

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features six pages of the latest news, plus a full page from **Tourism New Zealand**.

Sampson to exit QF

QANTAS has revealed that long-time board member and advertising guru Todd Sampson will depart the business on 31 Jul.

Sampson has been part of the executive team for close to a decade, with Qantas Chairman John Mullen saluting his "guidance and insights" during one of the most challenging periods in the airline's history.

In further board news, Qantas has added a new member who the company believes will bolster its experience and knowledge of digital technology and AI.

Former President and Chief Executive Officer of HP Inc Dion Weisler has joined Qantas as a Non-Executive Director, injecting new skills into the C-suite as part of a previously flagged plan to evolve the board.

"[Weisler] brings immense value to Qantas as we accelerate our investment in digital improvements across our business while navigating the risks and opportunities posed by AI, cyber threats and increasing global connectivity," Mullen said.

Weisler also sits on the board of BHP, Thermo Fisher Scientific, and Intel Corporation.

Shareholders will vote on Weisler's position at the Qantas AGM on 07 Nov.

Push for accessible NTIA

EXCLUSIVE

EFFORTS are underway for the 2025 National Travel Industry Awards (NTIA) to include a category recognising an agent, supplier or destination for outstanding work in catering to travellers with disabilities.

At the centre of the movement is AccessibleOz co-founder and ittravel member agent, Yann Charavel, who told **TD** he has had discussions with the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) about introducing the category.

"We want to make it broad because [ATIA] might not want to do three or four awards in that category yet, but at least have one category that is promoting accessibility," Charavel said.

ATIA Chief Executive Dean Long said that while discussions had taken place, any new categories must go through the proper process first.

"We have a recommendation from a member [and] all those recommendations go through the NTIA Custodians, who review and make sure there is a category big enough that would have a competitive bunch of applicants.

"[Then] we can assess what it and then from there we will make



an announcement over that.

"I think it's a very worthy category and I'm sure the Custodians will look upon it very favourably," Long told **TD**. **ML**

To hear Charavel discuss accessible tourism, **CLICK HERE**.

Virgin IPO moves?

VIRGIN Australia is reportedly preparing for much-hyped return to the ASX, with the *Australian Financial Review* suggesting executives will meet prospective investors tomorrow to discuss a potential float.

VA delisted from the ASX in late 2020 after falling into administration at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prestige keel laid

ITALIAN shipyard Fincantieri has conducted the keel-laying ceremony for Regent Seven Seas Cruises' *Seven Seas Prestige*, the next new ship for the luxury line.

The 257-metre ship will cater to 850 passengers across 434 suites and will be delivered in 2026.

Seven Seas Prestige will be the first in a new class for RSSC, building on the success of the popular Explorer series.

Citilink scraps Bali

INDONESIAN low-cost carrier Citilink Airline has permanently cancelled all services between Denpasar and Perth for the remainder of this year.

The airline, which is a low-cost offshoot of Garuda Indonesia and headquartered in Jakarta, ceased flying the route last month.

Services were initially cancelled through 01 May but this has now been extended for 2025.

Agents can access information on a refund process - **CLICK HERE**.

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CCL's awesome foursome

P&O Cruises has officially integrated into Carnival Cruise Line (CCL) with the launch of *Carnival Encounter* and *Carnival Adventure*, the latter of which sailed into Sydney last week.

Previously known as *Pacific Adventure* and *Pacific Encounter*, the ships have been reimagined, featuring some of Carnival's signature experiences and some of P&O's popular elements.

The cruise line now has four ships in Australia: *Carnival Adventure* and *Carnival Splendor* sail from Sydney, while *Carnival Encounter* and *Carnival Luminosa* sail from Brisbane.

"Today is not only about our ships, it is about our people," said CCL President Christine Duffy.

"We are welcoming 3,000 new team members, bringing our global crew to over 50,000 and we are incredibly proud that 96% of the P&O crew members have joined CCL."



During the process, the Carnival team was very "sensitive and respectful" of P&O's long history, leading to the inclusion of P&O features like the Byron Bay Beach Club and the Luke Mangan restaurant, Duffy told **TD**.

All four ships display a Southern Cross flag as a nod to Australia too, she added.

"No other cruise line is here year round, so I hope that people ...will see that this really is in the best interests of everyone and [it gives us] the opportunity and ability to continue sailing with this capacity here in Australia."



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Davidson leads TEQ

TOURISM and Events Queensland (TEQ) has announced Craig Davidson as its new CEO.

Davidson has enjoyed a 35-year career working across hotels, resorts, attractions and nature-based experiences in companies such as Southern Pacific Hotel Corporation, Hamilton Island, Voyages Hotels and Resorts, Ardent Leisure Theme Parks and Journey Beyond.

He also previously lead Tourism Australia's Investment Attraction, Aviation Development, and Industry Development team, and has held numerous board roles, including as Director at Destination Gold Coast.



AKL slashes charges

AUCKLAND Airport has officially slashed its airline charges after a report by the Commerce Commission slammed the hub for "excessive" revenue forecasts and "unreasonably high" returns (**TD** 17 Jul 2024).

Over the next two years, Auckland Airport will discount per passenger airline charges on an average basis by NZ\$4.80 to NZ\$38.90 for international carriers such as Qantas.

Domestic per passenger fees will also drop by NZ\$1.70 to NZ\$12.80, Auckland Airport said.

The changes will see New Zealand's largest hub reduce its targeted return on infrastructure investment from 8.73% to 7.82% in line with the report's findings.

Auckland Airport is in the process of significantly upgrading its infrastructure - including a new domestic terminal - and was hoping the added revenue from airline charges would help fund much of the development plan.



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Window Seat

THE United States has not performed well in a new study examining the world's biggest tourism letdowns.

Three of the top 10 most underwhelming tourist spots are in America, according to review company CasiMonka, headed up by Times Square.

The bustling attraction in New York City had 934 negative words related to travel comments, with the most common pejorative terms being 'too touristy' and 'too expensive'.

The Hollywood Walk of Fame in California was at number two, while the Four Corners Monument in Arizona also made the undesirable tally.

Other attractions on the list included Stonehenge; Christ the Redeemer; and Loch Ness.

Tourism halt in Myanmar after quake

TOURISM infrastructure in Myanmar and surrounding areas is in a state of flux following a 7.7 magnitude earthquake that hit the country on Fri 28 Mar, destroying roads, buildings and damaging airports.

According to the Smartraveller website, "There's significant damage to buildings, roads and infrastructure in Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw, as well as surrounding regions".

It added that "Yangon International Airport remains operational, but Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw airports are closed to commercial aircraft".

The natural disaster has so far claimed more than 1,700 lives.

Thailand also felt the force of the quake after a 30-storey building in Bangkok collapsed - despite this, most tourist infrastructure including both major airports in the capital remain open.



Smartraveller is currently listing Myanmar as 'do not travel' status due to the quake and general lack of safety resulting from the threat of violence amid civil unrest, while it is also advises travellers in Thailand operate under a 'high degree of caution'.

The travel industry has been quick to jump to Myanmar's aid, most notably Intrepid, which has launched an earthquake appeal through its not-for-profit arm, The Intrepid Foundation.

The operator said all funds

raised will go directly towards providing medical support and aid to communities through Intrepid's trusted local NGO partner in Myanmar, and the Intrepid Foundation will match all donations up to \$100,000.

Strong aftershock tremors have also been felt in southwest China in the province of Yunnan, although there has been minimal damage and the area is not know for travel and tourism. **DF**

Pictured: Yangon International Airport in Myanmar.

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Infinity's best of HK

INFINITY Holidays has launched a new 'Hong Kong Unlocked' campaign highlighting the city's famous culinary scene, heritage, hotels and thrilling activities.

The campaign features a range of exclusive travel deals, curated itineraries and in-store content to showcase the best of the city.

Hong Kong Tourism Board Director of Australia, Karen MacMillan, said she is excited to equip agents with the tools to help craft unforgettable itineraries.

Seattle e-learning

AGENTS can now boost their knowledge of Seattle with a new interactive training program launched by Visit Seattle.

The program features four courses looking at Seattle's sports and events; culinary offerings; the great outdoors; and the art of selling the city, with graduates earning a 'Seattle Certified' digital badge and access to digital guides and local updates - [CLICK HERE](#).

Rex pays PAG debt

REX has confirmed proceeds from the sale of non-core assets have allowed the business to replay all outstanding debts owed to PAGAC Regulus Holding.

The airline has sold off multiple assets in recent months, namely its B737 flight simulator and surrounding property in Mascot, & its Textron King Air 350 aircraft.

Rex said it will use excess sales revenue to pay down other debts incurred within the group.

Brand USA unveils local ambassadors

BRAND USA has named its inaugural 12-member ambassador panel in Australia and New Zealand (**pictured**).

Flagged last month at its Travel Trade Expo in Auckland (**TD** 11 Feb), the program featuring 12 local travel advisors will kick off on Wed to champion greater visitation to the USA.

The year-long program will see the dozen VIP retail agents engage with industry peers and offer valuable insights on market trends that influence travel to the USA, with their various perspectives to shape future training initiatives.

A highlight of the program will be a famil later this year, which Brand USA said is designed to give panel members an "immersive, first-hand experience to explore in new and unexpected ways".

The successful agent applicants include: Eloise Manto, Flight Centre (SA); James Rakus, Flight Centre (NSW); Jessica O'Grady, Travel Associates (Vic); Joanne Saunderson, NZ Travel Brokers (NZ); Kay Gregan, The Travel Brokers (NZ); Kirsty Jackson, Flight Centre Botany (NZ); Lauren Zanesco, itravel (NSW); Luke Watts, Travel Managers (NSW); Rebecca Gilbert, House of Travel (NZ); Siobhan Smith, Helloworld (Tas); Tash Henningsen, Luxury Escapes (Vic); and Tracy Flower, MTA (Qld).

"We were incredibly impressed by the high calibre of entries, highlighting the passion and



expertise within the ANZ travel trade," Brand USA Senior Director, Global Trade Development APAC Suzy Shepard said.


"We look forward to working with these exceptional USA advocates on a range of initiatives over the next 12 months."

The panel's creation is timely, after the United States suffered a 2.4% drop in overall international visitation in Feb on the same month in 2024, according to

internal federal statistics.

A recent report by research firm Tourism Economics also claimed inbound travel to the US is projected to decline by 5.5% this year, down from a previous growth forecast of 9%.

Air New Zealand is the exclusive airline partner of the initiative, with the United States still a key market for the carrier as it looks to rebound from supply chain and engine issues. **AB**



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All-inclusive searches up

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ALL-INCLUSIVE holidays are rapidly increasing in demand, according to resort operator Club Med, which has noticed strong spikes in web traffic and organic searches for the travel style, especially among ski properties.

According to Google data, traffic for 'all inclusive resort' was up 15% year-on-year in the US and 18% worldwide, while Club Med Australia has seen a 14% jump from Australia and a massive 86% from New Zealand.

Speaking to **Travel Daily**, Club Med General Manager Pacific, Michelle Davies, said the growth in new clients so far in 2025 is up 11% across both sun and ski resorts, with rates as high as 70% on European ski.

Davies said the rise was coming from both cost-conscious Aussies looking to fit as much as possible into finite budgets and travellers eager to minimise or eliminate the impact of foreign exchange rates.

"As cost-of-living pressures start to creep into everybody's consciousness, I think what's really important to note is that value will always be important.

"People are always looking for value and value can mean different things to different people," she added.

Davies said the company's hot ticket item at the moment is Japan, with Aussies flocking to the country's ski fields in droves.

"Japan has done exceptionally well in sales for this current ski



season," Davies said.

"Now we've probably only got about four to six weeks left of the current season, but our forward bookings for Japan ski for next year are exceptionally high.

"We're running off the back of almost a 70-75% increase in sales year-on-year for that destination, which is just extraordinary.

"And I think the fact that your all-inclusive ski package has such high value for money, with lessons included, lift passes, all meals, all your kids activities, and the exchange rate is so profitable, it means people can have their budget go further and explore the destination outside of just ski."

Davies said for travellers looking to go further afield, exchange rates are naturally something to be monitored closely but that an all-inclusive package provides clarity on costs.

"It doesn't matter what the exchange rate does to your currency, because you know your package will still be that same price that you paid for with your deposit," she added.

The local Club Med boss singled out the Maldives as an example of a region where multiple resorts promote all-inclusive packages but lack many things, such as drinks and water sports. *ML*

Putting Penrith on the map



WESTERN Sydney Convention Centre (WSSC) has expanded its services to encompass the Panthers Precinct, putting Penrith on the map as a key tourism and business events destination.

Now with over 4,000m² of event space, as well as the five-star Pullman Sydney Penrith Hotel, the precinct will act as the "catalyst" that positions Penrith as a "sought-after destination", Charles Young, the newly appointed GM for WSSC and Pullman Sydney Penrith, told **Travel Daily**.

The burgeoning precinct offers a "fresh new oasis at the foot of the mountains", Young described, with plenty of appeal for both leisure and business travellers.

This appeal is only set to increase when the Western Sydney International Airport opens next year, making the precinct easily accessible for overseas and interstate visitors.

"We are right in the early stages and beginning of that, to where we're setting the foundation for

people to come and experience it and to start to feel the energy that is going to be a result of the airport and everybody buying into Penrith," said Young.

"The precinct gives you everything, [and has] incredible opportunities to create worthwhile experiences for anybody - family, corporates, sporting teams."

Visitors are just steps away from attractions like indoor skydiving centre iFLY, Aqua Golf, and the Panthers Training Academy.

Travel Daily also spoke to Director of Sales and Marketing, Jo Naumovski, who described the WSSC precinct as "a unique opportunity to experience a different part of Sydney".

The destination is ideal for delegate and incentive groups, Naumovski said, highlighting the range of team-building activities and group dining on offer, with 14 food and beverage outlets across the precinct. *JM*

Pictured: Naumovski and Young.

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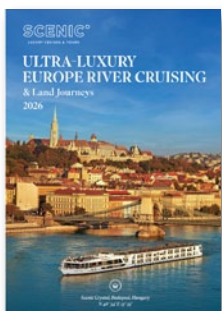
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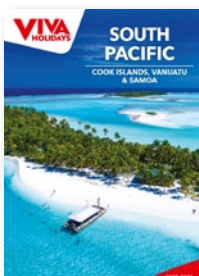


Scenic - Ultra-Luxury Europe River Cruising '26
Scenic Cruises has unveiled its latest brochure, showcasing a wide range of river and land journeys across Europe. Advisors and their clients can discover cruises like the 15-day 'Romantic Rhine & Moselle', and escorted land tours such as the 20-day 'Majestic Britain & Ireland'. The 148-page brochure also features a selection of Christmas and New Year itineraries, like the 11-day 'Danube Christmas Markets with Prague' river cruise. Readers will also find sections covering extensions and exciting river cruise combinations. See the brochure **HERE**.



The Africa Safari Co - Africa 2025-26

The Africa Safari Co has released its new brochure for 2025/2026, packed with safari options that can be mixed and matched to create your client's dream holiday. The 68-page digital publication (read it **HERE**) covers journeys across Southern and East Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Morocco and the Indian Ocean Islands, including new destinations like Gabon and The Congo. Readers will find a selection of unique, luxurious and remote hotels, lodges and resorts in the brochure's 'Must See Collection', highlighting offerings like the underwater room at The Manta Resort in Pemba.



Viva Holidays - South Pacific 2025/26

When you just want to soak up some sun and enjoy a swim in crystal clear water, you will find all the inspiration needed in Viva Holidays' new guide to the South Pacific. The guide focuses on the Cook Islands, Vanuatu and Samoa, the latter two both new for 2025/26. Along with highlighting the laidback nature and unique charm held by each destination, agents will find a wide variety of accommodation options covering all budgets and tastes, plus all of the complementary transfer and touring options needed to complete the holiday and make it memorable. To download or view the brochure online, **CLICK HERE**.

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TIME to network in Brisbane



MORE than 30 industry professionals enjoyed TIME's Brisbane event last week.

During the evening, Director of Sales for Adventure World, Elsa McLean, shared her career journey with guests, while AmaWaterways Regional Sales Manager and TIME graduate, Christine Oliver, discussed her own work trajectory and shared updates from the cruise line.

"It was wonderful to see so many new attendees at the

first event for 2025, with many seeking mentorship through the wonderful TIME program to further develop and advance their careers," said Emily Warbrick, Qld state representative.

"Elsa was a speaker highlight for Brisbane and we were delighted she could attend the event."

The next TIME event in Brisbane will be held on 01 May, with guest speaker Shannon Fogarty from the Luxury Travel Collection.

Pictured: Anna Shannon, Travel Agent Finder; Jacqui Tufala, Crystal; Emily Foy, Snowscene; and Janis McDonald, Air Canada.

MSC's big trifecta

MSC Cruises had three celebrations last week, with the delivery of *MSC World America*, the coin ceremony for *MSC World Asia* and the steel cutting for the newly named *MSC World Atlantic*.

MSC World America is the line's 23rd ship and will be officially named on 09 Apr in Miami.

Running on greener LNG, the ship has also been described by the cruise line as "one of the most energy-efficient cruise ships in the world".

CCL sales chief exits

CARNIVAL Cruise Line's Senior Vice President of Global Sales & Trade Marketing Adolfo Perez has announced his retirement from the company after seven years in the position.

Perez joined Carnival as a ticket agent at the Miami pier as a high school student in 1982.

Plans for the team will be announced at a later date.

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