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Visit USA appoints

VISIT USA Australia has announced two new appointments, including GTI Tourism's Trade Marketing Director Anne Lee in the executive role of Secretary. Eight Communication's Account Director Christina Atherton has also joined as PR & Media Manager, bringing over 20 years' experience in tourism PR across in-house and agency roles. Additionally, Aida Osta now serves as General Manager.

Cultural brand eyes agents

PREMIUM cultural tour specialist Martin Randall Travel (MRT) will focus on the Australian trade for the first time as part of a global expansion push.

Partnering with Ascend Travel Group to spearhead its formal entry into the Aussie market, the UK-based brand is now available to book with local advisors, opening up more options for travellers seeking small group tours led by experts in areas like art, architecture, music & history.

The decision to make a play for more of the Aussie market represents MRT's first overseas trade-focused expansion since its founding in 1988.

Speaking with **TD** ahead of the trade launch, the brand's Chief Commercial Officer Latasha Malik said the decision was helped by strong direct booking trends from Aussies for over 20 years.

"We have a nice little business that's been working very well, the market finds our product interesting and it fits nicely with their international travels because it is specific and niche."

"It feels like the right time to expand our network and we can't do that directly, because in Australia, the travel agent is very trusted and we also don't book flights, so we're losing an entire segment of customers by not selling through travel agents."

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of industry news, including our **Sustainability** page, plus a cover wrap from **Martin Randall Tours** and full pages from **Silversea** and **A Force For Good**.



Another driver for the Aussie expansion was being purchased by Piper Private Equity last year, which Malik said was accelerating its wider growth strategy.

The trip length for MRT ranges from five to 14 days, with a price point leading in at \$7,500 and topping out at around \$20,000, with Aussies historically attracted to the brand's musical agenda.

Other selling points include private after-hours tours of attractions, being able to visit places other operators cannot access, and its trips being planned from start to finish.

MRT has signed preferred partnerships with CT Partners, Envoyage, Link Travel Group, and Luxury Travel Collection (LTC).

Ascend Travel Group will deliver local training, sales support, and marketing to help agents capture demand in the premium cultural travel space - see **cover page**. **AB**

Skip US bag recheck

UNITED Airlines has launched the International Remote Baggage Screening (IRBS) initiative on its daily Sydney to San Francisco route, saving up to 45 minutes in connection time by eliminating the need to re-check bags.

Travellers are now able to check bags in Sydney and proceed directly through customs and TSA screening upon arrival in San Francisco, with their luggage automatically transferred to connecting flights.

An unmissable event

TICKETS are now on sale for the upcoming A Force For Good Event in Sydney, which takes place on 06 Mar - find out more details on the **back page**.

Cruise savings offer

FOR a limited time, clients can save up to 40% on Silversea's worldwide voyages, with reduced deposits starting at 15%.

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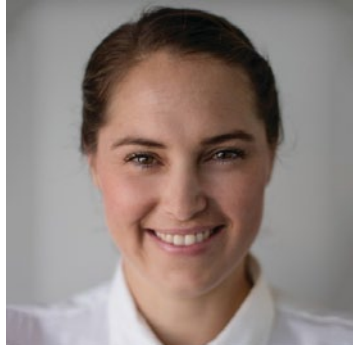
Wendy Wu Tours

TTC shores up trade team

THE Travel Corporation (TTC) has announced a new partner marketing team for its tour brands, strengthening its investment in the trade.

The division will be led by Partner Marketing Director Louise Levesque (**pictured**), who will oversee strategy across Oceania, ensuring campaigns align with consortia growth ambitions.

Supporting her will be Senior Partner Marketing Manager Mia Hamzic, who will focus on



executing campaigns, driving partner awareness, ROI, and ensuring seamless delivery of regional activity.

Completing the team will be Partner Marketing Coordinator Bridgett Crumplin, who will provide day-to-day support, including campaign delivery and partner communications.

TTC said the new structure reflects its ongoing commitment to empowering consortia and delivering greater value to partners of its tour brands. *MS*

Adventure in Mel

CARNIVAL Adventure is set to operate eight cruises out of Melbourne in 2028, a good injection of cruise confidence for the Victorian capital which has been left out of recent Carnival deployment schedules.

The sailings will be short four-night jaunts between 31 Jan and late Feb 2028.

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Pedal equity review

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group (FCTG) and the Turner family have appointed Grant Samuel to review future ownership options for its Pedal Group joint-venture.

The travel giant owns 47% of the business, which operates the 99 Bikes retail chain, with Graham Turner and his son Matt Turner holding 35% of the entity.

While confirming the agency appointment, FCTG said talks relating to any change of structure to support future growth are in their "infancy".

FCTG said it intends to maintain its investment in Pedal, however it is receptive to proposals relating to its equity stake if it feels it is in the best interest of FCTG shareholders.

The statement on the ASX also reiterated that 99 Bikes had performed strongly in 2025.

However, Pedal Group did strike financial issues a few years ago when the bike retailer was hampered by supply chain issues.

Wellness on the Med

ANOTHER boutique cruise brand is focusing on Australia, with the UAE-based Elixir Cruises appointing Sun Island Tours as its exclusive GSA for Australia and New Zealand.

Elixir Cruises owns two ships, the 25-cabin *M/Y Elysium* and the smaller and higher-end *M/Y Gemaya*, housing just 12 guests.

The brand caters for passengers seeking to cruise the Greek islands and focus on wellness, with yoga, pilates and aqua-pilates sessions, water sports, guided hikes just some of the activities on offer for guests.

"Small ship and boutique cruising is one of the fastest-growing segments in Mediterranean travel, and Elixir's unique focus on wellness and authentic Greek experiences is a perfect fit for our market," Sun Island Tours joint CEO John Polyviou said.

To view itineraries and all of the onboard features, **CLICK HERE**.

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Meetings solution

FCM Meetings & Events (FCM M&E) has launched a new solution called Strategic Meetings Management to help businesses with features such as designated account management, venue finding tools, and formalised supplier strategies.

“The solution has visibility, compliance, operational grip, cost control, stakeholder engagement, and strategic insights,” said Simon Seiler, Global GM, FCM M&E.

US biz trips canned

ONE in five US work trips are being cancelled due to increasing costs, with North America having the top five most expensive hotel room rates in the world.

NYC rates have risen 29% since Jan, with an average of \$728 a night, followed by Washington DC (\$631), Boston (\$622), Chicago (\$753), Ottawa (\$573) and Los Angeles, which dropped to \$372, according to FCM Consulting.

NCLH status match move

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) has launched a new Loyalty Status Honoring Program, which acknowledges the loyalty status guests have earned across all three of the company's cruise brands - Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises, and Regent Seven Seas Cruises (RSSC).

Members of NCL's Latitudes Rewards, Oceania's Oceania Club, and RSSC's Seven Seas Society can have their loyalty tier honoured at the closest corresponding tier across the brands on a per-cruise basis, beginning with sailings departing 15 Oct.

Status matching is not automatic and must be requested by guests at least 10 days prior to departure, with agents able to submit on behalf of their clients.

“With the new Loyalty Status Honoring Program, our guests can experience more of what makes each brand special, while still enjoying the loyalty recognition



they have worked hard to achieve,” said Harry Sommer, NCLH President and CEO.

MEANWHILE, Oceania Cruises and RSSC have embarked on an organisational restructure to support their growth strategies in Asia Pacific.

Lisa Pile (**pictured**), VP and GM, Asia Pacific for RSSC, has now assumed additional responsibility for Oceania Cruises in Asia.

Constance Seck also returns to the company as Director of Sales, Southeast Asia for Oceania Cruises and RSSC, while James Sitters will continue as Director of Sales, Australia & New Zealand, for Oceania Cruises. *JM*

Major DIY mistakes

NEARLY six in 10 Australians have made serious mistakes when booking their own flights, hotels and activities, according to a new survey by Insure&Go.

The nationally represented poll of 1,009 Aussies found 83% prefer to research and make their own travel arrangements, however 57% have lost significant sums of money by doing so.

Common errors include paying too much, choosing a hotel in an unsafe area or one of poor quality, and losing refunds by missing connecting flights.

Two-thirds of respondents say they use online hotel booking sites for their accommodation, with 28% using aggregators to find airfare deals and 26% finding tours through online platforms.

Only one-quarter said they prefer to book directly with specific travel providers, with 17% saying they put the majority of their trust in travel agents to make their bookings.



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Naughton to step down

AIR Canada General Manager Australia and New Zealand Vic Naughton (**pictured**) will step down from his role at the end of Oct after eight years, the carrier confirmed (**TD** breaking news).

In that time, Naughton has guided Air Canada through a period of strong growth, which saw Sydney services to Vancouver increased to daily during peak seasons and Brisbane added to the carrier's network year-round.

Other highlights included the



brief addition of Melbourne to the network in 2017 - an expansion that was only curtailed by the COVID pandemic.

Naughton said the decision to leave what he considered his "dream job" was not an easy one.

"It has been a real privilege to lead Air Canada through an exciting period of expansion and to see Vancouver established as a genuine North American gateway for Australian travellers," Naughton said.

"However, I've reached a point in my career where I feel it is time to explore new opportunities and challenges," he added. *ML*

Ongarello back at VA

MATTHEW Ongarello has returned to Virgin Australia in a new role as the carrier's Group Head of Consumer Public Relations and Brand.

After a year working with Virgin Group in London, Ongarello's new role sees him guide PR, brand strategy and creative direction for both Virgin Australia and Velocity.

US shutdown impact

AMERICA'S travel economy would lose US\$1 billion (A\$1.5b) every week in the event of a full government shutdown, the US Travel Association has warned.

In a letter to the US Congressional leadership, association President and CEO Geoff Freeman said the "wholly preventable" blow will affect millions of travellers and businesses while placing strain on an overextended workforce.

Despite this, TSA officers and air traffic controllers are considered essential workers, however will be working without pay for the duration of the shutdown.

An Ipsos study survey showed 60% of Americans would cancel or avoid air travel in the event of a shutdown, with 81% believing it to be bad for the economy.

The US Government is due to shut down at 12:01am on 01 Oct if a new federal funding bill, Continuing Resolution, does not pass Congress in time.

Vic shines differently

PLAYERS from national netball team Australian Diamonds will front a new tourism push to help drive more visitors to Victoria.

As part of the state govt's tie-up with Netball Australia, the state's new 'Every bit different' campaign will feature players including Jo Weston, Liz Watson, Hannah Mundy, Sophie Garbin, Kate Moloney, Sunday Aryang, and Amy Parmenter.

Kicking off this week, new advertising showcasing Victoria and upcoming matches in Oct will be rolled out across television, out-of-home spots such as billboards, and digital media channels across the country and New Zealand.

"The Diamonds are iconic on and off the court - and these new tourism ads will help Victoria sparkle on the national stage while supporting a hugely popular sport here in the state," said Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Steve Dimopoulos.



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Aussies get more Choice

CHOICE Hotels International has expanded its footprint across Australia and New Zealand with the addition of three properties to its portfolio.

Comfort Inn Robe (pictured) has joined the network in South Australia, while in Melbourne, the group has strengthened its presence with Quality Apartments North Melbourne.

On New Zealand's North Island, Choice Hotels has added Comfort Inn Sunset in Thames, a historic town known for its gold rush heritage and natural beauty.

Positioned at the gateway to the Coromandel Peninsula, the rebranded Comfort Inn Sunset marks continued growth for Choice Hotels in New Zealand.

"We're delighted to welcome these new properties to our growing portfolio," said Choice Hotels APAC CEO Trent Fraser.

"It is especially exciting to see this growth happening across both Australia and New Zealand, with new properties joining us in iconic regional towns as well as key city locations."

These three hotels also join the Choice Privileges program, Choice



Hotels' travel rewards program, where members can earn and redeem points for reward nights at properties across 7,500 Choice-branded hotels, spanning a diverse portfolio of brands in 46 countries and territories. *JM*

HAL's foodie pizzazz

HOLLAND America Line (HAL) has enhanced its Grand Voyages in 2026 with members of its Culinary Ambassador program to join select segments.

Global fresh fish ambassador Chef Masaharu Morimoto, acclaimed Seattle restaurateur Chef Ethan Stowell and founder and CEO of Art of Tea Steve Schwartz will join segments of the 133-day 'Grand World Voyage'.

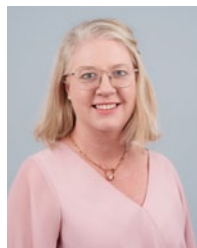
Additionally, acclaimed chocolatier Jacques Torres will join a portion of the 93-day 'Grand Australia and New Zealand Voyage', bringing exclusive events to guests on board.

The two Grand Voyages will meet on 07 Mar in Sydney when *Volendam* crosses paths with *Zaandam* as the two ships dock for an overnight stay.

While both ships are in port, Torres will host a Chocolate Teatime aboard for all guests, with creations crafted by 'Mr. Chocolate' himself.

ATIA UPDATE

from Nina Hedges, Compliance Manager



LET'S be honest, there are many businesses operating in Australia calling themselves travel

experts - and that number increases daily.

Every week, someone new pops up on TikTok or another medium with glossy content and equally amazing deals.

But when I see these, my mind immediately jumps to whether the people offering to fulfil these travel dreams have any history of selling travel, provide clear terms and conditions, manage consumers' funds securely or indeed abide by any code of conduct whatsoever.

Increasingly, travel is starting to feel like the wild west.

Like me, you became a travel professional not only out of a passion for travel, but because you care about providing the highest quality of service to your clients.

One thing we do have is the ATIA Accreditation Tick - the mark of quality and a clear benchmark of excellence for professionals in our industry.

Accreditation is more than a logo; it is an endorsement that

a business is credible and it separates you from those that are less reputable.

And let's be honest - when that important tick is missing, this also sends a message.

I see a future where the ATIA Accredited Tick is universal among professionals who take their responsibilities seriously and consumers don't have to question who they can trust.

The consumer message would be unmistakable: book with an ATIA-accredited business and you are in safe hands.

The stronger and more visible that message becomes, the harder it will be for businesses who do not meet the strict criteria to compete.

So I say this not to ruffle feathers but to inspire action: if you believe you operate at the highest level in this industry and you are not accredited, the question should not be 'why accreditation?' but 'why not?'.

I truly believe that the future of our industry depends on this: every Australian agent, tour operator and wholesaler operating at an elevated level should proudly represent the ATIA Accredited Tick.

When businesses do not, whether they intend to or not, they leave space for those less scrupulous to thrive.

Carrier stops playing

ICELANDIC budget carrier PLAY is closing operations after four years due to poor ticket sales, with "negative media coverage of its operations being a driving force", according to the airline. All flights have been cancelled.

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Credit shortfall

A SHORTFALL in carbon credits available for airlines to fulfil their obligations under the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) has been called out by carbon market shareholders and IATA.

The group has urged governments to act by issuing Letters of Authorisation (LoAs), which enable the release of CORSIA Eligible Emissions Units (EEUs) for purchase by airlines.

LoAs are official documents issued by host countries authorising the use of carbon credits for compliance.

IATA forecasts that airlines will require between 146 and 236 million EEUs during CORSIA's first phase between 2024 to 2026.

IATA calls out SAF tech bottleneck

AVIATION'S quest to reach net zero by 2050 is being curtailed by the slow pace of technology rather than insufficient sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) feedstock, according to a study by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

In the report, significant barriers were uncovered in turning feedstock into usable SAF.

As per the report, one of the serious issues is "the slow pace of technology rollout that would enable SAF to be produced from varied sources".

"Currently the only commercially scaled SAF production facilities use HEFA technology...converting used cooking oil into SAF."

The report also outlined that "competition with other potential users of the same feedstock" was causing issues too.



To reach net zero by 2050, 500 million tonnes of SAF will be required, which can only be achieved through maximising conversion efficiencies of both biomass and power-to-liquid SAF production by accelerating the rollout of new technology.

"We now have unequivocal evidence that if SAF production is prioritised then feedstock availability is not a barrier in the industry's path to decarbonisation," Willie Walsh (**pictured**), IATA Director General, said in the report.

"There is enough potential

feedstock from sustainable sources to reach net zero carbon emissions in 2050.

"However, this will only be accomplished with a major acceleration of the SAF industry's growth," he added.

"Governments, energy producers, investors, and the aviation sector must work together, de-risk investment, and accelerate rollout," said Marie Owens Thomsen, IATA's Senior Vice President Sustainability and Chief Economist.

"Policy certainty and cross-sector collaboration are essential to unlock the scale we need."

The report estimated that East Asia and the Pacific, including Australia, would produce 50 million tonnes of SAF by 2050, about half of what North America will produce.

CLICK HERE for the report. *DF*

AI eats up waste

CRUISE line A-ROSA has introduced smart waste analysis systems on three of its ships.

The technology automatically measures and analyses food waste and aids purchasing and menu planning for the ships.

It also supports targeted crew training and streamlines internal processes to ensure that less waste is created.

But major airlines stump up millions to help unbottle SAF

A GROUP of oneworld airlines plus Singapore Airlines have announced they will invest US\$150 million to push SAF technologies forward.

The investment fund is backed by cornerstone investors Alaska Airlines and American Airlines, plus IAG (British Airways, Vueling, Iberia, LEVEL, Aer Lingus), Cathay Pacific, and Japan Airlines, with Singapore Airlines as well, and is in

partnership with Breakthrough Energy Ventures (BEV).

BEV, through the investment fund, will aim to accelerate the global development of long-term aviation fuel solutions that are cost effective, scalable, and have lower emissions than conventional fuels and will also invest in "novel, next-generation SAF technologies".

"In Breakthrough Energy Ventures, we have a partner

with the scientific, technical and commercial expertise to make effective investment decisions that will create the market for next-generation fuels and power our industry in the years ahead," said Alaska Air Group Chief Executive, Ben Minicucci.

BEV is backed by well-known business people including Bill Gates, Andrew Forrest, Jeff Bezos, Jack Ma, Richard Branson, Dustin Moskovitz and more.

NEXT ISSUE:

Southeast Asia special report

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MONEY

WILL the shine come off the AUD before it's even begun? That's in *Money* today.

AU\$1 = US\$0.658

RECENTLY this column had hinted at the potential of the AUD hitting the US\$0.70 mark and above by the end of the year, with a strong 2026 ahead.

It would be great news for travellers if it came true, but CommBank economists have cast doubt over that possibility this week, suggesting a rise in the months ahead but the potential of another dip as we head into the new year.

"The AUD is benefiting from a weaker USD and strong investor sentiment," said Joseph Capurso, Head of Foreign Exchange, International & Geoeconomics.

But he asserted the gains may not last long.

"We expect the recovery to fade as the US economy regains momentum and Chinese growth remains subdued," he added.

A bottoming out of the USD in early 2026 is expected by Australia's largest bank, before a gradual recovery.

Wholesale rates this morning.

US	\$0.658
UK	£0.491
NZ	\$1.138
Euro	€0.561
Japan	¥97.74
Thailand	฿21.21
China	¥4.684
South Africa	11.356
Canada	\$0.915
Bitcoin	0.00000576

Top End upgrade plan



DARWIN Airport Resorts is preparing to undergo a significant upgrade, including new villas and executive suites, a refurbishment of existing rooms, and the launch of a Californian 'boho' style poolside restaurant.

The resort, which is made of three hotels - Novotel, Mercure and ibis - will receive three two-bedroom and five one-bedroom villas overlooking tropical bushland in the Rapid Creek Conservation Reserve.

A self-guided walking trail has been established in the reserve that includes information about bush tucker and medicinal plants and the area's cultural and environmental significance.

Additionally, as part of a full refurbishment of accommodation in the Novotel, five Executive Suites will be created, offering 55m² of space with a king-sized bed, a large lounge and entertaining area, 55-inch Chromecast TV, and views of the lagoon pool or the airport.

Other additions to the resort will include the launch of the Poolhouse Bar & Kitchen, a Californian-style concept that aims to capture the essence of

Darwin's tropical lifestyle.

Dishes emphasise local seafood with Californian twists, paired with Darwin beers, tropical-inspired cocktails and a wine list designed to complement the food and climate.

"We have enjoyed one of the strongest peak seasons in many years, and with further expansion of direct air services to Darwin Airport, ADG believes there is significant potential to enhance both our accommodation and hospitality," said Darwin Airport Resorts GM, Raymond Bragg. *JM*

Berkeley revamped

THE Berkeley River Lodge in remote Western Australia will emerge from its major three-year renovation and reopen to the public on 01 May next year.

Updates at the property include outdoor freestanding baths, an in-villa mini bar, and new experiences like barefoot BBQs and poolside massages.



Window Seat

WE'VE all experienced a serious snack craving and as part of a special one-off event, Air New Zealand and DoorDash are delivering delicious bikkies to Kiwis from the iconic Levain Bakery located in Manhattan, 14,000 kilometres away.

The celebration marks a new partnership, where DoorDash members can earn one AirPoints Dollar for every \$60 spent on the delivery platform.

The famously giant, gooey cookies will be available at an event in Auckland on Thu from 11am to 3pm.

Airpoints members who can show they have added their Airpoints number to their DoorDash account can pick up a cookie.

"By partnering with DoorDash, our Airpoints members can now turn everyday food deliveries into travel rewards, bringing them one step closer to their next adventure - whether that's a quick trip to Wellington or a once-in-a-lifetime journey to New York," said Air NZ General Manager Loyalty Alex Larsen.





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