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Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of the latest industry news including Business Events News.

Aperitivo returns

APERITIVO with Uniworld events are back and agents are encouraged to convince clients to attend sessions across Australia.

The events will showcase Uniworld's destinations and itineraries, while guests will also sample a selection of wines inspired by the rivers of Europe.

Uniworld will relay its latest special offers on last-minute cruises this year, plus new deals on 2025 and 2026 voyages, with generous savings offered exclusively to attendees.

These events are not only for seasoned river passengers, but also new-to-river cruise clients, with more than 100 bookings generated for travel advisors around Australia last year - [HERE](#).

CATO hails added RITG govt funding

FOLLOWING the approval of a second round of funding late last year (*TD* 01 Dec 2023), the Reviving International Tourism Grant (RITG) has received a further cash injection from the Federal Government this week.

Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) members will now be able to access an additional \$8,000 of funding through Austrade under the latest changes to the RITG, bringing total program grants to \$44,000 for successful applicants.

The RITG was created in two streams, one to connect operators with international markets, as well as a funding boost to foster digital upgrades.

Most of the extra cash injection has been allocated to the latter, with an additional \$6,000 on offer for grantees of the scheme's 'Digital Uplift' stream.

Meanwhile, members applying for the 'Connecting with



International Markets' tranche will gain an extra \$2,000.

In addition to the increase, the scope of the program has been broadened to include access to a wider array of international events, while completion dates have also been extended.

Extension of usage deadlines for the digital stream has been lengthened from 30 Jun 2024 to 31 Mar 2025, while the events stream has been pushed out from 30 Jun 2024 to 31 Dec 2024.

CATO Managing Director, Brett

Jardine, said the government decision to bolster the RITG is vindication for the "indispensable contributions" that Australian tour operators and wholesalers make to the nation's economy.

"The funding has been a major benefit to Australian inbound and outbound tour operators and travel wholesalers, and on behalf of members, CATO would like to express our sincere gratitude to Austrade and the Federal Tourism Minister [Don Farrell] for their support throughout the RITG program," Jardine said.

The RITG is viewed by CATO as an essential funding mechanism to speed up the recovery of the tour operator/wholesaler sector, which was severely hampered by the pandemic.

Jardine previously told *Travel Daily* the funding measure's value will ultimately be distributed through retail travel agents and the wider travel industry. *AB*

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Air India overhauls loyalty

AIR India has made the first major change to its loyalty program in more than a decade, with the carrier indicating members will now benefit from a “fairer” rewards model.

Headlining the revamp of the Flying Returns program is a move away from a legacy structure allocating points on the basis of distance travelled in exchange for a new spend-based system.

While Air India’s loyalty scheme will continue to offer four membership tiers, these have now been rebadged to Red (from Base), Silver (from Silver Edge), Gold (from Golden Edge), and Platinum (from The Maharaja Club).

The new accrual approach will see

six points allocated for every US\$1.20 spent for Red members, while Silver members will earn eight points, Gold will score nine and the most premium Platinum members will enjoy 10 points.

The New Delhi-headquartered airline is also creating an added incentive for customers to book directly, with loyalty members to receive an additional two points for every US\$1.20 spent on direct bookings made on the Air India website or mobile app.

Further loyalty benefits include the removal of an expiry on any points accrued, so long as members take at least one Air India flight every two years.

The carrier has also wiped away any blackout date or seat restrictions for points redemptions, and has also made payment methods more flexible by allowing members to pay for flights using a combination of cash and points.

Transferability is another major pillar of change, with Air India now giving loyalty customers the ability to share points with family members without paying any charges.

The airline’s Chief Commercial Officer, Nipun Aggarwal, said the loyalty overhaul was the result of wide-ranging market research to ensure its Flying Returns program was on



a similar footing with the best in the market.

“We spent the past year listening, gathering insights from over 50,000 customers, and benchmarking our program against the best loyalty offerings out there,” he said.

“This deep dive, coupled with a complete digital overhaul, has resulted in a much stronger and value-delivering program that we are proud to present today.”

Air India also confirmed that in “due course” it will introduce new co-branded credit cards and partnerships with popular brands to offer more extensive travel benefits and privileges. *AB*

The art of restoring Fiji



A MAJOR tourism attraction in Fiji will be restored to its former glory under a newly inked development contract, Tourism Fiji CEO Brent Hill has revealed.

The Pacific Harbour Arts Village, located in the country’s Serua province, will undergo a major refurbishment thanks to a new development project headed up by property management company Damodar Group and Yatu Lau Company Limited.

New retail stores, entertainment venues, accommodation and restaurants all form part of the renovation blueprint.

Speaking with *Travel Daily* yesterday, Hill said that once completed, the Arts Village will create a raft of positive tourism outcomes for one Australia’s most popular outbound markets in the Asia Pacific region.

“It’s such an impressive spot and the cultural demonstrations

and displays were always appreciated and loved by tourists,” Hill explained.

“The cruise industry alone will generate enough business, with the amount of cruises coming in to Suva these days, but we love seeing culture, art and food being part of our tourism offerings, so we really are delighted that this village is once again going to be a premium tourism destination.”

While once a thriving tourist attraction, the Village fell into a state of disrepair in the years leading up to the pandemic, with Hill stating COVID then “took it over the edge”.

Part of the revitalisation initiative will also see Yatulau’s flagship property, Yatulau Arcade, undergo a major upgrade, with the completion date flagged for Dec this year.

The wider project is set to be wrapped up by Q2 2025. *AB*



Whistler © Whistler Tourism / Justa Jeskova

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CASA takes key step toward flying taxis

AUSTRALIA is about to take another important step forward in fostering the development of electric vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) aircraft at key hubs across the country.

Key to the new electric aircraft's mainstream industry's inception in Australia will be the establishment of key safety standards associated with manufacturing VTOLs and the ground infrastructure needed, such as vertiports.

In the next few weeks, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) will release a specialist guide detailing what is required to build a safe vertiport in Australia.

In an update published this week, CASA's Director of Aviation Safety, Pip Spence, said the flagged manual will enforce the civil aviation regulator's position on best practices and appropriate safety guidelines for prospective builders of the new air facilities.



The latest guide will support an advisory document circulated by CASA in Jul last year following a period of industry consultation.

Flagged by *Travel Daily* last year (*TD* 14 Jul 2023), CASA was requested by Federal Minister of Transport, Catherine King, to provide more regulatory oversight of the safety aspects of unmanned aviation.

Part of CASA's brief was to create a Statement of Expectations over the next two years, detailing how autonomous VTOLs will safely fit into the

Australian aviation ecosystem.

One of the major players in the vertiport design space is Skyportz, a Victorian-based company which has already created a number of design renders (**pictured**).

Speaking with *Vertical Mag* last year, CEO Clem Newton-Brown said "there was no doubt the aircraft are coming", but cautioned the potential for the emerging industry will only be achieved if "we break the nexus between aviation and airports and enable a new class of land use to emerge". AB

Caravanning thrives

AUSTRALIA'S caravan industry continues to flourish, with the number of overnight caravan and camping trips in 2023 up 9% on pre-COVID 2019 levels.

The data, revealed in the Caravan Industry Association of Australia's new *National Visitor Economy Report*, shows Aussies embarked on 15.2 million caravan and camping holidays for the 12 months ending Dec 2023.

The industry's growth comes despite a downward trend in its main market, which is seeing a rising number of Baby Boomers favour overseas travel.

The 30-54-year-old (or "family package") demographic is picking up the momentum, however, with more and more choosing to hit the roads and explore their own backyard.

The caravan and camping sector plays a key role in Australia's visitor economy, with the cohort spending more than \$8.1 billion while travelling.

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Vietjet hails revenues

A RECENT audit of low-cost carrier Vietjet has found the business achieved transport revenues of US\$2.16 billion (A\$3.29 billion) for 2023.

The revenue result represented a 62% increase when compared to 2022, while pre-tax air transport profits for the airline last year were recorded at \$US18.98 million (A\$28.9 million).

Vietjet's total assets at the end of last year totalled around US\$3.5 billion, and its total cash in the bank at the same time was US\$203.62 million, healthy liquidity the carrier said would ensure its financial viability as it enacts future expansion plans this year.

The carrier did not release the full audit figures, so the business' total liabilities are unknown.

However, Vietjet did spruik a debt-to-equity ratio of two, which it said was "well below" the global industry range of between three and five.

WA off to a flier

WESTERN Australia is soaring high and back on track for a full recovery of its aviation industry, with the state setting a number of aviation records in Jan.

The month saw Perth Airport account for its busiest on record, with WA now well on track for a full post-pandemic recovery of international visitors by 2025.

Just under 1.4 million passengers flew through Perth in Jan, with close to 1,000 international flights and more than 1,700 interstate inbound services across the month.

The flight numbers represent a 107% recovery compared to the same period in 2019, with the upward trend continuing in Feb, when flight numbers reached 108% compared to the same period in 2019.

WA Minister for Tourism Rita Saffioti said the numbers highlight the success of the state's investment and initiatives in reconnecting to the world.

Cool agents hit the slopes



THIRTY Aussie agents - and one Kiwi - recently returned from an exhilarating trip to Canada, hosted by Sno'n'Ski Holidays.

The eight-day mega famil saw the lucky advisors whisked around Alberta and British Columbia over eight days, spending two nights each in Banff, Revelstoke, Sun Peaks and Whistler.

The group began their epic journey at Sunshine Ski Resort in Banff, where they spent the day hitting the beginner-friendly slopes before enjoying breathtaking views of Nightrose during a sunset gondola ride.

The next morning, the group was the first on the mountain at Lake Louise Resort, giving them the rare opportunity to enjoy the "first tracks" before the general public arrived.



"Being able to get a few runs in before the general public is definitely an experience I will remember; the views over to the famous Lake Louise are unforgettable and the whole resort has something to offer

from the bunny hill to the backcountry," Sam Hele from Flight Centre said.

Up next on the itinerary was a trip to Revelstoke, where agents enjoyed a stay at the Ski-in, Ski-out Sutton Place Hotel, followed by a scenic drive to the charming village of Sun Peaks.

While there, agents brushed up on their skiing and snowboarding skills with a morning of lessons, before unleashing even more energy with an evening of axe throwing at the Cleavage Axe Co.



The thrilling famil culminated at Whistler, where the group explored the massive ski area as well as the array of bars, restaurants and entertainment, before enjoying a Sabre Champagne experience at the Barefoot Bistro.

After one last day on the slopes, the agents could pick from snowmobiling, zip lining or a spa treatment before heading back home to warmer weather. JM

Travel Daily FEATURE

Cruising revival a boom for Sydney

With Ben Angell, Managing Director Asia-Pacific, Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL)



Cruise fever has captured Sydney with a record 70-odd ships in local waters this

summer, injecting \$5.63 billion into the Australian economy - the benefits of which go far beyond guests spending on shore.

NCL's complimentary clean-up excursions with Take 3 for the Sea provided a practical way to positively impact communities we visit, with nearly 120 guests sailing on *Norwegian Spirit* removing rubbish from beaches in Eden, and for the first time, Melbourne and Fiji.

The local season created opportunities for travel agent partners, media and staff to experience our ship's unique offering and learn from our crew first-hand.

As for the future, it's all systems go. Cruising has surpassed peak pre-pandemic levels; a younger generation is sailing - 35% of under-35s want to cruise in 2024 - and travellers are discovering the value of cruise compared to land-based holidays.

Last week we farewelled *Norwegian Spirit* and celebrated a record-breaking season. We now turn our focus to the launch of the European summer - our most extensive offering in the region to date.

But we look forward to our return to Sydney Harbour next summer.



NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE®



Etihad flies to Boston

ETIHAD Airways landed in Boston for the first time this week, offering a direct connection between Abu Dhabi and the US city, strengthening key ties between the two destinations.

With four-times weekly flights operated by a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, the new service marks Etihad's fourth US route, joining Chicago, New York and Washington, along with services to Toronto, Canada.

Qatar makes good on Fri



QATAR Airways has made an \$80,000 donation to the Good Friday Appeal, raising critical funds for The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) in Melbourne and its expanded regional efforts.

The airline also gifted two business class return flights to Europe for the annual fundraiser, marking the fourth year in a row it has supported the initiative.

Qatar Airways' team members based at the airline's Australian headquarters in Melbourne also volunteered their time on Good Friday for Kids Day Out, when they took calls from donors during the telethon.

The huge cash donation will go towards various initiatives, including medical research, advanced equipment and technology, programs focused on patient care, and more.

"We are proud to continue our long-lasting support for the Good Friday Appeal," said Qatar Airways Regional Manager for Australia and NZ, Justin Kestel.

"Since 2020, Qatar Airways have and will continue to donate to

this great cause.

"The Good Friday Appeal aligns with our global corporate social responsibility of supporting children and making their lives better so that they have the best possible outcomes in life." JM

Pictured: Kestel and Qatar representatives present the generous cash donation to the Good Friday Appeal.

Reymond represents

MELBOURNE-BASED PR agency Reymond Communications has announced a new partnership with Andria Mitsakos Public Relations (AMPR).

The collaboration will see Reymond represent AMPR's notable international hotel and hospitality clients in Australia and the Asia Pacific, including the The Doli in Athens and La Coquillade in France.

The two agencies have inked the deal to enhance their representation capabilities and expand customer reach for the hotel clients in the region.



Window Seat

THERE'S a lot in a name, which is why a campaign to rename an airport in the United States after the country's former president, Donald Trump, could fall flat on its face.

The ill-timed proposal, which came just after April Fool's Day, seeks to rename Washington's main gateway as 'Trump International Airport'.

The hub is currently named in honour of John Foster Dulles, who was Secretary of State in the 1950s.

"As millions of domestic and international travellers fly through the airport, there is no better symbol of freedom, prosperity and strength than hearing 'Welcome to Trump International Airport' as they land on American soil," Republican Congressman, Guy Reschenthaler, said.

While the draft bill has at least six co-sponsors, it doesn't look to be gaining much traction given the Democrats are in control of the Senate and the House.

However, the campaign has received some ironic 'support' from the opposition, with Democrat Congressman, Brendan Boyle, pointing out that "Dulles is an old, ugly airport that no one wants to see...so I think this is a fitting tribute [to Trump]".



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with Jenny

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Singapore is best

THE Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is highlighting why Singapore is the “World’s Best MICE City” in its new worldwide campaign, which spotlights events that have leveraged the city’s strengths.

Marking the first of six global campaigns that STB is rolling out in the coming year, the marketing push showcases how Singapore allows business event organisers and delegates to positively impact the industry, society, and environment.

“We remain committed to invest in new MICE products and experiences, and we invite event organisers and planners to co-create business events with us that yield meaningful outcomes,” said STP Deputy Chief Executive Yap Chin Siang.

ICC UNVEILS NEW DISABILITY PLAN

INTERNATIONAL Convention Centre (ICC) Sydney has unveiled its inaugural Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP), reaffirming its commitment to creating an inclusive and accessible venue.

Launched on World Autism Awareness Day (Tue 02 Apr), the roadmap builds on the venue’s Accessible and Inclusive Events Guide, which it released last year (TD 25 May 2023).

ICC Sydney, which is managed by ASM Global, consulted with community partner Get Skilled Access in order to gain a deeper understanding of the venue’s strengths, as well as identify opportunities to improve its overall accessibility.

The DIAP covers four key pillars, and includes outcomes across culture, build and digital environment, employment, and systems and processes areas, as well as initiatives aimed at



supporting ICC Sydney’s event attendees and workforce.

“Our mission at ICC Sydney is to make a difference for greater Sydney and for New South Wales residents, visitors and businesses,” said ICC Sydney CEO and Group Director - Convention Centres, ASM Global (APAC), Geoff Donaghy.

“This means ensuring our services are as welcoming,

inclusive and accessible as possible for everyone that arrives through our doors.

“We are cognisant of ensuring that every aspect of our visitors’ journey is considered,” he added.

The new blueprint looks at all facets of ICC Sydney’s services, from content presented across its digital channels to training for its team to best support people with hidden disabilities. *JM*

Good Fri at MCEC

THE Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) celebrated its 10-year partnership with the Good Friday Appeal by hosting several Easter-themed festivities last month.

The venue’s pastry chef, Alessandro Bartesaghi, hosted a chocolate egg decorating class for 10 lucky ambassadors and their families, while on Good Fri, MCEC served 900 house-made ice creams for visitors as well as nearly 300 milestone cupcakes to raise funds for the appeal.

Taste of Kakadu set to return next month

THE Northern Territory’s Indigenous food and culture festival, Taste of Kakadu, is returning in May to showcase the region’s bush tucker.

Over three days, visitors can indulge their taste buds across a range of events, including the feature ‘Bowali Under the Stars’ dinner - a four-course dinner under the stars with seasonal ingredients foraged locally in Kakadu National Park.



There will also be ranger-guided bush tucker walks, ground oven feasts, ‘croc and canapes’ cruises on Yellow Water Billabong, and the chance to meet traditional owners as they share their local bush foods knowledge.

Cairns gets Quark

THE Cairns Convention Centre is preparing to welcome more than 500 scientists for the 16th Quark Confinement and the Hadron Spectrum Conference in Aug.

Taking place over six days, the gathering is a significant event in the physics community, and will give delegates the chance to explore Cairns’ unique local cultural and heritage.




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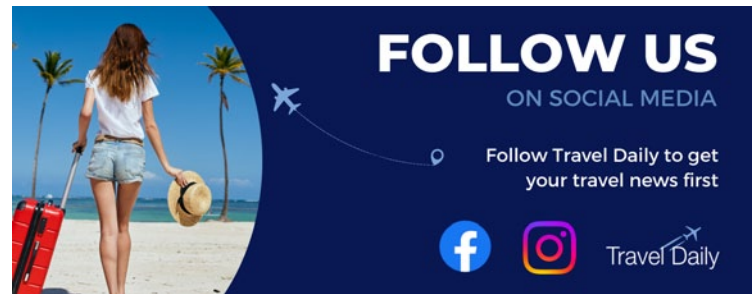
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Club Wyndham Kirra Beach on the Gold Coast has announced the appointment of **Christopher Ronalde** as its new Resort Manager. Ronalde brings an abundance of relevant experience to the position, having most recently been the Assistant Resort Manager at Ramada Resort by Wyndham Shoal Bay. He also held various key leadership positions in New Zealand at QT, Sofitel and Grand Windsor.

Insurance service provider **Charles Taylor** has appointed **Bob Battoo** as its new Managing Director for aviation in the Asia Pacific. The addition of Battoo is set to strengthen Charles Taylor's aviation insurance products and support across the region. The new recruit is tasked with managing aviation-related risks and claims across the organisation's insurance and leasing operations.

Low-cost carrier **Greater Bay Airlines** has announced the appointment of a new CEO, with **Liza Ng** taking the top job. She was promoted from her previous role of Chief Operating Officer to take the reins of the Hong Kong-based carrier. Ng replaces Stanley Hui, who will remain on the Board as a Director and advisor to the Chairman.

Michelle Freyre, The Estee Lauder Companies President of Global Brands, Clinique and Origins, has joined **United Airlines'** Board of Directors. She will draw on her expertise in business and product strategy to help guide the carrier's overall strategic vision and drive global growth. Freyre is also backed by 20 years of experience gained at Johnson & Johnson in various marketing and sales roles.

Virgin Hotels Collection has welcomed **Noami Moreno-Melgar** as its Global Director of Communications, where she will be responsible for overseeing public relations messaging for Virgin Hotels and Virgin Limited Edition. Bringing over 25 years of experience to the business, the communication professional enjoyed a decade-long stint with the PR team at Virgin Holidays, and has also held positions across IHG, Travelopia, Asahi and Peroni.

Anthony Roy has been appointed as the Cluster Executive Chef at **Radisson Blu Dubai Media City** and **Park Inn by Radisson Dubai Motor City**. Roy will manage the culinary operations at both properties, drawing on his experience leading food and beverage teams as Executive Chef at Sofitel London Heathrow, as well as at Park Plaza London Waterloo and Hilton London Wembley.

Industry stalwart **Joseph Khairallah** has taken on the role of Area Vice President, Head of Japan, Korea & Micronesia at **Hilton Hotels & Resorts**. The Tokyo-based professional, who boasts 40 years of experience - including as Hilton's Vice President of Operations for North China - will oversee the accommodation giant's 32 trading hotels and future pipeline growth.

Welcome to WA, my Lady



VIRGIN Voyages' Resilient Lady docked in Western Australia on Tue during the luxury vessel's maiden voyage to the state.

Highlighting the Fremantle Port as the only WA stop on the ship's current itinerary, a ceremonial plaque exchange took place between the ship's captain and WA Government officials.

With the cruise sector injecting more than \$300 million into the WA economy in 2023 alone, WA Tourism Minister, Rita Saffioti, expressed her delight upon *Resilient Lady's* arrival.

"Cruise tourism is incredibly important to the WA economy, injecting hundreds of millions of dollars into our state through visitor spend in local businesses, bars and restaurants, and creating hundreds of jobs for Western Australians," she said.

There was plenty of fanfare at the Fremantle Passengers Terminal, with cruise guests welcomed by musical performances and volunteers offering directions to the city's best activities and attractions. Passengers were also offered

complementary shuttle services to Fremantle's Walyalup Koort, where they enjoyed a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony, followed by a dance performance by local groups.

WA is expecting nearly 30 cruise visits this year, bringing more than 36,000 passengers and up to 17,000 crew to the port city, with the expansion continuing to align with Tourism WA's *Western Australian Cruise Tourism Strategic Plan 2023-2033*. MW

The Fairmont Blues

THE NSW Blues rugby league team is negotiating a deal with the four-star Fairmont Resort in Leura for the team to stay in camp before taking the field against arch rival Queensland.

The luxury Blue Mountains property is owned by Schwartz Family Co and is considering building a new training ground at Leura Golf Course and a nearby state-of-the-art gym to get the deal over the line.

Previously, the Blues have stayed at Crowne Plaza Cooee.