

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of the latest travel industry news, including a photo page from **AAT Kings** and our **Luxury** page, plus a product profile from **Vietnam Airlines** and a full page from **Inspiring Vacations**.

Royal eyes 7th Icon

ROYAL Caribbean Group has confirmed the option for a seventh Icon-class vessel as part of a renewed agreement signed with shipbuilder Meyer Turku.

The update from the cruise company overnight also stated it will go ahead with an order for a fifth Icon ship to join in 2028.

Meyer Turku has already constructed two Icon-class ships for Royal, with *Legend of the Seas* the next to join the fleet next year, and the yet-to-be-named fourth Icon vessel on schedule to be delivered in 2027.

Icon orders beyond the fifth are subject to Royal Caribbean Group's exercise of the options, which are subject to customary conditions including financing.

AAT unpacks 26/27

AAT Kings' 2026/27 Australia brochure is out now.

A key feature of the new program is the recently launched Small Group Tour collection, with departures limited to 24 guests.

There is a range of these new tours available across Australia - [CLICK HERE](#) to view the brochure.

Sabre unveils agentic APIs

IMPROVED client satisfaction, more automation of manual tasks, and real-time booking management are just some of the benefits on offer to travel companies through Sabre's newly revealed agentic APIs.

The technology company said the newly developed APIs are designed to solve "customer pain points" that typically drain time and resources, with the debut capabilities focused on flights, hotels and post-booking services.

"[Our] agentic-ready APIs are made possible by a new, proprietary Model Context Protocol server - which acts as a universal translator that makes the complex language of travel technology understandable to any AI agent," Sabre said.

Examples of how travel agencies can use the APIs include creating



a call centre proxy agent capable of waiting on hold with airlines, securing same-day rebookings, paying with stored card details, and updating a customer's travel calendar automatically.

Meanwhile, a hotel ops agent can call to confirm late arrivals, ensure rooms are not resold and arrange breakfast preferences.

An agent-to-agent collaboration is also possible, which works directly with another agency's AI to finalise complex changes like split tickets & combining fares. **AB**

New ANZAC tour

CROOKED Compass has launched a new tour to coincide with ANZAC Day 2026, focusing on Kokoda in PNG.

The 'Legacy of ANZAC Day: Kokoda & PNG Discovery' is a one-time departure, running from 24 Apr to 01 May 2026, beginning in Port Moresby.

Travellers will visit the newly opened Kokoda Gallery and attend the dawn service at the Bomana War Cemetery before taking a scenic helicopter flight over the Kokoda Ranges.

The itinerary is limited to a maximum of 12 travellers and includes accommodation at Hilton Port Moresby and Rapopo Plantation Resort, along with services from local guides.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more details.

Support for LHR

RESIDENTS in eight of nine boroughs bordering London Heathrow Airport say they remain in favour of the hub's expansion plans, as they are aligned with the economic benefits that will come as a result.

New polling in the area shows 90% of nearby residents back the hub's proposed third runway.

In a separate survey, airport staff say they are excited about the workforce opportunities the expanded airport may deliver for their children once they reach working age and seek careers.

Half-price buddies

INSPIRING Vacations has launched a limited-time offer for agents, allowing them to take a friend for half price on select tours in 2026/27 - see **p8**.

VN means business

VIETNAM Airlines is showcasing its business-class offering, which includes exclusive lounge access and luxurious amenities - learn more on the **back page**.

Changes ring for HX EXCLUSIVE

HX HAS restructured its leadership team, with Chief Commercial Officer Alex Delamere-White among three executives set to depart the line.

The news was first reported by *Travel Daily's* sister publication *Cruise Weekly*, with Vice President People & Culture Belinda Henriksen and Chief Expedition Officer Alex McNeil also set to depart.

All three will remain with HX for the next few months to maintain a smooth transition.

Also departing will be VP Revenue Management Sara Tomlinson, who is leaving the line independent of the restructure.

HX will not replace any of the three roles culled as part of the restructure, and there is no impact to the local office.

The overhaul was led by Chief Executive Officer Gebhard Rainer, and contributed to by the entire leadership team - more details in today's *Cruise Weekly*.



SQ cosies up to Vietnam

SINGAPORE Airlines has signed a new codeshare agreement with Vietnam Airlines, which takes effect on 26 Oct.

The deal will see SQ apply its code on services between the Lion City to both Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, while VN will sell seats on SQ-operated flights from Hanoi, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City to Singapore.

Codeshare services will be



available to book from 10 Oct, subject to regulatory approvals, on both travel agent and direct sales channels.

"The collaboration leverages the extensive route networks and premium services of both airlines, enhancing connectivity between Vietnam and Singapore, while delivering greater flexibility and a more seamless travel experience for passengers," said Vietnam Airlines Director of Corporate Planning, Nguyen Quang Trung.

MEANWHILE, Vietnam Airlines has signalled plans to add 30 wide-body aircraft to its fleet.

Models being considered are the A350-900s or B787-9 Dreamliners, with potential delivery dates in 2028. *ML*

Darling Hbr changes

SYDNEY'S iconic Novotel and Ibis Darling Harbour hotels could make way for fellow Accor brands Pullman and Mama Shelter as part of an overhaul underway for the west side of Darling Harbour.

The two hotels' owner, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, has listed the site for sale at \$500 million, with the mooted new hotels to sit atop a 1,000-unit residential development.

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DISCOVER

South Korea & Taiwan

Kiwis love royal visit

PRINCESS Cruises' *Crown Princess* arrived in Auckland this week, signalling the start of New Zealand's summer cruise season, which will see the country host 663 cruise ship port calls.

In Dec, sister ship *Discovery Princess* will make her first-ever visit to NZ as part of her maiden deployment Down Under, followed by *Coral Princess* and *Island Princess*, which are due to arrive in Feb and Apr respectively.

In total, the four Princess ships will make 52 calls across New Zealand, at ports including Auckland, Bay of Islands, Tauranga, Napier, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and Milford Sound.

Crown Princess, which just completed her 114-day round-the-world voyage, is scheduled to arrive in Sydney this Fri.



Celestyal switches

OFF the back of customer feedback, Celestyal has amended its 2025 repositioning sailings, which will operate as seven-night cruises from Athens to Jeddah.

Celestyal Journey will depart 22 Nov and call into Marmaris and three ports in Egypt - Port Said, Sharm el Sheikh and Safage - then end in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, *Celestyal Discovery* will make her debut in the Arabian Gulf, cruising from Athens on 28 Nov and stopping at Kusadasi and the same three ports in Egypt, then Jeddah.

QF updates iOS app

QANTAS has launched a new version of its Entertainment App, which is especially designed for inflight streaming.

Now live on iOS, the app features a fresh look, dark mode, kids mode, a faster wi-fi login, and picture-in-picture so pax can watch while multitasking.

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Drones spark delays

FLIGHTS were halted for close to four hours in Denmark and Oslo yesterday after large drones were sighted above both hubs.

While there is no formal explanation for the incursions, Danish authorities have pointed the finger at Russia, claiming it is part of a disruption campaign.

Gretel now on TIME

THE TIME Committee has recently announced new member Gretel Puisens, bringing 12 years of experience in the travel and tourism sector.

"It is a privilege to join the TIME Committee and contribute to an organisation that champions mentoring and career development in our industry," Puisens said.

"TIME has had such a positive impact on so many travel professionals, and I am excited to play a role in shaping the future of our sector," she added.

Oz in top 10 most-visited

AUSTRALIA has ranked among the world's top 10 most-visited destinations during the Jun-Aug 2025 travel season, according to a new report from eSIM technology provider Holafly.

Spain topped the list, which was based on a survey conducted last month involving 980 respondents around the world.

South Africa ranked second place, followed by Japan and Canada, while Australia appeared in ninth spot, with Melbourne's creative scene, Queensland's sunny beaches, and Sydney's coastal lifestyle drawing international travellers.

In the city ranking, Melbourne shared 10th place with Paris, Cancun, Madrid and Barcelona, while Cape Town took top spot, followed by Durban, Toronto, Las Vegas and Busan.

The Holafly report showed that 38% of people travelled internationally last quarter, while

almost 63% holidayed within their own borders.

Additionally, 43% of travellers visited more than one place, showing a trend towards more dynamic itineraries as opposed to single-stop vacations.

The survey also found that one in five trips taken during the three-month period had a business purpose, with 20% of travellers opting into the 'bleisure' trend. *JM*

Uzbekistan takes off

UZBEKISTAN Airways has made the largest-ever purchase of aircraft in its history, ordering up to 22 Boeing 787 Dreamliners.

Boeing and the Uzbekistan Ministry of Transport also signed a Memorandum of Cooperation, committing to growing the aviation ecosystem, which has arrived amid a flurry of travel interest for the Central Asian country.



Window Seat

HOLIDAY Inn Express has come up with a much tastier way to wake up its guests, dispensing with loud alarms for the scent of sizzling bacon.

"We offer a free hot buffet breakfast for every stay and the smell is so inviting," GM Rob Fahey said.


"[An alarm clock with a bacon scent] is a fun way to help our guests reclaim their mornings and enjoy something delicious and make sure that they never miss breakfast."

But with our sense of smell essentially switching off when we are asleep, we remain a tad confused about the idea.



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NSW, Vic top visitor stats

OVERSEAS visitor spending hit a record high in both New South Wales and Victoria this year, according to Tourism Research Australia's annual international tourism results.

The two states confirmed themselves as the numbers one and two visitor economies in Australia respectively, with spend in the country up almost 20% on Jun 2024 levels.

Australia brought in \$37.5 billion from international visitors in the most recent financial year, the lion's share of which was received by NSW, Victoria,



and Queensland, with travellers spending \$13.9 billion, \$9.8 billion, and \$6.9 billion in each state respectively.

"These record results confirm the NSW Government is firmly on track to achieve its goal of \$59 billion in visitor expenditure by 2026," NSW's Minister for Tourism Steve Kamper said.

Meanwhile Victoria's Minister for Tourism, Steve Dimopoulos, acknowledged his state's tourism performance, adding that it showed how important the industry is for the state.

Australia's total number of trips for the year was also up to 7.8 million, 6% more than the PCP.

Nights spent in Australia totalled 301 million, an 8% hike on last year's figure. *MS*

Green off to Japan

NORTHERN Territory Assistant Minister for Tourism Nita Green has travelled to Japan to promote Australia as part of a new 'Come and Say G'Day' campaign.

Green will take part in a variety of discussions and activities showcasing Australia's offerings at the Tourism Expo in Nagoya.

Australia's clean energy future will also be demonstrated during the visit, with Green making a stop at the World Expo 2025 site in Kansai.

She will also meet with aviation stakeholders, government officials and advocates to build interest in Australia among Japanese travellers.

Australia welcomed 400,000 short-term visitors from Japan last year, who generated \$2.1 billion for the national economy.

More Korean luxe

MANDARIN Oriental will open a new luxury hotel in South Korea as part of a new development in Seoul opening in 2030.

The new Mandarin Oriental Seoul will feature 128 rooms with facilities including multiple restaurants, bars and lounges.

A wellness space will be home to a swimming pool and gym plus golf simulators and a games room within the kids club.

Nand catches island vibes



PERPETUAL road-warrior Walter Nand has regained his wheels, signing on with Sun Island Tours to become its new Business Development Manager for NSW and ACT.

Nand's appointment marks the first dedicated BDM recruited by the Mediterranean wholesaler in more than five years, with the company's new recruit bringing nearly 30 years of travel industry experience to the role.

"I'm excited to be back on the road, representing a company that is so well-established and respected within the travel industry," Nand said.

Sun Island Tours Joint CEO John Polyviou said he is thrilled to welcome Nand to the team.

"His long-standing relationships with Australian agents will be a huge asset to us," Polyviou said.

"We sought to fill this position in response to feedback from our yearly survey to travel agents

[and] it was clear that agents want face-to-face training and interaction with BDMs."

Polyviou is **pictured** above left with Nand at the company's Sydney office. *ML*

Ha Long Bay hotel

INTERCONTINENTAL Hotels has opened its newest property in Ha Long Bay, in the northeast coastal pocket of Vietnam.

Located in Quang Ninh Province, the new InterContinental Halong Bay features 275 rooms, suites, private villas and residences, each with turquoise blue upholstery.

Six restaurants feature as part of the resort, each serving a variety of international cuisines, day spa and sporting facilities including beach volleyball and archery.

Families can make use of three swimming pools and a kids club, featuring a cinema and a range of culturally immersive activities.

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A-lister agents go on location with AAT Kings to New Zealand

AAT Kings hosted its inaugural A-Listers On Location incentive trip to New Zealand's stunning South Island recently, showcasing the region's adventure tourism and premium travel offerings with a packed itinerary of unique experiences and activities.

As part of the multi-day fam, the group of 20 high-performing agents got a taste of the best of the South Island's attractions and experiences, from the famous Queenstown Shotover Jet boat and Shotover Canyon swing to helicopter rides to Franz Josef Glacier, as well as a unique *Lord of the Rings* tour and curated wine tastings featuring regional vintages.



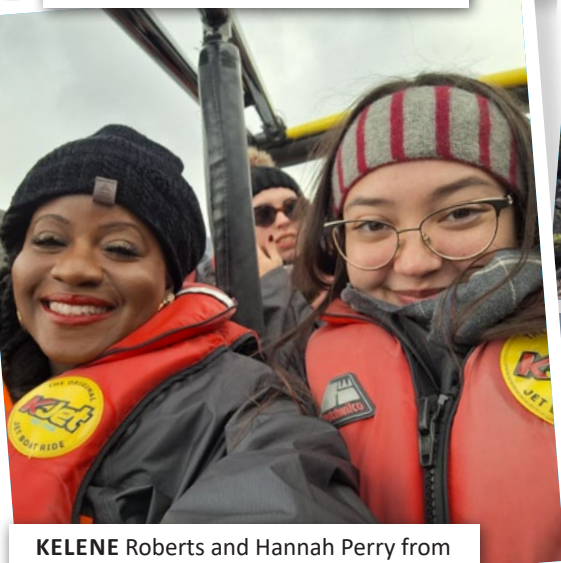
ENJOYING the Lord of the Rings tour.



STEVE Wilkinson from First Class Holidays discovers his inner Gandalf.



AUDREY Peltier from AAT Kings on feeding duty during a farm show in Walter Peak.



KELENE Roberts and Hannah Perry from Global Journeys enjoy a jet boat ride.



QUEENSTOWN A-listers hit the water.



JESSICA Gerstenmayer, Flight Centre Mildura hangs around during a canyon swing.



ANGELA Mount, AAT Kings NZ; Hannah Perry, Global Journeys Qld; Kellie Kramer, Flight Centre Northlakes Qld; and Teigan Gallivanter, Travel Townsville.



A TRIP to Walter Peak Farm Queenstown.



STEVE Wilkinson, First Class Holidays UK; Ian O'Reilly, Discover Australia Holidays Perth; and Russ Littleford, NZ Fine Touring Wanaka enjoy the view over Franz Josef Glacier.

AA raises a glass

AMERICAN Airlines has upped its bubbles game, partnering with Champagne Bollinger, the high-end family-owned maison, on both the ground and in the air.

Starting today, Flagship lounge customers will be greeted with a glass of Champagne Bollinger Special Cuvee at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport, Miami International Airport, and O'Hare International Airport.

Next month, the premium bubbles will be served exclusively in Flagship First and Flagship Business on all flights to and from Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport, followed by a broader rollout across international flights in the months ahead.

First class given last rites by Thai Airways

YET another major international airline has confirmed it will ditch first-class cabins, with Thai Airways sharing it will move to a business, premium economy and economy layout across all flights.

According to *The Straits Times*, it will be done under a two- or three-year restructuring plan, and the airline will consider introducing a new 'premium business' section positioned in the front rows of selected aircraft.

Thai Airways has already scaled back its first-class offering, with just three recently delivered Boeing 777 aircraft equipped with the luxury cabins.

Those aircraft service flights between Bangkok and London Heathrow, and Tokyo Narita (NRT), with no Australian ports having received the planes.

"This seat upgrade plan ensures



all Thai Airways aircraft offer consistent, standardised products across the fleet," Thai Airways CEO Chai Eamsiri said.

He added that "major international airlines have already abolished first class and left business class as the top tier".

While Australia's national carrier Qantas still offers first class on selected flights on its Airbus

A380, major carriers including American Airlines, Turkish Airlines, Oman Air, Air New Zealand and Malaysia Airlines, among others, have already cancelled the cabin.

Thai Airways recently exited bankruptcy protection and resumed trading on the Stock Exchange of Thailand, having been profitable since 2023. *DF*

Carlingford goes luxe

ITRAVEL Carlingford, a member of LUXE by itravel, has become the first agency in the group to join Virtuoso.

LUXE by itravel was created by the group over two years ago when it originally joined the Virtuoso network.

Ittravel Carlingford, run by Sue Todorovski and Emily Kadinski, recently celebrated its 10-year anniversary.

The store is a cruise specialist, with Kadinski a CLIA Cruise Ambassador.

Capital investment and HR mismatch now critical

THERE is a serious "global shortage of exceptional management and staff to match the substantial investments in increasingly impressive ultra-luxury properties", according to Luxury Travel Intelligence founder, Michael Crompton.

Sharing his opinion at the launch of the 2025 World's Best Luxury Hotel Brands annual report, Crompton asserted that his warning in 2023 had not been heeded and the situation was now "very serious".

"This mismatch between capital investment and human resource development is now becoming critical and, if not addressed, it could threaten the reputation of several top-tier brands," he warned.

"Relying on well-meaning but inexperienced locals under the guise of offering a 'sense of place' or 'relaxed luxury' is no longer acceptable."

He said there was no single quick fix but brands should be investing from the outset.

Istanbul held Aloft

MARRIOTT has announced the opening of the Aloft Istanbul Karakoy, the brand's second hotel in Turkiye.

Local artists Serap Sokol and Ecem Dilan were engaged to ensure the hotel created the right aesthetic.

It boasts 107 loft-style guest rooms and suites with high ceilings and walk-in rainfall showers in each bathroom.

Aloft Istanbul Karakoy is located in the cultural district close to key landmarks.

NEXT ISSUE: Southeast Asia special report

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Renaissance Phuket Resort & Spa, which is nestled within Sirinat National Park, has unveiled a fresh look following a major renovation to mark its 15th anniversary. The beachfront resort features reimagined guestrooms and villas that draw inspiration from Southern Thai village life - think artisanal details woven into fabrics, seashell-inspired lighting, and organic materials, as well as layers of wood, stone, and soft textiles.



Set along the boulevards of Dunhua North Road in Taipei, **Capella Taipei** has unveiled The Glasshouse, a standalone tri-level bar destination. Three distinct yet connected venues - Tilt, Cooper, and Playback - aim to bridge the gap between authentic local culture and luxury accommodation. Tilt offers curated cocktails, while Cooper features a menu of aged spirits and classics, and Playback combines Japanese-inspired cocktails with dynamic music programming.



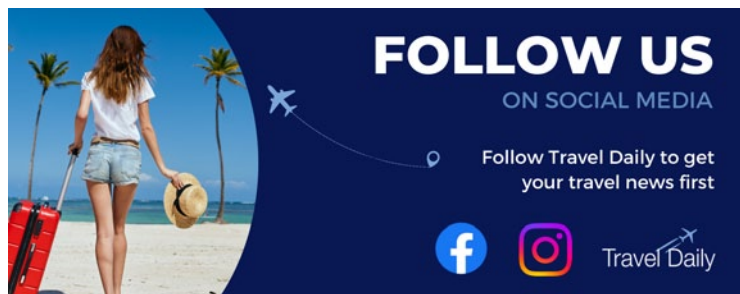
Melia Pattaya Hotel, located 1.5 hours' drive from Bangkok, has enhanced its family-friendly credentials with a new fun-filled kids' program. Children can unleash their energy in The Kidsdom, a dedicated space that offers a rotating menu of activities, such as plastic doll painting and balloon art, while families can also enjoy a dedicated kids' pool, conveniently located next to the resort's main pool.



The Kimberley's **Berkeley River Lodge** wrapped its 2025 season last week, and will debut a new look in May 2026, following a three-year refurbishment. The remote property is set to offer new experiences, including a signature spa treatment, morning movement sessions, and a barefoot barbecue, while interiors will undergo final upgrades - new textures, colour palettes and furniture.



Four Seasons Resort Bali has introduced the Fitness Hub, a dedicated space perched above the Ayung River that combines modern training methods with restorative therapies. The hub features jungle and river views, male and female locker rooms with steam and sauna, and a Fit Bar for healthy refreshments, as well as a fully equipped gym, a Pilates space, and a dedicated recovery area.



A 'wheely good' tour



TOURISM and Events Queensland (TEQ) has teamed up with The Hit Network's *Carrie & Tommy Show* and dentsu Qld to inspire travel along the Pacific Coast Way Drive, dubbed 'Australia's Holiday Highway'.

As part of the new 'Wheely Good Adventure' campaign, Carrie Bickmore and Tommy Little have taken their show on the road this week in a motorhome, showcasing Queensland's coastline and beachside towns.

The duo will broadcast their show live from four iconic Queensland locations, including K'gari/Kingfisher Bay on the Fraser Coast; Sixty6 Acres on the Sunshine Coast; Sandstone Point in Moreton Bay; and Tallebudgera Creek on the Gold Coast.

Listeners will also hear stories that celebrate other destinations and experiences along Australia's Holiday Highway, including the Whitsundays, Townsville, Gladstone, and Mackay.

There will also be a listener competition to win a \$5,000 Queensland holiday.

"Leveraging the much-loved *Carrie & Tommy Show* to share the

energy, excitement and adventure of a Queensland road trip along Australia's Holiday Highway offers a dynamic way to connect with a national audience," said TEQ Group Executive Marketing Kim McConnie.

"This partnership allows us to lean into storytelling that celebrates the experience itself - building authentic connection and consideration, while also driving meaningful publicity outcomes for regional Queensland." JM

New Tiny campaign

TINY Away has launched a campaign with four short films and visuals, encouraging Australians to slow down and "reconnect with what matters".

"Australians are increasingly seeking escapes that give them more than just a change of scenery," said co-founder Jeff Yeo.

Tiny Away has also launched an interactive microsite for consumers, matching their preferences with one of the brand's travel experiences.

Users are then offered a discount code for their next stay.

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-  16 Small group, max 16 guests, fully escorted by expert guides
-  Dedicated transport throughout

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- Expedited immigration and security clearance at all Australian departure airports (SYD/MEL/PER)
- Exclusive lounge access:
 - o **Perth Airport:** Aspire Lounge
 - o **In Vietnam:** Lotus Lounges
- Priority boarding and disembarkation
- Priority baggage handling on arrival

Onboard Business Class Experience

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- Boeing 787 Dreamliner: 28 lie-flat seats
- Airbus A350: 29 lie-flat seats
- Seat pitch: 106 cm with fully flat-bed recline

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- Charging ports for personal electronic devices

Dining

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- Menus curated by culinary experts and refreshed regularly
- Premium selection of international and Vietnamese cuisine, wines and beverages

Amenities

- Soft blankets and plush pillows
- Luxury amenity kits by Sprekenhus which includes eye mask, earplugs, socks, comb, dental care set, foam slippers and premium skincare items.
- Lavatories equipped with high-quality toiletries and shaving kits
- Additional comforts: hanger, aromatic oils, fresh flowers
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ON ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE IN VIETNAM

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