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Quantum of Brisbane

ROYAL Caribbean's *Quantum of the Seas* has returned to Brisbane for a fourth year, where she will sail 28 departures ranging from three-night jaunts to longer nine-night sailings of the South Pacific.

Shorter cruises will visit Airlie Beach and Cairns, while Pacific voyages will stop in ports such as Noumea, New Caledonia and Mystery Island in Vanuatu.

More details [HERE](#). AB



VIRGINIA

Today's issue of *TD* is coming to you courtesy of Virginia Travel Corporation, where we are reporting on the Virginia Global Travel Forum.

THE conference kicked into full gear today with addresses from Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority's Chryssa Westerlund and United Airlines' Thorsten Lettnin before speed-date style meetings commenced with a range of hotels, destinations and marketing organisations.

Media later joined a special press briefing led by Virginia Tourism Corporation president and CEO Rita McClenny which also featured representatives from Virginia's various counties and experiences. ZH

Maldives tax faces the axe

THE Maldivian Government has introduced an amendment bill to its *Goods and Services Act* that will seek to repeal the controversial 17% GST charge on inbound tourism products, which took effect on 01 Oct.

Not only is the bill looking to reverse the levy on tourism products and services sold overseas to visitors, but it is also mandating that refunds be made for any GST collected so far under the rule since it became active.

Signs that the impost may be modified first surfaced earlier in the month, when a local report suggested it would be delayed until Apr next year, citing a speech made by Tourism Minister Mohamed Ameen during a tourism event (*TD* 07 Oct).

However, no formal

confirmation of the media report was made by the Maldivian Govt.

ATIA CEO Dean Long told *Travel Daily* last month (*TD* 28 Sep) that while the Maldives is a niche destination for Australians, the body remained concerned the decision to tax services that are not delivered in the Maldives was a "dramatic overextension of its powers that has not been thought through".

Long confirmed ATIA had expressed its concerns directly to the Maldivian authorities about the ramifications of the tax and would continue to work through formal channels, including via the Australian Government.

Pressure to reverse the tax was exerted from several international source markets, with the United Kingdom's Association of British Travel Agents previously claiming the tax would derail any advisor's ability to sell the Maldives and make a profit. AB

FACTS links PCMA

FACTS has inked a partnership with PCMA, which will see the network for business events strategists bring its perspective to FACTS 2026 held at ICC Sydney on 25-26 Nov.

Under the agreement, PCMA will host a session to deliver practical education for business events professionals from a panel of leading experts in addition to its signature Labs - Sydney luncheon and workshop.

This year, the session will examine the impact of events beyond attendance numbers. AB

The stars of cruising

IT IS time to shine a light on the best and brightest in the cruise sector - nominate yourself or a colleague for the CLIA Cruise Industry Awards - see [back page](#).

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features seven pages of the latest industry news, including our **Business Events News** and a full page from **Cruise Lines International Association**.

FAA ticks Max 10

AFTER a long period of delay, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has finally approved the Boeing 737-10 Max 10 aircraft for passenger use in the United States.

Boeing's largest model in the Max family of planes can seat between 185 and 230 passengers depending on the configuration, and is designed as a direct competitor to the Airbus A321neo in the single aisle short-to medium-haul segment.

Virgin Australia has 10 firm orders for the 737-10 Max, which are expected to join the fleet late next year, according to a release from the carrier in Jun.

While the FAA's decision clears the way for production and deliveries to international airlines, Boeing's latest model still needs to be approved by CASA locally in order to pass safety protocols and operate in Australia. AB



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Thursday 22nd Oct 2026

Taste the destination

SEABOURN has launched Earth & Ocean, a new culinary philosophy that brings food and drinks to guests on board and ashore inspired by the destination being visited through locally sourced ingredients. **AB**



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Direct NY in BNE's plan

DIRECT flights to New York and key European hubs are on the radar for Brisbane Airport to have in operation by the mid 2030s, CEO Gert-Jan de Graaff has told *The Courier-Mail*.

Qantas previously stated that Brisbane is on its Project Sunrise wish list, but it is understood that the viability will be determined by the success of direct Sydney and Melbourne flights to New York.

"From an ultra-long-haul perspective, it would be fantastic if...there were direct connections to the east coast of US or North America, and maybe even Europe direct," de Graaff said.

"With more people travelling, we want to offer people more choice than we currently can offer them and our forecast is that we will - this is a target number - by the mid-2030s have 50 destinations or more."

However, de Graaff cautioned that greater investment into seamless borders before 2032 was essential to avoid arrival and departure bottlenecks.

He added that Brisbane Airport's existing terminals would hit capacity between 2030 and 2032 as pax numbers grow to 40 million a year, with the hub now deciding how many stages of its new third terminal are needed to cater for that growth.

"It does not make sense to build a 15 or 20 million passenger terminal in one go because we will only use a very small part of



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that on day one," he said.

De Graaff also revealed that terminal three may initially only service domestic needs before expanding to int'l passengers. **AB**

Deep in Fukushima

SEVEN advisors have been selected to take part in two familiarisations to Fukushima, thanks to a tie-up between the Australian Travel Industry Association (ATIA) and Fukushima Prefecture.

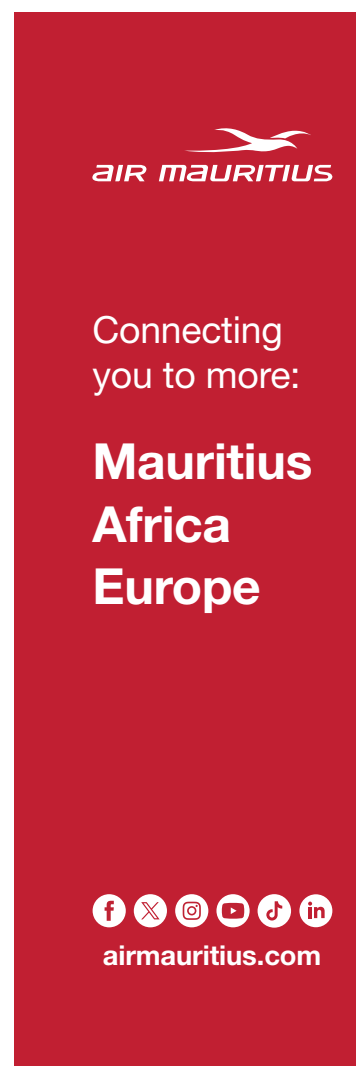
The agents are: Heidi Barrenger, Angas Travel; Mitchell Tam, Phil Hoffmann Travel Norwood; Molly Jackson, itravel Griffith; Louise Leo, Ida Portella Business and Travel Services; Melissa Goodwin, Envoyage Cronulla; Vicki Carmichael, Main Beach Travel; and Eileen Orrell, MTA.

The famils will focus on providing participants with a deeper understanding of the region through the story of Fukushima's recovery and regeneration, with a view to better selling the destination.

"We were thrilled to receive more than 100 applications for just seven places across these two famils, and that level of interest speaks volumes about the appetite within our industry to discover new destinations and experiences in Japan," ATIA CEO Dean Long said. **AB**

Yatridis named GM

CHRISTINE Yatridis has been appointed GM of Discoveries Collection, where she is charged with expanding the Greece and Portugal specialist's local reach.

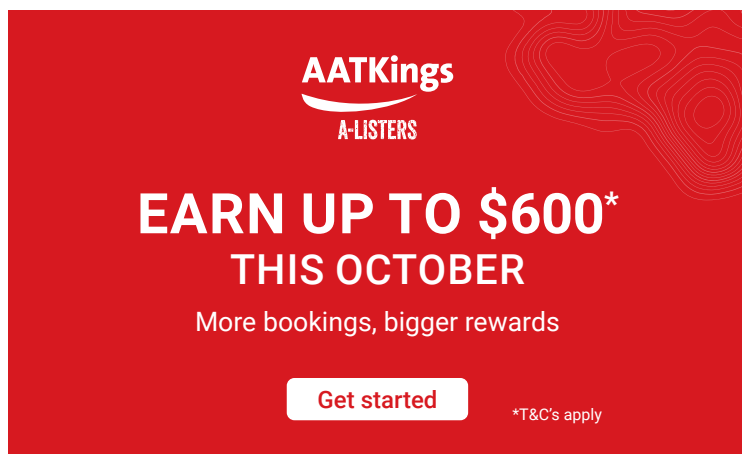


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BA Avios Majorca

BRITISH Airways has released its latest Avios-only flights, offering services to Majorca and Crete from London Heathrow during Aug 2027.

Majorca will cost 28,000 Avios points plus £5 return in economy, while Crete will take 33,500 Avios and £5 return in economy. *AB*

UA maps premium growth

EXCLUSIVE

UNITED Airlines is expanding its premium offering and investing more funding in Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) through new aircraft, a broader range of cabin products and upgraded airport facilities.

Thorsten Lettnin (**pictured**), director of sales for Continental Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Israel and India, said IAD was one of the carrier's fastest-growing hubs, handling 300 daily flights to 100 destinations, including 20 international destinations.

The airport is also undergoing a US\$20 billion infrastructure upgrade over the next decade, with a new concourse featuring 14 gates due to open on 09 Nov.

The concourse will include United's second-largest United Club lounge globally, with capacity for 600 customers.

Lettnin said the investment reflected the importance of IAD to UA's global network, with further routes planned.

The UA senior executive also highlighted the airline's expanded cabin range, which now offers six distinct products across economy, premium economy and business class, giving passengers greater choice in how they travel.

"We want to have a competitive offer to every customer segment," Lettnin said at the Virginia Global Travel Forum.

Lettnin said the carrier was also seeing "a strong demand for more premium products",



spanning economy plus through to its Polaris business class.

"The one thing we see throughout is a strong demand for more premium products."

UA is also preparing to introduce its Relax Row product next year, allowing passengers to convert a row of seats into a flat surface in a similar fashion to Air New Zealand's Skynest.

"We love it because it provides more options, more choices to our customer and to meet their specific needs," he said.

Alongside its cabin investments, United is expanding onboard connectivity, with approximately 645 aircraft equipped with Starlink internet.

A new flight-tracking feature on the airline's website and app now allows passengers to check whether their upcoming flight will offer the service. *ZH*

Antarctica departures

ANTARCTICA21 has opened bookings for its 2028-29 season, the largest in its history with 47 air-cruise departures.

Guests are also provided with exclusive access to Explorers House, its private expedition club in Punta Arenas, Chile. *AB*

WSI going digital

THE digital Australia Travel Declaration is set to arrive at Western Sydney International with the first inbound flight to the facility on Mon, making it the first airport in the country to use it.

It is slated to replace the physical Incoming Passenger Card by mid-2028. *MS*

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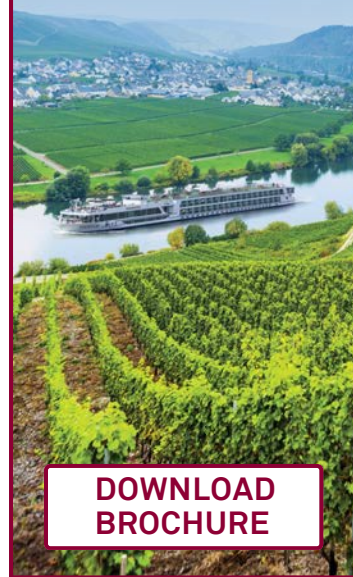


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Kindred solo spirits

SPECIALIST solo tour operator Just You's new online community platform Kindred has attracted almost 7,000 members since launching earlier this year.

Developed as a way for guests to share stories and tips, Kindred said that 800 members access the platform each week.

Each Just You tour departure has a dedicated trip chat on Kindred, giving clients the chance to meet beforehand, while a holiday director will join conversations to help prepare them for their trip.

The tour operator launched in Australia last year to serve the growing solo travel market.

"We've been really encouraged by the response to the platform since its launch, as we work towards our target of 10,000 members by the end of the year," Charlotte Field, marketing director at Just You, said. *JHM*

Spotlight on WA

THE 2026 Australian Regional Tourism Convention kicked off this week in Busselton, showcasing WA's regional tourism capabilities and supporting collaboration, knowledge-sharing and industry growth.

On until Fri at the new Saltwater Busselton convention centre, the event brings together tourism operators, destination managers, industry leaders and government representatives to discuss emerging trends and explore opportunities for regional tourism. *JM*

Uluru is no quick trip

NOT booking experiences in advance of arriving at Uluru was listed as the number one mistake made by travellers when planning a trip to the Aussie icon, according to new insight from Ayers Rock Resort.

Trying to fit too much into a short visit also ranked as one of the biggest regrets for visitors, ahead of failing to understand how much there is to do in destination, not booking a long enough trip, and visiting at the wrong time of year.

Voyages Tourism Australia said the broader insight was clear - visitors need to treat Uluru as a multi-day destination rather than a quick trip.

"Many Australians still think of Uluru as a destination you can see in a day or two, but our guests consistently tell us they have underestimated both the scale of the landscape and the range of experiences on offer," chief marketing officer Ana Sofia Ayala said.

"Visitors are not coming just to tick Uluru off a bucket list, they are looking for a deeper, more meaningful connection with the destination, and that takes time."

Echoing that sentiment were the nearly three-quarters of past guests who said the destination offered more experiences than expected, while more than half (52%) indicated they would stay longer if planning their trip again.

Over two-thirds (68%) also recommended that first-time


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visitors spend at least four nights at Uluru to make the most of the destination, a contrast from the current average, which stands at just 2.5 nights. *AB*

Accor knows loyalty

BENEFITS and price are the two most important factors for consumers when it comes to travel loyalty subscriptions, according to a new report from Accor Plus, which involved more than 7,000 respondents from across 11 markets,

The New Travel Value Exchange report also found that cost was the strongest factor influencing subscription renewal (23%), followed by frequency of communications (12%), seamless application of the discount (10%) and feeling like a part of the member community (9%).

Focusing on recent member behaviour, the report discovered that of ALL Accor+ Explorer members who reached renewal between Oct 2025 and Jun 2026, nearly six in 10 completed two or more stays and 66% use member-only hotel offers.

The results of the year-long study directly informed Accor's revamped loyalty program. *JM*



Window Seat

CONGRATULATIONS to Finland, which has emerged as the surprise winner of the World Olive Picking Championship this month on the Croatian island of Brac.

Despite the fact that Finland does not have its own established olive-growing traditions, the triumphant team pipped its competitors and harvested 55.4 kilograms of olives in just 45 minutes.

Last year, the team came in fourth place.

The championship took place in the pretty coastal town of Postira and was organised by the Postira Tourist Board.

"We are creating a destination brand that does not imitate but inspires," Ivana Jelincic, director of the Postira Tourist Board said.

"We are proud that our little town has become the centre of such a wonderful event, celebrating and promoting the culture of olives and olive oil through unforgettable experiences and the many friendships formed here over the years," she added.




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Saddles opens bookings

BOOKINGS for the luxurious Grand Saddles Lodge at Saddles Mount White on NSW's central coast have now opened before its official opening on 02 Nov.

Located near the Hawkesbury river, the retreat is set on 11 hectares of bushland and features 20 suites with generous living spaces, open fireplaces and private terraces.

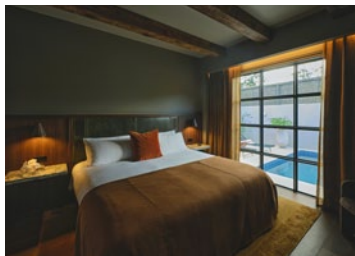
Included in each stay are two signature experiences, such as a cruise on the Hawkesbury aboard the lodge's private boat, The Grace Kelly, visiting oyster farms, and discovering local trails.

Guests can also fish with guides or go to the Glenworth Valley to watch the running of the horses.

The collection of suites includes three categories: The Gardens features garden terraces and super king beds, The Classics include private heated circular plunge pools, and The Lodge features generous terraces and sun lounges, freestanding baths and larger plunge pools.

Guests can also enjoy dining experiences at The Homestead located opposite the hotel or at its signature restaurant called The Hawkesbury, followed by drinks at cocktail and piano bar Ned's.

Meanwhile, guests are invited to unwind at The Spa, which was developed in partnership with Synthesis Organics, including five treatment rooms and a hydrothermal suite with a Finnish sauna, domed steam room and cold plunge.



Reservations are now open for stays of two nights or more at as well as bookings at The Spa. *JHM*

Intrepid's big month

INTREPID Travel has reported its busiest Sep month ever, with a record number of more than 35,000 travellers, resulting in an 11% year-in-year increase in monthly departed revenue.

Despite the uncertainty around the Middle East, travel to the turbulent area, as well as Europe and Asia all saw "significant growth" during the month.

According to the brand, the uplift reflected a return to traveller confidence and the popularity of off-peak travel.

Vietnam was the most popular destination for Aussies, followed by domestic travel - which saw a 145% year-on-year increase, and then Morocco, India and Egypt.

"Despite rising cost pressures and ongoing geopolitical uncertainties, travel remains a key aspiration for more people

In addition to a bumper month, Intrepid's NPS score finished ahead of target at 83," local head Brett Mitchell said. *JHM*



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All in the family at MSC



MSC Cruises has unveiled its new family accommodation concept, the Grand Hamptons Villa, launched exclusively on board *MSC World Atlantic*.

Featuring family-friendly experiences, expansive spaces, privacy and personalised service, the new suite has capacity for up to eight guests and features more than 230sqm of indoor and outdoor space.

The villa features a dedicated kids' suite, a private movie theatre, a number of exclusive family experiences, and a secret door, which the line said would reveal "new surprises every day".

Fun additions include interactive gaming, a climbing tower, a spacious private terrace with a whirlpool, panoramic ocean views and a private bar.

Guests will also enjoy the ship-within-a-ship MSC Yacht Club experience, including 24-hour butler service and access to



exclusive areas of the Yacht Club.

A single villa will be available on *MSC World Atlantic*, which will sail alternate seven- and 14-night Eastern and Western Caribbean trips from Port Canaveral to destinations including Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve, MSC Cruises' private island.

"As demand for family and multigenerational travel continues to grow, we are constantly looking for new ways to elevate our guest experience to create unique and memorable experiences," Gianni Onorato, CEO of MSC Cruises said. *JHM*



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EVENTS DOWN, SPEND UP AT ICC

ICC Sydney welcomed 1.4 million attendees to more than 500 events in the 2025-26 fiscal year, while generating more than three-quarters of a billion dollars in visitor expenditure.

The convention and exhibition centre's *Annual Performance Review FY2025/26* outlined the impact of the 533 events hosted by ICC over the course of the year, slightly down from 2024-25.

However, expenditure from the gatherings hosted by the ICC generated a 5% increase in economic contribution from the 2024-25 fiscal year.

The ICC also supported 1.3 million hotel room nights across the state during the period.

Other highlights of the year included the ICC expanding its portfolio with The Cutaway at Barangaroo (TD 23 Apr), broadening the organisation's



capacity to deliver immersive experiences, cultural events, exhibitions, corporate launches and major activations.

Chief executive officer Adam Mather-Brown said the events industry is beginning to expand beyond the four walls of the venues they operate in.

"We are living through what

I call a 'digital Woodstock' moment, driven by technology, creativity and digital engagement," he said.

"In this way, ICC Sydney is both an economic and content creation engine, creating opportunities for audience engagement, brand storytelling and cultural legacies for our community." MS

Come alive, Sydney

SYDNEY Showground has revealed a refreshed brand identity that reflects both the evolution of the business and its vision for the future, with the tagline 'Where Sydney comes alive'.

The new visual identity features a new logo drawing inspiration from the precinct's iconic dome, complete with a new colour palette of dark blue, light blue, green, and yellow. MS

Sydney welcomes a new events venue

SYDNEY'S event industry has welcomed Verde Alexandria, the city's newest venue, which is ready to welcome occasions of almost 500 guests.

The 600m² destination in South Sydney is headed up by the team from Verde Italian restaurant in the city's Darlinghurst neighbourhood, and is now available to host intimate dinners, large-scale launches and celebrations.

A multi-million-dollar



transformation has seen the former site of COOH Cafe & Restaurant turned into an event space for 300 people indoors and 180 outdoors.

There are also five semi-private spaces for 100 guests.

W Brissy events

W BRISBANE has announced the introduction of three new meetings and events studios at its hotel.

Located on level 6, the three new river-view spaces bring advanced technology, bespoke catering, and flexible event experiences to W's MICE offering.

At the centre of the collection is Studio 7, which will serve as W's premier new event space.

At 63m², the studio is framed by sweeping views across South Bank and the Wheel of Brisbane.

Meanwhile, the other two spaces, Studios 5 and 6, feature tech such as three-metre direct-view LED displays, ceiling audio, wireless presentation, and one-touch room control. MS

AIME knows Monday

AIME has revealed the theme for its Knowledge Monday program: 'AIMEplify: People, Business and Impact'.

Attendees at the event next year will explore the intersection of human connection and technology, with industry leaders and experts to share collective wisdom and challenge conventional thinking.

The Knowledge Monday program takes place on AIME's opening day, with next year's conference set for Feb in Melbourne, Victoria. MS



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Melbourne Airport has announced its new head of aviation services, **Mervin Ng**, who was previously senior manager of aviation interface. Ng has worked at Melbourne Airport since 2009 and worked at Australasian Jet for almost three years prior to that.

Amilla Maldives has appointed **Marc Reader** as general manager, bringing more than three decades of international hospitality experience to the role. Reader brings a long-standing connection to the Maldives to the property, having previously served in leadership roles with Huvafen Fushi and Seaside Finolhu from 2016 to 2023.

Rosewood Hotels has expanded its global leadership team across operations, retail and wellness. **Friedrich von Schonburg** is now VP of operations APAC & operations excellence, and **Gaye Gibson** has joined the business as VP of retail & partnerships global. Meanwhile, **Sam Gibson** is the new VP of wellness global and will oversee the development of the business' wellness platform.

Travel Associates has recently promoted **Whitney Wong** to global lifecycle marketing lead. Wong began her career in travel at Flight Centre in 2021 as a part-time marketing assistant and has since then moved into roles including global marketing automation coordinator and global digital marketing specialist.

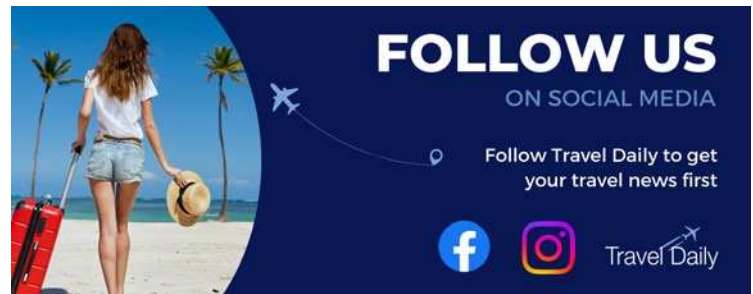
Kellie Nolan is joining Railbookers as a business development executive for Victoria, South Australia, & Western Australia. She will join the team, which is conducted by Craig Owens, continuing a career in travel which began in the 1990s.

Lee Theng Kiat and **Henrik Poulsen** were appointed to the **Singapore Airlines** board at the start of the week. Lee will serve as a non-independent non-executive director and will join the board executive committee and the board safety & risk committee. Meanwhile, Poulsen will serve as an independent non-executive director, and from Feb, will also join the board safety & risk committee.

AC Hotel by Marriott Gold Coast has announced its leadership team ahead of its Dec opening. Set along the Nerang River, the new hotel will be led by multi-property general manager **Ravinder Dhesi**, alongside director of culinary **Paul Smart**, director of sales & distribution **Kerry Fowler** and multi-property director of marketing **Laura Wiersma**.

Japan National Tourism Organization's Sydney office has welcomed a new executive director, **Keita Kadowaki**, who will bring more than 30 years of industry experience to the role. Kadowaki replaces former JNTO Sydney executive director Naoki Kitazara.

Annie An has started a new position as Top End Visitor Information Centre manager at **Tourism Top End**. She has worked with the organisation for three-and-a-half years.



Agents point 50° North



OVER 300 Australian advisors attended 50 Degrees North's Nordic Roadshow last week, which took place across Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne.

The events connected seven partners from Norway, Finland and Iceland with advisors, pairing short supplier presentations with open networking.

Five attendees - one from each event - won a \$5,000 travel voucher to redeem on one of the operator's Nordic small group tours, giving them the chance to experience the product firsthand.

"No single supplier tells the whole Nordic story, which is exactly why a roadshow like this works," Salla Ekman, head of partnerships APAC at 50 Degrees North, said.

"An advisor who hears all seven [partners] in one afternoon leaves with a better understanding of how a trip across the region fits together, not just a list of names."

50 Degrees North revealed plans to take the roadshow to Sydney, Perth and its home city of Melbourne in 2027. *JM*

KI preps for ferries

KANGAROO Island's SeaLink ferry service has temporarily closed to allow crews to upgrade vehicle ramps at Cape Jervis and Penneshaw ahead of the arrival of two new ferries (**TD** 13 Jan 2025).

The first, Wangngami, is expected to enter service later this month, while the second vessel, Ruwi, remains delayed, with SeaLink launching legal action in the Federal Court to have the ferry delivered from a shipyard in Indonesia.

"We need the ferries here to help us to grow the economy for both tourism and agriculture alike," she said.

The two new ferries were initially expected to enter service early last year, but last Oct the company pushed the start date back to 01 Jun this year.

Kangaroo Island regional tourism manager Megan Harvie described the delays as "frustrating".

"We need the ferries here to help us to grow the economy for both tourism and agriculture alike," she said. *JM*



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