

NZ brings forward tourist reopening

FULLY vaccinated Australians will once again be welcome in New Zealand from 11.59pm on 12 Apr, under a radically revised reopening plan announced by New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern this morning (**TD** breaking news).

Ardern said the reopening, which followed revised guidance from medical advisors, would help accelerate the country's economic recovery and allow operators to plan with greater certainty.

The initial opening to Australians will be followed three weeks later on 02 May by visitors from countries with NZ visa waiver agreements as well as eligible visa holders.

Tourism New Zealand will now roll out a major campaign targeting Australian visitors under the theme of "within your wildest dreams" (**TD** 14 Mar), showcasing the country's fine dining, unique hospitality and wide array of activities such as jet boating, cycling and star gazing.

Ardern noted that pre-pandemic Australians comprised 40% of overseas visitors to NZ, with the announcement enabling travel through the upcoming school holidays as well as giving a massive fillip to the NZ ski sector.

She also flagged an easing of restrictions on the cruise sector, with a task force working on revised regulations consistent with today's announcement.

Helloworld flags growth

HELLOWORLD Travel Limited says it's seeing a "steady increase in air sales across the business," with booking levels now at 50% of pre-COVID figures.

The company yesterday issued an investor update, noting that new bookings for air for the financial year through to 06 Mar amounted to \$547 million, up 121% on the prior year's total of \$248 million.

The greatest growth was coming from Helloworld's leisure travel outlets, with CEO Andrew Burnes saying the increases were "consistent across all networks and across all states and territories".

"It's a credit to our agents that they have been able to steer a course through these incredibly tough times and now finally begin to grow again," he said.

Burnes also welcomed the 17 Apr lifting of the cruise ban (**TD** breaking news), saying "this has been a long time coming, and agents and their clients across

Australia are both relieved and thrilled that this ban is finally coming to an end".

Burnes noted that pre-COVID cruise sales made up a third or more on average of most of its retailers' leisure sales, and also contributed significantly to air and land bookings, with total cruise sales across the Helloworld business in Australia more than \$1 billion in 2019/20.

"The lifting of this ban will make a material difference to the sales of our agents and of Helloworld's leisure travel divisions, both retail and wholesale," he confirmed.

Helloworld is currently in the process of divesting its corporate operations to rival Corporate Travel Management, in a \$175 million deal which is expected to settle by the end of the month.

Reid to leave UA

JULIE Reid has decided to depart from United Airlines, after more than seven years leading the carrier's operations for Australia, New Zealand and Tahiti.

She's leaving the airline at the end of the month, with plans to take some time out to travel and renovate before hopefully working part-time.

Club Med commits to commission

CLUB Med has today confirmed it will not be reducing any of its commission to travel agents, including maintaining a 5% payout on tickets for all full-service carriers when booked as part of a Club Med package.

The operator's GM Pacific, Michelle Davies, said the decision not to change its commission structured despite moves by various carriers to cut agent base pay, reflects Club Med's key recovery strategy which is "finding ways to support our travel partners".

"Saying the past two years has been tough for the entire travel industry is a huge understatement, and while every business is doing its best to recover, we believe the best way to thrive post-pandemic is to support our valued agent partners," she said.

More at clubmedta.com.au.

Today's issue of **TD Travel Daily** today features five pages of news.

Sheraton Fiji open

SHERATON Fiji Golf & Beach Resort has officially reopened today after a renovation costing almost \$50 million.

The iconic property at Denarau Island, previously named "Sheraton Fiji Resort," now boasts a new layered design, with 300 rooms and suites which have all been refurbished.

A huge array of leisure amenities are available at the integrated resort complex, including a championship 18-hole golf course, five restaurants including three brand new dining venues, five bars, four swimming pools, tennis courts, a fitness centre and spa.

Guests also have complimentary access to the facilities at sister property Sheraton Denarau Villas - for more details **CLICK HERE**.



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ATPI in Manchester

ATPI is moving its head office from London to Manchester to take up residence in a larger refurbished office from 21 Mar.

The corporate travel management company noted the move followed a number of appointments and would help facilitate future growth.

Not a silver bullet: AFTA

WHILE the news of a cruise restart in Australia from 17 Apr (TD breaking news yesterday) has been met with great euphoria across most quarters of the travel industry, AFTA CEO Dean Long warns that the announcement will not be the magic panacea to cure the industry's many challenges overnight.

"International travel, including cruise, is not going to be anywhere close to normal before late 2022 and the travel sector needs ongoing govt support until that happens," Long said.

"Even if everything lines up and the state and territory governments also greenlight the return of cruise, it's going to take a couple of months for the ships to get here," he added.

While applauding the decision to not extend the cruise ban under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, Long said clarification was still needed from state and territory governments about when cruise ships would be allowed back, added murkiness that he believes demonstrates travel agents still need more government support in the meantime.

"Now more than ever Australians are relying on their travel experts for support and to help manage the up to \$6 billion in credits for COVID-impacted travel," he said.

MEANWHILE Clean Cruising General Manager Dan Russell, who has been an active voice in trying to get the cruise

sector rebooted, described the government's decision as "a welcome relief to travel agents", but added it was a call that was many months overdue.

"The new health protocols are well proven, and there cannot be any further delay or unnecessary red-tape that holds back the industry's recovery from here," he said.

Russell added his business has been processing hundred cancellations on *Royal Princess* cruises (TD 15 Mar) after the vessel was removed from the local market yesterday due to uncertainty around New Zealand's ongoing cruise ban.

"It's vital that our Kiwi and South Pacific neighbours lift their own restrictions on cruising so they do not miss out on the upcoming 2022/23 season and the economic benefits," he said.

Princess plots return

PRINCESS Cruises will deploy *Coral Princess* to Australia in Jun, with the company's US team revealing round-trip sailings from Brisbane ranging from three to 12 days are in the works.

While there has been no local confirmation just yet, it is believed the voyages will call at destinations in Queensland and New South Wales before repositioning to Sydney in Aug to service a 12-day voyage that will visit Queensland, the Conflict Islands in Papua New Guinea, before returning to undertake its full Australia/New Zealand program for the 2022/23 season.

There are also unconfirmed reports that *Majestic Princess* will service cruises from Sydney on newly configured Queensland voyages in Feb 2023, with more details expected to be revealed later in the week.

Mercure opens Mel

ACCOR has opened the doors of its new Mercure Melbourne Doncaster hotel located 20 minutes from Melbourne's CBD.

The 183-room property features six function spaces and outdoor terraces to service meeting and conventions, as well as an indoor/outdoor swimming pool and a fitness centre.

"[The hotel] will become a hub for visitors to enjoy the many drawcards of Melbourne's inner north-east and its surrounding regional attractions," Accor Pacific CEO Sarah Derry said.

NT keen for cruise

THE NT Government has confirmed that a number of international expedition cruise operators have already indicated they would like to return to the territory in 2022, labelling the resumption of cruising as a "fantastic outcome for Australians who still hold bookings on Northern Australia voyages".

As part of the safety measures, all vessels operating in the NT will be required to have a COVID management plan approved by NT Health prior to cruising.

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One month beats a year

JANUARY saw more inbound travellers to Australia than the total for the entire previous calendar year, with the month seeing 265,190 arrivals compared to 2021's 245,770 visitors according to new ABS figures.

The numbers were just one example of the wildly diverse effects the Omicron variant has had on the Australian inbound and outbound sectors, with departures decreasing in Jan, despite large increase in arrivals.

Total departures were 188,200 - a monthly decrease of 39,030 on the previous month.

Short-term visitor arrivals for Jan totalled 53,880, which was an increase of 45,890 compared to the corresponding month of the previous year.

However the figure was also a 92.6% decrease when compared with volumes in Jan 2019.

The United Kingdom was the

largest source country for short-term visitor arrivals, accounting for 17% of the total.

Other leading source countries included India (6,390) and the United States (4,760).

Not a done deal yet

WHILE media reports have been swirling that Pakistan International Airlines is gearing up to launch flights from Lahore to Sydney from Apr, the airline has revealed it is yet to clear all of the regulatory steps to do so.

Speaking with SBS Radio, the carrier's General Manager of Corporate Communications Abdullah Hafeez confirmed the airline had applied to service passenger flights to Australia, but still needed to obtain a foreign air transport air operators certificate from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority to proceed.

Chimu lifts 23/24 lid

CHIMU Adventures has unveiled the details of its 2023/24 Antarctica season, featuring multiple departures on its polar specialist *Ocean Endeavour* ship.

Prices for voyages in the program lead in at \$9,990ppts for an 11-day Best of Antarctica which departs from Ushuaia in Argentina and crosses the Drake Passage to visit places like the South Shetland Islands and the Antarctic Peninsula.

Other options on offer for the season include a 14-day Best of Antarctica: In Depth itinerary priced from \$14,560ppts, as well as a longer 21-day Shackleton's Antarctica: South Georgia & Falklands Explorer cruise from \$21,410ppts.

Earlybird specials are also in place, offering up to 15% discounts on select departures, with early bookings more likely to get access to the full range of cabins on any given departure.



Window Seat

IT'S time to tease your hair and pull up your leg warmers, because Sydney's highest 1980s arcade has opened at the Sydney Tower Eye.

Also featuring a pop-up bar, the arcade includes games like pinball, Dance Dance Revolution, Space Invaders, Donkey Kong, twin car racer, PacMan, air hockey, and more.

80s tunes will be pumping all night as you battle it out with your friends on arcade games while sipping on 80s-themed cocktails and snapping selfies at the 80s themed insta-worthy walls.

Each ticket unlocks two hours of unlimited free play on a variety of arcade machines, one hot dog, one beverage, and more - **CLICK HERE** for info.



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SIA results down

SINGAPORE Airlines Group's (SIA) passenger capacity stood at 44% of pre-COVID-19 levels last month, coming in at two percentage points below Jan.

The result was attributable to Feb being a shorter month, SIA said, adding that passenger load factor declined by 0.9 percentage points to 39.1%, which is still a 29.4 percentage point improvement year-on-year.

Ticket sales on Vaccinated Travel Lane services remain subject to a 50% reduction in arrival quotas in the first half of last month.

Virtuoso cruise head

VIRTUOSO has announced Melissa Araya as its new Vice President of Cruise.

She rejoined Virtuoso in Nov, having previously been its Managing Director Member Sales, and has since become instrumental in leading the company's Cruise division.

In her role, Araya will be tapping into her extensive history with international markets to help further Virtuoso's strategic growth in its global markets.

All systems go for Ireland



TOURISM Ireland is encouraging travellers to "press the green button" and start planning a trip to the Emerald Isle, as part of a major initiative to restart tourism and encourage as many overseas visitors as possible to take an Irish holiday.

Yesterday key industry partners were hosted for a special Ireland luncheon at Sydney's Centennial Park in the lead-up to St Patrick's Day tomorrow.

However this year's celebrations are being somewhat tempered, with the annual "Global

Greening" of landmarks across the globe - including Australia's own Sydney Opera House - put on pause out of respect for the suffering of the Ukrainian people.

Despite this, Ireland's marketing innovation will pivot to technology, with a global Irish music festival taking place via digital billboards in Sydney, London, New York and Milan.

The Australian activation will take place from 11am to 7pm tomorrow at Sydney's Overseas Passenger Terminal, where passers-by will be able to use their smartphone to scan massive QR codes and press the green button to activate a performance.

Tourism Ireland's Sofia Hansson thanked the organisation's trade partners for their continued support in promoting the destination, which pre-COVID welcomed about 250,000 annual visitors from Australia and NZ.

All COVID-19 entry restrictions for travel to Ireland were removed earlier this month (**TD** 08 Mar) with visitors no longer required to complete a passenger locator form, provide proof of vaccination or undergo any form of COVID-19 testing.

Pictured at yesterday's event are, from left: Cassandra Kerr, Qatar Airways; David McMahon and Sofia Hansson, Tourism Ireland; Rosie Keane, Consul General of Ireland; and Sarah Built from Etihad Airways.

EK flags Tel Aviv

EMIRATES has confirmed it will commence flying daily services between Tel Aviv and Dubai from 23 Jun, a service originally flagged to commence in Nov last year (**TD** 05 Nov).

The carrier will operate its Boeing 777-300ER aircraft on the route, featuring eight private suites in First class, 42 lie-flat seats in Business class and 304 seats in Economy.

"Emirates' debut into Israel will mean more choice for travellers as they return to the skies, and more opportunities for businesses to visit Dubai and beyond," Chief Commercial Officer Adnan Kazim said.

Get your clogs on

CROISIEUROPE has launched its new Best of the Netherlands sailing which cruises the Markermeer and Dutch canals to destinations such as Amsterdam, Edam, Volendam, Gouda, Kinderdijk and The Hague.

The six-day voyages take place on either the 94-guest *MS Mona Lisa* or the 90-passenger *MS Victor Hugo*, with departures on offer from 10 Apr through to 18 Oct this year.

CLICK HERE for more details.

Bali welcome deal

THE Tanah Gajah Ubud resort in Bali has launched a short-stay package that allows guests to relax in comfort while meeting the local COVID requirements for inbound leisure travellers.

Chosen by the Indonesian Government as one of the hotels visitors can stay at as part of the "Warm Up Vacation" requirement, Tanah Gajah Ubud is offering Aussies airport pick up, face masks and disinfectant in each villa, personal butler services, wi-fi, daily afternoon tea and a sunset cocktail, as well as a complimentary minibar including alcohol selections.

Package prices start from \$882 for a single occupancy suite.

QATAR Airways logo and Discover Qatar logo are visible in the top left and right corners of the advertisement.

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Travel Daily's second Survival Survey shows green shoots of recovery, but it is a serpentine road ahead. Read more in the latest *travelBulletin*.



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Flooded with effort

THE Queensland Government has stumped up an additional \$745,000 to assist with the recovery efforts of the state's eco-tourism industry after massive flooding ravaged many of its national parks and marine areas.

Funding will go to volunteer groups to help speed up recovery efforts, with large amounts of debris still clogging waterways and walking tracks.

Efforts will focus on getting tourism areas back online before the busy Easter holiday period.

Maxing out growth

NEW Caribbean low cost carrier Arajet has ordered 20 737 Max aircraft from Boeing to help further its expansion ambitions across the Americas.

The airline also has options to purchase 15 additional 737 MAX jets which, combined with existing leased jets, could take its emerging fleet to 40.

The Dominican Republic-based Arajet's business strategy is to launch routes in under-served markets in the continental United States, Brazil and Colombia.

A licence to thrill in the UAE



ABU Dhabi has been actively working to position itself as a major hub for adrenaline junkie travellers, with the destination in the UAE recently compiling a list of some of the adventure options on offer for visitors.

With a range of activities just as thrilling as its bold red exterior (pictured), Ferrari World Abu Dhabi boasts a climate controlled racing environment, multiple racing simulators, a selection of traditional Italian restaurants and the world's fastest roller coaster.

Across town is Clymb Abu Dhabi, the city's premier indoor adventure sport facility.



Here travellers can enjoy the world's biggest indoor skydiving flight chamber (inset bottom), standing at over 25 metres tall, as well as one of the world's tallest indoor climbing walls.

Another important stop-off for the family is Bounce Abu Dhabi, a giant trampoline park that contains jump areas, trampoline sporting competitions, a dodgeball court, zip lines and speed slides.

When travellers have worked up a sweat, they can cool off by heading over to Wadi Adventure in Al Ain (inset above), offering guests a man-made white-water rafting experience deep in the heart of the desert.

In addition, Wadi Adventure also offers surfing and kayaking, as well as high-octane zip line experiences overlooking the park.

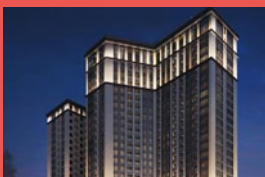


ACCOMMODATION

WELCOME to Accommodation Updates, *Travel Daily's* Wed feature. If your property has undergone some recent changes you would like to make the industry aware of, send a brief description with an image to accomupdates@traveldaily.com.au.



Modern Mexican restaurant Chido Chido has launched in **Mercure Melbourne Doncaster**. Located on level three of the new hotel, which is adjacent to Westfield Doncaster, Chido Chido is a celebration of Latin energy and culture. Combining local produce with lively spices, flavours, and textures, Executive Chef Trent Whelan showcases a modern menu filled with fresh Mexican dishes, including pan-fried prawns, burritos, and charred cauliflower.



WorldHotels Collection has announced a brand new property, **MW Luxury Halong**, in Vietnam. When it opens its doors in the first quarter of 2023, the property will be the launch hotel for the Elite collection in the region. Offering views of the horizon over

Ha Long Bay, MW Luxury Halong will feature world-class architecture and sophisticated interior design, as well as an impressive range of gastronomic experiences.



The Luxury Collection has debuted **Hotel Clio**, a **Luxury Collection Hotel, Denver Cherry Creek** in the heart of one of the city's most vibrant neighborhoods. Owned by DiamondRock Hospitality Company, the luxury hotel has just undergone a multi-million-dollar transformation, and now features a fully integrated lobby experience, and refreshed interior spaces.