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Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily features six pages of news, a cover wrap from **Tourism New Zealand**, including our **Luxury page**, plus a full page from **Disney Days**.

Tourists massacred

AT LEAST 20 tourists are feared dead as a result of a terror attack in India's Jammu & Kashmir area.

The Himalayan region has become increasingly popular with travellers in recent years, with local authorities confirming a short time ago the full death toll is still to be determined.

"This attack is much larger than anything we have seen directed at civilians in recent years," Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah lamented.

It is not known if any Australian tourists were involved.



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NTIAs head north in '25

NOMINATIONS for the 2025 National Travel Industry Awards (NTIAs) will open on 30 Apr, with a three-week window for the industry to put forward its best and brightest for recognition.

The industry's annual night of nights will this year take place in Queensland at the city's glamorous new riverside venue, The Star Brisbane.

The Beyond Borders Travel Summit has been scheduled for Fri 17 Oct, with the NTIA Gala the following day.

Submissions for judged categories will open on 23 Jun, also for a three-week window, while industry voting for 'Most Popular' categories opens 21 Jul.

Finalists will be announced in mid-Aug, with judging interviews taking place from 01-19 Sep.

The Summit is expected to



deliver a melting pot of ideas, thought leadership, inspiration and insights, while the NTIA Gala will honour those who made their mark on various industry sectors over the past 12 months.

ATIA CEO Dean Long said he is excited to start the countdown to the industry's two marquee events for 2025.

"These events are about more than recognition; they're about inspiration, community and setting the agenda for the future of travel," Long said. *ML*

Long is **pictured** above left with ATIA Directors Graham 'Skroo' Turner, Danielle Russom, Christian Hunter and Brett Mitchell. *ML*

Bunnik goes early

BUNNIK Tours has released its first wave of Europe itineraries for 2026, marking the earliest the operator has opened bookings for the region.

The initial launch features 12 Europe holidays with a total of 87 departures, headlined by the return of its luxury In-Style small group tours to Morocco and Turkiye, designed for guests seeking a more indulgent escape.

Travellers can also opt for favourites like 'Jewels of Dalmatia' and 'Croatia & Slovenia', as well as tours to lesser-known and harder-to-reach destinations, such as the 'Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan' journey.

The release is spurred by an uptick in early bookings, with lead times for 2025 departures now averaging eight to 10 months - a trend Bunnik expects will continue into next year.

The family-run business is also seeing a noticeable rise in shoulder season bookings.

Bunnik will release more itineraries in the coming months.

Vintage now on track

JOURNEY Beyond has operated its first Vintage Rail Journeys departure since acquiring the brand last year (*TD* 07 Jun 2024).

The brand's 2025 season began on Mon this week, as a five-day itinerary set off from Sydney to the Riverina, visiting Bowral, Junee, Coolamon, Murrumbidgee, Griffith, Temora, Bundawarra and Orange before returning via the Blue Mountains.

The journey includes four nights onboard the train and a range of meals and off-train experiences to visit local growers, winemakers and producers.

"It's a culinary journey whilst seeing the best of NSW's scenery travelling primarily during daylight hours," said Journey Beyond Executive General Manager of Rail, David Donald.

Vintage Rail Journeys' 2025 season for Riverina Rail Tour departures is now sold out, but places remain on its North Coast Rail Tour which visits Port Macquarie and the Macleay Coast.

Win a trip to NZ

IT IS the last chance for travel advisors to win a trip to New Zealand as part of the destination's promotion with *A Minecraft Movie*.

Advisors can join the running to win the ultimate trip for two, including flights, activities, and accommodation - see the **front page** of today's *Travel Daily* for more details.

Disney Days is back

DISNEY Destinations is inviting travel advisors to join an all-new Disney Days experience this year, in partnership with Visit Anaheim.

Attendees will enjoy in-depth panels featuring guest speakers who will provide insights, tips, tricks, and more.

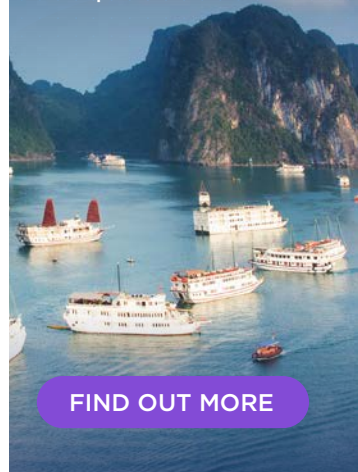
Head to **page seven** for info.

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Fewer seats hikes prices

AIRLINES are squeezing more passengers onto fewer flights between Sydney and Melbourne, with capacity failing to address steadily climbing demand.

According to government aviation data from Nov 2024, load factors on flights between the two capitals increased to above 92%, while the volume of available seats remained flat at 7% below pre-pandemic levels.

The load factors are a big jump on the previous record of 85.8%, which coincided with Rex going into administration, leaving only Qantas and Virgin Australia serving the route.

As a result, the declining capacity is reducing choice and pushing airfares up.

The route is already the world's fifth busiest domestic city pair, with corporate demand helping to push load factors well above the global average as well.

According to FCM Travel's Q4 *Quarterly Travel Trends Report*, the cheapest fares are going to those booking well in advance, with major events held in both cities also compounding prices.

The FCM report also showed departures in corporate hours are flying at 100%, with every seat on board occupied.

FCM Travel General Manager ANZ Renos Rologas said seat availability between the two cities was frequently tight.

"The economy cabin on the route is so highly sought-after that we are seeing airfares sit steady between Sydney and Melbourne [and] without a big capacity or competition shake-up, this is unlikely to improve any time soon," Rologas said.

"It would appear that airlines are pumping up load factors on the Sydney to Melbourne route, but it comes as a result of limited competition, a lack of access to the right aircraft...& good airline management," he added. *ML*

US border warning

AUSTRALIAN travellers to the United States cannot be strictly denied entry for expressing anti-Trump sentiment, however they can be denied entry due to expressions of anti-US sentiment, according to a legal expert commenting on tougher border entry protocols enacted this year.

Director of Carter Capner Law, Peter Carter, told *Travel Daily* that US immigration officials need "valid grounds" for denying entry to visitors who would otherwise be permitted entry into the USA.

"Any 'grounds' are likely sufficient, even if the rationale is mistaken or unreasonable," Carter clarified.

Carter also suggested that taking out travel insurance before trips to the US won't necessarily protect Aussies from any additional expenses incurred in cases when they are rejected by border officials.

"There is usually an exclusion regarding cover for expenses occasioned by customs and immigration officials acting in the course of their duties," he said.

Carter added airlines bear no responsibility for compensating travellers who need to return to Australia sooner than anticipated, but did suggest travel agents and operators should be warning travellers about the risks.



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Agent earns a Slice of Bali



TRAVEL lay-by service Slice Pay recently hosted an incentive to kick off 2025, designed to boost brand awareness and welcome new agents to the program.

The winner - Ajit Jawanda from Star Flights in Melbourne - is now planning his trip to Bali as the winner of the Slice promotion.

"Ajit has shown outstanding engagement with SlicePay, introducing the platform to over 100 customers in the past three months," Slice Pay said.

"By offering SlicePay as an alternative payment option, he has helped make travel more accessible and truly embodied our mission of 'Making Travel Accessible to Everyone.'" *ML*

Ajit is **pictured** above with his prize certificate from Slice Pay.

Solara welcomed

APT christened its new luxury river ship *APT Solara* in Rotterdam this week, flagged last year (*TD* 16 Oct 2024).

The ceremony featured speeches from APT Travel Group CEO David Cox, and co-owners Robert McGeary and Lou Tandy, before Tandy, the ship's godmother, performed the traditional breaking of the champagne bottle on the bow.

APT Solara will sail her maiden voyage on Fri - see more in *CW*.

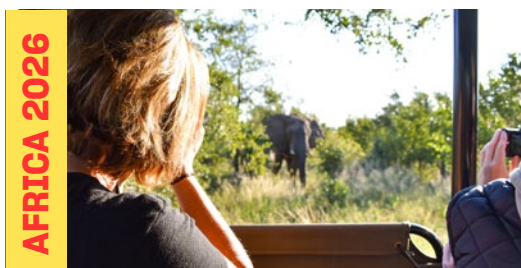
Ama blesses vessel

AMAWATERWAYS has officially launched *AmaSintra*, its third luxury river cruise ship on the Douro River.

The cruise line hosted a special ceremony in Porto last week, where the ship was christened by her godmother, and President of Vacation Planners, Jenn Lee.

AmaSintra, which can cater to 102 guests, will operate the seven-night 'Enticing Douro' itinerary, offering opportunities for guests to visit vineyards, enjoy regional wine tastings, and experience the charming cities of Porto, Regua, and Salamanca.

Travellers can also book an optional three-night pre-cruise land program in Lisbon.



Our first Africa 2026 tours are here!

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Virgin heads canx spike

VIRGIN Australia led a surge in cancellations in Mar, which overall was more than double the long-term average of scrapped services at 5%.

Virgin shared the dubious honour of cutting the most flights with QantasLink, with each brand axing 5.5% of all flights.

Qantas did not fare much better, opting to cancel 4.7% of services, while its budget carrier Jetstar pulled the pin on 5.1% of its flights for the month.

Ironically, although Virgin



Australia was the equal poorest performer, its regional arm Virgin Australia Regional Airlines delivered a perfect record with zero flights abandoned.

Cancellations were highest on the Ballina-Sydney route at 15.6%, followed by Launceston-Brisbane (14.3%), Gold Coast-Melbourne (13.7%), and Canberra-Gold Coast (13.3%).

Aussie airlines have placed an emphasis on trying to get their cancellation rates down in recent years, but the Mar result was the first time the sector hit 5% since Dec 2023.

The result was also a significant uptick on Feb 2025, which was around 3% of all flights. *AB*

AAT earlybird offer

AAT Kings has launched an early booking offer for 2026/2027 departures, offering savings of up to 10% on a range of popular tours across Australia and NZ.

The offer is available to agents from now until 04 Jul, for travel departing between 01 Apr 2026 and 31 Mar 2027.



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Collette group offer

TRAVEL advisors can enjoy \$1,500 bonus commission when they make a new 2026 group booking with Collette between 01 Apr and 31 May.

This incentive offer applies to all new bookings with a travel window from 01 Jan 2026 to 31 Dec 2026, for groups with 15 or more paying passengers.

Email augroups@collette.com.

Entire boosts rail

ENTIRE Travel Group has expanded its team to include more dedicated rail travel specialists to cater to a surge in demand from Aussie travellers.

Sales and Marketing Director Greg McCallum said the move will ensure travel agents a seamless booking experience.

Entire Rail Journeys said it will unveil more itineraries - including new destinations - soon.

The wholesaler launched its rail program exactly 12 months ago.

IHG's Brissy debut

IHG Hotels & Resorts will debut its luxury InterContinental brand in Brisbane following the signing of a long-term management agreement with ISPT.

Located on Elizabeth Street and connected to the Queen Street Mall, the property will be converted from the former Hilton hotel, opening as InterContinental Brisbane in early Jun.

After undergoing a two-year transformation, the property will reopen as part of a renewed retail, dining, entertainment and hospitality precinct, featuring 321 rooms, four restaurants and bars, and expansive conference and events facilities.

"The Brisbane hotel market, and SE Qld region, is entering a golden era fuelled by...infrastructure projects, a booming tourism sector and the countdown to the 2032 Olympics," said Cameron Burke, Director of Development, Australasia & Pacific for IHG Hotels & Resorts.



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Magical future of cruise

CRUISE WISH LIST

This special feature is coming to you courtesy of an Aussie cruise executive writing under the pseudonym of Excess Baggage.



WELCOME to my cool new feature called, 'If I Had A Magic Wand: The Completely Unrealistic, Under Researched, Unethical, Slightly Offensive, Environmentally Unfriendly, Cost Prohibitive, Cruise Wish List' for 2025.

Put your life jacket on, turn your pineapples right side up, set your course for adventure and your mind for a new romance, I have some ideas that are as big as a whale and are about to set sail.

For anyone who attended the CLIA Awards, there were some undeniable truths on display that night about the Australia and New Zealand cruise industry.

We have the best cruise leaders, we have the best cruise minds, and we have the best cruise sellers (and best looking).

To anyone attending, the most noticeable challenge was what was going on on the dance floor.

We can do better, particularly the river cruisers, and our other challenges include currency exchange, global politics, local politics, fuel costs, port fees, redeployments etc...and don't even get me started on epibiosis.

Thanks to the amazing people in the cruise industry, 5% of Aussies and Kiwis cruise, but if we had a magic wand, and could make some of the biggest obstacles disappear, could we hit 10% or 15% saturation?

This is written in the same spirit as giving car keys to a five year old - it's going to be a wild ride, not sure where it's going to go, and we all know it's not going to end well.

But armed with multiple multi-generational obscure pop culture references, anchors away!

If I had a magic wand, I would:

1. Bring back cruising out of Perth, Hobart, Adelaide, Melbourne, Auckland, and throw in Mildura in Victoria for good measure (see today's **CW**).

2. Get two cruise terminals at Port Botany, keep the Overseas Passenger Terminal available for visiting ships, and keep White Bay open to continue to irritate Balmain residents.

3. Three berths for big ships at Brisbane because it is an instant Olympic village. Throw in a cruise terminal at the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast for events there, too. And for luxe sake, I'd bring back Portside for the luxury and expedition ships.

While we're at it, from Brisbane International Cruise Terminal (BICT), get direct ferry transfers to the city, Moreton Island, Straddie, and the Yatala Pie Shop. Also, how about a train from BICT to the airport? And since I have the wand out, I would create the world's largest incense holder with the world's largest incense sticks and position them at BICT.

4. Make Great Keppel Island great again! The XXXX Bahamas are waiting to be built. How many derelict former resorts off the Queensland coast are just begging for a waterslide to become cruise company private resort islands?

What a massive injection this would mean to the local economy, local workforce, and to the broader Whitsunday and Capricorn coasts.

5. Whatcha talk'n bout, Willis Island? It's on many cruise ship itineraries, but nobody goes there. Inspiration for Huxley's 1962 utopian manifesto, *Island*, Willis Island has been at the top of everyone's minds recently.

Is the Fyre Festival coming to Willis Island? If I had a magic wand, we would work with the Willis Island village people (Not The Village People) to develop a cruise tourism plan.

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Coral's big voyage

THERE are less than 15 cabins remaining on Coral Expeditions' second circumnavigation voyage of Australia, which is set to depart Cairns on 17 Oct.

Coral Adventurer (pictured) will make her way around the nation's coastline over 60 days, including 48 excursion days.

Guests will enjoy three signature special events spanning food, wine and culture, including a cultural festival in the Torres Strait Islands, a winemaker's lunch at the Leeuwin Estate in WA's Margaret River, and a charter flight to an outback homestead in Queensland for lunch.



AC exec change-up

AIR Canada has updated the key responsibilities of three executives to promote greater cross-functional capabilities.

The changes will take effect from 01 May and see Executive VP and Chief Operations Officer Craig Landry appointed Executive VP & Chief Innovation Officer and President of Aeroplan.

In his new role, Landry will manage innovation to improve customer experience, leading digital, data, cyber security, and artificial intelligence functions.

As President of Aeroplan, one of the major objectives will be to grow its loyalty program.

Meanwhile Executive VP, Marketing & Digital and President of Aeroplan Mark Nasr will transition to Executive VP & COO, taking charge of safety, in-flight services, and contact centres.

Executive VP CCO and President, Cargo Mark Galardo also adds marketing, design and brand development to his role.

ATEC meets in Perth

THE Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC) will convene with members, industry leaders and international buyers in Perth at its annual ATEC Meeting Place 2025 event from 27-29 Oct.

Hosted in partnership with Tourism Western Australia, the conference is expected to generate more than \$2 million in direct visitor spending.

The three-day event will foster thousands of in-person meetings as well as a comprehensive conference program, market briefings and networking.

"Meeting Place plays a central role in Australia's tourism export sector - it's where our industry connects, collaborates and does business," said ATEC Managing Director, Peter Shelley.

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Celebrating romance

PRIVATE Luxury Events (PLE) has unveiled the shortlist for the 2025 Love Travel Awards, highlighting the most exclusive romantic escapes around the world.

There are six properties vying for the title of 'Most Romantic Hotel', including three in Italy - Borgo Egnazia, Monteverdi Tuscany, and Bellevue Syrene.

Sir Richard Branson's Necker Island - a 30-hectare island in the British Virgin Islands - has also made the list, along with Villa Dubrovnik in Croatia and Kasbah Tamadot in Morocco.

The winners will be announced at a black-tie ceremony on 26 Apr in Sardinia as part of Amour 2025, an invitation-only global romance gathering.

The three-day event provides more than 100 luxury hotels, resorts, and wedding venues the chance to engage with 110 romance travel buyers.

"The destination weddings and honeymoons sector continues to thrive as couples seek unique and unforgettable experiences," said Christy Kuplic, MD at PLE and Amour.

"Amour is where the most innovative, passionate minds in romance travel meet to inspire the next era of luxury celebration," she added.

QATAR'S NEW QSUITE TAKES CENTRE STAGE

QATAR Airways is showcasing the latest innovations in airline luxury at this year's Arabian Travel Market (ATM), which takes place from 28 Apr-01 May at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

With this year's ATM theme, 'Global Travel: Developing Tomorrow's Tourism Through Enhanced Connectivity', the carrier will spotlight its continued investment in technology and customer experience.

Qatar Airways will bring its Qsuite Next Gen - the newest iteration of its Qsuite Business Class - to the event, giving visitors and exhibitors a chance to experience the new product.

The Qsuite Next Gen features fully customisable Quad Suites, creating the largest social space in the sky for groups of four, in addition to window aisle



Companion Suites.

Both suites boast 4K OLED manoeuvrable in-flight entertainment screens, which can be moved to connect the suites, as well as increased dining space and taller digitally controlled privacy dividers.

Guests travelling in the new cabin class can also take

advantage of the 'Make My Bed' button for Qatar Airways' five-star turn-down service.

ATM visitors will be invited to interact with Qsuite Next Gen's wide range of customisation options, including ambient lighting and privacy controls, at stand ME 1420 located between halls three and four. *JM*

A&K serves up a trio of new culinary journeys

ABERCROMBIE & Kent (A&K) has announced a series of culinary-inspired itineraries, designed to showcase the flavours and cultural traditions of France, India and Vietnam.

With departures beginning from Aug, the three new small group journeys are designed to immerse travellers in the culture and history of each region, from the street food of Hanoi to the vineyards of Provence or the spice markets of Mumbai.



"At A&K, crafting journeys that place local culture at the heart of the experience is not just our specialty, it's our passion," said Suzanne Teng, Director of Global Group Product.

Discover more details [HERE](#).

Virtuoso expands

VIRTUOSO Travel has recently welcomed a host of luxury hotels into its Preferred Partners network.

Among those joining are The St. Regis Red Sea Resort; Nobu Hotel Chicago; Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas; Parisi Udvar Hotel Budapest; InterContinental Buckhead Atlanta; The Amauris Vienna - Relais & Chateaux; Dylan Hotel Dublin; Vermelho Hotel Melides; and more.

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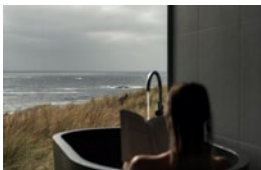
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Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group will carry out a simultaneous renovation of its two founding properties as part of a push to elevate the brand standards and implement new sustainable initiatives. **The Mandarin Hong Kong and The Oriental Bangkok** will both see more than \$100 million spent on new elegant rooms, new restaurant interiors and new wellness experiences, all for completion by year's end and ahead of the brand's 150th anniversary in 2026.



Bali's emerging Nuanu Creative City has welcomed its first boutique resort with the opening of **Oshom Bali**. The property features 18 uniquely styled suites including a treehouse and ocean suites. Located 15 minutes from Canggu, the resort overlooks the Pantai Nyanyi black sand beach and features a cliffside restaurant, daily wellness rituals, poolside lectures and co-working spaces.



Tasmania's off-grid **Kittawa Retreat** King Island has opened its new two-bedroom suite for families or small groups to stay together. The new category matches the property's one-bedroom design but comes with added space, a secluded outdoor seating area, outdoor bathtub and private cellar. The property is again hosting its Guest Chef Series in May and Jun, with bookings open now.



Value accommodation brand Travelodge has unveiled a new design at its **Kyoto Shijo Omiya Hotel** in Japan. The property now features upgraded room interiors, new wall artworks and thoughtful guest touches. The property is located five minutes from Shijo Omiya Station and offers access to local attractions including Nijo Castle, the Kyoto Imperial Palace, and the Gion district.



First opened in the 1920s, **Hotel Victoria Gran Melia** on the Spanish island of Palma has reopened its doors following a €12 million renovation. The property has worked to bring back its glory days of the 1950s and 1970s with modern touches and amenities against meticulously restored rooms. A new all-day dining venue that celebrates local flavours has also opened, complete with a terrace that invites guests to indulge in Palma's celebrated cafe culture.

Agents experience India, unbound



INDIA Unbound recently hosted six Australian travel advisors on a famil through Southern India, where they experienced first-hand the destination's rich history and culture.

The journey kicked off on 28 Mar in Chennai and travelled across the state of Tamil Nadu into Kerala, before wrapping up in

Cochin on 05 Apr.

The trip included a visit to Pondicherry, with the group able to experience the city's unique blend of French and Indian culture, the spectacular mansions of Chettinad and the lush tea plantations of Munnar.

They also explored many bustling markets, historic temples and enjoyed many authentic local experiences, while staying at a range of heritage and boutique style accommodation. *JM*

ANA, SIA are closer

ALL Nippon Airways and Singapore Airlines will launch joint fare products and revenue sharing flights between Singapore and Japan from Sep.

Expanding beyond their existing codeshare, the carriers will offer a greater variety of fare options, enhanced coordination of flight schedules between Singapore and Japan, and seamless connectivity.

Both airlines are also working to boost reciprocal benefits for ANA Mileage Club and KrisFlyer frequent flyer members.

Subject to regulatory approvals, ANA and SIA intend to expand the joint venture to include other key markets, including Australia.

AA scores big goal

AMERICAN Airlines has been named the official North American airline supplier of the FIFA World Cup 2026.

The tournament will see AA collaborate with fellow oneworld partner and FIFA Global Airline Qatar Airways to offer special airfares and travel deals for travellers moving between host cities in the US, Canada & Mexico.





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Disney DAYS 2025

Disney Destinations along with our friends at Visit Anaheim invite you to join us for an all-new Disney Days experience in 2025.

This year, we're bringing you in-depth panels featuring incredible Guest Speakers who will provide insights, tips, tricks and more! You'll also hear updates and the latest news from the *Disneyland* Resort in California, *Walt Disney World* Resort in Florida, Disney Cruise Line, and Visit Anaheim.

Auckland
Thursday 22 May

Melbourne
Monday 26 May

Sydney
Wednesday 28 May

Places are **strictly limited** and by **invitation only**, so register your interest early for the best chance of securing a space. Invitations to follow.

We can't wait to see you real soon!

