

Take it to the Edge

CELEBRITY Cruises Chief

Executive Officer Laura Hodges Bethge believes Aussie travel agents have been “hitting it out of the park” in terms of selling cabins on the inaugural local deployment of *Celebrity Edge* - more on **page four**, as well as in today’s issue of *Cruise Weekly*.

Tourism betters pre-COVID

TOTAL tourism consumption for the latest financial year outperformed the value delivered before the pandemic, a new report from Tourism Research Australia has revealed.

Total tourism value was 8% higher in 2022-23 than it was in the 2018-19 period, with the Australian economy most recently benefiting from \$164.5 billion in total tourism consumption.

The latest figures also represented a seismic jump in tourism value when compared to the previous year, increasing by \$68.6 billion (72%) on 2021-22.

Travel agency and tour operator services enjoyed a \$300 million rise in consumption compared to pre-COVID numbers, while tourist spend on accommodation and food services led the tourism segments, jumping by \$8 billion.

The same report also showed

that tourism imports from the money Australian residents spent while travelling overseas grew by \$30 billion to \$41.1 billion during the 2022-23 period.

Further highlights included tourism GDP as a share of the national economy increasing from 1.5% in 2021-22 to 2.5% in 2022-23, and tourism exports from international visitor spend on Australian goods rising by \$20.1 billion to \$26.1 billion in 2022-23.

Tourism-filled jobs also increased by 42% from 442,600 in 2021-22 to 626,400 in 2022-23.

While the number represented a healthy growth in employment, the figure was still 11% shy of the tourism staff volumes recorded in 2018-19. *AB*

Silversea group tier

SILVERSEA has introduced a new Super Advantage tier for group bookings, allowing the eighth guest to sail for free when seven passengers pay full fares on a select number of sailings.

The tier also includes US\$300 of shipboard credit per suite and 15% minimum agent commission.



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Fiji signs JetBlue

FIJI Airways has formed a new interline partnership with US carrier JetBlue, allowing its passengers to purchase fares on both airlines on the one ticket.

The latest partnership will make it easier for American passengers to connect to onward markets in the region, including Australia and New Zealand.


SIA commits to BNE

BRISBANE Airport has continued its winning run of inking more capacity from overseas carriers, with Singapore Airlines announcing plans to operate an extra four services a week from Nov next year.

When the additional flights take to the air, it will mark an important milestone for the airline as it moves to 99% of pre-COVID capacity Australia-wide.

The additional services will also see Singapore Airlines operating 25 flights per week direct from Brisbane to Singapore using A350-900 long-haul aircraft.


Tickets will be available for sale progressively from 10 Dec.



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Robbie to fly TK flag?

IT APPEARS as though Turkish Airlines may be pulling out all the stops to promote its flagged direct services to Australia (**TD** 24 Jul), with local media suggesting *Barbie* megstar Margot Robbie (**pictured**) will front the marketing for the Aussie push.



The carrier's Chairman, Ahmet Bolat, who was in Melbourne earlier in the year to trumpet Aussie flights, has been quoted in Turkish media over the weekend as stating services via Singapore will start from 15 Mar next year.

In the same statement, Bolat indicated that Margot Robbie is who the carrier would like to have as its brand ambassador.

"We are currently in discussions with Australian actress Margot Robbie, we plan to bring her to Turkiye a week before the flight and explore various places, including the historic site of Gobeklitepe," Bolat said.

Turkish Airlines had initially

hoped to have flights in place to Sydney and Melbourne by last month, but due to a regulatory hiccup, the airline has been forced to bide its time and jump through more red tape with the Federal Government.

Bolat had previously stated Australia represented a major tourism opportunity for Turkiye, with the country's large diaspora seeing as many as 600,000 Aussie travellers potentially make their way to the country every year.

TK is aiming to fly three times a week initially, before moving to daily and rolling out to other Australian cities in the mid- to long-term. **AB**

\$50 savings in Bali

AUSTRALIAN travellers could save \$50 in entry fees to Bali if a proposal to scrap the need for entry visas gets the go ahead.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has been requested to make 20 countries eligible for visa-free travel to Bali, including Australians, with local tourism authorities stating an ambition to ensure the big visitor numbers to Bali continue in the longer-term.

A decision will be made in the next month, according to local reports, with view to scrapping some entry visas in Jan.

While the axing of the visa system will save Aussie travellers some cash if approved, a separate \$15 tax (**TD** 05 Oct) flagged for 14 Feb is still expected to proceed.

The new levy will be paid electronically upon arrival, with Balinese officials confident the payment will not slow things down at the airport, with 20 officers to be on duty at any one time to process transactions.



MIAMI

Today's issue of **TD** is coming to you courtesy of Regent Seven Seas Cruises who are this week hosting guests on board *Seven Seas Grandeur*.

EXCITEMENT is building in Miami today as guests gather ahead of the glittering christening ceremony of Regent Seven Seas' newest ship, *Seven Seas Grandeur*, this evening.

The third sister ship to *Splendor* and *Explorer*, *Grandeur* continues the elevated design that the brand is known for in its all-suite, all-balcony accommodation.

We will be on board all week as *Grandeur* voyages through the Caribbean, so follow along for all the insider information on the ship.

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Window seat

AN ONLOOKER at Melbourne Airport recently captured a wholesome moment between two VA employees looking to improve their swing.

One of the men appeared to be giving his co-worker a quick golfing lesson on the tarmac, demonstrating how to correctly swing a golf club.

His colleague attempted a few swings of his own until he received a nod of approval, adjusting his technique as the "coach" gave him feedback.

Footage of the exchange has been labelled as "the cutest", after garnering more than 40,000 likes since it was uploaded on TikTok last Fri.

"If this is why my bags took so long to drop yesterday... then I'm OK with this," one comment read.

Hugh just had to be there!



VIRGIN Voyages hosted an unforgettable Scarlet Night party on board *Resilient Lady* over the weekend, to celebrate her arrival into Melbourne ahead of her five-night Australian MerMaiden voyage, which sets off today.

Docked at Station Pier in Port Melbourne, the ship opened up to celebs, including Aussie actor and singer Hugh Sheridan (**pictured**), as well as media, travel agents, brand partners and cruisers,

giving them an exclusive look at the cruise line's newest ship.

Party-goers enjoyed Korean BBQ and authentic Mexican food and live entertainment as they danced the night away by the poolside.

"We wanted to make an epic splash in Melbourne - one that would match the excitement we have about our summer season here - and we certainly accomplished that," VV CEO Nirmal Saverimuttu enthused. *JM*

Utah connected

UTAH Tourism connected with the Australian and New Zealand travel trade last week in virtual one-on-one appointments.

Running last Wed and Thu, 14 of Utah's tourism industry partners representing 11 regions including Visit Greater Zion, Park City Convention and Visitors Bureau, Ski Utah and Moab Travel Council, met with representatives from 19 Aussie and Kiwi tour operators to update the travel trade on what's new for 2024.

Fake parts arrest

AN ARREST was made last week in relation to the fake jet engine parts scandal which has now affected several airlines, including Virgin Australia (**TD** 19 Sep).

London-based firm AOG Technics is currently being investigated after being accused of supplying falsely documented parts for use in the world's most-sold passenger jet engine, the CFM56.



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THE TASMAN

Today's issue of *TD* is coming to you courtesy of **Celebrity Cruises, aboard *Celebrity Edge* as she cruises from Sydney to Auckland for the first time.**

CELEBRITY *Edge* has more than 2,900 passengers aboard, with the sold-out Australasian inaugural cruise attracting guests from across the globe.

As well as a strong contingent of Aussies and Kiwis experiencing the new-to-region product, there are lots of North Americans, some of whom joined the ship during her redeployment from Singapore.

Celebrity CEO Laura Hodges Bethge is also on board, making her first ever visit to New Zealand, taking the opportunity to further encourage Aussie and Kiwi trade partners in their Celebrity sales efforts.

The current 12-day itinerary takes *Edge* round trip from Sydney to experience several NZ ports, with Celebrity having already confirmed three years of local deployments for the latest-generation vessel.

CX freighter order

CATHAY Pacific has announced an order for six next-generation Airbus A350F freighters, along with options for 20 more.

The acquisitions are part of a strategy envisioning Cathay Cargo as "the world's most customer-centric air cargo service brand".

The freighters will be designated to link Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland with long-haul destinations in North and South America as well as Europe.

CX noted the purchase agreement brings its new aircraft delivery pipeline to 77, with CEO Ronald Lam saying it also "reflects Cathay's confidence in the Hong Kong hub".

China cuts visa fees

VISA fees for tourists wanting to enter China have been temporarily cut by 25%, with the reduction applying to applications via all overseas embassies through until 31 Dec.

The move aims to attract more foreign arrivals, according to a spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who said "we stand ready to work with relevant countries to create favourable conditions and provide greater convenience for easy cross-border travel".

Earlier this month, China added six more countries to its 15-day visa-free entry policy, which now includes nationals of Italy, France, Germany, Singapore, Spain, Brunei, Malaysia and the Netherlands.

New IPW host cities

THE US Travel Association (USTA) has announced the cities which will host its annual IPW convention through until 2030.

On top of the previously announced Los Angeles (03-07 May 2024) and Chicago (14-18 Jun 2025), the additions include Greater Fort Lauderdale in 2026 and New Orleans in 2027.

Detroit, Michigan will host IPW for the first time ever in 2028, followed by Denver in 2029 and then Anaheim in 2030.

USTA CEO Geoff Freeman said past IPW cities had each generated over US\$5.5 billion in future travel to the USA, with the event attracting 5,000 delegates.

Batik group fares

BATIK Air has advised its travel agent partners that special group fares are now available on both Batik Air Indonesia (ID) and Batik Air Malaysia (OD) flights, via a dedicated local Australia/NZ Batik Air Groups desk.

Competitive fares with flexible conditions are on offer for departures from Sydney, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane and Auckland via batikairgroups@airlinerepservices.com.

Celebrity welcomes the trade



AUSTRALIAN travel agent partners aboard *Celebrity Edge* are experiencing everything the ship has to offer as she makes her way across the Tasman.

As well as a plethora of bars, restaurants and entertainment venues, *Edge* features a huge array of retail outlets and non-stop activities ranging from dance classes, trivia and bingo through to archery and even curling competitions - without the ice, while nightly shows in the high-tech theatre from the onboard entertainment team showcase top talent.

Some of the Aussies aboard are **pictured** above enjoying the spectacular Eden venue at the rear of the ship, with multiple levels overlooking the wake: Steve Labroski, itravel; Ryan Thomas, Ignite Travel Group; Celebrity's Trevor Thwaites; and Ash Ghasemi from Dreamlines.



JILL Abel, Australian Cruise Association CEO rubs shoulders with Celebrity chief Laura Hodges Bethge.



AN EPONYMOUS catch-up between Joel Katz, Cruise Lines International Association and Flight Centre's Joell Ogilvie.



HELLOWORLD'S Stan Scott not talking shop with Flight Centre Travel Group leisure chief James Kavanagh.



HUNTER Travel Group chief Brett Dann with Dan Russell from Clean Cruising.

Fuel keeps pressure on tix

TRAVELLERS hoping for some relief in the cost of air tickets next year may be disappointed by a new report from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which suggested jet fuel prices are likely to stay where they are in 2024.

The latest figures from the airline body predicted fuel prices would average US\$113.8 a barrel next year, with IATA's own fuel monitor tool showing that is roughly where the price has been for the last two months.

Airlines are expected to fork out an eye-watering US\$281 billion on jet fuel in total next year, accounting for 31% of all operating costs.

"High crude oil prices are expected to continue to be further exaggerated for airlines as the crack spread - the premium paid to refine crude oil into jet fuel - is expected to average 30% in 2024," the report noted.

The prospect of rising overall expenses being passed on to consumers is not helped by IATA's forecast that the bills for carriers will grow by around 7% next year to US\$914 billion.

China, Singapore announce visa pact

CHINA and Singapore are preparing to implement a 30-day mutual visa exemption agreement early next year, after the two countries agreed to further upgrade their trade pact.

The news comes as flights between both countries are recovering to close to pre-pandemic levels.

"At present the competent authorities of the two countries are in close communication on specific matters," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin confirmed.

China has been active in ensuring the reboot of its tourism economy following the pandemic - see **page four** for more news.



The focus of the rise is sharper even still when contrasted with 2019 expenses, which had airlines paying 15% less on operational costs than they are now.

However, there is some relief in sight for travellers, with non-fuel unit expenses tipped to fall in line with pre-COVID levels over time, an area of the ledger IATA said is currently being "controlled quite well by airlines despite inflationary pressures". *AB*

S America warning

TENSION between Guyana and Venezuela have increased, with the Australian Govt advising travellers heading to border regions to exercise more caution.

"The security situation may deteriorate near the Venezuelan border, if you choose to travel in this area, monitor local media and follow the advice of local authorities," DFAT said.

Air Vanuatu passes

AIR Vanuatu has become the first airline in the South Pacific Ocean nation to achieve Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) approval from the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

The carrier satisfied more than 950 criteria in order to pass the internationally recognised and accepted evaluation system, which assesses the operational management and control systems of an airline.

Air Vanuatu's acting Chief Executive Joseph Laloyer said the accreditation, which is valid until Aug 2025, "allows us to be a part of the global air travel network through codeshare agreements and other partnerships".

UA stands united in Christchurch



UNITED Airlines became the first US airline to touch down in Christchurch yesterday, with the arrival of its inaugural flight from San Francisco to NZ's South Island.

The carrier will offer non-stop flights on the new route three times a week using a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner.

By the end of 2023, United will operate 66 flights between the US and the South Pacific region each week, signalling a nearly 50% growth over the past year - the biggest expansion to the region in American aviation history.

"This is a route I've personally wanted to add to United's network for a long time," United's Senior VP Global Network Planning and Alliances, Patrick Quayle, shared.

"It's such a special destination

that offers travellers an experience unlike anywhere else in the world.

"Because of United's partnership with Air New Zealand, customers can easily connect from Christchurch to 19 other destinations across NZ."

Christchurch Airport Chief Executive Justin Watson said the direct flights will "supercharge" tourism in the region.

"The American travel market is buoyant, with Americans travelling widely again and we know they want to experience what the South Island offers," he enthused. *JM*

Wintjiri accepts two

THE Wintjiri Wiru Working Group who created Wintjiri Wiru in partnership with Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia, recently accepted the gongs won at the NT Tourism Brogla Awards at Uluru (**TD** 13 Nov).

Gathering at the open-air theatre at Ayers Rock Resort, the Group accepted the 'Chair's Choice for Tourism Excellence' and the 'Best Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Experience' accolades.

The Group includes senior Anangu from Mutitjula and Kalitukatjara (Dockers River), who are custodians of the chapter of the ancestral Mala story told during the cultural storytelling and drone experience.



Aranui expands '25

ARANUI Cruises has announced it will expand cargo cruising to more of French Polynesia in 2025, delivering cargo cruises to the Austral Islands for the first time.

Mixed freight and passenger vessel *Aranui 5* will operate three 13-day Austral voyages in 2025, during which she will deliver cargo as well as collect goods such as coffee to deliver to Raiatea, Bora Bora and Papeete on the return leg.

The ship will also continue to offer her traditional cargo cruise itinerary to French Polynesia's remote Marquesas Islands, with 19 12-day round trip cruises from Papeete delivering freight to the six inhabited Marquesas Islands.

Aranui is offering a 15% earlybird discount on the 2025 Austral voyages when booked by 29 Feb.



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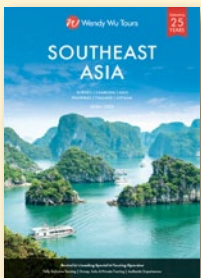
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Viva Holidays - UK & Ireland 2024

Viva Holidays' 2024 UK & Ireland brochure features a range of accommodation and sightseeing options, as well as rail packages, escorted coach tours and self-drive holidays. Travellers will find even more sightseeing options featuring ABBA Voyage, Westminster Abbey, Downtown Abbey, and an Oxford & Harry Potter rail tour. There is also an expanded range of accommodation including the Resident properties in London and Liverpool and Scotland's Virgin Hotels. There are additional extended touring options such as an escorted London & Iconic England tour and four new self-drive options.



Wendy Wu Tours - Southeast Asia 2024-2025

Amid the launch of its new Explore More, Save More campaign, Wendy Wu Tours has also printed a new brochure showcasing to travellers what the tour operator has on offer throughout the Southeast Asian region. The guide presents 19 diverse group tours, including the 25-day Grand Mekong Odyssey journey, departing in Apr, Sep, Oct, and Nov. Also included are three new private tours for extra date flexibility.



Trafalgar - Australia & New Zealand

Trafalgar has unveiled its brochure across the trans-Tasman region, featuring up to 21 hand-crafted itineraries in 25 cities. As easy as selecting the destination and "let Trafalgar take care of the rest", the travel booklet highlights the destinations Aussies can call home. From local stories over a delicious meal to hidden gems that one might not have ever known about, Trafalgar has it all for every kind of traveller.



APT - Private Jet Air Tours Australia 2024

The 44-page private jet air tour guide by APT displays journeys unlike any other, showcasing a unique way to traverse across Down Under. Itineraries include the seven-day Great Australian Bight by Private Jet from Perth to Melbourne, or the nine-day Queensland Tropics & Outback via Townsville, Cairns, and more. Travellers can also learn the type of aircraft they will be boarding, as well as significant experiences throughout.

TM lives it up in Vegas



IT WAS all about luxury for TravelManagers (TM) last month, with representatives from the independent travel agency network attending two global luxury-focused events.

Personal travel managers (PTMs) Dana Brown and Julianne Gazal-Rizk and TM's CEO Joe Araullo, COO Grant Campbell and Operations Manager Troy Coelho flew to Las Vegas for Signature Travel Network's annual conference, which took place over four days in Nov.

The cohort mingled among 2,600 agency owners, suppliers and travel agents from around the world, attending workshops, keynote presentations and supplier trade shows.

TM was also just one of three Australian travel agent brands invited to attend the Los Cabos VIP Travel Summit the following week, where they were able to meet face-to-face with the best luxury operators in Mexico's fastest-growing resort area.

"I now have the confidence and connections to advise our

PTMs on the best properties and ground suppliers for their clients," Coelho shared. *JM*

Pictured taking in a private showing of the immersive Postcards to Earth experience at The Sphere in Las Vegas (L-R): Coelho, Brown, Campbell, Araullo and Gazal-Rizk.

PassportCard push

TRAVEL insurance company PassportCard has launched a new brand campaign, "When 'It' Happens", in partnership with PR and creative agency Keep Left.

"PassportCard understands it is the only company in the world to offer instant payouts for the three most common claims and 24-hour support," Keep Left's Strategy Director Laura Agricola said.

"Our strategy was to tell this story clearly and reframe travel insurance from a grudge purchase to adventure assurance."

The integrated campaign is being rolled out across OOH, radio, digital/social, and PR - see the new ad [HERE](#).

EDITORIAL

Editor - Adam Bishop
Associate Editor - Myles Stedman
Journalists - Janie Medbury, Matthew Wai
Publisher - Bruce Piper
Editorial Director - Damian Francis
Associate Publisher - Anna Piper
info@traveldaily.com.au

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Head of Sales & Marketing - Sean Harrigan
Advertising Operations - Nicki Harford
advertising@traveldaily.com.au

ACCOUNTS

accounts@traveldaily.com.au

Suite 1, Level 2, 64 Talavera Rd
Macquarie Park NSW 2113 Australia
PO Box 1010 Epping NSW 1710 Australia
Tel: 1300 799 220 (+61 2 8007 6760)

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