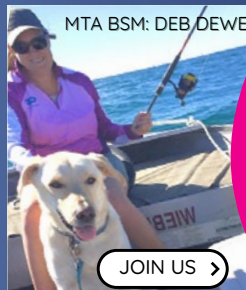


# Travel Daily

First with the news

Wednesday 21st May 2025



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## Today's issue of TD

*Travel Daily* today features eight pages of the latest travel industry news, including a photo page from **Adventure World** and our **Luxury** page, plus a full page from **City of Gold Coast**.

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## Webjet to broaden appeal

**DIVERSIFYING** the Webjet OTA brand beyond being a domestic flight-led business has been identified as a key goal in capturing more of the travel wallet moving forward.

Detailed in its annual report released this morning (**TD** breaking news), Webjet OTA unpacked its five-year growth plan, which included expanding its share of international flight bookings to between 25%-30%, which currently sits at 20%.

Webjet feels it can achieve this uplift in overseas flights by investing more in content, engagement and reach.

While historically Webjet has deployed a flight-first model, it now wants to shift to a packaged hotel/flight approach, expanding its range and value of accommodation options.

"We are up strongly on member sign-ups for our hotel deals, and 28% of our package bookings are

coming from first-time customers, who are incredibly valuable to us," Webjet Group Chief Executive Officer Katrina Barry said during a conference call.

Another major growth pillar for the company will be making corporate travel more tailored through a new stand-alone offering, enabling a more seamless digital experience through a structured approach to bookings.

Barry also said the company's new loyalty program, flagged in Mar (**TD** 19 Mar), will be firmed up in the year ahead, while other key goals include integrating Trip Ninja on all long-haul flights, and revitalising the former GoSee business into more global markets through affiliates - more on **p5**.

## Get nature funding

**ELIGIBLE** nature-based travel businesses are being encouraged to apply for funding from the City of the Gold Coast - see **page nine**.

## NTIA bundles BB

**TICKETS** are now on sale for two of the Australian Travel Industry Association's major events, the National Travel Industry Awards (NTIA) and Beyond Borders.

The two events are being held in Brisbane, and are available in a bundle offer - **CLICK HERE**.

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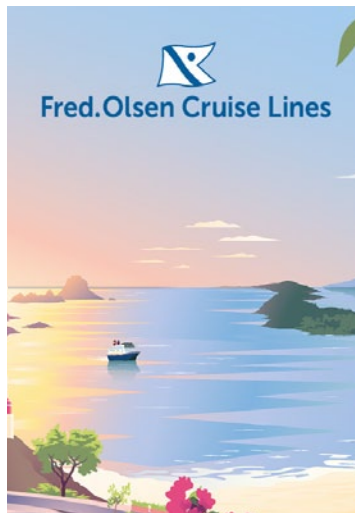
## 1000Access delivers

**TRAVEL** advisor network 1000 Mile Travel Group (1000MTG) has revealed the strong performance of its air, hotel and car booking platform, 1000Access, which offers an efficient and streamlined way to book global travel.

The company recorded more than US\$1 million in total transaction value (TTV) and more than \$40,000 in commission payouts to advisors between Jan and Apr 2025.

"1000Access was created with our independent advisors in mind - to give them a smarter, faster, and more profitable way to book travel globally," CEO Nicola Veltman said.

"These early results prove that when you pair great technology with the right people, you drive real success," she added.



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## Aussies leading with wallet

**AUSTRALIAN** travellers are more thrifty than any other market, with low pricing ranked as the top booking factor across all categories in a new report compiled by Expedia.

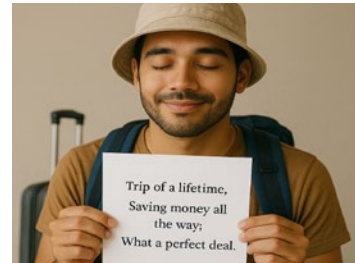
While Aussies were found to be biggest bargain-hunters of the 11 nations surveyed, the global trend also showed there is a growing appetite for placing price at the top of the priority list.

Just shy of 60% of the 11,000 travellers sampled said they expect to be more price-conscious over the next 12 months when it comes to making travel decisions.

While economic factors are clearly applying pressure to the budgets of travellers, the study showed that trust is an essential ingredient needed for people to spend more on bookings.

Three-quarters of respondents said they are willing to pay more for lodging with better reviews for example, with Expedia suggesting the result underscores the importance of confidence and reliability in travel choices.

Further findings showed the



desire to book travel through loyalty programs continues to grow, with 83% of travellers making travel their top category for redeeming loyalty points.

Four in five travellers also indicated they are interested in booking travel through loyalty programs outside of the travel industry, such as credit cards or retailers, highlighting the expanding influence of non-travel loyalty rewards.

Social media was also presented as an ever-growing sphere of influence on travel decisions, with 61% of people now sourcing inspiration from social platforms, up from 32% just three years ago.

Additionally, 73% said influencer recommendations had inspired their decisions to book trips or travel components. **AB**

## Douglas exits HLO

**HELLOWORLD** General Manager Wholesale Sales Peter Douglas has departed his position after a recent executive restructure at the company.

Douglas joined the business in late 2023 as National Sales Manager, before being promoted to GM of Wholesale late last year.

The experienced travel sales executive (**pictured**) previously held senior roles at a range of travel brands, including as Head of Sales at Globus family of brands for close to nine years, as well as tenures leading the sales strategies at Excite Holidays and Creative Holidays.



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## A Platinum AI agreement

**INDEPENDENT** corporate travel agency Platinum Travel Group will integrate a new level of AI automation into its operations in partnership with Acai Travel.

The Link Travel Group member agency has embarked on a growth plan to increase revenue ten-fold by 2030, and aims to harness AI to simplify elements of its operation and boost efficiency.

Using Acai Travel's AI agents, Platinum Travel Group said it has already reduced its repetitive tasks by 70%, allowing it to boost



client response times by 50%.

The company is aiming to show how mid-sized agencies can utilise purpose-built automation to scale-up operations without losing the human element.

"As the role of the TMC evolves, we're preparing to offer more than bookings - we want to offer guidance, personalisation and new forms of value," said Platinum Travel Group Managing Director, Sarah Szubanski.

"It frees up our people to focus on relationships and problem solving, not decoding PNRs or hunting for penalty conditions."

Platinum Travel Group's team is **pictured** above. *ML*

## Red Tail to the USA

**QANTAS** has launched its latest Red Tail Sale featuring fares to the USA, Canada and Hawaii.

On sale until 27 May, return fares to Honolulu start from \$997, with Los Angeles from \$1,149.

Onward connections with American Airlines to more than 130 destinations are also on offer.

## Helloworld grows its garden



**HELLOWORLD** franchisee Bryan Doensen has expanded his network to a second store, pulling up the shutters this week at Helloworld Waverley Gardens.

The new store complements Doensen's existing outlet at Helloworld Wheelers Hill, which he has operated since 2016.

Helloworld General Manager of Network Development, Adrian Boccia, said he was thrilled to be facilitating growth and supporting Doensen as a multi-store owner.

"It's terrific to be opening another agency, bringing on another team and adding to our amazing travel industry at a time where travel professionals are so in demand," Doensen said. *ML*

Boccia is **pictured** above at the new store with the Helloworld Waverley Gardens team.

## Fogarty sails to top

**LUXURY** Travel Collection Global Product Director, Shannon Fogarty, has been selected as the Oceania representative to join the National Geographic - Lindblad Expeditions Travel Advisory Board.

The expedition line's advisory group serves as a key beacon in the company's efforts to navigate the evolving expedition market, and was formed in 2016 in line with its 50th anniversary goals.

The board meets periodically to discuss new expedition concepts, marketing strategies, sales support tools and to provide overall performance feedback.

Fogarty will serve a three-year term on the board and share local insights and market conditions to help guide pricing strategies and guest experiences.

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## VSC's winter warmer

**VISIT** Sunshine Coast (VSC) has partnered with Expedia Group on a new campaign inviting travellers to find their 'sunshine moment' this winter.

Running until 30 Jun, the campaign will roll out across NSW, Victoria and Qld via Expedia and Wotif Australia channels, and includes a dedicated Sunshine Coast landing page featuring a range of touring, dining and entertainment options.

The marketing push will focus on marine and outdoor activities, with special discount deals on offer at a range of properties across the Sunshine Coast.

"The trade really understands that there is no such thing as a southern winter on the Sunshine Coast and with the special deals being offered through the Expedia Group campaign, there will be the incentive to book a winter break on the Sunny Coast," said VSC Trade & International Manager, Emily Zinowki.

## Crystalbrook in Canberra

**CRYSTALBROOK** Collection has announced it will open a new property in Canberra, with construction now underway at the site for an opening in 2027.

Crystalbrook Aurora will be a 10-storey newbuild featuring 225 rooms and suites, a European-style rooftop restaurant, along with ground-floor dining, retail, meeting and event spaces, and a wellness precinct featuring Crystalbrook's Eleme spa brand, a pool, sauna and fitness centre.

Guests can expect the brand's strong environmental credentials to be on full show as well, including 100% waste-free bathrooms, recycled timber key cards, coathangers and more.

The property will help the wider brand reach group-wide targets on emissions, energy, water and waste management as per strict EarthCheck benchmarks.

"As we continue to expand Crystalbrook Collection's national



footprint, Canberra represents both a strategic investment and an opportunity to help shape the next era of Australian hospitality," said Crystalbrook Collection Chief Executive Officer Geoff York.

Crystalbrook Aurora marks yet another Australian city to join the brand's network, with building continuing in Adelaide on Crystalbrook Sam ahead of its 2026 opening (**TD** 01 Aug 2024).

"Crystalbrook Aurora's identity reveal and development progress marks an exciting next chapter in our Canberra journey," said Crystalbrook Collection founder and owner, Ghassan About. *ML*



## Window Seat

**A PROFESSIONAL** solo traveller from Wollongong has scored the boozy gig of 'Chief Hangover Officer' for Australian anti-hangover supplement, alc-eze.

After kicking off its search for the world-first position earlier this year (**TD** 30 Jan), the brand has entrusted 'fearless traveller' 28-year-old Jacki Hodges with the special task of uncovering hangover hacks across the globe.

The dream gig will see Hodges (**pictured**) travel across Europe and Asia, all expenses paid, while earning a six-figure salary - cheers to that!



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## Webjet bookings down 7%

**COST-OF-LIVING** pressures and a softer domestic travel market have seen Webjet Group bookings drop by 7% to 1.53 million for the year to 31 Mar compared to the prior 12 months.

Total transaction value for the group was down by 6% to \$1.5 billion, and revenue also dipped by 3% to \$139.7 million, however EBITDA managed to buck the trend and climb 1% to \$39.4m.

During a conference call held this morning, CEO Katrina Barry conceded the first few months of its latest financial year had been "soft", but pointed to a range of initiatives (see p1) that she believes will enable the business to double its TTV by 2030.

In the 12 months to 31 Mar, Webjet Group has managed to trim expenses by 10%, creating a healthy cash reserve of \$118.1m and a debt-free balance sheet.

Webjet OTA delivered a slight decline in EBITDA, posting a result

of \$51.6 million, with a slide in domestic bookings offset by higher margins during the period.

Meanwhile, Webjet Group's online vehicle rentals product GoSee appears to have been rebranded to Cars & Motorhomes, with the latest report referencing the division as "formerly GoSee".

The brand saw its bookings shrink by 7% in the last period, however added functionality and more affiliates have it positioned for future growth, Webjet said.

## Four Seasons grows

A **SECOND** luxury yacht will be built for Four Seasons Yachts after more than €400 million in financing was sourced for its construction by brand owner, Marc-Henry Cruise Holdings.

Like the brand's first vessel *Four Seasons I*, which sets sail in Jan 2026, the second ship will be built at Fincantieri's Ancona shipyard in Italy and delivered in 2027 for sailing to begin the following year.

"With financing secured for the creation of a second Four Seasons Yacht in partnership with lauded Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri and luxury hospitality leader Four Seasons, we are thrilled to be expanding our fleet to include *Four Seasons II*," said Marc-Henry Cruise Holdings Chief Financial Officer, Donald Mason.



## \$70m Adelaide hotel ditched



**PLANS** for a \$70 million Ramada by Wyndham Playford hotel in Adelaide have been scrapped following the collapse of its developer, four years after the property's groundbreaking ceremony (**TD** 16 Apr 2021).

Administrators have been appointed to Playford City Hotel, which owes creditors close to \$3.8 million, according to *Adelaide Now*.

Originally meant to open in 2022, the failed hotel would have featured 205 guest rooms, as well as a swimming pool, gym, restaurant and sports bar with conference and events spaces.

Playford Council has now taken over the development site, buying back the land as part of a settlement of a legal claim it initiated after the developer failed to begin work on the project within the set timeframe.

In a statement, Playford Mayor Glenn Docherty said the council was exploring alternative development options for the site. "As identified in the state

government's Greater Adelaide Regional Plan, Elizabeth is the regional centre of northern Adelaide," he said.

"A hotel is a key part of any regional centre and there is ongoing interest from private investors and hotel brands to have a presence in northern Adelaide."

Travel + Leisure Co., which runs the Wyndham hotel chain, declined to provide a comment to *Adelaide Now*. **JM**

**Pictured:** A render the Ramada by Wyndham Playford.

## MTA targets ADL

**HUNDREDS** of home-based MTA Travel agents will congregate in Adelaide for its annual national conference, which will celebrate the group's 25th anniversary.

With support from Business Events Adelaide, the event will be themed 'Milestones and Momentum' and will run for two days from 25-26 Jul.

The company is yet to reveal the conference program, format and guest speakers for the event.

## Travel biz flies away

**TRAVEL** Bird has become the latest intermediary to voluntarily withdraw from the ATIA accreditation scheme, effective from 16 May.

The move follows the delisting of 10 other businesses (**TD** 01 May) over the past two months, with ATIA now advising seven of these are due to the business either being sold or closing down and ceasing operations entirely.

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# Hoffmann team adventures into Vietnam

Wednesday 21st May 2025

IN LATE Mar, Adventure World led an educational journey to Vietnam for the Phil Hoffmann Travel executive team - a trip packed with purpose, connection, and discovery.

From wandering Hanoi's tree-lined French Quarter to dining at KOTO, a social enterprise that trains disadvantaged youth in hospitality, the group experienced the kind of travel that gives back.

One of the most meaningful moments was visiting Animals Asia's bear sanctuary in Tam Dao, where they met Twilight, the moon bear they are proud guardians of.

In the peaceful hills of Pu Luong, the team woke to birdsong and misty views before trekking through rice terraces and local villages on a unique MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® Experience.

The adventure wrapped in Hoi An, where time was spent soaking up the charm of the Old Town.

**ANDREA** Morgan, Adventure World; Jill Robinson, Animals Asia; Wayne Gallagher; Peter Williams; Stacey Clark; Mary-Anne Guest; Michelle Ashcroft; Julie Bray; Alison Hunt; Lorien Everett; Kirsty Morris; Darian Foot; and Patricia Fromentin.

**SOAKING** in the sights of Pu Luong, Thai Nguyen province in the Northeast region of Vietnam.

**EXPLORING** Hoi An Old Quarter.



**PETE** Williams, Managing Director and CEO; Wayne Gallagher, Head of Technology; Kien, tour guide; and Darian Foot, Regional Sales Manager.



**KIRSTY** Morris, Head of Operations and Stacey Clark, Head of Partnerships.



**ANDREA** Morgan, Adventure World and Jill Robinson, Animals Asia Founder & CEO.



**STACEY** Clark, Head of Partnerships and Julie Bray, Accountant & Business Advisor.





## Network additions

**ELEGANT** Hotel Collection has welcomed Fonab Castle Hotel and Spa as its maiden property in Scotland.

Located in Pitlochry and built in 1892, the five-star Scottish Highlands castle features 42 rooms alongside a menu of spa, wellness and culinary experiences.

Joining the Elegant Hotels soft brand will see the property's sales, marketing and booking responsibility expand to markets globally.

**MEANWHILE**, Furore Grand Hotel on Italy's Amalfi Coast has become the newest Virtuoso Collection member.

Barely one year old, the property joins a preferred accommodation network key to its luxury objectives.

Furore Grand Hotel features 35 rooms and suites and is also part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World and Mr & Mrs Smith networks.

**FINALLY**, villa management brand Elite Havens has added Koh Samui's Golden Lotus Villas to its tropical network.

Located on the Bophut headland, the estate features six multi-bedroom villas overlooking the coastline.

Each villa features open-plan design, merged indoor and outdoor living spaces, and private swimming pools catering to families or friends travelling together.

## AGENTS MORE CRUCIAL THAN EVER

**DISRUPTORS** are making travel and travel advisors "all the more important in people's lives" despite the encroachment of AI, Virtuoso Chairman and CEO Matthew Upchurch believes.

"At its heart, luxury is the 'how did you make me feel business,' a highly defensible business model that's deeply personal and human-led," he said.

The comments came during the luxury advisor network's annual Symposium, which this year took place aboard a chartered Crystal Cruises ship, *Crystal Serenity*.

Running from 13-17 May, the voyage carried 375 advisors from Barcelona to Marseille, with port calls in Portofino and Monte Carlo and plenary sessions in between.

"In the midst of another tech inflection - or as some call it, a disruption - with AI, I love how



optimistic Virtuoso members are about its potential," Upchurch said during his opening remarks.

The Virtuoso chief's comments accompanied a new survey of the network's agents, who now see AI as an opportunity and not a threat to their livelihoods.

The survey also revealed the top challenges facing luxury travel this year, including political uncertainty, labour and staffing challenges, stock market volatility,

geopolitical conflicts and more.

Upchurch also noted that for the first time in history, as many as six generations - from the Silent Generation to Generation Alpha - were now travelling simultaneously thanks to rising global wealth and prioritisation of experiences over goods.

First quarter sales in 2025 have surpassed the prior year by 14%, with sales up in all categories, the Virtuoso leader added.

Hotel sales have increased nearly 30% year-on-year, followed by service, cruise and touring.

Future sales are also painting a positive picture, with forward bookings for 2026 and 2027 increasing 17% year-on-year.

Up to 55% of advisors surveyed said they expect sales to climb by as much as 50%, with most owners and managers planning to hire new full-time or independent contractors to cope with demand.

Virtuoso said Scandinavia was a top-seller as travellers looked to escape the searing European summer heat, with sales for the region up 79% for Jun to Aug.

Elsewhere, *The White Lotus* effect is sparking interest and sales to Thailand, with the first quarter of 2025 seeing sales to the Land of Smiles climb 27%.

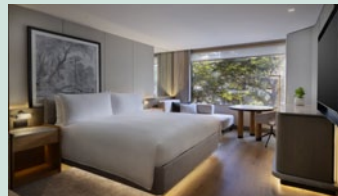
In line with previous research, Virtuoso reiterated that more than 40% of travellers are willing to spend more to support sustainable brands that are making greener choices. *ML*

## JW Marriott opens its doors in New Zealand

**MARRIOTT** International has introduced the JW Marriott brand to New Zealand for the first time, with the doors to a revitalised hotel in Auckland's CBD opening late last week.

Formerly the Stamford Plaza Auckland, the opening marks the second JW Marriott in the Pacific region, joining the Gold Coast, which opened in 2020.

JW Marriott Auckland features 271 rooms and 15 suites with shifting colour palettes inspired by New Zealand's surroundings.



The top-tier category is the 133m<sup>2</sup> Presidential Suite with city skyline views.

The hotel features several striking features, led by a hand-blown chandelier in the grand lobby which casts reflections of water on the ceiling.

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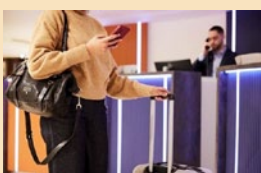
Two years after it began, **Pan Pacific Perth** has pulled the covers off a property-wide, multi-million dollar transformation which will usher in a new standard of luxury. All 488 guest rooms, suites and public spaces have been reimagined, inspired by Western Australia's natural beauty. Sustainability was front-of-mind in the new design, with decorative panels made from recycled denim and furniture produced with 100% recycled plastics recovered from the ocean.



Teardrop Hotels has opened **Kalkudah Beach House**, its newest property in Sri Lanka's remote east coast. Set within a coconut estate six hours from Colombo, the boutique property features a range of room options including the two-bedroom palm villa, which comes with a 22-metre pool. A series of smaller studio-style rooms are also available in the main house. The property is fitted with solar panels and has a water purification system.



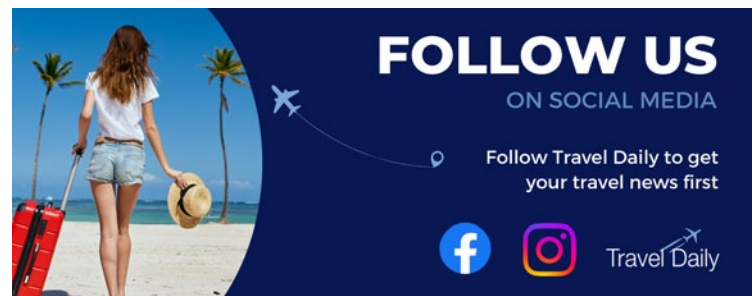
Queensland's Moreton Island has a new accommodation option in **The Dakabin Hotel**, a hospitality destination resort. Guests can select from villas, safari-style tents and camp sites, with a highly alluring resort pool and family splash zone also available. A short walk away is the resort's dining and entertainment precinct which features dual kitchens, sunken fireplace and pool tables.



London's **Clermont Hotel Group** has joined forces with Obvlo to launch an AI-powered digital concierge at its Thistle brand hotels, which will offer customers suggestions for attractions and highlights. Guests can select from a range of interests, such as cultural attractions, F&B highlights and outdoor activities to receive tailored advice including local hidden gems or major attractions.



**Voco Gosford** has unveiled what will be the Central Coast's first rooftop ballroom ahead of the hotel's grand opening later this year. Designed for product launches, meetings and major events, the space comprises six conference rooms and spaces across two levels. Capable of accommodating up to 600 people, the space also features a grand ballroom offering views of the local waterway, complete with a pre-function space overlooking the pool.



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## Agents on the go in Egypt



**ON THE Go Tours** recently hosted nine lucky agents from around NSW on a trip to Egypt, between 09-18 May.

The group was able to explore the Pyramids of Giza, check out King Tutankhamun's famous gold mask, and visit the tomb-strewn Valley of the Kings.

Another highlight of the itinerary was experiencing the Nubian culture of Aswan and enjoying downtime sailing the Nile by traditional felucca.

To learn more information about On The Go Tours' Egypt trips, **CLICK HERE**. **JM**

**Pictured:** Back - Stephanie Maber, FC Rouse Hill; Barry Spiers, FC Rockdale; Pia Folden, FC George Street; Toby Wilson, FC Revesby; Meghan Barrett, FC Southgate; Melissa Armstrong, FC Menai; Rachel Vielhauer, FC Windsor; Jonathon English, On The Go Tours; and Amelie Leach, FC Queanbeyan.

Front - Brendan Cascarino, FC Macarthur Square; and Alam, OTG guide.

## Stark to sleep out

**FOR** the third consecutive year, Flight Centre Global Managing Director Andrew Stark will take part in the Vinnies Qld CEO Sleepout, now in its 20th year.

The event will be held on 19 Jun and raise funds for homeless Aussies with proceeds going to the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Stark (**pictured**) will spend a winter's night sleeping outside in the cold at the Gabba Stadium in Brisbane, with only a cardboard box for shelter.

"Many of us who travel for work appreciate that there's truly 'no place like home'," Stark said.

Stark also appears in a short video (see it **HERE**), where this year's participants share why they are joining Vinnies CEO Sleepout.

To learn more, register or donate to the cause, **CLICK HERE**.







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