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Explora stays loyal

MSC Group's luxury line Explora Journeys has launched a new five-tier structured loyalty program.

The new Explora Club boasts a range of benefits, including credits and savings; priority access to new collections; exclusive events; more personalised services; and a range of gifts.

Explora's loyalty structure includes Classic, Silver, Gold, Platinum, and Diamond, with the line stating each level curates a collection of unique benefits.

VA glitch affects 60,000

MORE than 60,000 Virgin Australia customers have been overcharged over a five-year period (**TD** breaking news).

The system glitch is understood to have been identified by Virgin internally, and involved transactions where customer made changes to itineraries.

"We recently found that in some instances from 21 Apr 2020 to 31 Mar 2025, some bookings were repriced in a way that does not



align with our policy, and we are refunding all impacted guests for that amount," a spokesperson for VA told **Travel Daily**.

"This involves 61,000 guests and approximately 0.1% of all bookings made during this period, with an average refund per guest of \$55 (including GST)."

The carrier has appointed Deloitte Australia to accelerate the claims process, with pax able to claim for up to 12 months.

"Any amounts that guests elect not to claim will be donated to charity," Virgin Australia added.

The airline said it has set up a dedicated team to fix the current issue, adding it has undertaken a range of other actions to prevent the glitch from reoccurring.

VA has notified the ACCC and will continue to work with the regulator on any additional actions necessary.

For more details about how to claim, [CLICK HERE](#). AB

ADL scores Bali link

INDONESIA AirAsia will commence flying four times a week between Adelaide and Bali from 25 Jun, marking the airline's debut in the Aussie city.

Deploying a 180-seat A320-200 aircraft on the route, the Asian carrier will add 74,000 seats a year from the Adelaide hub.

Flights on the route are on sale now from \$199, and follows significant pent-up demand from Adelaideans for budget Bali tickets, ADL MD Brenton Cox said.



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Tailormade A&K

ABERCROMBIE & Kent (A&K) is highlighting its Europe tours, including a 14-day exploration of Spain's most romantic cities.

For a limited time, couples can save up to \$4,000 on these tailormade journeys - see [page 9](#).

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features eight pages of news including our **Business Events News** page plus full pages from:

- Abercrombie & Kent
- Disney Resorts
- Designer Journeys

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CHINA AIRLINES

Shop with gift cards

AGENTS can earn gift cards up to \$250 in value for each booking with Designer Journeys as part of the organisation's loyalty program.

The three-tiered program also rewards agents with gift cards for genuine and qualified leads - more details on **page 11**.

Pelikin flies once again

THE intellectual property of travel money card Pelikin has been purchased by Equitfund, with the new owners signalling a commitment to settle all agent commissions owed as a priority.

After *Travel Daily* exclusively revealed Pelikin had entered administration last year (**TD** 07 Nov 2024), outstanding commission payments accrued between Jan and Jun last year will be paid promptly over the coming weeks, with some already settled.

Equitfund confirmed that to ensure continuity, founder Sam Brown will be retained as the CEO of the business, while advisor David Hughes will also stay on with Pelikin as CCO.

The new owners stated Pelikin



will focus on a "range of exciting developments", including improvements to the core product, expanded partnerships, and providing exceptional services to affiliate partners.

Equitfund views its investment strategy as scaling businesses for the long-term through strong capital support.

"As unfortunate as the events of last year were, we're pleased to now have this opportunity," Equitfund Chair Greg Huxley said.

"It's time to move forward with a renewed structure, a clear vision, and a product that continues to evolve with the needs of modern travellers."

Part of the next growth phase will see recruitment take place, with a marketing coordinator position currently open. **AB**

Disney ticket deal

DISNEYLAND Resort California is offering Australian residents a ticket deal, on sale now through a range of wholesalers.

The offer is valid on all three-, four-, and five-day theme park tickets for a range of travel dates from next month - see **page 10**.

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Ultra-Luxury Cruising

EXPEDITION VOYAGES
2025-2026

East Antarctica



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Intrepid office rocks

INTREPID Travel has been named one of Australia's best places to work.

The tour operator topped both the Retail, Hospitality, Tourism & Entertainment category, and the Large Organisation category at the 2025 AFR BOSS Best Places to Work Awards last night in Sydney.

Intrepid was recognised for its employee travel program, which gives every staff member a free trip each year - plus five extra days of leave in order to take it.

The program saw more than 400 team members travel with Intrepid last year, with partners and family able to join them at discounted rates.

Samoa goes flat

SAMOA has declared a State of Emergency due to an unfolding energy crisis.

According to DFAT, the Pacific Island nation is experiencing regular power outages and electricity rationing, impacting some essential services.

Travellers are encouraged to check with accommodation providers for impacts.

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EXPEDITION VOYAGES
2025-2026

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FJ lands in Cairns

"GAME changer" flights to Cairns from Fiji have touched down for the first time today, courtesy of Fiji Airways.

The new, year-round service from Nadi creates Far North Queensland's first non-stop connection to Fiji.

15.9254° S, 69.3354° W

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Lake Titicaca, Peru



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Millennials lead the charge

AUSTRALIANS in the 25-44 age bracket are the most keen to get away this autumn, according to new research from the Tourism & Transport Forum (TTF).

Eighty-three percent of this cohort are planning a trip between 15 Mar and 15 May - significantly higher than the national average of 71%.

"We're seeing Millennials set the pace when it comes to prioritising travel this autumn," TTF CEO Margy Osmond said.

"Australians in the 25-44 age bracket are not only the most prolific travellers but are also eager to explore international destinations," she added.

Millennials comprise almost one in five (18%) of the total 14% of Aussies who are planning to head overseas this autumn, with the overall number almost double compared to a similar time period in 2024, when only 8% ventured out of the country.

The TTF statistics reveal New Zealand as the top international destination, knocking Europe out of the top spot from last year.

As for domestic hotspots, Sydney just beat out Melbourne (11% vs 10%) as the most popular city to visit during autumn, while the Gold Coast (8%) and Sunshine Coast (4%) are the most in-demand regional areas, with travellers seeking to soak up the remaining warmth.

The TTF survey also revealed that 40% of those planning an



autumn holiday intend to spend less than \$2,000 on their entire trip, while 37% look to spend between \$2,000-\$5,000.

Additionally, women are the most frugal travel planners, with 48% looking to spend less than \$2,000 (versus 32% of men). *JM*

TC is perfect again

TRAVELLERS Choice has maintained its record of achieving a perfect score in its annual Member Survey for the third consecutive year.

Members taking part in the 2025 survey reported 100% satisfaction with their membership, and were especially happy with the company's communication strategy, range of preferred suppliers, marketing support and annual conference.

"The unrivalled connection we have with our members ensures we understand the most pressing challenges they face," Managing Director Christian Hunter said.



QF America chief

QANTAS has appointed Ash Howell as Executive Vice President of the Americas region.

Starting later this month, Howell will play a key role in raising Qantas' profile ahead of Project Sunrise, offering nonstop flights between NY and Australia.

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Window Seat

POSSESSED sea lions.

Now that we have your attention, sadly this is actually quite serious - sick sea lions affected by an increasingly common algae bloom in California are randomly attacking people in popular tourist spots.

The usually placid animals are suffering from domoic acid toxicosis - a neurological condition caused by a harmful algal bloom.

BBC reported that "the bloom of algae started earlier than normal this year and has spread roughly 370 miles", with two attacks reported recently - a surfer in Southern California and a beach-goer in Long Beach.

Marine Mammal Care Centre in LA is treating the animals.

Barlow says hello to HLO

HELLOWORLD Travel Limited (HLO) today announced the full acquisition of Barlow Travel Group, otherwise known as BCD Travel, based out of Wellington, New Zealand (**TD** breaking news).

The business was founded by Peter Barlow in 2011 and traded as BCD under license from the Netherlands-based business of the same name.

Barlow (**pictured**) who is Managing Director, and Director Ross Jamieson, will both remain in the business working alongside Helloworld NZ's Executive General Manager, Chris Hunter.

Andrew Burnes, CEO and Managing Director of HLO, said, "We are very pleased to announce our acquisition of Barlow Travel Group.

"They have been one of the most iconic brands in corporate and event travel in New Zealand for many years and throughout that time have supported HLO



New Zealand as part of our Associate network of agents."

The acquisition comes after HLO and Barlow agreed to a long-term partnership in 2018 that included put and call options.

Barlow said, "We have been partnering with HLO now for seven years as a member of their network in New Zealand and are delighted that the opportunity to take the next step and become a part of HLO has eventuated." **DF**

AA carries LAX bag

AMERICAN Airlines passengers will no longer need to collect and recheck their bags after a flight from Sydney to Los Angeles as part of a new expedited bag trial.

The process has been a much-maligned part of transiting through LAX for many years, with American Airlines aiming to expand the bag transit to other airports in the future.

The move is expected to ease the transit process for travellers connecting to another AA flight, however connections to partner airlines will still require bags to be collected and rechecked.

The bag transfer will scuttle plans by any traveller engaging in 'skiplagging', whereby a connecting flight is booked at a lower price but not taken.

American Airlines has recently cracked down on the practice, last year successfully litigating a website which showed travellers how to save money on their trip by skiplagging (**TD** 21 Oct 2024).

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Aman names luxury yacht



AMAN Resorts has revealed the official name of its first luxury motor yacht as *Amangati*, with the upscale hospitality brand ventures into the cruising sector (**TD** 24 Jan 2023).

The vessel is currently under construction by Italian shipbuilder T.Marriott, and is scheduled to launch in the Mediterranean during the summer 2027 season under the company's new maritime brand, Aman at Sea.

"Naming Amangati marks a pivotal and inspiring milestone for Aman," said the group's

Chairman and CEO Vlad Doronin.

"The vessel will embody the very essence of our brand's DNA, providing exceptional privacy, best-in-class amenities, now synonymous with Aman, and our signature unparalleled service not yet experienced on the water."

The 183-metre yacht will feature 47 spacious luxury suites, four dining concepts, a Jazz Club, Aman Spa, and an expansive Beach Club offering guests direct access to the water at the stern of the vessel.

The ship will also boast a suite of green technologies, such as utilising battery power, as part of Aman's commitment to reducing its environmental footprint.

Amangati was originally planned to debut in 2025. **JM**

BWH inks an Oz first

BWH Hotels has announced its first hotel management agreement in Australia with the signing of the Cambridge Hotel Kununurra in WA.

The hospitality company will assume hotel management rights in May, with a complete rebrand to be carried out in three phases starting from Jun.

The transformation will see the hotel's capacity almost doubled, with an extra 48 new guest rooms to arrive by the end of 2026, while the existing 49 rooms will undergo a full refurbishment.

Additionally, the hotel's facilities will be extended, including a conference centre, wellness centre and a pool bar.

Cambridge Hotel Kununurra serves both business travellers, as well as domestic and international leisure travellers exploring the iconic Bungle Bungles and the greater Kimberley region.

Sofitel sparks Buzz

SOFITEL Sydney Wentworth, which recently underwent a \$77 million refurbishment, has selected The Buzz Group to represent it in Australia.

The hotel has also announced a new partnership with fashion house Carla Zampatti, celebrating a joint 60th anniversary for both the hotel and the designer label.

To mark the partnership, Sofitel Sydney Wentworth will host an in-conversation session with Carla Zampatti CEO Alexander Schuman on 20 May, followed by a curated, wine-paired dining experience at one-hatted tilda.

Additionally, the new Carla Zampatti collection will be displayed in the hotel's lobby throughout May.



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FEATURE

It's all happening with Collette:

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THERE'S never been a better time to book your clients on a Collette guided tour. With new tours being released for 2026, plus a European famil, there is so much on offer for you and your clients.

In 2026, Collette will feature over 50 small-group Explorations as part of its 170+ tours spanning all seven continents. These small-group Explorations, which are Collette's fastest-growing tour style, have struck a chord with Australian travellers. With the highest number of guaranteed departure dates available and a flexible cancellation waiver, you can confidently secure your clients' 2026 holiday plans. Additionally, Collette offers dedicated support through its Australian BDMS and local call centre, ensuring flexibility and peace of mind for you and your clients.

For aurora chasers, there's not one, but three new journeys across Canada, Iceland and Norway to seek out the northern lights. For clients wishing to explore a little closer to home, discover the beauty of Northern Vietnam or embark on the ultimate small group exploration to Africa, spanning shorelines from South Africa's Cape Town to Egypt's Nile or discover Namibia's epic landscapes.

Handcrafted by Collette's in-destination experts, the new

tours underscore Collette's commitment to delivering authentic, immersive experiences without intermediaries.

With these new tours, and plenty more to choose from, now is the time to secure 2026 group space with \$1,500 bonus commission* per group booking of 15 or more. Ask your local BDM or call our Australian call centre to learn about how you can boost your business with a Collette group.

For those clients still wishing to travel in 2025, you can save them \$1,500+ per couple on airfares everywhere. Plus, when you buy air with Collette, your clients get door-to-door sedan service to and from select airports, hotel transfers, and all internal transfers during their tour. It's the perfect stress-free way to start and end their trip.

Don't forget, all Collette bookings made between 01 Jan-30 Apr 2025 brings you closer to securing your spot on Collette's 'Peaks of Europe' famil, a 12-day small group Explorations tour through Europe's towering Alps and idyllic towns across France, Switzerland, Austria & Italy.

Terms and conditions apply, so contact your business development manager or Collette's Australian call centre on 1300 792 195, or check out www.collette.com.au for more information.

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Travel on national stage

THREE travel and tourism bodies have joined a wider joint campaign to remind political parties of all persuasions to call for better regulations and growth support in the lead-up to the federal election on 03 May (**TD** breaking news).

The Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA), the Tourism and Transport Forum, and the Australian Airports Association have joined 17 other advocacy groups in a national marketing push to call for more support Australian businesses.

ATIA Chief Executive Officer Dean Long will also represent the travel sector at a national media conference in Canberra.

"We're proud to stand with other peak bodies in calling for smarter regulation that supports growth and lets businesses focus on delivering for Australians," Long said.

"ATIA is proudly ensuring the travel sector is a serious player in national policy, we are in the room, at the microphone, and on the front foot," he added.

Full page advertisements calling for more business support have been placed across *The Australian*, *The West Australian*, and *The Australian Financial Review* as part of the campaign.

With more than 90% of ATIA members being small businesses, efforts from the industry body will be focused on securing more SME support and resources.

ATIA members booked over \$30

billion in travel services in 2024, supporting nearly 17 million Australian travellers annually. *AB*

Club Med sales up

CLUB Med has reported a record-breaking 2024, with its sales in Australia and New Zealand up 32% year-on-year.

The hotel company achieved an overall business volume of €2.09 billion (A\$4.38 billion), representing a 7% increase from the year prior.

Club Med's mountain resorts winter season saw a significant growth of 20%, now accounting for over 35% of total business volume, with its Japan ski resorts witnessing a 125% growth.

The company also saw strong performance across its European ski destinations, particularly Valmorel Chalets (up 155% year-on-year) and Val d'Isère, the only Exclusive Collection resort from its Europe ski (up 52%).

Its Asia sun resorts also performed well, with the newly renovated Club Med Phuket seeing an increase in sales of 20% from the year prior, while Bali continued to be a popular choice, making up 23% of Club Med's total sales for the year.

"Our 2024 results reflect the enduring appeal of Club Med's premium all-inclusive experience, as well as the growing demand for immersive, meaningful travel," said Rachael Harding, CEO of Club Med East South Asia Pacific.

Lux travellers to lower impact



A NEW survey from Virtuoso has revealed sustainable tourism is a top priority for luxury travellers, with more than two-thirds (68%) suggesting recent global events have inspired them to travel more responsibly.

This number is up from 55% last year, with many seeing the personal rewards of this shift.

Almost two-thirds (62%) believe sustainable travel enhances their experience, a significant rise from last year (44%).

Almost half of all travellers (42%) now see strong sustainability policies as a top priority when choosing who to book with.

Tourists are now also considering how and where they travel, with almost a third (32%) saying they would explore a less-visited destination; more than a quarter would travel outside of peak season; and 5% would even pay more to access a popular destination, Virtuoso found.

Those willing to adopt all three strategies has more than doubled, indicating a firmer commitment

to tackling overtourism and a growing preference for lesser-known destinations.

Demand for expert guidance on travel is growing, as tourists seek to limit the impact of their holidays, with 25% saying they're more likely to travel responsibly with support from an advisor.

"Through deliberate action, mindful spending and a desire to make a difference, luxury travellers are looking to take a more active role in ensuring they travel responsibly," Virtuoso Vice President of Sustainability Javier Arredondo said.

"Sustainable travel has been viewed as either something observed by backpackers or, on the other end of the spectrum, an exclusive choice for a select few.

"We're now seeing sustainable tourism as an accessible option for travellers who recognise that doing good and travelling well are not mutually exclusive."

Virtuoso will host its inaugural Impact Summit this Jun at The Fairmont Lake Louise in Banff National Park (**pictured**). *MS*

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ABEA links up with IAPCO

THE Australian Business Events Association (ABEA) has announced a new strategic partnership with the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers (IAPCO).

Under a three-year agreement, the bodies will work together to strengthen the global meetings and events industry through enhanced knowledge sharing, increased visibility, and collaborative opportunities.

ABEA and IAPCO will jointly host industry and online education initiatives, including panel discussions, as well as co-write a white paper to benefit both membership bases.

"Our collective efforts will provide our members with exceptional value, critical industry knowledge, and the ability to connect on a global scale," ABEA Chief Executive Officer Melissa Brown said.

MEANWHILE, ABEA has formed a Research Advisory Group made up of academics and industry experts, including from Business Events Sydney and Melbourne Convention Bureau.

The new body is dedicated to informing the Association's research priorities, ensuring projects are evidence-based and methodologically sound.

ADELAIDE INSURES SUCCESS

ADELAIDE Oval is set to reinforce its reputation as a world-class venue after inking a major new deal with NRMA Insurance which will see one of its popular outdoor meeting places renamed.

Under the five-year agreement, the Southern Plaza will be known as NRMA Insurance Plaza, with new signage set to light up the 4,000m² space from this week.

Additionally, game day usher and stadium tour ambassador uniforms will be refreshed and the venue's concierge desk rebranded to the NRMA Insurance Help Desk.

The partnership will support the growth and development of grassroots football and cricket through the stadium's management model, which sees profits returned to both sports.

"As the custodians of South Australia's most recognisable



asset, we have a responsibility to maintain its standing as an internationally renowned venue and seek partners that share that vision," said Adelaide Oval CEO Nick Addison.

"In NRMA Insurance we have secured a partner that not only shares our values and our commitment to South Australia, but also our enthusiasm for creating new opportunities for customer engagement and community outreach."

The new partnership represents NRMA Insurance's second major investment in South Australia's events industry this year, following its inaugural season as presenting partner of the Adelaide Fringe festival.

Adelaide Oval welcomes over 1.9 million visitors annually, hosting concerts, international sporting and cultural events, and over 1,800 functions each year, in addition to its 30-plus cricket and AFL game days. *JM*

Amway China delegates taste Tassie

AROUND 400 delegates from Amway China's Leadership Summit (**TD** 03 Apr) have arrived in Tasmania this week for an incentive experience.

The group will embark on a Tasmanian itinerary while staying at The Tasman, a Luxury Collection Hotel.

Delegates will enjoy local produce in restaurants across the city and engage in culinary experiences, such as catching



and preparing fresh seafood on custom charters with Tasmanian Wild Seafood Adventures.

They will also explore the state's natural environment on sightseeing adventures led by Pennicott Wilderness Journeys.

Darwin goes big

DARWIN Festival has announced its biggest-ever foodie program, which will introduce new immersive food and bar events.

Taking place from 07-24 Aug, the festival's Taste of Darwin program will double in size to six events, including a 'City Cocktail Experience' with 1920s and tropical themes, and a 'Gloom and Gourmet Dinner'.

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In a full circle move, tourism professional **Julieta Lopez** has rejoined the **Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC)** in its NSW Leadership Group. Lopez returns to the association from her current role at the Art Gallery of NSW and brings extensive experience in tourism distribution, trade and consumer marketing and building industry connections.

A few weeks after leaving MSC Cruises, travel operations professional **Arnaud Michelin** has landed in his new position as Vice President of Operations at **Accommodations Plus International**. The company provides travel crew with layover accommodation, drawing on a mobile app which provides each crew member with real-time communications with transport operators and hotels as needed.

A new leadership team is now in place at **Rydges World Square Sydney**, working under the tutelage of Area General Manager Lisa Parker. The hotel has promoted **Daniel Neuman** to Executive Assistant Manager while welcoming **Jamie Bramwell** as Food and Beverage Manager, with experienced chef **Matthew Lambert** bringing his skills to the property.

Two new Business Development Managers have joined the team at **1000 Mile Travel Group** to spearhead the company's next growth phase. Based in Florida, **Kristina Kristianson** will work to grow the company's advisor network in the US, while **Stu McLennan** joins the UK-based team focused on building the corporate client lead generation program.

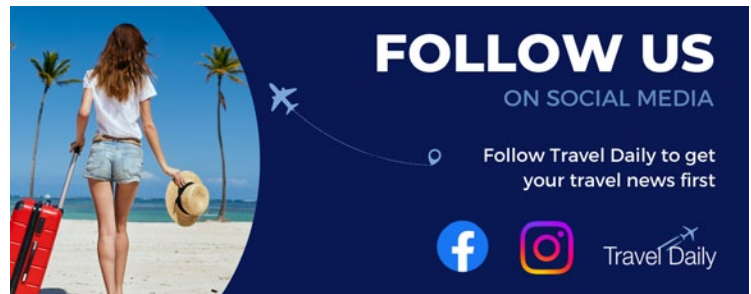
Hotel industry veteran **Carl Forrest** has been appointed to the General Manager post at **Pan Pacific Melbourne**, bringing 24 years of experience to the property. Forrest moves across from recent management posts at Yarra Valley Lodge, Lindenderry Red Hill, and View Hotels property in all three of Australia's east coast capitals.

Bringing over four decades in the hotel industry, **Thomas Hoeborn** has been named the new General Manager at **Conrad Singapore Orchard**. Highly experienced in luxury hospitality, Hoeborn moves to the Lion City from his recent role leading Conrad Maldives Rangali Island.

Mulpha Events has recruited **Claire Back** to the role of General Manager Events & Partnerships, with Back commencing in the role this month. Back brings more than 20 years in events to her role and is respected for her ability to shape brands and lead high-performing teams.

Continuing his career journey within **Sunway Hospitality Group**, **Alex Castaldi** has moved up to the top job as its new Chief Executive Officer. In the new role, Castaldi will help drive the Malaysian company's next growth strategy across its portfolio of hotels, resorts and attractions.

Adnan Yucel has joined **InterContinental Chiang Mai** in Thailand, taking on the duties of General Manager. While overseeing all hotel operations and ensuring all guests enjoy exceptional service, Yucel will oversee the newly launched spa and Club InterContinental.



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Growth spurt at Fine Tours



NEW Zealand tour operator Fine Touring is marking the success of its trans-Tasman expansion brand Inside Australia Travel by unveiling a corporate restructure to bring both brands under one roof.

With a refreshed identity - Fine Tours Group - the two brands will continue to offer its style of self-drive, escorted and independent touring holidays in Australia and New Zealand.

Fine Touring brings 20 years of operation to the table, whereas Inside Australia Travel has just marked its first anniversary, with strong growth so far spurring a need to grow the team rapidly.

In one year, the team at Inside Australia has grown to a team of 17 travel professionals with the recruitment underscoring the demand for personalised and independent travel experiences.

"Expanding into Australia is an exciting next step, allowing us to share the same expertise, warmth, and personal service in a new destination," said Fine Tours Group CEO, Anton Stanish.

"We are investing in our people and technology to continue delivering holidays of a lifetime with the same care and attention that define us," he added.

The company said its move to bring both brands under one name will make it easier for travellers to recognise and

connect with it, no matter which side of the Tasman they're on.

Fine Tours Group is co-owned by investment firm Evergreen Partners, Director Greg Muir, and the company's original founders, David and Kerry Kettle.

Pictured above is part of the team from Inside Australia Group.

Sea World report

MALFUNCTIONING antennae, poor visibility and issues with seat belts have been identified as key causes of the tragic helicopter crash at Sea World in 2022.

In the final report handed down by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB), a series of errors contributed to the mid-air collision which killed four people and injured nine others.

The investigation also found that the two helicopters operated by Sea World used separate landing pads which had created a collision zone if one departed at the same time as another was coming in to land.

In addition, a taxiing radio call to be made by the departing pilot was not broadcast when expected by the approaching pilot due to the faulty antennae.

The ATSB report provided 28 recommendations which Sea World said it would consider and respond in due course.

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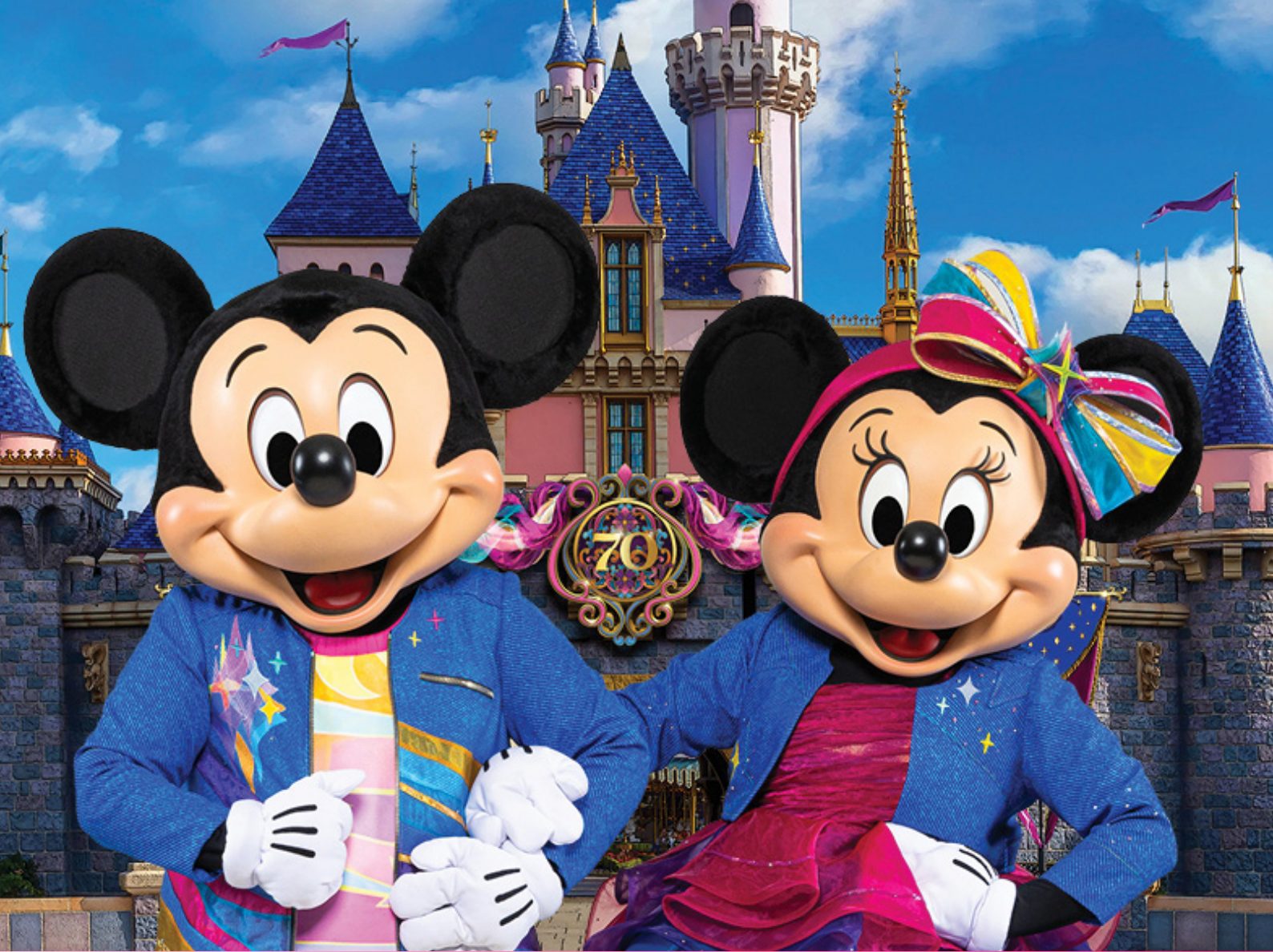


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