

Helsinki in demand

AUSSIES will soon have even more opportunity to travel to Finland, with Emirates planning to launch a year-round route from Dubai to Helsinki on 01 Oct.

The carrier will deploy its Airbus A350-900 wide-body aircraft on the service, offering 312 seats across business, premium economy and economy class.

EK's decision follows a landmark move by Finnair to launch year-round flights to Helsinki from MEL in Oct (**TD** 18 Dec 2025).

QF in top three for safety

QANTAS is considered the world's third-safest carrier, according to AirlineRatings.com's new ranking for 2026.

The Flying Kangaroo beat rival Virgin Australia by several places in the full-service airline category, with the latter coming in at number nine, while across the Tasman, Air New Zealand fell between the two in sixth spot.

Etihad claimed the title of the world's safest airline, marking the first year a Gulf carrier has taken the number one spot, followed by Cathay Pacific.

AirlineRatings.com CEO Sharon Peterson said, "Etihad achieved this through a combination

of factors: a young fleet, advancements in cockpit safety, particularly around turbulence, a crash-free history, and the lowest incident rate per flight of any airline on the list."

Qatar, Emirates, Singapore Airlines, and EVA Air made up the rest of the top 10.

Meanwhile, Jetstar was named the second-safest low-cost carrier in the world, bested only by Cathay Pacific's low-cost subsidiary, HK Express. *JM*

TAAP kicks off sale

EXPEDIA Travel Agent Affiliate Program (TAAP) is giving advisors access to hotel discounts of at least 25% across thousands of properties worldwide as part of its new January Sale.

The promotion applies to bookings between 06 Jan and 02 Feb for travel 13 Sep 2026.

TAAP's inventory includes three million properties, 170,000 tours and attractions, 110 car rentals and 500 airlines.

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Viva goes to Britain

VIVA Holidays is inviting clients to experience Britain differently with its latest packages to the destination - see **page eight**.

Win a trip to Norway

TRAVEL agents can now secure a spot on Hurtigruten's upcoming mega famil to Norway - find out how on **page nine**.

Get inspired in Egypt

INSPIRING Vacations is shining a spotlight on its 23-day 'Essential Egypt, Jordan & Israel' small group tour - see the **back page**.

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of industry news, including a photo page from **Switzerland Tourism** and our **Luxury page**, a product profile from **Inspiring Vacations**, plus full pages from:

- Viva Holidays
- Hurtigruten

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Bargains causing a delay

AROUND seven in 10 travellers (72%) are delaying booking trips this year due to price, new research from Skyscanner shows.

While the appetite for travel is continuing to grow, with six in 10 respondents planning an overseas getaway in 2026, cost is the main barrier to finalising bookings.

A third (37%) of Aussies are chasing cheap getaways, and many are still undecided on their holiday plans for this year - 60% have not settled on dates and 40% are still choosing destinations.

Rather than slowing down on travel however, Aussies are instead taking a more flexible approach in order to save money.

More than half (55%) are opting to fly at different times, while others are compromising on accommodation, booking cheaper activities, or shortening trips.

Additionally, two-thirds are open to lesser-known destinations.

For those who are already booking, locking in flights (47%) and accommodation (41%) are at the top of the priority list.

Jan is the most common planning month, with 41% of respondents mapping out their holidays at the beginning of the year, with top motivators being the desire to relax and recharge (59%) and to have something to look forward to (54%).

Cairns is Australia's most affordable destination to fly to this year, according to Skyscanner's new 'Cheapest Destination Planner' feature, while across



the pond, Queenstown in New Zealand and Nadi in Fiji boast the lowest average return fares. *JM*

McLachlan sets sail

MAT McLachlan Battlefield Tours (MMBT) has opened sales for its Anzac Day 2027 river cruises in Holland and Belgium.

The sailings will be operated by AmaWaterways' *AmaSerena* during tulip time, exploring WWI, WWII and Waterloo battlefield history, commemorating Anzac Day at the Menin Gate in Ypres, and delving into the culture and cuisine of the region.

MMBT will also offer other history cruises in 2027, featuring exclusive battlefield touring and onboard history seminars.

Bookings for the cruises are open now - [CLICK HERE](#).

MEANWHILE, MMBT has issued a final call for Anzac Day 2026 bookings, with few spots remaining across its commemorative tour program - [CLICK HERE](#) to book.



Amangati sails closer



THE hull of *Amangati*, the debut vessel of Aman at Sea, made her way to the Port of Genoa last month to undergo outfitting in time for the scheduled 2027 delivery.

Aman at Sea is a partnership between Aman Group and Cruise Saudi, demonstrating the hotel group's desire to expand into the luxury cruising space.

Aman's 183-metre luxury vessel will hold 47 suites, each with a private balcony and features several amenities such as a jazz and beach club, four restaurants, and a spa complimented by a Japanese garden.

The luxury mega-yacht will

begin taking reservations for itineraries in early 2026.

Aman Group's expansion joins a list of luxury hotel brands making a push into the sector.

The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection was the pioneer of this trend, with its third vessel *Luminara* setting sail last month (*TD* 28 Jun 2024). *JB*

Adventurer stalled

CORAL *Adventurer*, which is currently detained in Papua New Guinea undergoing repairs, still has no set date for a resumption, *Travel Daily* understands.

The ship was detained by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority last week after running aground on a coral reef in the waters of PNG in Dec (*TD* 05 Jan).

In previous statements, a spokesperson from the cruise line said the ship had sustained "no significant damage".

At least two sailings have been cancelled so far, with all passengers offered full refunds.

Coral Adventurer had 80 passengers and 43 crew when it struck a coral reef on 27 Dec.

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Merger creates huge budget airline

SUN Country Airlines will soon disappear as it has been bought out for US\$1.5 billion by Allegiant to create a larger-scale leisure-focused airline.

The merger will formally take effect later this year, however both airlines will continue to operate as separate entities until granted a single operating certificate by the FAA.

A combined carrier will serve over 650 routes with 195 aircraft in its fleet, making it the second largest low-cost carrier in the US.

The 551 Allegiant routes focus on the small- to mid-sized holiday destinations throughout the US that are considered underserved by the market.

Sun Country's routes will carry the load for int'l flights, with ports in Canada, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

Aurora Georgiadis

AURORA Expeditions has announced the appointment of Madeline Georgiadis as global director of PR & communications.

The Sydney-based professional brings extensive experience in communications across major travel and entertainment brands, including P&O Cruises Australia, Carnival Cruise Line and Accor.

In her new role, Georgiadis is tasked with leading Aurora Expeditions' global PR strategy, strengthening media relationships worldwide and elevating the brand's global presence.

NZ's hidden nugget



QUEENSTOWN'S Nugget Point Hotel has been rebranded as the Coronet Ridge Resort, following a \$30 million redevelopment.

The new-look resort will house 41 rooms & suites, with brand-new amenities such as a fitness centre, private cinema, outdoor jacuzzi and Roman-style spa.

Elevation Bar & Restaurant will be run by executive chef Dominic Dsouza, having experience in Michelin-starred venues with dishes that combine Indian heritage and local ingredients.

Kiwi hotel group Capstone Hotel Management was selected to manage the new resort.

Founder and managing director Claire Davies has revealed the instant demand for bookings, "The feedback we've had from trade and media we've had through the property has been overwhelming, so the product's really hitting the mark in that luxury market," she said. *JB*

New ships on show

CRUISE Lines International Association (CLIA) will showcase seven brand-new cruise ships for 2026 as part of a virtual event running from 03-06 Feb.

Live online sessions will provide more details on Royal's *Legend of the Seas*; Emerald Cruises with *Emerald Kaia*; Explora Journeys with *EXPLORA III*; NCL with *Norwegian Luna* and RSSC with *Seven Seas Prestige*.

The sessions will detail accommodation styles, dining options, recreation and entertainment feature on board.

CLIA's event is only available for its registered members.

DL locks in 30 787s

DELTA Air Lines has placed an order with Boeing for 30 787-10 Dreamliners, with the option for up to 30 more.

The purchase agreement will support the US carrier's goal of growing its long-haul international services, as well as the renewal of its widebody fleet.



Window Seat

ONE Qantas pilot has spoken about how he spent more than half of the airline's 105-year history watching it evolve from the inside.

William Byrnes hung up his captain's hat yesterday after piloting his final flight on board the Adelaide to Sydney service, signalling the end of a 55-year career.

Since joining Qantas as a 16-year-old apprentice in 1971, Byrnes has seen many leaders come and go.

"CEOs were a lot different in the early days and naturally, have had to change their style because the company has changed over the years," said Byrnes told *The Australian*.

"If the company was run now like it was in the early days when I started, we wouldn't be here having this talk."

VA beats the blues

VIRGIN Australia has dropped one million sale fares, with domestic seats starting from \$49 one-way and international return flights from \$419.

Business class fares are also discounted to \$219 one-way and upgrades to premium extra legroom Economy X seats available from \$17 one-way.

The sale ends 11.59pm AEST Mon 19 Jan **HERE**, for travel between 18 Feb-16 Sep 2026.



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Michelle Newton on the trends you need to know.

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Loyalty scheme returns

DESIGNER Journeys is relaunching its travel agent loyalty scheme this year off the back of high engagement during last year's program.

In 2025, travel agents earned \$172,571 in incentives, inspiring the scheme's return in 2026, with a structure that supports agent loyalty and the development of long-term agent partnerships.

Unlike other loyalty models, the program was created to reward real, qualifying enquiries as well as confirmed bookings.

Agents can take part in bronze, gold and platinum status levels.

Advisors can earn enquiry incentives through gift cards of up to \$50 per entry, while incentives of up to \$250 are offered for each fully paid booking.

"The 2025 Loyalty Scheme delivered record engagement, with approximately 6,000 genuine enquiries from agents who earned over \$170,000 worth of incentives, exceeding all expectations," said CEO Matt McCann (pictured).



"We deliberately chose to reward genuine enquiries to ensure we stayed front of mind for all travel agents in need of a personalised travel product for their clients - and it worked.

"As a result, Designer Journeys is increasingly becoming part of agents' core suite of offerings, giving them access to a high-margin, personalised travel offering in a category that has traditionally been difficult to profit from," he added. *JHM*

Disney in Thailand?

THAILAND could become home to Southeast Asia's first Disneyland theme park, with the country considering the concept as a way to boost visitor numbers and stabilise arrivals throughout the year, according to Deputy PM Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn.

He said the government would first invite Disney to invest directly in the project, while a backup option would be to purchase a licence to operate the theme park locally.

The proposal has sparked interest among Thai investors, according to local news reports.

Trafalgar Harmonie

TRAFALGAR has revealed plans to add a third ship to its river fleet next year.

With capacity for 126 passengers, *Trafalgar Harmonie* will debut in Apr 2027 on the Seine River.

The vessel will offer a new itinerary, 'Best of the Seine with Paris & Normandy'.

EK hits it out of the park



EMIRATES has returned as the official airline of the Australian Open (AO), which kicked off this week in Melbourne.

The excitement began with the opening of Emirates' family-friendly AO Ballpark, which last year saw upwards of 26,000 children engage with tennis.

Located beneath an air traffic control tower, the Ballpark features the 'Emirates Little Travellers' tiny trikes baggage track for younger children, as well as a robot navigation challenge for older kids.

Also on offer are classic favourites like the Hot Shotz Mini Courts, waterslides, and live shows featuring popular characters Peppa Pig and Superman, alongside plenty of other tennis-themed activities.

The fun will continue on Sat 17 Jan with the Kids Tennis Day presented by Emirates, offering one-day-only activities across the entire precinct, followed by Emirates Day on Tue 20 Jan,

which includes giveaways, photo opportunities, and a special performance featuring the carrier's cabin crew.

In the air, Emirates passengers can enjoy live matches on the inflight entertainment system, complemented by AO-themed amenities and menus on board.

Barry Brown, EK divisional vice president Australasia, described the partnership as "a powerful affirmation of our deep, long-standing commitment to Australia - a relationship that now spans nearly three decades". *JM*

Luft links with Star

LUFTHANSA Group has partnered with Starlink to install high-speed internet on all fleets across all of its airlines.

The wi-fi will begin rolling out in the second half of 2026, with all planes to be equipped by 2029, and will be free to use for status customers and Travel ID users across all travel classes.



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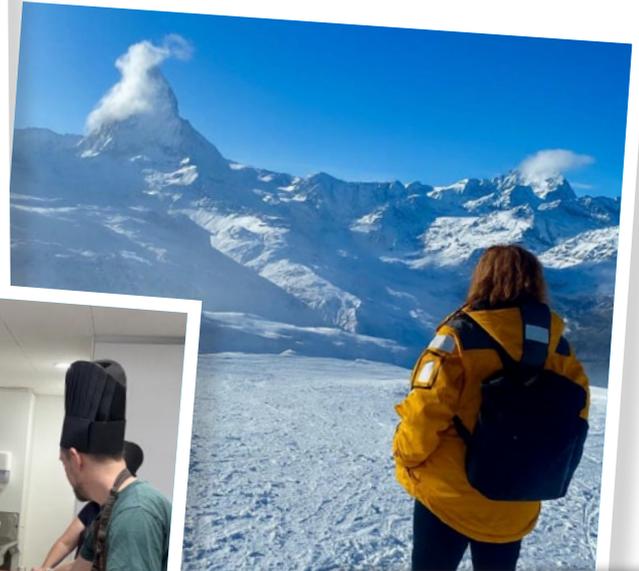
CONTINUING a much-loved tradition, Switzerland Tourism recently hosted an eight-day winter and Christmas famil for eight participants. Travelling by train, the itinerary included many iconic locations, such as Geneva, Montreux, Interlaken, Jungfrau Top of Europe, Zermatt and hidden gem St Gallen.

Further highlights featured chocolate and watchmaking workshops in Geneva and visiting the lakeside Christmas markets in Montreux - including the famous flying Santa. Guests were also able to enjoy night-time raclette rafting in Interlaken, see the snowfall on the Jungfrauoch, enjoy breathtaking views of the

Matterhorn, and see the UNESCO World Heritage Listed Abbey Library in St Gallen.

With so many Christmas card moments, the trip showcased the natural beauty, tranquillity and charm of travelling to Switzerland in the winter season.

The famil reinforced Switzerland Tourism's 'Travel Better' strategy including the benefits of off-peak travel and the ease and comfort of travelling by train and public transport.



LAUREN Egas from Travel Associates surveys the scene.



ENJOYING a chocolate making workshop.



RAFTING at night while eating raclette - where else but Switzerland (and Interlaken)?



BRAVING a blizzard to get the shot at the top of Jungfrau.



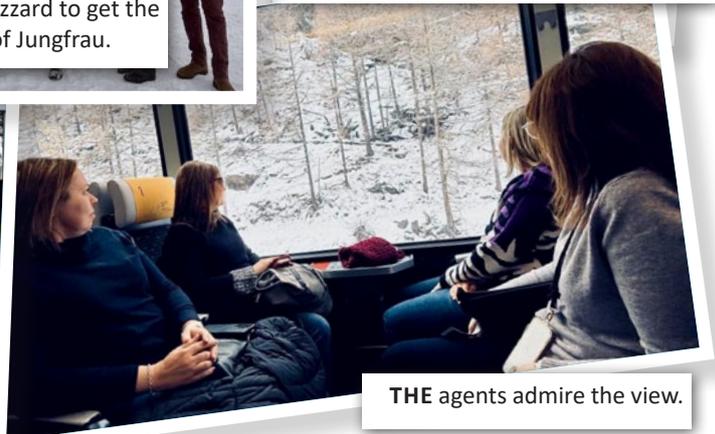
STEVE Demedio from Mind and Body Travel and Sam McPaike from APT on the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise cableway.



MONIKA Szak from Europe Travel snaps a scene from the train.



AT THE front of the United Nations HQ.



THE agents admire the view.

Hilton Oman trifecta

HILTON has introduced three new hotels at Barr Al Jissah on Oman's coastline, a waterfront destination famed for its natural beauty.

Al Husn Hotel Muscat combines luxury with Omani heritage and features 180 guest rooms and suites with uninterrupted views of the Gulf of Oman.

Hilton Muscat Al Bandar at Barr Al Jissah provides a lifestyle and business hub with state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor event spaces, including a ballroom capable of hosting up to 850 guests.

Meanwhile DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Al Waha offers family-friendly accommodation in a village-like environment that features 302 spacious guest rooms and suites.

The trio of hotels share extensive recreational, dining, and leisure amenities at the Barr Al Jissah complex, and boast 500 metres of private beach front.



Armani JV will create more hotels globally

A PORTFOLIO of Armani Hotels & Resorts in select global destinations has been flagged via the creation of a joint-venture between Symphony Global LLC and Giorgio Armani Group, a partnership that has already created success for the fashion brand in the hotel space.

Symphony Global LLC, Mohamed Alabbar's private investment firm, has significant experience in creating and developing businesses across the hospitality and retail sectors, and has previously partnered with Armani to create the Armani Hotel Dubai, located in the Burj Khalifa, and the Armani Hotel on Via Manzoni in Milan.

The new agreement sees Symphony Global gain worldwide exclusivity for the development of Armani Hotels & Resorts, with the



JV based in Milan and Dubai.

The venture is a 20-year partnership - plus an additional 10-year renewal option - with each new development being flagged as a complete lifestyle development, from building to interiors and service standards.

"This joint-venture builds on a partnership that has already proved its strength over time,"

Giuseppe Marsocci, CEO of the Armani Group, said.

"The success of Armani Hotel Dubai and Armani Hotel Milan, together with the upcoming Armani Hotel at Diriyah Gate, Riyadh (planned for 2027), clearly demonstrates how our design philosophy and our approach to hospitality have strong appeal to today's global luxury client." *DF*

IHG 25% off sale

IHG Hotels & Resorts is kicking off 2026 by extending its 25% off promotion on stays for IHG One Rewards members and 20% off for non-members across the Asia-Pacific region.

The 'Your Year in Travel' promotion is available across more than 270 participating hotels, including Regent Hotels & Resorts, InterContinental, Vignette, Kimpton, Hotel Indigo, Crowne Plaza and more.

Hannah St Melbourne is open for business

BOUTIQUE luxury hotel Hannah St has officially announced its opening, after soft launching bookings towards the end of last year.

"Melbourne has a soft spot for underground openings, so it's fitting that Hannah St Hotel slipped quietly into the Southbank scene late last year," the statement read.

Designed by Flack Studio, the \$150 million hotel celebrates art, architecture, and cultural connection, offering guests

what it calls an "immersive experience that could only belong in Melbourne".

The hotel features 188 rooms and suites featuring custom furniture, rich textures, curated minibars, premium amenities and Marshall speakers.

"It's part grand hotel, part underground bar, part cultural clubhouse," said Designer David Flack, founder and principal of Flack Studio.

"We've created a space that feels lived-in," he added.

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The **Shepard Mayfair** in London is set to open this year. The complex sits at 3121.5 sqm and includes 82 rooms and suites across six floors. Every room has a unique layout that accommodates the space as well as subtle nods to British craftsmanship in curved upholstery, red and blue velvet finishes and light tonal palettes. There are three food and drink options at the Fayre restaurant, The Lounge cafe and Teddy's cocktail bar



The **St. Regis Singapore** has completed extensive renovations to its rooms and suites, dining concepts and conference spaces. The improved 229 rooms now include sustainable features such as motion-activated lighting and portable water taps. The three new dining spaces include an Italian restaurant called Sophia, The St.Regis Bar inspired by Manhattan speakeasies and a cafe lobby known as The Tea Room.



Construction has commenced on **The Residences at Intercontinental Phuket**, with completion set for 2027. The Kamala Bay property in Thailand will include 111 residences ranging from one-bedroom suites to five-bedroom penthouses - all finished with stone facades and jade marble. Part of the property will include nearly 2,000 square metres of green space with the Paradise Garden Court after the refurbishment.



Hyatt's **Secrets Playa Mujeres Golf & Spa Resort** north of Cancun has completed its major renovation. The adults-only resort features 424 suites with a fresh new coastal design. On top of this, guests can enjoy a refurbished ocean-view restaurant and private beach club, with the day spa opening next month. The resort complex will be surrounded by an 18-hole golf course designed by Greg Norman.



The **JW Marriott Las Vegas and Rampart Casino** have merged to form the Summerlin Resort. The \$75 million redevelopment houses 549 rooms and suites with 98 including balconies and 11 with terraces. Amenities include a brand-new conference space, fitness centre and relaxation area, as well as three new dining concepts, and two fine dining restaurants called ai Pazzi and Wineaux.

BNE clears the clutter



BRISBANE Airport has raised \$160,000 for charity through its annual Lost Property Auction.

More than 800 items went under the hammer, all of them left behind by some of the airport's 24 million pax that passed through in 2025.

The most expensive item sold was a Bvlgari gold diamond necklace, valued at over \$11,000, which sold for just \$1,650.

The biggest steal of the auction was a Samsung display monitor, valued at around \$1,200, selling for just \$2.

This year, special items were also auctioned off to commemorate the airport's 100-year anniversary such as plane seats, departure signs, flight recorders, 12 months of airport parking and an air side tour.

BNE's CEO Gert-Jan De Graaf announced that this year's auction was one of the biggest the airport has ever hosted.

"The results from Brisbane Airport's Lost Property Auction have shattered all previous fundraising records, with this year's treasure trove

topping our previous result of \$90,000 last year," he explained.

"Thanks to some fierce bidding, these forgotten items have created some unforgettable outcomes." JB

Phuket's penthouse

PHUKET Beach resort Devasom Khao Lak has introduced its brand new penthouse experience, Sky Villa Moments.

The package gives travellers access to the hotel's two-bedroom penthouse, including a private infinity pool, sky garden and butler service.

Those who book the package will also receive transfers to and from the airport, a three-course dinner at the nearby Takola Thai Restaurant, as well as a welcome spa treatment.

Prices for the package start from A\$2,837 per night.



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Tick off 'must see' bucket list experiences such as the Great Pyramids, Sphinx, the Valley of the Kings, the ancient city of Petra, floating in the Dead Sea, and the holy cities of Jerusalem and Nazareth. This small group experience - featuring a maximum of 20 guests and private transportation throughout - combines ancient wonders and cultural treasures into a truly memorable tour. With a carefully-curated itinerary, designed to heighten your time on the ground, this tour also includes domestic flights, and home-cooked meals in Luxor and a Nubian Village.

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