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HLO votes Costello

FORMER treasurer Peter Costello has been elected to the Helloworld Travel board, securing 98.89% shareholder support at the company's 2026 AGM.

Shareholders also backed the re-election of directors Martin Pakula and Garry Hounsell, alongside adoption of the remuneration report. *ZH*

A tempting offer

PONANT Explorations and Paul Gauguin Cruises are giving agents a \$200 gift card for each booked passenger - see the **cover page**.

Save on rail & cruise

RAILBOOKERS is celebrating Cruise Month with savings of up to \$1,000.

See the **back page** for details.

Biggest opening since the Harbour Bridge

JETSTAR flight JQ362 to the Gold Coast took off from Western Sydney International yesterday, marking the first passenger flight from the most important piece of travel infrastructure since the opening of the Harbour Bridge.

That proclamation was made by WSI CEO Simon Hickey, who heralded Australia's first major airport launch in half a century as one that would bring the world closer to the region.

"For decades, countless people have advocated for an airport in Western Sydney and the social and economic benefits it would provide, and today, that ambition is a reality as we mark the beginning of an exciting new chapter in our city's cultural heartland," Hickey said.

"WSI is here to grow with Sydney for the coming century,

expand choice for travellers



and airlines, and connect more people with more places and opportunities," he added.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also spoke at the official launch, pouring fuel on the new airport rivalry in Sydney by declaring WSI as "Australia's best airport, without question".

"The terminal floor space is equivalent to around 13.5 football fields, and in keeping with Western Sydney's place at the forefront of solar energy uptake, WSI has around 9,000 solar panels, capable of meeting approximately 40% of the terminal's energy demand.

"It has 40 check-in kiosks and 34 bag drops, all operating with Australia's best technology, and 44,000m² of roof structure."

Thousands gathered in Sydney yesterday to watch the first flight take off, with the JQ service the most watched in the world on

tracking app Flight Radar 24.

WSI has been designed with growth in mind, with Hickey stating that in a few decades' time, it could be the same size as Heathrow Airport.

While initially the airline and destination selection will be modest, within a year, it is expected to grow firmly to at least 250 overseas ports.

Another milestone was achieved today when the first international flight took off courtesy of Air New Zealand, which flew to Auckland.

WSI has heavily promoted itself as a digital-first airport, with passengers no longer required to look for their airline or flight number to check in.

Instead, travellers can go to any one of the 40 self check-in kiosks and 34 bag drops available. *AB*

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features five pages of news, plus a cover wrap from **Ponant Explorations**, and a full page from **Railbookers**.

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Monday 26th Oct 2026

Cruising into luxury

CRUISE Lines International Association (CLIA) has launched the fourth week of its Cruise Month campaign.

Initiatives will shine a light on luxury cruising, which CLIA executive director in Australasia Joel Katz said is "one of the biggest growth areas in travel right now".



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A&K is leading the way

ABERCROMBIE & Kent (A&K) is tracking another record-breaking year, with demand growing for immersive travel, in-depth regional experiences and destinations including Egypt, China and Kenya.

"This year is on track to be another record-breaking year for our business, following what was already our strongest year in history last year," A&K vice president marketing APAC Michelle Mickan (**pictured**) told a media event in Sydney.

"People are now travelling back to regions in-depth, doing one region and doing it really well, as opposed to doing multiple regions," she said.

That trend is reflected in demand for private access, exceptional guides and multi-generational and family travel, particularly in Africa.

Mickan said luxury travellers were increasingly choosing to explore individual regions in greater depth, rather than combining multiple destinations in one trip, while clients were also booking entire camps years ahead for milestone celebrations, including 80th birthdays and wedding anniversaries.

"Experience is leading the luxury," Mickan continued.

Africa is A&K's strongest-performing region, followed by the Middle East, while Egypt remains its top destination.

Mickan said the opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum was helping drive interest in the

region, stating, "we cannot keep



up with the demand".

China has also surged during the past 18 months, at times outselling Japan, while Kenya leads A&K's African destinations.

Italy remains in high demand, India is "definitely back", and Sri Lanka is benefiting from demand for closer-to-home alternatives.

Mickan also flagged Costa Rica, Patagonia and Uzbekistan as ones to watch, alongside growing interest in Peru and Georgia.

A&K now has more than 70 offices globally, with recent openings in Mexico, South Korea, the Nordics and more, with Mickan hinting at further openings in the pipeline.

The event also highlighted Ecoventura's Perfect Match concept, which uses three identical ships departing on the same day for three unique voyages of the same duration.

Guests can be matched by demographics and interests across the vessels, with a similar approach applied to shore excursions. *MV/ZH*

DL restores LAX

DELTA Air Lines is reinstating seasonal non-stop connectivity between Auckland and Brisbane to Los Angeles from this week.

The daily AKL-LAX service has resumed today and will operate until 27 Mar, while DL's three-times-weekly BNE-LAX service will start up on Wed until 26 Mar. *JM*



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QR mulls premium econ rethink, daily WSI sooner

QATAR Airways global chief executive officer Hamad Al-Khater has revealed that the carrier is “seriously considering” introducing premium economy seats to its services.

While the Doha-based airline had snubbed the idea in the past, arguing that its economy class cabins were already of premium standard, Al-Khater (pictured) hinted that the door is now open for such a move.

Speaking during a media briefing in Sydney on Sat, the QR chief disclosed few details about its premium economy ambitions, stating only that the idea had always been on the table and to “watch this space” for updates.

Al-Khater’s predecessor, Akbar al Baker, appeared to have a very different view, claiming in 2020 that airlines were “pulling the wool over the eyes” of customers with premium economy offerings. He told *Doha News* that many

of QR’s rivals were guilty of window dressing economy seats and charging an unfair price.

“They are giving the same service, just a little bit higher quantity of food and beverage, and just putting it in a fancy nice glass, or a larger tray with actually the same kind of amenities that somebody paying half your fare is sitting behind you and enjoying,” al Baker said.

If premium economy seats were to be installed, it would represent a significant change of course for Qatar Airways under Al-Khater, who has been in the job for just under a year.

Meanwhile, the QR chief also revealed that a new first class product for its fleet of B777-9s was “under serious design”.

However, he stated the plan



would only go ahead if it was a “first class that was worthwhile talking about and would appeal to our consumers”.

The disclosures about class

follow the carrier becoming the first Middle Eastern airline to sign on to Western Sydney International (TD 21 Oct).

The plan is for QR to commence flights from 15 Dec 2027 and move to daily the following year.

When asked about ramping up frequencies in late 2028, Al-Khater suggested the shift to daily flights “could be earlier” because it has a healthy fleet capacity with a strong diversity of aircraft.

“We are adding north of 15 aircraft next year and that capacity is going to allow us to really manoeuvre and add more routes,” Al-Khater said.

“We want to really ensure that we have a bit of space to start generating demand [in Australia]...and then build slowly into WSI,” he added.

Reflecting on Qatar Airways’ key partnership with Virgin Australia, Al-Khater said one key future focus would be to “go the extra mile” in making sure high service standards were maintained during periods of disruption.

“Making sure that focus is on consistency is absolutely key, particularly in disruption.

“It is very easy to talk about things when they generically happen, but how we treat our customer within the call centre, the website, the application is key - so we are looking at further integration on that front,” he said.

Al-Khater also confirmed that more cooperation on airport lounge access and via loyalty programs was in the pipeline with Virgin Australia. AB

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Monday 26th Oct 2026

Ruwi is on her way

THE second of SeaLink's two new ferries, *Ruwi*, is now on her way to South Australia from Batam, Indonesia (TD 22 Oct 2026).

Ruwi's arrival in around two weeks' time will enable the full, expanded Kangaroo Island ferry service to kick off ahead of the summer school holidays. JM

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Virginia is tuning up Aus

EXCLUSIVE

VIRGINIA is looking to grow international tourism through a new global travel forum, while positioning the US state for Australian visitors ahead of the 2027 centenary of country music.

The inaugural Come Find Your Virginia Global Travel Forum last week brought together travel trade partners from around the world for business appointments, industry presentations and destination showcases.

Virginia Tourism Corporation president and CEO Rita McClenny (pictured second from right) said the event was created to give international partners a deeper understanding of the state's tourism offering, previously promoted alongside Maryland and Washington DC through Capital Region USA.

"What we found is that our partners, our travel media, our travel operators, they really were interested in spending more time learning about Virginia... this global travel forum is a way to go deeper and across Virginia," McClenny told *Travel Daily*.

The state recorded 510,000 international visitors in 2025, generating US\$1.1 billion (A\$ 1.57b) in spending, although visitation was down 10%.

Its 2026 growth forecast has been revised from 6.4% to around 2%, with Australia, Germany and France among markets now expected to record slight declines.

However, 2025 data shows

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overseas visitors spent an average of US\$2,215 per visitor and stayed 12.4 nights with Aus accounting for 11,505 visitors.

McClenny said Virginia remained optimistic, citing its diverse tourism offering and new airline services, products and experiences as key drivers.

"We want to change people's perspectives over Virginia, there are just so many continued reasons, and the market will follow the economy and everything that's out there, but we're very bullish on travel and tourism," McClenny said.

Australian travellers will have an added incentive to visit in 2027, when Virginia marks 100 years since the first country music recordings were made in Bristol.

"Next year, with the music heritage celebration...it's going to be extraordinary," McClenny said, adding that the state offered experiences for families and extended-family groups, such as the cultural arts and museums.

McClenny confirmed the forum would not run in 2027, making way for other industry events in the United States, though it will return in the future. ZH



Finnair lands in MEL

FINNAIR'S first flight to Australia using its own aircraft and airline code has touched down at MEL this morning (TD 20 Oct 2026).

The arrival makes Melbourne the only Aussie city to be served by an airline from the European Union, with the service set to inject \$190m per year into Vic. JM

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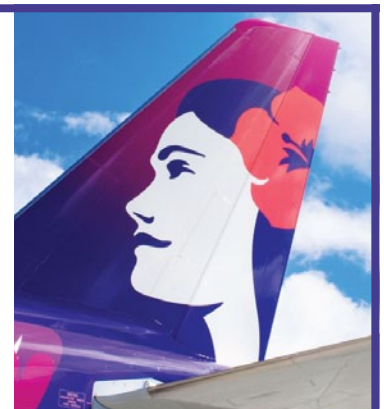
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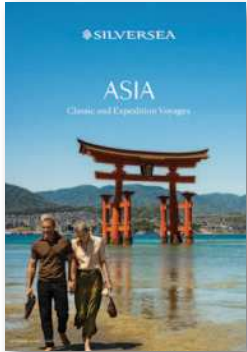
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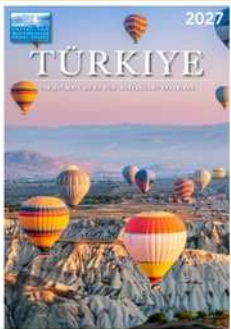
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Silversea - Asia Classic and Expedition Voyages
Silversea's new Asia brochures highlights a wide range of voyages, including classic itineraries that feature more overnights and later departures. Travellers can witness Japan's cherry blossoms in full bloom in Mar and Apr on a 14-day roundtrip Tokyo sailing from Mar, or explore the cultural richness and tropical beauty of Southeast and East Asia on longer itineraries from Nov to Feb. The brochure also showcases the line's expedition voyages, where travellers can journey through the continent by land and sea with expertly guided Zodiac, kayak and

hiking tours, on itineraries such as the 14-day 'Southern Japan and the Philippines: Exploring Okinawa'. Click [HERE](#) to check out the brochure.



Greece & Med Travel Centre - Turkiye 2027
Greece and Mediterranean Travel Centre has unveiled its 2027 brochure collection, including one dedicated to Turkiye. The 50-page publication highlights the specialist's small group tours around the country, as well as self-drive holidays and Istanbul city stays. Travellers can also cruise the Turkish coastline aboard a traditional gulet, travel at their own pace with a private guide and vehicle, and create their own holiday by customising the itineraries featured in the brochure, such as the

14-day 'Magical Turkey' tour and the 10-day 'Classical Turkey by Air'. See the new brochure [HERE](#).



Travelmarvel - Europe Preview 2028
Travelmarvel has released its 2028 Europe preview brochure, giving guests the opportunity to secure their place on a collection of river cruises, ocean cruises, yacht voyages, rail tours and land journeys. The brochure highlights the brand's expanded ocean cruising portfolio, which includes two new Mediterranean voyages aboard Holland America Line. The release also marks the return of Travelmarvel's Rhine, Main and Danube River cruises, along with Douro River

cruising aboard the *MS Estrela*, rail journeys, small group tours and land journeys. In addition, the brochure features the popular 'European Gems' river cruise - find out more [HERE](#).

1000MTG rewards

1000 Mile Travel Group (1000MTG) is rewarding its top travel advisors this week with a luxury Indonesian escape.

The five-night escape to Bali and Sumba recognises the independent business owners driving growth and excellence across its network.

Departing today and travelling until 31 Oct, the annual Top Achievers Trip recognises those achieving highly in corporate travel, luxury leisure and teamwork, as well as new talent.

Those joining the trip include Sam Rowe, Kurt Hufer, Stephanie McDonald, Emily Davidson, Erin Price and Nick Anderson.

The curated itinerary showcases two contrasting sides of Indonesian luxury hospitality, with 1000MTG working with La Collection on the trip.

GM Lauren Gray said 1000MTG was amazed by the quality of this year's top achievers and the level of their performance. *MS*

TIME scholarship

ENVOYAGE'S Travel Industry Mentor Experience (TIME) scholarship has been awarded to Belle Goldie of The Cruise & Travel Store (*TD* 17 Aug 2026).

She will begin a sponsored six-month mentoring placement with a senior industry leader this month, with Envoyage calling out Goldie for the way she has shown up for the travel community through events, supplier opportunities, industry initiatives and peer conversations.

Goldie also impressed with her clear plan to scale her business sustainably while helping develop the industry's next generation. *MS*

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Window Seat

'TIS almost the season to... slow down?

While most major cities are beginning to gear up for the festive season, the capital of Lithuania is taking a different approach this year.

Vilnius is challenging visitors to forego the Christmas rush and take the time to notice the magic of the season by joining the Slowest Christmas Marathon, which is open to city residents and visitors with no registration required.

Digital maps, available until 03 Jan, will lead participants through decorated streets, cosy cafes and details easily missed at a faster pace, with routes ranging from three kilometres to 42km.

During the main weekend on 12-13 Dec, selected stops will offer small surprises, with prizes waiting for those who complete their route along the required stops.

Alongside Vilnius' main Christmas attractions, the routes will lead visitors to lesser-known spots, including Senatorių Pasazas (Senators' Passage), a historic courtyard with a bakery offering a popular cinnamon bun, and the Uzupis Cat, a small sculpture in the city's bohemian district.



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