

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features six pages of news, including our **Corporate Update**.

Sykes to step down

VISITBRITAIN Australia Country Manager Maria Sykes (**pictured**) will step down from her role leading the United Kingdom's local tourism office in early 2025.

From 17 Jan, Skyes will take up a position as Chief Executive Officer of the Jane Goodall Institute Australia, based at Taronga Zoo.

Since joining VisitBritain in 2018, Sykes has presided over a record-breaking period of visitors and spend by Australians in the UK.

During her tenure, Australia has also remained in the top four most valued inbound source markets to the UK, and at one stage, moved to second spot behind the United States.

"Earlier this year, VB hosted its most successful trade missions ever, welcoming over 40 of Britain's finest suppliers to meet with over 400 travel agents and product managers in three cities across Australia," Skyes said.

VisitBritain has now launched a search for a replacement.



Plaza plots Oz growth

EXCLUSIVE

PLAZA Premium Group has revealed it is actively engaging with airport operators across the country to expand its network of premium lounge facilities.

Speaking with *Travel Daily* this week, founder and CEO Song Hoi See said Plaza Premium Group is committed to growing its domestic terminal footprint in Australia - especially in light of what it views as a "booming" local tourism market.

"[Australian] airports are seeing higher passenger volumes, increasing the demand for premium, yet affordable, hospitality options for all travellers," Hoi See said.

When quizzed on why Aussie travellers would need extra lounge options in a country flush with offerings from Qantas and Virgin Australia, Hoi See said there was a gap in the

market for passengers flying with budget carriers who want a premium lounge experience at an affordable price.

This was the motivation for recently unveiling its pilot Flight Club location at Adelaide Airport (**TD** 22 Nov), a concept opening mid next year that pledges to deliver premium food, beverages and atmosphere for all travellers.

"We welcome travellers regardless of airline, cabin class, or loyalty status," Hoi See said.

"Passengers flying on budget airlines, which dominate domestic travel in Australia, often miss out on premium lounge experiences offered by airline-specific lounges," he added.

Plaza Premium operates in 600 airports across 15 countries, serving 20 million pax a year. **AB**

Bishop's ride is over

JAYRIDE founder Rod Bishop will depart the company following the completion of a \$4.3 million capital raising announced today.

Bishop, who last year stepped down from the CEO role amid financial challenges and low margins (**TD** 23 Nov 2023), is currently a director, but will exit completely to make way for a major board refresh.

Part of the executive renewal will also see Director Yifat Shirben resign effective today, with new directors being sought to lead the "next phase of growth".

Entire seeds future

ENTIRE Travel Group is thanking the trade by planting a tree for every travel advisor who has made a booking with the company in 2024.

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Rocky Mountaineer is seeking an experienced travel professional to join the AUNZ team as a Sales Development Manager.

The successful candidate will be responsible for driving and maximizing revenue potential with the retail partners in their region.

This role is open to applicants in Sydney or Melbourne.



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Applications close 5th January, 2025.



Window Seat

THE founder and CEO of Crooked Compass, Lisa Pagotta, recently teamed up with a sexologist to discuss topics that most people shy away from.

Pagotta spoke with entrepreneur and sex expert Lauren White on her podcast *White Hot Business* about embracing authenticity, breaking boundaries, and owning your own power.

"If you think this is just a polite little chat, think again," Pagotto warned.

"This episode is bold, unapologetic, and might just leave you questioning everything you thought you knew about success."

Check out the risqué episode [HERE](#) to listen...if you dare.

Madagascar lands

APG has been appointed the GSA for Madagascar Airlines in Australia and New Zealand.

The decision coincides with recent efforts to strengthen the brand in global markets after suspending most of its international network in 2023.

APG will be charged with managing sales and marketing for Madagascar Airlines in the local market, targeting both travel agents and consumers.

Under a new recovery 2030 strategy launched last year, Madagascar Airlines has placed a stronger focus on its domestic services, with the carrier previously flagging plans to operate a simplified fleet of six ATR72-500s by mid 2025.

For further details, [CLICK HERE](#).



CLIA to raise the Darr

CRUISE Lines International Association (CLIA) has appointed a new global leader to help guide the industry through its next phase of sustainability targets.

MSC Group Executive VP, Maritime Policy and Government Affairs, Charles 'Bud' Darr, will assume the role of global CEO on 03 Feb next year, replacing Kelly Craighead, who flagged her exit earlier this year ([TD 19 Sep](#)).

Reflecting on his appointment, Darr said the cruise industry is poised to raise the bar for innovation and sustainability.

"I am eager to harness our collective expertise to propel us toward an even brighter future," Darr said, adding that CLIA will navigate the global complexities and reach significant milestones.

He returns to CLIA after a previous seven-year tenure with the industry body, where he held the Senior Vice President of Technical and Regulatory Affairs

role for five years, as well as the title of Director of Technical and Regulatory Affairs, Environmental and Health for two years.

Darr has been an outspoken advocate for green changes in cruising, recently expressing concerns about the Trump victory in the US and how it might adversely impact decarbonisation policy in the maritime sector. *AB*

Methanol ruled out

TOXICOLOGY testing conducted on the drinks consumed by Australian tourists in Fiji has revealed no traces of methanol or illicit substances.

Fiji's Tourism Minister Villiame Gavoka said the findings bring "much-needed reassurance to the global community that Fiji is a safe destination for travellers".

Investigations into what caused the seven people at a five-star resort to fall ill will continue.

A large advertisement for Great Southern. The top half shows a train traveling through a green landscape. The bottom half shows a beach at sunset. The text reads: "GREAT SOUTHERN FAMILY & FRIENDS OFFER We are excited to offer our selling agents, their family & friends 40% off Gold Premium on the Great Southern in January 2025!* Book via our Agent Online Booking Engine or phone our Travel Centre on 1800 703 357 BOOK BY 31 JAN 2025 JOURNEY BEYOND *T&CS APPLY".

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Travel Daily

G, what a buyout

THE impact of the pandemic is well and truly in the rear vision mirror for G Adventures, with the tour operator buying out the recovery investment taken from private equity firm Certares in 2021 (**TD** 11 Feb 2021).

Founder Bruce Poon Tip has always remained the controlling shareholder in the company, however this week G Adventures confirmed it has parted ways with Certares on the back of a strong sales performance this year.

"Certares has been a fantastic partner, from whom we have learnt a great deal, and has been an invaluable support in a turbulent time and we thank them for their flexibility and guidance," Poon Tip said.

The funding from Certares allowed the operator to implement an aggressive recovery strategy during the lean years of the pandemic, including big investments in its tech systems.

Poon Tip also teased that several new projects are ready to roll in the coming months.

ACA agency move

THE Australian Cruise Association (ACA) is ending its contract with Barking Owl Communications, after working with the Sydney-based PR agency for the last 10 years.

Thanking the agency for its support, ACA CEO Jill Abel said the cruise body will now run all media and communications in-house after expanding its team.

Long-haul change needed

THE current first come, first served approach deployed by Australian air traffic controllers has the potential to damage the country's reputation as a viable market for international airlines, the Australian Airports Association (AAA) contends.

In a submission to a review into the flight priorities used by Airservices Australia, the AAA threw its support behind a proposal to give higher priority to long-haul flights entering from the Americas and Europe.

The AAA said these services are more likely to be running lower on fuel upon arrival, and giving them priority will increase safety and lower the risk of having to divert to other cities because of

Accelya accelerates

ACCELYA'S NDC corporate travel bookings grew by a huge 123% during the Black Friday to Travel Tuesday period, compared with the previous year.

NDC volumes for Accelya increased 19% in total year-on-year during the period.

Airline partners also saw strong momentum, with up to 40% plus year-on-year increase in NDC transactions on Black Friday.

"Our strong year-on-year momentum highlights how NDC is transforming the travel ecosystem for the better," Chief Executive Sam Gilliland said, emphasising NDC's greater choice and options for travellers.

extended air holding times.

In instances where long-haul flights are required to land at alternative ports, the AAA argues it has a raft of negative impacts on air travel, including increased flight crew costs, hefty aircraft operational expenses, and a delay in airport security screening.

Another adverse consequence of flight diversion is a growing negative perception of Australia as a travel destination by overseas tourists, especially when they become stranded at an unfamiliar port without available accommodation or pre-arranged onward transport.

The AAA wants long-haul flights from the Americas or Europe to be offered priority where practical when holding patterns exceed 10 minutes. **AB**

TTC Big Tour savings

TTC Tour Brands is offering savings of up to \$3,000 per couple off a range of global tours, as part of its Big Tour Sale.

Agents will have a nine-day jump on the public launch date to access the deals, which include \$2,200 discounts per couple on select Trafalgar tours across Italy, Britain, and the United States.

Insight Vacations is providing \$3,000 per couple off a range of destinations, including its 'Britain & Ireland Discovery' tour.

View all offers and use marketing collateral on the TTC travel agent portal **HERE**.

Mexico warning

SMARTTRAVELLER has raised its travel advice for Mexico, and is now urging Australians to reconsider their need to travel to the states of Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Guanajuato, Sonora, Colima and Chiapas, due to a rising and high level of violent crime.

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Guests want everything

HOTEL guests are demanding “everything” from trending to traditional needs, new research from SiteMinder has suggested.

According to the company’s *Changing Traveller Report 2025*, the ‘everything traveller’ will come with a complexity level that will make hotels fundamentally change the way they operate.

Key findings from SiteMinder’s report include 80% of travellers intending to seek out ‘on-site experiences’, with 87% willing to spend on extras such as breakfast, a larger room, views or to make their stay more eco-friendly.

More than 40% plan to work during their stay, up 5% from the same survey in 2023.

The report delivered mixed sentiments on technology, with 78% saying they want AI to handle part of their stay, despite only one in 12 stating they want it to handle “all hotel functions”.

Australian travellers are more wary than other nationalities when it comes to using AI, with only 62% eager to use it, well down on Thai travellers at 98%.

Negative booking experiences are turning off younger travellers, with 70% of Gen Z more willing to abandon an online booking due to sub-par IT, scaling down to just 13% of ‘Radio Babies’, the generation label given to those aged 79-96.

The company’s Chief Growth Officer, Trent Innes, said the study proved technology needs to be adaptable to suit an increasingly multifaceted traveller in 2025.

“In an era where guests hold increasing influence over their stays, it’s clear that their evolving needs are both broad and deeply specific,” Innes said.

“Our research signals to hoteliers that accommodating these nuanced preferences isn’t just about adapting to a trend - it’s about committing to a deep understanding of how specific traveller preferences and behaviours are changing, and



keeping a finger on the pulse as they do,” he added.

SiteMinder’s poll surveyed 12,000 travellers from 14 markets including the US, China, Thailand and Australia.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read the report.

A Crowdstrike 2.0?

A **NEW** global executive survey has revealed 87% of business leaders anticipate another major IT outage to occur in the next 12 months, similar to Jul’s widespread Crowdstrike failure.

The PagerDuty study of 1,000 company directors from Australia, the US, UK and Japan showed 86% of respondents prioritised IT security over readiness in the event of a major disruption.

A further 83% agreed the global outage from this year caught them off guard and exposed gaps in their systems, with 37% noting the event cost them revenue.

Nearly half of Australian respondents (48%) said limited access to real-time data tools will hinder their organisations in the event of a repeat, which most said is a ‘when’, not an ‘if’.

Slightly less than half (44%) said the Crowdstrike failure highlighted the importance of manual processes as a backup to a reliance on digital tools.

Diamond in Vietnam

ACCOR has announced the signing of Sofitel Diamond Crown Hai Phong in Vietnam, a new luxury hotel set to open in 2026.

Part of the Diamond Crown Hai Phong complex, the hotel will include 231 rooms, 180 serviced apartments, an infinity pool, golf simulator, gym, spa, and more.

itravel’s perfect end to ‘24



ITRAVEL has welcomed Adela Backhouse, owner of Travel with Adela based in Brisbane, as its newest member.

Backhouse brings a wealth of expertise to itravel, specialising in family and luxury travel and with a dedication to creating bespoke travel experiences.

The new addition is the perfect end to a strong year of growth for itravel, which saw a 24% increase in members nationwide.

“We are very thrilled to welcome Adela to our growing network in Queensland,” said itravel BDM, Jo Howard (**pictured right with Backhouse**).

“She is an exceptional new addition and this is the perfect way to wrap up what has been an incredibly successful year.”

Backhouse shared that she is excited to join itravel, saying she chose the network because “the brand aligns [with] and compliments how I work with my clients and how I operate my boutique travel business”.

“The support given by Steve [Labroski], Jo and the itravel head office team has been outstanding.

“Being able to operate under my own brand and collaborate with them in the future is a very exciting space to be in for my business,” she added.

MEANWHILE, Rosemarie Church, owner of itravel Sutherland in NSW, is celebrating 40 years in the industry this year.

Reflecting on her journey, Church credits much of her

success to her loyal team, many of whom have worked alongside her for over 21 years.

“Through the highs and lows, we have achieved and stuck together,” she said. *JM*

APT adds to board

APT Travel Group has expanded its board of directors with three new appointments.

Philip Corne, Joe Powell, and Henriette Rothschild will join what is now a six-person board, alongside co-owners Robert McGeary and Lou Tandy, and Chair Simon Jones.

Corne joins with three decades of experience at Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessy, while Powell’s career includes executive roles with Singtel Optus, Seek, and Catapult Sports.

Rothschild is a partner in the Corporate team at KordaMentha, and has previously served in roles with iSelect and Hay Group.

The appointments strengthen APT’s governance structure as it approaches its centenary in 2027.

“The expanded board structure brings diverse expertise that will enhance our ability to innovate and deliver exceptional experiences for our guests,” McGeary said.

“As we approach our 100th year of operation, these strategic appointments reflect our commitment to maintaining APT Travel Group’s position as Australia’s premier [travelco].”

CORPORATE UPDATE

Sport kicks ahead biz travel

AUSTRALIA'S pipeline of major sporting events is expected to deliver a boost in business traveller numbers next year, according to Flight Centre's Corporate Traveller.

Host cities for the Australian Open, AFL and NRL grand finals, NRL Magic Round and Bathurst 1000 this year saw an average 19% growth in business travel arrivals, the brand's figures revealed, with even bigger numbers anticipated for 2025.

Melbourne is set to attract the highest proportion of business travellers during the Australian Open in Jan, after it drew 46% more corporate visitors this year compared to the other four events combined.

Brisbane during the NRL



Magic Round recorded the highest growth in business travel bookings this year, at 26% followed by Bathurst during the Bathurst 1000 at 20%.

Melbourne's AFL Grand Final and Australian Open were up 19% and 17%, respectively, while Sydney during the NRL Grand Final saw a 10% increase.

"High profile events bring people together from all walks of life and internationally, giving businesses the opportunity to network informally, with a dose of fun, allowing businesses to build stronger rapport with stakeholders," said Corporate Traveller's Australian-based Global MD, Tom Walley (pictured).

"The Australian Open is particularly attractive to business travellers because of its longer duration and scheduling.

"With a three-week program, businesses have the flexibility to attend on days that suit them best, including weekdays, which may be preferable for corporate engagements," he added.

Shorter events like the NRL Magic Round or Bathurst 1000 are also appealing, Walley said, because they allow busy corporate travellers to tap in and out without a lengthy time commitment.

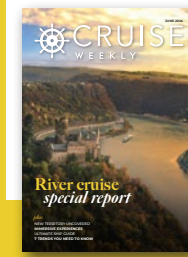
The Global GM noted that major music concerts are also drawcards for business travellers, saying, "commonly, businesses gift tickets to customers, staff or suppliers, then arrange to take them to lunch or a leisure activity such as a cruise around the harbour to network in the days before or after the event." JM



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TC catches Rottnest Express



JOURNEY Beyond recently hosted a group of 10 Travellers Choice members on a networking event on Western Australia's Rottnest Island/Wadjemup.

The agents travelled to the holiday spot on the Rottnest Express ferry, which takes just 30 minutes from Freemantle, and upon arrival were given an update on Outback Spirit Tours by Journey Beyond's Fiona Stewart.

They were also given a tour of The Samphire Rottnest, a 64-room resort overlooking Thomson

Bay, before enjoying lunch at nearby Isola Bar & Restaurant.

Travellers Choice BDM Tim Bolton said the day trip provided the perfect opportunity to bring agents up to speed with Journey Beyond's ever-expanding portfolio of Australian products.

Pictured: Front row - Vicky Johnston; Fiona Stewart, Journey Beyond; Michelle Cook; Michelle Siorgiovanni; Back row - Ben Johnston, Di Garbin, Floreat World of Travel; Saibra Twigg, Australind Travel and Cruise Centre; Carol Shaw, Tour de Force Travel; Sheree Wilson; Michelle Shea, City Beach Travel & Cruise; Tim Bolton, Travellers Choice; Chlorissa Devries, Travellers Choice; and Mike Cook.

Baby turtles abound

NRMA Turtle Sands Nature Resort in Mon Repos, Queensland is encouraging travellers to book now in order to reserve their spot during turtle hatching season.

Guests staying at the resort from Jan-Mar 2025 will have the chance to witness hundreds of adorable baby turtles make their way into the ocean by moonlight.

From Oct this year to date, the resort's guests saw a large number of turtles laying their eggs amongst the sand dunes on Mon Repos beach during what has proved to be a bumper nesting season, with as many as 66 turtles spotted on one night.



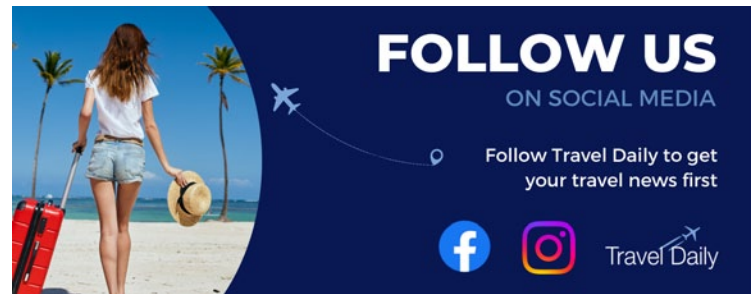
FoundersCard in Oz

FOUNDERSCARD, a membership program which offers travel discounts to business leaders, has announced its expansion into Australia.

For a yearly membership fee, members receive preferred pricing and elite status with major airlines (including up to 16% off first class and business fares), rental car programs, loyalty programs, and travel brands.

The program also offers discounts, added amenities, and flexible cancellation at leading hotels around the world, including Sydney.

However, FoundersCard does not yet appear to offer many Australian-centric benefits.



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Moxy Sydney Airport has launched a new 'Park, Stay and Fly' package inviting travellers to enjoy valet parking at the hotel's secure carpark for five nights for free with a one-night stay. After five free nights, daily rates start at \$15 or weekly from \$100, with the promotion valid to book until 03 Dec 2025. Bookings can be made [HERE](#).

Australian small group walking specialist, **Park Trek Walking Holidays**, is offering a 15% discount for agents looking to put together a private group of 10 travellers in 2025. Individuals looking to join a regular tour can save \$600 on a booking for two people or \$300 for solo travellers on selected tours departing before 30 Jun 2025. Agents can use the code 'Summer24' when making the request with the reservation team who can be contacted on info@parktrek.com.au or call 03 9997 0500.

Cruisers can take advantage of earlybird savings on **Ponant's** newly launched 2026/27 Antarctic season. Enjoy 30% off a range of itineraries, including the 17-night 'The Great Austral Loop' voyage, which offers six departures between Jan 2026 and Feb 2027. More information [HERE](#).

To celebrate Christmas, **Railbookers** is giving a \$100 Railbookers gift card to travellers who book one of its best-selling trips, including the 15-day 'Iconic Italy' journey, before 31 Dec. [CLICK HERE](#) to learn more.

Swan Hellenic has launched a new deal allowing travel companions to sail for half price. The offer applies to select 2025 cultural expedition cruises, like the 11-day 'Seychelles Enchantment' voyage, for bookings made by 16 Mar. Find more information [HERE](#).

Discover Australia's natural wonders with **APT**, which has unleashed savings across its tours Down Under. Travellers can save \$1,200 per couple on an exclusive departure of the brand's seven-day 'Central Australia Escape' on 18 Feb with Bruce Munro, the artist behind Uluru's iconic Field of Light and Kings Canyon's Light-Towers. The unique trip from Uluru to Alice Springs blends art, culture and ancient landscapes, with limited spots available. [CLICK HERE](#) to view dates and prices.

HX is offering up to 25% off on its 2025/26 voyages. Suites on journeys to the Northwest passage feature savings of up to \$4,859pp, while savings of up to \$2,883pp are available on Antarctica itineraries. Call 1300 159 127 or visit travellhx.com.

Travel agents can unwrap up to 30% off their clients' next Bali getaway with **Club Med**, which has recently launched its Boxing Day sale. The savings apply to stays between 01 Mar and 30 Jun 2025, for bookings made before 08 Jan. Find out more by logging into Club Med's travel agent portal, [HERE](#).

Wendy Wu Tours has launched its 'Ready, Set, Travel' sale, offering up to \$4,000 off per couple and free or half-price solo supplements on 2025 and 2026 departures. Call 1300 727 998 for details.

Agents feel the love at Club Med



HELLOWORLD recently teamed up with Club Med to treat 23 travel agents to a famil at Club Med Bintan, following the group's Frontliners conference in Singapore (**TD** 12 Dec).

The three-day getaway gave agents the opportunity to experience one of Club Med's most popular destinations for Aussie travellers.

During their stay, the group delved into the resort's wellness offerings with activities such as aerial yoga and spa sessions, before stretching their legs on the padel court and golf course, kayaking across crystal-clear waters, and even trying out the flying trapeze.

The evenings saw agents indulge in the local and international flavours at the resorts' restaurants before enjoying the nightly entertainment.

Club Med's General Manager, Michelle Davies, said sales for Club Med Bintan from the Pacific region grew by 11% in 2024 compared to last year.

"This prompted us to identify

the Helloworld Frontliners conference as an excellent opportunity to highlight Bintan's appeal for travellers seeking a relaxing stop over as part of their long haul holidays.

"With Singapore serving as a key stopover and business hub in the Asia Pacific region for our guests, Club Med Bintan's proximity to Singapore at just a 45-minute ferry ride away makes it an ideal destination for those craving relaxation after a city stay or en route to their next destination.

"With many of the agents in attendance travelling to Club Med for the very first time, the feedback we received was wonderful," Davies added.

The Helloworld Bintan Famil came just before Club Med launched pre-registration for its 2026 earlybird sale.

Agents can now encourage clients to pre-register for the sale so they can secure their holiday at up to 30% off, two days before the general public.

Visit the Club Med Travel Agents Portal [HERE](#) to find out more. *JM*