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## Houston, US arrivals have a problem

“WE HAVE serious problems,” was the admission by US Travel Association President and CEO Geoff Freeman (pictured) when discussing the growing strength of the American dollar and air space issues over Russia.

Speaking at the start of the of US Travel Association’s IPW session, Freeman said that despite the US facing a number of headwinds, there were



opportunities to overcome them.

“There’s a lot we can do about issues in our control like visa wait times, customs efficiencies, and the challenges travellers have when trying to make a connection and having to rescreen their bags when coming to the United States,” Freeman argued.

“If you’re in Colombia and want to come to the United States, the wait times for interviews are over 600 days...if you’re in Mexico, the wait times are over 800 days... if you’re in India, the wait times are...150-200 days,” he lamented. “We have challenged the State Department to set a goal of processing all visas in 30 days or less at any consulate.”

Freeman also noted that while

previously there was a US\$12 billion travel trade surplus, at the end of last year, there was a US\$50 billion travel trade deficit.

The US body’s chief also took aim at Customs, suggesting too many travellers, like those from Australia and New Zealand, were waiting more than two hours to get into the US after spending 10-14 hours on flights.

“There is nothing more predicatable than when planes are going to land,” he said.

“We know that other countries around the world realise you have to make significant changes and that it’s a competitive environment to attract travellers...they are putting in place steps to attract travellers away from the United States.” DF

### It’s all about Choice

**TRAVELLERS** Choice is encouraging travel professionals to choose a new future for their business by discovering the support and benefits the network can offer - for more details, check out today’s cover page.

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### Today’s issue of TD

Travel Daily today features eight pages of the latest news including our Sustainability page, a cover wrap from Travellers Choice, a photo page from Visit USA, plus a full page from Silversea.

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Travel Daily  
ON LOCATION

LOS ANGELES

Today’s issue of TD is coming to you courtesy of the IPW conference.

THE penultimate day of IPW begins as Australia sleeps, with a few delegates probably wishing they were snoozing.

Last night saw presentations from Pennsylvania, New York, Philadelphia, San Diego and more, as well as Santa Monica’s party on the pier.

For an authentic experience, TD skipped the courtesy bus and caught the Metro E line to the pier - some would call it an unmissable adventure.



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## Tonga taps into its point-of-difference

EXCLUSIVE

**TONGA** Tourism is currently on a rebrand journey in an effort to showcase its unique culture and heritage, going beyond the same stereotypical image of its South Pacific neighbours.

Villiami Takau, CEO of Ministry of Tourism Tonga (**pictured**), spoke with *Travel Daily* about the rebrand at the South Pacific Tourism Exchange, which is taking place in Fiji.

"A lot of people think that the Pacific [islands are] similar...but we need to focus on our unique factors, which is our culture and people," he explained.

"These are things that I hope will come out of the rebrand and reflect our recovery and our product development on the



ground as well."

With several partners on board, including Fiji Airways, Australia-based Market Development Facility, and New Zealand agency Tomahawk, Tonga Tourism has just completed a consultation process with key stakeholders, who have shared their insights into the future of the brand.

The results of the consultation will be released in a few months' time, and by the end of the year, the start of a marketing plan will be put in place, with the tourism board also looking to appoint agents in Australia and NZ.

However, Takau is conscious

that Tonga is still managing the impacts of COVID-19 and the volcanic eruption and tsunami that took place in 2022.

"We are still in recovery in terms of our accommodation and our tourism product.

"It's one thing to go on a full-on marketing campaign overseas, but it's another thing to be ready on the ground; it will be a step-by-step process," he shared.

Tonga's current branding has been in place for more than 10 years and Takau is keen for the upcoming rebrand to be a reflection of the country's past, present and future.

"We don't want to just be known for our whale watching, we want to also be known for our rich culture and heritage," said Takau, pointing to Tonga being the only remaining kingdom in the Pacific, with its own king and queen.

As Tonga is a largely Christian nation, it is also the only country in the Pacific that still maintains strict Sunday laws, explained Takau, and it's an interesting fact that he is keen to showcase as a unique selling point of Tonga. *JHM*

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Travel Daily  
ON LOCATION



DENARAU

Today's issue of *TD* is coming to you courtesy of Tourism Fiji, which is this week hosting us at the Fiji Tourism Exchange.

LAST night, attendees were invited to drinks at the new Latitude Bar and Lounge nightclub at the Crowne Plaza.

We were all impressed by its chic interior and ambience as we sipped on cocktails.

Today, we will be updated about tour operators and cultural experiences from Waya Island Resort and Vavavi to Captain Cook Cruises.

## THE PLACE TO BE IN THE MALDIVES





## Fiji Airways to put more on the table

Fiji Airways is set to launch Chef's Table, a new fine dining experience at its premier lounge at Nadi International Airport.

"It's us sharing Fiji with the world," Fiji Airways Chief Marketing and Sales Officer, Akuila Batiweti (pictured), told *Travel Daily* at the Fiji Tourism Exchange this week.

"As an airline, our purpose statement is that we fly for Fiji - that means more than just flights for us, it is [about] connecting our culture and destination with the world," Batiweti said.

"This is something that you can't get anywhere else in the world," he added.

When Chef's Table officially launches later this month, guests will be invited to pre-book their meals via email before check-in.

Lunch or dinner sessions will be enjoyed in a private dining room with up to 10 guests at the premier lounge at Nadi,



featuring a four-course meal that showcases local dishes, such as wild-caught ocean water prawns, flame-grilled tenderloin, housemade curry leaf, cardamon ice cream, and more.

In the future, the travel trade will also have the opportunity to book Chef's Table for their customers, the carrier confirmed.

"This is a step above the buffet meals offered at the lounge," Batiweti insists.

"It is an elevated Fijian dining experience where each dish

tells a story celebrating our rich history and cultural diversity."

MEANWHILE, Fiji Airways will soon unveil a stopover program in collaboration with Tourism Fiji.

Due to the Fijian Government's 72-hour tax-free transit program, travellers are not required to pay departure taxes during stopovers, giving Fiji Airways the opportunity to elevate its customer experience.

Batiweti explained the program will offer tourists a full range of activities in Fiji to enjoy, whether they are transiting in Fiji for two or the full 24 hours.

The past year has been a successful one for Fiji Airways, reaching a new record of 2.1 million passengers - representing 57% growth compared to 2022.

"[The stopover program] is part of ongoing market research and we look forward to sharing the news when decisions have been made," Batiweti teased. JHM

## Silversea appreciates

SILVERSEA has launched its first-ever Travel Advisor Appreciation Month promotion, which offers an incentive program throughout May for Australian and New Zealand agents.

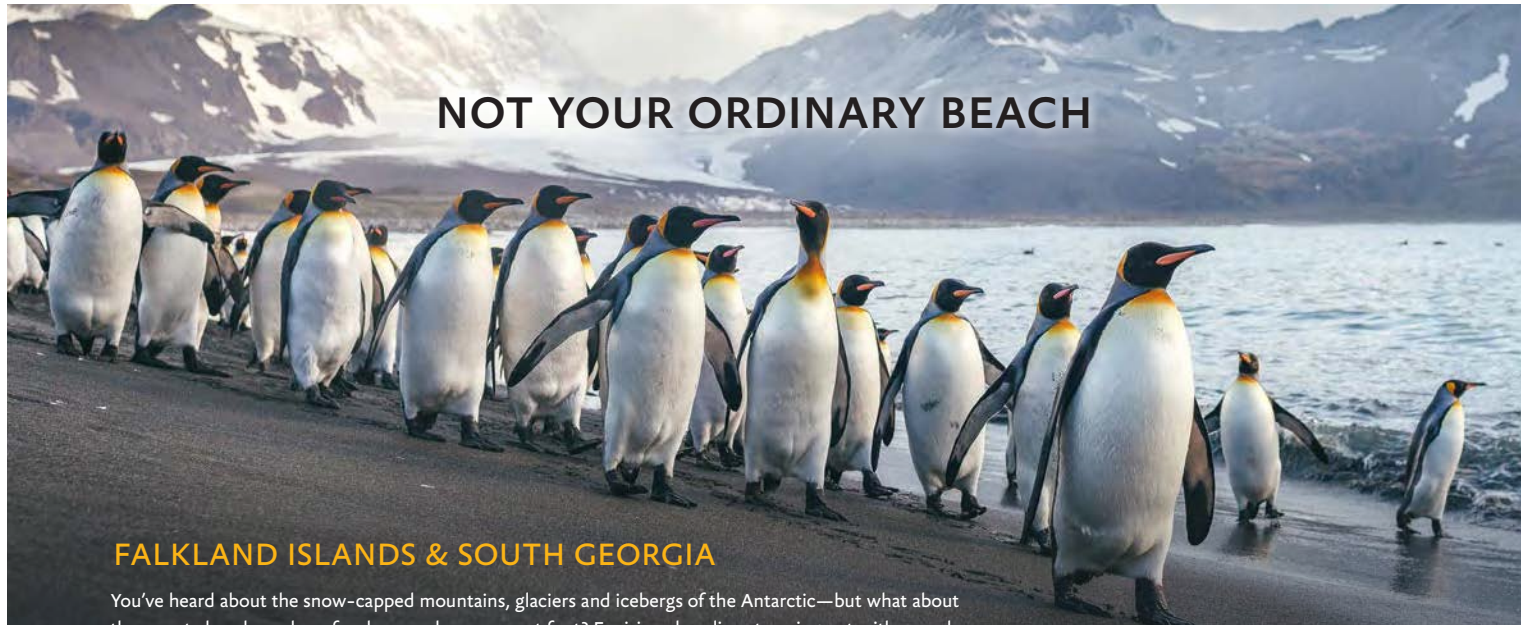
Agents will be automatically entered into a draw to win one of 50 gift cards valued at \$150 for every new booking they make, whether for classic ocean-going or expedition voyages.

The cruise line is also offering specially reduced rates for travel advisors, giving them the opportunity to experience Silversea's luxury at a lower cost.

One prize per entrant is allowed, with winners to be randomly selected from qualified entries and notified via email by 31 Aug - for more info, contact the sales team at [salesaunz@silversea.com](mailto:salesaunz@silversea.com).

For further information on the generous Silversea Travel Advisor Appreciation incentive, see the **back page** of today's issue of *Travel Daily*.

## NOT YOUR ORDINARY BEACH



### FALKLAND ISLANDS & SOUTH GEORGIA

You've heard about the snow-capped mountains, glaciers and icebergs of the Antarctic—but what about the remote beaches where few humans have ever set foot? Envision shorelines teeming not with crowds of sunbathers but with epic wildlife!

Come visit the sandy beaches of the sub-Antarctic islands of the Falklands and South Georgia, home to thousands of king Penguins, massive elephant seals and soaring albatrosses. Then, explore the rugged shorelines of the Antarctic Peninsula.

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## CATO celebrates 25 years

**THE** Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) will hold its 25th anniversary dinner at the Sydney Hilton Hotel on 20 Jun.

Following the industry body's 2024 Annual General Meeting, the celebratory dinner will commemorate CATO's milestones and offer members the chance to form bonds and network with key stakeholders and learn more about what support mechanisms are open to them.

This includes the introduction of the enhanced CATO Accreditation



Program (**TD** 05 Dec 2023), which now includes an annual financial health check conducted independently by an external accounting firm.

The evening will also recognise the efforts of Peter Baily (**pictured**), founder and life member of CATO, as well as provide gourmet cuisine and an atmosphere of camaraderie.

"This event is a celebration of the dedication and collaborative spirit of our members, whose steadfast commitment has driven CATO to new heights over the past 25 years," CATO Managing Director, Brett Jardine, said.

For more information and to register to attend, see **HERE**. **AB**

## Don't kick the bucket

**COLLETTE** is reminding the trade that its 'Bucket List Sale' is still running and will conclude on Mon 13 May.

To field enquiries, the operator's Australian-based call centre team has extended its hours to assist agents, which is now open every Sat 9am-1pm.

Agents can save up to 20% on tours worldwide - details **HERE**.

## itravel links with new duo



**TWO** new Link Affiliate members have been added to itravel's Queensland network this week, with Above & Beyond Travel owner Nicola Rowlingson and Journey On Travel founder Sara Birtwhistle coming on board.

"We're thrilled to see the continuing growth of new members in Queensland," itravel CEO, Steve Labroski, said.

"We welcome Nicole and Sara to our expanding portfolio of Link Affiliate members."

Jo Howard, itravel Business Development Manager, added the new recruits prove that



many agents feel its Link Affiliate program empowers businesses to focus on their brand while leveraging its products, advanced systems, and support.

Ittravel said that its Link Affiliate program offers travel businesses the opportunity to run their companies "their own way", while at the same time accessing its expansive network, time-saving technology and support. **AB**

**Pictured:** New Queensland-based members at itravel, Birtwhistle and Rowlingson.

Learn about itravel's Link Affiliate program **HERE**.

## Explore Norway, your way!

The North Cape Express offers an elevated experience aboard the newly refurbished MS *Trollfjord*. Your clients will be immersed in Norway's extraordinary coast and culture, from the capital Oslo to Europe's northernmost point, North Cape.

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## Training, but with a twist



**TRAVELLERS** Choice members from across NSW recently gathered in Sydney for a weekend of training sessions, complete with a cruise ship lunch and a chance to get creative.

The three-day event included a full-day training session at The Travel Corporation's Bondi Junction head office, where agents were given updates from each of the company's brands before catching up over drinks.

Agents were also able to connect with Travellers Choice preferred suppliers during a Pinot & Picasso session organised by Viva Holidays and Gate 7, where they could unleash their inner artist and paint San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge.

The event concluded with an onboard lunch and inspection of *Celebrity Edge*, where agents were able to check out the ship's 'Magic Carpet' - a tangerine glass-sheltered platform that rises alongside the vessel.

National Business Development

## Brazil flood warning

**DFAT** is warning travellers in Brazil to be aware of flooding in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, which has damaged infrastructure and essential services.

Transport may be disrupted, and travellers are being advised to follow instructions from local authorities and monitor the media for updates.

Manager, Paula Moylan, said the weekend aimed to provide Travellers Choice members with more than a standard update on recent product developments.

"We had a real mix of consultants taking part - from new entrants to experienced agency managers - which is why we decided to create a multi-layered training event," she said.

"The result was a three-day program that offered every participant...the opportunity to enhance their professional skills.

"The fun and interactive nature of the activities ensured that members also forged lasting connections with their colleagues and some of our most valued supplier partners." *JM*

**Pictured:** Travellers Choice members gathered for a full-day training session at The Travel Corporation's Sydney HQ.

## HAL's big giveaway

**AUSTRALIAN** travellers could win the 'ultimate Alaskan cruise experience' thanks to Holland America Line's (HAL) new comp, which runs until 10 May.

With a prize value exceeding \$17,000, the winner will embark on the 11-day 'Yukon + Denali Tour Cruise Tour', taking them through Alaska's Inside Passage, complete with a scenic train ride into Alaska and two nights at McKinley Chalet Resort.

Fill in a form **HERE** to win.

## ATIA UPDATE

from Dean Long, CEO



**IT HAS** been a huge seven days for the Australian travel industry with many highs and a terrible low, with Bonza entering

administration and unlikely to return to the sky.

Bonza's collapse will leave millions of regional people under-served and in some circumstances not connected.

Bonza as a business idea no doubt had some sceptics in the travel and tourism industry, but their on-time performance and product was gaining traction with many Australians.

As regular readers of this column, you will know that ATIA has been very vocal on calling for sensible reform of the rules - particularly for slot management at Sydney Airport, which we believe is essential.

This week also saw a huge number of industry events.

No doubt, the highlights were Helloworld Travel OMC in Sydney, Home Travel Company's Robyn and Murray's celebration of an amazing 40 years in Hobart, and

Envoyage's global gathering in Chile's capital Santiago.

What connected these events was the camaraderie that makes the travel industry unique.

We will look to build on this at ATIA's Beyond Borders Summit on Fri 25 Oct.

The summit will provide the perfect opportunity for ATIA members to come together as one, and during the event, they will have the chance to engage with leaders beyond their consortia or businesses, as they plan for 2025.

The summit will also provide some amazing insights into the emerging trends from our destination partners and networking opportunities on the eve of NTIA.

Stay tuned as tickets are about to be released in the coming days.

Next week members, directors and the ATIA team will be in Canberra for what will most likely be the final budget of the first term of Albanese Government.

As a result, Ingrid Fraser will be writing next week's column, which will feature in Wed's **TD**.

She will provide a review of the key aspects of the budget and its impact on the travel industry.

## Coombes in da house

**HOUSE** of Travel Holdings has snared the services of former Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) NZ Managing Director, David Coombes (**pictured**).

The travel veteran will lead House of Travel from 14 May in the position of CEO, his first major travel role since exiting FCTG NZ amid a high-profile restructure of the business early last year (**TD** 09 Feb 2023).

In a prophetic development, Coombes stated several times while on the sidelines of the industry that a leadership role at House of Travel would be the most likely company to coax him into a return.

"We are thrilled that David accepted the position, as a result of his knowledge, experience and his well-cemented relationships within the travel industry, he will hit the ground running," House of



Travel Chair, Keith Sutton, said.

Coombes has spent the last year focusing on upskilling his governance skills through the Institute of Directors in New Zealand, and also providing strategic direction and governance as an independent director for various businesses.

"I can't tell you how pumped I am to be coming back into an industry that I am so passionate about; I have always respected Chris Paulsen's vision as its founder," Coombes enthused. *AB*

## Party time! Visit USA welcomes AU/NZ to IPW

VISIT USA Australia welcomed the Australian and New Zealand IPW delegation to IPW 2024 with a dazzling rooftop reception in Los Angeles.

Over 200 delegates joined Visit USA members, US Commercial Service, and United States travel reps for an afternoon of cocktails and sunshine.

Sponsored by Los Angeles Tourism, Visit California, Visit Anaheim and Delta Air Lines, the event brought together the delegation and Visit USA members, showcasing the strength of the Australian market.

President, Caroline Davidson, highlighted the record AU/NZ delegation attendance, emphasising the vital role of collaboration in Australia's surging interest in US travel.



**PRESIDENT** of Visit USA Australia, Caroline Davidson, and Secretariat and Director of Events, Aida Osta, kicked off the IPW Welcome Event for Australian and New Zealand delegates.



**MONIQUE** Roos, US Commercial Service; Clinton White, Brand USA; Julie Ott and Kim Grant, TravMedia.



**LAURA** Handlery, Handlery Hotels; Cynthia Schmitt Easey, Citadel Outlets; Jocilyn Schumacher, Visit California; Jennifer Jasper Montero, Visit California; Jack Handlery, Handlery Hotels; and Aida Osta, Visit USA.



**POOLSIDE** cocktails and catch ups in Los Angeles.



**KATHLEEN** Brown, Los Angeles Tourism with Darren Ross, Magic Castle.



**LOK** Wang and Jerry Ma from Evergreen Holidays Group.



**DON** Skeoch, Los Angeles Tourism and Jennifer Jasper Montero, Visit California.



**DELTA** Air Lines were well represented with Nicole Bennett and Nicole Laurie looking very stylish.



**RONNIE** Collins and Mike Waterman, Visit Anaheim.



## Fiji tosses the trash

'IF YOU can't bin it, bag it' is the slogan for Tourism Fiji's new national cleanup initiative, which aims to preserve the country's natural beauty and promote responsible practices.

The campaign encourages people to store their rubbish in bags until proper disposal is available, with the message underscored by the tourism body's move to distribute reusable bags that were produced in collaboration with local partners.

The first lot of reusable bags were handed out to attendees at the Fiji Tourism Exchange who wished to participate in volunteer cleanup efforts, and will roll out nationwide in Jun.

## FCTG plants 100 trees

**FLIGHT** Centre Travel Group (FCTG) and Reforest have reached their annual target of planting one million trees, four months early.

The achievement was spurred by huge demand from customers for the agency's Captain's Pack, which involves a contribution towards 'Planting for the Planet', resulting in the million trees committed across Australia, New Zealand, Canada & Morocco.

## ANDBEYOND PROPERTIES GO BEYOND GREEN

**GLOBAL** sustainable accommodation portfolio, Beyond Green, has added 23 of andBeyond's properties to its collection under a new deal.

The agreement reflects the alignment of both companies' commitment to sustainability, leadership and a shared dedication to fostering positive change within the travel industry.

The andBeyond properties joining Beyond Green's portfolio include the newly launched Punakha River Lodge in Bhutan, the recently renovated Phinda Forest Lodge in South Africa (pictured), and Ngala Tented Camp in South Africa, which will reopen in Sep.

The 23 lodges and camps will be available to book via Beyond Green's 'Hotels' page [HERE](#) over the next 12 months after they have passed an on-site inspection by a third-party sustainable



tourism expert.

As part of the agreement, andBeyond will continue to service Beyond Green's 'Plan Your Trip' itinerary program, offering new bespoke travel itineraries through Africa and the Americas.

Available to book now, the itineraries range from seven to 18 nights, and include two limited-edition programs, one of which is a 14-night journey into South America to explore wildlife conservation projects aimed at protecting jaguars and pumas.

AndBeyond CEO and Executive Chairman, Joss Kent, commented

"as part of our 2030 vision to scale our impact through strategic partnerships and coalitions of change, we are incredibly pleased to announce an expanded collaboration with Beyond Green".

"Their dedication to sustainability exemplifies our own ethos as a bespoke luxury travel company committed to responsible travel across our operational footprint."

Preferred Travel Group acquired Beyond Green in 2021, with four andBeyond properties joining the portfolio as founding members ([TD 16 Jun 2020](#)). *JM*

## Gen Z prioritising the planet over plane travel

**THERE** is a small but significant cohort of Gen Z travellers around the world who are turning their backs on air travel for the sake of the planet, new research from StudentUniverse has unearthed.

The study, which looked at the latest travel sentiments of those aged 18-25, found that 13% are refusing to travel via plane because of emissions.

The student and youth travel

marketplace believes there is "every reason" indicating this trend will continue gaining momentum, and eventually enter the mainstream.

Half of Gen Z prioritise booking travel through companies with strong green credentials, *The State of Student & Youth Travel in 2024* report also revealed, while 23% are willing to pay an optional carbon offset fee.

## Eurostar pledges

**EUROSTAR**, the high-speed rail network linking France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK, has committed to powering its trains with 100% renewable energy by 2030.

The ambition is set out in the company's first-ever sustainability report, which focuses on three key strategy areas, including reducing its energy requirements.



## #TRAVELINSPO

Check out which destinations are trending [HERE](#)

Travel & Cruise  
Weekly



## Addressing the skills gap



**SKILLSIQ** NSW ITAB recently hosted its annual Industry Forum at Club Parramatta, where the focus was on the growing importance of a diverse workforce in Western Sydney for the travel and tourism sectors.

The NSW Minister for Skills, TAFE, and Tertiary Education, Steven Whan, was a key speaker, who informed attendees about his plans for TAFE reforms.

David Collins, Executive Director of NSW Training Services, Paul Nicolaou, and Dr Sherman Chan of Business Sydney, Jobs & Skills Council representatives, all presented their own vision of how the jobs future should look.

Professor Dr Simon Darcy from UTS also put forward his case for improving ways to attract and engage disability workforce to plug skills gaps in travel. **AB**

**Pictured** attending the event in Sydney was Minister Whan (centre), flanked by the SkillsIQ team of Melinda Brown, Jackie Zelinsky, and Yasmin King, and CEO of Australian Travel Careers Council Rick Myatt.

## FAA Boeing probe

**MISCONDUCT** investigations have been launched by the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) after Boeing claimed some safety checks by staff had been falsified on its 787 aircraft.

The aircraft manufacturer added it was taking "swift and serious corrective action with multiple employees", relating to the issue.

Boeing said the alleged safety misrepresentations related to bonding and grounding where the wings join the fuselage.

The company is now in the process of re-inspecting all 787 Dreamliner planes still in the production process, with the FAA adding it must also formulate a plan to address those in service.

However, the planemaker said this alleged misconduct did not create any flight safety issues.

Earlier this month, Boeing said there would be delays to its 787 delivery timeline due to supplier shortages on key parts, plus more thorough checks being conducted by FAA inspectors.

## Window Seat

**USUALLY** camping and road trips are an ideal budget-friendly travel option for many Aussies, but this unfortunately wasn't the case for one group of campers, whose jaunt ended up costing them far more than an overseas holiday.

Fraser Island Towing recently posted images to Facebook showing a K'Gari 4WD trip that went belly-up, in what was likely one of the company's most dramatic call-outs.

The photos show a white Jeep and a fully packed camping trailer submerged in water almost up to its roof off the shores of the holiday island during high tide, requiring two tow trucks to pull the vehicle out.

One Facebook user commented on the post to suggest the driver "had no idea what they were doing", stating that, as a fellow Jeep owner, the vehicles are "the most capable 4X4s money can buy" and "I can't get mine bogged if I try".

Other commenters voiced similar opinions, and one was helpful enough to tally up the costs - "a \$60K camping trip: Jeep \$40K, trailer \$15K, and \$5K towing services".

Although, apparently the 4WD is actually worth \$54,000 - we can only hope they had off-roading insurance.



## MONEY

**WELCOME** to Money, TD's Tue feature on what the Australian dollar is doing.

**AU\$1 = US\$0.662**

**THE** Australian dollar is off to a strong start this week, gaining almost a cent against the greenback, which has been on a slump due to last week's underwhelming jobs numbers.

In other parts of the world, the Aussie currency is establishing solid ground against the Chinese yuan, British pounds and the euro, but has slightly fallen against the Japanese yen.

*Wholesale rates this morning.*

US	\$0.662
UK	£0.527
NZ	\$1.102
Euro	€0.615
Japan	¥102.275
Thailand	฿24.37
China	¥4.779
South Africa	12.25
Canada	\$0.906
Crude oil	US\$82.96

## Aurora departure

**AURORA** Expeditions Chief Marketing Officer, Hayley Peacock-Gower, has departed the organisation after three years to pursue new opportunities.

The expedition company praised the efforts of Peacock-Gower and gave thanks for her hard work.

"She has been a passionate ambassador for our business purpose and approach to responsible expedition travel and we wish her all the best in her future endeavours," the line said.



# Travel advisor appreciation month

YOU HAVE OUR DEEPEST THANKS. AND THIS MONTH, EVEN MORE.

## Celebrating you with new rewards & benefits

Following a hugely successful Australia and New Zealand summer cruise season, we are delighted to recognise the invaluable work and contributions you make to Silversea. For 30 years, Travel Advisors such as you have played a vital role in our mission to deliver authentic experiences to your clients, and we are beyond grateful that you entrust your most discerning clients to us. As a token of our deepest thanks, throughout May we are making booking even more rewarding. Again, thank you for everything you do! We look forward to a future of continued success together.

### **\$150 GIFT CARDS** TO MAKE YOUR SILVERSEA BOOKINGS EVEN MORE REWARDING

For every new Silversea voyage you book during May, you will be automatically enrolled for a chance to earn a **\$150 gift card**. We have 50 gift cards to give away; one could be yours. Good luck! And thank you again.

\*Terms and conditions apply. Visit [events.silversea.com/gratefulforyou](https://events.silversea.com/gratefulforyou) for full conditions.

### SAIL INTO LUXURY FOR LESS WITH TRAVEL ADVISOR RATES **AS LOW AS \$245 PER DAY**

Remember, our ongoing gratitude to you also includes **exclusive Travel Advisor rates** that let you enjoy a luxurious voyage at a more affordable price – as well as gain first-hand product knowledge to be better prepared to plan your clients' future Silversea sailings. The voyage list and additional information are available on Marketing Central: Trade Specials and Incentives.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CLICK HERE  
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