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## Today's issue of TD

*Travel Daily* today features five pages of the latest industry news, including our **Luxury page** plus full pages from:

- Hong Kong Airlines
- Italian National Tourist Board

## INSPIRING VACATIONS

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## Purchase to propel Explore

### EXCLUSIVE

**THE** closure of Dertour's acquisition of Hotelplan Group this week marks an "exciting chapter" for brands like Explore Worldwide, Regional Director Australia & New Zealand Ben Ittensohn believes.

Speaking with *Travel Daily*, Explore's local chief said his brand will only benefit from Dertour, which is one of the strongest tourism networks in Europe.

"We are really excited that Dertour sees the potential in Explore and our growth in international markets like here in Australia," Ittensohn said.

"[The new parent company] is a really strong fit - we are aligned with our values around areas like



sustainability, customer focus, and innovation.

"Dertour believes in specialist travel businesses, which should bode well for us into the future because we have hit all of our KPIs this year, including a record turnover again," Ittensohn added.

That positive sales performance has seen Explore's Australian business pile on 22% growth this year when compared to the same stage last year, while forward bookings into 2026 are up 43%.

One of the key drivers of that increase has been a strong take-up of Explore's upgraded range of tours introduced around 18 months ago, featuring four- to five-star product.

Ittensohn confirmed the early success of that product line will see it expanded significantly. *AB*

## Discover more Italy

**ENROL** in the Travel to Italy Academy to learn more about the country via a range of interactive training modules - see **p7**.



Win the flavours of Paris with Qantas Agency Learning\*

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\*Competition closes 11.59pm AEST 12 September 2025. Terms & Conditions apply.



## A new way to Asia

**HONG** Kong Airlines is gearing up to launch direct services to its namesake city from 13 Dec.

The carrier is eager to get the trade excited for its debut with a full page showcasing the onboard product and its many connecting city hubs - see **page six**.



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## Koala AOC claim doubts

**THE** roller-coaster ride that is Koala Airlines has taken another swift turn, with reports suggesting the carrier does not have regulatory permission to fly its newly leased trio of Boeing 737 MAX aircraft (**TD** 22 Aug).

While founder Bill Astling recently told *Australian Aviation* he had his ducks in a row regarding a viable Air Operator's Certificate (AOC), the Civil



Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) has clarified to *The Australian* that the Desert Air AOC held by Astling remains subject to "a direction not to operate".

"This direction was issued because the previous operations conducted under the AOC were considerably different to those which Koala is now proposing - air transport operations in large jet aircraft," a spokesperson for the government body said.

The safety hurdle throws into doubt Koala's previously flagged launch date of Jul next year, with the application to operate large planes like B737s typically taking a protracted timeline to approval.

"An operator applying to conduct airline operations in Australia must meet strict safety and regulatory requirements and undergo a rigorous approval process," CASA added. **AB**

## Experience Wonder

**DISNEY** Destinations is offering ship tours of *Disney Wonder* during her upcoming farewell season in Sydney on 24 and 27 Oct, and in Melbourne on 30 Oct and 06, 13, 20 Nov.

Agents who have not previously toured or sailed on board the ship can submit an expression of interest **HERE** before 12 Sep.

## Fresh digs for NCLH



**NORWEGIAN** Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) has opened its new Sydney office in Barangaroo, also celebrating 10 years of operation in the city with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The event last night was hosted by Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises (RSSC) SVP International and Consumer Sales, Steve Odell, with Norwegian Cruise Line VP and MD APAC, Ben Angell, and RSSC Vice President Sales and GM APAC, Lisa Pile (**pictured**).

"I think the longevity of the management and the consistency of the management has been key to our success," Odell said.

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## Dream gets worse

**TRAVELLERS** left out of pocket by the collapse of Traveldream (**TD** 15 May) have been told not to expect any return of funds.

Customers are owed around \$1.3 million, with a new administrators report confirming Traveldream had paid another company to secure flights, accommodation and tours - which has also gone bust.

Melbourne-based My Travel Experience failed to pass the money from Traveldream onto suppliers, with administrator Bill Karageozis stating that "without creditor funding to progress the claims detailed in the body of this report, no dividend is expected".

## MTA rewards Perth

**MORE** than 90 home-based agents from MTA Travel have qualified for the company's 2026 Platinum Event, which will take place next year in Perth.

Hosted in partnership with Tourism Western Australia, the event will see the highest number of MTA agents to ever qualify for the annual bonus trip.

Agents will enjoy a 'choose your own adventure' style experience in WA, selecting from itineraries that incorporate Rottnest Island, Fremantle and the Swan Valley, with all agents hosted at the lavish Ritz-Carlton Perth.

Six top-sellers will also enjoy a visit to Margaret River, packed with experiences showcasing the region's wine and fresh produce.

## The Legend is out

**ROYAL** Caribbean has floated out its third Icon-class ship - *Legend of the Seas* - at its shipyard in Meyer Turku, Finland.

The ship has now moved to the outfitting dock ahead of its debut in Europe next year.

EST. 1994

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## FREMANTLE

Today's issue of TD is coming to you from the Australian Cruise Association, which is hosting its annual conference.

**THE** Australian Cruise Association is hosting its annual conference in Fremantle this week, which soft launches tonight with a welcome event at the Gage Roads brewery.

Over the next two days, delegates will hear from a number of prominent local and international speakers, as well as Western Australia's Minister for Tourism Reece Whitby, who will be in attendance tonight.

Adding spice to this evening's event will be the sail past of Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours' *Scenic Eclipse II*, which like us, is paying visit to Freo this week.

## N America ditched for EU

**TWO** in five Aussies have changed, or are considering changing, their travel plans because of geopolitical tensions, with almost a third (31%) shifting their travel plans from North America to Europe, a survey from SimCorner has revealed.

While 25% of respondents said they have no problems travelling to North America in 2024, that number has fallen away to just 17% in 2025.

Europe, on the other hand, showed the greatest increase among Aussies, with more than half travelling or intending to travel to the continent this year - up from 46% last year.

Older generations are the most cautious, the study found, with 23% of respondents aged 65 and over stating they are actively avoiding specific regions right now, versus only 9% of those aged between 18-26.

However, both age groups are in



agreement that Europe is the best place to visit this year.

The SimCorner survey also found that 20% of travellers switched their North America travel plans to 'other regions', and 9% swapped a US holiday to a getaway in Asia.

"We know our customers are carefully planning their trips right now, and in some cases they're reconsidering their trips entirely, especially to regions like North America and the Middle East," said Shehbaz Shaikh, CEO and co-founder of SimCorner.

"Ultimately, it affirms what we already know about travellers; they simply want reliability and a sense of security when they go on holiday," he added. *JM*



## Window Seat

**QANTAS** has found itself in a hairy predicament as it seeks to enforce a beard ban for pilots across its QantasLink regional operations.

It may come as a surprise to learn that the Flying Kangaroo has, in fact, already enforced the ban across its mainline QF and JQ services, and is now hoping to standardise the rule - which has since gained international backlash.

Qantas said the beard veto is a matter of "safety, not grooming", and claims that facial hair could interfere with the seal of oxygen masks, resulting in reduced effectiveness in emergencies.

There are studies that contradict this claim, however, prompting the carrier to launch a review of the policy.

# FULL CIRCLE ICELAND ARCTIC 2026



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### See Italy with Aman

**AMAN** has introduced 'Journey across Italy', a new five-night escape combining the upscale hospitality brand's newest property, Aman Rosa Alphina, and one of its most luxurious retreats, Aman Venice.

The journey can begin at either Italian property, and is inclusive of water taxi transfers from Aman Venice to Piazzale Roma and a private car journey to the Dolomites, or vice versa.

Guests will enjoy a complimentary room upgrade upon arrival at both properties, along with curated experiences designed to immerse them in each destination.

The new package is available seasonally until 12 Oct 2025, and from 04 Dec 2025 to 05 Apr 2026 - find out more [HERE](#).

## EXPLORA JOURNEYS SAILS SKY & SEA

**AIRFARES** can now be bundled into the overall cruise product available from Explora Journeys, the luxury line has announced.

The new 'Sky and Sea' fare allows travellers from a variety of airports around the world, including Sydney and Melbourne, to integrate flight arrangements into a cruise booking to ensure a seamless travel experience.

Currently, airfares from Australia can only be booked to the embarkation ports of Athens and Barcelona, however more cities are expected to come online.

Packages can also be curated to include return airport transfers, hotel stays pre- and post-cruise, and 24/7 guest support.

Explora Journeys said upon arrival at the ship, guests will immediately be able to enjoy the signature Explora Journeys



experience that it said has redefined luxury ocean travel.

"From world-class dining across nine culinary venues to unlimited beverages including fine wines and premium spirits, every detail reflects uncompromising standards of excellence," it said.

"Guests will also benefit from complimentary high-speed wi-fi, access to its Ocean Wellness spa and thermal areas, and all

onboard gratuities included, along with exceptional service provided by a dedicated team maintaining an industry-leading host-to-guest ratio."

'Sky and Sea' fares are now available for selected itineraries, and can be combined with market offers including the Explora Early Booking Benefit, Extended Journeys Benefit, and exclusive Explora Club privileges. *ML*

### W Hotels unveils first all-inclusive resort

**MARRIOTT** International has broadened the operational scope of its upscale lifestyle W Hotels brand to all-inclusive, opening its first property to adopt the new approach.

The new W Punta Cana, Adult All-Inclusive resort in the Dominican Republic is the first all-inclusive property for the brand, with all meals and on-site experiences included.

W Punta Cana sits on 400 metres of beachfront and features 340 rooms and suites,



each starting at a generous 65 square metres and including a standalone bath tub.

W Hotels Senior Vice President and Brand Leader, George Fleck, said W Punta Cana marks an evolution of the brand as it enters the all-inclusive space.

### A Resplendent offer

**RESPLENDENT** Ceylon has launched a limited-edition Journey Offer for travellers who want to experience the diversity of Sri Lanka in a single itinerary.

Running from 02 Sep-19 Dec 2025, guests can combine stays across the brand's three Relais & Chateaux resorts - Ceylon Tea Trails, Wild Coast Tented Lodge and Cape Weligama - to enjoy a 30% discount and US\$150 spa credit (see [HERE](#)).

### Get a taste of Cognac

**GUESTS** staying at Hotel Chais Monnet & Spa in Cognac can now enjoy a trio of exclusive packages designed to showcase the region's namesake spirit, gourmet cuisine, and history.

The options include 'The Maison Hennessy Experience', featuring overnight accommodation and breakfast, a two-hour guided tour and tasting at the cognac house, a limited-edition bottle of Hennessy V.S.O.P Deluxe, and more.

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## ACCOMMODATION

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**Novotel Geelong** is getting behind its local brewing industry, partnering with Bells Beach Brewing to launch its own custom line of beverages available in-house. The tie-up has seen the creation of the new Novotel Super Crisp and Novotel Apple Cider, both of which are now served across the hotel's restaurant, bar, mini-bars and events. Both beverages are served in custom cans featuring a rendering of the views from the hotel's seventh floor rooms.



Three properties in the **Amara Hotels and Resorts** collection have launched a new suite of local experiences designed to offer guests a taste of life in the community. Available at Amara Singapore, Amara Sentosa and Amara Bangkok, activities include local heritage walks, guided market tours, cooking classes, as well as experiences that aim to showcase local traditions, food culture and everyday rituals as an authentic look at the destination.



Birdwatchers can indulge their passion at **Elements of Byron** via a new resort bird trail that takes guests through four unique habitats on-site. Designed by property naturalist Alastair Oakman, the self-guided trail brings guests up close with up to 250 bird species, including rare and threatened varieties. The bird trail builds on the resort's existing nature program, which includes a guided rainforest walk - often cited by guests as a highlight of their stay.



Sixty newly refurbished one-bedroom and family villas will be available for booking at Vietnam's **Four Seasons Resort The Nam Hai** following the final phase of renovation, soon to be completed. While architectural structures have been retained, villas have increased in size, with a range of modern refinements added. Guests will also now enjoy more direct lines of sight to the gardens and ocean.



Travellers with children will love a new indoor-outdoor playground now available at **Ayana Bali**. Inspired by the wonders of the sea, the new Ayana Ocean Adventure invites travellers to climb, connect and learn about the undersea world through hands-on play experiences. The new playground is located next to the Ayana kids swimming pool, directly connected via some fun waterslides.

## Big spend on small stays



**REFLECTIONS** Holidays is doubling down on its tiny home portfolio, with a \$5.3 million investment in the unique stays.

The holiday park operator will install 18 new tiny homes in five of its most popular coastal parks - Byron Bay, Lennox Head, Scotts Head, Evans Head and Seal Rocks.

For the first time, family-size tiny homes that can sleep four will be included, in addition to the traditional two-person stays.

"Reflections currently has 53 tiny homes across its portfolio, with 21 of these being added in the past two years, and this new batch of 'tinies', as we call them, will take the total to 71, which is great news for our guests," Reflections CEO Nick Baker said.

"The popularity of our tiny

homes is consistently strong... they are a cosy space to enjoy with all the conveniences...and, importantly, they're small enough to encourage guests to leave their tiny home and explore all the nature around them."

The compact stays will be added over the next six to 12 months, funded with assistance from a NSW Government loans facility.

"These tiny homes offer a low-impact, sustainable way to enjoy nature, and they're helping to future-proof tourism in some of our most iconic coastal destinations," said the state's Minister for Jobs and Tourism, Steve Kamper. *JM*

## SAA flies Botswana

**SOUTH** African Airways is preparing to launch a twice-daily service between Johannesburg and Gaborone, Botswana, commencing 04 Nov.

Bookings are now open for the route, which Group CEO Professor John Lamola said "not only strengthens the cultural and economic ties between Botswana and South Africa, but also reinforces SAA's position as a premium network carrier".

## Alma Resort training

**AGENTS** are invited to register for a one-hour training webinar on Vietnam's Alma Resort, hosted by The Unique Tourism Collection Account Director, Louise Hill.

The session will take place at 11am AEST on Fri 12 Sep and will showcase highlights of the resort and its new Sun & Sea incentive.

To register, **CLICK HERE**.



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