TRAVELDAILY
traveldaily.com.au
Thursday 26th Nov 2026

Today's issue of *TD*

Travel Daily today features eight pages of news, including our **Business Events News,** plus full pages from:

- **Celebrity Cruises**
- **Helloworld**

Celeb sale still on

THERE is still time to make the most of Celebrity Cruises' Black Friday sale, with up to 75% off a second guest.

See more on **page nine**.



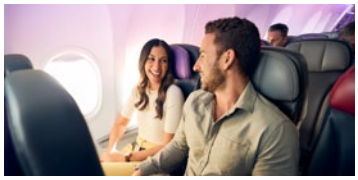
VA points power holidays

AUSTRALIANS redeemed $2.5 billion worth of Velocity frequent flyer points over the past year, Virgin Australia has revealed in its newly released annual Points Pulse Report.

Almost five million Australians used points to help pay for their holidays while grappling with the cost-of-living crunch, with three in four (75%) saying they felt significantly more pressure compared to this time last year, up from 55% in 2025, research cited in the report showed.

One in three Australians (32%) are also planning on cashing in their loyalty points to travel over the Christmas period.

According to the report,



Gen Z and Millennials were the most likely to earn and redeem points, according to the VA report, at 54% and 47% respectively, compared with other generations.

Aussies are increasingly seeking more opportunities to make everyday spending count, with 66% saying they changed where they shopped in order to maximise points.

"When everyday costs are rising, people are looking closely at how to make their money go further and that's evident in the estimated $2.5 billion of value Australians have redeemed using Points over the past year," Velocity Frequent Flyer CEO Andrew Cleary said. *JM*

FCTG leisure breach

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group is investigating a potential cyber security breach of a third-party accommodation booking system used by some of its leisure travel brands, including Travel Associates and Cruiseabout.

The company confirmed that flight and corporate travel bookings are not affected. *JM*

Hello to Perth

PERTH was the host to Helloworld Travel's successful Frontliners Forum.

See more on the **back page**.

CATO IWD out now

TICKETS for the CATO International Women's Day Travel Industry Lunch are out now.

The lunch will be held on 05 Mar 2027 at the Hyatt Regency Sydney, marking the first time the event has been held in the Harbour City, as Force for Good takes a break.

CATO's celebration will recognise the great work women do in the travel space, while giving industry professionals a chance to network - purchase a ticket **HERE**. *JB*







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World Asia arrives

MSC Cruises has celebrated the delivery of *MSC World Asia* (***TD*** 05 Nov 2026) at the Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard in Saint-Nazaire, France.

The vessel is now the 24th in MSC's fleet.

Her naming ceremony will take place in Le Havre on 28 Nov. *JB*

Travel getting too complex

SPEAKERS at the FACTS 2026 Leaders Forum have warned that advancements in the travel industry are putting customer experience at risk of becoming too complex.

BCD Travel's Stephan Baars said that companies are constantly releasing too many new platforms, activating and booking channels the average consumer cannot keep up with.

"For travellers, it makes the industry even more complex to understand and navigate," Baars explained.

"So the question I have is, do we underestimate that we throw too much at our customer base as well with the speed of AI, and do we really deliver on simplifying the process?"

Adding to Baar's insights, Jason Gill of AMEX Global Business Travel explained that the booking process is no longer "looking at lowest logical and cheapest



available", but now focusing on "technology to service content in a way that customers can understand so that they can access that choice".

"Curating content effectively, providing a view to travellers and travel management teams, procurement teams around the value decision that needs to be made beyond just the price that you see on the screen or through the agent is critically important," Gill said. *MV/JB*

Pictured: Catherine Logan, Cam Wallace, Stephan Baars, Jason Gill, and Danielle Jones.

Elysee gets Waldorf

THE Elysee Collective has been appointed as the Australian PR representative for Waldorf Astoria Kuala Lumpur.

Recently opened to guests (***TD*** 29 Apr 2026), the property offers 268 suites with dining concepts led by chefs Garima Arora and Jean-Georges Vongerichten. *JB*



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Window Seat

ANYONE who has been on an African safari knows the excitement of getting up close with the wildlife for the first time - but as it turns out, this enthusiasm may appear rather bizarre to the people who reside there.

A group of Tanzanian locals of Maasai origins decided to do just that, making comedy skits on Instagram that poke fun at foreign tourists taking in the sights of their country.

The short videos demonstrate familiar tourist behaviours, including gasping at ordinary features of the landscape, complaining about the lack of mobile reception, and over-enthusiastically greeting the locals.

Each video has attracted a lot of attention on Instagram.

Sri Lankan Airlines sees uplift in conflict

EXCLUSIVE

SRI Lankan Airlines has seen an uptick in travellers connecting to Europe via Colombo, as the Middle East conflict (***TD*** 02 Mar 2026) has made Dubai and Doha more dangerous as stopovers.

Speaking with ***Travel Daily***, the airline's sales manager (national accounts Australia & New Zealand) Brad Crawford identified a significant increase in passenger volume from Mar onwards, correlating with the beginning of the war in Iran.

"A lot of travellers that maybe had not previously considered Sri Lankan Airlines are now flying with us, which is great, given that we have a perfect safety record and we are a Oneworld carrier and therefore a partner of Qantas," he said.

The spike in demand was one of the leading factors in the airline's decision to increase its



Melbourne to Colombo service to 10 flights per week (***TD*** 19 Mar 2026), with double-daily flights on Mon, Wed and Fri.

"It was to offer travellers more options as far as connections," Crawford explained.

"And as an example, the new flights connect same-day services through to all of our Indian cities, straight through to London in both directions," he added.

Sri Lankan Airlines' three European gateways include London Heathrow, Paris Charles de Gaulle, and Frankfurt Airport in Germany.

Heading into 2027, Crawford said the focus was to potentially increase its amount of services from Sydney, as well as explore the possibility of a third Australian gateway.

Elaborating on this, Crawford identified the key challenge to introducing another service was acquiring the right aircraft to operate it.

"Unfortunately when we looked at that, the problem was finding those spare aircraft, and that's not just us - that's nearly every airline around the world at the moment," he said.

"Most airlines around the world are talking about additional aircraft and say, yes, they can launch here, there and everywhere, but whether they actually get the aircraft that's scheduled is another thing."

Australia is currently Sri Lanka's second-largest source market. *JB*



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Air NZ taking off again

AIR New Zealand is preparing to re-establish a strong presence in the Australian market, as it recovers from ongoing fleet and engine shortages (***TD*** 28 Aug).

Speaking at FACTS 2026, the carrier's chief operating officer Scott Wilkinson confirmed that recently grounded aircraft are now back up and running.

"Our last retrofit 787 rolled out of the hangar yesterday, which is really good," Wilkinson said.

"So now we've got a full wide-body fleet that's ready to go, and we're thinking about where we can deploy that.

"We haven't been able to properly operate the network that we've wanted to over the last few years, and it's nice to be able to start to look at the map and think about how we can fill out those gaps now."

As Air NZ expands its services and passenger volume, Wilkinson has identified Australia as a key



growth market.

"For us, Australia and New Zealand are naturally connected markets, and we think there is significant opportunity to continue growing travel between the two countries," he said.

"The average Australian spends more [money] than any other tourist that comes to NZ.

"We're looking at where we can add capacity, where we can add frequency, and how we can make sure we're continuing to serve the Australian market better," Wilkinson (**pictured**) added.

The carrier recently resumed its Auckland to Hobart flights. *SH/JB*

Nelson to join CT

CT CONNECTIONS has appointed industry leader Jonathan Nelson as executive general manager travel solutions & transformation, to drive the national growth of the travel management company.

Nelson will commence his role from next year, it was announced at this week's FACTS conference in Sydney, bringing extensive executive leadership experience from senior positions with Corporate Travel Management, Express Travel Group and CWT.

Based in Perth, Nelson will lead CT's national sales function, accelerating business growth and identifying new opportunities across the Australian market.

MEANWHILE, CT has partnered with APG Pay to help simplify corporate travel payments and enhance financial visibility.

The partnership will deliver greater payment flexibility, streamlined reconciliation and enhanced financial reporting. *MS*

TRAVELDAILY
ON LOCATION

Rhodes

Today's issue of *TD* is coming to you from aboard the *Viking Vela* cruising in the Aegean.

RETURNING to Greece after yesterday's brief sojourn in Turkiye, we now begin our exploration of some of the country's famed islands.

Our first stop is Rhodes, home of the famed ancient Colossus and one of the largest islands in the Aegean.

The old town is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, while sparkling beaches, whitewashed houses and a wide array of resorts cement the island's role as a tourist draw.

Our included tour today takes us to the Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes, a medieval masterpiece.



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HAL sails to Buenos

HOLLAND America Line (HAL) has announced the 17-day 'South America & Antarctica Circle' cruise aboard *Zuiderdam*, part of its 2028/29 season in the region.

Departing 28 Nov 2028 and sailing roundtrip from Buenos Aires, the voyage will make calls in Punta Arenas, Chile; Ushuaia, Argentina and the Falkland Islands; as well as Antarctica.

Voyages throughout the season will range from 15 to 32 days, with *Zuiderdam* offering southern sailings and *Volendam* focusing on Amazon River cruises. *JB*

EK wraps roadshow

EMIRATES, in partnership with Dubai Economy and Tourism, has concluded a seven-day roadshow across Australia and New Zealand.

The series of events saw hundreds of travel industry professionals attend across Christchurch, Auckland, Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, as they gained product insights and inspiration to pass onto their clients.

Alongside EK and Dubai's tourism board were flydubai, Dubai Experiences and several hotel brands. *JB*

Viking welcomes *Libra*

VIKING has taken delivery of its newest vessel *Viking Libra* at Fincantieri's shipyard in Ancona, Italy, set to spend her inaugural season in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe.

The ship can hold up to 998 guests across 499 staterooms.

Libra also sports a hybrid propulsion system, using liquefied hydrogen and fuel cells.

Viking Astrea, which is currently under construction, will utilise the same technology.

The cruise line hopes to have both vessels operating on hydrogen in 2027.



Viking president and CEO Leah Talactac has called *Libra's* delivery "a proud moment for Viking and an important milestone" in the fleet's planned growth.

Talactac also hopes that the vessel's new technology "will set a new standard for innovation" and will open the door for new travellers aboard Viking. *JB*

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Sommer shines

PETER Sommer Travels has recently celebrated 1,000 five-star customer reviews, independently sourced by the UK's Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO) customer review system over 12 years.

Founder Peter Sommer declared it a "tremendous milestone". *JB*

TA confronts the AI shift

TOURISM Australia (TA) is confronting the AI-driven shift in travel discovery, with managing director Robin Mack (**pictured**) reporting that the destination management organisation has lost more than a quarter of its website traffic.



Mack, speaking at this week's FACTS conference in Sydney, confirmed a 27% decline in traffic to Australia.com, the official consumer travel website run by Tourism Australia, as AI reshapes travel discovery.

He attributed the decline to consumers increasingly receiving answers through AI platforms.

"This world is evolving, and from our world in Tourism Australia, we projected that we would see a drop in traffic to Australia.com, because the answers were being served in AI.

"We're in a zero-click world in many markets, and they're looking and getting the answer and not needing to take the next step," he explained.

However, this change in travel discovery does not mean travellers have stopped being served Australia, with Mack confirming TA has seen a 245% increase in traffic from large language model web crawlers, including that the DMO's content is increasingly being accessed by AI systems.

Mack confirmed this shift in travel discovery has changed TA's marketing mantra.

"When the question is asked online, Australia has to be the answer," he enthused. *MS*

Xmas at Crystalbrook

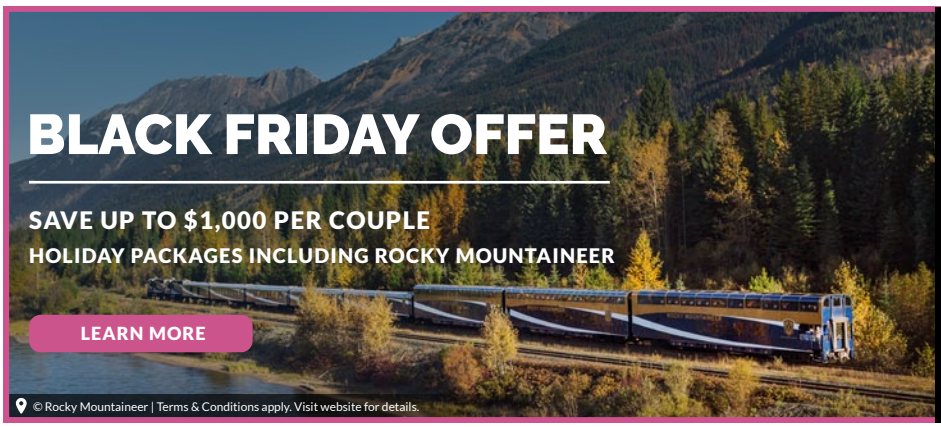
CRYSTALBROOK has launched its 12 Ways of Christmas campaign, showcasing an array of festive stays, dining and wellness experiences available across its portfolio during Nov and Dec.

Experiences range from Christmas-themed breakfasts to post-work function packages. *JB*











business events news

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businesseventsnews.com.au

ABEA TO FOCUS ON DELIVERING

EXCLUSIVE

RECENTLY appointed Chair of the Australian Business Events Association (ABEA) Matt Pearce (***TD*** 19 Nov 2026) has identified the next phase for the organisation is to focus on delivering tangible outcomes and services to its members.

Speaking with ***Travel Daily***, Pearce (**pictured**) explained the first three years of ABEA was about establishing its member base, which it can now leverage to provide adequate services.

"We are working hard on the board having a strategy game early in the new year to really run through how we are going to leverage those," Pearce said.

"But we know that our members want different things... and so, we're now tailoring much more what we do around what each group values."



Pearce added that empowering its members will provide ABEA with more authority to showcase the economic benefits of business events to the federal and state governments, particularly when it comes to increasing the Bid Fund (***TD*** 24 Sep 2026).

"We've got some terrific data already on the value of government investment from those bid funds," Pearce said.

"We need to continue to build that data, because ultimately government wants to know what their return on investment is."

"The stronger we are able to tell that story, I think, the stronger our position ultimately becomes when we're asking for support."

MEANWHILE, ahead of the Victorian state election on Sat, ABEA has welcomed the stronger focus on tourism and events brought forward by the Coalition led by Jess Wilson.

The Coalition has proposed that it will bring tourism and events under one portfolio in Victoria, re-establish the Victorian Major Events Company, as well as cut supposed red-tape on Place of Public Entertainment permits.

With the strong pipeline of events in both Victoria and Australia next year, Pearce says ABEA will be well positioned to work with the government. *JB*

SEG extends with Melbourne Town Hall

SHOWTIME Event Group (SEG) will continue to activate and manage events at Melbourne Town Hall until mid-2034.

Since the partnership was first established in 2024, SEG has delivered over 1,000 events on Spring Street, welcoming more than 460,000 guests.

Standout events have included RISING, Now or Never, and the Melbourne International Film Festival.



SEG chief commercial officer, Katie Tinetti, has expressed her excitement in continuing the group's investment in the venue and maintaining a reputation of delivering high-quality events. *JB*

Hidden no more

AI EVENT planning platform Headbox unveiled *The Hidden Budget: A Travel Manager's Guide to Capturing Meetings and Events Spend* at FACTS 2026 in Sydney yesterday.

The new resource shows travel and procurement managers solutions how they can plan, book and manage their meetings and events program in one place.

Get the guide **HERE**. *JB*

NSW needs more

EXCLUSIVE

CEO of the NSW Tourism Association, Natalie Godward, has admitted that the state could be more competitive in the business event space.

Speaking with ***TD***, Godward believed that NSW could increase its attractiveness to event planners through more venue capacity, in addition to improved infrastructure and regional connectivity.

"We have some incredible venues, but we are kind of limited on higher end capacity in some cases, and also to offer business events across the state," she said.

"Regionally, particularly, requires connectivity and infrastructure, and that is challenging in regional areas.

"So there needs to be some government support for building up the investment in those areas so that we can, as a state, attract business events across the whole state," Godward added.

In terms of government support, Godward identified smoother planning pathways, faster DA approval and stronger collaboration with local governments as the key considerations when supporting business events.

She added that government support will lead to private investment matching it. *JB*



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APPOINTMENTS

Send your new appointments to:
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Oceania Cruises has appointed **Andrea Massaro** as its new business development manager for NSW and ACT, effective 08 Dec. She joins from The Travel Corporation where she was sales manager for the past 10 years. Her career also includes a stint at Air New Zealand, serving as business development representative.

Brad Hanna has joined **Celestyal** as its new national sales manager for Australia and New Zealand. He joins the cruise line after a five-month stint as BDM for Collette. His 20 years of travel industry experience includes roles at Norwegian Cruise Line, Chapman Freeborn, Cruiseabout and Virgin Australia.

The **Unforgettable Travel Company** has promoted head of marketing **Nick Talbot** to the newly-created role of AI & automation director. He will assume the new position effective 07 Dec, as the company introduces a dedicated AI & automation division. He has served in his current role since Jul last year.

Plaza Premium Group has announced the appointment of **Lorenzo Valori** as senior vice president - EU & UK. He previously served as vice president of lounges at Qatar Airways. This is his second stint with PPG, having spent over nine years across several operations, business development, and commercial development positions.

Amy Maiden has stepped into the role of executive manager, destination and experience at the **City of Ballarat**. She has been with the Victorian city's council since Nov last year, serving as executive manager - visitor economy. Before that, she held the same role at Tourism Midwest Victoria.

Caroline Beteta will assume the position of interim president and CEO of **Brand USA**. She has been the president and CEO of Visit California since 1998, in addition to serving as Chair of Brand USA's board. It follows the resignation of Fred Dixon.

Simon Mendelawitz has announced that he will be resigning from his role of general manager for **Intrepid DMC Australia**. He has held the position since Oct 2022, previously serving as managing director of Inspiration Outdoors, before it was bought out by Intrepid.

Wander Beyond has appointed **Fiona Borserini** as its new business development manager. She has held several BDM positions for Helloworld Travel, spanning all corners of Queensland. She also had a stint at Tourism Western Australia as sales manager for Queensland and Northern NSW.

Eloise Dalla Costa is starting a new position as product lead - airport & lounge at **Virgin Australia**. This is her first position in the travel space, previously holding consultant roles at both Deloitte and EY, as well as working in the design and strategy space with UK-based firm FreeState.

Malta in the spotlight



VISIT Malta and Emirates took their three-city Australian roadshow to Sydney this week, inviting industry leaders to a Mediterranean-inspired dinner at The Palomar restaurant.

Visit Malta's director for Australia and New Zealand Mario Farrugia-Borg shared with guests the beauty of the country's destinations, including capital city Valletta, Gozo, and the Maltese Islands.

"Australia remains an important market for Malta, and our partnership with Emirates provides a wonderful opportunity to showcase the diversity of the Maltese Islands to Australian travellers," said Farrugia-Borg.

"We want to encourage more Australians to discover Malta's rich culture, history, gastronomy and natural beauty, while continuing to support a sustainable approach to tourism that protects what makes our islands so special."

Following that, Emirates regional sales manager Adam D'Ambrosio discussed the airline's global network and easy connections to Malta via Dubai as well as its new premium economy class experience.

"Through our Dubai hub, Emirates offers convenient connections from Australia to Malta, helping bring the Mediterranean within reach," enthused D'Ambrosio (**pictured** right with Farrugia-Borg). *JHM*

Kids have their say

SOFITEL has launched the Very Important Children Program, a dedicated hotel review board made up of three children who stayed at Sofitel properties and shared their feedback.

The board includes chief fun officer Gabriel, who will focus on kids' clubs, activities and family entertainment; chief menu officer Liyah, tasked with reviewing the culinary concepts; and chief dream officer Amira, who will provide feedback on Sofitel's bedding options and comfort factor.

Sofitel has released a hero film depicting their experiences. *JB*

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