

Do Britain different

INFINITY Holidays is inviting travellers to see Britain differently and escape the crowds by booking one of its packages. Find out more on **page eight**.

APT raises a glass

APT Travel Group recently celebrated its VIP partners at an event in Sydney, recognising their outstanding performance. See pictures from the night on **page nine** and **page 10**.



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More UAE flights on way

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group MD Graham Turner has been told that Etihad will resume some flights to Sydney and Melbourne tomorrow, so long as the safety of passengers can be assured.

Speaking with the ABC this morning, Turner said that while the situation remained "very fluid", if all goes according to plan, there should be around 24 Emirates flights an hour leaving Dubai from tomorrow, as well as a smaller number of Etihad services from Abu Dhabi to Australia.

If the plan holds, it will be welcome news to the roughly 24,000 Australian currently stranded in the UAE.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Penny Wong confirmed that she had been in contact with authorities in the UAE about accelerating commercial flight

options for Aussies.

"Obviously, it's unpredictable, we would say to people on the ground, you need to ensure you stay in contact with your airline in relation to that flight if you are on it," Wong said.

"Flights have been cancelled and changed at short notice."

Speaking with **TD** about the unfolding situation, senior tourism lecturer at the University of Technology Sydney, David Beirman, said that while the Federal Government has contingency plans in place for evacuation flights, it can only do so when the respective Gulf governments permit them.

"Neither DFAT or me can name a day when that will occur but it may not be that long," he said.

Beirman also said there are "high expectations" that evacuation flights will be operated for Aussies who, because of 'act of war' insurance clauses, have run out of money.

He also predicted a resurgence of trips to Europe via Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Manila and China following the conflict. **AB**

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of industry news, including our **Luxury** page, plus full pages from:

- **Infinity Holidays**
- **APT Travel Group**

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Tahiti route ticked

AIR Tahiti Nui has confirmed the return of direct flights between Sydney and the capital Papeete from 14 Dec.

As first reported by **Travel Daily** last month (**TD** 23 Feb), the upcoming service will operate two flights a week, and eliminate the need to stop in Auckland.

The carrier last flew the Sydney to Papeete route in 2009, with a direct route part of a new diversified destination strategy.

Tickets are now on sale. **AB**



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QF suspends PER direct

QANTAS' nonstop service between Perth and London will no longer be direct from today, as the carrier tweaks the route to cater for the needs of pax during the crisis in the Middle East.

A mandatory refuelling stop in Singapore is now in place, with Qantas stressing the decision is a temporary measure that will remain under constant review.

The revised route and stop will allow the airline to add an extra



50 to 60 passengers and fly with a full load.

This will be especially beneficial for Aussies travelling to Europe, who now have fewer carrier options and overall capacity access to make the trip, with the effective grounding of Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways.

Previously, the route had taken around 17 hours to complete, but a stop in Singapore is likely to add about three hours to the journey.

This is not the first time that Qantas has been forced to suspend its mammoth route from Perth, adding a stop in Singapore and changing air routes in 2024 when it received intelligence that Iran was on the verge of firing a barrage of retaliatory missiles at Israel (**TD** 15 Apr 2024). *AB*

Cruise ship threat

CRUISE ships caught up in the widening Iranian conflict may be docked in the Persian Gulf for the foreseeable future, after Iran threatened to set "ships ablaze" that pass through the only exit - the Strait of Hormuz.

According to CruiseMapper, vessels currently in the Persian Gulf belong to Celestyal Cruises, MSC Cruises, and Terra Nova Expeditions' *St. Helena* - see **Cruise Weekly** for the full details of the developing story. *AB*

AAT adds day tours

AAT Kings has launched an expanded 2026/27 day tour collection, which features 17 itineraries across the NT and Tropical North Queensland.

Among the new offering is the 'Uluru Culture & Kata Tjuta Trails', a Red Centre experience that explores Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, priced from \$155pp, and an Uluru BBQ dinner from \$219pp.

Travellers can also join an updated 'Kata Tjuta Sunset & Valley of the Winds Walk', which now includes sunset drinks and light snacks at Kata Tjuta at the end of the 5.4km trek, available from \$219pp.

AAT Kings will introduce the 'Alice Springs Highlights & Nature Escape', replacing the 'A Town Like Alice' tour, from \$189pp.

The tour encompasses the West MacDonnell Ranges, Simpsons Gap, Angkerle (Standley Chasm), the School of the Air and the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, with lunch included.

See the full day tour 2026/27 collection **HERE**. *JM*

All about Uniworld

UNIWORLD Boutique River Cruises has launched a new course within Uniworld University, highlighting the brand's upcoming offerings for 2026 and 2027.

Advisors who complete the course will gain insider knowledge on the five new ships set to join Uniworld's fleet by 2027, as well as the line's 50th anniversary programming.

The course will also cover the cruise and tour experiences set to launch next year - register **HERE**.

Payment power

TRAVELSOFT Pay, the new payment platform of Travelsoft Group, has partnered with Mastercard to deliver secure and scalable payment infrastructure for the global travel industry.

The collaboration aims to bring a new level of efficiency to travel payments by using the Mastercard Wholesale Program to issue on-demand virtual card numbers, enabling flexible, secure, and instant payments. *JM*



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Window Seat

IF ANY of our readers are in the market for a private island, they may be excited to hear that one has been freshly listed - and it comes with a slice of pop culture history.

Global superstar Shakira is looking to offload Bonds Cay, her 650-acre remote island in the northern Bahamas, around 60km from Nassau.

It was reportedly purchased by the Colombian singer for around A\$20 million two decades ago, and now it is going for twice the price.

Shakira, alongside Pink Floyd bassist Roger Walters, invested in the island with the idea of turning it into an artists' retreat, complete with luxury hotels and residences.

Bonds Cay boasts turquoise blue waters, white-sand beaches, protected coves and panoramic views of the Atlantic Ocean.

Corcoran CA Christie Bahamas, which is managing the sale, said: "Whether it be a world-class resort, an exclusive residential enclave, or an ultra-private family retreat, the scale of the island allows for extraordinary vision without compromising its natural beauty." *JM*



Aircraft stuck, EK takes off

EXCLUSIVE

MORE than 20 aircraft from Emirates, Qatar and Etihad are currently stranded in Australia, according to information **Travel Daily** has sourced from Australian airports.

Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide airports have all provided updated numbers on grounded aircraft, with Melbourne Tullamarine the most significantly affected, currently holding 10 aircraft.

That includes five jets from QR, four from EK and a single EY jet.

Sydney is the next most heavily impacted, with seven aircraft in long-term layover - the majority of those belonging to EK.

The Dubai-based airline has continued to operate its flights connecting Sydney with Auckland and Christchurch.

In Perth, there are three grounded aircraft, two belonging to QR and one to EK, while Adelaide has confirmed it has one EK and one QR aircraft sitting idle.

Brisbane Airport did not respond to **Travel Daily's** requests for an update.



Meanwhile, another EK aircraft is on its way to Australia with EK414 (**pictured**), an Airbus A380, now in the air, having taken off from DXB at approximately 9.30am AEDT (**TD** breaking news).

The flight was foreshadowed by Foreign Minister Penny Wong, who told ABC *Radio National* this morning that she understood EK would be putting an aircraft in the air to Australia.

The flight will be cutting it fine to make curfew at Sydney Airport, with a spokesperson for the hub telling **TD** that kind of dispensation was a matter for the Federal Department of Infrastructure to decide.

At the time of writing, no aircraft from either of the trio of airlines had departed on trips back to the Middle East. *DF*

Svenson joins SSCG

THE South Sea Cruises Group has appointed Tom Svenson (**pictured**) as its new sales manager for Australia and NZ.

In his role, Svenson will support travel agents and create new partnerships across the group's portfolio of brands, which include South Sea Cruises, Blue Lagoon Cruises, Yasawa Adventures Fiji, South Sea Sailing and Malamala Beach Club.

Svenson was most recently the New Zealand trade partnerships manager at Tourism Fiji, leading the tourism board's trade initiatives and promoting Fiji as a key destination for Kiwi travellers.

His resume also includes roles as a business development manager at Intrepid Travel and a Contiki tour leader in Europe, where he began his career in the travel industry. *JB*



JQ links WA to NZ

JETSTAR has announced a new seasonal non-stop service between Perth and Christchurch, launching 27 Oct 2026.

The flights will operate three times weekly through to Mar 2027, delivering more than 15,000 seats to Western Australia from New Zealand.

Additionally, the Qantas subsidiary will open a new cabin crew base at Perth Airport, creating 90 new jobs. *JM*

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Insurers to extend help

SOME travel insurers may extend the coverage date of policies to support customers impacted by airspace and airport closures, according to the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA), which has also declared the recent Middle East events as “a significant event”.

Under the declaration, an industry-wide taskforce has been established and the association has begun collecting and analysing claims data and consulting with members.

The ICA is also working with the Federal Government on a coordinated approach to support impacted Australians.

“We encourage those in transit, or with upcoming travel plans, to speak to their insurer if they have suffered a loss and believe they have a claim,” said ICA CEO Andrew Hall.

“Each claim is assessed on its own merit and insurers are armed



with information to support those impacted,” he added.

Standard exclusions for war and conflict remain across most insurance products globally, the ICA noted, although nib Health told its customers that policies purchased before an event may cover some unexpected disruptions.

“Check your policy, understand your entitlements, and if you need help, get in touch with your travel insurer as soon as possible,” said Dylan Wilkinson, general manager, APAC & nib travel marketing, nib Group. *JHM*

McIntyre joins Accor

ACCOR will welcome on board Rob McIntyre as VP operations for NZ and Fiji, effective 13 Apr.

McIntyre brings deep expertise and understanding of the New Zealand market and was most recently based in Singapore, where he led the property group’s operations internationally, including the flagship Pullman Singapore Orchard. *JHM*

Hilton grows in Nam

HILTON Quang Hanh Onsen Resort has opened, marking the company’s third site in Vietnam.

The resort is a 30-minute drive from Ha Long and located alongside hot mineral springs of Quang Hanh.

There are 178 villas and 38 rooms with access to Yoko Onsen Quang Hanh, which includes 27 onsen baths and 18 baths across male, female and mixed areas, as well as sauna and spa facilities, and an indoor pool. *JB*

Solstice upgrades

CELEBRITY Solstice is ready to resume operations after undergoing a series of enhancements during a 45-day dry dock period.

The ship’s top deck has been transformed into Sunset Park - a half-acre, aft-facing outdoor lounge with an expanded Sunset Bar, private cabanas, a large movie screen and a cafe.

The vessel now also boasts upgraded staterooms, as well as four new stateroom categories, including the luxurious Panoramic Infinite Veranda Suites.

Other additions include two new dining venues, the Italian-inspired Trattoria Rossa and the Fine Cut Steakhouse, as well as the Boulevard Lounge, a cabaret-style space with an adjacent bar. *JM*



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Gulf Air waives fees

GULF Air is allowing all guests holding tickets issued on or before 28 Feb and scheduled to depart between 28 Feb and 07 Mar to rebook free of charge.

The policy update comes as travellers are impacted by the closure of Bahrain airspace.

Rebooking and the new departure must take place no later than 18 Mar, with any difference in fare waived.

Additionally, pax are entitled to a full refund for unused tickets, and a 50% refund of the base fare for partly used taxes. *JM*

Luck of the Irish deal

CELTIC-FOCUSED travel company Brendan Vacations has launched its 'Taking You Beyond the Green' sale, offering up to \$1,000 in savings on tours across Ireland and Scotland.

The promo also celebrates the company's recent debut in Australia (*TD* 10 Nov 2025). *JB*

NCLH laments mistakes

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) has conceded its recent underperformance is largely self-inflicted, pointing to poorly timed capacity expansion and internal operational shortcomings rather than a broader weakness in demand.

The company's new president and CEO John Chidsey has admitted that "execution and cross-functional alignment have fallen short".

"Our priority is to act urgently to address these gaps by improving coordination, reinforcing accountability, and strengthening financial discipline across the organisation," he said.

The comments follow the sudden departure of Chidsey's predecessor, Harry Sommer, last month (*TD* 13 Feb).

NCLH CFO Mark Kempa backed Chidsey's statements, telling analysts on an earnings call that the company's performance



struggles are mostly "self-inflicted wounds", acknowledging that the line's 40% capacity increase into the Caribbean was "premature".

Despite some missteps in strategy, NCLH still managed to post a strong fourth quarter and full-year result this week, with total revenue growing 3.7% to US\$9.8 billion for 12 months ending 31 Dec 2025.

Adjusted EBITDA for the full-year increased by 11% to US\$2.73 billion, exceeding the guidance of US\$2.72 billion.

The company also saw strong results for the fourth quarter, with a 6% uplift in revenue compared to the prior corresponding period. *JM*

Pictured: *Norwegian Dawn*.

ATIA backs WTAAA

THE Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) has reaffirmed the World Travel Agents Associations Alliance's (WTAAA) warning regarding a global fraud scheme that uses IATA accreditation numbers to issue fake airline tickets (*TD* 03 Mar).

"As a WTAAA member, ATIA and ATMC supports WTAAA's global warning about the unauthorised use of agency IATA accreditation numbers to access airline NDC systems and issue fraudulent tickets," ATIA told *Travel Daily*.

"This is a serious threat to travel businesses, and we urge all members to follow the advice provided to protect their businesses," the body added. *JM*



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HotelREZ goes lux

GLOBAL hospitality platform designed to boost growth, HotelREZ, has announced an expansion of its platform with a focus on luxury segmentation.

Approximately 350 hotels have qualified for the group's Elegant Hotel Collection (EHC), a defined luxury and upscale carve-out within the broader platform, appealing to a higher-net-worth demographic of travellers.

EHC operates as a performance-led framework, qualifying properties that meet defined positioning and commercial criteria, and enabling enhanced distribution and global demand access.

HotelREZ said the participation model creates a clear brand ladder across the portfolio while maintaining hotel independence.

The platform supports over 2,500 independent hotels around the world, representing approximately 222,500 rooms. *DF*

Mandarin to Palm Beach

MANDARIN Oriental has announced the development of Mandarin Oriental Residences, West Palm Beach - its first standalone residential offering in South Florida, which is anticipated to open in 2031 with 87 private residences available. *DF*

Four seasons in one day as first yacht delivered

FINCANTIERI has delivered *Four Seasons I*, the first ultra-luxury yacht for the premium hotel brand in partnership with Marc-Henry Cruise Holdings.

Four Seasons I is 34,000 gross tons and 207 metres, with 95 exclusive suites on board, each designed with privacy in mind.

The design philosophy aims to "remove barriers between guests and the sea", with generous terraces and open-air living.

Those who want ultra-luxury can opt for the Funnel Suite, which offers 457m² of indoor-outdoor private space.

"Today we deliver not just a ship, but a new paradigm for the hospitality [sector]," Folgiero said.

"*Four Seasons I* is the first Navis Sapiens: a vessel with a digital intellect, capable of learning, adapting, and growing alongside



its owner and guests.

"*Four Seasons I* embodies a one-of-a-kind ultra-luxury yachting experience, setting a new benchmark in the...segment inspired by haute hotellerie."

The delivery was made at the Ancona shipyard with Daniele Silvetti, Mayor of Ancona; Reverend Monsignor Angelo Spina, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Ancona;

and Rachele Grandolfo, Deputy Prefect of Ancona in attendance as special guests.

Fincantieri attendees at the milestone event included chairman Biagio Mazzotta, chief executive officer and managing director Pierroberto Folgiero, Luigi Matarazzo, general manager merchant ships division, as well as Ben Trodd, chief executive officer of Four Seasons Yachts. *DF*

British Pullman gets a touch of Baz Luhrmann magic with new carriage

BRITISH Pullman, a Belmond Train, has announced the launch of Celia, a new private dining and events carriage imagined and designed by famous Australian filmmaker Baz Luhrmann, together with Oscar-winning costume and production designer, Catherine Martin.

Launching in the UK summer, the carriage will be self-contained within the train with dedicated stewards.

Seating up to 12 guests, the carriage features a dining area



as well as a lounge and bar, plus pantry and kitchen.

On request, a private chef can design customised menus using seasonal British produce.

Luhrmann enthused, "Celia, at

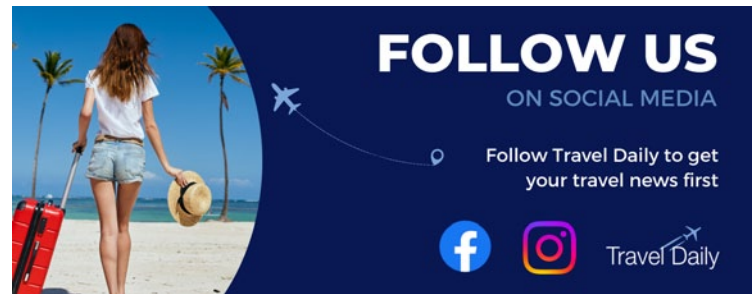
its heart, is a magical mystery tour - a travelling dining experience for friends or an intimate celebration, filled with food, music, wine, laughter, and performance." *DF*

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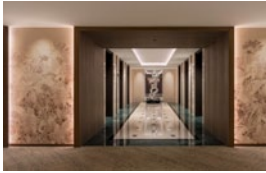
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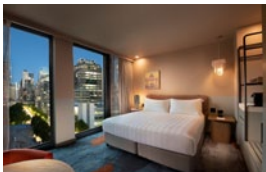
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JW Marriott Hotel Hong Kong has unveiled its Infinity guestroom floor. The newly revamped 34th floor is a collaboration with sculptor Richard X Zawitz, blending his signature Curvism style with Chinese concepts such as Tao and Zen, alongside paying homage to his hometown of Pittsburgh through the use of steel throughout.



Rosewood Courchevel Le Jardin Alpin has opened, making it Rosewood's first winter resort and second resort in mainland France. The 51-key property is located in the Jardin Alpin enclave of Courchevel 1850 with direct ski-in and ski-out access, along with interior and exterior designs that complement the alpine backdrop. The two main culinary concepts are the SALTO restaurant and lounge with alpine-inspired cuisine and signature champagne.



Mercure Melbourne La Trobe Street has officially opened, making the \$90 million development the largest purpose-built hotel in the Melbourne CBD this year. The 201-key property is built at the site of a former tinsmith factory on La Trobe Street and also includes a terrace bar, the restaurant Foundry and a gym. Each room has a calm, contemporary aesthetic, maximising natural light.



InterContinental Phuket Resort by IHG has launched **Sipping Tiger**, a new cocktail bar utilising Thai culture and techniques. The bar will be led by head of beverages Alif Abru and bar manager Kim Wongruen, who have a philosophy centered around local botanicals and sustainable practices. The 10-cocktail menu ranges from light refreshments to more substantial options, with highlights including the Calamansi Riposato, an aperitivo-style mix featuring peach sherbet.



Barlochan Cottage in Muskoka, Canada, made famous by the TV series *Heated Rivalry*, is now available to book on Airbnb. The three-bedroom property has an intimate, off-the-grid feel with a living room and open kitchen creating a welcoming atmosphere for guests. There is also a private dock at the cottage with direct access to swim at Lake Muskoka.

The US bridges the gap



BRAND USA hosted several trade and media events across Australia and New Zealand between 18 and 27 Feb, showing off what tourism in the US has to offer before the 250th anniversary and the FIFA World Cup later this year.

The Sydney event had 46 US partners meeting with 57 buyers across 37 organisations, engaging in 25 12-minute conversations in a traditional marketplace style.

Across the ditch in Auckland and Christchurch, Brand USA held its 'America the Beautiful Game' expos, which was a sports-themed format connecting 260 travel agents and media with US partners through press-conference style meetings.

Both Australia and New Zealand

remain high-yield markets for US inbound travel, with a high percentage of tourists opting for longer stays, as well as selecting destinations beyond the traditional tourism spots.

It is projected that tourism from this market will rise by 5% in 2026, reaching over 1 million visitors across the year. *JB*

F1 speeding ahead

THE Formula One Australian Grand Prix at Melbourne's Albert Park is scheduled to go ahead, despite several teams changing travel plans amidst the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

Several F1 teams based in Europe have been forced to change flight plans to avoid layovers in the Middle East.

An estimated 500 officials will be flown on three chartered flights in order to make it to Melbourne for the first practice session on Fri.

However, members of the Mercedes and McLaren racing teams are currently stranded in Bahrain, alongside tyre manufacturer Pirelli following a tyre test at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir. *JB*

Korean LAX move

RENOVATIONS at Korean Air's lounge at LAX have officially been completed, with the area set to reopen to the public on Fri.


The lounge spans the fifth and sixth floors of the terminal, and revamped amenities include two private suites, a la carte dining with a bar serving premium beverages and cocktails. *JB*

See Britain Differently

Step beyond the familiar and discover a different side of Britain.

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All bookings are subject to availability and may change, with amendments or cancellations incurring fees. Some services are non-refundable, hotels or tours may be substituted, and travellers are responsible for valid documents and insurance. Activities are taken at the traveller's own risk, and by paying, travellers accept these terms. See Infinity Holidays for further Terms and Conditions.

THE APT TRAVEL GROUP

Sydney shines bright

AT THE APT TRAVEL GROUP'S VIP CELEBRATIONS

Against the backdrop of Sydney's waterfront, The APT Travel Group recently welcomed their VIP Partners to the Pier One Sydney for an evening recognising exceptional commitment and performance. Representatives from VIP agencies and retail network head offices joined APT leaders to commend the exceptional efforts across the state. CEO David Cox also joined partners on the night, providing valuable industry insights that complemented the celebrations. A highlight of this year's event was the debut of custom-designed awards showcasing artwork from a Kimberley artist of the Imintji community, a cherished long-term collaborator of The APT Travel Group. The personalised touch resonated strongly with recipients, who valued the significance behind the gesture. Looking ahead, next year is set to bring even more exciting opportunities to be part of the celebration.



David Cox, CEO of The APT Travel Group and Chief Sales Officer, Scott Ellis host the award ceremony



Kristy Joyce and Corinne Cox from Flight Centre Port Macquarie wins Top Performing Agency 2025



Michelle Emmert and Rhiannon Pugh from Travel Associates Gungahlin wins Top Regional Travel Agency



Narelle Melhuish from Holiday World wins the Top Performing Consultant 2025



The NSW/ACT Sales team from ATG - Sandy Allan, Babs Baron, Rashelle Thompson, and Tony Fiscaro



Andrew Minto and Simone Berryman from Home & Afar Travel wins Rising Star Award



Hall of Fame Consultant Award goes to Angela Kaluzyn from Going Global



Jennifer Gibson from Flight Centre Ulladulla wins the Rising Star Consultant award for 2025



Southlands Travel & Cruise's Cathy Shroder and Kia Floto with Jamison Travel's Emma Sullivan and Jenna Lewis



Scroll down for more highlights from the night

THE APT TRAVEL GROUP

Sydney shines bright AT THE APT TRAVEL GROUP'S VIP CELEBRATIONS



Alfina Nughes and Ann Burgess from Flight Centre Baulkham Hills with Scott and Tony



Hunter Travel Group celebrate with Rashelle, David and Sandy from The APT Travel Group



itravel Carlingford's Emily Todorovski and Rozelle Bosman celebrate their achievements



Helloworld Travel agents enjoying a night of celebration



Top performing agents from Flight Centre celebrating their achievements



Tailored Journeys awarded Diamond Agency. Cassandra O'Bryan and Lisa Gair pictured with Scott and Sandy



Bailey McCool, Peter Castle and Bryce Moriceau from Flight Centre Miranda awarded Diamond Agency



Travel Managers Sandra Reucker and Michael Gazal awarded Diamond Agency

CONGRATULATIONS EVERYONE ON YOUR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS!

