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Travel Daily

ON LOCATION



DARWIN

Today's issue is coming to you courtesy of Ponant, which is hosting us to explore *MS Paul Gauguin* after a significant refurbishment in Singapore.

THE 330-guest vessel spent seven weeks in dry dock in Singapore being refurbished bow to stern, led by Sterling Design International.

Guests of the Ponant brand Paul Gauguin will today get to tour the ship prior to her departure in the afternoon, headed for Fiji.

Travel Daily is here for a quick fly in, fly out visit and will bring you the full report on the upgrades tomorrow.

AAT Kings rallies rail

AAT Kings has launched a new tool, AAT Kings Meets Train, offering itineraries that combine its tours with rail experiences.

For example, advisors may wish to offer a rail journey that ends in Darwin, followed by an outback adventure with AAT Kings.

AAT Kings' new episode on its *A-LISTERS* podcast focuses on the tool, offering insights, destination tips and selling strategies.

Silversea savings

SILVERSEA guests can save up to \$8,600, plus US\$500 of shipboard credit per suite.

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Cruise faces carbon levy

A NEW levy will be enacted for all ocean ships weighing over 5,000 gross tonnes from late 2027, under a new legally binding framework created by the International Maritime

Organization (IMO) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Ratified in the draft phase at the UN body's Marine Environment Protection Committee last Fri, the new measures will force shipowners - including cruise lines - to pay up to US\$380 per tonne of carbon dioxide emitted unless they take steps to cut emissions, according to a figure quoted by *Skift*.

In response, Cruise Lines International Association told **TD** "it remains critically important that the IMO requirements remain realistic, and that regional or national revenue-generating programs are avoided or harmonised with requirements to prevent double counting of emissions or related payments into more than one system".

The measures are set to be formally adopted in Oct 2025, and under the framework, ships will need to reduce their annual greenhouse gas fuel intensity over time, while vessels emitting above emissions thresholds will have to acquire remedial units to balance its pollution deficit.

The IMO Net-Zero Fund will also be established to collect the levy funds, with some to be returned to low-emission ships; fund training & tech; and mitigate impacts on smaller countries. *AB*

OMC preps Canada

HELLOWORLD Travel has revealed it will host this year's Owner Managers Conference (OMC) in Vancouver.

Running from 22-25 May, the event will also offer pre- and post-conference family opportunities to showcase the popular North American destination, while Helloworld TV Show presenter Anthony Lehmann (**pictured**) has also been locked in as emcee.

The conference will offer owners key insights, business updates, trends, networking, and product news as just a slice of the jam-packed program, in addition to several special events and functions to be revealed soon.

"Our OMC is a much anticipated and well-loved event, bringing together owner-managers for insightful sharing of knowledge and a celebration of being a part of the Helloworld Travel family," Group General Manager Retail Nick Sutherland said.

Partners for the OMC this year include Destination Canada, Destination British Columbia, and Destination Vancouver.



Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of news, including our **Sustainability** page, plus a product profile from **Inspiring Vacations** and full pages from:

- Silversea
- APT Travel

Travel Daily

ON LOCATION



AT SEA

Today's issue of **TD** is coming to you courtesy of Norwegian Cruise Line, which is this week hosting us aboard Norwegian *Aqua*'s christening voyage.

TRAVEL Daily is lucky to be the only trade media aboard Norwegian Cruise Line's new flagship *Norwegian Aqua*, which is sailing on her first voyage from her new home of Miami.

Guests will enjoy everything the new vessel has to offer aboard the three-night cruise, including the all-new 'Aqua Slidecoaster', a dual water slide-roller coaster only available on board the new ship.

We will also enjoy dinner at one of the many specialty restaurants on board, before taking in *Elements: The World Expanded*, a new take on one of NCL's most acclaimed shows.

APT hails VIP victors

CONGRATULATIONS to APT's Helloworld partners who won at the recent national VIP awards.

APT is thanking agents for their "passion, professionalism and commitment to excellence" - see **page nine** for all the fun photos.

Canada inspiration

FROM Alaska cruises to rail journeys with Rocky Mountaineer, Inspiring Vacations' 2026 Canada season is packed with new adventures, guided tours and carefully curated itineraries - see **page 10** for more.



Disney Days is back!

Register your interest now!



Insights spur Entire's soirees to new heights

EXCLUSIVE

ENTIRE Travel Group has revealed its 2025 Travel Showcase and Soiree events in Feb attracted a strong number of agents whose exposure to the brand was new.

Speaking recently to *Travel Daily*, Entire Travel Group Sales and Marketing Director Greg McCallum said that in line with an increasing number of agent attendees, the level of exhibitors is also climbing strongly.

McCallum said the events earlier this year delivered between 850 and 900 advisors across its three-event series, while exhibitor numbers climbed from 37 to 50.

"The second year was always going to be an improvement on the first year, because we had some learnings.

"We went from 37 exhibitors to 50 exhibitors, and we just tweaked the format, and we listened," McCallum said.

After Entire's first showcase last



year, two surveys were given to exhibitors and attendees, which yielded "little nuggets" about how to improve the events, and were implemented - and delivered results - this year.

Exhibitors also appreciated the fact Entire Travel Group is not aligned with any one retail group, meaning the broader industry can be invited," McCallum said.

"We got just about everybody

and the exhibitors loved that, because if you're an exhibitor and you're going to a retail travel conference, you're only engaging with members of that particular retail group," McCallum said.

"So the exhibitors see that as a huge bang for buck, and that's the feedback they always give us, because they get to communicate with travel agents across the whole retail sector," he added.

McCallum said Entire's 2026 soirees have been scheduled for 03-05 Feb to capitalise on the start of selling season and the return of many agents from New Year holidays.

"It's only two weeks after Australia Day, and there's event fatigue through the year because there are so many events, and then it's almost event starvation from late Dec to the end of Jan, so we hit them when they're not fatigued from events and things," McCallum added. *ML*

Intrepid's next win

INTREPID Travel has scooped up its second workplace accolade this month, this time making an appearance on LinkedIn Australia's Top Companies List.

The operator ranked 12th in the midsize employers category, featuring businesses with fewer than 5,000 global employees.

Some of Intrepid's policies that focus on employee wellbeing and satisfaction include a family leave policy that provides additional care costs, annual travel companion reimbursements, rooming upgrades and support for employees to travel with children under 18 months.

Other policies include flexible options such as the ability to work a nine-day fortnight, as well as 20 hours paid volunteer leave.

In addition, staff are invited to take part in employee-led DEI advocacy group.

Earlier this month, Intrepid won two top spots in the 2025 *AFR* BOSS Best Places to Work awards.

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Window Seat

AN AIR New Zealand passenger recently posted to social media to complain about his meal on a flight from Sydney to Auckland (pictured).

When interviewed by *Stuff* in NZ, Peter Macky said his meal looked akin to a “flesh coloured paste” for cats.

But the mystery was later cleared up by the carrier, which confirmed the sandwich was a pork and sage foccacia melt with tomato and relish.

“Presentation...is important to me,” Macky said.



Singapore doubles down on cruise

THE popularity of cruise trips departing Singapore will see the destination’s largest cruise terminal undergo its biggest renovation works since 2012.

Over the next nine months, Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore will enjoy a S\$40 million refurbishment to allow the facility to better cater for the global trend toward larger cruise ships from major brands.

In addition to an expanded number of lounge facilities, the terminal will also have larger seating areas for embarkation and disembarkation, as well as check-in stations that can accommodate two larger cruise ships concurrently.

The upgrade works are timely for Singapore, as more cruise passengers choose the Asian hub to commence sailings - especially South East Asian itineraries - including a growing number of Australian fly-cruise guests.

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VISIT KOREA YEAR



One of the major wins for Singapore’s cruise sector was inking a deal with Disney Cruise Line to homeport *Disney Adventure* year-round for five years from Dec (TD 30 Mar 2023).

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has also been bullish on Singapore, and Asia more broadly, with *Norwegian Spirit* making her debut in the destination as part of a year-long series of sailings.

The former *Pacific Explorer* is another ship that will soon call Singapore home, rebranding to *Star Scorpio* under the new ownership of Resorts World Cruises (TD 07 Jan).

Marina Bay Cruise Centre’s

capacity is anticipated to grow from 6,800 to 11,700 passengers following the upgrade, allowing the city to service a predicted uptick in leisure visitation.

Tourism figures previously released by the Singapore Tourism Board showed that cruise passengers in Singapore doubled from 900,000 in 2012 to more than 1.8 million in 2019.

Visitor numbers from Australia and New Zealand to Singapore more broadly have surpassed pandemic levels in 2024, with the region recording one of the strongest growth rates for the Lion City (TD 11 Feb).

Meanwhile, traffic accessibility will also be enhanced at Marina Coastal Drive, with converted land to increase the number of coach bays and more than double the number of ride-hailing lots.

This, in turn, will increase the number of pick-up and drop-off points for buses and pax. AB

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Tuesday 15th Apr 2025

Agents kick goal in HK

SIX Australian travel professionals have returned from a famil hosted by the Hong Kong Tourism Board and Cathay Pacific.

The trade reps enjoyed a match of the Hong Kong Sevens, a cruise on the harbour, a Rolls Royce sightseeing tour, and a chance to dine on a range of culinary experiences such as a Sham Shui Po foodie tour and dining at Epure, Azure 80 and LUMA.

"It really showcased this dynamic Asian city's diversity from world-class quality hotels, a foodie's paradise for all budgets, magnificent city-scapes and amongst the incredible vibe, plenty of green spaces to unwind and take it all in," said TravelManagers MD Michael Gazal of the famil.

"Of course, the brand new Kai Tak Stadium was a highlight, seeing some of the best women and men in the world compete for the prestigious Sevens



tournament," he added.

The multi-billion-dollar Kai Tak Stadium seats 50,000 spectators and is the new home of the Sevens Rugby Series.

Meanwhile, Karen Macmillan, MD at HKTb, commented on Australians' passion for sports travel, which has "exploded" as a global trend recently.

"Hong Kong Tourism Board is delighted to work alongside our enthusiastic trade partners to ensure clients have the ultimate sport and travel experience in the destination," she said.

Pictured: Martin Rowe; Michael Gazal; Iain Summers; Jennifer Boxell; Karen Prideaux; Tim Jones; Shafraz Hameed; Elliott Finley; and Karen Macmillan. JHM

ATIA UPDATE

from Dean Long, CEO



LAST week, I joined 19 of my fellow industry association heads including the Business Council of Australia, Council of Small Business, TTF and Airports Association in writing an open letter to all parliamentarians.

The letter called for a clear policy agenda to empower Australian businesses to fulfil our goal to drive economic growth and higher living standards for communities.

This is the first time I can remember where industry groups from all sectors of the economy have united on the need for a long-term plan to manage and grow the economy.

As the media focuses on the many challenges emanating from the White House, we must not forget the challenges that we can resolve on our shores.

The purpose of this campaign is to embolden our elected officials to focus on reforms they can

control. These reforms aim to improve business confidence and unlock new investment by the private sector.

Private businesses support six out of every seven Australians currently employed and the next parliament must enact reforms that supports a growing economy.

As regular readers of this column would know, ATIA works with a range of associations to ensure our members are effectively represented.

While much of our focus has been on the federal election, tonight I will join my colleagues from around the world for a board meeting of our global body.

These meetings happen twice a year and are an important platform for knowledge sharing and coordinating joint action.

While travel has been exempt from the tariff war to date, the group has shared insights from respective local markets regarding the impacts.

We will be sharing these in our Wed advocacy update.

These are weekly updates open to all members and you can register to attend. Finally, I wish everyone a great Easter break.

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Currency, not candidacy, the real US deterrent

OPINION

Brett Jardine
is the Managing
Director of
the Council of
Australian Tour
Operators (CATO).

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2024 saw a record-breaking year for availed outbound Australian leisure travel, up 21% on 2023 and 6% ahead of pre-pandemic 2019 - a phenomenal recovery by any standard.

But what about travel to the USA? While global headlines focus on tariffs, Trump, and trade tensions, the more telling story for the travel industry lies in the economics of travel, specifically the value of the Australian dollar to the US dollar.

Amid the geopolitical noise, one question deserves clarity: are

Australians still travelling to the USA? The short answer is 'yes', but not like they used to.

In 2024, Australian leisure travel to the United States increased by 10% over 2023. Encouraging, yes - but still 38% short of 2019, before the pandemic redrew the map of global travel.

These figures represent availed travel and predate the current presidential cycle indicating that the observed weakness in leisure travel to the USA is not primarily politically driven.

Looking at leisure travel for 2025, despite the media saturation around political figures and their policies, the reality is that Australians typically do not base their holiday destinations on the political climate.

The key factor influencing USA travel sentiment is the currency exchange rate. For most of 2024, the Aussie has hovered between 65-70 cents, this exchange rate is

a critical factor in travel planning.

The weakness that we have seen since Dec 24 is where the real travel calculus begins.

Subject to their structure, some tour operators and wholesalers are able to lock in forward contracts that secure their USD pricing, which will mitigate some of the immediate impacts of the weak Aussie dollar.

Others may be seeing a short term impact as most contracts are in USD, even those dealing with non-USA based suppliers, as the USD is a primary currency for global travel contracting.

Continued pressure on the AUD against the USD may leave Australian travellers exposed once final payments are due, so any prolonged currency pressure could lead to surcharges.

While surcharging mechanisms are perfectly legal and should be outlined in booking T&Cs, it is a last resort, rarely invoked.

However, this may start to change if the AUD continues to hover around, or under, the 60 cent mark against the USD.

With this in mind, it is important for retail agents to collaborate with tour operators - not blame them for current economic conditions beyond their control.

In an industry quick to point fingers at high-profile political developments, we must remember that economic fundamentals, such as exchange rates, influence travellers much more than foreign policy.

Case in point is the ongoing geopolitical tensions that have suppressed visitation to the Middle East in 2024 - leisure travel demand didn't disappear, instead, many Australians turned to North-East Asia, where 73% growth over 2023 confirmed accessibility, safety, and value align nicely with travel plans.

See the unabridged op ed [HERE](#).



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CATHAY NURTURES SAF ECOSYSTEM AS USAGE JUMPS

CATHAY Pacific says it is focused on developing a local Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) ecosystem in Hong Kong amid plans to expand its use of the renewable fuel type in the coming years.

The company's newly released *2024 Sustainability Report* cited a partnership with HSBC Hong Kong and EcoCeres to facilitate SAF usage at Hong Kong Int'l Airport and to develop a locally based SAF supply chain.

The partnership has led to the formation of the Hong Kong Sustainable Aviation Fuel Coalition, a multi-stakeholder group tasked with driving SAF policy adoption and expanding use across the city.

As part of its corporate SAF program, Cathay recorded a 22% increase in SAF usage across its global network compared to when the program launched in 2022.



Total volume of SAF used by the carrier in 2024 equalled 6,884 tonnes, which it said surpassed its total from the past three years.

EcoCeres SAF is made from 100% waste-based biomass feedstock, which CX said can reduce greenhouse gases by 90% compared to conventional fuel.

The airline added it has set an "ambitious" target of reaching 10% SAF usage across its global flying operations by 2030.

To achieve this, the carrier will continue to actively advocate for favourable policies and support more investment from the public and private sector towards alternative fuel technologies.

Other highlights for the year included Cathay's first SAF uplifts on commercial flights in Europe, which took place at Amsterdam and London Heathrow.

Cathay Pacific said this progress is enabling it to establish regular

SAF uplifts from multiple points across its network as it completes its two-year rebuilding journey and looks to scale up usage.

"We are very encouraged by the Hong Kong SAR Government's plan to establish a SAF usage target at our home hub as well as the participation by more and more corporates in SAF-related initiatives," said Cathay Group CEO, Ronald Lam.

"We believe this is an essential step to raise and future-proof Hong Kong's competitiveness as an international aviation hub and foster its transition to low carbon energy," Lam added.

Cathay Pacific will also aim to improve its circular economy goals in 2025 by increasing inflight recycling of water bottles to 33% and ensuring 50% of single-use plastic items are made from recycled plastics. *ML*

S Hotels marks Earth Day milestones

HOSPITALITY brand S Hotels and Resorts has formed partnerships with "like-minded sustainable brands" to implement green initiatives across its resort network.

SAii Phi Phi Island Village in Thailand said its 'Save Our Sharks' program has seen 35 sharks released into the ocean, while its on-site nursery helps to rehabilitate juvenile sharks to support ecosystem restoration.

The property has also joined

ADA Cosmetics International to introduce an eco-boutique amenities collection across all SAii resorts in Asia.

The five-product line is crafted with 98% naturally derived ingredients and 100% post-consumer recycled plastics.

S Hotels and Resorts has also installed solar panels across its hotel network and extended clean energy initiatives to managed properties, taking its clean energy use to 10%.

Cassowary certify

THE Cassowary Coast in Far North Queensland has achieved ECO Destination Certification through Ecotourism Australia.

Rich in biodiversity, it is home to two World Heritage-listed sites, and 60% of the region's land and marine areas are protected areas.

The region offers exceptional nature-based experiences and holds immense ecological and cultural significance.

Alma tree plant

ALMA Resort in Cam Ranh, Vietnam is inviting young guests to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty for the environment.

From 3pm-4pm daily, the award-winning resort's Kid's Club offers its "Green Hands, Green Future Tree Planting Activity", with a choice to plant a Golden Bell, a *Bauhinia variegata* or a coconut tree, complete with a personalised name tag.

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MONEY

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

AU\$1 = US\$0.631

THE Australian dollar has been battling hard over the last 24 hours to claw back some value against the US, after dropping below the 60 cent mark last week.

The last 24 hours of trade saw the Aussie fluctuate from 62 to 63 cents, impacted mainly by US tariff policies and speculation from some leading economists that the US is headed for a recession.

Analysts are having a tough time trying to predict the trajectory of the USD-AUD, with the NAB FX strategy team for example indicating that while short-term pressures may persist, moderate appreciation could materialise later in the year, with the caveat that numerous variables could influence the currency price.

Meanwhile, the UK pound fell against the Australian dollar last week, however further gains could be limited this week with new economic headwinds looming over the Aussie.

Wholesale rates this morning.

US	\$0.631
UK	£0.477
NZ	\$1.715
Euro	€0.555
Japan	¥90.54
Thailand	฿21.23
China	¥4.62
South Africa	11.94
Canada	\$0.88
Crude oil	US\$61.58

Advisors meet the new Paul



SEVERAL travel trade professionals across the APAC region recently enjoyed an adventure through Indonesia hosted by Ponant, sailing the 'Sacred Temples and Natural Sanctuaries' itinerary from Singapore to Darwin aboard the *MS Paul Gauguin*.

During the 13-day famil, passengers enjoyed highlights such as a visit to the Borobudur Temple, a traditional dance welcome in Surabaya, as well as a Tahitian dance class run by onboard performers.

The special voyage coincided with the vessel's return to service on 01 Apr, following a seven-week multi-million dollar dry dock undertaken in Singapore.

MS Paul Gauguin's refurbishment includes a redesign of Le Grill restaurant, a pool deck with shaded cabanas, new connecting staterooms, updated soft furnishings and enhanced

sustainable technologies.

MS Paul Gauguin made a 24-hour call in Darwin on Mon and is now continuing her journey back to French Polynesia.

Stay tuned for more updates with **Travel Daily** on the ground to check out the renovated ship.

Pictured: Martine Hero from Clean Cruising with Julie Rogers and Grace Ting from Paveway Holidays Singapore. *JHM*

Ormina's new view

ORMINA Tours is offering an alternative to the busy Amalfi Coast with a seven-day private itinerary to the southern Italian town of Tropea in Calabria.

Visitors will view archaeological finds and ancient ruins, walk through old towns like Le Castella and medieval villages like Chianale, and take in the coastal views at Marina Grande Beach.

Prices start at \$5,750pp.

HRW eyes record

HEATHROW Airport CEO Thomas Woldbye believes the London hub is still on track for a record number of passengers this year, despite a fire shutting down all traffic last month (**TD** 24 Mar).

Figures for Mar were impacted by the incident, with the 6.2 million passengers making their way through the gate marking a moderate decline on the same month last year.

Heathrow's record year forecast is expected to be fuelled by eight new and resumed routes offered by Virgin Atlantic, Air Canada and British Airways to cities such as Riyadh, Ottawa and KL.

Tauk goes small

TAUCK has announced new small ship ocean cruising itineraries for 2026, 'Sakura Seas: Japan & South Korea' and 'Arctic Days & Northern Lights'.

During the 14-day trip to Japan and Korea, guests will explore the 14th-century Gyeongbokgung Palace, local markets and traditional Hanok village homes.

Guests will also catch a high-speed train to Busan and tour the city before embarking on Ponant's *Le Soleal* for an eight-night cruise around Japan, exploring Osaka, Kyoto & Tokyo.

On the 12-day 'Arctic Circle Cruise' adventure, guests will sail along Norway's Arctic coast on board Ponant's Explorer-class ship *Le Laprouse*, from Tromsø.

Passengers will have the chance to connect with the region's indigenous communities, explore historical sites, and witness the northern lights.

All Arctic Circle 2026 sailings are sold out & a waitlist is now live.



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At this year's national VIP Awards events, APT Travel Group proudly recognised the exceptional efforts of their Helloworld Travel Group partners. Their passion, professionalism, and commitment to excellence continue to elevate the travel experience for clients across the country. The achievements of these teams reflect the strength of their partnership with APT Travel Group and the shared values that drive their ongoing success. From consistently strong sales to outstanding collaboration, their Helloworld Travel partners have truly made their mark in 2025. APT Travel Group extended their thanks for their continued support, and look forward to reaching new heights together!



NSW: Helloworld Travel Kotara – Diamond Agency 2025



SA: Phil Hoffmann Travel Modbury – Diamond Agency 2025



WA: Naturaliste Travel – Diamond Agency 2025



VIC: Helloworld Travel Sunbury – Diamond Agency 2025



QLD: Helloworld Travel Coolangatta – Diamond Agency 2025



TAS: RACT Launceston - Platinum Agency 2025





Explore Canada in 2026 with Inspiring Vacations

Inspiring Vacations' 2026 Canada season is now available, with a diverse portfolio of fully guided tours showcasing the country's most iconic destinations. From classic coach holidays and rail adventures to Alaska cruise combinations, the range offers exceptional value and carefully curated itineraries designed to meet growing demand for immersive travel experiences. With tours spanning coast to coast, there's a Canadian journey to suit every traveller.

A highlight of the 2026 program, the **16 Day Inspiring Canada with Rocky Mountaineer & Alaska Cruise** combines breathtaking landscapes and multi-mode travel across Western Canada and Alaska.

Beginning in Calgary, the tour travels through Banff, Lake Louise and Jasper, taking in alpine lakes, glaciers, and the dramatic Icefields Parkway. Guests then board the **Rocky Mountaineer** for a two-day daylight rail journey to Vancouver, featuring panoramic views, onboard commentary, and exceptional service. From Vancouver, the journey continues with a 7-night **Royal Caribbean cruise** through Alaska's Inside Passage, with opportunities to witness glaciers, fjords and local wildlife. The tour includes quality 3-star accommodation, guided sightseeing, and seamless transport throughout, offering an all-in-one solution for travellers seeking comfort, convenience and spectacular scenery.

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[Click here to view the full 2026 range.](#)