Travel Daily

2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

FEATURING

TRAVEL IS BACK: THE INDUSTRY STATE OF PLAY
BIG, BIGGER, BIGGEST: TOP STORIES OF THE YEAR
WELLCATIONS & DUPES: HOT TRENDS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Editor's Letter

While every year has its fair share of trials and tribulations, many in the industry saw 2024 as a period of important consolidation. Sure, there are still well-worn phrases we are yet to fully jettison, such as 'pre-pandemic levels', but in many ways, the last 12 months have allowed for a much-needed feeling of normality to return.

Australia is inching toward matching 2019 volumes of international visitors, important outbound markets like China have extended their visa-free periods for Aussies, and greater capacity and competition in the air has placed downward pressure on expensive plane tickets. While we want to see this progress make even more inroads next year - ideally at a faster rate - it is reassuring to know the trajectory is a positive one.

However, challenges have certainly continued in domestic aviation. Travellers were beginning to see the fruits of greater competition in the hip pocket; however, those brief buoyant feelings of progress came crashing down in the space of a few short months.

First it was Bonza falling over after such a bright and promising launch, with mishandling at the parent level conspiring with a lack of access to Sydney Airport playing prominent roles in its demise. The market saw trouble brewing at Rex before it entered administration, with the board almost coming to blows over the direction of the business. The play to compete on The Golden Triangle with Qantas and Virgin Australia was ultimately the airline's undoing. Hopefully moving forward, Rex will return to being a solvent carrier connecting important hubs in regional Australia.

Meanwhile cruise has presented a mixed picture, with the industry clearly resonating with younger cruisers and delivering on several major economic objectives. However, in the midst of the party poppers, we also saw Carnival retrench its P&O Australia brand, and major players like Virgin Voyages and Cunard opt not to base ships here in the future. High cruise fees have taken the lion's share of the blame for the withdrawals.

In the world of touring, The Travel Corporation's decision to sell the business to US-based asset manager Apollo Funds was clearly the most seismic development. The company is responsible for several of Australia's most loved touring brands, such as Contiki, Trafalgar, Uniworld, and Insight Vacations. While many have speculated these brands could end up being sold off individually, a recent trip Down Under by TTC's new Chair, Carl Leaver, moved to reassure the market that growth, not downsizing, was the name of the game for the foreseeable future.

There are so many more stories to touch upon, but I will let this report do that. Needless to say, despite rampant technological change brought on by AI, and rising geopolitical tensions in multiple regions, there is still so much to be optimistic about in the ever-robust industry of travel.

I say that knowing full-well the ultimate change agent in Donald Trump is about to enter the White House once again. Gulp. ••

***"THE MARKET SAW TROUBLE BREWING AT REX** BEFORE IT ENTERED ADMINISTRATION."*

Adam Bishop
Editor
Travel Daily


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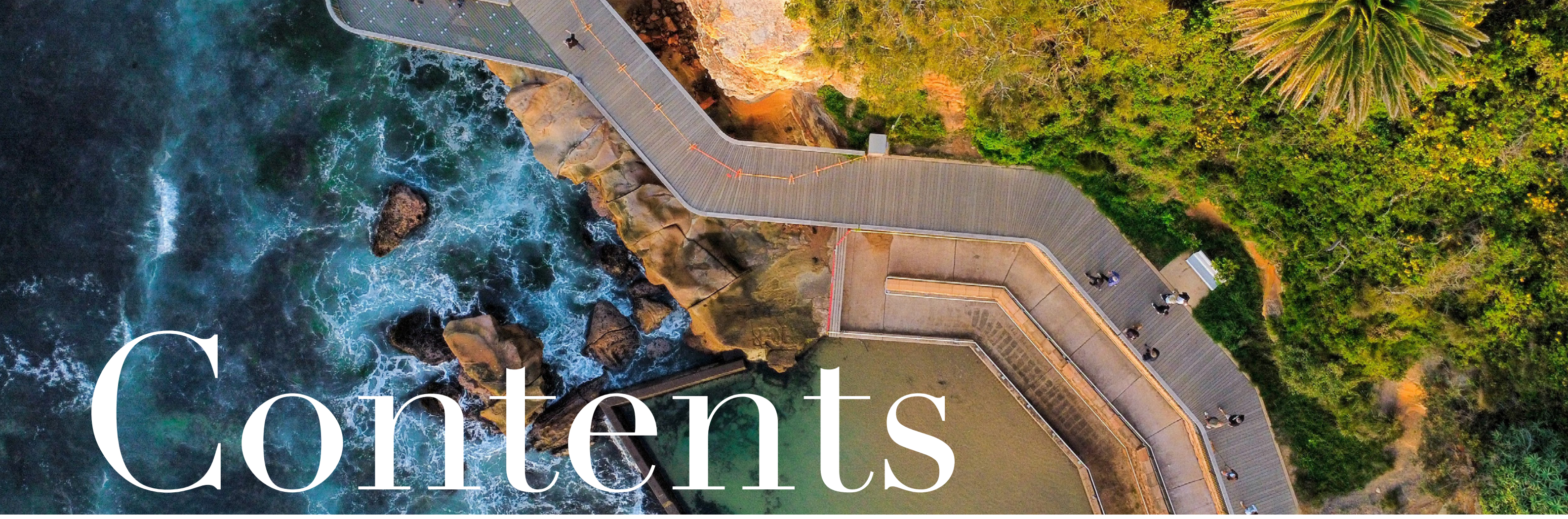

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Travel Daily

traveldaily.com.au
traveldaily.co.nz

Travel Daily is part of the Business Publishing Group family of publications.

Travel Daily is Australasia's leading travel industry cruise publication.

EDITORIAL
Associate Publisher - Jo-Anne Hui-Miller
Editor - Adam Bishop
Deputy Editor - Matt Lennon
Journalists - Janie Medbury, Myles Stedman
Designer - Katherine Gullotto
Publisher - Damian Francis

info@traveldaily.com.au

ADVERTISING & MARKETING
Head of Sales & Marketing - Sean Harrigan
Advertising - Laura Aghajanian & Dante Muranty
advertising@traveldaily.com.au

HEAD OF OPERATIONS & CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Anna Piper

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: (AU) +61 2 8007 6760 or (NZ) 0800 799 220
Tel: (Int'l) 1300 799 220

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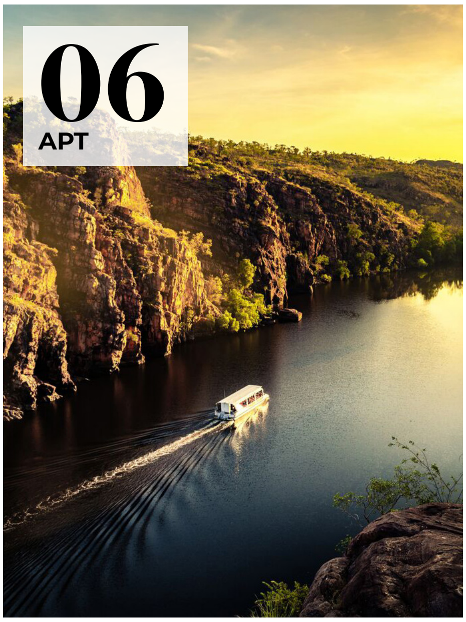

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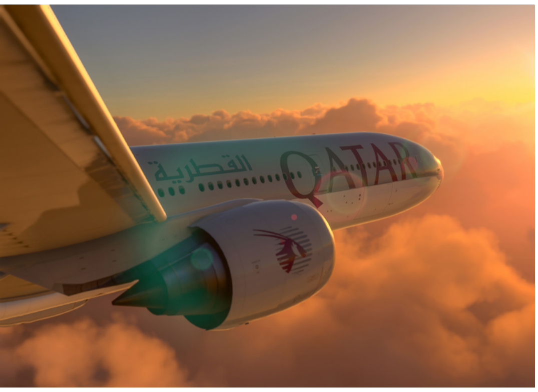
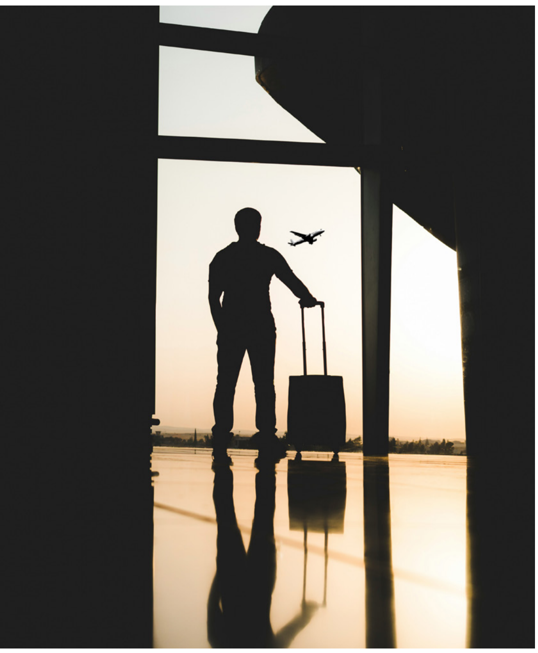




FEATURE

ANALYSIS: A year in review

From P&O's closure in Australia to the Aviation White Paper and the burgeoning partnership between QR and VA, 2024 was a big year in travel.

BY ADAM BISHOP AND MYLES STEDMAN

As 2024 comes to a close, *Travel Daily* Editor Adam Bishop and *Cruise Weekly* Editor Myles Stedman reflect on some of the biggest news stories of the year.

QR and VA strengthen partnership

After being rejected by the federal government to ramp up capacity in Australia a year earlier, Qatar Airways hatched a bold plan to shore up its presence in the local market through the back door.

In October, the partnership between Virgin Australia and QA was strengthened with news that QR intended to acquire a minority 25% equity stake in the Aussie carrier. If formally approved, the deal will provide more choice and likely lower airfares for Aussie travellers in a highly inflationary environment and also allow VA to re-enter the long-haul international market through a wet lease agreement.

At the time, VA CEO Jayne Hrdlicka said the acquisition would enable a "measured entry" into international flying from mid-2025. By November, the ACCC gave the airline the green light to start selling weekly return flights between Doha and Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. The new services will start operating in June 2025.

Effectively, the new partnership will challenge the dominance of Qantas' tie-up with Emirates.

Aviation reform

Another major story in aviation was the release of the highly anticipated Aviation White Paper, a well-overdue piece of policy advice that many stakeholders in travel felt was overdue to clean up the inadequacies in the aviation sector. Chief among the areas of concern were clearer rules relating to travel refunds in the event of delays and cancellations, the opaqueness around how the federal government allows international competitors launch in the market, as well as reform around slot management at Sydney Airport.

Many travellers and stakeholders in the sector had previously expressed what they felt was an increasing and pervasive influence Qantas was having on key government decisions. The recommendation to establish an independent aviation ombudsman to field consumer complaints and enforce a new Charter of Customer Rights in the event of cancellations and delays was largely well-received by the industry. »

From QR and VA's new relationship to the evolution of aviation, it's been a big year for travel.

Contiki was one of the TTC brands that Apollo acquired this year.

"DON'T BE TOO QUICK TO PREDICT WHAT APOLLO WILL DO."

The need for change was made clear for many, especially in light of the way Qantas and Virgin were banking up credits, the former being found guilty of selling flights that did not exist so that it could take the cash in exchange for credits also exacerbated a waning consumer trust. Reform of the way the country's largest airport allocated slots was also high on the agenda of change, with a bill passing the Senate in November to combat the scourge of slot hoarding.

The 80:20 use-it-or-lose-it rule also came under criticism, with carriers accused of scheduling flights and cancelling them as needed to keep competitors from accessing the hub. The defunct Bonza was among the system's many victims, with former CEO Tim Jordan stating that being locked out of Sydney did major harm to the business model. If more slots can be allocated to new international competitors, the hope is the greater choice for consumers will ultimately drive down the price of airfares.

Apollo purchases TTC brands

After more than a century of private ownership, the Tollman family made the sensational decision to sell 18 of The Travel Corporation's (TTC) marquee brands to US-based asset manager Apollo Funds for an undisclosed sum. Included in the deal were the major brands the Australian travelling public have come to know and love, including Trafalgar, Uniworld, Contiki, and Insight Vacations.

Discussing the motivation to sell the bulk of the TTC business to an outside asset manager after 104 years as a family-run affair, TTC Chairman Brett Tollman said the "time had come" to implement a strategic succession plan to take the business forward.

Apollo said that TTC's brands will be a great fit for its burgeoning asset portfolio given its previous experience growing other travel businesses.

Some in the industry worry that Apollo will break up the brands and diminish their heritage over time in pursuit of divestment profits. The investment company has a fairly long and established history investing in the travel sector, notably in major brands such as Sun Country Airlines, Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Oceania Cruises and The Venetian in Las Vegas.

But don't be too quick to predict what Apollo will do with its new blue chip TTC assets. One finance expert told *Travel Daily* off-the-record that Apollo often makes really big transactions and subsequent moves that are contrary to the direction of the market.

On a recent trip to Australia, TTC's new Chair Carl Leaver also told us Apollo's plan with TTC is to significantly invest in its new acquisitions, as well as sink for funding better systems, heavier marketing, more investment to propel the brands.

P&O makes bombshell announcement

If last year's announcement of Princess Cruises pulling out of its Melbourne home port – and Cunard Line leaving the country altogether – was cruising's 'day after tomorrow', June 2024 brought about the sector's Armageddon. Carnival Corporation announced on June 4 its plans to wind up the P&O Cruises Australia brand after almost 100 years, folding it into the company's flagship Carnival Cruise Line marque.

According to one employee who spoke to *Travel Daily*, the move to "strategically align" Carnival Corp's portfolio and strengthen its performance in Australia and the Pacific region was one the local sector should've anticipated for some time, as cheques cashed during the COVID-19 pandemic came due, and the cruise sector was forced to cut the fat. All of a sudden, P&O Australia was preparing for a March farewell to its loyal fans – less than 12 months away.

Miami's brutal rationalisation was a hard pill for the Australian cruise industry to swallow, which had taken P&O for granted for so long. Many even began to wonder if the clock was also ticking on year-round cruising in Australia.

However, for now, the plan is for P&O's Pacific Encounter and Pacific Adventure to begin sailing under the Carnival brand.

"We look forward to building on the history and heritage of P&O Cruises Australia by bringing some of our innovations to more cruise guests in the region," CCL President Christine Duffy said, in a press release handed down on D-Day. »

"We have challenges with cost across the board," CCL President Christine Duffy said on the closure of P&O in Australia.

"JUNE 2024 BROUGHT ABOUT THE [CRUISE] SECTOR'S ARMAGEDDON."

"While we plan to make some technology upgrades and other small changes to the ships, they will continue to be geared to the unique Australian market with a familiar feel and much of the same experiences for P&O Cruises Australia guests."

However, the following day, Duffy cut a far more serious figure when she spoke with *Travel Daily*. The Carnival chief confirmed the Australian cruise industry's greater fears, revealing the decision to integrate the P&O brand into her own line assures the best opportunity for the company to continue sailing Down Under at all.

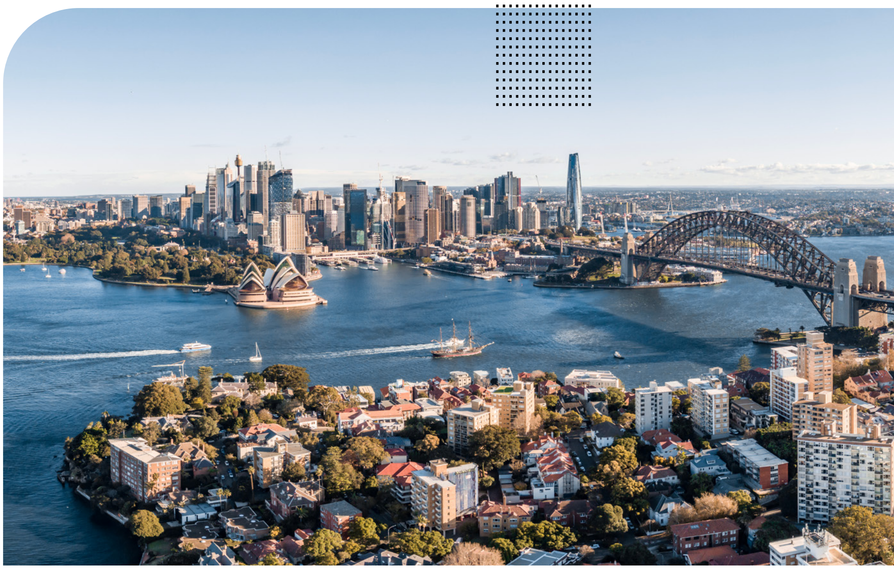
Conceding the "difficult" decision was not made lightly, she added the operating environment Carnival Corp was dealing with in Australia had made the standalone local brand "unfeasible" to run.

"We want to build on that history and heritage as we move forward by bringing new innovations and experiences over time...that's just not possible in the backdrop that we operate here in Australia," she said.

"We have challenges with cost across the board, fuel costs are up, currency is down, and across the supply chain, ports are increasing prices. We really had to figure out what was the best way for us to be more efficient, to leverage the scale the Carnival Cruise Line brand has."

The laundry list of challenges out of the cruise industry's hands – fuel costs, exchanges rates, and supply chain struggles – were supplanted with one self-made bogeyman which had been growing in the closet since well before the pandemic.

"More regulation creates more risk and more cost, and so those are big headwinds for us, and it also creates a lot of uncertainty for the operation in the future," she added, effectively leaving the Australian travel industry with some much overdue homework: stop being so damn hard to do business with.



A third cruise terminal for Sydney is still on the agenda.

Good news for cruise

June's bombshell announcement made the rest of the year feel like it had plenty of heavy lifting for the Australian cruise industry to inspire some good news.

Fortune would come in October, as the Government of New South Wales began to finalise the review of its Visitor Economy Strategy, as the government moved to firm the sector's importance to the state's visitor economy.

"The long-term future of cruise in NSW is very bright and our existing cruising facilities still have capacity to accommodate growth for years to come," a government spokesperson told *Travel Daily*.

NSW's Minister for Tourism John Graham would make this point even more acutely, at a lunch hosted by Business Sydney and Cruise Lines International Association, where he noted the cruise industry as being a major stakeholder that was consulted during the strategy's review. »

"'EXPERIENCE TOURISM' WILL BE KEY... CONNECTING TO THE CRUISE INDUSTRY'S *FEEDBACK OF THE NEED TO DEVELOP MORE ONSHORE EXCURSIONS AND EXPERIENCES."*

Food and wine experiences are plentiful in SA.

"Experience tourism" will be key, he noted, connecting to the cruise industry's feedback of the need to develop more onshore excursions and experiences.

"That focus will really be crucial to making sure that we're joined up between the regulatory changes [and] welcoming the ships here, to then smoothly making sure we're building up the experiences as people arrive," he said, adding the need for more assistance from the whole of government, from tourism and planning to transport.

Graham and the NSW Government also planted under the tree the gift the entire Australian cruise industry – particularly those in Sydney – wanted to unwrap: the confirmation that a third cruise terminal for the city is still on the agenda. The sector had been treated to scarcely little about a third port since the prior proposition at Yarra Bay was killed off last year. Everyone in cruise was only too happy to hear the hunt for a third berth in Sydney was still on.

"Port Authority is exploring alternate locations for a third terminal to cater for the expected long-term growth of cruise in NSW and has been engaging closely with the cruise industry. "[They are] well underway with this work and once completed will report back to the NSW Government on viable options," a spokesperson said.

A new era for cruise in SA

Perhaps Graham and the NSW Government were simply not looking to be outdone by their interstate neighbours, with South Australia just a month prior putting its hand up as arguably the most cruise-positive state in the commonwealth.

'The Festival State' played host to the Australian Cruise Association's annual conference this year, and opening the symposium, the state's Minister for Tourism Zoe Bettison made waves, announcing SA was set to launch a 'cruise attraction body' to entice more ships to its shores.

Bettison told *Travel Daily* the working group will consist of the South Australian Tourism Commission, Flinders Ports, and the Department of Transport & Infrastructure, and will also actively court participants from the cruise industry itself.

Bettison is confident the group will provide SA the opportunity to make up ground where it is lacking in its onshore offering.

"We want to be welcoming, and we want to be a place where you can test and try things as well," the Minister said. "We want to show that we're keen, we want to understand the industry more effectively, but more importantly, [we want them] to know what we have as a destination." »

Many were quick to point out Bettison's antithetical tone to her Victorian neighbours, which had spent much of the past year scaring cruise ships away with Melbourne's gargantuan port fees.

Bettison's number one aspiration is for the cruise industry to be taken seriously as a key economic driver for South Australia – music to the sector's ears. She told *Travel Daily* of her belief that cruise offers something for all parts of the state, with visits to Kangaroo Island and Port Lincoln, and expedition ships calling into Robe.

"We have this opportunity for very immersive experiences [and] we are number one for the nation [in food and wine], but connecting to nature is something people want to do, and we've got all of that here in SA," she said.

The governmental sign-off on cruise's importance to Australia made the sector feel exactly how it needed heading into wave season. Sentiment among the industry was that it had not just been heard, but validated, by governmental leaders around Australia – just as the private sector had begun to soften on its opportunity Down Under. Whether or not this will prove to be exactly what cruise needed is for 2025 to reveal. ••

Hopefully more cruise passengers will experience Kangaroo Island in SA in the future.

RESILIENCE AND *purpose*

Based on their presentation at *Travel Daily*'s new event Travel24 this year, Accenture cultural analysts share how Australians view the industry in 2024 - and where they're heading in the future.

BY MICHELLE NEWTON, HEAD OF CULTURAL FORECASTING AND VICTORIA LOUTAS, SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE, FIFTYFIVE5, PART OF ACCENTURE SONG

As 2024 comes to a close and we look forward to 2025, it's clear that travel and tourism are evolving faster than ever, driven by economic pressures, shifting consumer priorities, and what some are calling a 'permacrisis'. Global disruption has soared by 183% since 2019, impacting sectors from finance to travel. Yet amid this uncertainty, the travel industry has proven resilient, offering people not only a much-needed escape but also a meaningful way to reconnect - with themselves, each other, and the planet.

Travel as a form of resilience

Despite rising costs and economic anxieties, Australians are holding onto their travel plans, signalling the fundamental role of travel in people's lives. Travel is no longer seen as a luxury but as an essential for maintaining holistic well-being, nurturing relationships and providing a sense of adventure and renewal. In fact, over two-thirds of travellers feel they become their best selves while exploring new places. The 'travel at all costs' mentality is gaining momentum, as people find creative ways to prioritise travel over other expenses, even in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. A testament to this trend is the increase in 'holiday hacking', where travellers seek out cost-saving strategies like off-peak travel and using credit card rewards. Nearly 89% of Australians plan to use such hacks to make travel more accessible, while 43% prefer to take longer vacations, even if it means opting for more affordable accommodations or transport. Social media has played a significant role here, with travel hack content amassing millions of views, illustrating how travellers are adapting and finding new ways to fulfil their wanderlust.

Shifting from travel to wellbeing

As everything else feels out of their control, consumers are focusing on what they can manage - their health and well-being. This growing desire for balance is leading to a shift in travel, with more people seeking "wellcations" - vacations centred around wellness. This is a trend that reflects a growing desire to use travel as a tool for rest and mandatory self-care. Many are escaping the relentless pressures of daily life, choosing destinations and experiences that promote mental and physical health. »

Savvy travellers are swapping overcrowded Santorini for the lesser-known village of Paros.

“AS EVERYTHING ELSE FEELS OUT OF THEIR CONTROL, CONSUMERS *ARE FOCUSING ON WHAT THEY CAN MANAGE – THEIR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.”*

Sleep tourism has gained significant traction, especially following years of pandemic-induced ‘coronasomnia’. In response, many hotels are now offering suites designed specifically for rest and recovery, reflecting a shift from activity-packed getaways to serene, restorative experiences. With 58% of travellers now seeking sleep-focused retreats, it’s clear that vacations today are as much about rejuvenation as they are exploration.

Regen routes and responsible tourism

The urgent need for sustainable travel practices has never been more evident. With rising global temperatures and environmental threats, travellers are increasingly mindful of their ecological footprint, seeking out ‘regen routes’ or nature-positive tourism options. In fact, 75% of Australians want to travel more sustainably over the next 12 months, and many are choosing eco-friendly accommodations, visiting conservation areas and engaging in volunteer tourism.

Meanwhile, some governments are encouraging travellers to turn away from the environmental impact of air travel and the ‘chaotic skies,’ choosing railway travel instead. This trend reflects a broader consciousness about how travel can impact both the planet and local communities. In fact, 74% of global travellers report making more eco-conscious choices than in previous years, recognising that while tourism can enrich lives and economies, it must do so with the intent to rebuild and restore the environment.

The rise of dupe destinations and set-jetting

Another notable shift is the rise of ‘dupe destinations’, where travellers opt for similar experiences closer to home, avoiding the crowds and costs of major tourist hotspots. This trend resonates especially with Gen Z and Millennials, who prioritise authentic, affordable travel without compromising on quality.

For example, Taipei and Paros are gaining popularity as alternatives to Seoul and Santorini, appealing to younger travellers eager to have a similar experience without the cost and crowds.

Closely related is the ‘White Lotus effect’, or ‘set-jetting’, where TV shows and movies inspire travellers to visit filming locations. Recent research from FiftyFive5 found that over half of Australians now report TV shows and movies shape their travel choices, with places featured in series like White Lotus experiencing a surge in interest. Some travel apps even let users pinpoint iconic filming spots, transforming how people plan and personalise their journeys.

The power of cultural forecasting

Navigating future travel trend horizons requires a deep understanding of consumer behaviour and the turbulent cultural forces that drive it. Recognising that travel is an integral part of our identity as Australians and that it binds us to people and place, businesses that understand the motivations behind tomorrow’s travel trends are better positioned to respond to consumer needs in times of change.

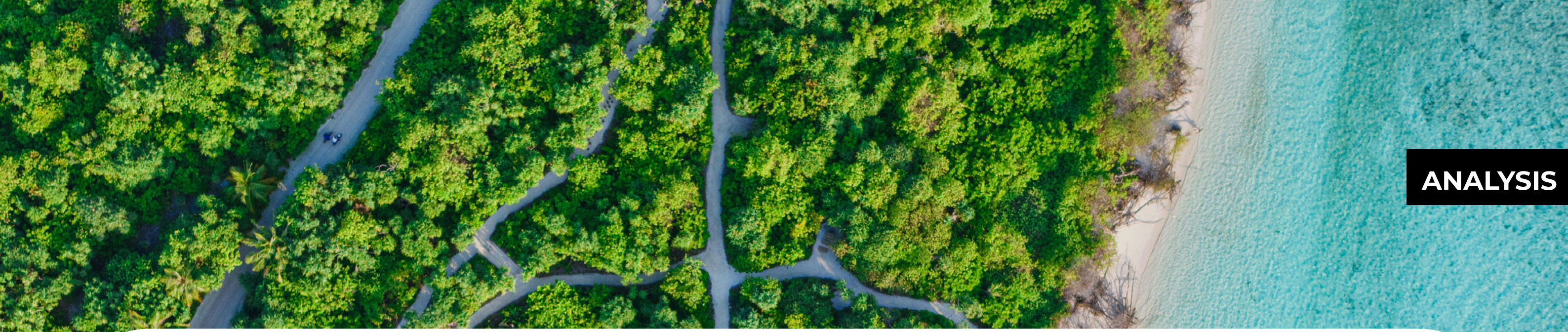
From ‘hush cations’ for burnt-out professionals combining remote work with relaxation, to rising demand for wellcations, the travel industry in 2025 is set to rapidly adapt to offer diverse experiences that meet new expectations. Cultural forecasting plays a crucial role in identifying these trends, enabling businesses to craft strategies that meet consumers’ evolving needs and behaviours.

The past year’s challenges have, in many ways, reinforced the travel industry’s foundation. Australians’ commitment to travel, even through economic hardship, highlights its enduring value as a source of connection, resilience, and personal growth. Looking forward, the industry has a unique opportunity to shape a positive future by embracing evolving trends and continuing to adapt to culture that is in a state of flux. ••

WINNERS AND LOSERS

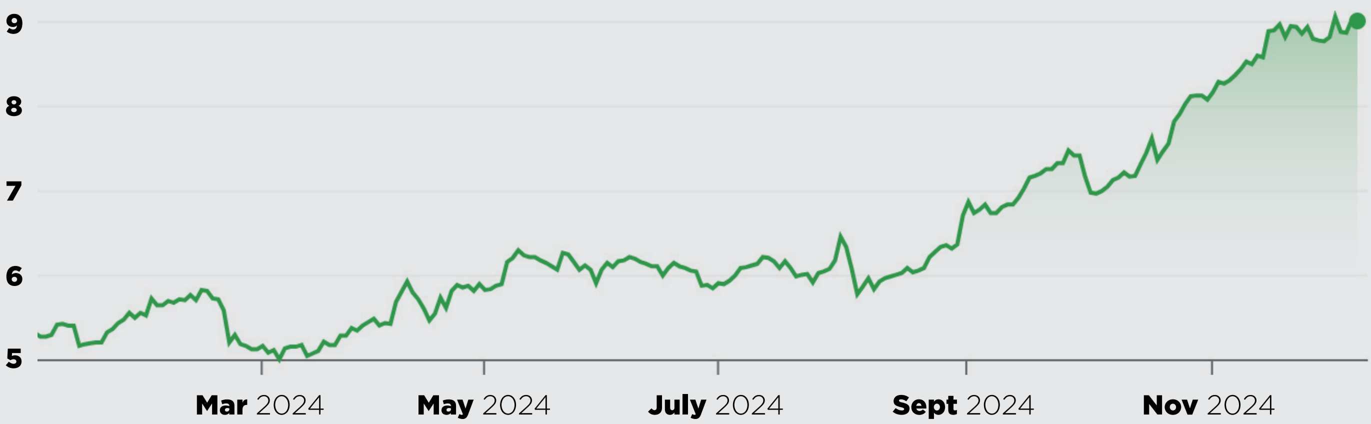
It's been a rollercoaster year for some of Australia's biggest ASX-listed travel businesses (some far rockier than others). We take a look at how they performed in 2024 and where they succeeded - and struggled.

BY MATTHEW LENNON



QANTAS AIRWAYS LIMITED

9.04 AUD
+3.69 (68.88%) YEAR TO DATE
9 DEC, 2024



MKT CAP: 13.68B | **52-WK HIGH:** 9.14 | **52-WK LOW:** 5.01

QANTAS (ASX: QAN)

Qantas Group's 2024 announcements painted a mixed picture of recovery and lingering challenges.

While domestic and international flying rebounded strongly and fleet upgrades announced, cracks remain visible.

The airline faced a $100 million penalty after ACCC proceedings over misleading flight cancellations, alongside a $20 million customer remediation programme - a costly fallout from its handling of post-COVID disruptions.

After new CEO Vanessa Hudson took the helm in September 2023, following Alan Joyce's departure, Qantas prioritised initiatives to restore customer trust. These included introducing better customer service policies, baggage tracking technology, refreshed in-flight menus, and more consistent cabin upgrades.

Qantas accelerated its fleet renewal, adding new aircraft, including Jetstar's A321LR and QantasLink's A220s, which were praised for improved efficiency and customer comfort. The group also launched new international routes, such as Perth-Paris, and continued preparations for Project Sunrise, with plans for non-stop flights to New York and London from 2026.

Jetstar's international network expanded with a focus on short-haul destinations, while Qantas Loyalty introduced major programme upgrades, such as Classic Plus rewards, providing members greater value and flexibility. These strategic moves demonstrated Qantas' commitment to innovation and customer satisfaction.

Interestingly, Qantas' stock crossed over the $9 mark a couple of times late in the year. First on 19 Nov, it hit $9.05 before falling back under $9 again. Then on 03 Dec, it was back up to $9 again.

According to Alice Shen, Portfolio Manager at investment firm VanEck, the airline was the best performing ASX-listed travel business, generating a 64.25% increase to its share price for the year.

> ***"QANTAS PRIORITISED INITIATIVES** TO RESTORE CUSTOMER TRUST."*

"The country's largest airline has benefited from improvements to its domestic route margins following the exit of local competitors Rex and Bonza," she says.

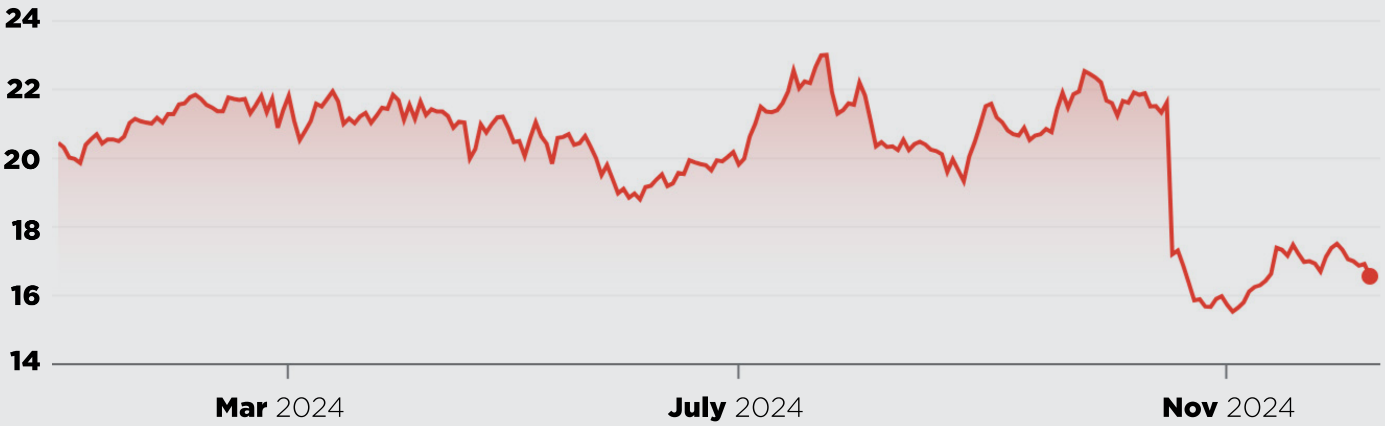
"Compared to its pre-COVID capacity levels in 2019, Qantas has been operating at slightly higher capacity (103%) for its domestic segment and at lower capacity (94%) for its international segment, reported as at 30 August 2024." »

FLIGHT CENTRE TRAVEL GROUP

16.70 **AUD**

-3.76 (-18.39%) YEAR TO DATE

9 DEC, 2024



MKT CAP: 3.70B | **52-WK HIGH:** 23.06 | **52-WK LOW:** 15.43

FLIGHT CENTRE TRAVEL GROUP (ASX: FLT)

Flight Centre Travel Group made strategic moves in 2024 to strengthen its global presence and expand its offerings. Key developments include acquiring Cruise Club UK to accelerate growth in the booming cruise sector and bolster its UK leisure market position.

This aligns with FCTG's strategy to scale its portfolio, enhance margins, and expand internationally. The company also delivered record total transaction value (TTV) of $23.74 billion in FY24, surpassing pre-pandemic levels, while maintaining a leaner workforce and focusing on profitability. Investments in technology, productivity, and digital solutions highlight FCTG's commitment to innovation and sustainable growth.

In 2024, FCTG demonstrated strong progress across its corporate and leisure travel divisions. Key growth was driven by its corporate business, which saw a 44% increase in underlying profit, supported by the successful execution of strategies like regional restructuring and the "Grow to Win" initiative. This helped secure significant new accounts, particularly in the SME sector in the US.

> ***"THE COMPANY DELIVERED*** *RECORD TTV OF $23.74 BILLION."*

On the leisure side, FCTG focused on expanding its high-margin luxury and independent travel brands, with initiatives like Envoyage and Scott Dunn strengthening its position in emerging markets. Tech advancements, including the adoption of AI and enhanced digital platforms, also improved customer experiences and operational efficiencies. These efforts reflect the company's adaptability and its strong recovery trajectory in a competitive and evolving travel industry.

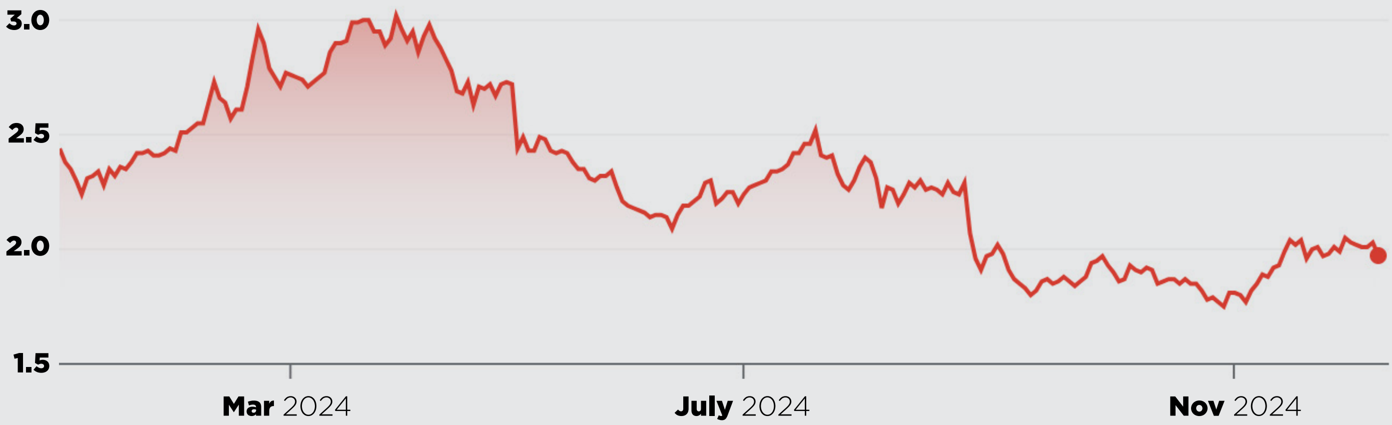
"Flight Centre performed relatively well in 2024, albeit nowhere near its pre-COVID glory days, but its share price saw a sharp drop after it announced its October trading update to the market," notes Shen.

"The Group indicated modest growth to its TTV due to lower airfares and softer revenue margin, prompting its share price to decline by 12.55%."

Shen says that the back end of the year could possibly be more forgiving for the business, as it expects profits to be "heavily second half weighted" due to the seasonally busier trading period and increased corporate travel activity. »

HELLOWORLD

2.00 AUD
-0.44 (-18.24%) YEAR TO DATE
9 DEC, 2024



MKT CAP: 325.15M | **52-WK HIGH:** 3.05 | **52-WK LOW:** 1.74

HELLOWORLD (ASX: HLO)
Helloworld Travel has made bold strides in 2024, underpinned by its $70 million acquisition of Express Travel Group (ETG).

Completed in mid-2023, this strategic move significantly enhances HLO's scale and capabilities across Australia and New Zealand. ETG's established networks in air ticketing, retail travel, and wholesaling, combined with HLO's proprietary ResWorld technology, position the company to support travel agents more effectively and cater to a resurgent global travel market.

HLO's decision to retain ETG's CEO, Tom Manwaring, ensures leadership continuity, while its expansion initiatives - including equity rewards for franchisees - highlight its commitment to modernising operations and reinforcing market competitiveness.

In 2024, Helloworld Travel achieved significant growth, largely driven by the successful integration of ETG, which was acquired in late 2023. This merger allowed Helloworld to streamline operations and leverage ETG's established network to enhance its offerings across corporate and leisure travel services. The integration has already shown tangible benefits, with the company reporting a 117% increase in underlying EBITDA and a sharp rise in revenue.

> ***"IN 2024, HELLOWORLD TRAVEL ACHIEVED** SIGNIFICANT GROWTH."*

The company's focus on professional travel advisors continued to pay off, as both leisure and corporate travel segments saw strong demand. Helloworld's expansion into the cruising market, along with its growing network of travel agents, further boosted performance. Additionally, the company made substantial investments in training and development, with over 400 travel consultants undergoing training at the Helloworld Travel Academy .

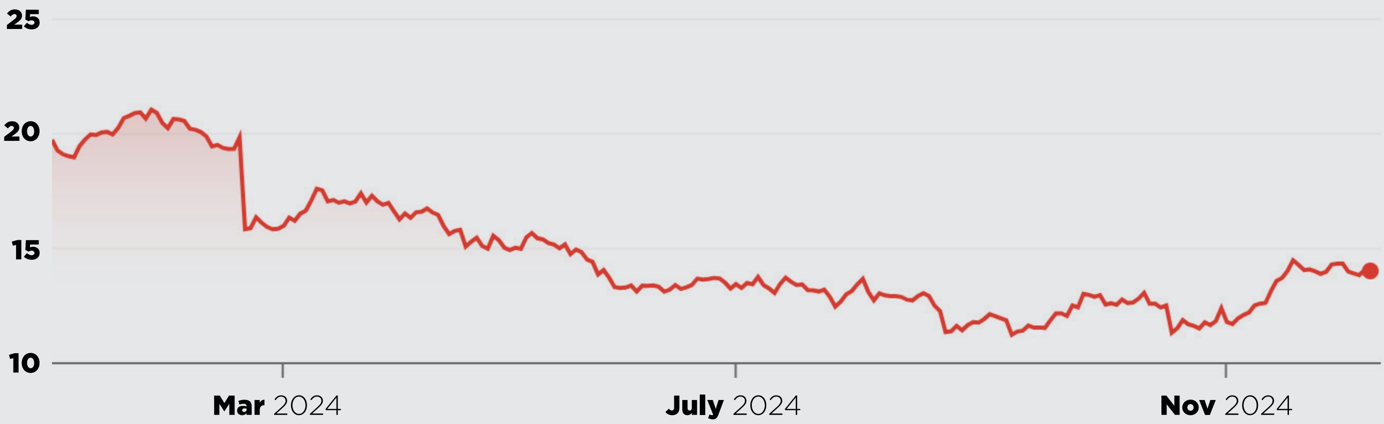
The positive financial results, alongside an expanding footprint and improving operational efficiencies post-ETG integration, position Helloworld for sustained success. The company remains well-placed to capitalise on the increasing consumer reliance on travel agents, especially as the global travel industry continues to recover.

"In its most recent trading update, Helloworld's management noted that the period of booming travel volume following the pandemic lockdowns was likely in the rearview mirror," observes Shen.

"This commentary, which also observed that its inbound and outbound travel within Australia had recovered 90-100% and 85-95% in New Zealand, saw the travel distribution company's share price to tumble by 10.43% for the year." »

CORPORATE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

14.03 AUD
-5.72 (-28.98%) YEAR TO DATE
9 DEC, 2024



MKT CAP: 2.05B | **52-WK HIGH:** 21.49 | **52-WK LOW:** 10.80

CORPORATE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT (ASX: CTD)
Corporate Travel Management (CTM) has solidified its position as a global leader in business travel with impressive performance in FY2024. The company reported a 10% increase in TTV to $12.1 billion for its corporate segment, surpassing pre-pandemic levels, even as the sector itself lags behind full recovery.

Key growth drivers included strategic wins in the US SME sector and enhanced digital capabilities through proprietary platforms like the FCM Platform and Corporate Traveller's Melon.

CTM also focused on integrating acquisitions, such as Helloworld's corporate and entertainment travel businesses, which have contributed to EBITDA growth in Australia and New Zealand. Technology advancements, such as the AI-powered Scout virtual assistant, have driven operational efficiency and improved customer satisfaction .

Looking forward, CTM is optimistic about scaling benefits from process automation and digitisation, which are expected to reduce costs per transaction and further strengthen its profitability and market share globally.

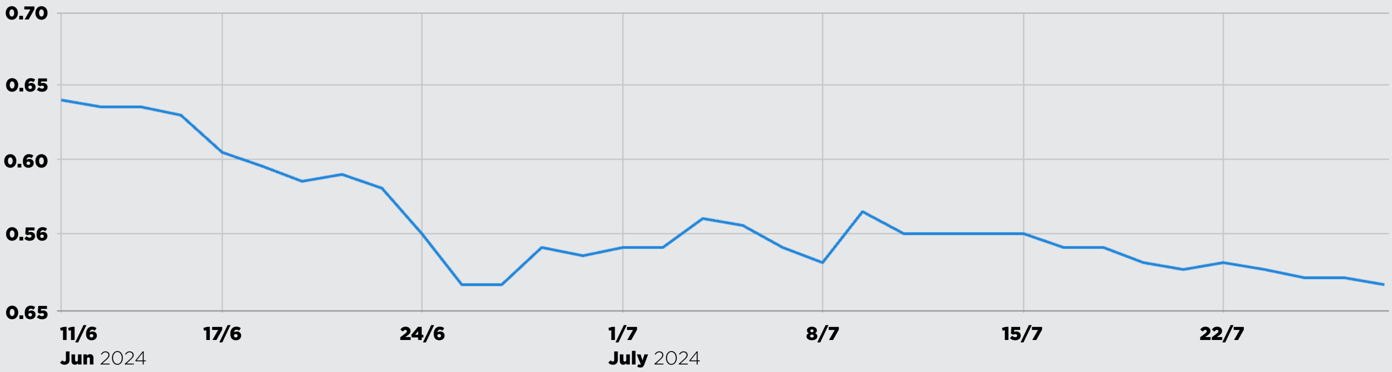
"CTM has remained resilient overall, benefiting from increased demand for corporate travel and their global presence," observes financial expert Austin Rulfs from Zanda Wealth.

> ***"THE COMPANY REPORTED A 10%** INCREASE IN TTV TO $12.1 BILLION."*

"However, they too have felt the impact of inflationary pressures on operational costs, even as they worked to expand their offerings." **»**

REX AIRLINES

0.56AUD
26 JULY, 2024



MKT CAP: 64M | **52-WK HIGH:** 0.92 | **52-WK LOW:** 0.55

REX AIRLINES (ASX: REX)
Regional Express Holdings Limited (REX) imploded in late July 2024, entering voluntary administration after months of financial strain and internal turmoil.

The collapse, blamed partly on poor strategic decisions, grounded its domestic Boeing 737 fleet and left regional operations in disarray. Boardroom conflicts had simmered earlier in the year, with key stakeholders clashing over the company's direction. These disputes undermined stability and contributed to REX's inability to adapt to competitive pressures.

While regional Saab 340 services were preserved, the administration revealed Rex's overextension in attempting to dominate larger domestic routes, a move many labelled as reckless. Observers criticised the board for failing to safeguard its core regional customers, betraying its reputation as a lifeline for remote communities. The fallout raised broader questions about governance failures, leaving employees, creditors, and passengers scrambling for answers amid widespread disruption.

"Rex took a heavy hit after its cost-cutting strategy to expand its intercity routes proved unsustainable, with its share price declining 34.88% for the year," observes Shen.

> ***"REX TOOK A HEAVY HIT AFTER ITS** COST-CUTTING STRATEGY."*

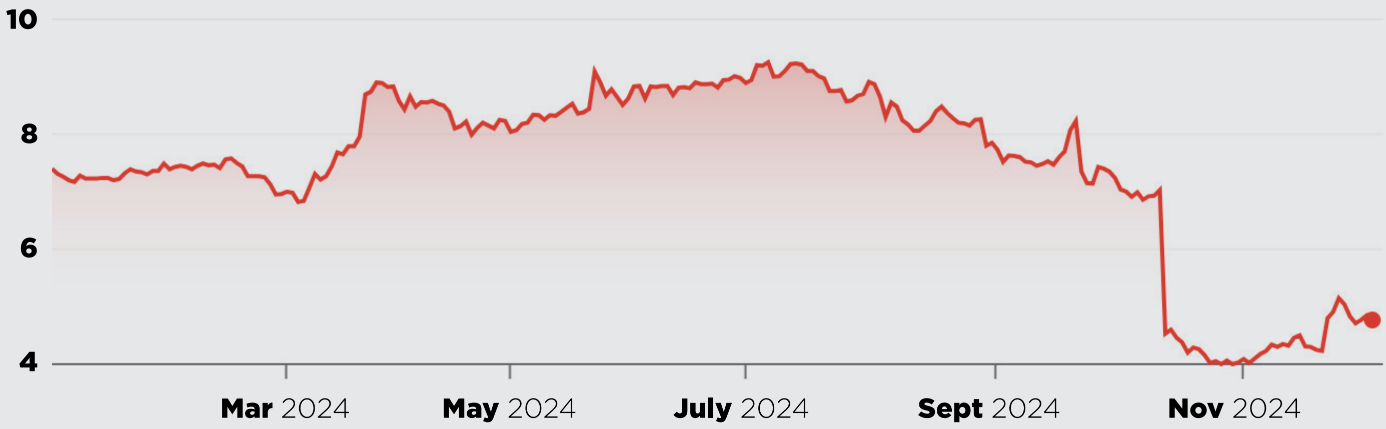
"The troubled regional airline ceased trading on the ASX on 26 July 2024 and entered into voluntary administration. In November, the company announced that the federal government would put in $80 million to keep the regional routes running while it waited for the voluntary administration period to extend to 30 June 2025." »

WEBJET

4.78AUD

-2.63 (-35.47%) YEAR TO DATE

9 DEC, 2024



MKT CAP: 1.87B | **52-WK HIGH:** 9.72 | **52-WK LOW:** 3.94

WEBJET (ASX: WJL) AND WEB TRAVEL GROUP (ASX: WEB)

In a pivotal move that reshaped the travel industry, Webjet and Web Travel Group finalised their demerger, sending both companies on their own unique growth journeys. The decision, which unfolded over several months, was driven by a shared vision of independence to better navigate the post-pandemic travel market.

The original Webjet Limited was renamed Web Travel Group, focusing on its B2B travel marketplace, WebBeds, while the new Webjet Group assumed responsibility for consumer-facing businesses like Webjet OTA, GoSee, and Trip Ninja. This restructuring aimed to simplify operations, enhance strategic focus, and provide tailored growth opportunities.

Webjet, known for its consumer-facing online booking platform, has since pivoted towards strengthening its digital offerings. Over the past few months, the company invested heavily in AI and automation, aiming to provide customers with more seamless and personalised travel experiences.

Early days for the relisted Webjet have been a little rocky, with TTV of $752 million compared against a corresponding period prior to the demerger, while the company also now faces legal trouble as the ACCC takes action over misleading airfare prices in which it allegedly failed to disclose booking fees in its minimum price.

Meanwhile, Web Travel Group redirected its efforts towards B2B operations, reinforcing its relationships with travel agents and wholesalers. By separating from Webjet, the group has positioned itself as a leading wholesale travel distributor, benefiting from the ability to make quicker, market-specific decisions.

Industry analysts noted that the demerger has created opportunities for both entities to innovate and grow independently. The travel industry will be watching closely over the coming year to see how each company capitalises on this fresh start.

> ***"EARLY DAYS FOR THE RELISTED** WEBJET HAVE BEEN A LITTLE ROCKY."*

However, Shen is unsure of the future of the company, describing its year as "a bumpy ride".

"After its share price peaked in July, it has been in steady decline as it finalised the split of its corporate and consumer businesses. For the year to date, Web Travel Group's share price has declined 21.9%, and analysts forecast that its margin may remain under pressure as global airfare prices come down," she says. ••

2024
IN REVIEW

A LOOK BACK AT THE BIGGEST STORIES OF THE YEAR

JANUARYNEWS

NORWAY TO PHASE IN NET-ZERO IN ITS FJORDS FROM 2035

The year started off with a sustainability-themed bang for the cruise sector, with Norway announcing it will phase in net-zero regulations in its fjords from 2035.

The proposal will require cruise ships currently using low- and zero-carbon fuels to transition to zero emissions from 2026 to 2035.

Cruise Lines International Association - whose members have targeted 2050 for net-zero sailing - hopes to ensure good access to new fuel solutions so its members' ships can continue to sail in the fjords. ••

Study: Airlines cancel for *profit*

Airlines are strategically cancelling flights to maximise profits, a report commissioned and released by ATIA revealed.

The study conducted by former Qantas economist Dr Tony Webber focused on slot misuse at Australia's major airports and found the '80-20 rule' was grossly unfit for purpose.

The report noted that a 5% drop in travellers due to flight cancellations could lead to an estimated $405 million loss in domestic tourism revenues from Australia's top 10 airports.

In fact, cancellations at Sydney Airport alone could cost Australia's domestic tourism balance sheet between $143 million and $572 million each year, with the top 10 airports collectively racking up annual losses of $4.8 million in aeronautical revenue.

For travel advisors, the report found the primary cost incurred was time spent reorganising trips including rebooking hotels and other services, resulting in lost revenue opportunities. ••

TOURISM LEGENDS HONOURED

Legends of the Australian travel and tourism industry were recognised for their service to the sector in the 2024 Australia Day Honours List. Founding Board Member of the Tourism Council WA and current Mandurah Tourism Chair, Patricia Strahan claimed the highest honour, named a Member of the Order of Australia.

Congratulations also to the following people for outstanding and ongoing careers working to advance travel and tourism:

Penelope Fowler AM: Current Tourism Australia board member
John Irving AM: Former South Australia Tourism Commission Board Member
Sheila McHale AM: Former WA Tourism Minister
Lynette Adamson AM: Former Tourism Western Australia board member
David Robson OAM: Former CEO, Aviation Theory Centre
Colin Dunn OAM: Founder and current Executive Officer, Bureau of Accessible Tourism
Janette Hyde OAM: President, Port Macquarie Tourism Association
Jennifer Lambert OAM: Former CEO, National Tourism Alliance
Paul Rogers OAM: Former Director, Tourism Hawkesbury
Elaine Sandow OAM: Founder and Chairperson, Milparinka Heritage and Tourism Association
John Tulloch OAM: Former President, Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Association. ••

EXP SECURES CBA FUNDING

Experience Co secured a new $42.7 million corporate debt facility with CommBank (CBA).

The facility comprises a market rate loan facility maturing in three years, and an equipment loan facility maturing in five years, and will provide Experience with additional working capital and funding for organic and acquisition growth. It will also allow refinancing of Experience Co's existing corporate debt facilities, replacing the company's remaining $20 million debt. ••

FEBRUARY NEWS

NEWS

FCTG REBOUNDS FASTER THAN THE INDUSTRY

It was a big month for FCTG. First, the group reported a 15% growth in TTV to $11.3 billion for the six months to 31 December, representing the company's second strongest start to a year in its history.

Both corporate and leisure TTV performed strongly, increasing by 16.8% and 18% respectively, with both areas of the businesses outpacing the broader travel sector's recovery.

The picture was also bright on the revenue front, with FCTG posting a 28% increase on the same period last year to $1.28 billion, while underlying EBITDA also improved by 98.9% to $189.14 million.

"At a time when discretionary budgets are typically tightening, travel remains an outlier and a priority spend for many," FCTG Managing Director Graham 'Skroo' Turner said at the time.

Then, the company launched Envoyage, a new division for independent travel agents and agencies, which will also look to branch out into extensions specialising in corporate and luxury travel. ••

Virgin cancels second Aussie season due to Red Sea crisis

This month, *Virgin Voyages* cancelled its second Australian season due to the Red Sea crisis. Virgin, which at the time had not even made it through its inaugural Aussie season, said the conflict "puts unacceptable risks for safe passage through the region for our sailors, crew, and vessel".

The cruise line left the door ajar for the future though, and said it was currently working through options to return to Australia and the Asia Pacific region "once regional repositioning opportunities become more tenable".

The news was a harsh reminder of just how acutely global affairs impacts Australia's cruise sector. ••

QANTAS, AIRNZ REVEAL LOWERED RESULTS

In was reporting season and Qantas' figures revealed its 1H24 earnings were 13% lower than the same period in FY23, as fares and capacity continue to normalise.

Statutory profit after tax for the period was $869 million, also down 13%, while statutory earnings per share dipped by 4% to 52c.

"Having the financial strength to keep investing is key and that makes the strong performance that all business units had in the first half so important," Qantas Group CEO Vanessa Hudson said.

Meanwhile, Air New Zealand may have failed to back up its highest-ever result from last year, but still delivered EBITDA of NZ$185 million for 1H24.

"We knew this year would be tougher than the last, when pent-up levels of demand and industry-wide capacity constraints drove one of the strongest financial results in our history," said Air New Zealand Chair, Therese Walsh. ••

JOURNEY BEYOND SEPARATES FROM HORNBLOWER GROUP

Rail operator Journey Beyond confirmed it will "return to being a freestanding company" after the cessation of trade by sister company American Queen Voyages.

Both businesses were part of US-based Hornblower Group, under the ownership of private equity firm Crestview Partners, which acquired Journey Beyond about two years ago.

Journey Beyond CEO Chris Tallent said the Australian business "intends to formally separate from the Hornblower Group, and whilst it remains subject to a number of consents and approvals, we look forward to our planned continued ownership by Crestview, as one of their portfolio companies".

Tallent noted the announcement had no impact on Journey Beyond's operations, which continue to enjoy record demand and strong trading across its range of experiences. He noted that Journey Beyond has a separate capital structure in Australia and its own sources of funding.

Journey Beyond also committed to assisting any Australian-based guests or travel agents impacted by the shutdown of American Queen Voyages. ••

MARCH NEWS

INTREPID DOUBLES DOWN

Purpose-led travel brand Intrepid revealed ambitions to double its customers to 600,000 and achieve revenues of $1.3 billion over the next six years, as part of its newly launched 2030 strategy.

Unveiled at the company's flagship Global Summit, the ambitious plan will see Intrepid pursue new verticals, including in publishing and accommodation, CEO James Thornton said.

Intrepid also signed a new deal with book publisher Hardie Grant to publish a series of travel books over the next three years.

"At Intrepid, the problem we are solving is so much more than a holiday," Thornton explained.

"We provide a sense of community and connectedness in an increasingly isolated and disconnected world.

"If we are successful in our 2030 strategy, Intrepid will give back a record amount to environmental and social causes that we believe in as a business."

Part of the giving plan ethos will see the operator donate 1% of all revenue directly to its various charity initiatives. ••

CRUISE LEGEND CELEBRATED AT CLIAS

New Zealand cruise legend Craig Harris from ISS-McKay was inducted into the Hall of Fame at the 21st celebration of the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) Cruise Industry Awards in Sydney in March.

Harris, an industry veteran in New Zealand, has held his role at the cruise services company since 2008, and also founded Cruise New Zealand in 1994, fostering collaborations between ports, cruise operators and the local tourism sector.

"Craig has not only shaped but significantly advanced the cruise sector in our region," CLIA Chair Ben Angell said.

"He is synonymous with innovation, dedication, and leadership, and his efforts have been pivotal in transforming NZ into a premier cruise destination." ••

AMEX GBT ACQUIRES CWT

This month, American Express Global Business Travel announced its definitive agreement to acquire CWT.

The acquisition will see CWT customers have access to GBT's software and services for travel and expenses.

The transaction value of approximately US$570 million is on a cash- and debt-free basis, and is subject to certain assumptions and purchase price adjustments, GBT noted.

It will be funded by a combination of stock and cash, and is expected to close in the second half of the year, subject to the satisfaction of certain conditions, including the receipt of certain regulatory approvals. ••

CATO TOURING ACADEMY LAUNCH

The Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) unveiled a new Touring Academy to improve travel agents' knowledge of land-based tour operators and wholesalers.

Modelled on the education formula used by CLIA Australasia, CATO's Academy keeps travel sellers up-to-date with the latest trends in touring - especially those who are new to the industry.

"The Academy is going to play a role in filling that void and from our side help retailers elevate their skills," Jardine believes. "[It] will also play its part to support business owners who are potentially being forced to bring in newcomers to the industry."

Designed to be flexible and self-paced, participants of the Touring Academy will become 'CATO Certified' upon the accrual of 200 points earned in various modules across topics like destination training, famils and more.

The platform was created in partnership with learning software provider ABSORB, giving CATO members the ability to build white label training content. ••

APRIL NEWS

NEWS

BONZA ENTERS VOLUNTARY ADMINISTRATION

Embattled airline Bonza entered voluntary administration, after repossession of its planes in Australia. All flights were forced to ground, with planes remaining on the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast and Melbourne Airport.

Thousands of passengers were left scrambling, with Virgin Australia, Jetstar and Qantas Link offering to repatriate them for free where possible.

By Jun, Hall Chadwick concluded Bonza's directors should have appointed an external administrator "much earlier", with Bonza likely to have been insolvent at least two months prior.

And by Oct, it was revealed that the collapsed carrier owed close to $170 million - almost $40 million more than Hall Chadwick originally estimated.

Liquidators were only able to recover $556,000 from Bonza's bank accounts. ••

No pre-COVID return for Vic yet

Significant further investment is needed from the Victorian Government to return the state's tourism economy back to where it was pre-COVD, claimed a Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) budget submission.

"We are still sitting in the number three spot overall for total tourism spend in the country, relinquishing our number two position behind NSW to Queensland during the pandemic, and we are unlikely to regain that spot without the Victorian Government going hard at driving demand for our destination," CEO Felicia Mariani argued.

"To now sit at $37.8 billion in total spend from visitors to our state is an achievement we should be proud of, but the job is not done, and Victoria cannot afford to take its foot off the pedal as we revel in the glory of what has been achieved."

Victoria's international visitor recovery continues to lag behind the national performance at just 73% of pre-pandemic levels, compared to NSW (96%) and Qld (94%), coupled with slowing visitation to its regional areas. The VTIC is calling on the next state budget to address the slide. ••

KOGAN TRAVEL MAKES A COMEBACK

Kogan Travel is back and this time it is returning as a new deals aggregator that it believes will "undercut some of travel's biggest names".

This is the third iteration of Kogan Travel, which began in 2015, then teaming up with Luxury Escapes in 2022 as part of another push in travel.

Kogan Travel deals are exclusive to Kogan FIRST members, with discounts on offer of between 10% and 20% across hotels, holiday packages and activities.

Founder Ruslan Kogan told News Corp that his company's two million customers provide "huge leverage" when negotiating deals with travel suppliers. ••

AURORA WELCOMES THIRD SMALL SHIP

B Corp certified cruise line Aurora announced a new vessel for 2025, the *Douglas Mawson*, named after the Australian geologist, Antarctic explorer, and academic.

Douglas Mawson's debut season will also mark Aurora's return to Australia and its first cruises to East Antarctica in 15 years, with new itineraries to include a 'Mawson's Antarctica' voyage, which will retrace the explorer's trip through the Antarctic Circle. It will depart from Hobart and serve as her inaugural cruise. ••

QANTAS' FINE YEAR

After a lengthy investigation and initial denial of any wrongdoing, Qantas reversed course and admitted its deceit in the 'ghost flights' saga uncovered by the ACCC.

In short, the Federal Court case lodged by the competition watchdog in Oct 2023 accused Qantas of continuing to sell tickets for hundreds of flights that had already been cancelled.

Reaching a deal with the competition watchdog, the Flying Kangaroo committed to a $100 million slap on the wrist, plus allocated a further $20 million for which some 86,000 affected customers would receive as compensation for inconvenience.

Payments ranged from $225 for a domestic flight and $450 for international, with customers needing to apply rather than being offered automatic payment.

While this payment was locked in later in the year, the ACCC said at the time the penalty should send a strong warning and deterrent to the rest of the corporate sector. ••

Cruiseabout celebrates major store opening

Flight Centre Travel Group's (FCTG) first new Cruiseabout store in five years opened its doors in Perth this month.

Located in Westfield Whitford City, the shop came two weeks after the launch of FCTG's CruiseHQ wholesale division, marking the company's commitment to cruise.

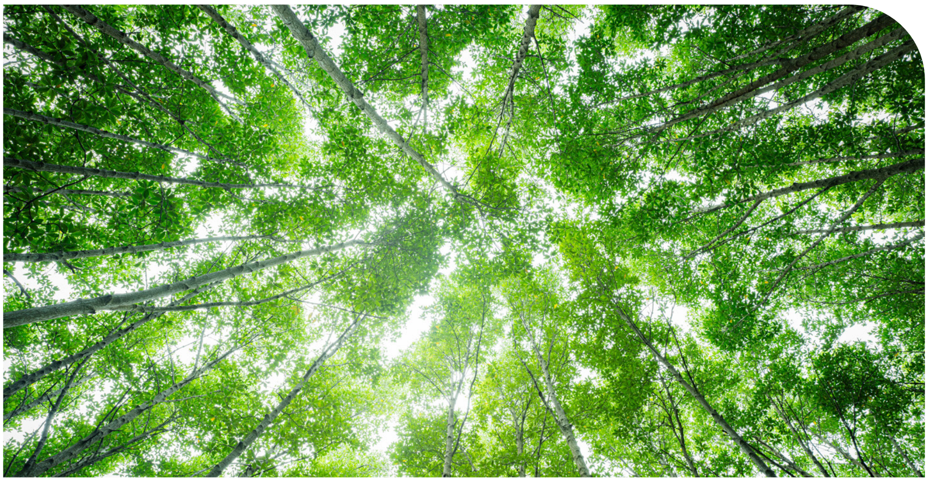
"Today's store opening in Perth signals the beginning of an exciting chapter for (FCTG) as we invest in our strategy to grow market share in the cruise sector," said Global Leisure Chief Executive Officer, James Kavanagh. ••

ALL HAIL *QUEEN ANNE*

Cunard Line debuted its new ship *Queen Anne* to much pomp and pageantry.

It was the first new 'Queen' that the 184-year-old British line had introduced in almost 15 years - and it celebrated as such, with thousands of spectators lining the shore in Southampton to watch the ship sail away on her inaugural cruise, a seven-night voyage to Lisbon.

"*Queen Anne*'s maiden voyage signals the dawning of a new era in luxury ocean travel," President Katie McAlister said. ••



AUSTRALIA COMMITS TO SAF FUTURE

After years of procrastination, Australia will finally start to realise its potential and natural advantage in the burgeoning Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) industry and net-zero emissions by 2050.

While only the first steps on a very long road have been taken, the 2024 Federal Budget included $1.7 billion in funding over 10 years for a 'Future Made In Australia' pledge, which will support the SAF industrialisation and commercialisation using vast locally-produced resources.

The Budget also included a $18.5 million allocation for a certification program, which will signal Australia's intention to play a major role in the growing low-carbon fuels ecosystem.

Qantas is already ahead of the game, investing heavily in public and private partnerships with businesses large and small as they build the supply chain and test and refine SAF to meet its own environmental targets.

These partnerships include projects involving feedstock supply chains, efficient transport, refineries and technological advancement to help Australia take its rightful place as an SAF world leader. ••

JUNE NEWS

P&O Cruises *sails into history*

In news that sent shockwaves around the industry, Carnival Corporation announced the retirement of the iconic P&O Cruises Australia brand.

The British-born, American-owned, Aussie-shaped cruise line will be folded into the company's higher-profile Carnival Cruise Line brand in March 2025.

CCL President Christine Duffy told *Cruise Weekly* the decision will assure the best opportunity for the company to continue sailing Down Under, opening Australia's eyes to the fact a year-round cruise presence in our country is no given.

As part of a strategic plan to boost capacity and lower costs, Carnival Corp announced the plan to sunset the P&O Australia brand effective from Mar 2025. Two of P&O's three ships – *Pacific Adventure* and *Pacific Encounter* – will be reflagged as *Carnival Adventure* and *Carnival Encounter* – and will join *Carnival Splendor* and *Carnival Luminosa* to double the flagship brand's presence in Australia.

The third ship in P&Os trio – *Pacific Explorer* – will be sold and leave the fleet.

Carnival Corporation CEO Josh Weinstein said the restructure was made to deliver greater efficiency in the Pacific region due to higher operating costs and smaller population.

After some minor technical and branding changes, the expanded fleet will see *Carnival Encounter* cruise year-round from Brisbane, joined each summer by *Carnival Luminosa*. In Sydney, *Carnival Splendor* and *Carnival Adventure* will operate year-round from Sydney. ••

Overhaul of the *ATIA Board*

A new generation of leadership has been ushered onto the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) Board, with three legends of the industry announcing their intentions to step down in less than a week.

ATIA said farewell to Consolidated Travel Group CEO, Spiros Alysandratos, MTA Travel Founder, Roy Merricks, and Express Travel Group CEO and ATIA Chairman Tom Manwaring after a combined 28 years on the Board and many decades of industry service between them.

Later that same week, ATIA introduced its new Board, with long-serving ATIA Director and Travellers Choice CEO, Christian Hunter, elected as Chairman. Helloworld's Rohan Moss, Globus MD APAC Gai Tyrrell and Intrepid Travel Managing Director, Brett Mitchell, all bring new energy and direction to the table. ••

GREECE TACKLES OVERTOURISM

The local blow to cruise was shortly followed by an international setback for the sector, with the government of Greece announcing it is set to introduce restrictions on the industry in its country.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said the "time has come" to restrict cruise ships, and consider limits or restrictions on the number of cruise visitors, with restrictions to start as soon as next year.

Chris Theophilides, CEO of Athens-based Celestyal Cruises, said his line supports the restrictions, but Greece & Mediterranean Travel Centre Managing Director Halina Kubica told *Cruise Weekly* she believes they will have little effect. ••

VISITOR SPEND HITS 99%

This month, Australia's recovery from the pandemic was almost complete, and earlier than anticipated too, with visitor spending levels hitting $10.2 billion or 99% of pre-COVID levels in the first quarter of the year.

According to data from the International Visitor Survey, tourists clocked up 87.5 million bed nights – which was 105% of pre-pandemic levels due to fewer visitors staying longer and increasing the average length of stay from 32 nights in 2019 to 37 nights in 2024.

New Zealand was Australia's highest source market in terms of overall numbers, while Vietnam was the fastest growing source market, with a 50% spike in visitor numbers from 2019. ••

JULY NEWS

REX ENTERS ADMINISTRATION

Rex Airlines entered voluntary administration, sparking urgent calls for government intervention to protect regional aviation.

With 2,000 jobs at risk, the Transport Workers Union (TWU) warned that Rex could become another victim, like Bonza, which collapsed earlier this year.

TWU National Secretary Michael Kaine criticised the unregulated aviation market, arguing that carriers like Rex are being undermined by industry giants like Qantas.

At the time of entering administration, Greens leader Adam Bandt called for the federal government to purchase Rex or take an equity stake to safeguard jobs and keep vital regional routes running.

With Rex grounding its Boeing 737 fleet, its regional Saab 340 flights remain operational. The federal government continues to assess how it can help Rex continue to serve regional Australia, pumping $80 million into the carrier to ensure these communities remain served, while administrators continue to restructure the business and prepare it for sale. ••

Battle lines drawn on PAY ON DELAY BILL

As Australia's aviation sector grapples with the fallout from the pandemic, a heated debate unfolded from multiple sides over how to handle flight delays and cancellations.

The federal government's Airline Passenger Protections (Pay on Delay) Bill 2024, which aims to enforce mandatory compensation for passengers, sparked a strong reaction from industry bodies.

The Board of Airline Representatives of Australia (BARA) labelled the government's approach as "incredibly simplistic", arguing that delays are often caused by factors beyond the airlines' control.

BARA Executive Director Stephen Pearse told *Travel Daily* that airlines are committed to customer service, offering compensation and rebooking when disruptions occur, and warned that the legislation fails to account for the unique challenges faced post-COVID.

Meanwhile, the Transport Workers Union pushed for stronger regulatory oversight. It argued that without addressing long-standing issues like understaffing and service decline, financial protections alone will not improve the passenger experience.

As the bill progressed through Parliament, the aviation industry found itself at a crossroads between customer compensation and sustainable, long-term improvements. ••

WENDY WU COMBINES LAND AND CRUISE

Wendy Wu Tours unveiled its first fully inclusive Cruise & Tour holidays collection - exclusively revealed by *CW*. The collection launched with a selection of nine itineraries available to book. It combines cruises with Wendy Wu's land tours, in a strategic move to leverage the company's expertise in land travel, and address the increasing desire for seamless, multifaceted holidays.

Wendy Wu noted growing demand for comprehensive travel experiences offering both relaxation and cultural immersion.

The tour operator will partner with Celebrity Cruises, Royal Caribbean, and Azamara to deliver the inaugural collection. ••

THE TRAVEL CORPORATION LEAVES TOLLMAN FAMILY OWNERSHIP

After more than a century of family owneship, The Travel Corporation (TTC) sold 18 of its marquee brands, including Trafalgar, Uniworld, and Contiki, to US-based Apollo Global Management for an undisclosed sum.

The deal marked the end of an era for the Tollman family, who had run the company since its founding in 1920.

TTC Chairman Brett Tollman explained that the sale was part of a broader succession plan to position the business for future growth amid rising global demand for travel experiences.

Under Apollo's ownership, TTC's portfolio is set to undergo significant investment, with plans for enhanced marketing, technology, and operational improvements.

Apollo also expressed interest in further consolidating the fragmented travel sector, exploring acquisitions that could complement TTC's strengths in land touring and river cruising.

New TTC Chair, Carl Leaver, highlighted the potential for growth, promising that while changes were ahead, the company's core offerings would remain largely the same. ••

JOYCE DOCKED OVER $9 MILLION

Many stakeholders cheered on a decision by the Qantas board to dock former CEO Alan Joyce more than $9 million, citing severe reputational harm caused by mistakes made during the final years of his controversial tenure.

The polarising aviation executive departed the business earlier than planned in the face of growing discontent around the sale of ghost flights and sketchy credit policies, with Qantas' leadership ruling Joyce should forfeit $9.23 million worth of shares and incentive bonuses because of the fallout.

While there were no findings of deliberate wrongdoing, the review determined that mistakes were made by the former leadership that correlated with major customer service issues and brand damage.

Outside of dubious policies around credits and sales practices, Qantas was also previously accused of playing a role in persuading the federal government to reject a bid by Qatar Airways to significantly expand local capacity in Australia.

While in a Senate hearing months before his early exit, Joyce admitted Qantas put a case forward to reject Qatar's bid to roll out new services, but he strenuously denied the charge of coercion.

Joyce argued that Qantas needed to be protected against the foreign carriers owned by rich governments, which had in theory unlimited cash reserves, making it an uneven playing field to compete.

While he may have helped convinced the government, it did not wash with very many Australian travellers.

If Qatar were to be approved, it would have led to increased capacity, lower airfares, and greater choice for Aussie travellers. ••

NSW Government commits to cruise

A month after handing out the contract for its White Bay shore power project, the New South Wales government doubled down on its commitment to the cruise industry, as it announced the state's upcoming Visitor Economy Strategy is set to acutely recognise the value of the sector.

Despite alarm about cruise being left out of the initial announcement of the Strategy, the government quicky confirmed it would indeed be acknowledged in the final plan.

The government also clarified the proposal for a third cruise terminal in Sydney is still alive, with a location being sought, despite silence on the matter since the Yarra Bay tender was killed off last year. ••

AVIATION WHITE PAPER DEMANDS INDUSTRY DOES BETTER

A new Aviation Industry Ombuds Scheme with the power to enforce better consumer standards from 2026 was just one of the key recommendations made by the highly anticipated Aviation White Paper.

The industry had been under intense scrutiny for over a year when the report dropped, especially in light of court cases brought against Qantas by the ACCC, a lack of transparency around new competitors, and a problematic slots system at Sydney Airport, to name just a few of the mainstream gripes.

Central to the new Ombuds Scheme was a need to better address traveller recourse on the issues of refunds and credits.

The call for major reforms of Sydney Airport's slot system will make it harder for carriers to sit on empty capacity and keep competitors out, with a stricter 'use it or lose it' policy to be implemented.

Bonza CEO Tim Jordan had stated in a Senate hearing that he did not even bother applying for access to the country's busiest airport because he was told by an unnamed source at the hub that he had virtually no chance of gaining approval. ••

AUGUST NEWS

NO TURKISH DELIGHT FOR SABRE

In a big shock to Australian travel agents looking to sell more Turkish Airlines tickets, Sabre revealed it had failed to ink a distribution agreement with the Middle Eastern airline.

The two parties were unable to agree on terms, effectively severing ties from 01 September regarding traditional EDIFACT and NDC.

At the time of the development, Turkish Airlines was tight-lipped, however Sabre stated it was disappointing that the airline was "not equally committed to achieving an agreement".

Sabre added it was key a new deal with TK maintains the Sabre GDS channel as a content source, as expressed by its customers.

Negotiations have continued in the background for months but there is still no resolution in sight.

Only a week later, *Travel Daily* wrote about a raft of issues Australian travel agents have experienced with the new challenger carrier, including poor customer service and a spate of involuntary seat reassignments.

Turkish Airlines had only recently launched flights to Sydney and Melbourne. ••

CRUISE'S HEAVYWEIGHTS DEBATE SECTOR'S NEXT 24 MONTHS

Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) hosted its largest-ever Cruise360 in August, with around 1,000 people in attendance.

Managing Director Joel Katz, opening the conference, asserted the industry's aim to secure the right regulatory settings, which will allow it to "thrive into the future in a well-managed way".

Katz said CLIA is working together with its strong community of stakeholders and supporters as it aims to battle some of the key issues cruise is facing in the region.

CLIA is hoping for an even bigger turnout next year, as the conference transitions back to Brisbane for the second time in three years. ••

SEPTEMBER NEWS

INTREPID MAKES WAVES

Intrepid Travel divested its stake in Chimu Adventures, with the latter declaring a "new phase of growth" with investment from leading shipping company, Nordic Hamburg.

While Intrepid no longer has an ownership interest in Chimu, the operator said it would remain a key distribution partner and continue to offer polar journeys.

Chimu and Intrepid had entered into a three-season charter of Ocean Endeavour to Antarctica, with the ship to operate under the Intrepid brand for the third and final time during the upcoming 2024/25 season.

"We are proud of what Intrepid achieved in Antarctica, but now with our ship lease ending, it is the right time for us to re-evaluate our approach," Intrepid Travel CEO James Thornton said.

Chimu's new investment from Nordic Hamburg is a key step in its long-term plan toward lowering the environmental impact of its operations, along with welcoming lower emissions vessel, Ocean Nova, to its fleet in March 2026.

"We're thrilled to join forces with Nordic, leveraging their shipping expertise to expand our polar offerings and advance low emission technology in this industry for the future," said Chimu MD, Chad Carey.

The brand is also preparing to expand into the North America and European markets. ••

NCL UNVEILS *NORWEGIAN LUNA*

Norwegian Cruise Line unveiled, *Norwegian Luna*, its latest Prima Plus-class ship.

Luna will be a sister to *Norwegian Aqua*, and debut in March 2026, sailing seven-day Caribbean voyages from Miami. The ship will accommodate approximately 3,550 guests, boasting an overall 10% size and capacity increase from *Norwegian Prima* and *Norwegian Viva*.

The 21st ship in Norwegian's fleet will kick off her inaugural Caribbean season with two western itineraries to Roatan, Costa Maya, Cozumel, and Harvest Caye, before sailing seven-day cruises with calls to Eastern Caribbean destinations, including Puerto Plata, Tortola, St. Thomas, and Great Stirrup Cay. ••

Webjet splits *into two*

In a watershed moment for Webjet, shareholders approved plans for the company to spin off its consumer arm and create two independent ASX-listed businesses.

Just over 97.7% of shareholders voted in favour of the demerger proposal, while 97.68% also gave flagged name changes the green light to proceed.

The existing listed company now owns WebBeds and was renamed Web Travel Group, while the spun-off consumer arm housing Webjet OTA, GoSee and Trip Ninja, changed it name to Webjet Group Limited.

Shareholders retained their existing holding in Web Travel Group, and eligible shareholders received one Webjet Group Limited share for every Web Travel Group share they hold on the record date.

Webjet decided to divide its fortunate after its B2B WebBeds business continued to be the prime driver of revenue for the business, with MD John Guscic conceding the growth opportunities between the consumer division and the B2B arm had become increasingly divergent.

The B2C division had been posting moderate growth, with Katrina Barry returning to the travel industry to spearhead future expansion opportunities. ••

SEPTEMBER NEWS

MS ESTRELA MAKES HER DEBUT

APT Travel Group (ATG) celebrated this month the maiden voyage of its own purpose-designed and built river ship *MS Estrela*, which sailed on the Douro in Portugal in August, officially beginning the company's next chapter, separate from former partner AmaWaterways.

"This ship marks a significant milestone for ATG as we elevate our offerings for our guests," CEO David Cox said.

"*MS Estrela* is the first Douro river ship we have built to our own specifications, and it is undoubtedly the best river ship on the Douro for Australians."

The ship features one of the largest swimming pools on offer on the Douro, as well as a sun deck, featuring an outdoor bar with loungers and a golf putting green.

MS Estrela features in itineraries for APT and Travelmarvel during her maiden season, including APT's 14-day 'Douro Delights' with Madrid and Lisbon, and Travelmarvel's 11-day 'Lisbon with Douro Discovery'.

ATG owns and operates *MS Estrela*, after the company divested its relationship with river cruise operator AmaWaterways in March. The two had previously partnered on Europe's rivers for 20 years. ••

WHITE BAY FACES TWO-YEAR DELAY

September also saw the announcement of news expected by the cruise industry for some time – the delay of Sydney's shore power project, slated for White Bay Cruise Terminal.

When the NSW Government announced the contract, it revealed the terminal will be completed by 2026 – a delay of two years. Powercon, the winner of the $20 million contract, will begin work on the on a charger at berth 5 by the end of 2024. The project is estimated to reduce emissions associated with the White Bay precinct by more than 4,000 tonnes every year. ••

KOALA: A NEW PLAYER ENTERS

A cryptic LinkedIn post that kicked off a flurry of speculation in the Australian industry over the potential of a new homegrown challenger was tempered in early September.

Koala Airlines finally returned a call from *Travel Daily* for further clarity, conceding it had "a tall mountain to climb" before it could release any firm plans.

"We never anticipated the level of interest it has generated, and we remain committed to keeping our plans under wraps until they are fully developed and finalised," Chief Operating Officer Sally Spring said.

"The enthusiastic response is a testament to the public's eagerness for a fresh approach in the aviation sector," she added.

Koala Airlines remains in the process of meeting regulatory requirements and finalising aircraft leasing agreements, however, any specific details regarding routes, aircraft, target markets remain somewhat of a mystery.

Later in September, Koala added even more intrigue to the market by stating that when it launches, it would implement a 'no flight, no pay' policy.

Clearly, the start-up brand is attempting to tap into the well of discontent shared by many Aussies about airlines deploying misleading tactics around refunds in instances of delays and cancellations.

Koala said the model would consist of funds for airfares being placed into a trust account until the flight by the passenger is taken. ••

OCTOBER NEWS

First Nations tourism victory

In a huge milestone for First Nations tourism, the federal government announced it will establish a permanent Indigenous national tourism peak body dedicated to growing the sector.

The move will see the government work closely with First Nations representatives across Australia to boost participation and economic opportunities for Indigenous people in the tourism industry. The First Nations Visitor Economy Partnership will be funded for an initial two years through the National Indigenous Australians Agency's Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

"We know that domestic and international visitors are increasingly seeking unique First Nations experiences as part of their travels," Federal Tourism Minister Don Farrell said. "This presents great opportunities for First Nations tourism and job creation in Australia's regions and First Nations communities." ••

ATIA Accredited
Australian Travel Industry Association

ATAS RE-BRAND

ATIA announced it will retire the ATAS brand in exchange for a more unified brand approach.

Revealed at the inaugural Beyond Borders Travel Summit, the ATAS branding will be updated to ATIA Accredited, a move that CEO Dean Long said will transition the gold standard of travel accreditation toward a single, recognisable identify.

"[It] is more than just a rebranding, it is about creating a seamless and trusted travel ecosystem that benefits the entire travel community," Long said.

"This move will allow us to engage more effectively with consumers and build long-term trust, ensuring that our members remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

The ATAS announcement forms part of a new five-year strategy across its member services and accreditations pillars, and more broadly under a new long-term ATIA strategy, Project A30.

Long stressed that the brand pivot in no way means ATIA is retiring the ATAS program, which will continue to evolve. ••

HELLOWORLD ANNOUNCES NEW EVENTS DIVISION

Helloworld Limited boss Andrew Burnes unveiled My Way Travel & Events, the company's new events division, at its annual general meeting in October. The brand plans to become a "premier experience integration provider for ticketed sports and entertainment events globally".

The news came at the same time as the company's latest figures, which were promising. The travel giant's wholesale and inbound businesses were up in Australia and New Zealand, with demand remaining high – particularly among the older demographic – despite cost-of-living pressures putting a dampener on splurging.

The company also reported strong demand for outbound travel to Bali, Vietnam and Japan.

"We are committed to the long-term future of travel agents and brokers and can see first-hand the demand for these services shows no signs of lessening," Burnes enthused. ••

QANTAS FRONTS $100M PENALTY FOR MISLEADING TRAVELLERS

October was not a great month for Qantas, which was slugged with a $100 million fine from the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) for misleading consumers.

The carrier was found to have breached Australian Consumer Law after it offered and sold tickets for flights it planned to cancel, without promptly informing existing ticket holders.

According to the ACCC, Qantas admitted it misled the public about more than 82,000 flights that were scheduled to depart between May 2022 and May 2024. The consumer watchdog also acknowledged that the airline cooperated early to resolve the proceedings.

"This is a substantial penalty, which sets a strong signal to all businesses, big or small, that they will face serious consequences if they mislead their customers," ACCC Chair Gina Cass-Gottlieb said. ••

NEWS

NOVEMBER NEWS

$200M UPGRADE FOR SYD

Sydney Airport T2 will get a major $200 million upgrade that will see passengers go from kerbside to airside in less than 15 minutes, Chief Executive Officer Scott Charlton announced.

It is the first upgrade for the T2 domestic terminal in 30 years and will be completed by the end of next year.

"It is the terminal which services Jetstar, Virgin and Rex, and is the biggest domestic terminal in the country with more than 17 million passengers every year."

The makeover will include new, next-generation security screening, new bag drop technology, new kiosks, plus a better layout to improve flow.

"These changes will boost our security screening rates by 113%, increase our hourly baggage processing by 300 bags per hour, and when this upgrade is formally completed by the end of next year, we expect our passengers to go from the kerbside to the airside in less than 15 minutes," he said. ••

FCTG MAKES FIRST FORAY INTO BRANDED INSURANCE

FCTG launched a new range of branded travel insurance products, bookable through Flight Centre, Travel Associates and Cruiseabout in Australia, with other markets to launch in the coming months.

The new range of products include: Flight Centre Travel Insurance Powered by Europ Assistance; Travel Associates Travel Insurance Powered by Europ Assistance; and Cruiseabout Travel Insurance Chartered by Europ Assistance

"We believe this is a world-class travel insurance offering for protection and peace of mind, and ultimately this will mean a better overall holiday experience for our customers," FCTG Global Leisure CEO, James Kavanagh, said.

The launch of Flight Centre Travel Insurance coincides with a new-look Captain's Pack, FCTG's value added protection, which is offering a 5% discount on FCTG Insurance available in Value, Plus and Cruise tiers. ••

VA WINS AND LOSSES

Etihad Airways' codeshare and bilateral frequent flyer partnership with Virgin Australia will come to an end in June, the United Arab Emirates' flag carrier confirmed.

The carrier said the decision "reflects a divergence in the strategic direction of the respective airlines", with its Middle Eastern competitor Qatar Airways announcing it intends to take a 25% stake in Virgin.

Passengers will no longer be able to book Virgin-operated flights through Etihad's booking channels once the termination takes effect, nor will they be able to earn Guest Miles on Vifin flights.

At the end of the month, the ACCC gave the preliminary green light for both airlines to commence selling 28 weekly return flights between Doha and Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth & Sydney. ••

HURTIGRUTEN ACQUIRED BY INVESTMENT CONSORTIUM

Hurtigruten announced this month that it had been acquired by a consortium of existing investors, who pledged to contribute hundreds of millions to the cruise line.

The funding will underpin Hurtigruten's next chapter, completing the brand's split from its expedition-focused sister marque HX.

The new investment of approximately €110 million in long-term funding will support the businesses' future growth, with the transaction expected to close in January.

The new ownership group will include existing investors Arini Capital Management, AlbaCore Capital, and Barings, with the move to also significantly reduce the outstanding debt of the company by more than €1 billion. ••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SEE YOU IN 2025.