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Perth lands Virtuoso '25

WESTERN Australia's run of securing top tier events has continued this week, with the formal announcement that Perth has won the rights to host the prestigious Virtuoso Forum Australia & New Zealand in 2025.

Scheduled to be held on 25-26 Feb, the event is expected to attract 200 travel agency owners, managers, and preferred partners to The Ritz-Carlton, Perth.

WA Tourism has made no secret of its ongoing ambition to become the country's premier events destination, with the landing of Virtuoso's annual forum seen as a major coup by MD Carolyn Turnbull.

"Tourism WA's overarching vision is for WA to be recognised as a world-class destination that unites culture, community and environment, and an important part of achieving this vision is bringing high-yielding travellers," Turnbull explained.

"The world-leading travel advisors and agents who work with Virtuoso will be able to explore our beautiful state to

The Ghan milestone

TODAY marks 95 years of The Ghan, and to celebrate Journey Beyond has launched a birthday promotion offering discounts.

Guests can access 10% off new bookings in Gold Twin or Single class bookings, or 5% off a Gold Premium Twin seat.

Savings of up to \$1,000 per person are also available on The Ghan's 'Red Centre Spectacular Tour', with the promotion on offer until 30 Apr for travel between 01 Jul and 30 Nov.

discover our unique luxury experiences," she added.

Virtuoso said its target clientele aligns with Tourism WA's objective to attract high-yield travellers through the state's global tourism brand, Walking on a Dream, and the forum will give WA operators the chance to actively promote their luxury and premium products. AB

Tourism green prog

THE Federal Government has launched the Tourism Emissions Reduction Program in Darwin this morning, a move designed to empower tourism businesses to improve their sustainability credentials and attract more visitors to Australia.

The latest program forms part of a wider refresh of the Australian Tourism Industry Council's (ATIC) Quality Tourism Framework (TD 27 Feb), which was relaunched last month to help tourism businesses gain access to a wider range of promotional tools.

"Australian tourism operators know the competitive advantage that can be gained by becoming a world leader in sustainable experiences," Federal Tourism Minister, Don Farrell, said.

"Australians should look for tourism businesses that have made the commitment to sustainability when booking their next tour, attraction, or place to stay - every dollar spent helps protect and promote experiences that can last for generations."

The tourism industry has committed to reducing its emissions by 43% by 2030 and achieving net zero by 2050.

Myer sees its Wirth

THE woman once touted as Alan Joyce's replacement at Qantas has this week been appointed the CEO of department store chain Myer.

Olivia Wirth resigned as the Flying Kangaroo's head of loyalty in Oct last year (TD 16 Oct 2023), iust over a month after losing out to Vanessa Hudson to be the carrier's next chief.

Wirth will take charge of Myer from 04 Jun after a handover period with outgoing John King.



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Virtuoso celebrates its best



VIRTUOSO Australia and New Zealand members and partners donned their finest on the final night of the group's regional gathering in Bangkok to celebrate the winners of its annual awards.

Coupled with an elegant gala dinner at the Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok, the ceremony honoured those that set new standards of service and excellence for clients.

Four members and partners were each recognised for highest overall sales across four categories including cruise, hotels, tours and on-site sales.

Respectively, these winners were Travel Associates, Goldman Travel Corporation, MTA Travel and Frontier Travel.

Agencies who had reported the highest growth in sales were also celebrated for highest annual growth in the same categories.

These were Spencer Travel (Cruise), Jigsaw Travel (Hotels), MTA Travel (Tours) and Frontier Travel (On-Site Sales).

Anthony Goldman was bestowed with the coveted Southern Cross Award, which recognises an individual member who has gone above and beyond in engagement, advocacy and promotion of Virtuoso in Australia and New Zealand.

Meanwhile, the Goldman Travel Corporation also took home the 'Most Engaged' category in conjunction with Regent Seven Seas Cruises, which recognises a member and partner jointly for engagement and participation across the Virtuoso network.

"As Virtuoso continues to evolve and expand globally, we are using our forums around the world to recognise stand-out members and partners within a given market for their contribution to the network," said Virtuoso Chair, Matthew Upchurch. *ML*

Pictured is Fiona Dalton, Virtuoso; Anthony Goldman, Goldman Travel; and Matthew Upchurch, Virtuoso.



Choose NT for tourism

A FEDERAL Government grant has funded a new campaign designed to inspire more young people, First Nations Australians and those living with a disability to pursue a tourism career in the Northern Territory.

The 'NT Choose Tourism' campaign will run until at least Jun and place a focus on the rewarding nature of a career in the tourism sector, as well as education around job opportunities and training pathways open to Territorians.

Tourism NT is spearheading the recruitment push, bankrolled by \$450,000 from the Federal Government, with vocations as tour guides, event planners and travel agents to be promoted.

Social media, Google, Spotify and YouTube will all be used as major channels for the campaign, while a \$200,000 tourism workforce, training and ambassador program will also be



delivered by the Industry Skills Advisory Council NT to leverage the campaign's traction.

"The 'Choose Tourism' grant is an important program which enables states and territories to develop new programs or extend existing activities aimed at attracting more workers to this exciting sector," Federal Minister for Tourism, Don Farrell, said.

"The Albanese Government will continue to work with the states, territories and industry to support the growth of our vital tourism sector," he added.

The plea for young people to seek out a tourism career arrives as Alice Springs continues to battle a spate of crime incidents involving the town's youth. AB



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The seat of the cause?

THE cause of a sudden drop in altitude of a LATAM flight this week from Sydney to Auckland has shifted to the cockpit seats. Initially flagged as a "technical issue" by the carrier (TD 12 Mar), Reuters has published alleged details from the investigation suggesting an inadvertent movement of the pilot's chair may have played a role.

The seat movement could have caused the nose of the Boeing 787 plane to tilt downwards.

Investigations are still ongoing.

Six Flags to merge

THE US Department of Justice is now considering whether to rubber-stamp a plan for theme park giant Six Flags Entertainment to merge with its chief rival.

Shareholders of Six Flags voted in the majority to combine with Cedar Fair, owner of Carowinds, which owns theme parks in Ohio, Virginia and the Carolinas.

Plug the travel skills gap

FXCIUSIVE

THERE is an urgent need for Australian schools around the country to amend their Year 12 curriculums to foster a greater flow of new workers entering the travel and tourism sectors.

The warning was expressed by Australian Travel Careers Council (ATTC) CEO, Rick Myatt, at a roundtable discussion about how to address the skills shortage currently plaguing the industries.

Myatt contended at the meeting with key stakeholders that traineeships into the travel sector are being "obstructed" by high schools failing to cater for important travel streams of education, such as 'International Destinations' and 'Airfare Construction' subjects.

"Students can only obtain a Certificate of Attainment instead of a full qualification for other sectors and it requires further gap training," Myatt argued. "It is difficult to find training providers willing to provide for only those units and the situation discourages students from choosing travel pathways."

Myatt confirmed the ATCC is now working with the National Education Standards Authority to review ways in which the skills blockage can be improved.

Another issue exacerbating the skills shortage is the disparity in vocational, education and training funding across the states and territories, Myatt believes.

Cert III in Travel (SIT30222) is not funded in certain states for example, forcing students to enrol in Cert III in Tourism (SIT30112), which according to Myatt does not have the competency units needed for entry travel consultants.

"This causes fewer colleges to provide travel studies and low course completion rates...the industry needs help," Myatt said.

Risks of travelling

TWO in every five Australians are taking unnecessary risks by neglecting travel insurance when they head overseas, according to research by Smartraveller and the Insurance Council of Australia.

The study identified younger travellers, those from low-income households and those from non-English speaking families, as more likely to travel overseas without adequate insurance.

More than one in 10 did not consider any risks prior to their last trip, while those who did were often distracted by potential transport disruptions as an issue.

Those surveyed said the most common reason for not buying travel insurance was because they believed they were "going somewhere safe", while a quarter said they weren't sure it was needed, and another quarter said they simply "didn't think of it".

One in seven respondents said they didn't buy travel insurance because of the cost involved.

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Airlines foot the bill

VIRGIN Australia, Qantas and Jetstar will not receive court costs involved in its defence against staff who unsuccessfully took legal action against the carriers last year for mandating the COVID-19 vaccination.

A group of employees claimed the carriers were guilty of unfair dismissal when they refused to accept the COVID jab, but while that statement of claim was dismissed in Jun, the Federal Court ruled this week the plaintiffs were not liable for costs and could pursue the case again.

Overtourism not an issue

TOURISM Australia Managing Director Phillipa Harrison believes it is unlikely Australia will find itself in a situation where its landmarks & natural environment are prone to overtourism.

However, the TA chief added that it was still important that Australia keeps up-to-date with what is happening overseas to ensure any danger signs are dealt with before they become a bigger problem here at home.

In her opening address to delegates attending Destination



Australia in Sydney this week, Harrison said some countries in Europe were now taking action.

She cited the Croatian city of Dubrovnik, which prior to the pandemic was seeing 36 visitors for every resident per year and was struggling under the load.

To combat this and preserve its infrastructure, the city moved to limit demand by introducing a per person tourist tax of €2.65 (A\$4.38) per night.

Harrison said despite Australia's distance being a major barrier or a great attribute - overtourism was still something that must form part of Tourism Australia's mission to grow annual arrival numbers in a sustainable way.

"It's not likely we're going to suffer from overtourism in the same way, but we do have sights of cultural and natural significance which we need to be sensitive to," Harrison said. ML



WHO among us doesn't love a great acronym?

The answer to that question is certainly not futurist, columnist and business advisor, Bernard Salt, or even the broader tourism industry.

Gracing the stage at the 2024 Virtuoso Forum at the Four Seasons Hotel at Chao Phraya River, Salt shared new acronyms that, judging by the crowd's reaction, well and truly resonate with the public.

Brace yourself for the PUMCINS - known to some as 'Professional Urban Middle Class In Nice Suburbs'.

If you don't know any of them, perhaps you will know the KIPPERS, or 'Kids In Parents Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings'.

Let's not forget the VESPAs either - 'Virus Escapees Seeking Provincial Australia'.

And then there is our personal favourite, the LOMBARD, and if the applause from the audience was anything to go by, a lot of delegates know about them.

For those playing along at home, these are 'Someone with Lots Of Money But A Real D**khead'.

Perhaps it's best to take Bernard's wisdom on acronyms with a grain of salt.





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CORPORATE UPDATE

FBI Travel salutes the sun

MORE than 40 members of the Melbourne-based FBI Travel team jetted off to the Sunshine Coast recently for its first company retreat held since the pandemic.

Setting up for the three-day stay at Essence Peregian Beach Hotel near Noosa, the group made the most of the beachfront location, with many taking the opportunity for some morning walks along the sand.



The event marked the first time the group's leisure, corporate,

FCTG corp grants

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group (FCTG) has launched its 2024 corporate travel grant program to turbocharge the expansion goals of five Australian businesses.

One major winner will receive credit exceeding \$30,000 to spend with Virgin Australia, IHG Hotels and Hertz Car Rental, along with two Platinum Velocity Frequent Flyer memberships.

Finalists will be flown to FCTG headquarters to present their pitch to company executives.

Entrants must be a member of Virgin Australia Business Flyer to be eligible for the major prize. **CLICK HERE** to learn more.



groups and back-office teams had come together in a social setting, but one which would also include some professional development.

This included discussions on resilience - an attribute much of the industry became all-tooknowledgable about considering global events of recent years.

The group also shared experiences about how they were adapting to the new normal in the travel industry and the impact of the industry's rapid rebound.

Of course, there was also plenty of space for some much-needed down time, with the group taking the opportunity to explore nearby Eumundi Markets and taking in the views Brisbane had to offer on a Story Bridge climb.



Joining the occasion too were some of FBI Travel's muchvalued trade partners, including Regent Seven Seas Cruises VP and Asia Pacific General Manager, Lisa Pile (pictured with Regent BDM, Scott Graham). ML



Women take centre stage



RESPONSIBLE tourism and supporting women in leadership were some of the major themes industry leaders tackled at 'A Force for Good' in Sydney last Fri. In a fascinating panel discussion (pictured), Lisa Pile from Regent Seven Sea Cruises: Kaylene

Shuttlewood from Amadeus: Karen McGilvray from Corporate Travel Management; and Alice Ager from Uniworld shared their insights into female leadership.

During the session, Shuttlewood explained the strategies that have led to Amadeus' diverse workforce, such as parental leave for both primary and secondary carers, as well as time off for domestic violence, miscarriages, and infertility issues.

In addition, Amadeus runs a global women's network for its employees, which includes mentorships and projects, such as its work around supporting girls in Bangalore to enter the technology industry.

"It's about having more women coming into the organisation, going through their career and giving them the development and training so that they're at least at the table with an opportunity," Shuttlewood explained.

Headline speaker, Dr Jill Robinson from Animals Asia, also revealed the horrific plight of animals used for entertainment in Southeast Asia, while G Adventures founder, Bruce Poon Tip, spoke of how community tourism can combat overtourism and shape a better future for the travel industry (TD 08 Mar).

G Adventures has developed a number of projects over the years to support local communities, from Women on Wheels in India to Masai Clean Cookstoves and SASANE Sisterhood of Survivors in Nepal.

"As an industry, we are missing an opportunity to be transformational," he said.

"We're in an industry where we're taking people to some of the poorest countries in the world but by just changing our business model slightly, we can make sure local people benefit.

"We can transform lives and make travel a two-way conversation," he implored. JHM



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SPECIALS

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Pimalai Resort & Spa in Koh Lanta Thailand has announced its 'The Ultimate Escape' promo, available on bookings made before 24 Mar 2024 for stays from 01 Nov to 20 Dec 2024. The deal offers a 25% discount on a minimum seven-night stay and up to 35% off for those who book a minimum 10-night stay. For more information, email svetlana@uniquetourism.com or CLICK HERE to view the offer.

Available until 28 Mar, Viking's 'Explorer Sale' includes return economy flights to Europe on select 2025 and 2026 river, ocean or expedition sailings. Up to \$3,000 of flight credit per couple is available on the 16-day 'Malta, Morocco & the Mediterranean' roundtrip, along with up to \$4,000 per couple on other various expedition cruises. Learn more about the sale by calling Viking on 138 747.

Valid for travel periods between 18 Mar and 30 Nov, AirAsia is offering travellers up to 50% off airfares through its 'Asia Mega Sale'. The promo includes fares from Sydney to Kuala Lumpur from only \$309, as well as to Bangkok from \$399 one-way. Book by 18 Mar to take advantage of the deals - CLICK HERE to secure your seat.

Greece and Mediterranean Travel is now offering discounted fares on selected coach tours of Turkiye. Savings of up to \$300 per room is available on the tour operator's 'Jewels of Turkey' trip, while travellers can enjoy discounts of up to \$250 per room on its 'Classical Turkey Tour'. Call 1300 661 666 for more details and to make a booking.

Vietjet is offering "unbeatable" one-way fares from \$165 for all Australian routes, including the recently introduced Hanoi-Melbourne service. The special is on offer for travel until 31 May 2025 and end must be booked by 17 Mar. Call 1900 1886 to action the deal. The carrier's economy passengers will also receive an exclusive complimentary hot meal and up to 20kg of luggage allowance until 08 Apr.

Travellers heading overseas in Mar can enjoy **Sydney Airport**'s P7 'International Parking Offer', with up to 15% off parking when prebooking online. Use promotion code 'MARCH24' when purchasing to action the offer. The deal is valid for entrance before 31 Mar - secure your parking spot HERE.

APT's 'Last Chance Worldwide 2024 Sale' is ending on 26 Mar, with huge savings on tours across the globe still up for grabs. The sale is offering a further \$1,000 off per couple on any APT tours of 10 days or more that depart this year. Call 1300 336 932 to secure the deal now.

Sail on an ultra-luxe, all-inclusive journey with Cruise Traveller's latest offer of a 23-night 'Regent in the Mediterranean' voyage. Guests will enjoy a three-night stay at a luxury hotel in Istanbul before boarding Regent Seven Seas Cruises' Seven Seas Navigator for a 17-night cruise to Barcelona. The cruise is available from \$12,995ppts - call 1800 507 777.

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Masterchef is hungry for HK



THE Hong Kong Tourism Board has partnered with MasterChef Australia to showcase the city's diverse culinary experiences.

The hit reality TV series will return to the Red Dragon for the first time since its inaugural 2009 season to film three episodes with Judges Andy Allen, Poh Ling Yeow, Sofia Levin and Jean-Christophe Novelli (pictured).

Viewers will follow along as the contestants and judges discover Hong Kong's top attractions, street eats, as well as its Michelinstarred restaurants.

Expedia partners

EXPEDIA Group has signed four new partnerships with Australian DMOs, which will see customers presented with more information to help with bookings, promote sustainable tourism and boost market share.

The new deals are with Brisbane Economic Development Agency, Tourism and Events Queensland, **Tourism Tropical North** Queensland, and Tourism NT.

"We are thrilled to partner with MasterChef Australia to showcase Hong Kong's celebrated culinary scene," Hong Kong Tourism Board Director, Australia, NZ & South Pacific, Karen Macmillan, shared. MasterChef Australia is coming soon to 10 and 10 Play. JM

The unsinkable Clive Palmer

JUST when you thought the idea of reviving the ill-fated Titanic for a new cruise ship experience was sunk, think again.

Australian businessman and politician, Clive Palmer, has this week revealed plans to commence construction of the long-mooted Titanic II in 2025.

So what do we owe the renewed push to revive the 'unique' cruise concept to?

The answer is world peace, according to Palmer.

"At a time when the world is full of war and hate... Titanic II can act as a catalyst of some of those values that we've got, which hopefully can lead to peace."

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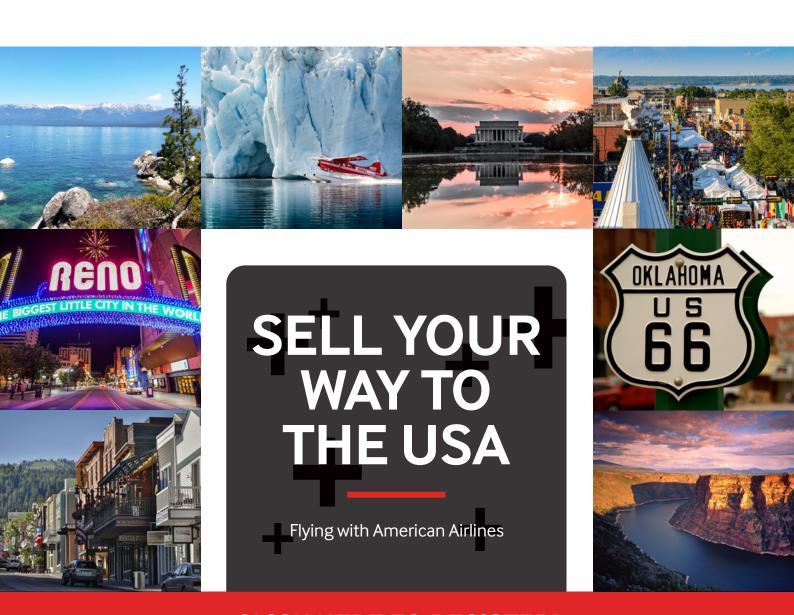


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