan Gordon, Chair of Visit California; Becker; Noreen Martin, Visit California Board Member; Leona Reed, Visit California's VP of Global Marketing; Aunty Margaret Campbell; Susan Coghil, Tourism Australia's Chief Marketing Officer; and Dougan.



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New Virtuoso division

VIRTUOSO has launched an ultra-high net worth (UHNW) business division to be led by former travel agency member Shelby Donley (pictured) (TD breaking news).

In her role at the newly-minted division, Donley will seek to bolster the luxury network's approach to selling ultra-high net worth travel experiences, as well as cultivate more relationships with a wider array of global ultra high-end brands.

Virtuoso intends to leverage its established reputation in global luxury travel to foster more collaborations with world-renowned luxury brands across jewellery, watches, fashion, art, culinary, wine and spirits, luggage, automotive, wellness and much more.

"This new initiative is yet another example of how Virtuoso co-creates with its members, advisors and partners," Virtuoso CEO Matthew Upchurch said.

"Combining the talents of our network with the talents of our dedicated team has been a winning formula, and I'm excited to see what this dedicated focus will bring," he added.

By expanding its partnerships to reach new industries, Virtuoso said it will strengthen its influence in delivering bespoke offerings through its network of travel advisors and partners in a way that specifically caters to the ultra-affluent traveller.



Brad Bourland, Virtuoso's Chief Operating Officer, also expressed his enthusiasm for the new division, stating its establishment marks "a transformative moment" for the network.

"[This will enable] us to build stronger relationships with ultra-luxury brands and deliver an unparalleled level of service to our most discerning travellers, he said.

"Shelby's profound expertise in the UHNW market make her the perfect choice to lead this initiative," he said.

"This is a pivotal step in our ongoing commitment to providing extraordinary value to our members, advisors and partners," Bourland added.

The positive development will be welcome news for the brand locally, with *Travel Daily* revealing this month it had lost more than 80% of Travel Associates members to the Luxury Travel Collection (TD 17 Jan). AB

Brissy to enjoy EK premium



EMIRATES is bringing its Premium Economy offering to Brisbane starting 01 Feb, on three-times weekly flights between Dubai and the Queensland capital.

Brisbane marks the third Aussie destination to be served by retrofitted aircraft equipped with the carrier's latest product, after Sydney and Melbourne.

Queenslanders will be able to enjoy refreshed interiors and enhanced cabins across all classes, with the popular Premium Economy product exuding a sense of 'quiet luxury', featuring cream-coloured leather and a wood panel finish.

Premium Economy passengers will enjoy optimal comfort and support, thanks to the 19.5-inch seats, with six-way adjustable headrests, a footrest, and a generous recline.

Each seat also has a 13.3 inch screen, in-seat charging points and a wood-finished side cocktail table, with passengers able to enjoy a welcome drink, as well

as a selection of dishes made with seasonal ingredients and an extended beverage list.

Customers in Premium Economy receive complimentary amenity kits made with sustainable and recycled materials, alongside sustainably made blankets and a generously sized pillow.

Australians can also experience Emirates' Premium Economy product on flights to popular destinations across the airline's global network via Dubai, such as London, Vienna and Riyadh. JM

Int'l Rail Greek ferry

INTERNATIONAL Rail has opened access to live Greek ferry bookings for the upcoming 2025 summer season, with tickets starting from \$65pp one-way.

This means travellers can book popular ferry routes from the mainland harbour port, Piraeus (Athens), including the Cyclades Islands, Dodecanese Islands, Saronic Islands plus the international route Athens to Italy.

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Experiencing the magic of spring in Ireland



THE thrills of a street festival, the incredible culture of bustling cities, the warm welcome of friendly locals: no matter the season, Ireland is ready for you.

Spring on the island of Ireland is a truly enchanting time, as the landscape bursts into vibrant greenery, colourful blooms, and mild weather, perfect for discovering its natural wonders.

From the breathtaking Cliffs of Moher to the lush surroundings of Killarney National Park, the island offers spectacular views

and outdoor experiences.

Delve into a riot of colour and fragrance at one of the island's glorious gardens, explore historic castles and ancient sites, or take a scenic drive along the stunning

Wild Atlantic Way.

With fewer crowds than in the summer, spring provides the perfect opportunity to experience the charm and beauty of Ireland at a relaxed pace.

Of course, no trip is complete without indulging in local food.

And how about celebrating Paddy's Day in style with the locals on 17 Mar?

Find out more **HERE**.



Celebrate St Patrick's Day

IF RAISING a glass to toast St Patrick at a traditional music session in one of Ireland's pubs is more your kind of thing, Ireland has got you covered.

Festivals and parades take place all around the island, from Belfast

to Cork and every colourful town and village in between.

This spring, you can fill your heart with Ireland and all it has to offer, no matter what your interests - discover more about St Patrick's day **HERE**.

Start of spring: St Brigid's Day

SPRING is a time of custom and celebration, and one that is associated with the country's only female patron saint, St Brigid, whose feast day on 01 Feb, is now a public holiday

It marks the beginning of Spring and the joyful opening up of the year after the hunkering down of the winter.

Today, St Brigid is seen as a strong woman said to have had miraculous powers and connected with the goddess Brigid and

Ireland's pre-Christian history.

During a spring visit, travellers will notice traditions that have survived for over 1,500 years, such as St Brigid's crosses, which are woven from reeds and placed above doorways to ward off evil spirits.

Some people still take part in the custom of leaving a 'brat Bhríde', or Brigid's Cloak (typically a piece of cloth) outside on the night before 01 Feb, for St Brigid's blessing.





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Travel Daily

Rex too critical to fail

TRAVELLERS would have suffered for a long time if the Federal Government had not stepped in to assist Rex with its mountain of debt, the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) CEO Dean Long has argued.

Despite the opinions expressed by some prominent stakeholders, Long believes the decision to acquire Rex's debt (**TD 23 Jan**) was a crucial move that secures the future of the domestic aviation sector & ATIA members.

"We need a third airline, and if Rex is allowed to fail, the reality is that even if another airline decides to enter this market, it will take so much longer for them to come into play," Long said.

"That's a delay that would hit regional and rural Australia hard, as well as the hip pocket of



Australian travellers.

"Allowing the company to continue means there's also an increased likelihood that our members, the travel businesses who are owed money as a result of having sold Rex tickets, are more likely to get at least some of their money back," he added.

Long also explained that currently, around 98% of passengers across the country are bound by the duopoly created by Qantas and Virgin.

"That's not great, especially considering we already have the most concentrated air market in the world," Long said.

"Ensuring the future of a third airline in Australia means we have competition in the skies, as well as access for regional and rural Australia," he added.

Some in the travel sector were hopeful of a Rex replacement player in Koala Airlines, however the dream could be over before it began, with court proceedings against its parent this week. **AB**

Med on the menu

HOLLAND America Line (HAL) is revamping its specialty restaurant, Rudi's Sel de Mer, onboard ships *Rotterdam*, *Nieuw Statendam*, and *Koningsdam*.

Rolling out in Jan and Feb, the updated venue will boast a "relaxed Mediterranean bistro feel" with new table settings and a fresh menu featuring classic Mediterranean dishes.

The menu will highlight traditional ingredients like olive oil, lemon, fresh vegetables, and herbs, featuring meals such Greek spiced lamb chops and warm strawberry tarte tatin.

The Rudi's Sel de Mer dining experience is available for a \$55 supplemental charge per person, or included as a dining option with the 'Have It All' premium cruise package.



Hyatt EAME(s) high

HYATT Hotels Corporation has announced a new plan to expand its presence in 13 new markets across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East (EAME) between 2025-2028.

The ambitious goal follows a strong year for the hospitality group in the EAME region, which saw its revenue per available room increase by 12.1%.

Hyatt's EAME pipeline includes projects set to debut in new European and African markets like Estonia, Iceland, Romania, Cape Verde, and Mauritius.

QF pilots a force for good



TWO of Qantas' accomplished female pilots, Lauren McLean, A320 First Officer and Instructor Pilot & Taleah Ditz, will take the spotlight at the hotly anticipated A Force for Good event in Auckland on 14 Mar.

The trailblazing women will share their insights and experiences in the aviation industry, discussing challenges they have overcome and the opportunities available to women in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Their stories aim to inspire the next generation of female leaders and highlight the importance of inclusivity and perseverance.

"We are thrilled to welcome these remarkable Qantas pilots to our event," said Helene Taylor

founder of A Force For Good.

"Their dedication, skill, and resilience embody the spirit of A Force for Good, and we know their stories will resonate with our audience."

Tickets are selling fast, with only six weeks left to secure a spot - **CLICK HERE** for more information and to book a ticket. **JM**

Aussie destinations high on list for China

CHINESE travellers are eager to return to Australia in 2025, according to new search data from Booking.com.

Sydney has emerged as the number one most searched destination among Chinese travellers over Lunar New Year, followed by Melbourne, the Gold Coast, Brisbane, and Cairns.

Victoria claimed the most spots in the list for any state, with seven of the top 25 destinations, including coastal getaways such as Port Campbell, Apollo Bay, and Phillip Islands, with Queensland closely following behind with six.

The data comes as Booking.com's recent generational travel research revealed Chinese travellers are seeking out unique experiences, with one in three (32%) saying they are drawn to culturally immersive stays such as outback or Indigenous experiences.

Four Seasons splash

FOUR Seasons Yachts has marked a major milestone in its cruise ambitions, with *Four Seasons I* successfully floating out during a ceremony held at a Fincantieri shipyard in Italy.

The premium 95-suite vessel boasts a 1:1 guest to staff ratio, 15 decks, Michelin-calibre restaurants, and a 20-metre aft pooldeck, and more.



CORPORATE UPDATE

GBTA assembles expert growth panel

THE Global Business Travel Association's (GBTA) push to strengthen its position in the Australian market has seen the body form a new country-level GBTA Advisory Board.

Close to 20 heavy hitters operating in the travel sector will help guide GBTA's local efforts to leverage expertise and insights to support members and foster faster growth in the country.

The wide-ranging advisory panel includes: Ama Aidoo-Sam, ResMed Australia; Lisa Batchelor, Cochlear; Veronica Bergel, Herbert Smith Freehills; Jim Crowder, Strategic Sales Director, Enterprise Mobility; Karryn Cutcheon, Marriott; Anthea Dimitrakopoulos, The Ascott Limited; Anna Fisher, Frosch Travel; Melanie Giles, Origin Energy; Ashley Houston, Bain & Company; Emma Jones, Accor; Kurt Knackstedt, Avis Budget Group; Bill Kokovas, CBA; Sue McEvoy, FCM; Mike Orchard, Festive Road; Tanaz Pochkhanawalla, AMP; and Siobhan Prideaux, Optus. Canva's Head of Travel &



Expense Andy O'Mara (pictured) will also serve as Chairperson.

Reflecting on the board's future role in the Australian market, GBTA Regional Senior Vice President for EMEA and APAC Catherine Logan said the panel of senior experts will form the foundation of future initiatives on the ground.

"Australia is a vital market for business travel, and the new board brings together diverse expertise from across the region," Logan said.

"[The board's] insights will help GBTA deliver tailored programs and offerings in our mission to shape the future together for



business travel and across the industry community," she added.

The major recruitment drive follows the appointment of business travel industry veteran Derek Sadubin to the role of Country Manager for Australia and New Zealand (TD 06 Jan).

Sadubin's appointment and the newly unveiled advisory board represent a watershed moment for GBTA in Australia, which has not had a local chief in-market for more than 10 years.

Part of GBTA's objective over the next year will be to double its membership base, as well as partner with the Association of Travel Management Companies (ATMC) to deliver the expanded Festival of Corporate Travel Summits (TD 14 Jan).

The ICC Sydney will be the venue for the major travel event showcasing the issues faced by the corporate travel, aviation, travel tech, and MICE sectors - effectively housing four summits under one roof for the first time.

Other points of difference include seminars tailored to the level of industry experience. AB



Window Seat

A CAT called Mittens has recently returned from three flights, after mistakenly being left in a plane cargo hold between NZ and Australia.

Mittens was booked for a one-way trip from Christchurch to her new home in Melbourne.

Her poor owner Margo Neas was waiting for her cat to be unloaded for three hours at the plane's freight area at Melbourne Airport.

It turns out that a stowed wheelchair had hidden Mittens from the baggage handler's view and the cat was on a return trip back to Christchurch.

The Air NZ pilot was made aware of his extra passenger mid-flight and to offer her some comfort, he turned on the heating in the cargo hold.

The airline apologised and promised to reimburse all associated costs.

Staff can choose: Mitchell

EXCLUSIVE

AS THE Australia Day long weekend approaches, Intrepid is once again offering employees the flexible option of continuing to work on the public holiday.

"For us, we understand these are very small decisions that we can make as a business, but ultimately it promotes an inclusive environment, by having no judgement and allowing people respectfully to make their decision," Intrepid MD Brett Mitchell told TD.

"It upholds what we stand for, which is respecting that there are diverse views and perspectives."

Intrepid implemented the initiative five years ago, when the company approached its teams about the public holiday and

actively listened to their thoughts on the issue.

"We also spoke to a lot of our First Nations partners and got their feedback, and after hearing their voices and views, we thought it would make sense to give staff the option," he said.

Regardless of what they choose, it is clear to employees that their decision is accepted without judgement, explained Mitchell.

Roughly half of the team normally decide to continue working on 26 Jan.

"It's been really positive and something that fits our values really well," Mitchell said.

"We respect that every other business is different, so ultimately, we don't comment on what other businesses choose."

MEET THE SPEAKERS



STEVE LABROSKI

CEO
itravel

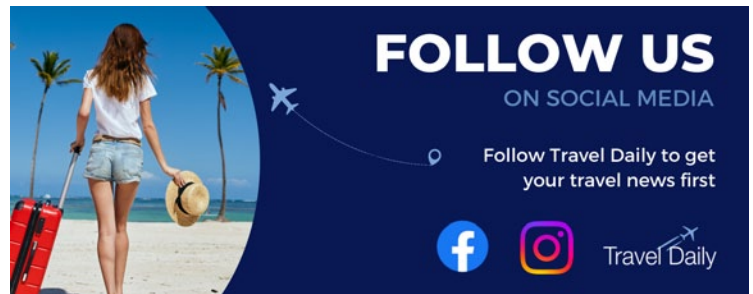
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In celebration of the Year of the Snake, **Wendy Wu Tours** has launched a Lunar New Year business class upgrade offer. Available until 10 Feb, the deal lets travellers upgrade to business class with Cathay Pacific from just \$399pp one way or \$1,399pp return when booking selected China tours. The offer includes departures from Sydney and Melbourne - call 1300 727 998 to learn more.

AAT Kings is reminding travellers that this is their last chance to save up to 15% on selected tours in Australia and New Zealand. The savings can be applied to the 14-day 'New Zealand Vista' itinerary, reduced from \$8,720pp twin share to \$7,412, as well as the seven-day 'Tassie's Parks & Nature' tour, now \$4,050pp twin share down from \$4,765. Take advantage of the sale **HERE**.

For a limited time, **Regent Seven Seas Cruises** is offering two incentives on 2025 and 2026 voyages. Guests booking any Regent voyage before 07 Feb will enjoy US\$500 shipboard credit per suite, while for bookings made before 28 Feb, guests will receive a free two-category suite upgrade and pay a low 7.5% deposit, plus 40% off select 2025 and 2026 sailings. Learn more about the incentives **HERE**.

Discovery Parks is highlighting its New Year Sale, which offers a 30% discount on cabins, rooms and glamping tents at its locations across Australia, for travellers who book online to stay midweek between 31 Jan and 25 Sep 2025. See the full T&Cs **HERE**.

Couples are being invited to dial up the romance at **Dorsett Melbourne** this upcoming Valentine's Day, with the hotel's 'Love at First Stay' package. The romantic getaway includes luxurious accommodation in a Deluxe or Executive Room; a handwritten card and single-stemmed rose; a sweet treat and bottle of sparkling wine on arrival; buffet breakfast for two at Port Bistro; and late checkout at 2pm - more **HERE**.

HX has announced up to 25% off all-inclusive voyages, as well as its price promise and no single supplement on select sailings. For example, the 19-day 'ANT & Falklands' voyage departing Mar 2026 is now available from only \$16,968pp - call 1300 159 127.

Moxy Sydney Airport has become the only Sydney Airport hotel to provide a complimentary shuttle service. The new offering came into effect this week, and means hotel guests can enjoy free shuttle services between Sydney Airport's domestic and international terminals, equating to a saving of \$24 per person round trip.

Aussies can secure up to 30% off **Club Med's** Japan ski resorts for a limited time only, for travel between 28 Nov 2025 to 04 May 2026. Some of the top savings include an all-inclusive ski package at Club Med Tomamu, which offers savings of \$1,491 per person, and Club Med Kiroro Peak, with a discount of \$1,239. Learn more **HERE**.

WSI gears up for operations



WESTERN Sydney International Airport (WSI) is preparing to welcome its first airline passengers, with a team of global aviation experts arriving this week to kick off the hub's operational readiness program.

The team from Fraport Group, a German aviation company, have convened at WSI to provide specialist support over the coming months.

"There's a buzz of excitement in the air as we progress important preparations for day one of passenger and airline operations and that's where our colleagues from Fraport come in," WSI Chief Operating Officer Matt Duffy said.

"Fraport will lend their world-leading expertise to WSI as we commence our thorough program of operational readiness to ensure we're ready and raring to go next year."

The aviation experts will help conduct a series of live trials to stress-test all of the airport's systems to make sure they are fit for purpose and that WSI teams are trained up to support airlines

and passengers.

"Our onsite team will work with WSI on vital operational topics such as aligning operational processes and trials to achieve readiness for their opening in 2026," said Fraport Project Director Alexander Larisch. *JM*

QR links Americas

QATAR Airways has announced its expansion into the Americas, with the launch of two new weekly flights beginning early summer 2025.

These flights will connect Hamad International Airport in Doha to Bogota El Dorado International Airport in Colombia, and then continue to Caracas Simon Bolivar International Airport in Venezuela.

The return flight from Caracas will operate nonstop to Doha.

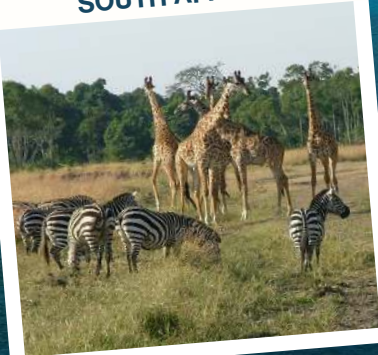
The new service makes Qatar the first and only airline to offer nonstop flights from the Middle East to Colombia and the only Middle Eastern carrier operating in Venezuela.

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