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Plan to slash Brand USA

CONCERNS about the US visitor economy have reached new levels after the Senate Commerce Committee proposed to slash Brand USA's funding from US\$100 million to just US\$20 million.

The Committee, led by Senator Ted Cruz, has put forward the massive budget reduction as part of a broader cost-cutting initiative to rein in the country's deficit.

In response, the US Travel Association said such a budget reduction would have "serious consequences" for the entire travel industry, adding Brand USA plays an essential role in

attracting international visitors and supporting the economy.

The proposal arrives in the wake of grim tourism predictions for 2025, including a warning by the World Travel & Tourism Council that the US is on track to haemorrhage US\$12.5 billion in int'l visitor spending (**TD 16 May**).

The bumpy road for Brand USA this year also saw several board members abruptly given their marching orders in Apr (**TD 28 Apr**), with little detail given at the time for the sackings, which were reportedly made on the direct orders of the White House.

The timing of the budget proposal is also complicated for the US trade, which is about to host IPW in Chicago, its premier inbound travel trade to enable US exhibitors to connect with international buyers.

Stakeholders are also concerned about Brand USA's ability to promote the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games with less budget.

Experience more NZ

TRAVEL agents can experience New Zealand first-hand by taking part in the Explore New Zealand Discount Programme.

Find out more about the Tourism New Zealand initiative, including how to apply, on the **cover page** of today's issue.

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Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily features a cover wrap from **Tourism NZ**, eight pages of news, including our **Sustainability** page, plus a product profile from **Tourism Solomons** and full pages from:

- Silversea
- btTB

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Thompson awarded

FORMER ATIA (then AFTA) Chairman and Helloworld executive Mike Thompson has been awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the General Division, as part of the Governor General's King's Birthday honours list yesterday.

Thompson was cited for his "service to the travel and tourism industry" through his long-time leadership of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (now ATIA), as well as senior roles at Helloworld, Travelscene American Express, and as a former Travel Compensation Fund trustee.

The citation also describes his wide-ranging philanthropic support for organisations involved in theatre, dance and the arts.

Also acknowledged for contributions to tourism was Lyn Lewis-Smith, a former Chief Executive Officer of BESydney, while Thomas Ganley and Donald Well were lauded for their services to the aviation industry.

WEX now with Sabre

TRAVEL payments provider WEX has teamed up with Sabre to offer agents more secure, efficient, and automated travel transactions.

As a result of the new partnership, WEX's virtual card technology has been integrated into Sabre Direct Pay, the company's payments hub.

The virtual cards allow agencies to pay suppliers more quickly in 210 countries and 20 currencies, and are customisable per transaction, improving security and helping users recover eligible chargebacks quickly.

Agents can also benefit from WEX's detailed payment metadata, which supports auto-reconciliation, saving OTAs and TMCs hours of manual work.

"WEX's partnership with Sabre is driven by the need to equip travel suppliers and agencies worldwide with industry-leading virtual payment capabilities, so that they can continue to meet demand



in this fast-evolving travel landscape," said Jason Hancock, GM & VP of Global Travel.

"By integrating WEX virtual cards into the Sabre ecosystem, we are empowering customers with flexible, scalable, and reliable payment solutions that drive business growth."

With WEX already working with eight of the top 10 OTAs globally, the partnership gives Sabre users access to solutions that are capable of handling high volumes and cross-border complexity. *JM*

Biz event hits Sydney

BUSINESS travel event with btTB is taking place 07-08 Aug in Sydney, featuring a conference and gala dinner and awards ceremony - see **p10** for details.

Albatross flies for '26

ALBATROSS has announced a raft of new tours to book for 2026 to destinations, including Europe's Macedonia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania.

New itineraries 'Mountains, Myths & Ancient Empires' and 'Crossroads of Balkan Empires' have been added to the stable, joining existing tours 'La Grande France' and 'Brussels to Belgium - Chocolate, Canals & Culture', which have been enhanced.

"We are absolutely thrilled to be extending our product range into these regions," Managing Director Shelley Poten said.

Albatross is offering earlybird discounts of \$350 per traveller per tour now until 31 Jul.

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TRAVEL PARTNER TOOLKIT

Cox lands in the UAE

FORMER CEO of Destination NSW, Steve Cox, has arrived in the UAE to take up a new role as Director, Sector Management - Strategic Marketing & Communications in the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi.

Cox wrote on LinkedIn that he is "energised" by the opportunity to build cultural bridges and drive strategic growth for the destination.

"In this new role, I have the privilege of working alongside an incredibly talented team to help shape how Abu Dhabi is experienced and understood by the world.

"Whether through culture, storytelling, festivals, or unforgettable tourism moments - our goal is clear: to grow visitation in ways that are meaningful, sustainable, and true to the identity of this remarkable Emirate," he added.



Cox spent almost five years in charge of Destination NSW, a role he took up after being Managing Director of Dymocks Retail.

He was appointed during a turbulent period, joining just as the pandemic struck.

During his tenure, Cox launched the 'Feel New' brand campaign and secured Sydney as the host of the first SXSW held outside of the United States.

In his new role, Cox will have plenty of future tourism appeal to work with, including the recently announced Disneyland Abu Dhabi (TD 09 May), which is scheduled to open in the early 2030s. DF

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Dixon exits cruise line

CARNIVAL Cruise Line's Entertainment Operations Manager Fiona Dixon (pictured) has been made redundant, with her role wrapping in early Jul.

Dixon has been with Carnival since 2013, initially joining as a Cast Manager before moving her way up to a senior operations role within the cruise line's entertainment division.

"I see this as an exciting opportunity to explore fresh challenges, industries, and creative avenues," Dixon said.



Hall ends Saudi gig

CHRISTOPHER Hall has wrapped up his tenure as Country Director - Australia and NZ at the Saudi Tourism Authority after two-and-a-half-years.

The emerging Middle Eastern tourism mega hub is looking to further cement its credentials in the Australian market as well, with the nation in the process of recruiting for a Country Manager to be based in Sydney.

Riyadh Air has also flagged its interest in connecting Sydney within the next two to three years (TD 07 May), and if it goes ahead as part of the road map, would be the first carrier to directly connect the two nations.

The airline signed a global distribution agreement with Sabre last month (TD 15 May), signalling its intention to connect with the global travel trade.

Hall has returned to Australia and there is currently no update as to what role the former A&K Country Manager will take next.



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Travel Daily

1000MTG hits surf

1000 Mile Travel Group (1000MTG) has revealed the destinations for its annual conferences next year, with its Australian network heading to Queensland's Burleigh Heads from 26 Feb to 01 Mar 2026.

The conference will take place at new luxury hotel The Mondrian Gold Coast, which is slated to open mid-2025 (*TD* 10 Nov 2020).

"Burleigh has always been special to our network - it's stylish, grounded in nature, and full of creative energy," said Lauren Gray, GM Australia.

Meanwhile, the network's US-based advisors will head to Nashville, Tennessee in Apr.

Both conference programs will offer a mix of professional development, strategic supplier roundtables, inspirational keynotes, and signature 1000MTG-style celebrations, with full agendas and registration details to be released in the coming months.

Fain to exit Chair role

AFTER close to 40 years as Chair of Royal Caribbean Group, Richard Fain (**pictured**) has announced he will step away from the pivotal leadership role in Q4 this year.

The group's current President and CEO Jason Liberty will succeed Fain in the position, but the cruise veteran will not exit the company entirely, remaining on the board of directors for the foreseeable future.

"It is time to hand the wheel to the next generation of



exceptional talent at Royal Caribbean, and I am very confident that under Jason's strong leadership, [the company] will accelerate to even greater heights," Fain said.

The changes will also see Director and Chair of the nominating and corporate governance committee John Brock take on the role of Independent Lead Director.

"Brock brings invaluable experience from his time as Chair and CEO of Coca-Cola Enterprises...that will support the company's growth," Liberty said.

AMS to lift charges

AMSTERDAM Schiphol Airport will hike airline charges by 33% over the next three years after being approved by the Consumer and Market Authority.

The decision will mean charges will effectively double 2019 fees by 2027, a move slammed by IATA as damaging the hub's viability.

Ormina into Swiss

ORMINA Tours is expanding into Switzerland with fully included tours, which are now available into next year.

The tour operator's offerings include panoramic rail journeys, an immersive Grand Swiss Cities tour, as well as a number of family-friendly packages.

Tours currently on sale include the five-day 'Lake Lugano, Switzerland', the eight-day 'Switzerland Panoramic Rail Journey', and the nine-day 'Switzerland Luxury Rail Journey'.

There are also three extended 10-day tours on offer: the 'Italian Lakes & Swiss Mountains', the 'Grand Swiss Cities Regional Discovery', and the 'Italian Lakes and Swiss Mountains'.

The European small group and private journey specialist has said its aim is to demonstrate to travel advisors that Switzerland "offers much more than just a rail pass".

CLICK HERE for full details on the new tours.

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The best famil ever, pho sure



ITRAVEL has rewarded its top travel advisors with an exclusive Vietnam famil.

The six-day incentive was hosted with Vietnam Airlines, CVFR, and Focus Asia, immersing advisors in the destination's vibrant culture, history, and cuisine.

The journey began in Ho Chi Minh City, where attendees experienced the Cu Chi Tunnels and the War Remnants Museum.

Next stop was Hoi An, where guests wandered through a traditional ancient house, visited the Hoi An Museum, and the iconic Japanese Bridge.

A standout for the advisors was the Vietnamese cooking tour, which included a visit to a local food market to select produce.

They then got a hands-on experience at a local cooking school, preparing a delicious lunch of seafood salad, handmade noodles, and more, showcasing the group's new culinary skills.

The famil wrapped up in Hue, where advisors explored the former imperial capital, which was once home to the Nguyen dynasty emperors.

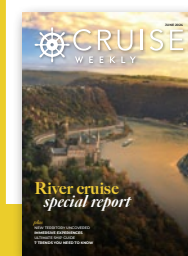
Highlights included the Imperial City of Hue, The Hill, and the Thien Mu Temple. *MS*

Qantas pax stranded

HUNDREDS of Australian passengers remain stranded in Azerbaijan after a flight from Sydney to Singapore was forced to land following a medical emergency on board.

Qantas said impacted passengers will be provided with overnight accommodation and are expected to depart for Singapore on Tue.

While all media reports have cited the medical incident as the reason for the emergency landing, a passenger who spoke to *TD* also suggested the plane had an engine issue.



Discover our River Cruise Special Report

Click here

King to depart CATO

THE Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) has announced that Julie King will step down from the Board this week (*TD* breaking news).

King (*pictured*), who has been on the industry body's board for a decade, will conclude her tenure this Thu 12 Jun.

"After 10 incredibly rewarding years on the CATO board, I have made the considered decision not to seek re-election at the upcoming AGM," she shared.

"In recent months, I've taken the time to consider where I can best focus my energy and how I can continue to contribute meaningfully to the industry.

"With that clarity, I feel this is the right time to step aside and allow others the opportunity to bring fresh perspectives to the Board," King said, adding that she will "remain deeply committed to supporting CATO strategically in any way I can".

CATO MD, Brett Jardine, said he



was "deeply grateful" for King's contributions over her time.

"Julie's calm and considered approach has had a profound impact on me personally and on CATO more broadly," he said.

"There have been many occasions where I'd catch myself thinking, 'What would Julie think?' - true testament to the positive influence she's had.

"I have no doubt her legacy will continue to shape the organisation into the future." *JM*

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New era for Branson camp

MAHALI Mzuri, Richard Branson's tented safari camp in Kenya, has reopened its doors after its first full refurbishment. Part of the Virgin Limited Edition collection, the property boasts a refreshed look and feel, and is ready to once again welcome guests, just in time for the annual Great Wildebeest Migration. "We're excited to be able to offer an even more luxurious safari experience, along with a seamless connection to the surrounding nature and authentic



local Maasai culture," said James Bermingham, Chief Executive of Virgin Hotels Collection. The 12 luxury tented suites now feature a contemporary African design and floor-to-ceiling glass windows, which provide panoramic views of the valley and its diverse wildlife.

Guests will also notice textiles, hardware and custom furnishings sourced from Nairobi-based suppliers; artworks by East African artists; accents of intricate Maasai beadwork in the accessories; and soft furnishings created by local nonprofit, The Maa Trust.

Each tented suite features king-size or twin beds, a lounge area, a separate walk-in shower and a free-standing bathtub overlooking the valley, as well as a spacious private viewing deck.

The new design concept also encompasses the camp's communal open firepit area, restaurant and bar, and infinity swimming pool, which includes the addition of cabanas featuring red and black soft furnishings, in a nod to traditional Maasai attire.

Guests can enjoy twice daily game drives, bush walks with Maasai warriors, hot air balloon safaris, and more. *JM*

TAF adds Swiss

TRAVEL Agent Finder (TAF) is calling on certified Switzerland advisors to be featured in its new destination guide.

TAF's new partnership with Switzerland Tourism will see it produce a guide tailored for Australian travellers, sharing travel advice and first-hand experiences from certified destination experts.

TAF is inviting advisors who have completed Switzerland Tourism's specialist training program to join the platform, elevating their authority, exposure, and skills as go-to professionals.

Users will be able to connect directly with Switzerland Tourism-approved specialists for expert personalised advice.

"It's been a pleasure partnering with Switzerland Tourism to bring this guide to life," TAF founder Anna Shannon said.

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Taiwan 30
THE ISLAND OF SOUL
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DNSW appoints

THE New South Wales Government has made a new board appointment to its DMO, with University of Sydney Vice President External Engagement Kirsten Andrews to join the board of Destination NSW.

Andrews will be charged with helping to ensure the growth of the state's visitor economy.

She will replace outgoing Director George Souris, who Tourism Minister Steve Kamper thanked for his contributions.

Meanwhile, three new directors have also joined Reflections Holidays, a holiday park group that manages Crown land on behalf of the state.

The new Reflections Holidays board appointees are former NSW Tourism Minister Adam Marshall; former NSW Shadow Crown Lands Minister Mick Veitch; and Destination Sydney Surrounds Chair Lyndel Gray.

Former Tourism Tasmania Chair John King has also been reappointed to the board.



Window Seat

ARE you ready for some bites that are out of this world?

The Australian-first Star Wars Galactic Cafe is now open at Melbourne Museum, with the opening weekend proving so popular it was booked out.

The Galactic Cafe brings galaxy-inspired menu items and a themed fit-out to the attraction, which is currently hosting the world-first LEGO Star Wars exhibition.

The cafe is expecting to welcome more than 2,000 customers during its first month of operations.

Interstellar delights on the menu include blue milk and the Canto Bight Burger.

Other highlights include vegetarian options such as the Sorgan Burger - who knew there were vegos in a galaxy far, far away?

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Canberra aces it

CANBERRA Airport has achieved the third-highest level of carbon management accreditation by Airports Council International (ACI).

Joining Adelaide, Brisbane, Parafield, and Sydney airports, the Canberra hub has now reached level 4 under ACI's Airport Carbon Accreditation scheme.

"We congratulate Canberra Airport for its significant strides in reducing carbon emissions, setting a benchmark for airports across the region," said Stefano Baronci, Director General of ACI Asia-Pacific and Middle East.

"Canberra Airport's approach aligns with our industry's collective vision of achieving net zero emissions by 2050."

VIRTUOSO DRIVES RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

VIRTUOSO brought together 105 tourism leaders from nearly 20 countries during its inaugural Impact Summit - a forum designed to shape the future of responsible travel.

Hosted at Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, Alberta last week, the two-and-a-half day event saw sustainability-focused advisors and partners convene to discuss how to drive progress in what Virtuoso has identified as the three pillars of sustainability: supporting local economies, celebrating culture, and protecting the planet.

Virtuoso's Vice Chair and Sustainability Strategist Jessica Hall Upchurch welcomed attendees during the event's opening session.

"Our principles when it comes to implementing sustainability in travel have always been 'no



shame, no blame' and 'start where you are', meaning we'd rather see 95% of the world take one step forward than five percent trying to get it perfect," she said.

Attendees also heard from variety of guest speakers, including tech entrepreneur and Virtuoso board member Gilad Berenstein, who discussed the role of AI in furthering sustainability efforts.

The programming also included three distinct panels aligned with Virtuoso's core sustainability pillars, which were each followed by an interactive ideation session, where participants collaborated on key topics.

The summit rounded out with sustainability-focused activities each afternoon, including hikes to Emerald Lake, volunteering with local charity Soup Sisters, and a warrior women tea ceremony. *JM*

Wellington in drive

WELLINGTON Airport has now replaced the majority of its ground fleet with electric or plug-in hybrid vehicles, after introducing a new fully electric bus into service this week.

Providing a convenient and sustainable transport option, the Yutong E9L is now taking travellers to and from the airport's long-term car park every 15 minutes.

The bus is zero emissions and offers more space, comfort and capacity for passengers.

Tourism Noosa makes plastic precious

TOURISM Noosa has launched Precious Plastic Noosa, a new sustainability initiative that transforms plastic waste into products.

This month, the community recycling program will repurpose plastic bottle caps into Noosa-branded pens and surfboard wax combs, available for purchase at the Noosa Visitor Information Centre.

"This project is about turning waste into something



meaningful," said Tourism Noosa CEO Sharon Raguse.

"Precious Plastic Noosa isn't just about recycling - it's about engaging our community, empowering our youth, and demonstrating how small actions can lead to big change."

HA airs eco-film

HAWAIIAN Airlines and Alaska Airlines have teamed up with Lonely Whale to stream a conservation film on their inflight entertainment this World Oceans Month.

The short film, *Seaweed Stories*, highlights how marine plants can address plastic pollution and restore and preserve ocean ecosystems.

The film hopes to inspire travellers to take action to protect marine ecosystems.

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Wendy Wu Tours

WESTERN AUSTRALIA
WALKING ON A DREAM

MONEY

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

AU\$1 = US\$0.652

UNCERTAINTY has been the flavour of the year for the US and it continues to affect the value of its currency, with the AUD on a relaxed climb since the start of the month which has seen it move up from 0.64 to 0.65 - hardly a meteoric rise but one that seems likely to keep going.

The US Dollar Index, which charts the value of the USD against major currencies, has seen the opposite trend as its value slowly declines.

It's a different story against the Euro, as Jun has seen the continuation of the AUD recover against the Euro - a trajectory that began in early Apr after a general slow decline over the last year.

US	\$0.652
UK	£0.481
NZ	\$1.077
Euro	€0.570
Japan	¥94.20
Thailand	฿21.29
China	¥4.683
South Africa	11.561
Canada	\$0.893
Bitcoin	0.0000591839

Learning flies with Air NZ



LAST week, Globus family of brands and Air New Zealand held a day of product updates for home-based advisors from Flight Centre's Envoyage brand, as well as Travelmanagers and MTA.

During the event, agents learnt about Air NZ's retrofit of their

Dreamliners, complete with an enhanced cabin experience and Melbourne to Vancouver flights with a stopover in Auckland.

Globus also shared news of its air-inclusive packages as well as the streamlining of its 12 styles to just three. *JHM*

Pictured: Globus family of brand's Mel Wouda with Mel Van Twest & Mel Train from Air NZ.

Uber's Taiwan buy

UBER in Taiwan is acquiring Crown Taxi, one of the nation's biggest fleet dispatchers.

The partnership is a reflection of Uber's commitment to the nation, said GM Margarita Peker.

"I look forward to working even more closely with Crown and its affiliated drivers, bringing innovative and reliable services to more riders, and expanding to underserved communities," she said in a LinkedIn post.

IAG faces turbulence

THE International Airlines Group (IAG) could be faced with a shareholder revolt at its upcoming AGM on 18 Jun, due to a proposed remuneration policy that could see CEO Luis Gallego receive a one-off share award worth more than £2.7 million (A\$5.6 million), according to a report from Sky News.

Robben Is closes

ROBBEN Island Museum in Cape Town is shutting down for three months due to renovations, as the city prepares to host the G20 Summit in Sep.

"Robben Island is a treasured national heritage site, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year," explained a spokesperson from the Robben Island Museum Council.

"We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause and appreciate the understanding of our visitors during this time."

All visitors with booked tickets during this period will receive a full refund - queries can be directed **HERE**.

Air NZ wi-fi trial

AIR New Zealand is trialling Starlink wi-fi on two domestic aircraft, including one of its Airbus A320 domestic jets ZK OXE, which will be joined by an ATR afterwards.

In a global first, the Starlink trial will also expand to the carrier's regional aircraft and be installed on one of the carrier's ATR turboprop planes.

According to Air New Zealand, the airline is currently in a test phase of Starlink's connectivity, as it monitors how the service performs in real-world conditions and listens to customer feedback.

The service is free for guests.

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Make the Tourism Solomons team laugh to win

Tourism Solomons is offering travel agents the opportunity to win a gift hamper jam-packed with goodies valued at over \$100 simply by making the Tourism Solomons team in Honiara laugh.

And it's really easy – all agents have to do is caption the image of two Solomon Island boys having fun on a rope swing, something you see almost every day somewhere in the Hapi isles.

There's no right or wrong answer – the caption that brings the biggest smile or the best laugh at head office will score the hamper.

All you have to do is click on the following link and write in your answer:
<https://enterhere.net/solomons-2025/>

Entries close at 5.00pm on 17 June with the winner to be announced in Travel Daily on 20 June.

