

Luminara opens up

THE Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection has unveiled its 2025 itineraries, with bookings now open for the inaugural season of its third superyacht, *Luminara* (TD 18 Mar 2022).

There are 53 itineraries on offer between Apr-Oct 2025, featuring new ports of call and shore excursions, plus nine voyages aboard *Ilma* in Northern Europe - a first for the collection.

With a capacity for up to 452 guests across 226 spacious suites, the newbuild ship will sail several seven-night, round-trip itineraries to destinations such as Rome and Barcelona.

Travellers can also opt for a 10-night sailing from Lisbon to Barcelona aboard flagship *Evrima*, which departs 24 Apr 2025 - see the full offering [HERE](#).

AAF a "toothless tiger"

IMPROVED aviation access for people living with disabilities has featured prominently in submissions from stakeholders to the Federal Government's *Aviation Green Paper*.

Among the recommendations put forward include the creation of a new independent body funded by the government that would have the power to police and enforce infringement notices on airlines and airports.

The suggestion from several parties represent a direct rebuke of how the Federal Govt's own Aviation Access Forum (AAF) is performing, which for over 10 years has been charged with providing advice on disability access to air services for people with disabilities.

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) presented the strongest criticism of the AAF, stating the body



is a "toothless tiger" which is symbolic of how people with disabilities are viewed and treated within aviation.

"The forum and its purpose desperately require review," the AFDO said, adding it also failed to meet even one time last year.

Further suggestions from the AFDO include adding people with disabilities to the executive team, and the power to take action.

The AAF has been contacted for a right of reply. *AB*

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features five pages of the latest news including **Business Events News**, plus a full page from **Crystal Cruises**.

A&K on the Nile

ABERCROMBIE & Kent (A&K) has announced it is constructing a brand-new bespoke Nile riverboat, set to launch in late 2025, which it said will "herald a new golden age of river cruising in Egypt".

The new vessel will feature 32 cabins with floor-to-ceiling windows, Juliet balconies, and marble bathrooms, while two presidential suites will offer even more space and luxury, each with their own private decks and outdoor hot tub.

Described as a "high-end floating hotel", the boutique boat will also include two restaurants, a spa, a gym, social spaces, a swimming pool, and a sundeck, and promises to immerse guests in ancient Egypt through intimate and exclusive experiences.

MEANWHILE, A&K is offering a complimentary suite upgrade on new reservations for Crystal Voyages in 2024 - see the **back page** for more information.

AC adds Travelport

AIR Canada has forged a new multi-year distribution agreement with Travelport, which includes New Distribution Capability (NDC) content and servicing, with the carrier confirming a rollout of its NDC solution in coming months.

Travelport-connected agents can access full end-to-end servicing of all NDC bookings via Travelport+, with further benefits including better search and dynamic offers.

WSI, WSU team up

WESTERN Sydney International Airport (WSI) is providing career pathways for undergraduate students at Western Sydney University (WSU).

The partnership will allow final-year students to gain industry experience while earning credits towards completing their studies.

The university's undergraduates will be given opportunities to work directly with lead designers, technologists, and business stakeholders at WSI and its partner DXC Technology on real-world research projects.

WSI Chief Technology Officer Tom McCormack said that WSI is committed to promoting career pathways for students in western Sydney, and described the partnership as a "natural fit".

"In our second round of engagement we've provided problems to solve for a Great Airport Experience and the University has provided the intellectual capability of their brilliant final-year students."

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Aussie passport in sixth

AUSTRALIA has held its place in the top 10 among the world's most powerful passports.

The latest *Henley Passport Index* for 2024 released overnight showed the Aussie travel document has maintained its sixth position on the list for 2024, with Aussie travellers enjoying greater access and less administrative rigmarole than the majority of other nations.

Australia finished with a score of 189, equal with three other nations - New Zealand, Poland and The Czech Republic.

Topping the Henley passport charts was a six-way tie between France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Singapore and Japan.

Commenting on the latest results, Henley's Chair Christian Kaelin said that although the general trend has been toward

greater travel freedom, the global mobility gap between those at the top and bottom of the index is now "wider than ever".

"The average number of destinations travellers are able to access visa-free has nearly doubled from 58 in 2006 to 111 in 2024," Kaelin said.

"However, as we enter the new year, the top-ranked countries are now able to travel to a staggering 166 more destinations".

The usual suspects found themselves at the bottom of the list, including last-placed Taliban-run Afghanistan with a lowly index score of 28, just behind similarly human rights-deprived countries such as Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Libya and Yemen. *AB*



APAC leads the pack

AIR travel demand in the Asia-Pacific for Nov reported the strongest year-on-year growth globally, with air traffic in the region increasing by 63.8%.

International traffic rose by 26.4% when compared to Nov last year, bringing volumes to 99% of 2019 levels.

"Economic headwinds are not deterring people from taking to the skies, international travel remains 5.5% below pre-pandemic levels but that gap is rapidly closing, and domestic markets have been above their pre-COVID levels," IATA said.

Travel warnings

WIDESPREAD civil disorder, violence and looting in the PNG capital of Port Moresby has led DFAT to advise travellers to exercise a higher degree of caution when visiting the country.

The Australian High Commission has this week also implemented heightened security measures in the wake of the violence, which was sparked by police going on strike over pay conditions.

MEANWHILE travellers to Kenya are being warned of heightened terrorist activity in Nairobi and other major population centres.

According to DFAT, terror groups are maintaining a "strong interest in attacking foreigners".

Enjoy a hit at the Hilton



HILTON Melbourne Little Queen Street (HMLQS) has teamed up with Game4Padel to open a rooftop pickleball court on 19 Jan, giving hotel guests and the

general public the chance to try their hand at one of the fastest-growing sports in the world.

Those who are new to the game, which combines elements of tennis, ping pong and badminton, can book in for 'how to pickleball' sessions with an expert coach.

The court will operate daily until 28 Jan, available only to hotel guests between 11am-4pm, while non-hotel guests can also access the facility from 4pm-9pm.

There will also be special Sunset Sessions available from 5pm-7pm, complete with music and a coach, with guests able to relax and replenish after their match with a delicious cocktail and bar snack at the exclusive courtside Monkey 47 Gin rooftop lounge.

The first 100 guests who sign up to the HMLQS and Game4Padel database via QR code at the venue will each receive a free Game4Padel gift bag, including Ellesse merchandise, Luci and Game4Padel gift vouchers.

For more details or to make a reservation, **CLICK HERE** or call 03 9116 8888. *JM*

It will never happen again: Boeing

BOEING has launched an internal review of its quality control processes in the wake of the FAA grounding the company's B737 MAX 9 jets (*TD 08 Jan*).

The company's Chief Executive Officer Dave Calhoun told staff in an email that Boeing is acknowledging errors made regarding the troubled MAX 9 aircraft, stating an incident like that which happened aboard an Alaska Airlines flight "can never happen again".

President and CEO Boeing Commercial Airplanes, Stanley Deal, also told staff at a town hall meeting in the US that he was "shaken to the bone" by the Alaska Airlines incident.

"We're going to approach it with 100% and complete transparency every step of the way," he said.

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Miami's new Icon

ROYAL Caribbean International's (RCI) newest ship, *Icon of the Seas*, arrived in Miami for the first time yesterday ahead of its official debut on 27 Jan.

The vessel was greeted by cruise fanatics and staff, with the vessel to operate seven-night sailings to the Caribbean, featuring excursions to RCI's private island.

Before her official debut, *Travel Daily* will be on board a preview sailing bringing you all of the latest ship and itinerary details.



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A NEW tourism and events marketing campaign to help attract travellers back to the flood-impacted Far North Queensland region has been flagged by the Queensland and Federal Governments.

The major push will be funded by a new tranche of rescue funding allocated by both governments this week, with a portion of the extra \$24.25 million to focus on tourism.

Grants will also be made available to impacted tourism operators to help get back on their feet, with funds aiming to address the payment of staff and rebuild with enhanced flood-resilient infrastructure.

"Australia's tourism operators are remarkably resilient and many are already once again showing visitors the wonders of the region," Federal Minister for Tourism Don Farrell said.

"This package will help those unable to re-open quickly to overcome this challenge and get back to what they do best - delivering unique, world-class tourism experiences to international and domestic visitors," he added.

The bulk of the emergency funding will go toward clean-up efforts in the wake of Cyclone Jasper, as well as the appointment of three specialists to help mitigate the extent of

future adverse weather events.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese added that the additional funding was necessary in Far North Queensland because the visitor economy is pivotal to the economy and the way of life in the region.

"Tourism in particular is one of the lifeblood industries of Far North Queensland, and we want to make sure businesses hit hard can not only survive but thrive again," Albanese said.

The latest funding will not impact access to any previously announced financial assistance packages, the Federal Government clarified. AB

Middleton's new gig

SENIOR Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) sales executive and TIME board member, Angela Middleton, has been promoted by the cruise line to the role of Director Field Sales ANZ.

She was previously the Senior Manager Sales for Australia and New Zealand, a position she had held since late 2019.

Prior to joining NCL, Middleton was Head of Sales for Insight Vacations for two-and-a-half years, and she also possesses a wealth of experience in the aviation and accommodation sectors, having held senior sales roles at both Virgin Australia and Best Western.



Window Seat

A RATHER unique Airbnb listing has divided internet users, leaving some shocked and appalled, while others were quite impressed.

For between \$72-\$130 a night, guests can enjoy a centrally located stay between London's Mayfair and Covent Garden, with all the amenities they could possibly need - but wait, there's a catch.

Guests will need to share their sleeping quarters with strangers, and instead of a bed, you'll be snoozing in one of three tents set up in the living room...how, err, romantic.

On the upside, guests will enjoy a kitchen and bathroom (shared, of course), wi-fi, a dedicated workspace, air conditioning, a washing machine and a hair dryer.

Despite the social media controversy surrounding it, the property holds an average rating of 4.45 stars, with many reviews praising the location of the apartment as well as the responsiveness of the host.

While, unsurprisingly, most complaints were about inconsiderate tent neighbours, the general consensus among past guests is that the unconventional arrangement is good enough for a short stay.

According to social media users, the unusual listing serves to highlight the cost-of-living crisis in London, with recent data showing that rent averages an eye-watering \$4,739 a month.





Tas events thrive

BUSINESS Events Tasmania has already secured 67 conferences for 2024, following a bumper year in 2023 for the state's business events industry.

"Many people think of tourism as cruise ships and fly-in fly-out visitors, but business events are a major force in driving positive economic activity," Premier and Minister for Tourism Jeremy Rockliff said.

Business visitors and conference delegates spend \$31.6 million on food and beverages, \$64.4 million on accommodation, \$8.2 million on activities and \$10.3 million on transport each year in the state, Rockliff pointed out.

Tasmania's corporate events industry is worth an annual \$200 million.

BESYDNEY EXPOSES GENDER GAP

THERE is a significant gender gap in the global business events industry, new research from Business Events Sydney (BESydney) and the PCMA Foundation has revealed.

The *Advancing Women in Business Events* study found that, despite accounting for nearly 42% of the sector's workforce worldwide, only 32% of women hold senior leadership positions.

A survey included in the study showed that less than one-third of respondents agreed that diverse identities are represented at the leadership level.

The results also highlighted limited career support and development opportunities for women, with nearly 60% saying they felt leadership roles at their organisation were either not available to them, or that they did not have clear steps on how to advance toward them.



Gender biases and different forms of discrimination were among several challenges identified in the study, as well as achieving pay equity.

"This report draws a clear line in the sand," BESydney CEO Lyn Lewis-Smith shared yesterday at the Convening Leaders 2024 conference in San Diego.

"We cannot innovate, grow and build resilience as a sector unless we are tapping into the full capacity of our global workforce.

"Whether it be gender, or ability, race, age, or any number of other factors, it is crucial that our sector challenge the prevailing status quo and embrace diversity in all its guises," she concluded.

A follow-up report that recommends actions for change is set to be released later this month - in the meantime, read the full findings report **HERE**. *JM*

Pictured: PCMA CEO Sherrif Karamat and Lewis-Smith.

UK unites on events

A MAJOR business events body in the UK, the Association of British Professional Conference Organisers (ABPCO), has teamed up with Memcom, a hub that supports professional bodies, to share best practice and add value for both organisations' members.

With the goal of creating more successful events, the two bodies will collaborate through speaking opportunities and content provision across each other's communication channels, including case studies and advice.

MCEC serves up 'inclusive' new menu

THE Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) has launched its 2024 menu, which champions local ingredients and highlights a commitment to sustainability.

The new offering introduces a new 'Everybody's Plate' menu range, which caters to vegetarian, vegan and gluten-friendly dietary requirements.

Visitors can enjoy delicious dishes that focus on whole



foods, pulses and legumes, and vibrant fresh salads.

Additionally, around 35-40% of all menu items are now suitable for all allergen and dietary requirements - check out the new menus **HERE**.

Dubai gets busy

THE Dubai World Trade Centre has unveiled a huge line-up of 70 exhibitions, conventions and conferences in the first half of 2024.

The events, which span a range of sectors including tourism, transport and technology, are set to boost Dubai's reputation as a global hub for the MICE industry.

The city will also welcome a number of new exhibitions.



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Adding to her current responsibilities as the PR Account Manager, Aus/NZ, for both Delta Air Lines and New York City Tourism + Conventions, **Kristine George** is now also representing South African Airways at **The Walshe Group**. She is based in Sydney, where she has been working with the two aforementioned organisations for the past two years. George boasts 25 years in the tourism industry, including a stint at Destination NSW for four years, first as Media Families Manager and later as the Media Programs Coordinator.

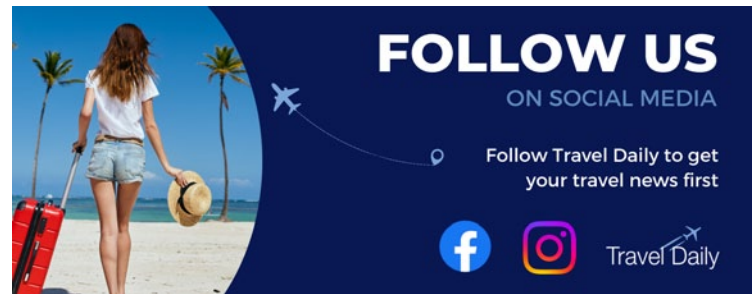
James Leslie has joined Aircalin as Sales Executive for the New Zealand region, where he will help drive sales revenue and build strong commercial relationships with retail head offices, travel agents, wholesalers, and corporate accounts. He was most recently the Senior Product and Pricing Specialist at Air New Zealand, where he worked for 12 years. In his new role, Leslie will report to Chris Thistlethwaite, General Manager Australia/New Zealand.

With Barathan Pasupathi stepping down as **Jetstar Asia's** Chief Executive Officer from 01 Mar, the airline has announced Qantas veteran **John Simeone** as its new CEO. Simeone is based in Singapore, and is currently Qantas' Senior Vice President for Asia - the latest in a long line of roles he has held at the Aussie carrier. The travel executive has racked up over 30 years of global experience in the aviation industry, making him the ideal choice to lead the low-cost carrier's commercial and operational functions.

Jeff Doane has been appointed as the new Chief Commercial Officer at **Omni Hotels**. Doane brings over 20 years of hospitality experience to his new role, drawing valuable expertise from previous senior executive roles, including a three-year post as CEO, North & Central America at Accor, and prior to that, a 14-year stint at FRHI Hotels & Resorts.

Low-cost carrier **JetBlue Airways** has named **Joanna Geraghty** as its CEO, succeeding the departing Robin Hayes. Adding to her two-decade tenure at the airline, Geraghty is currently JetBlue's Chief Operating Officer and before that was the Executive Vice President of Customer Experience for four years.

The Sydney-based hospitality investment and asset management platform **Pro-invest Group** has announced a number of key appointments to further improve and sustain the organisation's operations. **Neerav Gorasia** has been promoted to Director Hotel Performance for Pro-invest Hotels; **Mitchell Hacene** has become the Senior Director of Sales, and **Toby Yates** the Director of Sales, for the Luxury & Lifestyle Hotels Portfolio; **Jasmin MacMillan** has taken on the role of Director of Sales, Groups & Meetings; and **Tom Woods** has been announced as the new Director of Commercial Performance.



\$6.3m in sales? That's Chin-ing



EXCLUSIVE

SYDNEY-BASED travel advisor **Ash Chin (pictured)** is the only Australian to make the SmartFlyer ONE list this year, which means he has amassed more than \$6.3 million in sales.

Chin, who only opened his business 'Sojourns Of' three years ago, is the only Australian on an 18-strong list.

His achievement attracted the praise of Anthony Goldman, Managing Director of Goldman Group, which operates SmartFlyer Australia through a joint venture with SmartFlyer.

"The luxury travel agency attracts the best of Australia's remote travel advisors," Goldman enthused to **Travel Daily**.

"Ash has an enviable client list and works tirelessly to ensure his clients are happy and have the best travel experiences possible," he added.

"We are not about quantity of advisors, rather we prefer to attract the right luxury and premium advisors in the industry.

"With various programs to enhance our team's productivity, we strive to create an

environment for excellence."

There were also a handful of Aussies who earned spots on other esteemed tiers, including Sydney-based SmartFlyer agent Brent Wallace (over \$4m in actualised sales), while Smartflyer's Salli Alderson, Going Places' Carolyne Evans and Truant Travel's Riya Thanissorn were all recognised for making more than \$2 million in sales. *MS*

Tassie skills boost

A STRONGER Tasmanian tourism sector was secured earlier this week, with the State Government endorsing the new Tourism & Hospitality Industry Skills Compact.

The collaborative partnership is designed to help meet the needs of the state's rebounding tourism industry, as well as address training, retention, and recruitment in the sector, Tasmania's Minister for Skills, Training & Workforce Growth Felix Ellis said.

"The visitor economy is an important sector for Tasmania... it comprises 12.2% of total Tasmanian employment."

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