

## Today's issue of TD

**Travel Daily** today features eight pages of industry news, including a photo page from **Malaysia Airlines** and our **Luxury page**, plus a full page from **Scenic Discovery Yachts**.

## Discover an Ikon

**SCENIC** Discovery Yachts is inviting travellers to experience the new *Scenic Ikon*, which sets sail on her inaugural season in Apr 2026 - discover more details on the **back page**.

## VA priority changes

**VIRGIN** Australia will more than double its priority screening access for eligible guests across major domestic airports, a spokesperson for the carrier has confirmed to **Travel Daily**.

The carrier is also making changes to its lounge premium entry facilities at some airports to align with security requirements, including the rollout of advanced screening that will allow guests to leave belongings in their bags.

As a result, Virgin Australia's Brisbane lounge premium entry will close for upgrades from Dec 2025 to late 2026, with priority screening to be moved to all-day access at the new central security zone on the mezzanine level.

Lounge premium entry will permanently close at Sydney next month and be replaced with priority screening at the airport security screening during two time periods Mon to Fri, 5-10am and 2-7pm.

At Melbourne Airport, priority screening for VA has been extended to operate during peak hours 5-10am and 2-7pm, Mon to Fri.

## HLO makes play for WJL

**HELLOWORLD** Travel has launched a non-binding indicative proposal to acquire all of the issued shares in Webjet Group that it does not already own (**TD** breaking news).

Confirming months of industry speculation, the terms of Helloworld's play to acquire the Aussie OTA includes a cash consideration of 90c a share, which it said represented a "compelling" proposition for Webjet's shareholders.

The share price for WJL at the time of publishing is 89 cents.

"A combination of Webjet and Helloworld would create a powerful business proposition in the dynamic travel bookings industry," Helloworld CEO and MD Andrew Burnes said.

"We are committed to working collaboratively with Webjet's board and management team to progress this transaction



expeditiously and with minimum disruption to the company."

Helloworld already owns more than 17% of Webjet, with \$48.5 million of that equity purchased in the 12 months to Jun 2025.

In its response to the offer, Webjet Group said after careful consideration, it has agreed to provide Helloworld with an opportunity to conduct due diligence, but notes this does not mean there is "certainty" that a sale will go ahead.

Helloworld's proposal is subject to conditions, including terms acceptable to the prospective acquirer, no material adverse change in conditions, and a unanimous tick from the Webjet board to approve the deal.

The offer follows an unsuccessful bid by BGH Capital in May to buy Webjet (**TD** 14 May), with its investment partner Ariadne Australia seeking to have two reps elected to the Webjet board this week (**TD** 18 Nov). **AB**

## Hilton loyalty change

**HILTON** has unveiled a new premium tier called Diamond Reserve as part of an overhaul of its loyalty offering.

Elevated benefits of the new tier include a confirmable upgrade reward that can be instantly redeemed at the time of booking, guaranteed 4pm late checkout, and exclusive customer support.

The new loyalty level is on offer for premium guests who book 80 nights and US\$18,000 in annual eligible spend.

Hilton will also make it easier to earn gold status from next year, with guests needing to spend 15 fewer nights per year to qualify, at 25 nights.

## FCTG UK rumours

**FLIGHT** Centre Travel Group (FCTG) is rumoured to be in talks to acquire a stake in UK-based online travel agency Iglu.

A source told *Sky News* that the possible deal with part owner of Iglu, Lloyds Development Capital, is estimated to be worth around £100m (A\$202 million).

However, in response to the speculation, FCTG took to the ASX this morning to deny any deal had been done with Iglu.

"While the company regularly evaluates strategic M&A opportunities during the course of everyday activities, it has not reached any agreement with any party or parties in relations to acquisitions," FCTG said.

"Any discussions are ongoing, incomplete and confidential."

Iglu operates three brands - Iglu Ski, Iglu Cruise and Planet Cruise, with the cruise division reportedly performing very well.

FCTG is no stranger to UK investments, having purchased the Manchester-based Cruise Club UK to accelerate its global expansion in the cruise space in Oct last year (**TD** 30 Oct 2024), as well as luxury tour operator Scott Dunn (**TD** 31 Jan 2023). **AB**



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## Air NZ unveils Koru Black

AIR New Zealand has revealed a new loyalty tier called Koru Black that will go live in Apr 2026, with members who qualify to gain access to some of the airline's most sought after benefits.

Exclusive perks in the new tier include the Koru Circle, affording members the ability to share benefits with family and friends.

Two sharing options are available - the first is the Family Package which includes one Koru Black nominee and Koru family nominees for dependants.

The second is the Friends Package, which comes with two Koru Black nominees.

Further benefits of Koru Black include special rewards for members who reach status points milestones, access to the upcoming Koru Premier Lounge at Auckland International Airport, and additional recognition upgrades and valet parking.

To qualify, members must



earn over 3,200 status points, including 1,920 from qualifying flights in one calendar year.

"We're proud to be introducing a more rewarding experience that feels simpler, more personal, and unmistakably Kiwi," Air NZ CEO Nikhil Ravishankar said.

The new tier was revealed alongside a wider rebrand of the carrier's loyalty program, which will transition from Airpoints to Koru from Apr next year.

"Airpoints has been an important part of our story and now, that story is evolving, and Koru symbolises care, connection, and renewal," Ravishankar said.

Air NZ said there were more loyalty updates on the horizon regarding new partners, new ways to redeem points for flights, and opportunities to earn. AB

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## IATA pushes back

THE International Air Transport Association (IATA) has pushed back against the European Parliament's proposed EU261 reforms, warning the changes would raise airline costs and cares without addressing real passenger needs.

While IATA supports the idea of extending the delay thresholds for compensation, it opposes recommendations for several extra passenger entitlements.

## EK links with SAA

EMIRATES and South African Airways have expanded their existing codeshare partnership ahead of the peak travel season.

Signed at the 2025 Dubai Airshow, the deal will give EK customers seamless access from Johannesburg to three domestic points in South Africa - Cape Town, Durban and Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), and a further 13 regional points in Africa.

## EY's robust results

ETIHAD Airways has reported a profit of AED 1.7 billion (A\$712.5 million) for the first nine months of 2025, marking a 26% increase in profit after tax, while total revenue grew by 18% YoY.

EBITDA increased 27% year-on-year to AED 4.3 billion (A\$1.85 billion) as well, translating to an improved margin of 20%.

The carrier also saw a 17% rise in capacity and a higher load factor of 88%, which drove an increase in passenger numbers of 18% to 16.1 million between Jan-Sep 2025 - the highest ever in its history.

Additionally, Etihad's operating fleet reached 115 aircraft at the end of Sep - up by 19 compared to the same period last year.

"Etihad's performance this year has set a new benchmark, outpacing the market and driving nearly half of the UAE's total passenger growth," said Antonioaldo Neves, Etihad Airways CEO.

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## Hello there, Hampton



**HELLOWORLD** Travel Hampton in Victoria has opened its doors to much fanfare, featuring a launch event with key supplier partners, clients, family and friends and the head office team, including Nick Sutherland, Group General Manager, Retail Networks and his team.

The fresh store is led by Elizabeth Fernando, who is also new to the Helloworld network and brings expertise in customer service, along with a deep passion for travel.

"We want every journey that starts in our store to make a difference," explained Fernando.

"I'm passionate about helping people create unforgettable journeys, and I'm thrilled to bring that passion to life in our gorgeous new space.

I can't wait to welcome new and existing clients through our doors and start planning their next adventures," she added.

Adrian Boccia, General Manager of Network Development at Helloworld Travel, welcomed Fernando to the team.

"Her enthusiasm and commitment to delivering exceptional travel experiences is exactly what our brand stands for," Boccia said.

"It has been great working with Elizabeth on this journey, from finding the perfect location to seeing the vibrant new fit out come to life."

Boccia also noted that the Helloworld Hampton team worked very closely with the Helloworld Travel Academy and their wholesale brands in the lead-up to the store opening.

"We look forward to seeing the new Hampton store thrive and become a trusted part of the local community," he said. *JHM*

**Pictured:** Fernando and Boccia toast to the new Helloworld store in Southeast Victoria.



## LTC crosses the Tasman

**THE** Luxury Travel Collection (LTC) has appointed Kelly de Graaf (**pictured**) to the role of Head of Luxury Brands New Zealand, where she will be charged with debuting the Flight Centre Travel Group's (FCTG) luxury network across the Tasman.

De Graaf's remit will also include looking after the success of the Travel Associates businesses in New Zealand.

"She will be responsible for creating a community centred around those gorgeous businesses that are already in our purple brand and then bringing the independents together, just like we did in Australia two years ago," LTC General Manager Nikki Glading told *Travel Daily*.

De Graaf is based in Wellington, a city she has already created many strong travel agency connections in.

FCTG Global Managing Director - Luxury and Independent brands, Danielle Galloway, said



the move was in response to the "enormous opportunity" on offer in New Zealand's luxury market.

"This is a way for us to really propel it forward with the strength of what we are seeing in the Australian market with LTC," Galloway noted.

"It's a great opportunity for us to not just bring it together for FCTG but also for the industry and our partnerships...we think it's going to be powerful and it is missing in New Zealand."

De Graaf previously worked in the Travel Associates brand with Galloway prior to the pandemic.

The expansion will mean LTC will become the only luxury consortia to have a presence in NZ. *AB*



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## AI wanted for help on price

**EIGHT** in 10 travellers around the world want AI assistance during their booking journey, with price monitoring and alerts (44%) at the top of their wishlist, according to SiteMinder's new *Changing Traveller Report 2026*.

The report, which surveyed 12,000 travellers across 14 countries including Australia, found that travellers most wanted AI to monitor spending to avoid exceeding budgets (35%).

This was followed by restaurant suggestions based on their eating habits (30%) and destination recommendations aligned with health data (29%).

SiteMinder also found that 26% of travellers begin their hotel research on an OTA, up from 18% last year, while those who start with a search engine have fallen from 36% to 21%.

Aussies, however buck the trend and are significantly more likely to kick off their hotel research



with a search engine (31%), followed by OTAs (24%), friends and family recommendations (16%), and social media (6%).

When it comes to booking channels, OTAs are in the lead for Aussies at 35% (notably under the global average of 42%), followed by property websites (21%), travel agents (14%) and search engines (12%).

Australian direct bookers identified greater control (68%), better service (67%), and competitive pricing (66%) as their primary motivations.

Event-driven travel is also rising, particularly among Gen Z and Millennials, of which 81% and 74% are more likely to travel for concerts, festivals, and special events in 2026, respectively. *JM*

## Fara now Ritz' CEO

**THE** Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection's President, Ernesto Fara, has now taken on the role of Chief Executive Officer as well.

He takes over from Jim Murren, who will continue to serve as Executive Chairman.

Since joining the company in 2020 as CFO and board member, Fara has played a pivotal role in shaping strategy, financial operations and the development of *Ilma* and *Luminara*.

## Aroya changes at top

**CRUISE** Saudi has announced the departure of Jorg Rudolph, who has been the company's first President since early 2024.

Lars Clasen, CEO of Saudi Arabia's first domestic cruise line, will fill in temporarily while maintaining his current position.

Rudolph, who has three decades of experience, played a key role in launching the line and establishing its operational foundation.

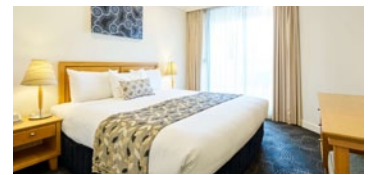
## PHG moves into Syd

**PANACHE** Hotel Group (PHG) has signed The Sebel Sydney Chatswood, marking its debut in the Harbour City.

PHG has assumed management of the apartment hotel, strengthening its partnership with Accor and adding another brand to its growing portfolio, alongside Peppers Docklands in Melbourne and Mantra on Hay in Perth.

Located 15 minutes from the CBD and offering direct access to Chatswood's business precinct, the hotel offers spacious one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, along with a swimming pool, gym and meeting spaces.

"Sydney has always been key to our growth story, and we are proud to establish our presence here," said PHG CEO, Wilson Bao.



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## NSW aims for \$91b

**THE** NSW Government released its roadmap for visitor economy growth this week at the NSW Visitor Economy Forum.

The strategy will aim to make it easier for more people to visit by growing aviation capacity by 8.5 million seats, opening up more than 40,000 new accommodation rooms, and boosting the travel and tourism workforce.

"Collaboration will play a key role in achieving the NSW Government's ambitious goal of \$91 billion in annual visitor expenditure by 2035," said the state's Minister for Jobs and Tourism Steve Kamper.

## Equity clarification

**TRAVEL Daily** would like to clarify that the \$420k worth of shares Helloworld used to buy 40% of Brighton Travelworld (**TD** 18 Nov) only represented part of the acquisition terms, with an undisclosed sum also paid.

## Travel in Google's AI plan

**TRAVELLERS** will soon be able to book hotels and flights in AI Mode on Google, the tech company has confirmed.

Julie Farago, Google's Vice President of Engineering for Travel and Local Search wrote in a blogpost that the team is currently working with a number of partners to turn it into a reality, including Booking.com, Expedia, Marriott International, IHG Hotels & Resorts, Choice Hotels International and Wyndham Hotels & Resorts.

Farago said the team is now building an experience where users can describe what they are looking for, compare different flights or hotels and browse schedules, prices, room photos, amenities and reviews.

"You'll be able to follow up and refine your options, and then once you're ready, you can quickly complete the booking with the partner of your choice,"



she wrote.

No details are currently available around booking logistics and payment or a timeline for the launch of the initiatives.

"We're not going to rush this out the door because we want to make sure that it's a seamless experience and that people have all the control that they need and expect," Farago said.

Agentic booking capabilities are now rolling out in the US for restaurant reservations with no Labs opt-in required, while agentic booking for event tickets and beauty appointments is also available to US Labs users. *JHM*



## Window Seat

**FANS** of childhood classic storybook *Goodnight Moon* will love staying at The Sheraton Boston Hotel, which has brought the tale to life.

The Great Green Room has been created with green walls, yellow rocking chair, an LED fireplace, tiger striped carpet and floating red balloon.

Meanwhile, guests will receive a plush bunny toy and a copy of the book to take home, while milk and cookies will be served in a souvenir bowl marked 'mush'.

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# MH hosts elite trade event in Sydney

**MALAYSIA** Airlines hosted a trade partner evening with 70 attendees on an exclusive charter cruise around Darling Harbour last week, sailing around the stunning Sydney Harbour, as they mingled and connected with one another.

Guests were welcomed with drinks and canapés on the upper deck, enjoyed networking, and watched the sun set over the harbour. This was followed by a formal dinner on the main deck, while Country Manager

Timothy Shepherd emceed the event and Chief Commercial Officer Dersenish Aresandiran spoke about Malaysia Airlines' products and services, and the continued expansion across the ANZ region.

Syazwan Ahmad Sabri, Head of Airlines Global Sales, also spoke about Malaysia Airlines' and Firefly's services, and the launch of routes to Krabi, Cebu, and Siem Reap, as well as the Bonus Side Trip product.

Several agents and partners won lucky draw prizes, including limited Manchester United gifts and two business class flights.

It was a great night of connection and collaboration.



**MALAYSIA** Airlines' HQ & ANZ local marketing team.



**DERSENISH** Aresandiran, Chief Commercial Officer, Airlines Business, Malaysia Aviation Group, calls out the lucky draw winner.



**DERSENISH** Aresandiran and Suriyati Nordin, Head of Airlines Revenue Management, Malaysia Aviation Group, gave away great prizes on the night.



**GUESTS** admiring the iconic views of Sydney Harbour on the upper deck.



**DERSENISH** Aresandiran discusses Malaysian Airlines' products and services.



**TRADE** agents/partners enjoying pre-drinks and networking.



**TIMOTHY** Shepherd, Country Manager, Australia, Malaysia Airlines.



**MALAYSIA** Airlines' management team had a great time connecting with key agents and partners.





## FCTG'S LUXURY ARM GROWS DESPITE GLOBAL WOES

### EXCLUSIVE

**WHILE** many areas of the luxury space have suffered a downturn due to a challenging global economy, Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) has enjoyed growth across the group, Global Managing Director - Luxury and Independent brands Danielle Galloway recently revealed.

Speaking with **Travel Daily** at Luxury Travel Collection's Business Soiree in Hong Kong, Galloway noted FCTG's luxury arm was benefiting from the trend of travellers placing a priority on experiences over goods.

"From an overall group perspective, travel in general is bucking the trend...which is exciting, but luxury travel in particular has seen some great growth for us," she explained. "Those trends are not just



within Australia, it's also the pattern of all of our global brands - in particular Scott Dunn - as we have visibility of the trends that are happening in the US market, as well as the United Kingdom, Singapore and Hong Kong."

Galloway added that FCTG's Scott Dunn private business was performing especially well, with memberships growing significantly in recent months.

While there have been well-documented travel hurdles associated with the United States,

Galloway said the key market for FCTG's luxury business continues to perform well.

"There was a period of a couple of months there where we didn't know what was going to happen with the US, but again in the luxury space, it just continues to hold and for us grows significantly," she said.

"It's definitely a targeted horizon for us as an overall group to continue to grow [in the US] and I can't see it changing anytime soon.

"We have seen the world undergo lots of different impacts from an economic perspective over the past two years, but still travel continues to outperform - which is great for us."

Luxury Travel Collection General Manager Nikki Glading added that FCTG's luxury businesses were being insulated by the macro economic factors more than most areas of the economy due to core consumer habits.

"The beauty for us is that 91% of those high-end customers want to use a travel advisor," Glading explained.

"Also, that luxury term has become quite a broad now, so travellers are paying lots of money to have experiences that some other people may not necessarily call or consider luxury," she added. **AB**

### Lana sails in style

**DORCHESTER** Collection's debut property in the Middle East, The Lana, now offers a bespoke yacht service for in-house and external guests.

Sunset cruises will be available on board the 18-metre Sunseeker Predator 57, as well as half and full day sailings and a Tea at Sea experience, inspired by the hotel's afternoon tea.

The yacht will also be able to transfer The Lana's guests to One Palm Jumeirah.

### Abercrombie & Kent launches DMC presence in South Korea

**ABERCROMBIE & Kent** has launched its South Korea Destination Management Company in Seoul, fuelled by the rising global interest in the country's vibrant music, pop culture and culinary scenes.

The new Seoul DMC will offer ground services to tour operators, cruise lines and advisors through exclusive B2B partnerships, while the travel brand's local expertise and 24 hour support will ensure a seamless journey for guests from



arrival to final departure.

"South Korea represents the convergence of ancient tradition and contemporary innovation that defines modern luxury travel," explained Rebecca

Osman, Chief Destination Officer at AKTG.

"This new DMC allows us to unlock authentic Korean experiences for our guests and trade partners, from Seoul's cutting-edge neighbourhoods to centuries-old palaces and the country's remarkable culinary heritage," she added.

AKTG's DMC launch in Seoul strengthens its presence in Northeast Asia, where it has operated for 42 years from its Hong Kong office. **JHM**

**PONANT**  
EXPLORATIONS

**THE EUROPE COLLECTION**

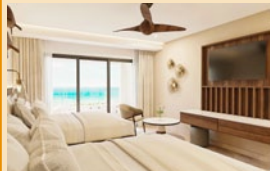
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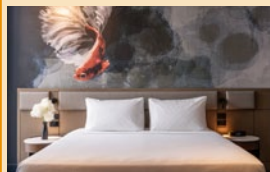
**Baines' Lodge**, an A&K Sanctuary, has opened following a complete rebuild. The design of the six-suite property in Botswana's Okavango Delta is inspired by the watercolour artworks of 19th-century artist, Thomas Baines. The property is characterised by open-plan spaces defined by columns instead of walls, featuring soft greens, muted tans, and rich timbers, with the Explorer's Lounge being a standout venue, complete with maps and a library.



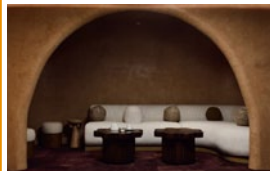
Hyatt Hotels Corporation has announced the opening of **Secrets Mirabel Cancun Resort & Spa** in the heart of Cancun's Hotel Zone. The adults-only resort features 487 rooms and suites in a modern coastal theme, with views of the ocean, lagoon or gardens. Guests can dine at eight restaurants and enjoy curated meals in the wine or agave cellars, or participate in interactive experiences such as cocktail-making lessons.



**The StandardX Melbourne** has introduced On Top, its redesigned rooftop bar and lounge. Previously exclusive to hotel guests, the venue is now open to the general public and can accommodate up to 60 guests. The space offers a mix of soft lounge seating and bistro tables, with a Corten fireplace, retractable roof and heating system, and sweeping views across the city skyline. Patrons can enjoy an all-day menu and local wine list.



Australia's first integrated club resort has officially opened in Cabramatta. **Cabravale Club Resort** brings together the Novotel Sydney Cabramatta, a range of dining venues, and an event and conference centre, as well as a variety of entertainment experiences. The hotel features 140 rooms, a resort-style pool, gym and event facilities.



**The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman** has announced the reopening of The Spa following a complete transformation of its physical space and treatment offerings. The interiors embrace an earthy palette of coral, clay, and white, complemented by marble tile flooring, ceiling motifs, and custom lighting. The facility now features 16 treatment rooms and an expanded hydrotherapy area.

## Ama expands Africa



**AMAWATERWAYS** is expanding its well-loved Africa Safaris and Wildlife Cruise program with four new itineraries beginning Aug next year.

Available for departure in 2026 and 2027, the journeys include: 'From the Cape to the Falls', 'Iconic Africa', 'Classic Kenya & Southern Africa' and 'African Wonders and the Skeleton Coast'.

Ranging from nine to 18 nights, the fresh itineraries include a luxurious three-night Chobe River cruise on board the 24-passenger *Zambezi Queen*, with land programs featuring Victoria Falls and new destinations such as Kenya, Namibia, Zanzibar and the Skeleton Coast.

On the 'African Wonders' trip, guests will have the chance to visit NamibRand Nature Reserve, Etosha National Park, and the dramatic Skeleton Coast, while on the 'Classic Kenya' adventure, they will enter Kenya's Amboseli and Maasai Mara reserves.

According to Amawaterways, the journeys were designed for travellers in search of "an authentic and enriching

African experience beyond [the continent's] iconic wildlife".

"Our Africa program is very meaningful to me, as it was one of the first cruises I experienced with AmaWaterways after becoming CEO and it truly left an unforgettable impression," revealed Catherine Powell, CEO of AmaWaterways.

"We're thrilled to offer even more opportunities for our guests to experience the trip of a lifetime - seeing wildlife right on the riverbanks, connecting with amazing people, and exploring the rich cultures and landscapes that make this region so special," she added.

"Our guests can now explore even more of Southern and Eastern Africa in comfort and style, while supporting local communities through sustainable tourism," Powell added.

The eco-friendly *Zambezi Queen* offers guests prime wildlife viewing opportunities, as well as private balcony suites with unobstructed river views, an open-air sun deck with plunge pool and an onboard spa. *JHM*



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**Scenic Eclipse II: 2026-2027**

Antarctica, South Pacific, Europe  
& the Mediterranean

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**Scenic Ikon: 2028-2029**

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The Mediterranean,  
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