

## Today's issue of TD

*Travel Daily* has six pages of news, including our **Sustainability** page, plus full pages from:

- Silversea
- Entire Travel Group

## AGT settles Echidna

### CONSERVATION-LED

Echidna Walkabout Tours will soon transition to Australian Geographic Travel (AGT), following an acquisition process that commenced in 2023.

Echidna founder Roger Smith will also retire from the business next month, handing over the reins to AGT, led by managing director Birgit Bourne.

Smith described the shift as "a defining move for conservation travel in Australia".

"It is a massive boost for both companies allowing us to share alternative and ethical travel ideas and resources to our clients," Smith said.

Meanwhile, AGT has its sights on becoming more B2B-focused and is now in conversation with a number of agency networks.

At the moment, trade currently accounts for only 10% of domestic bookings, although GM Bryan Arnicar said he hopes to see that one day increase to 50%.

## Hurry for showcase

**THE** travel industry is being encouraged to score some of the final places to Entire Travel Group's Travel Showcase & Soiree taking place in Feb - see **p8**.

## FCTG names Kiwi chiefs

**FLIGHT** Centre Travel Group (FCTG) has appointed Heidi Walker to the role of country manager New Zealand.

Her promotion is accompanied by the naming of chief financial officer Terrance Blokker as deputy country manager, and follows several restructures across the Tasman for the group.

FCTG managing director Graham Turner said the appointments will help the business guide future growth in an important market.

"We're delighted to appoint Heidi and Terence into these roles, two highly respected leaders with deep experience and a genuine passion for our teams,



brands and customers," he said.

"New Zealand is an incredibly important market for us... their leadership gives us great confidence and real brightness for the future," Turner added.

Heidi brings more than 25 years of experience with FCTG to the table, starting in the supply business at Ticket Centre before transitioning into retail and returning to lead the brand in New Zealand as general manager.

Reflecting on her promotion, Walker said she would continue the strong sense of team pride already cultivated in the market.

"I'm excited by the opportunity to lead our NZ community and work collaboratively across our brands to continue to deliver exceptional travel experiences that matter to Kiwis," she said.

In Nov, FCTG made its NZ MD and Supply Leader Victoria Courtney redundant as the business shifted to a more brand-based approach (**TD** 20 Nov). **AB**

## Six Senses London

**THE** Six Senses brand will make its UK debut in Mar with the opening of Six Senses London.

The UK capital was originally flagged for an opening date in 2023 (**TD** 19 Dec 2019), however plans were pushed back due to the complexities involved with redeveloping the historic Whiteley building.

Six Senses London will feature 109 rooms and suites, 14 residences, and the brand's first private members club - the Six Senses Place London.

Other amenities include a premium spa and wellness zone, dining at Whiteley's Kitchen, Bar and Cafe, and spaces dedicated to discussions about sustainability.

**CLICK HERE** for reservations.

## Intrepid secondment

**FURTHER** to Intrepid's decision to appoint Mariana Karavias to a short-term secondment to head of sales ANZ (**TD** 19 Jan), the company has confirmed Karen Shepherd has moved into a temporary project lead position.

The moves support domestic projects and staff development.

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## Louvre hike & strike

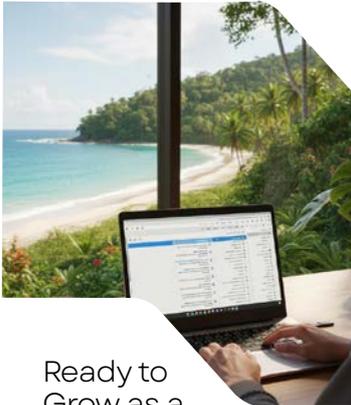
**STANDARD** tickets to enter the Louvre have increased from €22 to €37 for non-European visitors as French authorities look to add €20 million in annual revenue.

**MEANWHILE**, the attraction is closed today as staff strike for better pay, added recruitment, and improved maintenance.



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## New Cal looks to Aussies

**THE** New Caledonian Government has unveiled a new tourism recovery plan, which will see it target Australia as one of its main source markets.

With the aim of attracting at least 250,000 visitors by 2032, the plan is backed by a significant increase in the destination's international tourism promotion budget, now \$400 million CP francs (A\$5.8m), up from 250 million CP francs (A\$3.6m).

Alongside Australia, New Zealand and Japan were also identified as focus markets, which will see New Caledonia work to attract new international airlines.



Additionally, the recovery plan will encourage diverse accommodation types, including eco-lodges, guesthouses, and homestays, along with the introduction of a New Caledonian excellence label highlighting premium quality, sustainability and high-end experiences.

An annual calendar of major cultural and sporting events will also be implemented, while a fresh international tourism brand is also in the works.

The strategy follows a slow recovery for New Caledonia after a period of civil unrest, which saw visitation curtailed in 2024 due to the shutdown of Noumea Airport and a curfew that was previously in place for many months (*TD* 03 Dec 2024).

Last year, the country's tourism body launched an updated B2B platform to equip the trade with new tools to promote the destination (*TD* 18 Nov 2025). *JM*

## IATA fumes at call

**THE** International Air Transport Association (IATA) has expressed "deep concerns" over the European Parliament's decision to maintain compensation for passengers impacted by cancelled or delayed flights.

Air travellers in Europe are entitled to cash compensation if their flight is cancelled at short notice, is delayed by three hours or more, and if the disruption was within the airline's control.

IATA has argued the move ignores passenger preferences, who "consistently report" that they would prefer to arrive late than not at all.

The airline body was also advocating for the three-hour late threshold to be lifted to match operational realities of carriers.

## Come sail with Chimu

**CHIMU** Adventures is offering travel agents an eight-day faml on its Greenland itinerary, departing 05 Sep.

Between now and 31 Mar, advisors must be a top-seller of Chimu's Antarctic and Arctic expedition cruises - more **HERE**.

## Quark talks savings

**AGENTS** can learn about Quark Expeditions' current wave season offers by tuning into its Polar Bonus webinar on Wed 28 Jan at 8.15am AEDT **HERE**.

Attendees will hear about the savings they can offer clients as well as Quark's Arctic and Antarctica expeditions.

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## SIA deepens Air India ties

AIR India and Singapore Airlines (SIA) have forged a new commercial cooperation framework agreement that will pave the way for bookings under one ticket and offer a more seamless network schedule.

The deal will also look to explore plans to enhance privileges beyond the current Star Alliance benefits for members of



the carriers' respective loyalty programs, as well as greater cross-participation of their corporate travel programs.

A further update on loyalty benefits is expected to be finalised in the next few months.

While the short-term goal will be to expand the number of routes available between Singapore and India, the new agreement also lays the groundwork to broaden cooperation in other markets.

The deal remains subject to regulatory approvals.

**Pictured:** Air India chief executive officer and managing director Campbell Wilson with SIA chief executive officer Goh Choon Phong this week. *AB*

## Solomon gets lift

NEW routes and expanded operations to Australia are all part of the latest expansion of Solomon Airlines' int'l schedule.

The carrier is re-establishing a weekly flight between Honiara and Port Vila, as well as flights to Port Moresby, which will launch on 30 and 31 Mar respectively.

There will also be a second weekly flight from Espiritu Santo to Brisbane on Sat, which will be introduced from Apr.

## Sixty-Five in Brissy

RADISSON Hotel Group has signed Sixty-Five Hotel Brisbane, a member of Radisson Individuals, which marks the brand's Queensland debut.

Located in Brisbane's CBD, the fully renovated hotel is set to open in the second quarter of this year, offering 59 upscale rooms and an entertainment area along with dedicated workspaces on the lower ground level.

The compact, five-storey building sits within close proximity of Roma Street Station and is a 20-minute drive from Brisbane Airport.

"Brisbane is a strategic priority for Radisson Hotel Group, and this signing reflects our focused approach to expanding in tier one cities with assets that are well-located, commercially resilient and aligned with evolving guest expectations," said Radisson Hotel Group's director of development for Australasia, Danilo Curcuruto.

## Safari another way

EMIRATES Group's experiences division Arabian Adventures has introduced a luxury desert experience inside the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve.

The new Nomad Garden promises guests a reimagined desert safari stay with premium dining, immersive entertainment, and a more authentic dive into Arabian culture than rivals.

Included in the experience are dune explorations with an expert guide, three-course Arabic dinner, live Oud music and signature fire show, and canapes at the Whispering Angel Sunset Lounge.

Now open for bookings, prices start from around A\$487 per person and are available all evenings except Mon.



# YEAH

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## WWT bolsters team

**WENDY** Wu Tours has boosted its national trade support network with the appointment of Janeen Harris as state account manager - Qld North.

Harris brings expertise in retail travel, insurance and touring, with previous roles at Flight Centre, Cover-More and AAT Kings.

## New execs at Baillie

**BAILLIE** Lodges and Tierra Hotels is bolstering its team with several new hires.

Industry leader Stephen Marshall starts his new role today as VP, global sales and Zach Sennett is now VP, operations - America, reporting to CEO Michael Crawford.

Other new employees include CFO Alex Cameron, as well as Brendan Russo, VP, strategic capital; Rishi Kejiriwal, director, M&Q and strategy; and former CEO Michael Moret-Lalli who is now senior M&A advisor.

## Queens on way to Australia

**CUNARD'S** *Queen Mary 2* and *Queen Anne* have both set sail on world voyages and will call into Australia and NZ in Mar.

*Queen Mary 2* has embarked from Southampton, UK on a 108-night voyage crossing the Atlantic to the Caribbean, before moving through the Panama Canal to the Pacific Ocean.

The vessel will call at Sydney Harbour on 04 Mar, before travelling to Asia, Africa and Europe, and finishing back in Southampton on 30 Apr.

Meanwhile, *Queen Anne* is currently on her 110-night voyage, with scheduled calls in Cape Town, Singapore, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Colombo and Honolulu, before she makes her way to Sydney on 16 Mar.

Both voyages will boast a range of guest speakers throughout their journeys.

On *Queen Mary 2*, guests will hear from award-winning journalist and counter-terrorism



expert Margaret Gilmore, former pilot Jeff Skiles, who flew alongside Captain Chesley 'Sully' Sullenberger during the 'Miracle on the Hudson', and Zelda La Grange, former private secretary to Nelson Mandela.

*Queen Anne's* special guest lineup features *The Crocodile Hunter* producer John Stainton, US sprinter Tyree Washington, & solo cellist Julian Lloyd Webber. JB

## Easy Dusit for hotels

**THAI** hotel developer Dusit International enjoyed a record-breaking 2025 with 24 hotels.

The brand opened several properties across India, Japan, the Maldives, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

These include Dusit Hotel AG Park in Chengdu, China; dusitD2 Feydhoo Maldives; as well as the Tantawan Tented Camp in Chiang Rai, Thailand.

Dusit has also expanded its growth pipeline, signing six new properties across the Dusit Collection and Dusit Princess brands in a diverse mix of locations, including the Himalayan retreats of Solang and Kasol.

These signings have brought Dusit's active development pipeline to more than 50 properties worldwide, all scheduled to open within the next five years.

## SIA exits Canada

**SINGAPORE** Airlines ended all of its Canadian operations last week following a turbulent 40-year history that included three bilateral agreements.

Air Canada is now the only airline offering non-stop services between the two countries.

SIA first exited Canada in 2009 due to the global financial crisis, then returned 12 years later.

Sources suggest strong competition was a major factor.

## Velocity's platform

**VIRGIN** Australia's Velocity Frequent Flyer program is "pointing" out the savvy way to holiday in a new campaign.

Developed by creative agency Special, the new push aims to set Velocity apart in an increasingly crowded loyalty market.

The resulting creative platform is a celebration of the everyday wins that come with being a Velocity member, highlighting how consumers can turn everyday spending into meaningful holiday experiences.

A hero film, as well as social and out-of-home activations, will showcase the campaign.

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## CX pushes CH SAF after report

CATHAY Pacific has welcomed the findings of a new report from Peking University's National School of Development that has flagged cost parity on SAF in China in the future.

*Scaling Sustainable Aviation Fuel in China* highlighted the country's unique feedstock and manufacturing advantages, and projected long-term cost implications across different technical production paths.

It also suggested the Power-to-Liquid (PtL) path showed the greatest potential in reducing long-term costs.

The study noted that, with appropriate policy support, SAF produced locally via PtL may achieve price parity with conventional jet fuel when the cumulative eSAF output reached 1.6 million tonnes.

Cathay general manager sustainability Grace Cheung said, "This...is encouraging, as it demonstrates the long-term potential for cost parity between SAF and conventional jet fuel, provided there is sufficient support for the development of new technologies and large-scale SAF production, along with policies that support SAF deployment from both demand and supply sides."

## Bali Zoo jumps off elephant rides

JUST weeks after another Indonesian wildlife sanctuary was criticised for its treatment of elephants (**TD** 06 Jan), Bali Zoo has announced it is ending elephant rides at the park.

It joins TSI Bogor, TSI Prigen and A'Famosa in prohibiting the riding of the animals, albeit more than a year after the decision was made at those respective establishments.

Earlier this month it was reported that Bali's Mason Elephant Park had been accused of allegedly abusing elephants, with PETA and the World Animal Protection Organization (WAPO) launching scathing attacks on the park, before the park launched a defence of its own.

Suzanne Milthorpe, head of campaigns for WAPO ANZ, stressed that, "this progress for captive elephants follows years



of tireless advocacy and on-the-ground engagement by World Animal Protection.

"Our 2018 and 2023 reports on captive wildlife entertainment venues in Bali shone a spotlight

on the cruelty that wild animals like elephants endure at several of the venues, including the two that have announced the riding ban [this week]," she added.

WAPO asserted that Mason Elephant Park was still allowing the riding of elephants, as were many others in the country.

Milthorpe pleaded with tourists to make responsible decisions rather than choose a "once-in-a-lifetime encounter" that "means a lifetime of misery" for the animals at the parks.

She added that "Bali Zoo ending elephant riding sends a strong signal to the tourism industry that elephant riding belongs in the history books".

Animals rights groups have long called for the banning of elephant rides in tourism, arguing the industry is reliant on cruel conditions and harsh training. *DF*

## Raffles awarded

SINGAPORE'S Raffles Sentosa has been awarded Green Globe Certification for sustainability in the hospitality industry.

Recipients of Green Globe Certification are rigorously assessed across 44 criteria as well as over 380 compliance indicators before selection.

The resort sits amidst 100,000m<sup>2</sup> of greenery on Sentosa Island.

## Signature gives 11 grants for non-profits

TRAVEL Elevates, the non-profit arm of the Signature Travel Network, has revealed its 2026 Global Impact Grants, with a total of 11 grants issued to community projects across 10 countries.

The Travel Elevates board reviewed 79 applications with final selections based on projects it believed would create opportunities through education and economic

growth in the communities that they serve.

"Signature members now frequently visit or plan itineraries that include tours and volunteer opportunities at many of the community projects we support," Alex Sharpe, CEO of Signature Travel Network, said.

Since 2021, Travel Elevates has raised over \$2 million and funded 31 total grants.



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## MONEY

**WELCOME** to Money, TD's Tue feature on what the Australian dollar is doing.

**AU\$1 = US\$0.67**

**THERE** have been some small yet frequent movements for exchange rates between the Aussie dollar and some of the world's biggest currencies.

The AUD/USD dropped down as low as \$0.67 this week, amidst volatility created by renewed tariff threats between the United States and members of the EU over the ongoing Greenland dispute.

There is also concern over AUD/GBP as it dropped below £0.50 - a 10-month high - but MUFG is projecting the Aussie dollar to rise as yields move against the GBP.

It comes as welcome news to Aussies as commodity prices have boosted the AUD, especially for those who plan to travel to the UK this year.

The currency is also projected to make gains against the Yuan following China's trade surplus with Australia, as well as import growth rising for 1.9% to 5.7%, signifying strong relations between the two nations.

Wholesale rates this morning.

US	\$0.67
UK	£0.49
NZ	\$1.15
Euro	€0.57
Japan	¥106
Thailand	฿20.97
China	¥4.67
South Africa	11.00
Canada	\$0.93
Bitcoin	A\$0.000072

## Emirates serving kids



**EMIRATES** joined forces with the Australian Tennis Foundation (ATF) to host a group of children and young people on a once-in-a-lifetime experience at the Australian Open.

Twenty-five participants from Adelaide, along with their guardian or friends, were flown to Melbourne as part of the airline's 'Force for Good' program - a \$2.25 million, five-year program designed to inspire brighter futures for disadvantaged children through tennis.

As well as being immersed in the excitement of a Grand Slam, the young participants met tennis legends Casey Dellacqua and Pat Cash at the AO Ballpark presented by Emirates.

"Today is a celebration of the impact this program continues to have on children's lives," said Dean Cleaver, Emirates regional sales manager.

"We're not just introducing them to a sport - we are providing a pathway to build confidence, improve their physical health, and boost their mental wellbeing."

Afterwards, 85% of participants reported feeling more positive about themselves and their future, and 76% felt more

confident to try new things.

Throughout its 2025 pilot year, the Force for Good initiative introduced more than 2,000 marginalised kids and young people to tennis. *JM*

## Selling in the sun

**SUN** Island Tours has appointed Faye Vaughn as its new business development manager for WA and SA, in a part-time capacity.

Vaughn brings more than 10 years of travel industry experience, including more than three years spent at Wide Eyed Tours & Travel as its WA sales executive - a role she will continue to hold.

John Polyviou, joint chief executive of Sun Island Tours (pictured with Vaughn), said that Vaughn's appointment comes during a period of expansion for the company.

"SA and WA are key markets for us, and we look forward to being able to provide more face-to-face interaction and training for our valued agents," he commented.

The announcement comes just months after the appointment of Walter Nand for NSW and the ACT (*TD* 24 Sep 2025). *JB*

## Window Seat

**A BRITISH** fortune-teller who uses asparagus to make yearly prognostications has boldly predicted the British Asparagus Festival will be even more successful than usual.

Yes, without wanting to hurl accusations of bias at Jemima Packington - the Nostradamus of asparagus - she has thrown in a rather self-serving prophecy this year.

Alongside this, she forecasts that major flooding will cause damage to travel and tourism infrastructure in 2026.

In the world of sport, Packington said UK football will have a "tremendous World Cup", while in entertainment circles, there will be some unexpected deaths of showbiz and pop nobility.



## Tragedy in the Alps

**EIGHT** skiers have died following a series of catastrophic avalanches across Austria's alps.

The deadliest event occurred in the Gastein Valley and neighbouring Bad Hofgastein where two avalanches took the lives of five people.

More than 110km away in Pusterwald, another avalanche killed three Czech tourists.

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The background of the top half of the advertisement is a photograph of the Silver Ray cruise ship docked in the harbor of Valletta, Malta. The ship is white with a distinctive yellow funnel. The harbor is filled with blue water, and the city's historic stone buildings and fortifications are visible in the background under a clear sky.

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