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Wet leases drive Alliance

THE ability to react quickly to air capacity demands and a strong on-time performance record were listed as key growth drivers for Alliance Aviation Group's profit surge in the first half of the 2023/24 financial year.

In an update to investors this morning, the charter business posted a statutory profit before tax of \$37.7 million, up from \$9.5 million recorded in the same period last year, while revenue also increased by \$235.4 million to close to \$300 million.

The bulk of the revenue growth was generated by its wet lease business, which grew by 106% to \$128 million, fuelled largely by Qantas operating 22 out of a possible 30 E190s during the half.

A further four aircraft options have been activated by the Flying Kangaroo for the second half of the current financial year and the first half of FY25.

"Contracted wet lease agreements continue to increase

month-to-month and have pleasingly more than doubled over the last year," newly-minted CEO MD Scott McMillan said.

The Alliance chief also pointed to smart business acquisitions as a driver of the pleasing results, including the ability to purchase 100-seat aircraft in advance of operational demand in the thriving FIFO market.

In the second half of the 2023/24 financial year, the company plans to deploy added wet lease capacity for FIFO clients, lease seven E190s, focus on cost control and invest in new tech to support growth. *AB*

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features six pages of the latest travel industry news including **Business Events News**, a cover wrap from **Journey Beyond** and a full page from **Regent Seven Seas Cruises**.

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UNTIL 29 Feb, travellers can take advantage of a free two-category suite upgrade and a reduced 7.5% deposit with Regent Seven Seas Cruises.

The luxury cruise line is also offering up to 50% discounts on a range of selected sailings.

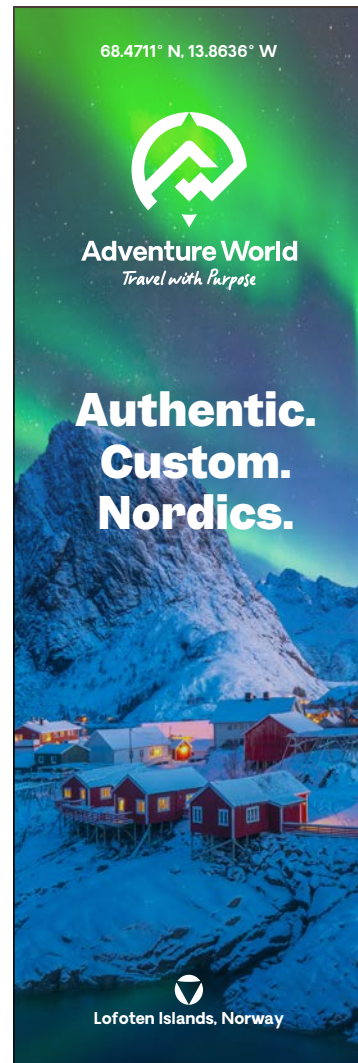
See the [back page](#) for details.

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Trilogy debut client

NEWLY established Trilogy Hotels (**TD** 14 Dec 2023) has landed its first high-profile client in 2024, announcing the Schwartz Family Company will partially adopt the independent hotel management model in Australia.

The deal will see Trilogy manage operations for more than 1,000 rooms across four of the Schwartz Family Company's hotels in NSW and the ACT, including Mercure Sydney, Ibis Sydney World Square, Mercure Canberra and Fairmont Resort Blue Mountains.

"This long-term agreement is a true meeting of the minds, we each share a passion for the hotel industry and understand what hospitality can achieve when everyone is playing to their strengths," Trilogy Hotels CEO Scott Boyes said.

VA cements GC future



VIRGIN Australia has signed a new 10-year agreement with Queensland Airports Limited which will secure the carrier's future in being able to operate flights from Gold Coast Airport.

The latest agreement is strategically important for VA's growth ambitions given its well-hyped submission to add capacity between the Gold Coast and Bali later this year.

Rights to secure added capacity on the coveted Bali route are currently being fiercely contested with rival Qantas, with the ACCC coming out in support of VA only last month, stating that seats given to VA "would appear to be more conducive to fostering a competitive environment and a broader distribution of capacity than the proposal from Qantas".

Virgin Australia CEO, Jayne Hrdlicka, said VA has an important role to play in providing more choice for passengers in the region.

"The Gold Coast is among our most popular destinations for

leisure travellers and we regularly increase capacity during the holidays to give our passengers more opportunities to visit," Hrdlicka said.

The carrier first launched flights between Sydney and the Gold Coast in 2001, and now operates up to 50 flights a day between the Gold Coast and Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Adelaide and Indonesia. **AB**

Hrdlicka is **pictured** with Queensland Airports Limited CEO Amelia Evans.

Intrepid educates

INTREPID is offering students in Melbourne new scholarship opportunities and mentoring sessions as part of an agreement with hospitality training provider William Angliss Institute.

The latest tie-up builds on previous collaborations which included the tour operator conducting guest lectures about sustainable travel.

Intrepid will also offer exclusive discount for current students on select tours and sponsorship of a range of graduation awards.

"We have over 30 years' experience in responsible and sustainable tourism to share with students and look forward to seeing the positive contributions they will make to our industry in the future," Intrepid's GM of Purpose Sara King said.

Zheng joins MCB

THE Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB) welcomed James Zheng to the role of Regional Director for North Asia and China.

Most recently he was the Director of the LA Tourism & Conventions Board's Shanghai office, and will be based at the Victorian Government Trade and Investment Office in Shanghai in his latest role - more Business Events news on **page five**.

Local SAF funding needed: TTF

AUSTRALIA needs to safeguard the future vitality of the tourism sector by investing more funds in the development of its own sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), the Tourism & Transport Forum (TTF) Australia believes.

Speaking in Canberra yesterday, TTF CEO Margy Osmond implored the Federal Government to allocate more money for local SAF manufacturing in its next budget, as an increasing number of travellers here and abroad seek greener air travel options.

"We applaud the Federal Government for making real progress and giving focus to this issue through the establishment of the Jet Zero Council...however we need to keep prioritising this and address the concerns of Australian travellers who want a greener future for aviation," Osmond argued.

TTF's chief added that Australia is running the risk of being left behind other developed countries such as United States, the UK, Singapore, Japan and Canada.

"The UK plans to build at least five commercial SAF plants by 2025 but so far Australia has none although three are currently under discussion," she said.

Supporting the call was a recent TTF survey which found that 86% of Australians would support the development of a local SAF industry to lower the emissions of travel and "possibly" make overseas travel less expensive.

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QF hikes impacted inflation

THE Federal Department of Treasury should hold a follow-up review to the current Department of Transport examination of anticompetitive behaviour in the aviation sector.

That's the conclusion of a report handed down yesterday by the The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), which looked at unfair pricing practices across multiple sectors in Australia.

Among the findings listed for the aviation industry was the claim that Qantas fare increases over the three months to Dec 2022 were so large they produced a sizable impact on inflation.

The ACTU report suggested that "Qantas aggressively raising airfares" moved the needle of inflation by as much as 25% of the increase felt during the quarter as it appeared in the ABS CPI measure.

While Qantas was pinned as the primary culprit, the report

indicated that Virgin Australia also contributed to heightened inflation via high priced tickets.

The ACTU also called for the current inquiry to ensure it intensely reviews and removes anticompetitive restrictions on the allocation of airport slots, as well as better enabling overseas airlines to serve Australian travellers on international routes.

Airport fees also came in for heavy scrutiny, with the ACTU supporting previous calls from the ACCC for greater price regulation at aviation hubs across the country, which the report stated "as a natural monopoly are enabled to overcharge" when prices are unregulated.

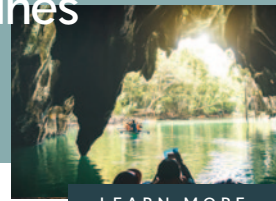
"These calls have always been rejected [by the Federal Government] seemingly with weak reasons," the report stated.

"It is recommended that the ACCC recommendations for airport control be adopted." AB

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Expedia and chill

EXPEDIA Group has become the first global advertising partner to sign on to Netflix's new ad-supported plan throughout 2024.

The online travel platform said the new agreement will assist in furthering its global expansion ambitions, with Netflix able to reach a whopping 23 million monthly subscribers globally.

Finnair weighs in

WHILE they are not the first carrier to do it, Finnair has caused a social media storm by announcing it will start weighing passengers to assist with aircraft balance calculations.

The airline is running the new boarding process on an anonymous opt-in basis and has pledged that all pax data will only be used for safety purposes.

Air NZ ran a temporary version of its own weigh-in scheme last year (**TD** 31 May 2023), which sparked a similar online outrage.



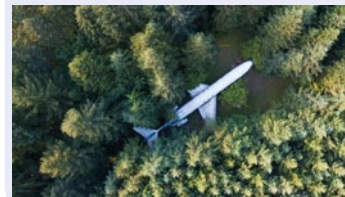
Window Seat

FROM above, it looks like a lost jet has been found but alas, this Boeing 727 is somebody's home.

Perched in the forests of Hillsboro, Oregon, is the abode of retired electrical engineer, Bruce Campbell, who has spent 20 years and nearly US\$250k converting the jet from a flight capable aircraft to a residence.

While only the fuselage is in use, the wings act as a balcony and access is via the rear stairs.

Campbell spends half his year living here and the other half in Japan, where he is converting a Boeing 747 into a second home.



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WSI road upgrades

THE Property Council of Australia is urging the NSW Govt to widen roads serving the future Western Sydney Int'l Airport following the release this week of a Master Plan for the surrounding city of Bradfield.

The Council's Western Sydney Regional Director, Ross Grove, said business demand to relocate to the Aerotropolis is at "a record high" but that infrastructure must be of a suitable size to ensure the region's growth plan is realised.

"Our industry is advocating for the upgrade of key roads to ensure the new airport is supported by a thriving industrial, freight and logistics precinct — rather than the cow paddocks that exist today," Grove said.

The draft Master Plan lays out a staged approach to a space five times the size of Barangaroo and details all aspects of a new city including transport corridors, residential and commercial blocks, parks and open space.

Members of the community are invited to have their say before the deadline of 04 Mar.

Adina to Cherside

TFE Hotels will introduce its Adina Apartment Hotels brand to Cherside in Brisbane's inner north in 2025.

In addition to 148 rooms, the new hotel will feature an all-day restaurant, cafe and bar, lobby lounge, meeting facilities, fitness centre and an advanced rainwater harvesting system.

Flight disruptions to stay

A SURVEY of airline and airport executives has shown a majority believe flight disruptions of any kind will remain at an elevated level for the foreseeable future.

According to a new report from Amadeus titled '*Rethinking how to manage disruption in aviation*', more than half of senior aviation leaders polled said their companies are experiencing more disruption than in 2019.

According to flight data provider Infare, flight disruptions starting at schedule changes and scaling up to include cancellations and major delays are 300% above historical norms, with large parts of the airline industry plagued by an ongoing skills shortage against a sustained surge in demand.

In the survey, airlines and airports report "brand damage" as the primary concern stemming from operational delays, ahead of "increased costs" in second.

Other key findings from the study included 64% of airlines are investing in new technology to improve their disruption response times and protocols.

However, the survey also noted 70% of respondents said the top reason for investment was to "improve our public image", far ahead of "reducing costs" at 34%.

Amadeus Airport and Airline Operations SVP, Holger Mattig, said disruption is a highly complex problem that requires multiple parties to work together.

"Unfortunately, we still have too many information silos in



aviation, which impacts the overall response and ultimately passengers," Mattig said.

"However, I do sense a real determination across the industry to put historic commercial tensions to one side and deliver a better, more joined-up and traveller-centric approach to disruption that's empowered by shared technology." *ML*

Cunard going home for Queen Anne

CUNARD'S "spiritual home" of Liverpool will play host to the official naming ceremony for the line's newest and fourth ship, *Queen Anne* later this year.

The ceremony is set for 03 Jun and will take place mid-way through a 14-night British Isles voyage departing Southampton which will call in Edinburgh, Invergordon, Greenock, Belfast, Liverpool and Cobh.

Queen Anne is in the final stages of completion at the Fincantieri shipyard in Marghera, Italy.

The ceremony will be hosted by British media personalities, Matt and Emma Willis.

NCL dumps Venice

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line has pulled the plug on calls to Venice, with the cruise line confirming the Italian city will be replaced in all 2024 and 2025 itineraries.

The line said the changes were being made due to new restrictions on large cruise ships docking in Venice in a bid to help protect the city's environment, with larger vessels now required to anchor outside of the lagoon and use tender boats for access.

"While we have made every effort possible to maintain these calls to Venice, the tender operation and overall experience this provides our guests has fallen short of the standard we aim to deliver," NCL told *Travel Daily*.

Calls to Venice in 2024 will be replaced by Ravenna, Italy; Rijeka and Zadar, Croatia; or Koper, Slovenia, based on port availability, while planned 2025 visits have been substituted with a day at sea until a new port is able to be confirmed.

Crown's Initiative

CROWN Resorts has appointed Initiative to be its new media agency, transferring the account from previous holder Carat.

The agency news follows a major rebranding of the troubled resort and gaming company's marketing collateral last year (*TD* 25 Sep 2023), with Crown stating at the time the refresh signalled a new era following well publicised links to money laundering and crime syndicates.

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ACT floats appeal

EXCLUSIVE

THE Enlighten Festival and Canberra Balloon Spectacular is set to return to Australia's capital in Mar, with both events expected to attract a combined attendance of almost 400,000.

Kicking off on 01 Mar, the 11-day festival will see Canberra's national attractions transformed in a spectacular display of light, sound and movement.

The program also includes culinary experiences, live music, a short film festival, and plenty of after-dark experiences - details **HERE**.

Part of the festival, the Canberra Balloon Spectacular will see dozens of hot air balloons unleashed across the city each morning from 09-17 Mar.

With around 15% of attendees to come from interstate or overseas, it's predicted that the events could help generate more than \$6 million in direct economic benefit for the ACT.

"The Enlighten Festival and the Canberra Balloon Spectacular continue to capture the imagination of locals and visitors alike, while providing countless opportunities to showcase the nation's capital," Events ACT Executive Branch Manager Ross Triffitt told *Travel Daily*.

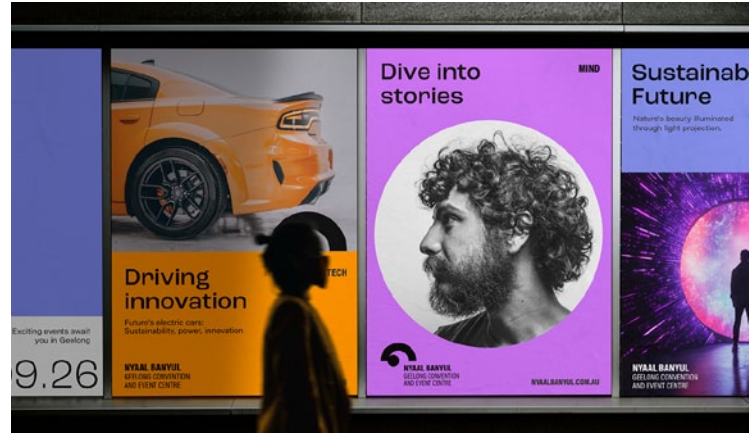
GEELONG CENTRE BRAND REVEAL

MELBOURNE Convention and Exhibition Trust (MCET) has unveiled the branding for its new Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre (TD 27 Jul 2023).

Developed in collaboration with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, the new look pays homage to the site's history as a gathering place, and aims to "encourage a deeper appreciation and renewed viewpoint through iconic, playful and bold symbology".

The eye-shaped logo symbolises enlightenment and perspective, while the colour palette reflects the "ever-changing natural light of Sky Country", from sunrise to sunset.

MCEC Chief Executive Natalie O'Brien said, "we're thrilled to launch the inaugural brand for Nyaal Banyul, which celebrates



First Nations culture and storytelling and is influenced by the architecture of the venue." "We've collaborated with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to develop a brand that the whole Geelong community can be proud of, as well as creating a captivating value proposition for customers and visitors, that

encourages belonging, sharing and seeking."

Slated to open in 2026, the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre is currently under construction in the heart of Geelong, close to craft breweries, local wineries, and farm gates.

Take a first look at the new brand **HERE**. JM

AIME goes neon

AIME has revealed the details of its 2024 Welcome Event, which will take place on Mon 19 Feb at Melbourne's Grazeland under the theme 'Neon Carnival'.

Expected to attract over 1,600 guests, the event will see the dining destination transformed into a "colourful playground" with a focus on "interactive live entertainment, food and out-of-the-box drinks".

A new meeting space in Adelaide Hills

REGIONAL event venue operator Discovery Events has unveiled a new executive boardroom space at Adelaide Hills Convention Centre.

The new venue includes a purpose-built 30-seat board table with integrated AV and video conferencing facilities, open gas fireplace and lounge area, and is ideal for board meetings, workshops and corporate events.

Delegates can also use the



adjoining function space as a break-out area or for intimate dinners, thanks to its fully equipped bar, lounge area and open-plan layout.

It also offers access to an alfresco space and lawn area.



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An experienced airline sales professional has joined **Rex** as its new National Account Manager. **James Dun** brings over two decades of experience to the carrier, including a previous 12-year tenure at Qantas. Most recently, Dun spent seven years at Delta Air Lines as its National Account Manager.

Cover-More Group has announced the appointment of **Justin Sebire** as its interim Group CEO. Sebire was previously the Group CFO, and takes charge of the top job from Cara Morton, who has been promoted to CEO of Zurich Global Ventures in Switzerland. Sebire will be responsible for the company's day-to-day operations, and boasts more than 25 years of global leadership experience across Europe, the United Kingdom, Asia and Australia.

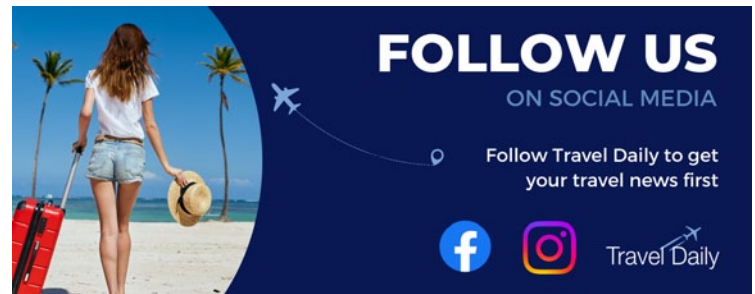
Event Hospitality has appointed **Robert McGufficke** as the new General Manager of Rydges Resort Hunter Valley. The highly experienced GM is a results-driven professional and will supplement his new role with duties as Area General Manager Hunter Region. McGufficke brings more than 22 years with EVT Hospitality to his new territory, having recently overseen the company's Southeast Qld and Northern NSW region, where he launched new Group-wide food and beverage innovations.

Kirsty Blows has joined **HelloWorld Travel** as its Inbound Manager New Zealand. Blows was most recently the General Manager Australia and New Zealand at Rail Online, and the customer care manager APAC at Rail Europe before that. Blows also spent eight years with the Rail Plus brand in Australia.

The **World Travel Agents Associations Alliance (WTAAA)** has appointed **Otto de Vries** as its Executive Director. Based in Cape Town, de Vries also serves as the CEO of the Association of Southern African Travel Agents. In this new position, de Vries will advocate for a greater balance consumer rights with airlines and further support travel agency interests across the globe.

The airline industry veteran **Nathaniel Pieper** has joined **Oneworld** as its new CEO, effective 01 Apr. Pieper joins the airline alliance as it marks its 25th anniversary, with his focus to be on strengthening relationships between its partners to generate a more seamless travel experience for air travellers. Bringing more than 25 years of experience, Pieper is currently the Senior VP, Fleet and Finance for Alaska Airlines.

Andre Jacques has been promoted to the position of Regional Director of Marketing, Pacific at **Langham Hospitality Group**. He will spearhead marketing initiatives across the Pacific region, including the portfolio of The Langham Melbourne, The Langham Sydney, The Langham Gold Coast, and Cordis Auckland. Jacques will report directly to the Regional Vice President of Operations, Pacific, Jeffery van Vosselen.



Hilton next in SLH camp

SMALL Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) has inked a strategic pact with Hilton which will allow members of the Hilton Honors loyalty program to earn and burn points across the SLH network.

The partnership will deliver a significant boost to Hilton's luxury portfolio, with 560 properties in the SLH camp now bookable on the Hilton website.

Under the deal, the SLH group effectively becomes a satellite luxury brand of Hilton, with hotels to be promoted alongside established brands including

Waldorf Astoria, Conrad and LXR.

The move also greatly expands the Hilton network, with many SLH hotels located in some of the world's most remote places.

Hilton President of Brands and Commercial Services, Chris Silcock, said the company is always looking for "amazing new experiences" to share with its discerning Hilton Honors guests.

"This relationship with Small Luxury Hotels of the World will grant Hilton customers and Hilton Honors members access to a community of high-end boutique hotels in exciting new luxury travel destinations, giving them more ways to dream, book, and earn and redeem points with Hilton," Silcock said.

The tie-up with Hilton is the second deal SLH has signed with a major hotel group in recent weeks following a similar deal signed earlier this month with Ovolo Hotels (**TD** 01 Feb).

MEANWHILE, Hilton Worldwide Holdings reported an adjusted EBITDA of US\$3.08 billion for the full year in 2023.

The company's global room pipeline at the end of 2023 stands at 462,400 rooms. **ML**

NCL Florida growth

JACKSONVILLE will become the newest home port for Norwegian Cruise Line, with a deal to base the 2,394-pax *Norwegian Gem* in the city, operating round-trip sailings to the Caribbean.

Hyatt Hotels to hone in on China

HYATT Hotels has entered into a strategic cooperation agreement with Hangzhou Trade and Tourism Group (HTTG) and The Dragon Group to expand its brand footprint in China.

In addition to growing the number of properties under Hyatt's Independent Collection and select service brands in China, the collaboration also aims to drive the strategic development of The Dragon Group and its nine hotel brands.

The agreement will see Hyatt and The Dragon Group develop more than 60 properties over the coming decade, starting with a Hyatt Place hotel in Hangzhou.

Uruguay flag airline

A NEW flag airline in Uruguay is set to begin operations this year, flying an all-Airbus fleet.

Sociedad Uruguaya de Aviacion will be a privately owned airline led by experienced pilot Antonio Rama and based at Carrasco Intl Airport 20 mins from Montevideo.

Six aircraft will make up the airline's initial fleet, flying services to various South American cities.

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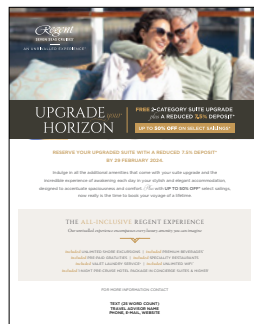
Plus, from 1 February - 15 February 2024, guests will receive **US\$500 Shipboard Credit per suite*** when booking up to a Penthouse Suite on ANY 2024 voyage*.

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