

Japan & the Cherry Blossoms
16 DAYS DEPARTING 24 MAR 2025



traveldirectors.com.au

travel directors
SMALL GROUP ESCORTED TOUR EXPERTS
1300 856 661
MORE INFO

UK turns to the Council

TWENTY-ONE leaders from key players in the British tourism sector have been hand-picked by the UK government to form a learned council designed to boost collaboration with the industry.

The newly formed Visitor Economy Advisory Council met for the first time this week, tasked with conceptualising ideas as part of the government's forthcoming National Visitor Economy Strategy.

The Council is aiming to meet the government's target of welcoming 50 million visitors per year by 2030 and to be one of the world's most visited countries.

Acting as co-Chairs of the new Council will be UK Tourism Minister, Sir Chris Bryant, and IHG Hotels Managing Director for Europe, Karin Sheppard.

Among the names serving as Council members are VisitBritain CEO Patricia Yates; UKInbound boss Joss Croft; British Airways Chief Executive Sean Doyle and CLIA Europe CEO, Andy Harmer.

Leaders from regional tourism boards, attraction operators, transport providers and retail



travel agents are also represented on the Council.

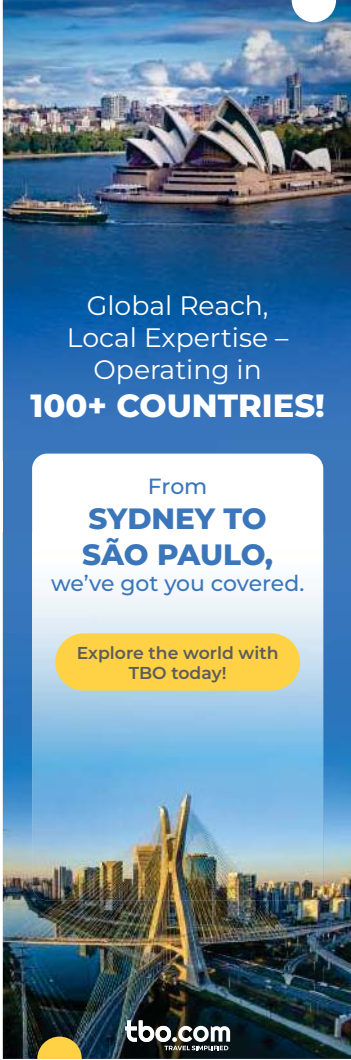
UK Tourism Minister Sir Chris Bryant (**pictured**) said domestic and international tourism are key parts of the national economy.

"[That is why] I want to increase cooperation between the government and the tourism sector so that we can make the UK the best destination that it can be," Bryant said.

Central to the Council's mission is finding ways to increase visitor numbers outside London. *ML*

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of news, including our **Sustainability page**, plus a full page from **Trafalgar**.



Global Reach,
Local Expertise –
Operating in
100+ COUNTRIES!

From
SYDNEY TO SÃO PAULO,
we've got you covered.

Explore the world with
TBO today!

tbo.com
TRAVEL SUPPLIED



air mauritius

Mauritius
AND BEYOND

UP TO
25% OFF

On sale until 03 Feb 2025
Travel from now until
31 August 2025

✉ mk.anz.res@aviareps.com
☎ +61 (08) 7082 0550, Opt #3

YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION:
**NO CHARGEBACKS
IN 2025**

Mint



LEARN MORE

*Terms and Conditions Apply

SINGAPORE AIRLINES

Career Opportunities

Join the world's most awarded airline and take your career to greater heights.

Sydney

- Account Executive - Agency

Melbourne

- Account Executive - Agency

Applications close 30 January 2025
For more information and to apply, visit singaporeair.com/aucareers



CELEBRATE THE LUNAR NEW YEAR

UPGRADE TO BUSINESS CLASS

FROM **\$399_{PP}** ONE WAY | **\$1,399_{PP}** RETURN

Wendy Wu Tours

SELECTED CHINA GROUP TOURS





Amazing 2025 Sale
AUSTRALIA → LONDON
A\$1,628*
Roundtrip from
Book by 09 Feb 2025
*T&C Apply

Vale Ossie Pitts

PROMINENT Australian travel industry figure Ossie Pitts has passed away at the age of 101.

The industry pioneer was a former President of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA), the precursor to today's ATIA, serving in two separate stints in the 1960s and 1980s.

Two years ago, the NSW Legislative Assembly formally called out Pitts' extensive contribution to the travel industry, highlighting his lasting impact.

Looney, Nelson out at Infinity

INFINITY Holidays Director of Sales Kevin Looney (pictured) and Director of Customer Experience & Technology Leslie Nelson are set to depart the business at the end of next month, *Travel Daily* has learned.

The departures follow the quiet shuttering of Infinity's API division last year, reported by *TD* last week (*TD* 20 Jan), which also resulted in the departures of General Manager James Whiting and Account Manager APAC Teena Hollwey.

The wholesale side of the Infinity business has also largely been moved to New Zealand, with a small number of staff remaining in Australia.

Infinity's wholesale arm will continue to operate as usual.

Elsewhere within the business, Ashley O'Reilly has begun a new role as Senior Marketing Manager at Infinity, in a role unifying the department across both Australia and New Zealand.

Based in Sydney, O'Reilly joins the Flight Centre Travel Group wholesale brand after nearly 14 years in a variety of senior roles with DriveAway.

TD understands FCTG's decision to shutter the API Hotel Connectivity side of the business was a strategic decision related to a reluctance to invest any further in Infinity's technology.

Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) resurrected the Australian wholesale Infinity brand in late 2023 (*TD* 28 Sep 2023), which was previously folded into a Product Excellence Hub during a restructure of the business during the pandemic (*TD* 20 Aug 2020).

FCTG Chief Executive Officer



Graham Turner said at the time that the move to return Infinity allowed the trade to adapt to growing demands.

"The travel industry is in a period of evolution like nothing we have seen in recent times... and Infinity Holidays will be the go-to partner of the global travel trade, with simple supply solutions that power endless growth and unbreakable partnerships," Turner said.

Chimu incentivises

CHIMU Adventures has launched its 2025 Ultimate Chimu Chile incentive, with the top ten Australian sellers able to win a place on a South America famil on bookings made before 31 Mar.

Famil attendees will explore the South American gateway city of Santiago before travelling the country to see some of the best highlights Chile has to offer.

The incentive is timed to pair with the launch of the Great Chimu Sale from next month.

Points are awarded for each sale based on value, with five points for bookings on Chimu's 'White Desert' itinerary, through to one point for South America product extensions - **CLICK HERE** for more.

Koala survives chop

LEGAL action brought against the parent company of mooted domestic carrier Koala Airlines has been dismissed.

Supreme Court of Victoria documents obtained by *Travel Daily* show the case was dismissed by Judicial Registrar Claire Gitsham with mutual consent, with no costs sought.

A winding up order against Koala Tech Pty Ltd was lodged with ASIC on 15 Jan (*TD* 15 Jan) by plaintiff Wealth Creation Pty Ltd.

Expedia TAAP

TAAP into Singapore

Book a STAYOVER to enjoy a HOLIDAY Made in Singapore

expediataap.com.au

Holland America

Explore Europe with Holland America Line.

Make a booking during our Start your Journey sale and WIN 10 days Athens & Adriatic Allure August departure cruise for you and one guest.

T&Cs apply. Visit GoHAL for full competition details.

INSPIRING VACATIONS

EARN A \$50 GIFT CARD

FOR EVERY \$5K IN BOOKINGS **BOOK BY 31 JAN**

NEW AGENTS EARN A \$200 GIFT CARD FOR FIRST BOOKING

FIND OUT HOW



LEARN MORE ABOUT TOKYO WITH TRAVEL DAILY TRAINING ACADEMY

Click here to discover

Travel Daily

OpenAI takes on agents

THE company behind ChatGPT has launched new AI agent functionality capable of using its own browser to book travel plans for the first time.

In what could be perceived as a major threat to the viability of travel agents globally, OpenAI's new Operator tool has the capacity to autonomously book flights, hotels and tours online, including complex itineraries that feature multimodal travel.

The OpenAI service can research travel options, compare prices, and finalise bookings without any human intervention.

Operator can also respond to real-time issues and deliver booking alternatives - potentially undermining one of the key pillars of value that travel advisors provide to their clients.

Customisation is listed as another major hallmark of Operator, which boasts the ability to instantly tailor travel recommendations based on the user's past preferences, behaviour, and budget.

Providing competition to agent expertise, Operator also analyses online reviews and ratings to add value to its recommendations, including providing insider tips and 'hidden gems' experiences.

Travel Daily asked ChatGPT about the potential customer and business concerns Operator might raise, and the tool said that travel agents are the key segments that its new service could disrupt.



It also noted Operator could raise some privacy risks for users, in that it interacts with external websites and could compromise personal data and present challenges around how user data is handled.

Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) CEO Dean Long told *Travel Daily* the association's accredited members adhere to strict standards of excellence and ethics, instilling confidence that no single AI can replicate.

"Their ability to offer personalised assistance and build lasting relationships sets them apart, making the travel planning process both enjoyable and reliable," Long told *TD*.

"In essence, while AI can provide efficiency, combining the use of an ATIA accredited travel agent and tour operator offers a level of care and expertise that transforms travel into a truly memorable experience."

OpenAI is trialling and honing its new Operator service in the United States exclusively for its ChatGPT Pro subscribers, and at this stage has not revealed any specific dates to launch the feature in Australia. AB

QF the most on-time

QANTAS Group has pipped Virgin Australia in on-time performance for 2024, despite domestic services across the board still more delayed than they were before the pandemic.

Just over 75% of Qantas flights arrived on time, compared to 73% of flights flown by Qantas' low-cost subsidiary Jetstar Airways, and 72% of Virgin services.

All three airlines fell below the long-term average of 80%, according to Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (BITRE) data.

The report also confirmed 76% of Qantas Group flights (Qantas and QantasLink combined) departed on time last year, compared to 74% of flights on Virgin and its rural offshoot.

Qantas' full-year victory was somewhat blemished by a loss to Virgin Australia in Dec's on-time statistics, with the Bain Capital-owned airline beating its largest rival in on-time departures, leaving as scheduled 74.4% of the time, versus 73.1% for Qantas.

Australia's aviation sector as a whole dipped below the long-term average of 80.7% for on-time arrivals across the month, coming in at 74.7%.

The Big Tour Sale

FIVE trending destinations for 2025 are on sale with Trafalgar in its 'Big Tour Sale'.

Learn more about some of the guided holiday brand's most popular itineraries on **page eight**.

Travel Daily

ON LOCATION

AT SEA

Today's issue of *TD* is coming to you courtesy of Viking Cruises, which is this week hosting us on a leg of its Grand Australia Navigation.

AFTER boarding *Viking Venus* in Townsville, the ship made a call in Cairns yesterday to offer a variety of exciting shore excursions, such as expert-led bush hikes and trips to the Cairns Aquarium.

We are now at sea for two days before we disembark in Darwin, however *Venus* - which is making her debut in Aussie waters - will continue to loop around the continent on a comprehensive 32-day sailing.

Savings of up to \$2,000 per couple are on offer for Viking's 2026 circumnavigation.

First UK tourist tax

EDINBURGH will become the first UK city to introduce a tourist tax, with authorities approving a levy to be imposed on overnight visitors staying in the city.

Set to take effect from the middle of 2026, visitors staying in hotels, B&Bs, hostels, self-contained apartments and guest houses will be hit with an extra 5% of their stay per night.

Accommodation providers will be tasked with collecting the tax, which will be capped at five nights.



Garuda Indonesia

The Airline of Indonesia

Special Network Fares

TOKYO

Return From AUD

899*

SEOUL

Return From AUD

931*

A free stopover in Bali or Jakarta

*Fares from MEL. Refer to GDS for SYD fares and T&Cs.



Travel Daily
Learn more about Italy with Travel Daily Training Academy
 Click here to discover

Viking delivers a warm Antarctic welcome

VIKING Polaris has officially arrived in Antarctica, carrying a contingent of the brand's key Australian and New Zealand trade partners and Viking hosts.

Welcoming the group aboard, Viking hosted a cocktail party for the group in 'The Hide' - a unique space in the bow of the ship that is, as the name suggests, rather tucked away.

Toasting to the surprisingly smooth crossing of the Drake Passage, the group gathered for an evening of warm drinks and tasty canapes and shared stories of their adventure so far.

Embarking from Ushuaia after a charter flight from Buenos Aires, the contingent of Australian and New Zealand travel trade is this week experiencing the 13-day 'Antarctic Explorer' itinerary.

Over the next fortnight, the group will experience everything on offer aboard a Viking expedition vessel, including navigating the Antarctic



scenery on the ship's high-speed special operations boats, zodiac explorations, kayaking expeditions among the icebergs, and a chance to explore below the waves with *Polaris*' two onboard submarines. **AP**

Pictured above enjoying 'The Hide' is Toby Lemma, Viking; Shelley and Frederic Jacquemin, Travel Associates at Home; Jean Summers and Dean Reeves, Clean Cruising.

KE ready for A350

KOREAN Air has introduced its first two Airbus A350-900 aircraft to the fleet, with passengers on the airline's flights between Seoul and both Osaka and Fukuoka now utilising the next-generation jets.

The aircraft accommodates 311 passengers, with 283 in economy class and 28 in Prestige class.

Korean Air has a further four A350-900 aircraft on order.

Travel Daily
ON LOCATION

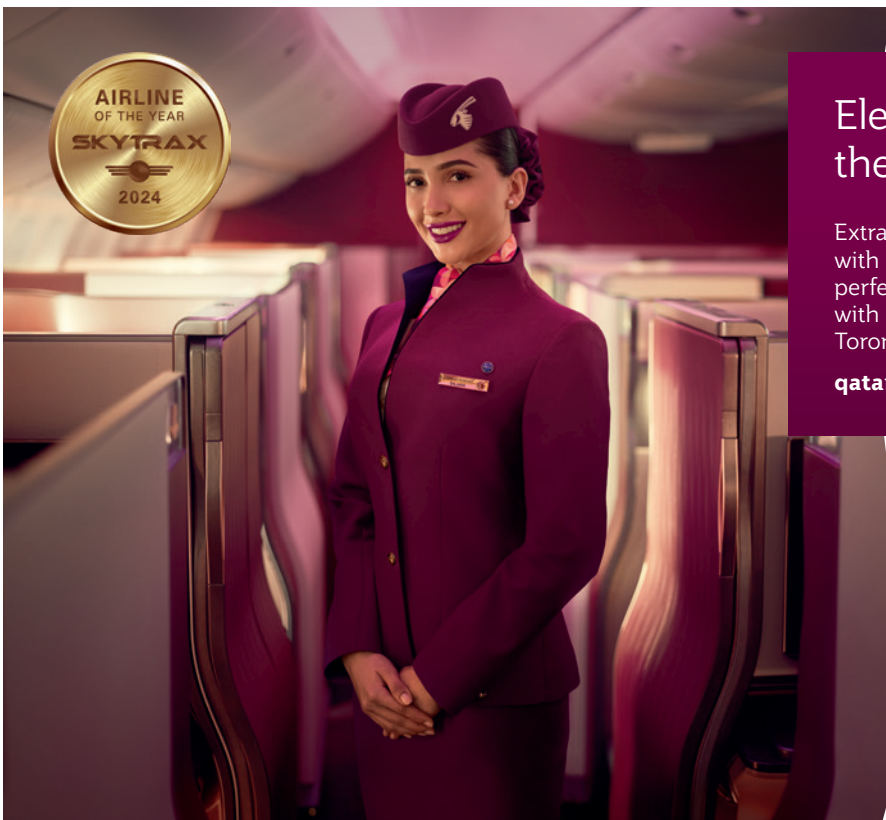
 **ANTARCTICA**

Today's issue of *TD* is coming to you courtesy of Viking, which is this week hosting an Antarctic expedition aboard *Viking Polaris*.

VIKING POLARIS has officially arrived in Antarctica. After a comfortable crossing of the Drake Passage, the ship celebrated her arrival to Antarctica with warming bouillabaisse on the bow.

As we sailed into the waters of the White Continent this morning, we were greeted by humpback whales and swooping birds against the backdrop of the surrounding icebergs.

This afternoon, our expedition begins aboard the vessel's unique special operations boats, zodiacs and kayaks.



Elevate your journey with the World's Best Airline

Extraordinary adventures await your clients in 2025, with remarkable destinations to explore. Now is the perfect time for them to plan their next holiday, with special fares to London, Athens, Lisbon, Toronto, Doha, São Paulo, and more.

qatarairways.com/tradeportal



GOING PLACES TOGETHER



Discover our River Cruise Special Report

[Click here](#)



Window Seat

FORGET booking a trip to see the next Boston Marathon, **TD** has found an alternative that takes racing to new levels.

China has announced it will host the world's first half-marathon that will pit man against machine.

According to local media, 12,000 humanoids will take on robots (without wheels) from 20 Chinese tech firms to see if flesh and blood competitors still have what it takes to outperform their silicon overlords.

While humans will fight cramps with pickle juice, robot athletes may potentially receive hits of WD40 if they tighten up mid race.

The event is scheduled for Apr, which gives some pause for thought if the date turns out to be 01 Apr.

The hidden side of Canada



ADVENTURE World recently hosted travel advisors on a family to Canada that explored the country's winter appeal beyond the traditional ski slopes.

Highlights of the tour included checking out the hidden gems of British Columbia and Alberta, featuring stops in popular

hotspots Vancouver, Jasper, Lake Louise, Banff, and Calgary.

Advisors also hopped aboard a VIA Rail train journey, where they experienced the beauty of Canada at high speed in the comfort of the scenic rail service.

The group is **pictured** above enjoying the views over Banff. **AB**

SA cracks top 10 list

THE world's most welcoming destinations have just been revealed by Booking.com.

According to the website's Most Welcoming Regions on Earth list, South Australia has made it into the top 10, as well as Osijek-Baranja, Croatia; Kakheti, Georgia; Madeira, Portugal; Misiones, Argentina; and others.

South Australia made another appearance on Booking.com's Most Welcoming Cities in Australia list, with Port Lincoln cracking the top 10.

Other cities including Montville and Maleny, Qld; Margaret River, WA; Orange and Mudgee, NSW; Bicheno, Tas; and Halls Gap and Daylesford, Vic.

"From the Adelaide Hills to Kangaroo Island, from the Barossa to the Murray River and the Flinders Ranges, guests will always be warmly welcomed in South Australia," said South Australian Minister for Tourism, Zoe Bettison.



Discover your next adventure

stay 2 nights & save 25%*

Discovery Resorts - El Questro
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

BOOK NOW with your preferred wholesaler.

*Offer subject to availability and valid for new FIT bookings placed between 31 March 2024 - 28 February 2025, for selected travel dates. Blackout dates and T&C's apply.

Operated by the





Brasilia Vive

BRAZILIAN tour operator Vivejar Experiencias has this week launched its first responsible tourism itinerary, 'Parintins Aboard'.

Taking place from 24 June to 01 Jul 2025, the eight-day cultural adventure will offer travellers the opportunity to become part of the annual Parintins Festival celebrations, giving them behind-the-scenes access to the stage, where the floats and costumes are crafted.

In addition, there will be opportunities to engage with Amazonian culture through guided city tours and meetings with local artists.

The trip will start in the town of Manaus, then the tour group will board a regional boat to Parintins, stopping to admire the Meeting of the Waters, where the Negro and Solimoes rivers converge.

That is followed by six days in the town of Parintins, where guests can immerse themselves within the celebrations, enjoy local cuisine, take part in sunrise yoga sessions and enjoy a sunset at Lake Macurany.

Vivejar Experiencias is a local tour operator recognised for its responsible and sustainable tourism practices, connecting travellers with culture.

COST TRUMPS SUSTAINABILITY FOR PAX

TRAVELLERS' desire for affordability still trumps their interest in sustainable options, according to a new report from the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC).

The new research analysed responses from more than 10,000 consumers and explored the disconnect between travellers' wish for sustainable travel and their actual behaviour.

These respondents were categorised into six different segments, including the 'Hopeful Worriers' and the 'Climate Change Agnostics'.

Across all of these categories, more than 50% said the most important factor influencing their purchasing decisions is cost, while 30% prioritise quality.

Meanwhile, sustainability is a primary factor for only a few consumer segments, ranging from 11% to 7%.

The report also revealed that



more than 10% of respondents felt like they have not been exposed to any messaging around sustainable travel through any channel, such as mainstream media, social platforms or community-driven initiatives.

The WTTC said that travel operators should consider showcasing the economic and personal benefits of sustainable travel, making it easy for consumers to understand.

In addition, tailored marketing that speaks to the values and needs of different kinds of

customer segments would also increase engagement.

Another suggestion was for sustainable tourism companies to offer tiered reward programs.

"Travellers care about sustainability but when buying travel, cost and quality are king. Customers expect businesses to create affordable sustainable options," said WTTC President and CEO Julia Simpson.

"But many WTTC companies inspire change - whether that is regrowing coral reefs or reducing food waste." *JHM*

A-ROSA supports social initiatives

A-ROSA River Cruises recently raised €10,600 (A\$17, 672) for three selected partner charities in Germany, including the Rostock Homeless Aid Association, the Rahe Family Foundation and the Rostock Animal Welfare Association.

The cruise line raised the money from its annual New Year's raffle on its fleet at the end of last year.

Traditionally, the proceeds of the raffle are donated to charitable projects.

"We were once again thrilled by the generous participation of our guests in the annual New Year's Raffle," said A-ROSA CEO Jörg Eichler.

"Social commitment is very important to us and our guests - and together we can make a real difference."

Sirru Fen recruit

LUXURY resort Sirru Fen Fushi in the Maldives has welcomed new Sustainability Manager, marine biologist Muhamad Izuan.

With more than 10 years' experience at conservation businesses, Izuan will strengthen Sirru Fen Fushi's resort's commitment to the environment and educate guests on resort activities.


Now, it's your turn to experience
the magic of Norway

 HURTIGRUTEN

WIN A CABIN
ON THE WORLD'S
MOST BEAUTIFUL VOYAGE



Discover more

T&Cs apply



FOLLOW US
ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow Travel Daily to get your travel news first

  Travel Daily

MONEY

WELCOME to Money, TD's Tue feature on what the Australian dollar is doing.

AU\$1 = US\$0.627

TRAVELLERS are reported to be tightening their belts, with the Australian dollar sliding against the greenback and other currencies.

Meanwhile, analysts predict the dollar will drop below US\$0.60 as Trump tariffs loom.

Australian inflation data to be released tomorrow will further influence the interest rate outlook and value of the local currency.

Wholesale rates this morning.

US	\$0.627
UK	£0.502
NZ	\$1.105
Euro	€0.599
Japan	¥97.15
Thailand	฿21.22
China	¥4.544
South Africa	11.77
Canada	\$0.902
Crude oil	US\$73.15

777X tests resume

BOEING has resumed testing of its much-delayed 777X model five months after a key mounting structure forced a major redesign.

The grounding last Aug came five weeks after its certification flight program had commenced, according to Reuters, with US aviation regulators onboard for the program's resumption.

The first 777X is now expected to be delivered in 2026 - six years late - with 481 units in the order book from 13 airlines.

Racquets and records smashed



VICTORIA is hailing the success of the 2025 Australian Open tennis tournament, labelling it as "the biggest ever", with more than 1.2 million fans passing through the turnstiles for the two-week showcase.

With daily attendance records being broken almost routinely, the first Grand Slam of the year surpassed the attendance of last year's tournament by Day 14.

The event has been a particular boon for the accommodation sector, with hotel market analyst STR confirming 93% of hotel rooms in Melbourne were booked for the night of 18 Jan - halfway through the tournament.

While the final receipt tally has yet to be fully calculated, the tournament is expected to eclipse the \$533 million generated for Victoria during the 2024 event - and add to more than \$3.14 billion the tournament has raked in over the past decade.

"This year's Australian Open has broken records with over a million tennis fans flocking to Melbourne Park to witness the

world's best tennis players, and many millions more watching at home as we showcase Victoria to the world," said Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Steve Dimopoulos. *ML*

BA lounge upgrade

MORE than two years after reopening its flagship lounge in Singapore (*TD* 26 May 2022), British Airways has completed a renovation that it pledges will "embody dedication to innovation and comfort".

Part of the carrier's £7 billion transformation program, the new-look lounge, which has been renamed 'Concorde' features a new menu of classic British favourites such as herb-crusted beef tenderloin and sticky toffee pudding for dessert.

The drinks selection has also expanded and now includes three premium champagnes from Joesph Perrier and Bollinger.

The lounge also boasts added individual pods for privacy, improved seating arrangements, and upgraded ambient lighting to create a warmer atmosphere.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



MARISSA PAPAS

Director,
Connected Travel

SESSION

Empowering the next generation of agents

HOME EX
HOME AGENT
VIRTUAL
EXPERIENCE

LIVE FROM 10 MARCH

REGISTER FREE

BIG TOUR SALE

Top trending **five for 2025.**

Best of Italy | 13 days | 13 cities | 2 countries



4.7/5 Feefo star rating

Britain & Ireland Highlights | 8 days | 13 cities | 5 countries



4.5/5 Feefo star rating

Grand European | 21 days | 27 cities | 11 countries



4.7/5 Feefo star rating

Treasures of Spain & Portugal | 14 days | 14 cities | 2 countries



4.5/5 Feefo star rating

Scenic Parks Explorer | 15 days | 21 cities | 1 country



4.8/5 Feefo star rating

*Terms and conditions apply.

BOOK NOW