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Today's issue of TD

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

- **Backroads**
- **24/7 Solutions**

QR Group profits fly

PROFITS across passenger, cargo, catering and duty-free have soared to QAR7.85 billion (A\$3.3 billion) at Qatar Airways Group, aided by the renewal of a group-wide reinvention strategy. The results were an increase of nearly A\$725 million on the prior year, with Group CEO Badr Mohammed Al-Meer citing strong partnerships and the hard work of its global team for its success.

Key achievements over the year included the expansion of QR's Hamad International Airport hub to cater to 65 million pax annually, the installation of Starlink wi-fi on its Boeing 777 fleet and its 25% stake purchase in Virgin Australia (**TD** 29 Nov 2024).

Al-Meer said the "outstanding results" will allow it to continue to offer and develop exceptional service in the skies.

Small group flavours

BACK-ROADS Touring is inviting agents to learn more about its small-group style and how travellers can craft their own tailor-made tour - see **page eight**.

AI to have positive impact

AROUND 85% of tourism operators and destination management companies in Australia believe AI will provide a significantly positive impact over the next three years.

While there has been plenty of trepidation expressed about how AI will change the travel and tourism landscape, the insight from Tourism Tribe's *The States of Artificial Intelligence in Tourism* report suggests there is broad optimism in Australia.

DMOs are currently leading AI adoption, using the emerging tech tools to create greater operational efficiency and to rethink their role in the travel purchase cycle amid the rise of AI-powered consumer planning

Exoticca accredited

ONLINE tour operator Exoticca has become officially accredited with the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA), a step it said will hold it in good stead as it expands across Australia.

"This recognition strengthens our credibility in the Australian market and reflects our dedication to building long-term relationships with local travel advisors and customers," MD Australia Dennis Basham said.

The growth plan will also see Exoticca invest in dedicated campaigns, advisor incentives, and on-the-ground support to boost engagement and sales throughout 2025 and beyond.



and booking tools.

While 79% of DMOs and 71% of tourism operators have already started using AI tools, the report also exposed a knowledge gap in those businesses, curtailing them from fully leveraging AI benefits.

Around 40% of all respondents said they lack the skills to get the most of out of AI, however operators were found to be well behind the DMO segment when it came to adoption confidence.

A quarter of respondents said they were "just starting out" with AI, while 22.2% said they "know a little" about the tech, and just shy of 18% said they "feel confident" about integrating AI.

Only 2.2% felt they are AI experts, and a third expressed concerns around data privacy.

The report recommended that DMOs continue to develop agile AI implementation strategies that align with customers and disrupt traditional marketing models.

For operators, the advice was to tap more govt grants to overcome resource limitations. **AB**

Get help after-hours

CLIENTS getting stuck due to unforeseen world events and natural disasters can have 24/7 Solutions at their disposal - find out more on **page nine**.

NZ at your pace

NEW Zealand is welcoming applications from travel advisors to plan and explore the country on their own self-famil where they can travel at their own pace.

Discounts at more than 370 participating businesses are available - see today's **cover page**.



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Serko revenue up but work still ahead

AUDITED financial results for the 12 months ending 31 Mar have been handed down by corporate travel technology firm Serko Limited, revealing a 27% jump in income to NZ\$90.5m.

The company attributed the strong result to ongoing high demand for its Booking.com white-label software Zeno, which has led to completed room nights and active customers both increasing by 29%.

However, despite the positive sales and revenue growth, the company has posted a \$22 million after-tax net loss, blamed largely on one-off costs associated with its acquisition of the GetThere travel management solution from Sabre Corporation (**TD** 07 Jan).

These “one-off costs and a non-cash accounting impairment” led to a \$6.1 million increase in the company’s overall loss.

Total income for the New Zealand-based business climbed



by NZ\$19.3 million, while operating expenses included one-off acquisition costs.

Aside from integration costs, the acquisition delivered a \$4.8 million boost to the balance sheet.

No dividends will be paid to shareholders for the financial year, with the company stating none will be forthcoming as it pursues new growth opportunities.

Overall, Serko posted a \$2.8 million EBITDA, which represented a \$4.3 million improvement on the prior year.

The company said it saw a 12% increase in average revenue per

booking and a 6% boost to online bookings, which propelled higher travel revenue growth.

“Serko is pursuing new growth, supported by targeted investment in its platform and North American expansion,” said Serko Chief Executive and co-founder, Darrin Grafton (**pictured**).

“We are in a strong position to do this, with continued income growth, cost discipline and an increase in our capability, including in data and AI.”

Looking forward, Serko said its year-to-date performance is in line with expectations but acknowledged spend is again forecast to surpass revenue.

The company added that risks to it achieving its goals for the next financial year include geopolitical factors such as ongoing economic uncertainty driven by the US, along with currency and average revenue per completed room night fluctuations. *ML*

Qantas back on top

ALTHOUGH Virgin Australia briefly overtook its main rival by servicing more domestic passengers in Dec 2024, Qantas has since regained the lead by servicing 37.5% of all traffic in Mar 2025, a new report from the ACCC has showed.

The Flying Kangaroo was ahead of Virgin Australia, which claimed 34.4% of the market, followed by Qantas Group’s budget carrier Jetstar with 26.4%.

Combined, Qantas Group serviced 63.9% of all passengers, and combined with VA, accounted for 98.3% of domestic travellers.

Meanwhile, struggling carrier Rex only managed to carry 1.7% of all passenger traffic in Mar.

Solomons in time

TRAVELLERS can learn more about the wartime history of the Solomon Islands, with battlefield tours a highlight of the country’s attractions - see **page 10**.



Unlock Italian Trains with Grant Robertson

Trenitalia is one of the **best ways** to explore Italy.



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Trenitalia also operates regional and Intercity trains for scenic journeys connecting charming towns and coastal regions. It’s the smart, sustainable way to see Italy. The booking horizon for these services are 60-90 days.

IMPORTANT: Regional train documentation — Trenitalia sends the customer an email with a link to their regional train ticket, which the customer needs to print. **Click here** for a video explaining this process.

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Women drop out of cruise

THE international cruise sector saw a significant drop in the number of female employees between 2021 and 2024, falling from 57% to just 5%.

Figures released by the International Maritime Organization's latest *Women in Maritime Survey* also showed a sizable drop-off in the number of women occupying middle management roles, falling from 50% in 2021 to 18% in 2024.

Of the 32 comparable sub-sectors within the maritime industry, 21 saw a decline in female representation in support roles, with one of the steepest reductions noted in the cruise industry, down from 100% representation in 2021 to 37%.

On a more encouraging note, the share of women occupying board positions held steady, increasing slightly from 20% to 21% from 2021 to 2024.

While there were no specific



data points provided in the report for women in the Australian cruise industry, the country fared better than most nations in the broader maritime context.

Australia was among the few countries to see an increase in the volume of women in core and support roles, while the number of women in Australia on boards was also one of the highest in maritime, at 32%. *AB*

Reagan appointed

BOUTIQUE luxury lodge platform Baillie Lodges has appointed Courtney Reagan as CCO, where she will lead sales for both the Baillie and Tierra brands.

Since 2019, the company has expanded its portfolio from four to nine properties.

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Egypt doubles down

AS PART of its newly-revealed bid to double tourists by 2030, Egypt has launched a range of visa updates to spur visitation.

From May through to 31 Oct, travellers who land directly at Luxor or Aswan airports will have visa fees waived, while the African country has also introduced an emergency e-visa on-arrival scheme.

Initially available at Cairo Int'l Airport before being rolled out to other hubs, the new system allows Aussies to obtain a visa using self-serve kiosks, mobile apps, and online platforms.

Egypt has also extended its free transit visa through to Apr 2026, providing the option for travellers to explore the country for up to four days without a visa, so long as they are flying with EgyptAir, Air Cairo, or Nile Air.

The news follows DFAT lowering the overall travel warning to 'exercise a high degree of caution' late last year (*TD* 04 Sep 2024).

110 flights cancelled

STRIKE action yesterday significantly impacted Finnair's flight schedule, with the Nordic carrier forced to scrap 110 flights.

Affecting around 14,000 travellers, Finnair said customers whose flights were cancelled will receive a refund or be rebooked.

King flags protection

NEWLY reappointed Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Catherine King has unveiled some of her second-term agenda plan.

Among the transport objectives for the next three years will be to establish a more robust consumer aviation protection regime.

King also noted that preserving regional aviation and driving competition in the sector would be a key policy area moving forward, as will be proceeding with the Melbourne Airport rail project and completing Western Sydney International Airport.

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Window Seat

THE chances of the Melania Trump statue in Slovenia becoming an iconic tourist attraction have just been dashed after the life-sized bronze sculpture was stolen last week.

Police are investigating the disappearance of the monument - a tribute to the First Lady of the United States in her hometown of Sevnica - which replaced the original eight-metre tall wooden statue that had been set on fire earlier that year.

According to Slovenian media reports, the bronze replica was sawn off at the ankles and removed.

It seems that the motive behind the statue's theft may not have anything to do with negative feelings towards the First Lady, but rather the fact that the tribute bears no obvious resemblance to her.

Even a local bakery worker who sells cakes decorated with Melania Trump's name isn't fazed, nonchalantly remarking that he thinks it is "okay" that the statue was removed.

"I think no one was really proud of this statue, not even the first lady of the USA."



New chapter for Manwaring



THE long and storied tenure of Tom Manwaring leading Express Travel Group (ETG) is about to come to an end, with the well-known executive to exit the position on 30 Jun (**TD** breaking news yesterday).

Manwaring (**pictured**) has been CEO of the now Helloworld-owned, formerly independent agency since 2003, with the latest development to see him transition to Non-Executive Chair of ETG and the First Travel Group co-operative within the broader HLO Group.

As a result of Manwaring's change, Jason Aghan, who is currently General Manager Sales & Marketing at ETG, will replace him in the position as Group General Manager ETG.

"Jason already sits on the executive management team of HLO, and I congratulate him on the outstanding job he has done since ETG became a part of HLO and on his promotion to this position," said Andrew Burnes, CEO & Managing Director, Helloworld Travel.

"Jason has had a long career in aviation before starting at ETG seven years ago in his current

position, and he has played a key role in the growth of the business and the development of the Agency networks within ETG."

Commenting on his role change, Manwaring said he was proud of the network and the legacy it will continue to have in the industry.

"Jason is the best person to lead our network of members into the next chapter of its success.

"I am also delighted to be taking on a role that allows me to be involved with the business across Australia and New Zealand."

Manwaring has been in travel for 55 years, and has held senior roles at ATIA and co-founded brands like Creative Cruising. **AB**

MSC adds new ships

MSC Cruises has signed an order for two new World-class ships, to complement the four already delivered or under construction for the line.

Chantiers de l'Atlantique will build the two new ships, which will bring MSC's fleet of World-class vessels to six.

The two new ships - currently referred to as World Class 5 and 6 - will be delivered in 2029 and 2030 respectively.

The other two new World-class ships under construction for the cruise line include *MSC World Asia* and *MSC World Atlantic*.

VA CarTrawler pact

VIRGIN Australia has partnered with car hire business CarTrawler to enhance its car rental offering for loyalty members.

VA will offer seamless hire, as well as Velocity points for its frequent flyers.

CarTrawler offers access to vehicles from top car rental providers including Europcar, Hertz, Dollar, Thrifty, and Sixt.

Other airlines partnering with CarTrawler include Jet2, Finnair, American Airlines, and more.

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Cruising to a bright future

GLOBAL cruise passenger numbers are forecast to rise to 37.7 million in 2025 - an 8.6% uplift on last year's record figure of 34.6 million - according to new research from Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA).

The *CLIA State of the Cruise Industry 2025* report predicts those numbers will continue to grow, hitting 41.9 million by 2028. The intention to cruise remains

strong, with 82% of those who have sailed in the past saying they want to do it again, and 68% of those who have never cruised said they would consider taking one.

Additionally, the number of first-time cruisers continues to increase: 31% of passengers over the past two years were first-timers, up from 24% in 2019.

"Cruising is more popular than ever and the diversity of experiences now available to cruise guests is phenomenal," said CLIA MD Australasia, Joel Katz.

"The outlook for cruising remains strong and cruise lines are preparing to enhance their fleets with a further 56 new ships to be launched into the next decade," he added.

See the full report [HERE](#). JM

Only flight chaos

HUNDREDS of flights were cancelled or delayed at Paris-Orly Airport on Mon due to an air traffic control breakdown.

It was the second day of substantial delays after a previous breakdown at the hub over the weekend, with disruption maps showing the French airport is finally back on schedule.

As a preventative measure, airlines were asked to reduce their flights by 15% yesterday.

Flights to Italy, Spain, Portugal and Southern France were cancelled yesterday.

The news follows a string of technical failures affecting airports in Europe, including almost 150 flights across Spain and Portugal being cancelled last month due to a major power cut across airports in Barcelona, Madrid and Lisbon.

In Mar, an inferno at an electrical substation near Heathrow Airport in London also caused chaos, with at least 1,350 flights impacted.

Delta shifts gears

DELTA Air Lines has renamed its seat products and experiences, with the brand changes taking effect on 01 Oct.

DL's seat products will now be classified: Delta Main (formerly Main Cabin), Delta Comfort (formerly Delta Comfort+), Delta First (Formerly First Class), Delta Premium Select, and Delta One.

The base level fare, previously known as Basic Economy, has now been renamed Delta Main, including three sub-categories: Basic, Classic and Extra.

DL's brand shift will begin on flights originating from the US and Canada.

ATIA UPDATE

from Nina Hedges, Compliance Manager



WANT to have your say in the most important endorsement of business excellence and credibility in

the Australian travel industry?

Now is your chance.

From 02 Jun, public submissions open for the 2025 ATAS Charter Review - and we are inviting you to get involved.

Wherever you sit within the industry, or even outside of it, your insights are welcomed and valued - visit atia.travel to find out how to make a submission before 01 Jul 2025.

We're proud to have legal expert and former senior Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) officer Michael Terceiro appointed as the Independent Reviewer.

With over 30 years of experience in legal, regulatory, and compliance roles, Terceiro has conducted numerous independent reviews across high-profile consumer sectors.

His expertise spans competition and consumer law, governance, and regulatory compliance.

At ATIA, our mission is always to continuously invite voices into the association - because a strong,

united travel industry association is one that listens.

While we regularly encourage feedback, this formal process - conducted only once every three years - is a rare and powerful opportunity to influence the governing documents that underpin the ATAS scheme.

The 2025 Review will examine the ATAS Charter, Code of Conduct, Solvency Definitions, and Terms of Reference for the ATIA Complaints Appeals Committee (ACAC).

The goal is to ensure that these documents remain effective and contemporary, as well as determine whether any changes are needed to strengthen the ATAS framework.

Terceiro is set to deliver his report to the ATIA Board by 29 Jul, with the Board then publishing its response and any endorsed amendments.

This transparent review reflects ATIA's ongoing commitment to upholding the highest standards of self-regulation and consumer protection.

The ATAS Charter and Code are more than just documents - they represent professionalism, accountability, and excellence in the travel industry.

Now is the time to speak up and be part of the future.

Submissions open 02 Jun.

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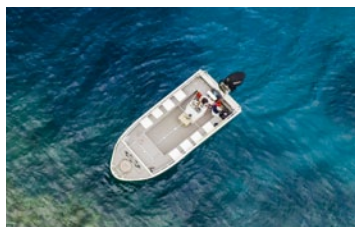
TRUE NORTH, REEF ALLIANCE SETS SAIL

TRUE North has partnered with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation to launch exclusive conservation itineraries in 2025, taking guests on an adventure into the world's largest coral reef system.

The cruise operator has worked with the foundation to develop the seven-night 'Great Barrier Reef Conservation Cruise' and the 13-night 'Great Barrier Reef Ultimate' itinerary from Cairns on board the recently refitted *True North II* (TD 16 Apr).

The conservation expeditions offer guests exclusive access to frontline reef protection and restoration efforts alongside leading marine scientists.

Travellers are able to engage



with researchers working on coral restoration research and marine species protection, such as searching for whale shark congregations from the sky, satellite tagging and monitoring of fish and coral species.

The 'Great Barrier Reef Ultimate' offers a deeper exploration of the reef's remote northern reaches, featuring heli-flights, snorkelling and diving in

rarely visited locations.

"Our focus is always on providing once-in-a-lifetime adventures for the adventurers joining us on *True North* or *True North II*, and with The Great Barrier Reef Foundation on board, we'll be able to do so in a more unique and sustainable way," said True North Director, Chad Avenell.

The Great Barrier Reef Foundation's Managing Director, Anna Marsden, described the partnership as a "game-changer for conservation tourism".

"Not only do guests experience the Reef in a way few ever do, but their journey directly contributes to protecting its future." JM

Every corner counts

AIR New Zealand has announced an investment of NZ\$1.2 million to support 100 community nature projects, with recipients of its Every Corner Project funding revealed last week.

A total of 115 projects across a range of locations and communities were selected from more than 640 applications by the airline's domestic port teams, with initiatives including native planting, wetland restoration, and establishing rainwater harvesting systems.

"Air New Zealand is committed to reducing our own carbon footprint, but we also want to uplift the inspiring work already underway across Aotearoa," said Air New Zealand Chief Sustainability and Corporate Affairs Officer Kiri Hannifin.

"This project is about backing local communities, and we're proud to help bring these initiatives to life," she added.

Funding will be distributed by the end of Jun, with projects set to begin within the next 12 months.



Katz at GSTC25

CRUISE Lines International Association (CLIA) Managing Director - Australasia & Asia, Joel Katz, has been announced as a speaker at the Global Sustainable Tourism Conference (GSTC) 2025 in Fiji on 05-08 Aug.

Katz will share insights on the environmental, social, and economic impacts of cruising, with a focus on promoting sustainable growth across small islands and coastal communities, during a panel discussion with Tahiti Tourisme CEO Vaihere Lissant.

Soneva's coral program gets UN kudos

SONEVA Foundation's Coral Restoration Program recently received major international recognition, after being officially endorsed by the United Nations and listed on the UNESCO Ocean Decade website.

Based in the Maldives, the foundation's program is now the region's largest coral restoration facility, with innovations including a coral spawning and rearing lab and micro-fragmentation tanks.

The initiative draws on the latest marine science, with local collaboration across governments, NGOs, the



tourism industry and global research institutions.

"This is a remarkable achievement for Dr Johanna Leonhardt, Soneva's Coral Project Manager, and her dedicated team, whose science-driven and community-led approach is redefining large-scale reef restoration in the Indian Ocean," the resort said.



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MONEY

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

AU\$1 = US\$0.645

THE Reserve Bank of Australia is expected to cut the interest rate by 25 basis points to 3.85% - down from 4.1% - after a monetary policy meeting, which takes place today.

While the AUD has made slight gains against the USD this week, it remains at a crossroads ahead of the RBA's decision.

New Zealand's dollar has followed a similar trajectory, recently rising incrementally against the US dollar.

Conditions are positive for the pound to AUD exchange rate, which has been trending higher over the past six months, with the pair gaining 7.5% since a low of 1.9251 on 24 Nov 2024.

However this is predicted to drop gradually over the next six to 12 months, so Aussie travellers looking to visit the UK should act fast to get the best bang for their buck.

On another note, Bitcoin has seen a 2.8% jump to reach US\$107,060.46 for the first time since Jan.

Wholesale rates this morning.

US	\$0.645
UK	£0.483
NZ	\$1.089
Euro	€0.575
Japan	¥93.57
Thailand	฿21.39
China	¥4.657
South Africa	11.672
Canada	\$0.965
Crude oil	US\$61.16

A eureka moment for JB



JOURNEY Beyond recently celebrated the 18th anniversary of Melbourne Skydeck, the southern hemisphere's highest observation deck.

Daniel Toby, Sales & Marketing Manager - Attractions & Dining (pictured second from the left) was on hand to help cut the cake, sharing pictures of the milestone celebration on LinkedIn.

"A huge thank you to all our incredible partners across Melbourne who have supported us on this journey," he said.

"Your collaboration, dedication, and passion help us continue to offer unforgettable experiences in the heart of the city."

At the same time, Toby announced the launch of the Melbourne Skydeck Photo Competition, inviting visitors to share their best Eureka Tower shots for a chance to win prizes.

Melbourne Skydeck has also introduced an 18th birthday package, allowing visitors to take in 360-degree views of Melbourne from the observation deck, as well as enjoy a 6D virtual reality experience, for just \$30 for bookings made by 25 May.

Find out more **HERE**. JM

US carrier looks OS

US CARRIER Southwest Airlines has applied to regulators for permits to fly international routes to all countries that the US has open skies agreements with.

The United States has around 100 open skies agreements with countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, while Australia also has an agreement in place.

While the application could open up a range of new destinations opportunities for the popular American budget carrier, the company was quick to point out in a statement that the filing was "not necessarily indicative of anything forthcoming".

Southwest suggested that it was taking advantage of the regulatory procedures of the US Department of Transportation in making a broad filing.

It has been a busy period for the Texas-based carrier as well; in Mar it began charging customers for checked bags while it also ended its open seating policy.

Recently the carrier also downgraded its financial forecasts due to the escalating issues around tariffs and trade.

Falls hit BA hard

BRITISH Airways has been slugged £3.2 million (A\$6.6 million) in fines following injuries to two workers in near identical accidents just months apart.

A ground operations agent suffered back and head injuries after falling 1.5 metres from a telelevator on 25 Aug 2022, while another was seriously injured and suffered brain bleeding when he fell three metres from a TLD elevator on 08 Mar 2023.

Both the telelevator and TLD elevator are used to load baggage into aircrafts and can reach heights of up to three metres.

In handing down the fine, Judge Brendan Finucane KC said, "I am satisfied that in both incidents the culpability was high".

Inspectors who visited in Mar 2022 had noted concerns that the judge believed could have been dealt with more swiftly, including a substantial gap between the telelevator and the fuselage of the aircraft when it was being operated.

Since the incidents occurred, the United Kingdom-based carrier has implemented guard rails on teleelevators.

Travel Money 100th

TRAVEL Money's worldwide store footprint has reached triple digits, opening its 100th store at Highpoint in Melbourne.

The Flight Centre brand now has 86 stores in every state in Australia, as well as 14 overseas.

Travel Money is also planning to open 15 more stores in the next 12 months.

The retail brand was forced to completely shut five years ago due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



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15-31May 2024	Vanuatu	Civil unrest
8-22 Aug 2024	QF WA	Schedule change QF9 PER/LON
16 Aug 2024	Japan	Typhoon Ampil
Sep-Oct 2024	Lebanon	Lebanon/Iraq/Jordan unrest
18 Dec 2024	Vanuatu	Earthquake impact
Dec-Jan 2025	Middle East	Middle East unrest
9 Jan 2025	USA	California wildfires disruptions
13 Feb 2025	WA	Cyclone Zelia flight disruptions
6 March 2025	QLD	Cyclone Alfred flight disruptions
20 March 2025	UK	LHR airport Fire
20 March 2025	Indonesia	Volcano flight disruption
March - Sep	Tel aviv	Tel aviv unrest disruptions
17 April 2025	NZ	Cyclone Tam flight disruptions
28 April 2025	Asia	Myanmar Earthquake

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Echoes of war in the Solomon Islands

In early August 1942, hoping to halt the expansion of the Japanese in the South Pacific, Allied forces landed on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands marking the start of one of the bloodiest conflicts seen in WWII.

It would take six long months of gruelling fighting and the loss of some 40,000 lives, including 31,000 Japanese soldiers, before the US Forces and their allies could wrest complete control of the island from the enemy and as importantly, place the Japanese Imperial Army on the back foot for the first time. The locals say that every step taken in the Solomon Islands is a step into history and reflecting huge interest in the country's WWII history, battlefield tours are readily available offering

memorable and moving tours to Honiara's open air museums and other significant sites including the American Memorial at Skyline Ridge and the Japanese Peace Memorial. One of the best collections of WWII relics to be found anywhere in the South Pacific, the Peter Joseph WWII Museum in Munda is a must for anyone visiting the Solomon Islands' Western Province. This amazing private museum features a huge collection of US and Japanese military utensils, ammunition, machine guns, shells, crockery, helmets, shavers and knives, all left behind by the Allied and Japanese forces after the conflict ended.

NEED HELP?

Speak to the expert - Tourism Solomons' Trade Manager Australia/New Zealand, Richard Skewes is the go to point for all travel industry related enquiries:

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