

Outrigger surfs expansion in Australia

EXCLUSIVE

NOW that Outrigger Hospitality has a property on all of the major Hawaiian islands, the company's CEO, Jeff Wagoner, said the emphasis moving forward is on growing its global portfolio.

Speaking with *Travel Daily* late last week while meeting with key Aussie stakeholders, Wagoner also revealed part of that expansion plan lies in Australia.

"We are obviously looking at options here in Australia, and we have already looked at numerous opportunities over the last few years and we continue to press to find the right location for us in Australia," Wagoner said.

"We are constantly looking on the Gold Coast because that would be an ideal location, and Manly would also be another interesting location because there are not a lot of resorts there."

Wagoner revealed that when assessing any potential Aussie project, the company was on the hunt for a conversion opportunity, ruling out any purchase that would require a resort to be built from scratch.

"The exception would be if another developer was building a hotel and looking for a brand and a manager, then we would have an opportunity to go in and partner with them on something, but we would do a wholly owned

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asset from the ground up.

"We wouldn't [build from scratch] in Hawaii either, so it's just not the way we do business, but if there was a property that wasn't in great shape, an A-plus location and on a beach, we might take a look at it."

Wagoner also indicated that Outrigger is examining prospects in Bali, as well as other tropical destinations in the region that would be a good brand match.

While historically retail agents have driven the majority of bookings traffic for Outrigger, the resort company's chief told *TD* that more recently the trend had seen the split level out to be 50:50 between direct and agents.

"When you think about the places you can book today, you can book through the travel advisor, you can go to booking.com, there are thousands of channels and it's a pretty broad spectrum of how people book into our properties," he said.

While acknowledging the trend, Wagoner also praised advisors as a key sales channel, adding that regular fam opportunities formed an important part of the education mix for travel sellers.

"We run these all the time and we love to do it and bring people so they can feel it and actually see what we're doing but we also do it with our contact centre agents," Wagoner explained.

"When you think about someone who's taking a call, if they haven't seen it or felt it, it's tough to really sell it." **AB**

Pictured: Wagoner in Sydney with VP Global Communications Monica Salter.

Today's issue of *TD*

Travel Daily today features six pages of the latest travel industry news, including a photo page from **Brisbane Airport**, plus a full page from **Inspiring Vacations**.

VA to ditch Max 10?

VIRGIN Australia is reportedly mulling plans to swap its order for B737 Max 10 planes with the smaller Max 8 models in a bid to expedite deliveries in the face of supply chain issues impacting the troubled Boeing business.

The claim was made in an article published by the *Australian Financial Review* yesterday, however, Virgin Australia has so far declined to comment on whether a switch in its fleet order will go ahead.

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Air NZ cancels government facility

IN SOME encouraging financial news for Air New Zealand, the Kiwi carrier has walked away from a NZ\$400 million Crown Standby Facility set up two years ago (*TD* 31 Mar 2022), at the time considered a key lifeline to boost cash flow through the pandemic recovery period.

Formed to protect the business against uncertainty associated with border closures and lockdowns, the government-funded facility was never drawn upon by Air New Zealand.

The unsecured loan was taken in 2022 alongside a capital raising of NZ\$1.2 billion offered to eligible shareholders in the form of pro rata renounceable rights, including NZ\$600 million of shares issued to the NZ Govt.

The Crown remains a 51% stake owner in the carrier.

Sell like an Egyptian

TTC Tours Brands has unveiled Egypt as the destination for its inaugural Inner Circle 2024 Top Achievers Famil 2024.

The reward for its top-selling agents includes one of 12 spots on an all-inclusive luxury trip to the north African nation for winning agents and a friend.

Highlights of the intimate journey departing in Aug include a five-star Nile cruise, a high-tea at Sofitel Legend Old Cataract hotel in Aswan, and explorations of the Great Pyramids of Giza with an Egyptologist, to name just a few of the attractions.

Agents selling any Luxury Gold, Insight Vacations, Trafalgar, Cost saver or Contiki products between 01 Nov 2023 and 31 May will go into the running to score a place on the trip, with winners to be announced in Jun.

"With the 2024 travel booking window not slowing...there are plenty of sales opportunities for agents to convert and be a top seller to win a spot," TTC Tour Brands MD, Toni Ambler, said.

Recent domestic air hikes "justified"

EXCLUSIVE

RECENT domestic airfare rises passed on by Qantas and Virgin Australia are justified in the context of a still-recovering airline sector post-pandemic, a prominent Australian aviation expert has claimed.

Speaking with *Travel Daily* about confirmed 2-3% hikes in domestic air tickets, Aviation Projects Managing Director, Keith Tonkin (*pictured*), said the two carriers are entitled to protect their profit margins on the path towards normalised operations.

"Like all businesses, [Qantas and VA] will be experiencing steadily rising costs, and while passenger numbers are going up, they'll still be working hard to optimise various corporate objectives - including customer satisfaction as well as profitability," Tonkin said.

When contacted for comment regarding the rises, Qantas claimed the increases are needed to help cover the rising costs passed on to its business from a range of suppliers.

The same rationale was relayed to *TD* by the carrier last week when justifying its 17% Qantas Club annual membership hike from 17 Apr (*TD* 19 Mar).



A spokesperson for the Flying Kangaroo also pointed to "inflationary pressures" being felt more broadly across the economy, as well as some above-inflation rises in industry costs.

Even taking into account the 2-3% increase in domestic tickets, Qantas suggested average fares remain well below the peaks seen in late 2022.

While the increases are no doubt raising the blood pressure of many travellers still struggling to budget for their next domestic holiday, Tonkin defended the recent VA and Qantas moves,

claiming it is "fairly standard practice" for supplier costs to be passed on if the pricing mechanism allows it.

"It's key to remember that seats on an aircraft are a perishable good and their prices change fairly constantly according to a range of factors including yield management, as well input costs," he said.

Tonkin added that BITRE data regarding restricted economy airfares and best discount fares indicate that domestic air fares are fairly stable in historic terms and will be subject to short term influences as usual.

On a brighter note, Tonkin confirmed what many other analysts have already predicted - that the prices of international air tickets are likely to come down over the coming months.

"International fares will be reducing as increased capacity comes back into the market," Tonkin forecasted.

Vindicating this view, Qantas told us that there is no change to international fare structures outside of flights to/from New Zealand, pointing to regular fare sales across the Qantas and Jetstar network to keep a lid on overseas air ticket prices. *AB*

Travel shines at SME Champion Awards



THE travel industry finalists have been revealed for the 2024 Australian Small Business Champion Awards, with 27 tourism operators and travel agencies making the cut from more than 5,500 entrants.

Heart of Hunter Tours, Travengers and Werriberri are among the 14 operators going head-to-head in the Tourism

category, while Armani Travel, Global Travel Group, and Sonia Jones Travel will compete in the Travel Agency category, which features 13 businesses.

Only one small business will be crowned Champion per category, judged by an independent panel with small business experience.

"I believe the resilience of Australia's small business

community is more evident today than ever before," said Steve Loe, Founder of the Australian Small Business Champion Awards.

"The remarkable quantity and quality of submissions we received this year is testament to the triumphant spirit of so many small business operators - absolutely including those from travel industries."

The winners will be announced at two National Presentation Evening Gala events at Sydney's The Star on 12 and 13 Apr and feature a star-studded entertainment line-up - see the full list of 2024 finalists [HERE](#). *JM*



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Royal pitches beach club tent in Mexico

ROYAL Caribbean International has confirmed plans to create a new beach club experience in Cozumel, Mexico.

Flagged to open in 2026, the upcoming cruise destination will be located along the western coast of the island and feature swim-up bars, private cabanas, snorkelling & kayaking areas, as well as a restaurant and bar and lounge with beach views.

More details about Royal Beach Club Cozumel will be revealed in the coming months, with Royal CEO Jason Liberty stating the club will connect ultimate vacation experiences with local culture.

Kresse to Virtuoso

VIRTUOSO has appointed Lori Kresse to the position of Vice President, Hotels & Resorts.

In her new role, Kresse will oversee the network's property program, Virtuoso Hotels & Resorts, with the primary objective of enhancing and elevating the program by responding to evolving market dynamics, as well as increasing the value for members.

Kresse joins Virtuoso with two decades of leadership experience, most recently serving as Senior Vice President of Client Service and Integrated Marketing at NY agency Spherical.

Bonza tickled pink by Townsville demand

BONZA saw a surge of travellers nab seats on its direct flights to Townsville over the weekend to catch the last leg of American popstar P!nk's tour Down Under.

The *Just Like Fire* singer performed back-to-back concerts on 22 and 23 Mar at Queensland Country Bank Stadium, as she embarked on the biggest Australian tour ever undertaken by a female artist.

Bonza welcomed the uptick in bookings, as hundreds of regional fans from Toowoomba, Sunshine

Link Travel Group touches down in Auckland



THE success of the Link Travel Group is really taking off, and there is no clearer example of this than its meeting with Air New Zealand in Auckland last week.

The advisory board for the invitation-only members group held its first quarterly meeting overseas as guests of Air New Zealand and Cordis, Auckland, with the visit boasting an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of Air New Zealand's Hangar 22.

Renowned for being the innovation hub for New Zealand's largest carrier, the Link team was able to learn about and sample the next generation of premium products inside the hangar, including Air New Zealand's much hyped six-pod configured sleep zone, Sky Nest.

Later in the evening, the Cordis, Auckland hosted the advisory board at an event attended by soon-to-retire Cordis General Manager, Franz Mascarenhas.

The group enjoyed a dinner while listening to the stories of pilot, author and after-dinner speaker, Captain Jeremy Burfoot.

“Our quarterly advisory board meetings are always a success as the group debates and plans the way forward for Link and this one was extra special, being hosted by special partners such as Air New Zealand and Cordis, Auckland was a privilege and their hospitality encompassed everything that is great about our partnership and our industry,” Link Travel Group GM, Scott Darlow, said.

“We look forward to welcoming

the new financial year and our new members,” he added.

Link Travel Group is pictured with Air NZ reps: Rohan Farrance, Air New Zealand; Jessica Quigley, Air New Zealand; Andy Buerckner, Platinum Travel Group; Danielle Galloway, Link Travel Group Chair; Penny Spencer, Spencer Travel; Karsten Horne, Reho Travel; Tim Lane, Travel Beyond Group; Scott Darlow, Link Travel Group General Manager; and David Goldman, Goldman Group. AB

HK security law

HONG Kong's new 'Safeguarding National Security' law came into effect on Sat 23 Mar, meaning Aussies are now at greater risk of unintentionally breaking local laws.

DFAT has advised travellers that the strict laws relating to national security can be interpreted broadly, with visitors able to be detained without charge and access to a lawyer.

The new security law was established by China to combat what it labelled the crimes of secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign organisations, which includes any open speech or intention relating to Hong Kong's secession.

Smarttraveller continues to advise travellers to exercise a high degree of caution in Hong Kong.



To mark P!nk's arrival in the Sunshine State, the Bonza cabin crew donned a touch of pink with their purple uniforms. JM



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Ambassador 2025/26

AMBASSADOR Cruise Line has launched its 2025/26 season alongside a range of promo offers, including 'buy one, get one free', 50% off single fares, and 25% drinks package discounts.

The new season includes itineraries in western Europe, the British Isles, the Mediterranean, Scandinavia and the Caribbean, as well as festive sailings during the month of Dec.

See all the voyages on offer or make a booking [HERE](#).

Hathor floats out

VIKING has marked a major construction milestone for its newest ship, *Viking Hathor*, with the 82-guest vessel floating out for the first time at Massara shipyard in Cairo.

Set to debut in Aug, *Hathor* will voyage the cruise line's 12-day 'Pharaohs & Pyramids' itinerary on the Nile River.

By 2025, Viking will have six ships sailing the Nile, with the addition of another sister ship, *Viking Sobek*, also in the works.

Rex 737 milestone

TO SUPPORT the growth of its Boeing 737 fleet, Rex Airlines has been granted certification from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority to operate its new purpose-built flight simulator located at its Sydney office in Mascot.

"This is an important milestone in supporting the growth of our 737 fleet and clearly demonstrates the commitment of the Rex board and management to safety by investing in this critical piece of training infrastructure," Rex GM of Flight Operations, Paul Fisher, said.



CVFR hosts Iftar in Sydney



CVFR Consolidation Services combined with the Saudi Tourism Authority last week to host agents and stakeholders to mark the fast-breaking milestone of Iftar during Ramadan at the Armani Restaurant in Parramatta.

Local reps for Saudi Tourism, Chris Hall and Demeiter Vaubell were in attendance, with Hall heaping praise on local travel agents for keeping the emerging Saudi Arabian market top-of-mind with travellers. *AB*

Pictured enjoying the tasty food on the night are: Ram Chhabra, CVFR Travel Group; Nidhi Nijhawan, CVFR Travel Group; Denise Gebrael, CVFR Consolidation Services; Demeiter Vaubell, Saudi Tourism Authority; Gabrielle Vicari, Airline Rep Services; and Chris Hall, Saudi Tourism Authority.

Robbie's role cooked

STAR Entertainment Group's chief, Robbie Cook, has announced his immediate departure after 16 months in role, stating he has "done everything that could possibly be done".

Shareholders have lauded Cook's exit, along with a number of his senior reports, as a "move in the right direction" as the beleaguered casino operator attempts to regain its license.

Walshe sing Korea

THE Walshe Group has been appointed by the Korea Tourism Organization to be its destination representative in New Zealand.

As part of the new contract, the agency will be charged with heightening awareness of South Korea as a tourist destination with Kiwis travellers through a combo of travel trade promotion, consumer media, as well as key partners to increase promotion and product offerings.

No French fries here

CATHAY Pacific is set to offer a new menu of 16 reinterpreted French classic dishes to customers flying in first and business class on selected long-haul flights from Hong Kong.

Created in partnership with JIA Group's Michelin-starred French restaurant, Louise, the first class menu features delectable options like steamed Chilean sea bass with chorizo sauce, while business class pax can enjoy braised Iberico pork belly with bacon jam.

The carrier has also expanded its partnership with Rosewood Hong Kong to rotate a new limited-time exclusive tasting menu at its first class lounge, The Pier, featuring traditional Cantonese flavours and specially crafted cocktails.



Window Seat

PART of the mysterious allure of Antarctica for many adventurous travellers is its unexplored nature, and this month the White Continent added even more intrigue.

An image (**pictured**) posted on Reddit (it's always Reddit) by a Google Earth addict depicts what appears to be a hidden door covered by snow.

Naturally, the post has garnered a number of fanciful conspiracy theories, including several users suggesting the door is the hidden entrance to Adolf Hitler's secret bunker.

More mundane theories postulate the door might be an underground entrance to a base camp or a storage facility for seeds (please, use a little more imagination people).

A *Metro UK* article suggests the coordinates of the door places it just 300 metres from Japan's Showa Station, a permanent research base located on East Ongul Island in Queen Maud Land.

Reddit is no stranger to posting strange images from Google Earth alongside wild hair-brained explanations, including the small uninhabited Vostok Island in Kiribati, which previously caused a stir when an optical illusion appeared to make the island look blacked out.

Brands have also been quick to pick up on the trend, with KFC a few years back constructing a massive 'spacevertisement' in Nevada depicting Colonel Sanders to attract Google Earth sleuths - that's finger lickn' tricky!



Sleepless in Seattle Brisbane

AIR Canada, Visit Seattle and Brisbane Airport (BNE) hosted over 50 southeast Queensland travel advisors for an exclusive event at Industry Beans last week, including a coffee tasting experience & espresso martinis. Guests learned about the fantastic connections via BNE with Air Canada to Seattle and updated their destination knowledge, including Seattle's famed coffee culture, key attractions and access to cruises.

Juanita Holman from Global Jetsetting was the night's big winner, taking home the major prize of Air Canada flights to Seattle for two people, plus five nights' accommodation, a Seattle CityPASS, and a day tour to Mt Rainier National Park, courtesy of Evergreen Escapes.



THE Brisbane Airport Corporation team of Kirsty Lucas, Anthony Cicutinni and Julie Leung, with Air Canada's Janis McDonald and Eunica Pineda and Amanda McCoy from Linkd Tourism.



MAJOR prize winner, Juanita Holman (pictured centre) with Janis McDonald and Amanda McCoy.



TRIVIA winner, Debra Gibb of Why Travel, proved her Seattle and Air Canada knowledge.



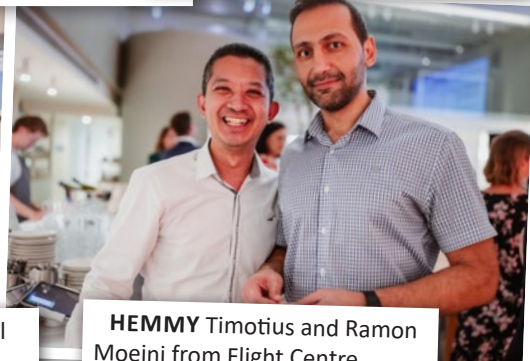
BROOKE Christey from Flight Centre and Tania Williams from The Luxury Travel Collection.



CASSIE Agnew, Global Jetsetting.



SAMIRA Biyar from Global Work and Travel enjoyed a VIP coffee tasting experience.



HEMMY Timotius and Ramon Moeini from Flight Centre.

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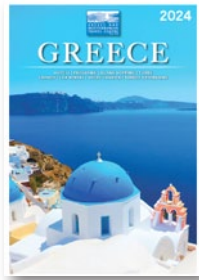
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Journey Beyond - Find your Outback Spirit 2025
Savings of up to \$2,995 per person are available in Journey Beyond's new earlybird sale to celebrate the launch of Outback Spirit's full 2025 touring season. The mammoth 168-page guide goes into great detail about the range, which includes a brand-new eight-day 'Arnhem Land and Kakadu Explorer' all-inclusive adventure. Travellers eager to include The Ghan can combine Outback Spirit's 13-day flagship itinerary 'Jewels of the Kimberley' with a ride on the two-day cross-country train.



Coral Expeditions - 2026 Micronesia & Melanesia
After a five-year break, Coral Expeditions is back exploring the farthest regions of New Guinea, Melanesia, Micronesia, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. Three new voyage series feature in the new brochure, departing in Jan and Feb 2026. Guests on the voyages will encounter remote islands, explore vast natural habitats and make friends with local tribes, while also enjoying daily snorkelling and dive activities.



Greece and Mediterranean Travel Centre - 2024
Available both online and as a 100-page printed guide, the new program from Greece and Mediterranean Travel Centre features a range of island-hopping options, coach tours and self-drive holidays. Supporting info such as maps, ferry connection details and island information can also be found. Hotels on the islands are divided into three categories for easy searching. Users will also find a luxury section and a guide to yacht charters.



Emerald River Cruises - Europe River Cruises 2025
Travellers can discover fairy-tale scenery and quaint little European villages along the riverbank across a wide variety of immersive river cruise itineraries from Emerald Cruises. Guests can explore the Rhine, Main and Danube through Central Europe, the Rhone and Saone rivers in France or tap into the gourmet viticulture in the sun-drenched Douro Valley in Portugal. An earlybird deal offering savings of \$4,300 per person has created high demand, with staterooms disappearing quickly.

TM shines at APT Awards



TRAVELMANAGERS walked away with multiple accolades after APT Travel Group's recent industry awards nights, with the company attributing the wins to its strong sales growth in 2023.

Taking place at Castlereagh Boutique Hotel in Sydney, the event saw TravelManagers declared 'Best Mobile Agency Group', while one of its personal travel managers (PTMs) was named as top advisor in Australia.

Upon receiving the award, Dubbo-based PTM, Robbie Barrett, shared "last year was a wonderfully successful year for the partnership between APT and TravelManagers, and I feel proud to have been a part of it".

According to Executive General Manager, Michael Gazal, who was also at the awards dinner, the company achieved 82% growth in sales with APT compared to 2022.

"We are delighted to also have achieved Diamond status with APT Travel Group as a result of our very strong sales performance in 2023," Gazal said.

"We look forward to continuing our partnership with APT as one of our preferred suppliers in 2024, and have our sights set on achieving even greater heights together in the year to come." JM

Pictured: Scott Ellis, General Manager Sales at APT Travel Group with TravelManagers' Robbie Barrett and Michael Gazal, accepting their award for Best Mobile Agency Group.

FCM new Euro chief

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group's (FCTG) travel management company division, FCM Travel, has promoted Andy Hegley to the new role of Europe Leader.

Hegley was previously the brand's Managing Director for the UK, Ireland and Netherlands, and in his new remit will be responsible for driving FCM's "strategic initiatives and growth across the European region".

He joined FCTG in 2007 as a BDM and was also UK GM for sister brand Corporate Traveller.

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