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Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features five pages of travel industry news, a full page from **Tourism NZ**, plus full pages from:

- Ponant
- Infinity Holidays
- Eva Airways

SIA premium revamp

EXPANDED food and beverage options and a new amenity kit have been unveiled by Singapore Airlines to improve its premium economy experience.

Pax will now be offered a glass of Charles de Cazanove Brut Tradition NV champagne after take-off and access to a roving selection of 200 new meals.

On flights of seven hours or more, pax will also be given eco amenity kits curated by new partner Out of the Woods.

Uber pays \$272 million

UBER has this morning agreed to settle a long-running class action with taxi and hire car drivers, paying out the fifth-largest class action amount in Australian legal history.

The case was prosecuted by Maurice Blackburn Lawyers on behalf of 8,000 taxi and hire car owners, who claimed they had lost significant income when Uber "aggressively" entered the Australian market in 2012.

The heart of Asia

TAIWAN is riding a wave as one of Asia's trendiest destinations, with agents able to engage with some of the country's best dining options & festivals, as well as how Eva Air can get you there.

For more details, see **page eight**.



As a result, Uber has agreed in-principle to compensate the plaintiffs to the tune of \$272 million, a figure the ride-sharing platform said reflected the evolved state of regulations, which have now caught up to the transport sector.

"When Uber started more than a decade ago, ridesharing regulations did not exist anywhere in the world, let alone Australia," Uber said.

"Today is different and Uber is now regulated in every state and territory across Australia, and governments recognise us as an important part of the nation's transport mix."

Uber also stated it had made significant contributions to state-level taxi compensation schemes over the years, and in conjunction with today's settlement, deserves to put its "legacy issues firmly in our past". *AB*

Get your culture fix

TOURISM New Zealand's agent self-famil program grants access to a variety of Indigenous experiences - see the **front page**.

Virgin Max delays

VIRGIN Australia has confirmed there will be delays to some 737 Max-8 aircraft entering its fleet.

The carrier told *TD* this morning that it will be working hard to "minimise impacts" to its schedule in light of the hold up, which has been caused by ongoing safety issues with Boeing's Max model aircraft.

VA has so far taken delivery of four 737 Max-8s and has a further 10 in the pipeline, with the carrier expecting to take delivery of four more this year.

The remaining six will join the fleet from early 2025 and in the longer term, VA said it expects to receive up to 25 737 Max-10s from 2026 onwards.

See more of Europe

PONANT'S Grand Voyages offer a more in-depth exploration of Europe, with multiple ports of call in each country - more on **page 6**.



Book smart and win one of five Easter Hampers



To celebrate Easter, we're giving away x5 Easter Hampers. Simply make a Stuba booking over \$500 across our curated hotels between 18-24 March to be automatically entered in our Easter prize draw. Good luck!

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CATO makes capital move



THE Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) was in Canberra last week to lobby key government departments about the biggest issues currently facing the land-supply sector.

Among the topics raised by CATO was a recommendation to expand the Reviving International Travel Grant (RITG) program to bolster opportunities for grantees within its membership.

The industry body and the Australian Tourism Export Council had an important victory last year regarding the RITG when the Federal Government formally approved a second round of funding (**TD** 01 Dec 2023).

Another crucial meeting was held with Tourism Research Australia (TRA), with CATO advocating for a new and "extensive" economic impact study to be published to support the outbound leisure travel.

The proposed economic impact report would utilise a range of data sources to provide insights into the industry's current and future trajectories.

CATO suggested such a study would empower stakeholders with more data-driven strategies for a greater sustainable growth.

During the tour of the nation's capital, CATO also met with the Egyptian Embassy to discuss the importance of the African country being a gateway to outbound travel in Australia and a perceived unfair Smarttraveller advisory, which currently suggests Aussie travellers should "reconsider their need to travel".

The Federal Government has its advisory set at such a high level because of the threat of terrorist attacks, exacerbated by the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.

However, CATO believes Egypt plays a pivotal role in attracting tourism to the Middle East, and with a review of Egypt's advisory to take place in two weeks, felt it pertinent to hold talks with the Egyptian Ambassador to Australia, Hanan Nagi.

"Discussions were held on how CATO, its members, and the Egyptian Embassy, can work together to further boost Australian tourism to Egypt and the surrounding region," CATO MD Brett Jardine said.

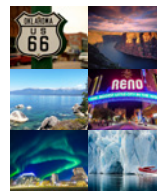
The industry body also noted there had been "robust growth" in tourism traffic to Egypt in recent years, with a 42% increase in 2023 compared to 2018, matching the pre-pandemic levels of 2019.

Pictured: James O'Donnell, TTC; Dennis Bunnik, CATO Chair; Hanan Nagi, Egyptian Ambassador; Crooked Compass founder Lisa Pagotto; and Brett Jardine. **AB**

LE Agent Hub live

LUXURY Escapes has formally launched its Agent Hub, a move flagged by **Travel Daily** earlier in the year (**TD** 22 Jan).

Travel sellers can access a range of benefits on the new platform, including cheap deals, commissionable product and exclusive add-ons and a streamlined booking process.



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QF confirms loyalty revamp

EXCLUSIVE

QANTAS has confirmed it will introduce "significant" improvements to its Frequent Flyer program in Apr.

Speaking with **Travel Daily** this morning, a spokesperson for the carrier confirmed rumours reported on by the **AFR** on Fri are accurate, and that changes to its loyalty program will see better points exchanges for flights.

"We're still working to finalise the frequent flyer improvements, which are responding to what members are telling us about the importance of redeeming points for flights at the times they most want to fly," Qantas said.

"It's a significant investment that will deliver great value for members, but it also makes sense for the program & our partners."

However, Qantas was also quick to stress that any changes it makes to its loyalty structure will not impact the existing Classic

Flight Reward program, with the flagged new scheme to be an "additional way" for members to use points to book flights.

While Qantas declined to divulge a name for the new loyalty scheme, **AFR** reporting suggests it will be called Classic+ and allow members to convert one point to 1c for economy flights - equating to 10,000 points needed for a \$100 flight.

In the airline's latest financial results, it revealed the business had already invested \$50 million into its existing Classic Flight Rewards program to "unlock more reward seats". **AB**

Canada's finest

ACCESS some of the most iconic journeys from the Pacific coast to the Canadian Rockies this week with Flight Centre's wholesaler Infinity Holidays.

See **page seven** for details.

Rail Europe



Unlock European Trains with James Hooper

Eurail Mobile Pass 101

Eurail Mobile Pass: Be it for a single country or multiple countries, the **Eurail Mobile Pass** provides travellers maximum freedom and flexibility to explore Europe. Pick from flexible or consecutive travel days and class of travel according to your clients' needs. For added convenience, book your clients' seat reservations in advance and share the **various resources available**.

Did you know: Children under 12yo travel for free with their guardians, while youth travellers from 12-27yo enjoy 25% off their passes, and senior travellers enjoy 10% off standard passes.

Expert tip: To help your clients save more money, ensure they know their Eurail Mobile Pass comes with a variety of discounts for ferries, attractions, restaurants and experiences.

Reminder: Don't forget to register for the Eurail webinar on 26 Mar at **2pm** or **4pm** AEST.

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QR to reimagine first class

QATAR Airways is teasing the imminent reveal of what it says will be an innovative, high yielding and “unique” first class cabin product that will spearhead the airline’s overall growth plan.

Speaking to CNBC in his first major interview since assuming control of the carrier last Nov, Qatar Airways CEO Engr Badr

Mohammed Al-Meer said the new product will be “something new” which combines QR’s experience flying both commercial and private jets.

“We are 70-80% ready and are only finalising colours,” Al-Meer told the US network.

Al-Meer added the hyper competitive landscape in Gulf aviation was helping to raise the bar in customer experience terms but that he was confident Qatar Airways will maintain its market leading position and “outshine any competition”.

Qatar Airways is preparing to add Hamburg and Tashkent as its two newest destinations, along with resuming flights to several seasonal ports including Marrakesh, Mykonos & Sarajevo.

Al-Meer said digital innovation was also helping to maximise organisational efficiency and add new ports in key markets, including China and India. *ML*

LA800 cockpit error

A MISTAKE by a flight attendant which pushed the pilot seat forward and into the controls is now considered the most likely cause of LATAM Airlines’ mid-air altitude plummet last week.

According to preliminary evidence into the incident, the attendant may have accidentally hit the switch during meal service.

Boeing has now issued a communique to all airlines advising to check the placement and rigidity of its cockpit seats.

More than just an airport



GOLD Coast Airport will begin its build-up to supporting the 2032 Olympic Games in Brisbane with a “future-focused” *Master Plan* aimed at reinventing the hub as a destination in itself.

“We want to be more than an airport, we’re committed to creating a mixed-use precinct that would further benefit the local community, with the addition of a retail village, health and wellness hub and a conference and tech centre,” said Queensland Airports Limited CEO, Amelia Evans.

Accessibility will sit at the forefront of the airport’s plans, with biometric check-in and a passenger experience capable of anticipating customer behaviour.

The airport will also begin work on a range of sustainability initiatives including solar panels, electric vehicles and SAF facilities.

From an access perspective, the plan shows how the extended Gold Coast Light Rail will continue south of the existing Burleigh Heads terminus to Coolangatta, with a stop at the airport. *ML*



EXPERIENCE TASMANIA'S OFF SEASON AND WIN A SELF FAMIL

Tourism Tasmania invites Tassie Specialists to join them this March and April on a journey around the Apple Isle for The Off Season Webinar Series; sharing a taste of what Tasmania has to offer over the cooler months.

During the interactive webinars, participants will meet Tasmanian tourism operators, build their Tassie knowledge and have questions answered by local experts.

Webinar participants will be in the running for one of many \$2,000 Tasmanian self famil vouchers as well as an assorted Tasmanian tasting experiences.

For more information and to view the full Terms and Conditions, visit the [Tassie Trade website](#).

Not a Tassie Specialist yet? Complete the [learning modules](#) today.

TASMANIA
 COME DOWN FOR AIR



itravel gets Formal

ITRAVEL is inviting people to support Australian students by donating formal wear to The Formal Project this month.

The charity drive, which kicked off at the recent itravel Conference, is driven by community donations, and provides free formal wear to graduating students.

itravel would like to extend the opportunity to the wider industry to contribute to the charity drive, which can be done by dropping contributions until Thu 28 Mar between 9am and 5pm (Mon to Thu) at its office in Surry Hills.

The address is Level 1, 410 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010, with additional enquires best sent via 02 9280 0008 or emma@itravel-au.com.

itravel has already donated close to 400 formal garments to The Formal Project.

Interested parties can also click [HERE](#) to learn more about the charity drive.

UN Visa openness

THE world is more open now than ever before, according to the latest UN Tourism Visa Openness Index released last week, with fewer passport holders requiring traditional visas to travel.

The report showed the world has essentially returned to its pre-pandemic status in terms of global mobility, with 21% of the world's population now able to travel without a visa at all.

Asia and the Pacific were found to be the most receptive region for traveller movement with an Openness Score of 46, compared to the global average of 40.

The world leader for openness was the Cook Islands, which earned an Openness score of 100, meaning it welcomed travellers under any passport or visa.

Conversely, North America and both north and western Europe were deemed most restrictive, with the USA in particular scoring just 12 and comfortably taking out the 'most restrictive' title.

The future is worth its salt



DESPITE a cost-of-living crisis and nervousness in the economy, spend on travel will continue to surge, according to futurist and columnist Bernard Salt.

The high-profile prognosticator was the keynote speaker at the 2024 Virtuoso Forum in Bangkok, where he suggested a number of key factors will continue to drive travel spend through the current economic climate.

"After calamity, you want to celebrate life, it's what humanity does after disasters that last four or five years on a global scale," Salt argued.

The Australian columnist added the resurgence in travel spend is likely to continue well into the next decade.

Parrtjima in new light

PARRTJIMA - A Festival in Light, which returns to Alice Springs from 12-21 Apr, has announced its talks program, and has confirmed a brand-new light installation, Tjoritja Cockatoos.

Some of the speakers include screenwriter and producer Aaron Fa'aoso; health researcher Roxanne Ngarulya Highfold; TV presenter Marcellus Enalanga; art historian Professor Gregory Lehman; and musicians and singer-songwriters Troy Cassar-Daley, Shellie Morris and Miiesha.

The new Tjoritja Cockatoos will immerse guests in the calls of black cockatoos as evocative art is brought to life through animation.

Window Seat



Window Seat

AFTER initially protesting his innocence, Hollywood actor Pierce Brosnan has pleaded guilty to stepping off a trail in a thermal area during a visit to Yellowstone National Park in the United States last year.

While the court hearing in Wyoming last week fined the actor US\$500 and ordered him to make a US\$1,000 donation to the park's recognised charity, Yellowstone Forever, Brosnan managed to escape the more sizable financial whack prosecutors were after, which was a fine of US\$5,000.

Taking to Instagram to explain himself, Brosnan said: "As an environmentalist I have the utmost respect for and love of our natural world, however, I made an impulsive mistake - one that I do not take lightly - when entering a thermal area covered in snow in Yellowstone National Park to take a photograph".

The actor added that he did not see the 'No Trespassing' sign posted that warned of any danger, and nor did he hike in the immediate area.

"I deeply regret my transgression and offer my heartfelt apologies to all for trespassing in this sensitive area, Yellowstone and all our National Parks are to be cared for and preserved," he added.

Pictured below the former *James Bond* star flaunting his shabby chic style in the 80s.



"You have prosperity in Australia and New Zealand, the effects of the pandemic have now ended, you have a generational shift, and you have the savings of an entire generation in superannuation - all of which are unleashed in this decade".

Salt shared that Australians had put \$3.5 trillion into superannuation for the purpose of Baby Boomers to spend on travel over the next 10 years.

"We measure social sophistication and success by the ability to travel - we're tucked away on the other side of the world, being able to connect and to travel is very important to Australians and New Zealanders," Salt posited. *DF*

Pictured: Bernard Salt.

Explore to Tunisia

EXPLORE Worldwide has operated its first group departure in Tunisia in nine years, launching a new itinerary to the African nation to meet renewed demand.

The 10-day 'Best of Tunisia' tour starts in the capital Tunis and includes one night in a cave hotel, along with visits to the cities of Tozeur and Hammamet.

The company has scheduled nine departures for 2024 and is selling 13 more for next year.

Tunisia was removed from Explore's product range in 2015 after a series of terrorist attacks at a museum and a holiday resort targeted foreign visitors.

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APT - Europe 2025 pre-release brochure

The trip of a lifetime awaits with APT's newest luxury European river ships, launching in 2025 and detailed inside the tour operator's latest brochure. Sail on the Rhine, Danube and Main aboard APT's newest river ships, the APT *Solara* and *Ostara*, alongside the brand-new *MS Estrela* cruising the Douro River in Portugal. From the timeless charm of Prague to the sun-drenched shores of the Mediterranean, discover APT's many travel styles, including river/coastal cruising, as well as land and rail journeys. Travellers can also enjoy the wonders of its expertly guided tours and treat themselves to culinary delights that ignite the senses. The latest brochure also contains an earlybird offer, giving travellers the chance of saving earn up to \$4,000 per couple.



Lyn Taylor's Adventure Travel - Active Holidays

Explore the lands of Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, India, Vietnam, Spain and Peru with Lyn Taylor's Adventure Travel's latest brochure. The two-page publication showcases adventurous holidays in some of the world's most exotic and extraordinary locations available in several highlighted destinations. With Taylor's 20 years of experience, travellers are assured of the ultimate holiday, including climbs, walks, history, culture and

people. The tour operator also designs tailor-made itineraries for budget travellers to more premium adventures, as well as specially curated women's travel group tours where Taylor personally organises and leads the trips.



Viva Holidays - New South Wales & Canberra

The 2024-2025 guide from the tour operator showcases a great range of accommodation and touring options on offer to Australian travellers looking for unique adventures, including the new four-day Australia's National Treasures fully-escorted small group journey in the nation's capital. To better illustrate the travel allure of New South Wales' coastal areas, the brochure also highlights the best towns to visit, as well as the vibrant urban lifestyles of Sydney. The scenic landscape of bushlands across the Hunter Valley and the alpiners of Blue Mountains are also detailed, as well as the crystal clear beaches along the northern NSW coast in Byron Bay, Port Stephens and Coffs Harbour.

Good morning New Caledonia



THE Morning Show has kicked off a new series of segments promoting New Caledonia this week, showcasing a five-day holiday that hosts Larry Emdur and Kylie Gillies recently enjoyed to the beautiful destination.

Almost 1.6 million Australian TV viewers will take in the beauty of New Caledonia, as they watch Emdur and Gillies frolic around various islands, enjoying the spectacular Isle of Pines, visiting the local Xodre Kanak tribe and

many more attractions.

In addition, *The Morning Show* is running an exclusive New Caledonia giveaway, with one lucky winner to scoop up a luxury holiday for two with flights and accommodation covered in Noumea and The Isle of Pines.

Aircalin will also run special deals on their website, including discounts on direct flights to New Caledonia for all Aussies.

According to a New Caledonia Tourism, a record number of Australian travellers visited the island last year, surpassing its pre-pandemic numbers. *JHM*

Pot rule up in smoke

THAILAND'S flourishing cannabis culture could be coming to an end, as the country's government seeks to ban the recreational use of the drug.

If the ban is ticked, it will put an end to the tourism economy that has sprung up around the decriminalisation of the drug by the end of the year, with only medical use to remain permitted.

However, Thailand is getting closer to the legalisation of casinos, with the country's parliament to investigate its feasibility this week.

Bali cleans beaches

A MASSIVE clean-up mission is under way at Bali's most popular tourist beaches.

Salvage teams have been deployed across much of Bali's coastline to clear tides of debris which have washed up on the shore following a week of extreme weather.

Trash has also been washed downstream from villages inland, with Kuta Beach, Legian Beach, and Seminyak's coastline hit hard.



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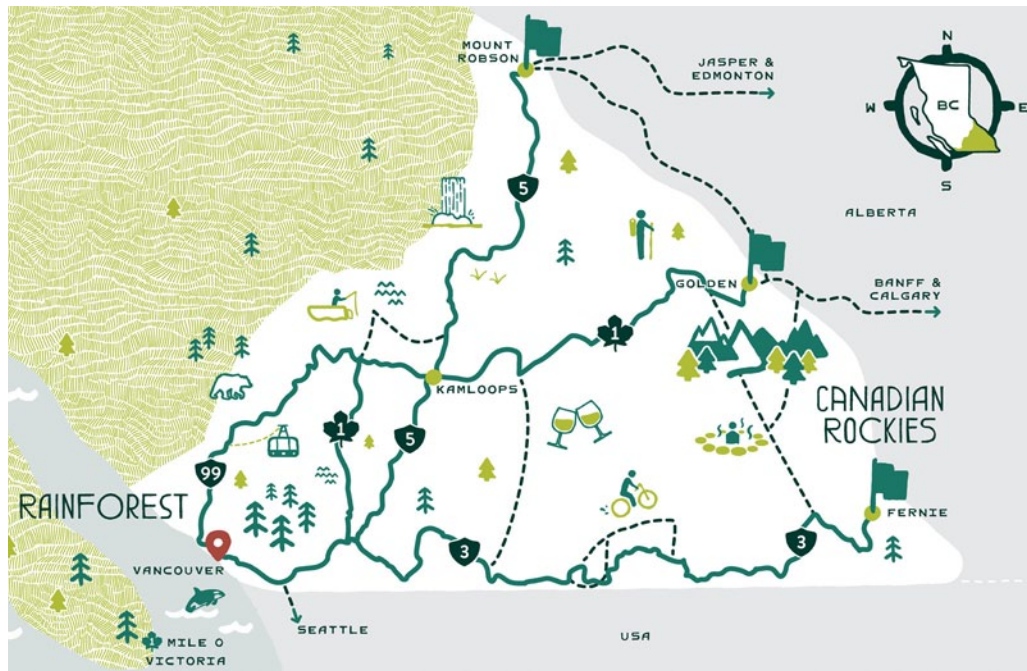
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