

Today's issue of TD

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

Bonza goes big

BONZA has announced its biggest-ever sale, releasing a whopping 24,000 seats to and from the Gold Coast with up to 50% discount.

Travellers based on the Gold Coast can snag tickets for \$59 or less to Cairns, Mackay, Mt Isa, Rockhampton, Townsville, Whitsunday Coast, Albury, Launceston, Mildura, and Melbourne (both Avalon and Tullamarine airports).

"This is a great opportunity for travellers to take advantage of this sale and make the most of summer 2024 by seeing somewhere new this month," Bonza CEO Tim Jordan said.

The sale ends 07 Jan unless sold out prior, and applies to travel from today until 31 Jan 2024.

EXP secures CBA funding

EXPERIENCE Co has secured a new \$42.7 million corporate debt facility with CommBank (CBA), the company recently announced to the ASX.

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's existing corporate debt facilities, replacing the company's remaining \$20m debt.

Chief Executive Officer John O'Sullivan said Experience expects to see continued volume growth into the second half of the fiscal year - news which will please shareholders.

"We have worked closely with CBA to develop a flexible funding facility and are pleased with the support and commitment from

CBA," he explained.

"The additional working capital and flexibility afforded by the facility ensures the business is well placed to capitalise on the increased volume, progress planned organic growth projects and evaluate complementary and accretive acquisition opportunities," he added.

The news comes as Experience has fully recommenced its operations, following the impact of Cyclone Jasper.

Services in Cairns, Mission Beach, Port Douglas, and Cape Tribulation are all operational. *MS*

MK raises tax prices

AIR Mauritius has issued an update stating it will increase its ticket pricing for flights, including a Virgin Australia domestic sector which connects with MK, from 15 Jan - for enquires, call the airline's res team on 08 7082 0550.

JAL HND disaster

HANEDA Airport (HND) has resumed partial operations after the significant crash last night between a Japan Airlines Airbus A350 and a Coast Guard De Havilland Dash-8.

Passengers faced significant delays today after 155 departing flights were cancelled.

Both Delta and United are allowing affected pax to rebook at no extra cost, while today's flights to HND from SYD (QF59 and JL52) have departed and are on route.

An investigation being led by the Japan Safety Transport Board is currently underway into the crash, which resulted in all 379 pax onboard the Japan Airlines flight, including 12 Australians, being safely evacuated, while five of six crew on the Coast Guard plane were killed.

According to local reports, the Airbus A350 was cleared to land when it collided with the turboprop aircraft.



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Ride the RCI Wave

RIDE the wave with Royal Caribbean International (RCI), which has unveiled its new year deals, allowing guests to claim up to 40% off all local sailings.

Globetrotters can also save big with a buy-one-get-one 60% off deal on all international sailings, including world cruises segments.

Guests can claim the local and international wave season deals until the end of the month.

Topdeck Euro sale

TOPDECK has announced a massive Europe sale, offering a saving of \$1,000 per person as part of its new 'The Real Me: Europe' promotion.

The sale is billed as Topdeck's biggest of the year, and is available for departures for the next two years to Europe - the group travel provider's most popular destination.

The discounts are applicable when booked before 14 Feb.

TTNQ's ferry alternative

SCENIC boat transfers between Cairns and Port Douglas for just \$50 are now available, while the coastal road between the two cities is closed.

The ferry service, operated by Quicksilver and Reef Unlimited, is an alternative to the coastal drive, with Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) Chief Executive Officer Mark Olsen urging travellers to take up the unique opportunity.

"[Tourers can] settle in for a unique view of the World Heritage rainforest between Cairns and Port Douglas from the water to start their Port Douglas getaway and enjoy it with a cold beverage from the bar," he said.

"The Port Douglas boats are heading to Low Isles and the outer Great Barrier Reef every day, Brett's Outback Tours are showcasing the amazing produce on the Atherton Tablelands, and the Port Douglas markets are still



happening on Sun.

"The inland route via Mount Molloy takes just one hour longer than the coastal route to drive and Exemplar is honouring the same price for transfers between Cairns Airport and Port Douglas."

Road transfers with Exemplar need to be booked via phone or email, or booked online with Port Douglas Transfers, TTNQ noted.

The destination management organisation has been urging travellers not to cancel their bookings in the wake of Cyclone Jasper, which last month lashed North Queensland with torrential rainfall (**TD 22 Dec**). *MS*

EY adds more India

ETIHAD Airways is welcoming the new year with more Indian destinations, beginning flights to Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, earlier this week.

The non-stop services bring the total number of Indian gateways served by Etihad to 10.

"We have established a fantastic group of non-stop routes between India and Abu Dhabi, providing customers with easier access to our growing network without transiting through one of the main Indian hub airports," Chief Executive Officer Antonoaldo Neves said.

"Seamless and practical connections at Abu Dhabi ensure that our guests can easily access destinations across the Gulf Cooperation Council, Europe - including our four daily services to London - and North America."

Etihad reintroduced services to Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, last year (**TD 28 Mar**).

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Window Seat

WATERPROOF passports may emerge as the next travel innovation, after a Malaysian newlywed couple missed out on their honeymoon due to a wet passport.

The lovebirds were denied baggage check-in at Kuala Lumpur International Airport a week before Christmas, after an airline employee refused to accept 29-year-old Muhammad Fikry Azman's water-damaged passport.

The staff member said they were concerned the duo would face disruptions and potentially be fined in Turkey, where they had booked a tour.

Fikry posted a video on TikTok detailing the ordeal, and said he was caught in heavy rain the night before his flight - in addition to his bag not being waterproof, his passport did not have a cover.

The traveller conceded it was his own fault, and said it was a "lesson learned".

The incident cost the couple US\$4,500 in travel losses, as they were registered under a tour group and unable to refund or reschedule their flights - talk about putting a dampener on things!

The video serves as an important reminder to travellers to ensure their passport is in good condition.

DL, VS partnership

DELTA Air Lines and Virgin Atlantic are celebrating 10 years of joint venture partnership, during which time they've flown nearly 40 million customers across the Atlantic between the US and the UK.

Since 2014, DL and VA customers have enjoyed more benefits, including more choice and flexibility, smoother connections, and efficient freight handling.

AI to transform air travel

ELECTRIC air taxis are expected to become commonplace at major international airports by 2030, according to a new report from Sita.

The *Meet the Megatrends* report, which identifies 12 key trends that are shaping the future of travel, predicts that investment in the Urban Air Mobility (UAM) sector will balloon from \$5 billion in 2022 to \$28 billion in 2030.

"UAM is a growing mode of short-distance transport, the need for which has been accelerated by increasing road congestion in large cities," the report stated.

Airlines and airports are showing increased interest in UAM, with 32% of both groups confirming major programs and R&D in services and infrastructure within the emerging sector.

The Sita paper predicted that electric air taxis will provide an auxiliary revenue stream for airports and airlines, offering quick and seamless journeys for travellers, as well as sustainability and energy cost benefits.

The report also posited that "intermodal connected and seamless travel will become a reality with passenger processing and ease of checking in and baggage handling harmonised between the modes of transport".

According to Sita, travellers can also expect to see connected

Tassie art experience

THE Henry Jones Art Hotel in Hobart has launched a new art experience, Palawa Connection: Stories with Allan Mansell.

Designed in collaboration with Mansell, a local Indigenous artist known for his sustainable approach to printmaking, the experience will take guests on a journey through Tasmanian history and indigenous culture.

The experience is free for guests and \$20 for non-guests - call 03 6210 7700 to book now.



autonomous robots, vehicles and mobility equipment in airports, as well as a rise in chatbots and virtual assistants.

Additionally, airlines are expected to hone in on generative AI, with the report showing 97% of airlines are planning a program to develop the technology.

Sita predicted the increased focus on advanced technology in the air travel landscape will lead airports and airlines to restructure their workforce.

"Technology means achieving more scalable operations and upskilling employees to support these changes, with a more significant focus on service," the report reads.

The paper also predicted that, by 2030, there will be bespoke technological solutions and bolstered staff resources at airports to cater to a growing demographic of aging travellers, including end-to-end customer support services. *JM*

HX flights included

AUSSIE travellers can now enjoy included flights when they book select Hurtigruten expeditions to Antarctica, Greenland or Iceland before 31 Mar.

The offer applies to itineraries such as the 15-day Highlights of Antarctica, priced from \$12,998 with round-trip flights included from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane or Auckland - **CLICK HERE** for more information.

Air traffic delays

VIRGIN Australia has said a rise in air traffic service disruptions are impacting its ability to operate flights efficiently and on time.

The comment comes after the route between Brisbane and Sydney was suddenly left without air traffic services twice yesterday, and 26 times in total over the last fortnight.

The disruptions were the result of staff breaks, according to Airservices Australia, which was called out recently by Qantas in its submission to the government's aviation review as being "responsible for close to 20% of delays at the country's four biggest airports in the financial year 2023".

New statistics from Airservices showed it was responsible for 11% of flight delays in Nov.

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Emily Kadinski
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Viking '26 open

VIKING has announced the opening of its 2026 European river season, due to heightened demand.

Bookings are now open for Viking's fleet of 80 river ships, as many of this year's dates are already sold out.

"Our guests are curious travellers who are interested in history, art and culture, which is why Europe remains our most popular destination," Chair Torstein Hagen said.

"The idea of a modern river voyage is still new to many, even to some of the most well-travelled individuals.

"We look forward to welcoming more guests, both returning and new, onboard our state-of-the-art vessels in the coming years."

LUX TRAVELLERS ARE GETTING SMARTER

EXCLUSIVE

LUXURY Travel Collection Member Portfolio General Manager Nikki Glading (pictured) believes the luxury sector will have to continue to work as hard as it has been, as travellers become increasingly more educated about the market.

The combination of bucket list and revenge travel is continuing to fuel the luxury sector's boom, she explained, however the supply side in particular will need to "check itself" to ensure its value remains apposite.

"I think that luxury will work harder than everybody else... whether you're an advisor or a supplier, everybody's working harder than they ever did, because the booking time is longer out now, and the budgets are higher," Glading explained.

"I do think luxury will need



to remain relevant and check themselves in terms of revenue management, so if demand does back off, the suppliers need to be very quick to be aware of that and remain relevant at a relevant price point."

"[Travellers are] still very much looking for value, so they'll spend the money, but they've got to feel they're getting value."

Travel advisors remain a source of expertise to help the luxury sector keep its finger on the pulse of value, Glading added.

"Luxury travel advisors are at the forefront, they're getting asked the questions every day, they're comparing you against your competitors every day, they know exactly who's the best value for their customer," she added.

Glading said she had not seen any signs of the luxury sector backing up, part of which is down to higher-end travellers "living in the moment".

"Part of it is, 'I might not be here tomorrow', so I'm going to upgrade to Business class, I'm going to buy the suite instead of the stateroom, I'm going to treat myself for a longer period of time," she explained.

"People have a little bit more propensity to show themselves value and give themselves something that they that they treasure, so bucket list travel is off the Richter [scale]." MS

Maldives Nest reopen

THE Maldives' only jungle dining experience has returned, as Niyama Private Islands Maldives reopens its Asian restaurant Nest.

The eatery has returned with reimagined, bold flavours, served deep in the heart of the resort's Maldivian island.

Nest's ground floor consists of tribal huts centred around the restaurant's showcase teppanyaki.

Guests can also ascend the spiral staircase and cross the bridge to a dining platform suspended six metres in the air.

Melbourne Peppers unveils elevated luxury

SHADOW Play Melbourne by Peppers has unveiled its Level 45 Penthouse suites (pictured), which includes five new three-bedroom apartments.

Set against the backdrop of Melbourne's Southbank neighbourhood, the series has been designed by local architect Elenberg Fraser.

The Penthouse suites feature exquisite materials and finishes with avant garde design.



Floor-to-ceiling windows adorn each penthouse, providing lashings of natural light and city or bayside views, while each apartment also boasts a gourmet kitchen.

Crystal Chair cruise

CRYSTAL Cruises has announced its Chairman's Cruise for this year, which will offer the opportunity to sail with industry legends, such as Abercrombie & Kent's Executive Chair Manfredi Lefebvre and company founder Geoffrey Kent.

The cruise sails from 02-08 Apr aboard *Crystal Symphony* from Jeddah to Rhodes, with a pre-voyage trip to Al-'Ula.

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Staybridge Suites Bangkok Sukhvit has landed in the capital city of Thailand. The IHG-affiliated brand celebrates its 25th anniversary with its second opening in Asia Pacific, offering daily housekeeping, complimentary breakfast, as well as The Socials, a gathering event for hotel residents that occurs three times a week. Communal areas of the hotel, including The Den and lobby, exert a home feel, designed for guests to wind down.



Set on Sanur's beachfront, the 566-room **Grand Inna Bali Beach** - one of Bali's oldest and most famous hotels - will reopen as the **Meru Sanur Hotel** this year, after undergoing an extensive transformation. Part of the newly established Special

Economic Zone and close to the Meru Convention Centre, the property will be taken over by the Meru Hotel Group and the Bali International Hospital, set to open in Apr.



Tokyo Dome Hotel has entered a new chapter in "urban luxury" after completing the first significant renovation in its 20-year history. Located in the vibrant district of Bunkyo, the resort has revamped its upper levels into luxurious Executive Floors, which offer an urban oasis experience, including panoramic views of the city landscape. Guests staying in the revamped rooms can access amenities such as the Executive Lounge and a state-of-the-art gym.



Address Boulevard in Downtown Dubai has reopened as **Kempinski The Boulevard Dubai**, featuring a collection of beautiful dining rooms offering modern brasserie-style cuisine, including The Living Room, The Kitchen, The Collection Room and The Dining Room. The urban resort comprises 198 rooms and suites featuring fine furnishings and original artworks.



Six Senses Wadi Safar in Saudi Arabia is slated to open in 2026, offering an ideal base from which international visitors can explore the Kingdom's heritage sites and natural beauty. The hilltop resort will feature 80 rooms offering panoramic views across the majestic Southern Dunes. Positioned on 49 acres, the property will also feature a salon, a gym, and a yoga studio.

Air Canada scores a goal



AIR Canada recently teamed up with the new Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL) ahead of its inaugural season opener on 01 Jan.

The landmark deal sees the carrier become an Inaugural Premier Partner of the North American professional ice hockey league, and the Official Airline for the league's six teams in Boston, Minnesota, Montreal, New York, Ottawa, and Toronto.

"As Canada's national carrier, and a longstanding supporter of Canadian sports, this partnership reflects the love we share with our customers for hockey, as well as our work in championing gender equality in the aviation industry," Air Canada VP Brand, Andy Shibata, said.

The airline has marked the partnership with a new ad campaign titled 'We All Fly', which features a group of young and upcoming hockey players alongside Canadian hockey legend Melodie Daoust, and will premiere ahead of each PWHL home opener.

As well as granting official jersey branding rights for Montreal's PWHL team, Air Canada will also provide travel support for the league, and is set to promote the PWHL and its future stars across its marketing and communications channels. *JM*

HIS Way in Hawaii

THE Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) and Meet Hawaii have announced a new strategic partnership with major Japanese travel wholesaler, HIS Japan.

The year-long agreement will see Hawaii promoted to HIS corporate clients as a premier destination for corporate meetings, conventions, and incentive travel.

The 'HIS New Way of Incentive Travel' partnership will include corporate family tours for HIS sales executives, as well as site visits at key meeting venues such as the Hawai'i Convention Center, educational programs, opportunities for delegates to give back to the local community, and more.