

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features eight pages of the latest travel industry news, including a photo page from **Viking** and our **Corporate Update**.

Leaving in Styles

VISIT Qatar Regional Director for Australia and New Zealand, Richard Styles, has wrapped up his role with the Middle Eastern tourism body after five years.

Styles was charged with increasing the tourism appeal of Qatar in the lead-up to the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup, which involved setting up a tourism board from Melbourne in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The brief was ambitious, to follow the 'State of Qatar's 2030 Vision' for tourism and put Qatar on the map in ANZ," Styles said.

"We were able to motivate the travel trade...to buy into the vision of a stopover in Qatar, making the ANZ source market number one for the program."

Rex buy awaiting PM tick

PRIME Minister Anthony Albanese is reportedly looking over the details of a new acquisition offer lodged by an American aircraft operator for the beleaguered Rex brand, sources have informed the *AFR*.

If true, the long road to exiting administration for the Aussie airline may finally be at its end, with sources close to the matter suggesting the Nasdaq-listed Air T is now in the box seat to acquire the business, which struck financial trouble in Jul last year.

Consulting firm Alvarez & Marsal is understood to be advising Air T on the proposal, with a signed deal expected to be announced as early as Mon, according to the report.

The Arizona-based Air T is an air operator that runs cargo flights, including for FedEx in the United States, as well as services in the aircraft trading, leasing, and engine parts spaces.

Interestingly, Air T became



aware of Rex as an acquisition target when the Aussie business was accused of taking four Saab twin-engine turboprops belonging to Jet Midwest without paying for them (*TD* 13 Sep 2024).

The latest development follows Renaissance Partners stepping up efforts to acquire Rex last month, despite being rebuffed by the carrier's administrators EY.

The group - which wants to base Rex out of Canberra and Darwin - made the bold move to approach the Federal Government directly to bypass EY (*TD* 28 Aug). *AB*

Expedia boosts Stayz

EXPEDIA Group is now distributing Aussie listings on its Stayz platform across its global brand ecosystem and B2B network, which consists of more than 160,000 travel agents.

The platform has also been upgraded with the latest tech solutions to streamline operations and unlock new revenue opportunities for partners, including a new optional payment solution.

Stayz is also testing new AI features to simplify trip planning for travellers, including a feature that uses AI to provide instant answers using property details and guest reviews.

Paying for AI help

TWO-THIRDS of travellers are willing to pay for an AI travel assistant that could help with in-trip information, according to a new study by Amadeus.

Close to one in five also said they would pay 5% of the total trip to benefit from such services.

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ATAC develops key tools

EXCLUSIVE

THE Australian Travel Agents Cooperative (ATAC) has pioneered a new app that its members can use to maximise their earnings.

Revealed during its recent annual conference in Adelaide, ATAC General Manager Michelle Emerton told **Travel Daily** the app allows members to filter sales through various brands to instantly compare returns.

"Our members can put all their sales in [through various brands] and see how shifting that small amount of business is going to make a difference to their bottom line," Emerton said.

ATAC is also developing an app that will help with the acquisition of new members, with the tech set to relay what prospective joiners will be able to earn in overrides if they were to join the independent buying group.

The cooperative has been out and proud about its goal being more than just growing its membership ranks, with the need to maintain transparency and the entrepreneurial fabric of the group always paramount.

However, ATAC is also laser focused on boosting its network by finding the right kind of agencies, which is why it has recently introduced a new information pack to make the transition from being a remote-based agency to an ATAC member even easier.

"We help [prospective members] learn more about how they should go about setting up



their business, and this includes a checklist on ATAC membership, ATIA membership, accounting, mid office, etc," Emerton said.

ATAC Chair Jack Taylor added that the new information packs were created as a key learning from challenges experienced in previous years.

"What we have learned through the process is that people maybe have not joined us in the past because the perception is it is too hard to start your own business in this segment in particular.

"So we were trying to find a way to simplify that, to give these entrepreneurial minds the confidence to take the leap of faith and build their own travel business from the ground up with ATAC," Taylor said.

Part of the push to scale up suitable members will also see a new membership acquisition officer join ATAC's head office (TD 09 Sep), with Taylor confirming the group is striving to have a person on board before 2026.

"It is a key priority for us post-conference, because it is an investment and something many boards before us deliberated over, and we resolved that it was time to challenge and test this concept," Taylor revealed.

"We're confident it will yield strong results for our group." AB

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Club Med growth

ALL-INCLUSIVE holiday brand Club Med has announced record results for the first half of 2026, achieving a business volume of €1.175 billion (A\$2 billion) in the first six months of the year, a 4% increase on the previous year, as well as an 8% rise in its Australian customer base.

The brand also delivered a 17% rise in its resorts operating income, while the average room occupancy rate remained at 70%.

Club Med Tomamu in Japan continues to be a popular choice for travellers, while Bali remains the Pacific market's most popular sun resort, and Phuket achieved a 36% year-on-year sales increase.

According to Michelle Davies, Club Med Pacific GM and New ESAP Markets, the growth was "driven by the appetite for effortless, all-inclusive holidays".

Seibu aces big buy

JAPANESE hospitality giant Seibu Prince Hotels Worldwide (SPW) has acquired Ace Group International, marking a significant step in SPW's plans to expand its global portfolio to 250 properties by FY35.

Ace Group International is the parent company of Ace Hotel, which will now operate as a subsidiary of SPW's hotel division, while remaining independent in brand and creative direction.

Ace Hotel properties are located across the world, including Sydney, Seattle, Palm Springs, New York, Brooklyn, and more.

Mackay makeover

MACKAY Airport announced this week an investment of almost \$600 million in an infrastructure program, aimed at improving passengers' experience and building "critical infrastructure to futureproof and enhance connectivity".

Upgrades will include a terminal transformation, major runway overlay, refurbished bathrooms, expanded car parking, remodelled observation deck and commercial development at Milton Precinct.

Preliminary work has begun on some projects, while the terminal upgrade will begin in Jan 2026.

Bali halts new hotels

INDONESIA is banning the development of new hotels and restaurants on Bali's untouched land and farming plots for an indefinite period of time, according to a report from *Sydney Morning Herald* today.

The decision comes off the back of recent floods, which have been linked to tourism-related overdevelopment.

The provincial government discussed last year a potential moratorium on new developments due to rampant growth, although they were shelved due to disagreements.

It is expected that the death toll from the floods will rise to the 20s, while hundreds of people have been left displaced.

Developments on already approved land will still go ahead.

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ATIA welcomes SAF

THE Australian Travel Industry association (ATIA) has hailed the Federal Government's recently announced plan to invest \$1.1 billion into cleaner fuel production, including the local development of more sustainable aviation fuel (SAF).

"This is a welcome investment that acknowledges the critical role sustainable aviation fuel must play in decarbonising Australia's travel and aviation sectors," said ATIA Director, Public Policy and Advocacy, Ingrid Fraser.

The Federal Government's Cleaner Fuels Program offers grants to domestic producers of low carbon liquid fuels (LCLF), such as SAF, building on its existing investment of \$33.5 million under the Sustainable Aviation Fuel Funding Initiative.

The program is designed to attract more investment in LCLF projects and help to compete with existing production overseas.

The government said it will now consult with the industry on the detailed design of the program later this year.

"For an island nation so reliant on long-haul aviation, the ability to scale sustainable fuel production onshore is vital - not only for reducing emissions but for securing Australia's global competitiveness and connectivity," Fraser added.

SAF is widely recognised as key to playing a significant role in reducing aviation emissions both now and in the longer-term, the industry body added.

Hotels are losing millions

RESEARCH by guest acquisition platform SiteMinder has found tens of millions in extra revenue can be unlocked by hotels adopting faster, more efficient and fully integrated systems.

A global survey conducted last month drew more than 700 participants, with seven in 10 Australian respondents believing up to 10% more annual revenue is waiting to be captured.

The study looked at the barriers facing streamlined hotel booking systems, such as the ability to react to competitor rate changes, market shifts, or demand-driving events such as new flight routes.

Respondents were nearly unanimous in believing speed to market with appropriate revised rates in response to events was critical, with 45% conceding they have missed revenue chances at least weekly because they are unable to act fast enough.

Nearly eight in 10 said they are hamstrung by manual processes that can be automated, while 36% related they are only able to update pricing monthly.

Nearly half of respondents said they are actively seeking AI solutions, with another 43% open to what innovations are available.

SiteMinder Chief Product Officer Leah Rankin said the research affirmed its vision that the future of hotel optimisation lies in seamless market connectivity that eliminates manual processes.

The company has this week unveiled SiteMinder UltraSync,



a new solution which enables real-time, two-way updates to pricing through both SiteMinder's platform and a hotel's property management system (PMS).

"With UltraSync's unifying integration - built around a shared vision with our partners - hotels will have the ability to operate as dynamically as the markets they serve," Rankin said.

"Pricing decisions will flow automatically to the PMS, while reservation data will return to inform smarter strategies, transforming hours of manual work into instant, intelligent execution - empowering hotels to shape market dynamics rather than simply respond to them." *ML*

Taiwan entry rules

FROM 01 Oct, travellers entering Taiwan must complete a Taiwan Arrival Card (TWAC) within three days of arrival.

For further details on how to complete and submit the form, **CLICK HERE**.



Window Seat

THE troubled Fyre Festival has been purchased by LimeWire - yes, the filesharing service that was popular in the naughties before being shut down for copyright issues.

As the tech brand wryly questioned in its media statement, "what could possibly go wrong?"

While LimeWire provided few details about the future, the company said it was poised to begin a new chapter grounded in tech, transparency, humour, and to "own the meme".

Sydney Airport jobs

SYDNEY Airport held its annual Jobs Fair this week, showcasing a range of career opportunities to high school students and connecting them with more than 30 employers including Qantas, Heinemann Oceania and more.

The event was held in partnership with NSW Department of Education's Regional Industry Education Partnerships program, featuring roles such as apprenticeships and traineeships through to degree-qualified jobs.

"The airport precinct already supports more than 35,000 jobs, and with thousands more to come over the next two decades," said Sydney Airport Chief Executive Officer Scott Charlton.



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Intrepid has family in mind

INTREPID Travel is introducing a new range of family trips and short breaks, the brand announced at this week's TravelManagers conference in Nusa Dua.

Head of Partnerships Meg Lowe revealed the news on stage, in an early product update to attendees.

No further details about the new line of tours were unveiled, however Lowe noted China will play a large part in Intrepid's future product.

"China is gaining momentum and we have just exceeded our pre-COVID numbers, so expect to see more in China," she said.

Intrepid has also hinted at every new trip it launches this year having no internal flights, with the brand instead preferencing rail, local transport, and other low-impact infrastructure.

Other priorities for Intrepid will include deepening its commitment to Australia as a destination for domestic guests,



not just inbound tourism.

Australia is now among Intrepid's top 10 destinations globally, with the company having acquired Kimberley Wild Expeditions last year.

"We are not front-of-mind for Australian trips within the industry, so this is a huge opportunity," Lowe said.

New DMCs are also coming for Intrepid in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. *MS*

Pictured: Marketing Specialist Caitie Taylor, Key Partnerships Manager Rhi Morgan, and Lowe.

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Pets on VA planes

VIRGIN Australia has become the first carrier in the country to allow pets on board, with trial services from Melbourne to the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast now on sale.

The service is available for small cats and dogs with a combined weight of pet and carrier of no more than 8kg, among several other conditions.

The 'Pets in Cabin' trial flights will officially take off from 16 Oct before expanding across VA's domestic network next year.

"Airlines in the USA and Europe have operated pets in cabin flights for decades and we're excited to bring this service to Australian travellers," VA said.



More Globus tours

GLOBUS has expanded its collection of Small Group Discovery Tours for 2026 with three new Europe itineraries.

Joining the line-up is a 10-day adventure through Ireland, featuring experiences like scone-making on a working farm, sailing one of the country's most remote islands, and a medieval banquet at Bunratty Castle.

Also on offer is a 10-day 'Gems of Sicily & Malta' tour, where guests will cook Sicilian street food in a chef's kitchen, stand beneath the mosaics of Monreale Cathedral, and enjoy a rustic farm dinner in Catania with live music.

Rounding out the new additions is the eight-day 'Soul of Portugal' itinerary, which includes an exclusive 'backstage' winery visit in Monsaraz and a tour of an olive estate.

With an average of just 15 guests per tour, MD for APAC Chris Hall said these experiences "simply can't happen in a crowd".



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Princess Canada '27

PRINCESS Cruises has announced its 2027 Canada and New England season, which will see *Regal Princess* and *Caribbean Princess* sail 17 departures between 21 Aug and 30 Oct.

Guests can choose from itineraries between seven and 13 days, which will visit 14 destinations across 10 states, including favourites like Boston, Saint John, Newport and Halifax.

The cruise line is also offering two cruisetours, including the 'Maple Explorer', which includes a trip to Niagara Falls, a guided tour of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and visits to cathedrals and the 19th century Rideau Canal.



A Mickey-approved collab



CATHAY Pacific and Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (HKDL) have teamed up to enhance in-bound tourism offerings and reinforce Hong Kong's reputation as a premier global travel destination and regional transit hub.

The two companies signed a Memorandum of Understanding earlier this week at Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel, hosted by Cathay Group CEO Ronald Lam (pictured left) and HKDL MD Michael Moriarty (pictured right), with Mickey Mouse also present to commemorate the occasion.

Under the agreement, the

carrier and the resort will explore opportunities for collaboration, including a product for travellers transiting in Hong Kong that is targeting a 2026 launch.

"By combining world-class air travel with Disney experiences, we will create unforgettable journeys that celebrate the very best of Hong Kong," Lam said.

"Together, we aim to inspire travellers from around the world to come to our home city and experience all that it has to offer."

"This collaboration with CX exemplifies our commitment to HK," Moriarty added. *JM*

Lares goes cold

AQUA Expeditions will follow its debut in eastern Africa with a series of new voyages to the Arctic Circle and Svalbard on board its new ship *Aqua Lares*.

The company this week unveiled its next deployment of the new 30-passenger luxury icebreaker, with Arctic itineraries scheduled for between Jun and Sep 2026.

Season highlights will include opportunities to spot polar bears, whales and migratory foxes, along with visits to historic whaling stations and seabird nesting cliffs.

Travellers can explore the region for between five and 14 nights, reaching areas such as the Lofoten Islands and Tromsø on twice-daily shore excursions.

The five-deck ship features 15 staterooms, lounge and dining areas and a wellness zone with a spa, sauna and outdoor hot tubs.



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Viking treats agents to a night of glamour with *Downton Abbey*

VIKING once again partnered with Universal Pictures Australia for the release of *Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale*, the new film in the storied franchise.

As a corporate sponsor, Viking supported the promotion of the third and final movie, building on its longstanding relationship with Highclere Castle in Hampshire, the home of the Earl and Countess of Carnarvon and the filming location of *Downton Abbey*.

As part of the partnership, the cruise line was delighted to treat a number of valued travel advisors and their guests to exclusive premiere screenings in Brisbane and Melbourne, giving them the chance to experience the glamour of the red carpet and be among the first in Australia to enjoy the highly anticipated film.



A TOUCH of glamour outside the cinema.



LUCY Woodward, RACV, with guests.



NICOLA & Kelsey from Cruiseabout Carindale with Ramon Drew, Viking at the Brisbane premiere.



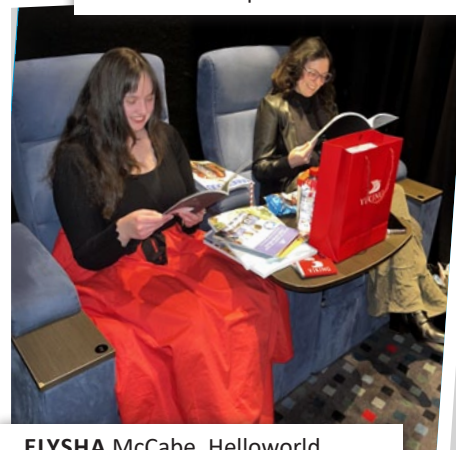
RAMON Drew, Viking (centre) with Stephy Cole, Cruise Express (right).



CRAIG Fyfe, Your Travel and Cruise (third from left) with clients and Ramon Drew, Viking (right).



A LIVE string trio set the tone, welcoming guests on arrival.



ELYSHA McCabe, Helloworld Macarthur Square and her friend settling in for showtime.



JOANNE Cullen, Viking (third from left) hosting Melbourne travel advisors.



NATHALIE Fagan, Viking (centre) with the team from Mary Rossi Travel: Lee-Anne Barrett, Gai Campbell, Carina Tanna, Melissa Ferguson, and Esther Fraser.

CORPORATE UPDATE

Travel budgets boosted

GLOBALLY, 45% of businesses expect to increase their travel budgets in FY26, according to Flight Centre Travel Group's newly released annual *State of the Market* survey.

The figure is up 3% on last year, indicating that investment in corporate travel is steadily rebounding each year.

Of the businesses that plan to boost their travel spend, 9% anticipate spending more than 20% above last year's levels, while 36% percent expect increases of up to 20%.

The outlook was particularly strong in the Americas, with



nearly half (47%) of respondents saying they plan to boost business travel spending in FY26 - a 10% rise from last year.

"With macroeconomic challenges beginning to ease globally, the survey shows that customers have a more optimistic outlook for the year ahead," said Charlene Leiss, president of Flight Centre Travel Group Americas.

"These figures reflect growing confidence and a renewed commitment to travel as a driver of growth and innovation."

The survey also highlights a growing focus on meetings, incentives, conferences, and events, with 33% of companies around the world planning to dedicate more than half of their travel budgets to this sector - up from 28% in the previous year.

"It is encouraging to see businesses continuing to invest in travel as a way to deepen relationships, increase collaboration, and create opportunities," Leiss added.

The survey, conducted by Flight Centre's corporate division, analysed more than 1,200 responses from clients of its flagship brands FCM Travel and Corporate Traveller. *JM*

BCD goes platinum

BCD Travel has been recognised for its sustainability efforts, achieving the EcoVadis platinum rating, putting it in the top 1% of those assessed.

The travel company was assessed against EcoVadis' updated scoring principles, which BCD said now places more focus on measurable outcomes, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with global frameworks, such as the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

"EcoVadis has raised the bar, and rightly so... [they] push companies to go beyond compliance and demonstrate real impact," said Olivia Ruggles-Brise, BCD's VP of Sustainability.

TokyoTokyo Old meets New

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Best performers honoured



TRAVELMANAGERS' annual National Conference concluded last night with an evening of revelry that celebrated the excellence of its network of more than 500 personal travel managers (PTMs).

Over 500 attendees, including advisors, partner suppliers, media partners, and National Partnership Office team members, gathered in Bali for the award ceremony, which capped off this week's annual conference (*TD 17 Sep*).

The evening saw Emma Lucas named PTM of the Year for 2024/25, having earlier claimed the award for top PTM in Victoria.

Joel Webb was named the nationwide winner of New PTM of the Year, while the Above and Beyond Award, which recognises an advisor who has committed an act of exceptional service, was this year shared by two

Queensland-based agents: Karen Christie and Rebecca Harrison.

The recipient of the PTM Choice Award, voted on by TravelManagers' nearly 500 advisors nationwide, was awarded to Rachael Portelli.

TravelManagers' network also selected Vietnam Travel & Tours as this year's winner of the Partner Supplier of the Year.

PTM Carli Byrne received the prestigious Barry Mayo Spirit Award, which recognises a long-time company stalwart who "lives, breathes and reflects the heart and soul" of TravelManagers.

The company also acknowledged the milestone accomplishments of 66 PTMs and NPO staff who have achieved 10 or 15 years with the company, as well as Lisa Metzl, the longest-serving PTM in the country, who is celebrating her 20-year anniversary in 2025. *MS*

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AAT Kings has announced last-minute deals on departures in Oct, including an eight-day 'South Australian Outback Adventure', which takes in Lake Eyre, the Flinders Ranges, Wilpena Pound and Arkaroola. The tour is currently available for \$5,800 per person, down from \$6,335. Also on sale is a 13-day journey through New Zealand's South Island, discounted from \$7,610 down to \$6,469. See more [HERE](#).

Solo savings are now available on three-night Murray River sailings aboard overnight paddlesteamer *Emmylou*. **Murray River Paddlesteamers** has halved the solo surcharge from 60% to 30% for new bookings between Sep-Dec this year, which equates to a saving of \$540. The offer is available until sold out - find out more [HERE](#).


Pullman Hotels has launched several spring getaway offers, including a 'Stay, Park & Play' package at Pullman Sydney Hyde Park from just \$349 per night, including overnight accommodation, breakfast and parking (click [HERE](#)). Pullman & Mercure Melbourne Albert Park is offering the same package, with rates starting from \$219 per night [HERE](#). Meanwhile, travellers in Brisbane can enjoy discounted rates when booking a minimum of two nights at Pullman Brisbane King George Square, which is offering a 'Stay Longer & Save' package - see [HERE](#).

Thrill seekers can now book **Daydream Island Resort & Living Reef's** 'Adventure Holiday Package', which offers a mix of high-octane fun and relaxation in the heart of the Whitsundays. With prices starting from \$366 per room, the package includes overnight accommodation with a bonus room upgrade; a one-hour guided jet ski tour for two adults; a one-hour Lovers Cove guided glass bottom kayak tour for two adults; 50% off ferry transfers; and complimentary use of non-motorised water sports. Plus, kids stay and eat free. Find out more about the package [HERE](#), which is valid for stays until 31 Mar 2027.

Viking is allowing companions to fly free up to \$2,500 per booking on its 15-day 'Into the Midnight Sun' voyage from London to Bergen or vice versa. The offer is available on 2026, 2027 and 2028 sailings, for bookings made by 01 Dec 2025 using code CFF25. Find out more [HERE](#).

Now is the perfect time for clients to plan their summer visit to Kakadu National Park, with **Kakadu Tourism** launching a range of special discounted cruise, accommodation and touring packages. Offers include a free Kakadu Parks Pass when travellers stay two nights at Mercure Kakadu Crocodile Hotel, for bookings made before 31 Mar 2026. For more information, click [HERE](#).




Vibe Hotel Docklands in Melbourne is offering a Deluxe Family Room package from \$289 per night, which includes two-for-one ice-skating at O'Brien Icehouse Docklands, children's welcome gifts, breakfast for two adults and two children, and more. The offer applies to minimum two-night stays, for bookings made by 31 Jan 2026. More information [HERE](#).



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SYD enjoys taste of Brooki



VISITORS to Sydney Airport will soon be able to get their hands on cookies from cult favourite Brooki Bakehouse when it opens a pop-up store in early Nov at the T2 Domestic terminal.

The brand will open within the food court in early Nov and run for six months.

"We're delighted to welcome Brooki Bakehouse to Sydney Airport and to be the first location outside Queensland for the brand," said Mark Zaouk, Group Executive Commercial at Sydney Airport.

"The pop-up will add an extra touch of fun and flavour to the T2 experience and is another example of us creating memorable moments and convenience for passengers as part of our broader food and dining strategy."

Customers will be able to indulge in one of Brooki Bakehouse's many flavours, from

classic choc-chip and indulgent Dubai Chocolate to gooey brownie-inspired creations, or even purchase Brooki merchandise from the pop-up.

"We asked our community where to open our first shop outside Queensland - and Sydney came out on top!" enthused founder Brooke Bellamy.

"Now passengers can grab a Brooki cookie and take it with them wherever they're headed around Australia."

Yesterday, Sydney Airport released its draft Master Plan 2045, which includes a proposed expansion linking T2 and T3, creating a new precinct where regional, domestic and international services are brought under one roof (**TD** 16 Sep).

T2 is currently undergoing a \$200 million upgrade, which began in May, focusing on improved check-in, faster security and upgraded facilities. **JHM**