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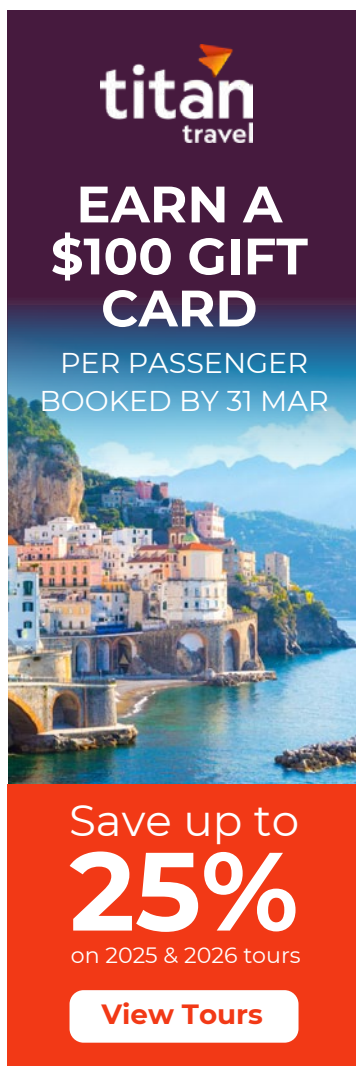
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Learn all about Utah

AGENTS can learn and win when they participate in Visit Utah's new three-part webinar series, which kicks off on Wed.


The sessions will cover the US state's iconic parks and places to stay, as well as its mountains and ski resorts - details on **page nine**.



titan travel

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View Tours

Stuart Udy exits Expedia

EXPEDIA Travel Agent Affiliate Program (TAAP) has announced its Director of ANZ Stuart Udy will retire from the industry in the coming months.

Udy (**pictured**) has been a fixture in the sector over his last 15 years in the role, maintaining a highly visible presence at travel events and conferences across the country to explain the virtues of the Expedia TAAP program to advisors in the APAC region.

Udy, who was instrumental in the launch of the Expedia TAAP program in 2010 (**TD** 01 Mar 2010), reflected on his time leading the brand with a sense of "deep pride and gratitude".

"It has been such an honour and



wonderful journey leading the development of Expedia TAAP in our region," Udy said.

"Coaching its evolution and impact on the travel industry has been a true highlight of my career, and we were excited about the potential for Expedia TAAP from the very first week."

Despite the lofty ambitions, Udy conceded the growth of Expedia TAAP in Australia had exceeded all of his expectations when he started steering the fledging division 15 years ago.

"To put it into perspective, the turnover of Expedia TAAP in its first year now equates to less than our average turnover for a few days in 2025," he said.

"That speaks volumes about the incredible success and the industry's response to what we have built," Udy added.

A replacement for Udy will be announced soon. **AB**

VJ flights 83% off

VIETJET is celebrating International Women's Day on 08 Mar by offering up to 83% off eco-class airfares between Australia and Vietnam.

Travellers can enjoy the cheaper seats across the carrier's entire network, including direct flights from Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney to Ho Chi Minh City, and from Melbourne and Sydney to Hanoi.

The offer is valid for bookings made between 03-05 Mar, and applies to travel between 17 Mar and 22 May 2025.

To take advantage of the deal, use the promo code **VJ83** when booking through Vietjet's official website or the Vietjet Air app.

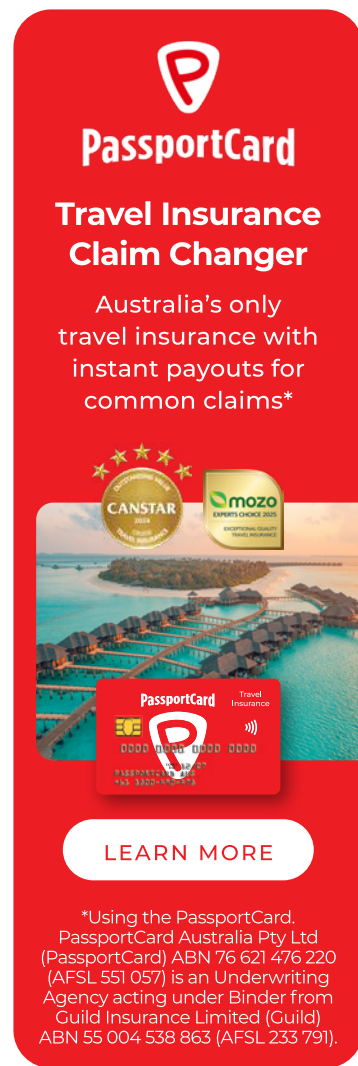
Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features eight pages of the latest news, plus a cover wrap from **Home Ex**, a product profile from **Destination Webinars** and a full page from **Club Med**.

Club Med earlybird

CLUB Med has opened its 2026 earlybird sale, offering up to 30% savings on its all-inclusive ski holidays in Japan, including in Kiroro Grand, Kiroro Peak, and Tomamu Hokkaido.

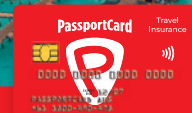


Find out more by heading to **page eight**.



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Win your Qantas Supernova Seat



Qantas is giving 15 lucky agents the chance to win corporate box seats to Oasis Live 25' in Sydney, including flights and accommodation. Plus, in partnership with VisitBritain, the top five selling agents will get to experience the ultimate UK adventure.

Find out more





Intrepid names CMO

INTREPID has promoted its Director UK & Ireland Hazel McGuire to the role of CMO.

The tour operator has been on the lookout for a replacement for former CMO Leigh Barnes since Jun last year (TD 18 Jun 2024), who has since been redeployed to the United States to grow the North American market.

McGuire will commence in the position on 01 Apr, remaining in London and reporting into CEO James Thornton.

She will be charged with managing brand, PR and communications, and customer and experiences globally, the latter being a new addition to the CMO portfolio of duties.

McGuire joined Intrepid in Aug 2022, and brings extensive travel marketing experience in the UK.

Skytrans plugs capacity gap

QUEENSLAND-BASED airline Skytrans has received an Air Operation Certificate to begin flights with narrow-body aircraft in the region, particularly its recently acquired Airbus A319 flagged last month (TD 17 Feb).

Part of the Avia Solutions Group, the world's largest aircraft, crew, maintenance and insurance (ACMI) provider, Skytrans suggested the introduction of the A319 was aimed at increasing passenger capacity in peak travel periods in Australia, as well as allowing regional carriers to test and open new routes or replace aircraft that require work.

"The AOC operations specification approval to operate the Airbus A319 is a significant achievement for Skytrans," Gytis Gumuliauskas, Managing Director at Skytrans said.

"It will expand our fleet capabilities and provide clients with the opportunity to deliver profit accelerating initiatives through the utilisation of additional fleet capacity at crucial peak season periods."

Skytrans was acquired by Avia



in Mar last year (TD 30 Jan 2024) and soon after announced that it would be bringing up to 20 Airbus A320 family jets to Australia within its first five years.

Like the first A319 to arrive, the remainder of the jets were earmarked largely for ACMI and charter operations in Australia.

At the time, Gumuliauskas told *Australian Aviation* that he expected "[the] first aircraft to be arriving in October, three units by the end of 2024, and adding five to seven units during 2025, then varying in the following years to grow by three to five units" each year after that.

The Skytrans Managing Director also mentioned that the plan was flexible depending on customer needs, and that if there was additional need, Skytrans could bring in planes quicker. DF

Travel Daily

ON LOCATION

DUBAI

Today's issue of TD is coming to you courtesy of Celestyal Cruises, which is hosting us aboard *Celestyal Journey*.

WE ARE aboard *Celestyal Journey* as she cruises the Arabian Gulf in her inaugural season with the cruise line.

Today we are in Dubai for our overnight call in the United Arab Emirates' most populous city.

Our first day will see us head into the iconic Dubai Mall - home to arguably the destination's most famous attraction and the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa.

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Travellers urged to take fewer risks for 'likes'

AUSTRALIA'S peak travel safety advisory has warned travellers not to take added risks on trips based on the recommendations of online influencers.

In a post released late last week, Smartraveller said "no amount of likes are worth the risks", and that visiting locations where DFAT and other governments advise 'do not travel' can put travellers' lives in serious danger.

"Our advice levels are important to follow and they are put in place to protect your safety and wellbeing," Smartraveller said.

"If you do get into trouble, our ability to provide consular assistance in these places is extremely limited.

"In almost all cases, you also won't be covered by travel insurance," the body added.

Providing commentary on the latest government advice, Crooked Compass founder Lisa Pagotto told *Travel Daily* that



while her business loves "pushing boundaries" and taking travellers to destinations outside of the mainstream, the operator does a thorough risk assessment before undertaking any departure.

"If a destination is listed as 'do not travel', we respect that advice, and our duty of care means we won't take guests somewhere that puts them at unnecessary risk," Pagotto said.

"People see me personally travelling to places that fall under 'do not travel' advisories, that's a choice I make with a full understanding of the risks, and it helps me better grasp geopolitical situations on the ground.

"I would never take guests into environments that don't meet

our strict safety standards."

That said, Pagotto personally believes travel warnings are often overly conservative and, in many cases, politically driven.

"They don't always reflect the true situation on the ground," Pagotto argued.

"Risks exists everywhere - Paris is one of the most attacked cities in the world, and yet millions visit every year.

"Travelling anywhere - whether it's a major capital or a remote region - requires a level of common sense, and anything can happen at any time.

"The key is to collect the right information, assess the risks, and decide what you're comfortable with - whether as an independent traveller or with an operator who has the right expertise.

"There's a fine line between adventure and recklessness, and at Crooked Compass, we believe in responsible exploration." AB



Window Seat

TWO women recently found themselves with more legroom than they knew what to do with, after boarding a Southwest Airlines flight as the only two passengers.

"We couldn't believe it when we first were told that we were the only two on the flight," Natalie Wolfley told *news.com.au*.

"We had the whole walk to the gate to get excited about it and when we got to the plane it was a wave of giddiness."

The two friends were flying from Salt Lake City, Utah to Phoenix, Arizona for a bridal shower, with the pair getting an early taste of the VIP experience when pilots and crew addressed them by name during all of the in-flight announcements.

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Travel Daily

SXSW's new leaders

TEG has appointed its Head of Commercial, Simon Cahill, and SXSW Sydney's General Manager, Jono Whyman, as Co-Managing Directors for SXSW Sydney, ahead of the festival's return in Oct.

The announcement follows Colin Daniels' decision to step down from the SXSW Sydney MD position, a role he has held since the event's inaugural year in Australia (*TD* 03 Nov 2023).

"Colin has done an outstanding job in building a passionate team, successfully launching SXSW Sydney, and ensuring the vision for this world-leading event is set for the future," TEG Group CEO and SXSW Chair Geoff Jones said.

"We are excited to build on the success of the festival and further develop SXSW Sydney as the premier destination for innovation, creativity, and collaboration in the APAC region."

Cahill will retain existing commercial responsibilities and has been appointed as TEG's CCO.

Local IATA training now available to agents

EXCLUSIVE

CONNECTED Travel is now an IATA Authorised Training Centre, offering local travel professionals access to globally-based, industry-backed training and a clear pathway to career opportunities all over the world.

Connected Travel will integrate IATA's curriculum into its existing practical Connect Program.

Described by Connected Travel Director Marissa Papas (pictured) as "a gamechanger" for the local travel industry, the accreditation is not just a career qualification, but a "career accelerator".

"[We're] ensuring agents aren't just ticking a box for certification, but are actually graduating with real skills required for this industry," Papas told *Travel Daily*.

"Combined with our Connect Program, what makes this even more significant is that our courses are produced by the industry, for the industry - which



is huge," she said.

Topics to be covered include airline ticketing and fare calculation; hands-on training in Sabre, Amadeus and Galileo; travel and tourism geography; and industry rules and regulations.

Participants will also develop skills to upsell travel products, manage client enquiries and create seamless itineraries.

They will also receive practical training so they can "hit the ground running from day one".

"This isn't just textbook knowledge - we're delivering training designed by experienced professionals who have worked -

or still work - as agents, ensuring new agents graduate with the real-world, job-ready skills we know they need," Papas added.

The new training is open for both new agents and experienced professionals, as a range of advanced study is also on offer, including topics such as managing travel business; accounting and financial management for travel agencies; and distribution and airline retailing with NDC.

"We wanted to ensure there's something for every skill level, so industry professionals can continue learning, upskilling, and staying ahead," Papas said.

Enrolments for the diplomas and certifications is now open, with the first induction taking place on 20 Mar.

Virtual classroom training is available for those who wish to pair theory with practical training.

For more information on the program, **CLICK HERE**. *JHM*



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GF scraps commish

GULF Air has revised its BSP commission rate on airfares sold from Australia to 0%, with the move effective from 01 Apr.

The move applies to all GF fares, including codeshare services by online carriers, with agents urged to finalise all pending bookings to avoid ADMs being issued.



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Emma Gorge, Western Australia

Biz pax go the distance

BUSINESS travellers are flying longer distances and venturing to new cities, forcing airlines to expand their networks to suit, a new Corporate Travel Management (CTM) report shows.

According to the company's *Global Corporate Travel Trends Report* for 2024, air capacity is now back above pre-pandemic levels and 6.4% higher than 2023.

The Sydney to Melbourne route moved into the top three booked among CTM's customers, trailing only London to New York and London to Hong Kong.

The domestic route was so well booked, it even surpassed Hong Kong to Tokyo, traditionally one of the busiest city pairs for business travellers, for the first six months of 2024.

CTM said corporate confidence was also increasing, leading to longer booking lead times and a global plateauing in hotel average daily rates (ADRs) at around 20-30% above pre-pandemic levels.

Additionally, stabilising airfares were leaving travel managers with greater certainty following price increases during 2023.

While many Australian business travellers stayed close to home in 2024, they have since returned to flying longer distances and have surpassed 2019 levels.

Corporate Travel Management CEO Australia and New Zealand, Greg McCarthy, said he was seeing increased confidence and strong accommodation demand in key markets.



"This positive trajectory highlights a market that is both adapting and growing," he said.

"By sharing insights from our *Global Travel Trends Report*, we aim to equip the corporate travel community with the intelligence they need to optimise their programs, drive efficiency and maximise value."

The report cites CAPA Centre for Aviation, which states airlines are increasing their networks and investing heavily in more aircraft, with over 1,600 aircraft deliveries expected for 2025. *ML*

Demand is sky high

GLOBAL load factors hit all-time highs in Jan 2025, according to IATA, with flights travelling at an average of 82.1% - a year-on-year increase of 2.2%.

Overall demand climbed 10% compared to the prior year, spurred by international, which saw a 12.4% jump and load factors past 82.5%.

The Asia Pacific region led the way, with demand up 21.8% and capacity failing to keep up, only climbing 16.5% and leading to average loads hitting 86.7%.

IATA Director General Willie Walsh said the record high loads amplified supply chain issues.

Queen Anne in Syd

CUNARD'S newest ship to join the fleet in 14 years arrived in Sydney for the first time on Fri, hosting a British garden party on board as she sailed into the Sydney Harbour.

Queen Anne docked in Sydney as part of a world voyage - see today's *Cruise Weekly* for details.

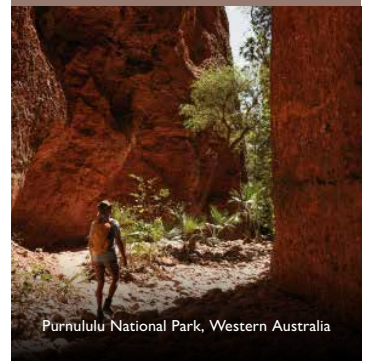


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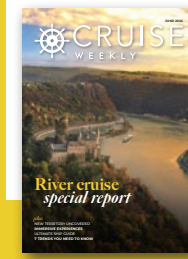


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Manila is far from vanilla

MANILA is the ultimate destination for Aussie adventurers, according to the Backpacking Paradise Index, a new report from CupoNation.

The study, which ranks the top 10 cities within an 8.5-hour direct flight of Australia's major international airports, placed the Philippines capital in top position due to its low flight costs, tropical climate, highly affordable public transport, and no visa requirement.

The ranking was determined based on 23 essential metrics, including flights, affordability, safety, local dining and delicacies, and social media buzz.

Nadi achieved second place, thanks to its outdoor activities and eco-conscious tours per capita, short flight time, and minimal rainy days.

Following in third position was Bali, on account of its exceptional affordability and direct flights from six Aussie airports, while following closely behind was Kuala Lumpur, which boasts the lowest-cost accommodation, as well as budget-friendly street food and rich cultural tapestry.

New Zealand appeared on the list twice, with Christchurch as number five and Wellington as number eight, while Singapore, Jakarta, Bangkok, and Ho Chi Minh City also made the index.

"We designed the Backpacking Paradise Index to empower Australian travellers to explore responsibly while maximising



their budget," explained Creed Van Ryt, Head of Account Management for CupoNation.

"These destinations offer not just affordability, but unique cultural and sustainable travel experiences," he added.

The index also provides travel insights, such as the best times to visit each of the destinations on the list based on weather patterns, seasonal events, and crowd levels - read it [HERE](#). *JM*

Fusion Dong Duong

FUSION Hotel Group has taken over the management of Dong Duong Hotel, marking the luxury brand's second property in Hue.

The heritage hotel is located along the southern bank of Huong River, and consists of two towers with a total of 161 rooms.

Fusion is undertaking a renovation of Dong Duong Hotel, preserving its historical style while introducing modern elements in line with the brand's unique flair.

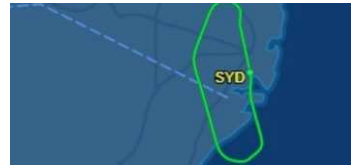
When it reopens in the third quarter of 2025, the hotel will bring full-service amenities, including multiple dining options, spa treatment rooms, wellness facilities and MICE facilities for up to 250 guests.

Qantas emergency

A **QANTAS** flight that took off from Sydney bound for Perth this morning was forced to make an emergency landing back in Sydney after smoke was spotted in the cockpit.

Flight QF643 turned back after only 25 minutes into the flight.

The flight returned safely after requesting a priority landing.



SAF study funding

TWO Queensland-based studies into alternative fuels for Australia's aviation industry will be funded by the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) through a \$10.2 million investment.

The organisation said the studies outlined an important step towards developing a viable SAF industry in Australia.

A grant of \$8 million has been allocated to technology firm Licella for its feasibility study into using hydrothermal liquefaction to convert sugar residue to SAF and the viability of establishing a biorefinery in Bundaberg.

The second grant of \$2.4 million will go to Viva Energy to recondition a tank at its Pinkenba terminal to enable a blended SAF supply for Brisbane Airport.

ARENA has been nominated by the Federal Government as the delivery agency funding and supporting the projects.

Discovering Oita

TRAVEL agents are invited to tune into a webinar on Japan this Thu, 06 Mar, which will focus on the Oita Prefecture in Kyushu.

The one-hour session will cross live to Beppu for a site inspection of two iconic experiences, Hoytan Onsen and the Sunflower Ferry.

Register now [HERE](#) for the chance to win one of two \$100 Mastercard vouchers.

BNE premium daily

EMIRATES will increase premium economy availability on one of its two Brisbane flights to daily, effective from 06 Mar.

Flight EK435 departing at 8:55pm will soon feature EK's four-class service daily, up from the current three-times weekly.

Flight EK431, which departs daily at 1.55am, will remain a three-class product with economy, business and first available.

REPS' Royal addition

REPS Unlimited has announced the addition of Royal Avila Boutique Resort to its portfolio, representing the Indonesian property in the Australia and New Zealand markets.

The beachside resort features 54 suites with panoramic ocean views and private balconies, with guests able to unwind at Amavi's Beach Club, enjoy Mediterranean-style cuisine at Olive Bar and Restaurant, or relax at Althea Spa.

Agents and tour operators can enquire [HERE](#) to discuss partnership opportunities.



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WFH challenges

AS THE world of home-based agents continues to grow, more business owners may struggle to create a thriving workplace culture.

“What people are looking for from their leaders is genuine and open communication, clear feedback and trust,” said people and culture expert Gabrielle Roux from the Human Strategist.

“People want to feel that their leaders understand what is important to them, that they are valued and connected to the business regardless of their location.”

The greatest challenge that leaders continue to face with teams while working from home is successful communication, she said, which needs to be regular, intentional and purposeful.

“There needs to be many communication touch points throughout the day and they need to be a mix of company specific updates, general information and genuine connection,” noted Roux.

“[It] needs to cover the things we would naturally think to share and talk about and also the things we don’t - often it’s the small details that get missed that make all the difference.”

Roux will be a speaker at Home Ex next week.

READY TO SCALE? LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

IT IS no secret that the demand for travel is continuing to climb, and while it is a great problem for agents to face, many home-based advisors are now considering scaling up their businesses to manage the increased workload.

From what Envoyage’s Global Chief Operating Officer Astrid Richardson (pictured) has observed, many travel agents consider scaling up when their work-life balance becomes difficult to maintain.

However, before agents start going hard on a recruitment drive, it pays to make sure that the foundations of the business are strong, she advised.

“There’s no point growing a business that’s either not profitable or doesn’t have systems and processes that aren’t

streamlined already,” Richardson told *Travel Daily*.

“Make sure that you know the systems are scalable and you’ve already looked at offshoring or outsourcing high-volume, low-value tasks whether that’s to virtual agents or automation tools,” she added.

Richardson also noted that “not all growth is good growth”, and it is crucial that advisors are clear on exactly what they are aiming for, whether it is profitable growth or perhaps growing into a



new segment.

“Think about what other elements of the business could be scaled,” Richardson explained, suggesting advisors consider not only the travel booking elements, but also adjacent products on offer. *JHM*

ATIA senior execs out in force at Home Ex

THE team at the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) will be joining Home Ex next week to share how the organisation can support agents through their key services, membership benefits, advocacy efforts and the prestigious ATIA accreditation.

CEO Dean Long will lead the discussion, followed by Director of Public Policy & Advocacy Ingrid Fraser, Director of Membership and Industry Affairs Richard Taylor, and Compliance Manager



Nina Hedges.

Attendees will also hear about the various resources available to them and how being ATIA-accredited can elevate their businesses.

Suppliers connect

FROM cruise and rail to touring and air, a diverse range of suppliers will be taking part in Home Ex, *Travel Daily’s* first virtual event especially for home-based agents taking place very soon.

These include Abercrombie & Kent, TravelManagers, Exoticca, Wendy Wu Tours, Envoyage, MTA, Viking and plenty more.

Home Ex goes live on 10 Mar - registration is free. To sign up, [CLICK HERE](#).

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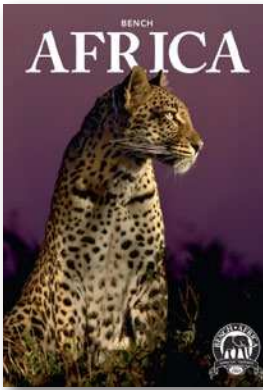
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THIS week's Brochures of the Week is brought to you by Bench Africa.



The Bench Africa Travel Brochure 2025
Bench Africa has unveiled a raft of updates in its latest brochure showcasing a mix of new and popular tours for 2025. The 111-page guide makes it even 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 in the latest edition following a sharp rise in demand, while advisors can also take advantage of a special rail section, as well as a large feature on luxury lodges and camps.

Bench Africa's popular 'elephant rating' also returns, providing agents with an alternative to the international star rating system. Throughout the guide, every tour and experience has an 'elephant score', taking into account extra criteria such as mode of travel; the safari experience; exclusivity of the region, as well as the level of participation involved. The brochure is updated every two years by Bench Africa, perfect timing for this year as outbound travel from Australia to the continent continues to surge. View the brox online **HERE**.



Awesome Adventures Fiji - 2025-26
Awesome Adventures Fiji, which offers packages and passes to explore the remote Yasawa Islands, has released its latest brochure. While base itineraries for the self-guided packages remain the same, included activities and hotels have been updated for the 2025/26 season. Additionally, the pricing of the flexible 'Bula Passes' (hop on hop off travel passes) have been reduced for durations of seven days or more. Readers can also find out the best way to explore the islands depending on what type of traveller they are. Packages highlighted include the five-day 'Island Adventurer' option, which features a selection of activities to choose from, such as snorkelling with reef sharks or a marine biology tour - more **HERE**.

Sky's the limit for Port Stephens



PORT Stephens has been named Wotif's 2025 Aussie Town of the Year, with the travel app reporting a 75% increase in accommodation searches for the NSW coastal destination in 2024.

The accolade follows the region taking out four silver medals at the 2024 NSW Tourism Awards, as well as an 11.5% year-on-year uptick in visitor expenditure for the year ending Sep 2024.

The spending boom, reflected in the latest Tourism Research Australia data, accompanied a 2.4% increase in domestic overnight visitor numbers during the same period.

"Port Stephens is home to the world-class experiences that are key to future growth in the NSW visitor economy," said Minister for Tourism, John Graham.

"The next decade of growth in the visitor economy will be underpinned by infrastructure milestones such as the new international terminal at Newcastle Airport, which is located just minutes from Port Stephens," he added.

Two other regional NSW towns, Kingscliff and Yamba, also secured spots in Wotif's 2025 Aussie Town of the Year top 10.

"With three NSW towns featured in Wotif's 2025 Aussie Town of the Year awards - more than any other state - this recognition highlights regional NSW as the premier destination for Australian travellers," said Destination NSW Acting CEO Karen Jones.

"From Port Stephens' beautiful beaches and marine adventures to Kingscliff's boutique coastal charm and Yamba's laidback surf culture, our state offers an unrivalled mix of experiences that continue to captivate visitors year after year." *JM*

16 hurt on Crown

THIRTEEN passengers and three crew on board *Crown Princess* suffered minor injuries on 25 Feb when the cruise ship encountered rough seas near Milford Sound.

The choppy conditions in NZ were caused by strong winds, resulting in the ship briefly tilting beyond its usual movement, leading to objects falling off shelves and flooding in some dining areas.

The ship did not suffer any structural damage in the incident.

Club Med 

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Visit Utah and partners are bringing travel advisors a special three-part webinar series to learn and explore the wonders of Utah. The local team will be joined by in-destination presenters, who will lead you in discovering breathtaking experiences, countless hidden landmarks, charming towns, as well as The Greatest Snow on Earth®, The Mighty 5® national parks and everything in between.

#1 Gateway to Utah: Salt Lake City & Beyond

Discover Salt Lake City, the ideal gateway for travellers visiting Utah's ski resorts or making a trip southward towards Utah's renowned red rock country. Salt Lake blends natural wonders with city life, offering adventure and culture year-

round. Just 90 minutes north of Salt Lake City, travellers can explore Logan. Famous for outdoor adventures, hands-on American West heritage experiences, and performing and fine arts.

#2 Utah's Iconic Parks & Places to Stay

Discover Utah's spectacular southern regions including Zion, Bryce Canyon, Kanab, San Juan County & Monument Valley. Discover unique and unforgettable experiences including legendary hiking trails, stargazing, stunning natural wonders, countless hidden landmarks and charming resort towns.

Utah #3: Utah's Mountains & Ski Resorts

With over 13 metres of light, dry snow falling annually on Utah's 15 resorts, Utah is the perfect winter holiday destination.

Escape to Heber Valley, where luxury meets adventure. Unwind in exceptional accommodations, indulge in exquisite dining, unique activities like soaking in the Utah Crater, guided snowmobiling tours, and serene snowshoe adventures.

REGISTER NOW

Each webinar runs live at 8.30am & 12pm AEDT and gives you a chance to win a \$100 gift card!

5 March: Gateway to Utah

2 April: Utah's Iconic Parks & Places to stay

7 May: Utah's Mountains & Ski Resorts