

EK retrofits A380s

EMIRATES has deployed the first of 120 Airbus A380s to be fully revamped, with the launch aircraft, designated as A6-EVM, operating on 06 Jan on the Dubai-London Heathrow route.

The massive US\$2 billion retrofit program will see EK's latest products and interiors installed in all cabins, including 56 Premium Economy seats on the main deck, plus new leather upholstery and finishings with a lighter colour palette in First and Business class on the upper deck.

All the work was designed, conducted and completed in-house at EK's Dubai facilities, with the massive project expected to be completed in 2025 - including refits of Emirates' Boeing 777s.

A timelapse video of the work is live at traveldaily.com.au/videos.

TravelManagers magic millions

TRAVELMANAGERS Australia has reported a record-breaking Dec, with the company's Finance & Commercial Manager, Tanyu Cilek, saying the number of members on track for at least \$1 million in sales this financial year had tripled since 2019.

The strong growth trend has seen the average growth recorded by TravelManagers advisors surging to 86% when compared to pre-pandemic sales in Dec 2019, as part of a long running growth trend which has seen members growing 52% on average versus the equivalent six month period three years ago.

"These PTMs are achieving leisure sales results at a level that would more commonly be seen in corporate, call centre situations," Cilek suggested.

He said the group was seeing a strong trend towards high-value holidays, both domestic and international, with sales

for Europe up 45% and South America increasing 55%.

Domestic sales are also up almost 60% across the group, with Cilek saying there was also strong evidence to support a resurgence in the perceived value of the travel agent, with significant sales increases in every segment.

Air sales are up 64%, while land product has increased 46% and insurance has risen 46%, he said.

"We are delighted to be entering 2023 in such a strong position and look forward to seeing our Personal Travel Managers reap the rewards of so much hard work and dedication over the past three years," he concluded.

NYC winter savings

VISITORS to New York City this month can enjoy special discounts and offers under the NYC Winter Outing 2023 program.

Running from 17 Jan-12 Feb, deals include special NYC Restaurant Week menus at almost 500 eateries, two-for-one tickets to 22 NYC Broadway Week Shows, and discounts at over 40 museums, attractions and tours under NYC Must-See Week.

NYC Hotel Week is also currently under way, with 23% off standard rates at over 140 hotels - see nycgo.com/winterouting.

Pagett back to TTC

JEN Pagett is returning to The Travel Corporation (TTC) as Key Accounts Manager at Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection, after a year with Virtuoso Travel where she was Account Manager, Member Relations.

China cans visas

CHINA has suspended the issuing of short-term visas to travellers from Japan and South Korea, as retaliation for what it described as "discriminatory" entry and testing requirements.

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features five pages of news including our weekly **Luxury** feature.

AA, BA boost pact

AMERICAN Airlines and British Airways will expand their cooperation on transatlantic and European flights over the upcoming Northern summer 2023 season.

The codeshare partnership will now see the AA code added to additional British Airways flights to and from London, including LHR to Cincinnati, Corfu, Dubrovnik, Faro, Mykonos, Split and Thira.

AA will also codeshare on BA flights from London Gatwick to Las Vegas, according to travel agent GDS screens.

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Vietjet coming to MEL

LOW-COST Vietnamese carrier VietJet has announced it will begin operating flights from Melbourne Airport (MEL) in Apr.

The airline will initially run three return flights per week between Melbourne and Ho Chi Minh City using Airbus A330 aircraft, with the route expected to operate daily by Dec 2024.

Vietjet's arrival at MEL will also enhance connectivity to other destinations, by offering low-cost onward flight options via Ho Chi Minh City to countries including India, Japan and South Korea.

"We are thrilled to welcome Vietjet to Melbourne for the first time, and to be part of their plans for expansion in Australia," Melbourne Airport CEO Lorie Argus said this morning.

"Vietnam is both a really popular destination and an important source market, and the addition of Vietjet increases total Vietnam seat capacity this year to 153% of what it was pre-COVID."

"Services will offer an evening departure from Melbourne, allowing travellers to land in Ho Chi Minh in the morning,

providing seamless connections to domestic destinations or facilitating a day of business in Vietnam," Argus added.

The new service will also help connect Victorian residents who were born in Vietnam to family and friends back home, in addition to providing another option for Vietnamese international students to travel to Australia for study.

Mercure CNS open

ACCOR has unveiled its newest hotel in Tropical North Queensland with the opening of Mercure Cairns.

Located two blocks from the Esplanade and across the road from Cairns Aquarium, the property was rebranded from ibis Styles Cairns, and underwent a multi-million dollar upgrade.

The hotel features 75 guestrooms, including Loft Spa Room and Executive King Room categories, a pool deck, and a new restaurant, The Stanley, which serves a modern Australian menu of fresh and local produce.

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Tourism Ireland chief resigns

TOURISM Ireland's Chief Executive, Niall Gibbons, has announced he will step down from the role in Apr.

Gibbons has worked for the national tourism marketing organisation for 21 years, initially as Director of Corporate Services from 2002-2009, followed by nearly 14 years at the helm.

In a statement posted to LinkedIn last night, Gibbons described being CEO of Tourism Ireland as "an honour and a privilege", adding "the time is right for a new challenge".

The announcement coincides with the lead-up to the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, which gave rise to Tourism Ireland.

Scoot on sale

SCOOT has launched a new year sale, offering discounted one-way air fares from \$159 to 38 destinations including Singapore, Tokyo and Phuket, flying from SYD, MEL, PER and OOL.

The deal ends on 16 Jan - **CLICK HERE** to book.

Thailand backflip

AUTHORITIES in Thailand have issued a further clarification about the country's vaccination requirements, now advising that the eased protocols introduced in Oct continue to apply.

Earlier this week Government statements indicated that incoming passengers were required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (**TD** 09 Jan).

However an update from the Tourism Authority of Thailand yesterday confirmed that "international travellers arriving in Thailand are not required to show proof of vaccination".

Negative test results are also not mandated - but the country's Minister for Health, Anutin Charnvivakul noted that while Thailand is welcoming all visitors, "a visitor source market may require incoming visitors, including their own nationals returning home, to have a negative PCR result".

In addition passengers who have such a requirement from their home country - currently including India and China - must have health insurance covering COVID-19 treatment in Thailand.

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QATAR
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Window Seat

THREE new Northlander trainsets will soon be on the rails between Toronto and Northern Ontario in Canada, but first, they're being stuck in the freezer - literally.

In Ontario's northern region, where winters are bitterly cold, the new carriages and engines purchased by the provincial government are being put to the test in an indoor climate chamber to see how they will perform in the razor-sharp winter climate.

The indoor research centre in Ottawa is equipped to simulate intense heat or cold, wind and ice, to see what conditions impact the equipment the most.

After further testing the new trainsets are hoped to be in service in the coming years.

Jayride riding high in '23

ASX-LISTED global airport transfers marketplace Jayride Limited today updated investors, saying it has seen a record high number of passenger trips booked during the second quarter of the 2023 financial year.

The 153,000 bookings made between Oct and Dec 2022 represents a 198% increase on the same period 12 months prior, generating a net revenue of \$1.13 million - up 186% year-on-year.

The company also smashed records for the first half of this financial year, with a total of 294,000 passenger trips booked and \$2.38 million net revenue generated.

These results exceeded its pre-pandemic performance, which sat at an all-time high of 235,100 bookings and \$2.37 million in net revenue for 1H FY20.

Although the marketplace saw a 35% decline in European trip volumes during Q2 due to

expected seasonality, Asian trip volumes increased more than tenfold following the reopening of key destinations like Japan.

"It is encouraging to see our new growth initiatives are beginning to deliver positive results," Jayride Managing Director Rod Bishop said.

"We are sharply focused on continuing to deliver on our strategy to become the world leader in rides for travellers, and accelerate our path to cash flow positive in the coming quarters".

Jayride also hinted at a number of new initiatives in the pipeline ahead of Europe summer in Q4 FY23, such as product launches and new partnerships including with several low-cost and traditional carriers via CarTrawler.

Wizz's Cardiff cut

EUROPEAN low-cost carrier Wizz Air will permanently shut down its base in Cardiff from 25 Jan due to high operational costs, after being situated in the Welsh capital for less than a year.

The airline will continue to operate at eight UK airports, with a network of 120 routes.

Oman Air to Russia

OMAN Air is now operating to Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport (SVO), with the carrier offering fares from Australia in combination with Malaysia Airlines, Thai and Batik Air.

World's best job

ABU Dhabi's Yas island is on the hunt for its next destination ambassador, with a major prize package up for grabs including a \$100,000 'salary', a luxury hotel stay, and exclusive entertainment experiences across the island.

Applications are now open to the public, with candidates asked to send in their video applications **HERE** before 26 Jan.

PLAY in Canada

PLAY, a low-cost airline operating flights between Iceland and Europe, is preparing to introduce its services to Canada from 22 Jun 2023.

Travellers are now able to book flights from John C. Munro Hamilton International Airport to 26 European destinations including London, Paris, Berlin, Copenhagen, Dublin, and more.

New drowning tech

A COMPANY called Coral Smart Pool has entered a partnership with Cyprus-based Leonardo Hotels & Resorts to install innovative drowning detection technology in hotel pools.

A pilot scheme will see the MYLO "virtual lifeguard" platform implemented at properties across the destination, with the system incorporating video surveillance above and below the water along with pressure sensors and alarm facilities to offer several layers of protection 24/7.

Cruise Reservations & Guest Services Specialist

Australia's leading small ship specialist, Cruise Traveller, is looking to expand its Gold Coast based team.

We are seeking an experienced cruise Reservations Specialist who can also offer support to our Guest Services department.

This is a full-time position based in our Mermaid Beach office.

The role involves servicing enquiry from both direct guests and retail travel agents on our extensive range of small ship cruise product and packages as well as supporting our Guest Services team for booking package components and sending final e-documents.

You would be an important part of a successful, friendly, professional, family owned and operated industry leading business with a huge focus on exceptional customer service in keeping with the premium travel products we represent.

Please only apply for this position if you have a minimum of two years' experience in a retail or wholesale travel position and GDS/Sabre experience would be an advantage.

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SALES MANAGER - AUSTRALIA

Rocky Mountaineer is seeking an experienced travel sales professional to join their global sales team as their Sales Manager - Australia.

The successful candidate will be responsible for driving and maximizing revenue potential for retail, wholesale, custom groups, and group tour block accounts.

This role is open to applicants in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane.



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For more details and to apply please click [here](#)
Applications close 20 January, 2023.

Cogar on prowl for Akorn, Sanctuary



FIONA Cogar has been announced as the Sales Director Australia & NZ for Akorn DMC and Sanctuary Retreats, both part of the Abercrombie & Kent group of companies.

Cogar (**pictured**) has actually been in the role for some months, after last year returning from the UAE where she was located for about eight years working for Arabian Adventures & dnata.

She was also formerly with Kerzner as Leisure Sales Manager for Australia.

Peter van der Schee, Senior VP Sales at Akorn and Global Director of Sales & Marketing at Sanctuary Retreats, said "as desire for premium and luxury tour operators is returning fast, I am pleased that Fiona has joined us at this pivotal time".

"Among our over 30 world-wide Akorn destinations, we are seeing particularly strong interest from Australians travelling to Southeast Asia, Egypt, Africa and Europe, while our luxury Sanctuary camps and lodges in Africa, and Nile cruises in Egypt, are in great demand too."

"We welcome Fiona and know she'll be a powerful addition to the team," van der Schee said.

Sanctuary Retreats has camps and lodges in Uganda, Botswana, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia and Namibia plus ships on the Yangtze, Nile and Irrawaddy.

QANTAS HOLDS ADDS LUXURY RANGE

EXCLUSIVE

QANTAS has this week expanded its offering with the introduction of a new brand called Qantas Luxury Holidays.

Qantas Holidays customers received an email communication about the new range earlier this week, inviting them to "explore our exclusive launch collection of limited-time luxury holiday offers".

A QF spokesperson told **Travel Daily** the new luxury offering is "loaded with inclusions and extra value, all expertly curated by the Qantas Holidays team".

"Our holiday experts secure exclusive inclusions - from room upgrades, food and beverage packages, spa treatments and more - with our best hotel partners," the spokesperson said.

Offers are exclusive to Qantas, are available for a limited time only and can be combined with a QF airfare to "complete the ultimate luxury holiday".

Customers who pay for their trips can choose to earn three

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Explore our range of expertly curated Luxury Holiday offers with exclusive savings and VIP inclusions

Qantas Points for every dollar spent on their booking, or use their points to book and secure what the carrier noted was "45 per cent more value".

Launch offers include a five night stay at Bali's Mandira Beach Resort & Spa leading in at just \$1,265 for two people with bonus inclusions such as a room upgrade, some meals and beverages, with the deal said to be a 43% saving.

The debut email also highlighted five nights for two adults at

COMO Point Yamu in Phuket from \$1,699 total, including daily breakfast & lunch OR dinner, a massage, F&B credits and more. which Qantas says is 64% off.

The new offering is showcased via a new "Luxury Holidays" menu option on the Qantas Hols website, with the current range also featuring Hayman Island, Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa in the Maldives, InterContinental Fiji, Sofitel Gold Coast Broadbeach, Crystalbrook Riley and Four Seasons Sydney.

Vana feel good?

SIX Senses Hotels & Resorts has debuted its first dedicated wellness resort, with the previously flagged rebranding of Vana in India's Himalayan foothills.

Six Senses Vana is spread over a 21-acre site, with guests offered a full program of yoga, Tibetan medicine, Ayurveda and Natural Healing Therapies.

The property originally opened in Jan 2014 close to Rishikesh, the birthplace of yoga, and north of Dehradun.

Six Senses says it aims to "deepen and strengthen the current offering" and complement it with signature experiences while bringing Vana to a broader global audience - sixsenses.com.

Former Crystal river ships sold to Riverside

GERMAN cruise startup Riverside Luxury Cruises has confirmed the acquisition of the remainder of the former Crystal River Cruises fleet, after previously also announcing the purchase of the *Crystal Mozart* (**CW** 06 Oct 2022).

Riverside Cruises is an offshoot of hotel group Seaside Collection, and plans to begin its first season on Europe's waterways in Apr this year.

Prior to its demise, the now defunct Crystal River Cruises constructed four identical ships, each with capacity for 106 passengers: the *Crystal Bach*, *Crystal Mahler*, *Crystal Debussy* and *Crystal Ravel*.

The near-new vessels are being renamed as *Riverside Bach*, *Riverside Debussy*,

Riverside Mahler and *Riverside Ravel*, with two to sail this year along with the double-width *Riverside Mozart*, and the full fleet slated to return to operation in 2024.

Riverside Luxury Cruises is aggressively targeting business in the USA, offering 21% commission to travel advisors on all 2023 departures as well as special industry rates.

Founder Gregor Gerlach said "we are thrilled by the expansion of our fleet to include these storied vessels".

"This acquisition allows us to expand our itinerary offerings, showcasing a level of space, personalised service and elegance not found with any other river cruise line," he enthused.

AC cans Doha route

AIR Canada has confirmed the cessation of scheduled flights between Toronto and Qatar next month, just over two years after they debuted in Dec 2020.

The Star Alliance carrier cited "commercial reasons" for the indefinite suspension.

Air Canada's Doha route also included a codeshare deal with Qatar Airways, with the pact at the time said to provide smooth connectivity to Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

New tenant for BNE

BRISBANE Airport will welcome electrical and furniture retailer BSR Group to its Da Vinci educational and industrial precinct, as the tenant of a newbuild 5,600 square metre office and warehouse space.

BNE Executive GM Commercial, Martin Ryan, said more businesses were basing their operations at the airport, with strong demand for premium development sites with the ability for 24/7 operations.

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.



InterContinental Saigon has unveiled a newly renovated ballroom, pre-function and meeting rooms. The Grand Ballroom, which can host up to 1,200 attendees and can be divided into two separate spaces, is now fully equipped with the latest audio-visual technology and a huge interactive chandelier. There is also a new Business Hub, a transformable space featuring in-built ovens, fridge and a counter that can be used for a master cooking class.



The new **DoubleTree by Hilton Monroe Township Cranbury** has officially opened its doors in New Jersey. The recently converted building has received a refresh on its exterior, all public spaces, meeting and banquet rooms, guests rooms and the restaurant. The hotel offers 150 rooms, state-of-the-art meeting facilities, an outdoor fire pit and lounge area, and 390 Prime, a restaurant specialising in steak and seafood.



The first **Hyatt Place** hotel in China's Hangzhou city is now welcoming guests, featuring 472 spacious guestrooms including 24 suites. **Hyatt Place Hangzhou International Airport** is located in the airport terminal with direct access to the departure and arrival halls and ground transport centre via indoor walkways. The property offers free wi-fi, event spaces, a fitness centre, and a dining venue that prepares meals anytime of the day and night.



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Viking Neptune celebrated



VIKING'S newest ship, *Viking Neptune*, was celebrated on Sun in Los Angeles with a naming ceremony, which saw her receive a blessing from ceremonial godmother and retired NASA astronaut, aquanaut and artist, Nicole Stott.

During the ceremony, Stott used a historic Viking broad axe to cut a ribbon, triggering a bottle of Norwegian aquavit to break on the ship's hull.

Guests enjoyed performances from Sissel Kyrkjebø, a world-renowned crossover soprano and godmother of the *Viking Jupiter*, as well as Norwegian violinist Tor Jaran Apold.

"The *Viking Neptune* is a ship named for both the furthest planet in our solar system and the god of the sea - and our newest Viking godmother, Nicole Stott, as a NASA astronaut and aquanaut, also has connections to space and the sea," Chairman of Viking, Torstein Hagen, said.

The 930-capacity ship departed for Honolulu after the ceremony,

and is currently sailing the 2022-2023 Viking World Cruise, a voyage from Fort Lauderdale to London that spans 138-days, 28 countries and 57 ports, with overnight stays in 11 cities.

Pictured: Three Viking "godsisters" - Nicole Stott, Karine Hagen, godmother of the *Viking Sea*, and Sissel Kyrkjebø - with Geir Rovik and *Viking Neptune* Captain Erik Saabye.

For more details, see today's issue of *Cruise Weekly*.

Canada closure

AUTHORITIES in Canada have announced that private vehicles will no longer be able to access the spectacular Moraine Lake in Banff National Park.

The measure applies year round, and follows huge demand last year which saw the destination flooded with cars as visitation surged.

Alternative access options include Parks Canada shuttles, public transport, hiking & cycling.