

Return to Brunei

GILES Gilbert has returned to Royal Brunei Airlines as its Country Manager for Australia.

The senior airline executive previously led local operations for the carrier from 2016 to 2018, and was most recently Regional Manager ANZ at Malaysian Airlines.

Agents have a "loud voice"

EXCLUSIVE

AUSTRALIAN Travel Industry Association (ATIA) Chair Christian Hunter has hit back at claims that travel agents are not being adequately represented.

The response arrives after a post on LinkedIn yesterday by The Cruise & Travel Store founder Belle Goldie, which suggested travel advisors "are often left behind" by industry associations.

Goldie has also called for a new industry association "for advisors, and only advisors".

However, Hunter told **Travel Daily** that all members - including its travel agents - have a "very loud voice" at ATIA, and that input directly drives the decisions



the body makes, and the wins it delivers "every single day".

"At ATIA, members don't just have a seat at the table, they set the table," Hunter said.

"The outcomes prove the point, the voices of our members...have led to real results, from keeping them out of the Aviation Industry Ombudsman Scheme to securing stronger consumer protections through the Aviation Customer Rights Charter, and driving our push for greater airline competition," he added.

The commentary from Hunter follows an update released by ATIA yesterday, reaffirming its full value to travel advisors.

More on the story on **page two**.

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Lisbon rail tragedy

AT LEAST one Australian has been injured in Lisbon after a popular funicular railway car derailed and crashed overnight.

The tragedy has claimed the lives of 15 people and injured a total of 18 others - including many foreign nationals.

A spokesperson for DFAT said it was not aware of any Australians killed in the incident, but was providing consular assistance to one person and is making urgent enquiries on the ground.



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Early support for council

EXCLUSIVE

SUPPORT for a new travel agent council has already received 50 submissions from interested parties who want to participate, The Cruise & Travel Store founder Belle Goldie has confirmed to **Travel Daily**.

"We will start with a founding panel and then have people come and go, because it is really important that we get a range of voices," Goldie said.

However, the agency owner insisted that any new advisor forum created would "not look to take anything away from ATIA or CLIA", but instead create a forum to narrow the focus specifically on the interests of advisors.

"[The associations] do things so well in their space, but they are advocates for so many different things, for advisors, for cruise lines, for training, for tourism boards - they really have got their hands full already."

Goldie added that there is a misconception that unless agents have been around for a long time, they should sit down and take their place.

"That is not working because

the death of the travel agent in Australia is coming, and unless us mid-level agents start looking at the future, we're going to be left behind," Goldie warned.

When asked about the viability of a specialist agent council, Complex Travel Group Director Mark Trim told **TD** that while he can understand the reasoning behind the idea, the sector needs to be very careful not to dilute the official channel of ATIA.

"Especially with government discussions, there must be one voice in that respect," he said.

"I would rather work with ATIA to better represent agents commercially and not just with the government agenda.

"I do believe there is nuance in advocacy and clearly there is a game to be played there, so it is best left to the professionals, and as agents we should continue to do what we do best," Trim added.

Meanwhile, Connected Travel founder Marissa Papas said she was in favour of the idea, so long as it has a clear purpose, genuine representation across all business models, and the ability to influence real change. **AB**

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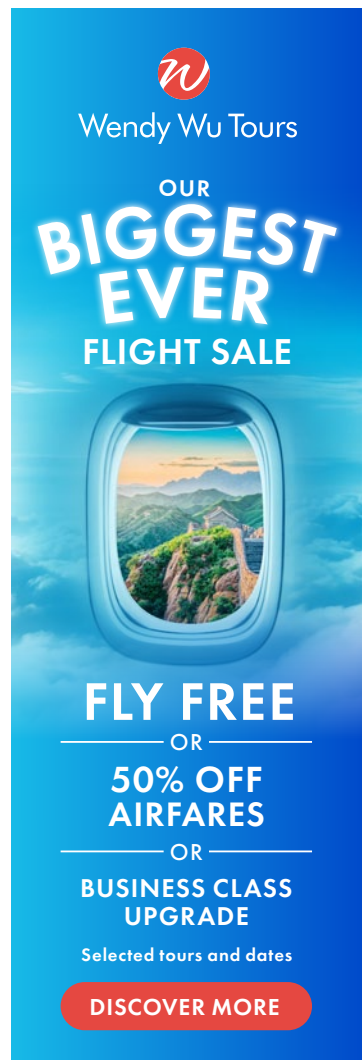



**HONG KONG
TOURISM BOARD**

Dengue claims surge

THERE has been a marked increase in insurance claims made by Aussies relating to dengue fever, following recent outbreaks.

According to Southern Cross Travel Insurance (SCTI), from 01 May to 31 Jul this year, the company has paid out 15 claims totalling \$7,000 to Australian travellers who have contracted the virus while travelling in popular hotspots like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam.




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A cool new recruit

MINOR Hotels Australasia has expanded the position of Russell Cool, who has this week been promoted to Director of Operations & Franchising.

Previously Cool had managed franchising only, but new operations duties will include strategic implementations.

The winner is Sydney

GLOBAL travel operator Destination Sport Group has chosen Sydney to be its new Oceania headquarters.

The decision is designed to complement the company's existing offices in Adelaide and Auckland, and follows greater demand locally for its services, such as travel management for elite sports organisations, fan travel experiences, youth sports tours, VIP travel and hospitality experiences, and mass participation event travel.

Local growth for Destination Sport Group was also spurred on by its involvement in the recent British & Irish Lions Tour, the Sydney Marathon, and the upcoming Ashes cricket series.

"The continued investment in Oceania is testament to that and will serve as a key asset as we continue to expand our in-market presence," Group Chief Executive Officer Paul Hemingway said.

"Our new Sydney HQ is an



exciting addition to reinforcing our ambition to set the standard in sports travel [globally]." AB

NCL picks winners

AMY Mortimer from Clean Cruising and Thomas Liardo from Cruiseabout Narellan have been selected by Norwegian Cruise Line as the lucky winners in the brand's recent incentive.

Mortimer and Liardo have both won a cabin on a selected NCL sailing to enjoy next year.

The six-week 'Experience more of the world with NCL' promotion saw 1,300 agents take part, with nearly 700 advisors also completing weekly quizzes, and more than 500 collecting virtual passport stamps to enter.

Drukair local GSA

BHUTANESE carrier Drukair has appointed Aviation Online to be its general sales agent in Australia and New Zealand.

The agency move was labelled an "important step" in local representation, with the carrier confident of attracting Aussies wanting a sustainable holiday.

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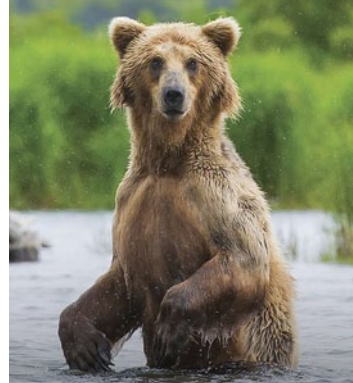
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Explore to double team in two years

EXCLUSIVE

A SURGE in booking interest from the Australian market will see Explore Worldwide look to double the size of its local team within the next two years.

Speaking with *Travel Daily*, Regional Director Australia & New Zealand Ben Ittensohn (pictured) said the roles will be added over time to help bolster the brand's marketing, customer service and reservation teams.

The recruitment will also seek to support existing partnerships with agency networks and appointed marketing representatives.

"Evolution Travel Collective represents us here in Australia and we have recently extended that to New Zealand.

"We are very happy with that partnership...and in New Zealand we also have a great partnership with House of Travel and Helloworld as well."

While Explore continues to mark



new sales records year-on-year, Ittensohn hailed the introduction of its upgraded tours as a key driver of recent growth.

"It's quite interesting actually, we are selling more of the upgraded range as a percentage than any other market globally.

"That's more than North America and more than the UK - which is obviously a very mature market for us," he added.

Meanwhile, a planned travel advisor portal flagged exclusively by *Travel Daily* earlier this year (TD 12 Mar) is nearing

completion, and has recently entered the beta testing phase, Ittensohn confirmed.

Originally slated for the middle of this year, the portal will likely go live in the last quarter of 2025.

"The date was delayed because we wanted to get a thorough testing through agents first and get them having a really good look through it.

"Feedback has been really positive - agents are loving the functionality and while there are some improvements we need to make, not a huge amount needs to change [before launching]."

Explore is confident the agent platform will be market-leading, allowing advisors to access more selling tools, marketing and social media assets, as well as a range of training webinars.

A new bookable API is also being developed alongside the portal, so the brand can also cater to its OTA partners. AB

Tourism training hub

THE Federal Government has partnered with the Australian Tourism Industry Council (ATIC) to launch the Quality Tourism eLearning Hub, a new training platform designed to improve industry skills and develop stronger business capability.

Referred to as etrainu, users of the hub can access a range of practical courses that have been created with input from tourism industry experts, covering topics such as sustainability, accessibility, customer service readiness, and other key areas.

Tourism workers and businesses can also use the website on the go, with videos and modules accessible on any mobile device.

The creation of etrainu was made possible through \$8m of govt funding to improve the Quality Tourism Framework, which offers operators a suite of online training and accreditation programs designed to build capability across the sector.



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Check the policy fine print

TRAVELLERS are being urged to check the fine print on their travel insurance policies and have a plan B in the wake of growing numbers of Aussies getting injured overseas.

Carter Capner Law Director Peter Carter's warning follows a series of incidents where Aussies had travel insurance claims denied due to policy wording.

Recent claim rejections include a Perth man who crashed on a motorbike in Romania, a NSW woman who sustained serious injuries while holidaying in Greece, and a Sydney teenager injured while snorkelling around coral reefs in Thailand.

Carter said there are inaccurate presumptions that travellers are guaranteed protection, and it is actually common for insurers to deny claims for various reasons.

"Keep in mind that insurers are in the business of claim denial, it's part of their business model," Carter explained.

"Insurers often conceal ambiguous policy exclusions in the fine print and in many cases the fine print is not made obvious to customers."

Activities such as motorcycle riding and jet skiing are ways insurers can deny claims, Carter added, along with any alcohol consumption near the incident.

Travellers are also being warned insurance may not be enough to cover a claim in the event of their way of life being disrupted, or if their employment and lifestyle



are affected as a result.

"To receive the compensation needed to cover serious injury and the ongoing expenses, you may have to seek legal compensation upon your return, and you will have better prospects if this involves an Australian company," Carter said.

"It is more difficult if you booked through a small, local outlet in a far-away country," he added. *ML*

Collette goes small

TOUR operator Collette has added 10 new tours to its 2026 offerings, centred around small groups explorations.

Key to the new collection is Cape Town to Cairo over 24 days, a journey through northern Vietnam across 11 days, and an 'Aurora Adventure' set across 10 days from Calgary to Vancouver.

Explorations have an average of 19 travellers and a maximum of 24, and focus mainly on off-the-beaten-path locations, authentic culinary experiences, specialty tastings, chef-led dining, as well as local interactions.

New celebrities hit the river



CELEBRITY Cruises is looking to shake up the river cruise scene with the introduction of "transformative ships with open decks, spacious staterooms, unmatched dining and its signature elevated hospitality" to the Rhine and Danube rivers.

The cruise line has opened bookings for the newly unveiled *Celebrity Compass* and *Celebrity Seeker*, with guests able to put down a fully refundable \$500 deposit to claim a stateroom on one of the two new ships.

Unique to the vessels are Magic Carpet cantilevered dining pods, allowing passengers to literally dine on the edge of the ship with unobstructed views of the scenery while being served regional, destination-driven culinary offerings.

Laura Hodges Bethge, President of Celebrity Cruises, said: "With about half of our guests having experienced or intending to take a river cruise, we know our customers are going to love sailing Europe's Rhine and Danube rivers." *DF*

Tassy road trip boost

EAST Coast Car Rentals has opened a new branch at Hobart Airport, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony taking place last night.

The new facility is now fully operational and houses a fleet of 500 vehicles across a range of categories, catering to all types of travellers setting off on Tasmanian road trips.

Customers can benefit from free shuttle services to and from the airport terminal as well.

"The opening of our new Hobart branch is another strategic step in our national expansion," said Managing Director Rohan Marx.

"Tasmania is made for road trips, and this facility allows us to better support travellers looking for affordable, flexible ways to explore the state, from Bruny Island to Cradle Mountain."



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FREMANTLE

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

THE Australian Cruise Association's annual conference kicks off in earnest today, hosted at Esplanade Hotel Fremantle by Rydges.

Today, attendees will hear from Cruise Lines International Association, Tourism Australia, and key port destinations on the state of the cruise industry in the country.

The conference will also be addressed by a cavalcade of international talent, including Robert de Bruin, Holland America Line; Debbie Holbrook, Princess Cruises; and Christine Manjencic, NCLH.

Huge Boeing sale

AIRCRAFT manufacturer Boeing has landed two major orders this week, with Macquarie Bank's global aircraft leasing arm AirFinance purchasing 30 Boeing 737-8 aircraft, as it transitions to more fuel-efficient, new generation models.

Meanwhile, Canadian airline WestJet has bought 67 more Boeing jets, bringing its order to 123 aircraft and making it the carrier's largest-ever order.

FCTG axes 100 IT jobs

AS PART of a previously flagged transformation of its enterprise technology services, Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) has confirmed it will reduce the IT workforce by around 100 people - shifting the majority of roles offshore (*TD* breaking news).

A spokesperson for the company told *Travel Daily* the shift was needed so the business can make further strides to enhance its service delivery and customer experience through a better service integration and management model.

Forming part of that transition, FCTG has chosen to partner with specialised service providers - typically located overseas - for day-to-day operations, which will impact some internal IT roles.

FCTG noted that some of the affected positions are already



located outside of Australia.

The company said it will continue to communicate with those people affected as the project gains momentum, indicating some will have the opportunity to work with the specialist services providers.

"Farewelling people is never easy, but this change will better position the company for the future," FCTG said.

"The new operating model will free up our retained teams and people in enterprise technology services to focus on strategic innovation and core business value delivery," they added.

The transformation will be implemented gradually through to Jan next year. *AB*

Best of both worlds

SMALL group touring businesses Autopia Tours and Via Travel have merged making it "a one-stop shop", offering a wide range of experiences in Australia.

"We both care deeply about giving travellers unforgettable experiences, looking after our mob, and doing right by the communities and landscapes we explore," said Paul Beames, Autopia's CEO.

Via Travel's Stuart Wesierski added: "Autopia brings the scale, we bring the boutique - together, we've got the both worlds."



Window Seat

AUSTRALIA'S youngest female pilot ever may not be able to drive a car yet, but 15-year-old Jennifer Hunt will take off this week on a month-long lap around the country, with her puppy by her side.

"[I'd] never flown solo before until Feb this year, but I've been around aviation my whole life so I know about planes a little bit," said Hunt, whose family have been in aviation for decades.

The teenager was mentored by pilot Bob Bramley, who previously broke the record for the youngest pilot to travel around Australia solo at 16.

In 2026, Hunt will hit the road - but dad is not happy.

"We'd much rather she flies than drives," said her dad.

"Next year she wants to drive around Australia, now that's a worry."

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Big month for Mel

MELBOURNE is preparing to welcome more than 6,000 visitors for business events this month, which are set to inject more than \$23 million into Victoria's economy and deliver more than 15,000 room nights.

The bumper month has already kicked off, with 400 delegates gathering for the Progress 2030 Summit, and hundreds of business leaders convening for the World Chambers Congress - both of which took place this week.

Next on the calendar is the APAC Wind Energy Summit from 16-18 Sep, followed by the World Congress of Gastroenterology on 19-22 Sep, with the latter alone expected to bring in almost \$18 million.

Retreat to Sundays

HAMILTON Island's newest boutique hotel, The Sundays, is now welcoming bookings for corporate retreats, leadership offsites, and incentive escapes.

Teams can enjoy relaxed, island-style dining at Catseye Pool Club, as well as more flexible accommodation and tailored experiences, such as eco-certified ocean rafting.

For a limited time, The Sundays is offering special value-adds for events taking place in early 2026, including complimentary room upgrades and discounted breakfast packages - see [HERE](#).

BRISBANE POP-UP '25 POPS OFF

BRISBANE Economic Development Agency's (BEDA) flagship showcase, Brisbane Pop-Up, wrapped its 18th iteration last week, after bringing together 300 business event organisers with more than 70 suppliers, venues and hotels.

The event took place at Sofitel Brisbane Central, giving guests a sneak peek at new additions to the city's business events scene, including The Summit Restaurant and Bar, while being entertained by a DJ performance and immersive activations.

"It's an occasion where Brisbane's venues, hotels, and event suppliers come together under one roof, demonstrating the creativity, professionalism, and hospitality for which our city is known," said BEDA Chief Executive Officer Anthony Ryan.

"BEDA understands the



importance of collaboration, this year partnering with the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre and other city partners, to confirm 95 new business events and incentives for the years ahead, representing more than \$125 million in economic impact.

"With momentum building,

Brisbane is primed to deliver more memorable experiences for delegates, from cutting-edge venues to uniquely local experiences and outstanding places to stay."

For more information on Brisbane Pop-Up 2025 and a full list of exhibitors, [CLICK HERE](#). JM

Crowne Plaza Hobart unveils Centurion

CROWNE Plaza Hobart has unveiled its newest event space, Centurion Sky, expanding the hotel's collection of venues to eight.

The new space features a glass ceiling, panoramic views of Mount Wellington, and retractable bi-fold doors.

A launch party was hosted on 28 Aug, attracting more than 100 VIP guests and featuring activations such as a Champagne wall, a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and live



harpist and DJ performances.

"Centurion Sky, with its unrivalled views of Mount Wellington/Kunanyi is the all-weather space that Hobart has been craving," said Crowne Plaza Hobart GM Scott Schaefer.

AIME spots open

AIME 2026 is shaping up to be a bumper event, with more than 80% of exhibition space sold or reserved.

Domestic and international hosted buyer applications are now officially open too, with 700 spots available.

Hosted buyers will also participate in the Uncover Melbourne Experience the day before AIME on 08 Feb, designed to showcase the city's business events potential - details [HERE](#).

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APPOINTMENTS

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appointments@traveldaily.com.au

Paul O'Sullivan has been reappointed for another two-year term as Chairman of the **Western Sydney Airport Co-Limited Board**. The stability in the role will help the airport move from construction to operational, with testing of the airport now underway. O'Sullivan also currently serves as Chairman of ANZ Bank and St Vincent's Health Australia.

A management shake-up has taken place at **Anywhere Travel Group** to drive the group's next phase of growth, led by 15-year company veteran **Nik Young** as its new Chief Executive Officer. Also promoted is **Vanessa Dunham**, who now holds the title of General Manager, Corporate. Additionally, changes see company founder **Barbara Whitten** move to a non-operational capacity after 43 years running the business.

Luxury Escapes has elevated **Chris Malina** to the position of General Manager - Flights and Cruise. Malina has been with the company for a little over two years, where he has held a succession of air-related roles.

Public relations, marketing and comms firm **Linkd Tourism** has recruited **Emma Prineas** as its new PR and Marketing Director to support the agency's growing client portfolio, which has included account wins such as Okinawa and The Great American West.

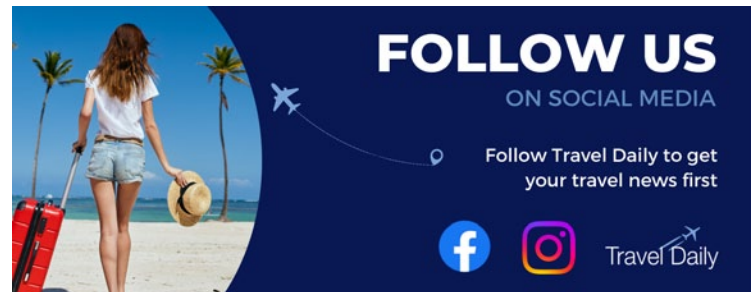
A host of new faces have popped up at Flight Centre Travel Group across its varied brands and departments. **Corporate Traveller** and **FCM Travel** in New Zealand have welcomed **Sarah-Jane Shaw**, **Jo Davies**, **Vanessa Williams** and **Tracey Howarth**, while **Travel Associates** has expanded with the arrival of **Chanika Prosser**, based in Mt Eden. At head office, **Prachi Makwana** is now in the PR & communications team, while **Max Vorpahl** is a new Digital Marketing Executive in the marketing team.

Joanna Chudy has been promoted within **G'Day Group** to the role of Trade Initiatives Manager. Chudy has been with the organisation for nearly four years in a variety of sales roles, with her history also including roles with Kingsford The Barossa and APT Travel Group.

Australians will see a greater representation for the Californian region of Ukiah, with **Gate 7** granted a year-long PR retainer for **Visit Ukiah**. The region is located two hours north of San Francisco along Highway 101.

Pullman Brisbane King George Square has welcomed **Lynsey Burke** as its new Associate Director of Sales. Burke has been primarily tasked with driving the ongoing success of the hotel's conferences and events division, and will also aim to grow the hotel's profile among key accounts as the city ramps up to the 2032 Olympic Games.

Pay-as-you-go airport lounge operator **Plaza Premium Group** has hired **David Thompson** as its new Regional Director for Latin America. Thompson has been tasked with expanding the group's footprint, bringing over 30 years of commercial leadership experience to his role.



Quark hits new latitudes



QUARK Expeditions recently hosted a fam for the winners of the 2024 Arctic Sweepstakes, with 10 lucky agents and their guests from around the world sailing the 'Ultimate Arctic Voyage'.

Hosted by Chris Catanzariti, BDM (NSW/SA/ACT), the journey saw the group travel as far north as 82° latitude - the farthest north that expedition ship *Ultramarine* has ever ventured.

Selected travel advisors enjoyed a pre-voyage inspection of the Quark ship, participated in a seminar at sea focused on Antarctica, and were given onboard credit to spend at the Tundra Spa.

Highlights of the voyage included a visit to two world-class birdwatching havens, Alkefjellet and the remote, enigmatic island of Jan Mayen, as well as the chance to witness a polar bear feeding on a whale carcass.

The group also shared in the polar rite of passage by plunging into Arctic waters together.

Reflecting on the fam, Catanzariti said: "Our fam voyages are designed to expand horizons,

both literally and professionally." "Standing on the deck at 82° North or witnessing wildlife few ever encounter gives advisors a perspective no brochure can capture," he added.

"They return with a depth of understanding that allows them to guide clients with authenticity and passion, shaped by their own first-hand polar experiences." *JM*

Save with Celestial

CELESTIAL has launched a new 'Sail & Save' campaign, which slashes the price of 45 itineraries by more than 50%.

The savings apply to Greek, Mediterranean and Arabian Gulf cruises between Sep 2025 and Mar 2027, with prices starting from \$1,069 per person twin share for Celestial's seven-night 'Idyllic Greece' cruise.

All sailings in the Arabian Gulf also feature a combinable 'kids go free' offer, where children under 12 years of age will qualify for a free-of-charge cruise fare.

The offers are available to book until 30 Nov - call 1800 648 737.

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