

travelBulletin

MARCH 2016



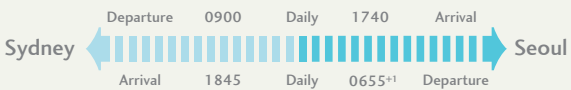
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COVER STORY 14

Helloworld, this is Andrew Burnes

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**From the managing editor
Bruce Piper**

FLIGHT Centre's launch last month of an unbranded "partnership initiative," under which non-affiliated travel agents can have access to Flight Centre product, could mark yet another seismic shift in the Australian travel industry. Complementing the existing Escape Travel branded franchise offering, the new move "will allow agents from outside the company to take advantage of FLT's buying power and access products and rates that haven't previously been available," enthused Flight Centre Australia general manager Melanie Waters-Ryan.

Clearly targeting the ongoing ructions at Helloworld, Waters-Ryan said the new opportunity to become part of an unbranded buying group would "appeal to other chains, unaligned agents and agents who are linked to other networks but considering their future options". The recruitment of former Helloworld/JTG veteran Danny Roche to oversee the new program is a master stroke, given his strong relationships with many existing Helloworld members and franchisees.

However newly minted Helloworld CEO Andrew Burnes quickly responded, pointing out that the seemingly magnanimous gesture by Flight Centre to open up its range was a stark contrast to its efforts to close out anyone else's products from their own retail distribution. "Not only has Flight Centre deliberately excluded several Helloworld wholesale businesses from being sold in their retail shops over the last few years, including Qantas Holidays and Sunlover Holidays, they actually financially penalise their consultants for selling these products," Burnes fumed, adding: "I don't believe other agents are going to be fooled into feeding the hand that bites them".

It should also be pointed out that this isn't the first move by Flight Centre to offer its products to other groups, with Back-Roads Touring and Topdeck Tours both majority owned by the company, but definitely targeting a wider distribution. And similarly Helloworld's wholly-owned Insider Journeys (formerly Travel Indochina) makes pains to distance itself from its parent company as it seeks to appeal across the board.

Given the controversy, it is very timely that this month we are pleased to feature the first in-depth interview with Andrew Burnes since he and wife Cinzia took the reins at Helloworld. With 40% of the company they have a huge vested interest in Helloworld's success and we can't wait to see what unfolds in the coming months.

This month's contributors

Steve Jones, Ian McMahon, Brett Jardine, Jayson Westbury, Peter Shelley, Andrew Hiebl, Gary Walsh, Amanda Woods, Brian Johnston, Ben Groundwater, Ben Piper, Nathalie Craig, Bonnie Tai, Jasmine O'Donoghue, Guy Dundas, Sarah Piper, Andrew Chan



www.travelbulletin.com.au

Travel Bulletin is part of the Travel Daily family of publications



EDITORIAL

Managing Editor – Bruce Piper
bruce.piper@travelbulletin.com.au

Co-ordinating Editor – Sarah Piper
Ph: 1300 799 220 or 02 8007 6760
sarah.piper@travelbulletin.com.au

Editor at Large – Ian McMahon
Ph: 03 9568 4464 or 0414 320 321
imcmahon@travelbulletin.com.au

ADVERTISING

National Sales Manager
Lisa Maroun
Ph: 0405 132 575 or 02 8007 6760
lisa.maroun@travelbulletin.com.au

Production Co-ordinator
Sarah Piper
Ph: 1300 799 220 or 02 8007 6760
sarah.piper@travelbulletin.com.au

www.travelbulletin.com.au

DESIGN TEAM

Sarah Piper, Wendy St George

FINANCE

Jenny Piper
jenny.piper@travelbulletin.com.au

4/41 Rawson Street Epping NSW 2121
PO Box 1010 Epping NSW 1710 Australia
Tel: 1300 799 220 (+61 2 8007 6760)
Fax: 1300 799 221 (+61 2 8007 6769)



Ian McMahon's perspective

WILL TA'S NEW CAMPAIGN BEAR FRUIT?

THERE are two conflicting theories about what stimulates tourism growth. Paradoxically, both may be about to be proved right. Or wrong, as the case may be. The first theory is postulated by the bean counters; the second is advanced by the marketers.

The first theory, often espoused by the mandarins of Treasury, is that there is no need for lavish expenditure on tourism promotion because tourism flows – both inbound and outbound – are governed essentially by the value of the Australian dollar. It is a view that the tourism industry has been forced to refute regularly over the years during a succession of controversies over the level of government funding for Tourism Australia (TA).

For my money, this theory has been definitively disproved by recent history. Despite the surging strength of the Australian dollar, the industry's marketing strategies have ensured that inbound numbers continued to rise steadily.

The opposite theory maintains that, in a world where governments everywhere are ploughing huge sums into attracting visitors, Australia must budget adequate funds for cost-effective destination marketing if it is to retain, let alone grow, its share of lucrative global tourism flows.

The good news is that the Federal Government has provided \$40 million for a

new, Chris Hemsworth-voiced, aquatically-themed global campaign. It is now being rolled out in major source markets around the world. And this is occurring at a time when the Australian dollar has dropped from previous highs around parity with the USD to around US70 cents. With this alignment of the stars, surely we can expect a turbo-charged boost to inbound numbers.

But what if the anticipated growth does not occur? What if the industry is left asking international travellers "where the bloody hell are you?" – because whatever the theorists say, neither the value of the currency nor the level of marketing will exclusively determine inbound tourism numbers. For example the Federal Government's plans to abolish the tax free threshold for working holiday backpackers has the potential to undermine this lucrative market sector. A case of cutting off your nose to spite your face.

The Government should note Qantas' recent experience. A dummy spit by the airline's chief executive Alan Joyce saw the carrier withdraw from its position as TA's "go to" airline. Happily, the two parties have now kissed and made up. But Qantas won't be in the same dominant position it was previously. Rivals have been able to move in and cement new relationships with TA. That's what happens when you cut off your nose to spite your face.

Value World re-emerges?

DESPITE presiding over a collapse worth millions of dollars late last year, interests associated with the failed Value World Travel attempted to re-enter the travel industry last month under a new name. Branded as Yupp Travel, the fledgling venture was formed by renaming a sister company to Value World, and relocating its operations to a serviced office in the Sydney CBD. There were red faces at AFTA when the business gained ATAS accreditation – which was swiftly withdrawn

‘There were red faces at AFTA when the business gained ATAS accreditation – which was swiftly withdrawn when the murky background of the company emerged in a *Travel Daily* exclusive’

when the murky background of the company emerged in a *Travel Daily* exclusive.

However AFTA shouldn't be too embarrassed – it appears several major suppliers were also taken in, with sources advising *travelBulletin* that Yupp was about to finalise contracts for GDS and consolidation – and who knows what else. The swift action taken by AFTA at the very least shows some of the advantages of a nimble, industry-led system and the controversy is also likely to have seen procedures tightened up even further when it comes to new ATAS entrants. It is also interesting to note the importance

BUSINESS MONITOR

OUTBOUND MARKET

Top 10 destinations, December 2015

Destination	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Nov 15/ Dec 15	Trend Dec 14/ Dec 15
	000	000	000	%	%
New Zealand	108.3	105.6	172.0	+0.4	+4.8
USA	85.2	87.0	106.8	+0.1	+2.1
Indonesia	96.0	96.9	103.1	+1.2	+3.5
UK	52.5	53.2	68.6	+0.1	+15.1
India	25.5	28.3	57.1	+3.7	+10.6
Thailand	44.4	41.6	48.0	-2.1	-3.0
Japan	29.9	30.0	44.9	+3.0	+34.5
China	36.4	37.6	44.9	+1.1	+8.6
Singapore	31.1	31.0	36.4	-0.3	+2.0
Philippines	17.8	18.5	35.6	-0.5	-1.1
All outbound	809.5	815.4	1088.6	+0.6	+5.7

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

INBOUND MARKET

Top 10 sources, December 2015

Source	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Nov 15/ Dec 15	Trend Dec 14/ Dec 15
	000	000	000	%	%
New Zealand	109.8	109.9	124.2	+0.0	+4.2
UK	58.1	59.5	112.4	+0.7	+6.0
China	100.3	103.3	93.2	+2.6	+34.1
USA	54.8	55.4	81.0	+1.5	+12.9
Singapore	35.3	34.9	56.7	+0.9	+15.2
Malaysia	29.4	30.2	42.8	-0.0	+11.1
Japan	30.1	30.1	36.0	+1.3	+14.3
South Korea	22.3	23.4	30.3	+5.0	+24.0
Hong Kong	19.8	20.0	27.4	+0.5	+17.2
India	19.6	20.0	26.1	+0.5	+6.1
All inbound	652.8	659.8	897.7	+1.0	+11.1

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

MAIN DOMESTIC ROUTES

Top 10 domestic city pairs at December 2015

City pair	Passengers YE Dec 14 (000)	Passengers YE Dec 15 (000)	% change
Melbourne-Sydney	8,316.9	8,613.4	+3.6
Brisbane-Sydney	4,448.1	4,476.2	+0.6
Brisbane-Melbourne	3,317.1	3,353.8	+1.1
Gold Coast-Sydney	2,595.2	2,618.3	+0.9
Adelaide-Melbourne	2,272.0	2,311.0	+1.7
Melbourne-Perth	2,160.7	2,138.9	-1.0
Adelaide-Sydney	1,813.0	1,831.5	+1.0
Gold Coast-Melbourne	1,754.0	1,812.3	+3.3
Perth-Sydney	1,798.9	1,760.9	-2.1
Hobart-Melbourne	1,400.1	1,493.6	+6.7

Source: BITRE

that ATAS accreditation has assumed in the short time since the scheme was set up, with Yupp Travel's backers clearly seeing it as a way of swiftly establishing a good reputation among the industry.

NTIA 2016 off and running

NOMINATIONS have now closed for the 2016 National Travel Industry Awards, with the full list of nominees set to be published later this month. This year the awards have a total of 37 categories for suppliers and travel agents, most of which open for industry voting on Thursday 17th March. After the three week voting period the finalists will be revealed and then the judging process begins, culminating in the industry night of nights, the NTIA Gala Dinner in Sydney on Saturday 16th July.

Among several changes this year is the introduction of an ATAS accreditation requirement for the judged supplier categories. At least one major tour operator – winner of several categories in previous years – has not joined ATAS at this stage, and this change means its various brands are locked out of the process. That also applies to the company's sales representatives who are unable to nominate in the best supplier categories – making several quite unhappy, *travelBulletin* is led to believe.

Vanuatu aviation crisis

TOURISM is one of the major industries for Vanuatu, and the withdrawal of flights due to the poor condition of the country's main airport runway in Port Vila is likely to hit very hard. Air New Zealand was the first carrier to flag the issue, early last month indicating it would cease operations over safety concerns. Qantas shortly thereafter terminated its

HUNTER GLOBAL TRAVEL IS 10!



THE Express Travel Group helped celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Hunter Global Travel Group last month, with a function where 300 key partners kicked up their heels at Surf House in Merewether. The business was founded in February 2006 and has since grown to four offices in

Maitland, Rutherford, Newcastle West and The Junction – all of which now trade as italktravel after rebranding as Australia's first italktravel in 2014. Pictured cutting the cake are founders Mark and Julia van Huisstede and Karen Jones along with their staff.

codeshare on Air Vanuatu's services, and two days later Virgin Australia canned its Brisbane-Port Vila services until early April at the earliest.

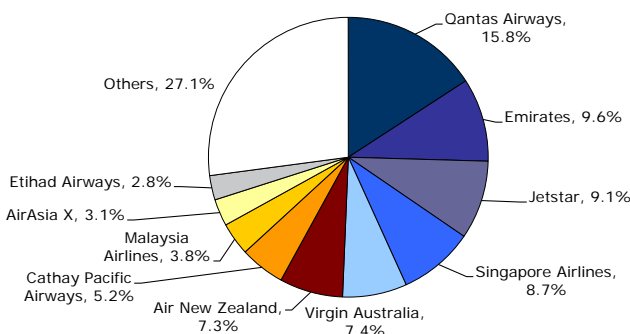
Air Vanuatu has deemed the runway safe, in the light of an independent expert's report which recommended ongoing daily sweeping of the runway and the removal of excess water in periods of heavy rain until a "surface rejuvenation" can take place.

However while there is funding available for an urgent upgrade, a decision on the project was delayed due to a political crisis which saw 14 members of parliament convicted over a corruption scandal. A contract has now been let for the works, but until they are complete the local tourism industry, already devastated by Cyclone Pam last year, looks set for a further significant downturn as forward bookings disappear.

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNATIONAL AIR MARKET SHARE

International passengers by major airline – year ended November 2015



Source: BITRE

DOMESTIC AIR MARKET – December 2015

	Dec 14	Dec 15	Growth (%)	Yr to Dec 14	Yr to Dec 15	Growth (%)
Total pax carried	4.93m	5.05m	+2.5	57.51m	57.49m	+0.0
Revenue pax kms (RPK)	5.85bn	6.01bn	+2.7	67.86bn	67.85bn	+0.0
Avail seat kms (ASK)	7.56bn	7.68bn	+1.6	88.97bn	88.70bn	-0.3
Load factor (%)	77.4	78.2	+0.8*	76.3	76.5	+0.2*
Aircraft trips (000)	53.1	53.1	+0.1	635.5	636.8	+0.2

Source: BITRE * Percentage points

DOMESTIC ON TIME PERFORMANCE – December 2015

	Departures on Time		Arrivals on Time		Cancellations	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Jetstar	5,439	68.0	5,056	63.2	374	4.5
Qantas	8,372	88.6	8,347	88.4	91	1.0
QantasLink	8,466	86.2	8,467	86.2	292	2.9
REX	4,505	88.0	4,625	90.3	26	0.5
Virgin Australia	9,592	88.3	9,665	89.0	151	1.4
All Airlines	40,295	84.2	40,071	83.7	1,009	2.1

Source: BITRE

Hawaiian's new team

HAWAIIAN Airlines appears to be very confident in the future of its Australian operations, having finalised the recruitment of a large team just over 12 months since Gai Tyrrell was appointed to the newly created role of regional director Australia/New Zealand for the carrier. Tyrrell has established a new standalone office in Clarence Street, Sydney and last month unveiled her new commercial team, including Kim Chapman as director of sales Australia, Keiryn Osborn as distribution manager, and Karen Macmillan in charge of partnerships and promotions.

Andrew Best and Jennifer Edmunds have been appointed as national account managers in Sydney and Brisbane respectively, while Hawaiian's new business development managers include Joyce Wir and Gillian Hayward in Sydney and Janis McDonald in Brisbane. While Hawaiian Airlines already operates daily Sydney-Honolulu flights and four services weekly from Brisbane, Tyrrell hinted at future growth saying the team had been scaled up in line with its "expanded operating presence and future plans in Australia".

Virgin's new FIFO Alliance

A NEW 'Charter Partnership' between Virgin Australia and Alliance Aviation Services launched last month reflects the decline of the resources sector in Australia, which has put pressure on these formerly lucrative fly-in fly-out operations. When the mining construction boom was on thousands of workers were travelling long distances on a weekly basis, living in major centres but working remotely. There's still plenty of FIFO business around, but as mines move

into operational mode (or are mothballed due to low commodity prices) the staffing requirements are lower.

Both Virgin and Alliance have a hefty competitor in this sector in the form of Qantas, which operates a fleet of FIFO and charter aircraft under the Network Aviation banner which was integrated into the group some years ago. The new Virgin/Alliance agreement is effectively a joint venture in which all new fly-in fly-out contracts will be managed together. The carriers will also jointly procure aircraft, provide ground services for each other and maintain a common pool of spare parts.

Arrivals continue to set records

OVERSEAS visitation to Australia reached 7.4 million arrivals last year, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics confirming the 2015 figure was up more than 8% on the previous

‘As expected China was one of the top performing markets, with more than one million Chinese tourists heading down under, up 22%’

corresponding period. As expected China was one of the top performing markets, with more than one million Chinese tourists heading down under, up 22%. However that still left China in second place, behind NZ which saw 1.3 million Kiwis cross the Tasman during the year.

Traditional markets continued to perform

strongly, with the UK at 688,000 up 5.6% – a fact hailed by Tourism Australia managing director John O'Sullivan who said "the healthy state of our visitor economy is founded upon a balanced portfolio. It's worth noting that all but one of Tourism Australia's 17 key inbound markets enjoyed growth in 2015," he said. Indicators are positive for a strong 2016 too, with the weaker Australian dollar making travel here much more affordable for many overseas tourists.

Agent-friendly Jetstar?

IT MAY seem somewhat uncharacteristic for a low cost carrier, but Jetstar has overhauled its group booking procedures to make them easier for travel agents. The move is a response to significant growth in groups travel on the Qantas offshoot, with the development of the new jetstar.com/groups site claimed to be the result of a six month development process which aims to provide faster and more competitive quotes.

The carrier is also innovating on the product side, recently introducing a 'Groups Plus Bundle' which includes a food and beverage voucher and Qantas frequent flyer points, which can be added to individual or group PNRs. Jetstar is also targeting group bookings by waiving booking and service fees, offering seat selection and unlimited name changes at no extra cost and allowing the pooling of luggage allowances for bookings of ten passengers or more.

Viator Sydney jobs go

THE US\$200m acquisition of Viator by TripAdvisor in 2014 was a great triumph for an Australian-founded business, with the tour and activity specialist having been established

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNET AGENCY MARKET SHARE

January 2016, compared with December 2015

Rank	Position	Visits Share	Relative Diff	Rank
1	2	Jan 16	Jan to Dec	Dec 15
1	Webjet Australia	15.47	-1.23	1
2	Expedia Australia	10.95	+9.33	3
3	Wotif.com	9.27	+9.91	2
4	Flight Centre	7.30	+7.50	4
5	Skyscanner Australia	7.08	+6.90	5
6	Lastminute.com.au	3.65	+4.38	6
7	Velocity Frequent Flyer	1.96	+2.41	7
8	Cheap Flights Aus & NZ	1.47	+1.57	8
9	Helloworld	1.44	+1.42	10
10	Luxury Escapes	1.39	+1.53	9

Source: Hitwise, a division of Connixity

INTERNATIONAL AIR ROUTES

Top 10 city pairs (at November 2015)

City pair	Passengers	Passengers	% of	% change
	YE Nov 14	YE Nov 15	total	14/15
Auckland-Sydney	1,470,720	1,528,343	4.4	+3.9
Singapore-Sydney	1,365,229	1,445,596	4.2	+5.9
Singapore-Melbourne	1,142,595	1,185,371	3.4	+3.7
Auckland-Melbourne	1,026,174	1,136,113	3.3	+10.7
Singapore-Perth	1,059,578	1,039,251	3.0	-1.9
Auckland-Brisbane	900,461	961,545	2.8	+6.8
Hong Kong-Sydney	935,843	955,309	2.8	+2.1
Los Angeles-Sydney	894,600	906,833	2.6	+1.4
Denpasar-Perth	901,716	886,892	2.6	-1.6
Kuala Lumpur-Melbourne	912,063	837,323	2.4	-8.2
Top 10 city pairs	10,608,979	10,882,576	31.6	+2.6
Other city pairs	22,319,949	23,559,317	68.4	+5.6
ALL CITY PAIRS	32,928,928	34,441,893	100.0	+4.6

Source: BITRE

SHARE PRICES

at 18 February 2016

Flight Centre (FLT)	\$40.49
Helloworld (HLO)	\$2.20
Webjet (WEB)	\$5.71
Disruptive Investments (DVI)	\$0.018
Qantas (QAN)	\$3.95
Virgin Australia (VAH)	\$0.465
Ardent Leisure (AAD)	\$1.77
Air New Zealand (AIZ)	\$2.57
Auckland International Airport (AIA)	\$5.50
Sydney Airport (SYD)	\$6.59
Corporate Travel Management (CTD)	\$11.95
Cover-More Insurance (CVO)	\$1.67
Regional Express (REX)	\$0.825
Sealink (SLK)	\$4.00

TD READERS CELEBRATE AIR CANADA



AIR Canada sponsored a fabulous festive season competition in *Travel Daily* during December with scores of inventive entries from across the industry fulfilling the criteria which required a Christmas-related image including Air Canada and

Travel Daily. We were bowled over by everyone's silly season creativity, with the winning entry (**above**) submitted by Alex Lee from Travel & Cruise Bright winning two return Air Canada flights from Australia to Vancouver.

Travel Daily HEADLINES

- 19 Jan** Expedia merges hotel brands
- 19 Jan** Travel Exhibition TIME pact
- 20 Jan** SQ kks SIN-CBR-WLG route
- 20 Jan** Choice slams JQ pricing
- 21 Jan** STA reports 26% sales hike
- 21 Jan** AFTA, agents laud SQ CBR
- 22 Jan** Burnes to take HLO reins
- 22 Jan** Malindo Air paying 10% comm
- 25 Jan** Viator sacks Sydney staff
- 25 Jan** AFTA refers Webjet to ACCC
- 26 Jan** New international campaign for Tourism Australia
- 27 Jan** CATO plans crisis forum
- 28 Jan** Qantas makes up with TA
- 28 Jan** IMAX Sydney hotel vision
- 29 Jan** Value World rises from ashes?
- 29 Jan** EK non-stop to Auckland
- 01 Feb** Yupp Travel out of ATAS
- 02 Feb** TTF: Axe backpacker tax
- 02 Feb** Local Malindo call centre
- 03 Feb** MOT pushes QF/AA jv nod
- 03 Feb** Cruise Team live chat debut
- 04 Feb** Virgin Q2 profit up 32.2%
- 04 Feb** *Scenic Eclipse* preview
- 05 Feb** VA axes Port Vila to Apr
- 05 Feb** SIA Q3 profits skyrocket
- 08 Feb** Official guide to AFTA '16
- 09 Feb** Four million visitors to Bali
- 09 Feb** Flight Centre affiliate push
- 10 Feb** Burnes labels FCTG content move "disingenuous"
- 10 Feb** HA ramps up local office
- 10 Feb** RMR steams ahead in Oz
- 11 Feb** Virgin records H1 growth
- 11 Feb** JQ rejigs group bookings
- 12 Feb** Star plots third Jupiters hotel
- 12 Feb** Airbnb challenges agents
- 15 Feb** Virgin forms FIFO Alliance
- 15 Feb** Bris cruise hub progress
- 16 Feb** Strong H1FY16 at SeaLink
- 16 Feb** Cover-More revenue rise
- 17 Feb** Alysandratos HLO stake up
- 17 Feb** Xiamen to MEL from Jul
- 18 Feb** Ace Travel agt stole \$287K
- 18 Feb** Webjet's TTV jumps 28%

in Sydney in 1995 and grown through several rounds of funding to become a world leader in the sector. However being part of a large global operation had its drawbacks for some of the Sydney-based customer service staff, who were made redundant in late January after a restructure. It's understood that about 40 roles were affected. A spokesperson told

travelBulletin the move was the result of consolidating English-language email and phone support functions to Viator's main call centre in Las Vegas. However "the company remains committed to its roots in Sydney," the spokesperson added, with Viator's core engineering team continuing to be based in the NSW capital.

AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS

International passenger through Australia's major international airports - November 2015

Airport	Passengers YE Nov 14	Passengers YE Nov 15	% of total	% change 15/14
Sydney	13,286,871	13,799,560	39.9	+3.9
Melbourne	7,976,600	8,754,160	25.3	+9.7
Brisbane	4,934,388	5,210,848	15.1	+5.6
Perth	4,182,856	4,185,090	12.1	+0.1
Gold Coast	884,710	930,514	2.7	+5.2
Adelaide	968,867	880,073	2.5	-9.2
Cairn	462,178	534,167	1.5	+15.6
Darwin	325,803	265,372	0.8	-18.5
Sunshine Coast*	10,248	12,261	0.0	+19.6
Norfolk Island	11,461	11,733	0.0	+2.4
Townsville^	n/a	7,573	0.0	n/a
Port Hedland~	n/a	4,597	0.0	n/a
All Airports	33,043,982	34,595,948	100.0	+4.7

* Operated scheduled service from Jul 2012 to Sept 2012, June 2013 to Oct 2013 and Jun 2014 to Oct 2014. ~Scheduled services recommenced Apr 2015. ^Scheduled services recommenced Sept 2015.

ATAS ACCREDITED LOCATIONS

at 19 January 2016

New South Wales	1,029
Victoria	745
Queensland	669
Western Australia	328
South Australia	233
Australian Capital Territory	51
Tasmania	40
Northern Territory	23
TOTAL	3,118

Got something to say?

We're all ears, so share your thoughts at haveyoursay@travelbulletin.com.au



Steve Jones' Say

SOME years ago, in an interview with Andrew McEvoy shortly after he took the reins at Tourism Australia, I asked him about the weight of expectation that must come with selling the nation to the world.

There was, he mused after a considered pause, one particular factor that made the responsibility such an exciting yet pressured one. Everyone has a view on how it should be done.

In much the same way sports fans gather in pubs and pontificate about their teams' successes and failures, the Australian public is never short of an opinion on the latest marketing efforts of Tourism Australia.

The reason is simple; everyone cares.

Fundamentally, Australia is an image-conscious nation, sensitive to, and interested how, it is projected overseas in a way that Britain, for example, simply is not.

In many respects it comes down to age. Australia is a young country, eager to be liked and anxious about how it is perceived. That extends to how the country

is marketed.

I have often thought that promoting Australia to the world must be one of the most blessed marketing jobs going, such is the richness of material at the marketer's disposal. But it is also strewn with landmines.

Get it wrong and you can expect a public mauling. Whoever thought Lara Bingle swearing at would-be visitors was a good idea can testify to that.

On the flip side, people still get all misty-eyed when they recall larrikin Paul Hogan throwing a shrimp on the barbie.

All of which brings me to Tourism Australia's recently-launched global marketing campaign, and its focus on coastal and aquatic experiences.

Lisa Ronson swapped Westpac for Tourism Australia a little over 12 months ago now and this latest push under 'There's Nothing Like Australia' is her first campaign from concept to launch. The intensity of the spotlight wasn't lost on Ronson

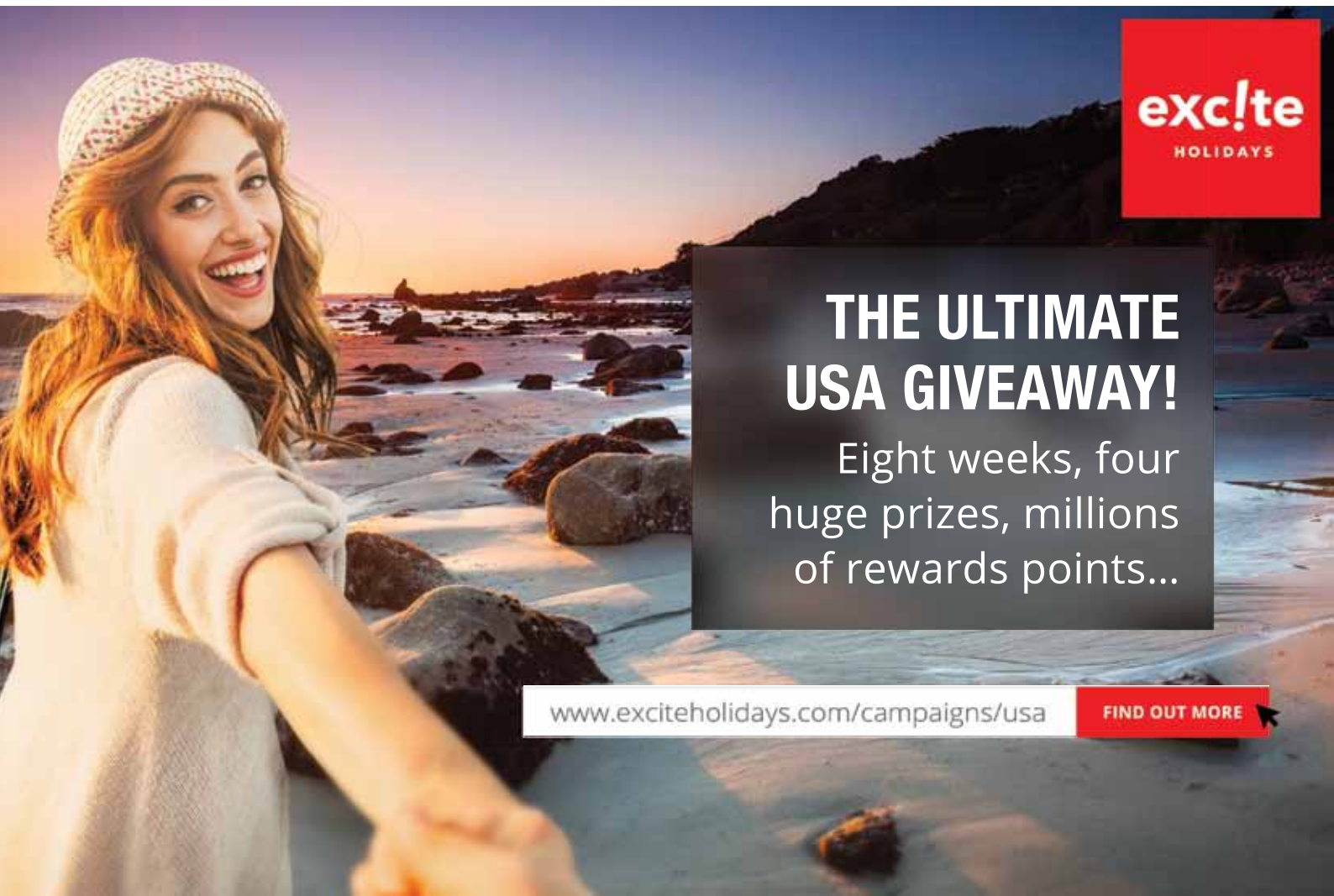
who described the level of interest as "absolutely a positive" before conceding there was also "concern and anxieties about what people are going to say".

It almost goes without saying that praise for the campaign has not been universal with some describing it as "beautiful but boring" and "lacking diversity".

By and large, however, it has been well received, and rightly so. At its most basic, imagery is designed to draw people in and from that perspective it has surely succeeded. The use of virtual reality could also be a masterstroke if take up of Google's low cost VR technology, Google Cardboard, reaches critical mass.

It's also worth noting that this campaign, like most released by Tourism Australia, is targeting international markets.

What we may regard as clichéd or unimaginative is viewed through an entirely different lens by those on the other side of the world, many of whom have never set foot on Australian soil.



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Spyros makes a move

INDUSTRY veteran Spyros Alysandratos clearly believes in the future of Helloworld, last month spending almost \$17 million to boost his stake in the company. The surprise acquisition followed the dilution of the stakes of all shareholders due to the merger with AOT, which saw the investment by Alysandratos' Sintack Pty Ltd reduce from 19.9% to around 13%. Alysandratos purchased 7.2 million shares from existing major shareholders UBS Australia and CVC's Europe Voyager, in the process lifting his stake back to 19.9% and making him the second biggest holder after new CEO and executive director Andrew and Cinzia Burnes who have 40% of the company.

The purchase puts Sintack's shareholding in the company slightly ahead of the stake held by Qantas, and should give further muscle to the voice of his representative on the Helloworld Board, Peter Spathis. The sell-down by UBS and CVC continues their gradual exit from the Helloworld share registry, with CVC's Europe Voyager now down to 12.3% while UBS Australia has just 1.3% remaining. Alysandratos, whose industry interests also include Consolidated Travel and 50% of the Express Travel Group, didn't comment on the move. But new Helloworld CEO Andrew Burnes - no doubt with a twinkle in his eye - told *travelBulletin* it was "a very good investment by Spyros!"



TNZ LINKS UP WITH SUPERMODEL

TOURISM New Zealand (TNZ) has recently unveiled its new partnership with Australian supermodel, TV personality and actress Megan Gale, with the internationally famous babe signing on to help promote The New Zealand Cycle Trail (NZCT), a diverse network of bike trails across the country.

"We are confident Megan's influence and authentic connection to New Zealand will increase awareness and preference for New Zealand as a world-class cycling destination", said TNZ GM Australia, Tony Saunders.

Cycling has been identified by TNZ as a key special interest area to help drive higher value and seasonal visitors to New Zealand during autumn and spring. "Holiday visitors that participate in cycling spend more and stay longer than average visitors," said Saunders.



AFTA VIEW

Jayson Westbury, chief executive AFTA

NEW ZEALAND IMPRESSES

LAST month I had the pleasure of meeting the New Zealand Prime Minister, The Rt Hon John Key as I attended a small gathering of Australian travel industry people to discuss a range of important topics impacting the tourism industry in New Zealand and in particular, from an outbound perspective from Australia.

As I am sure readers would know the Prime Minister of New Zealand is also the Tourism Minister. Such is the importance of travel and tourism to New Zealand that responsibility for its success and future sits with the PM.

John Key is an impressive person, even with the fact that he has been a politician since 2002, some 14 years. As Prime Minister he won three elections in 2008, 2011 and in 2014 and for the most part has kept New Zealand humming along even in the face of global financial difficulties and their own natural disasters including the Christchurch earthquake back in 2011.

What was also incredibly impressive was that as a nation's leader he was interested and engaged enough to sit down with just a few Australian travel industry folk and really talk about the issues and challenges that we face and how things look in the future.

‘Such is the importance of travel and tourism to NZ that responsibility for its success and future sits with the PM’

It was a two-way exchange and I definitely made the point that any governments who think taxing tourists or clipping the ticket as tourists arrive and depart by way of a passenger movement charge or border charge is unwelcome to the industry at large, particularly when we are dealing with such small margins.

Some of the emerging distribution models referred to as the sharing economy were discussed and it is clear that this is a global phenomenon, not a local one. I don't think there is an easy fix for this, if at all. Time will tell what governments of all persuasions decided to do about the sharing economy. One thing is for sure, reasonable attribution of taxation to offshore companies is something that needs to be addressed by governments. It will be interesting to see how it gets addressed over the years ahead both in Australian and New Zealand.

So by way of quick summary, the New Zealand people have definitely got themselves one hell of a Prime Minister who is engaged in real issues and keen to facilitate sensible debate to solve problems for the good of all.

On a final unrelated note, news of the conviction of Jordan Dittloff is indeed the first of what I am sure will be several more to follow. In the end the travel agent pleaded guilty of stealing \$277,993 from 47 different clients and will face jail for his actions. This is a strong message to any person thinking that they can get away with stealing by masquerading as a travel agent. Clearly the new de-regulated environment has the backing of the police who have pursued this case and got their man.

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Photo: Destination NSW

VIVID SYDNEY EXTENDS IN 2016

THE success of Vivid Sydney over the past seven years has led to the recent announcement that the festival of light, music and ideas will run for an additional five nights in 2016, running from May 27 to June 18, a total of 23 nights.

Last year Vivid attracted a record 1.7 million people, with more than 112,000 international and domestic overnight visitors travelling specifically to NSW to enjoy the spectacle.

Destination NSW Chief Executive Officer and Executive Producer of Vivid Sydney, Sandra Chipchase, said expanding the festival in 2016 will give visitors more time to experience the spectacular light, music and ideas that illuminate the Harbour City each winter.

This year the festival will expand to include sites in Taronga Zoo as well, with installations including a trail of giant, luminous animals sculptures.

ACI HR SOLUTIONS LAUNCHES IN AUS

CONSIDERING the plethora of travel industry recruitment specialists currently operating in the local market, you would have to think there wasn't much room for any more.

However Andrew Chan, the founder of ACI HR Solutions begs to differ. Sydney born and bred, and having been at Cathay Pacific and Singapore Airlines in Australia in the early stages of his career, Chan has now worked in Asia for some years and established ACI in Asia in 2012, with the long-term aim of bringing the business down under.

Sydney will be the fourth office for ACI, joining established operations in Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai to give the business a strong presence across Asia-Pacific. "Opening a Sydney office, along with aspirations in other markets where I have strong experience, has been the plan since day one," he told *travelBulletin*.

While Chan will be a regular visitor to Sydney from his bases in Singapore and Hong Kong, the local business is being represented full time by Executive Consultant Kathy Fatseas, who will work from Pitt Street, Sydney as the company's newest team member. Chan said the Sydney operation "complements our existing network of

offices in Asia and offers both clients and candidates in the travel and hospitality sector a true Asia-Pacific network that not too many other specialist industry firms – in fact if any in this part of the world – can boast".

Chan said he believes the timing of the Australian launch is perfect for ACI HR, which covers the whole gamut from travel and tourism through to inbound and hospitality sectors. The boom in hotel construction – particularly with Sydney's Crown project in Barangaroo - is very encouraging, he said, with many jobs likely to be required in the inbound and hospitality sectors. "In the early days we built our business around the integrated resorts in Asia," Chan told *travelBulletin*, with ACI helping recruit many of

the staff for properties such as The Venetian on Macao's booming Cotai Strip as well as Singapore's massively successful Marina Bay Sands. He has seen the prosperity that these tourism meccas have brought to the destinations, and believes the relatively low Australian dollar also augurs well for a strong performance for inbound tourism – meaning prosperity for all.

Chan said ACI HR differentiates itself from some of its competitors by specialising in middle to upper management roles, leaving entry-level positions to other recruiters. And Sydney is just another link in the ACI chain, with the company also planning to enter the UK market via an office in London sometime this year.



‘Opening a Sydney office... has been the plan since day one’

Andrew Chan, CEO and founder
ACI HR Solutions

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ECRUIISING'S HOT NEW VENTURE

TRAVEL industry entrepreneur Brett Dudley, founder of Sydney-based online cruise specialist ecruising, last month launched what he described as "Australia's newest elite travel company". Dubbed 33 Degrees, the move takes his business to the next level, having grown from the handcrafted portfolio of cruises and tours which Dudley has been operating for some years under the ecruising.travel brand.

"We decided to create a unique and separate company epitomising amazing experiences, luxury and effortless travel," he said, with ecruising's cruise tours having been so popular that he created a company and team dedicated to these "immersive high-end packages". Offering concierge-style service, 33 Degrees will offer tours visiting some of the most remote and interesting places on earth, he promised. Private jets, rail charters, exclusive resort buyouts and luxury ships are all on the agenda.

The name 33 Degrees is derived from three of Dudley's favourite cities: Sydney, Cape Town and Santiago, all of which are 33 degrees south of the Equator. "The number 33 enigmatically stretches as a latitude line across many diverse cultures in many different time zones," he added.

The 33 Degrees team is **pictured above** from left: Charlotte Mottram, Kylie Organ, Angela Chung and Brett Dudley.

TG rejigs Sydney schedule

THAI Airways International now claims to offer the fastest flight time from Sydney to European destinations such as Frankfurt, Paris and Brussels courtesy of a new schedule which includes an 11th weekly service between Bangkok and the NSW capital. Effective 27 March, the addition means there will now be an afternoon flight four times a week that offers quick, convenient connections to Europe and Asia.

TG472, operated using a Boeing 747-400, departs Sydney at 4pm each Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, arriving into Bangkok at 2220 the same evening. That's in addition to the existing daily TG476 departure by the Star Alliance carrier which leaves Sydney at 10am, arriving into Bangkok at 4.20pm.



ATEC VIEW

Peter Shelley, managing director ATEC

TAKE TOURISM SERIOUSLY

AS WE power into the new year there are a few issues which are resonating in the travel space that will influence our collective success in 2016.

For those focused on outbound, there is the challenge of selling international travel to Australians who are increasingly seeing the value of their travel dollar decline.

For inbound, the dollar story is more positive, but global economic jitters - particularly from our largest yielding export market, China - are worth keeping an eye on.

Happily, the traditional inbound market has picked up recently. The GFC provided us with close to ten years of sluggish

performance and we are now finally starting to see a turnaround from the US, UK and European markets. China has long been our rising star and it continues to dominate the inbound market's success, having reached 1m visitors and spend up 43 per cent to \$7.7 billion annually. But we also have more

‘Spending by foreign tourists continues to grow and elevate tourism exports to the No.1 position for service exports...’

opportunities ahead with greater engagement from new and emerging markets including India, Indonesia & South America.

We have a strong and desirable product to market abroad. Tourism Australia's 2 million Instagram followers (compared to Visit USA's 27k and Pure NZ 275k) and 6.7 million Facebook Likes (Visit USA 5.2m, Pure NZ 2m) show there is strong engagement with our product and what Australia represents. The challenge is to convert this interest into visitation.

Whilst this may be an ambitious expectation in the short term, the effectiveness of recent campaigns combined with the attractiveness our AUD exchange rates are delivering very welcome growth in visitors to our shores which, in turn, is increasing the value of export income received from international visitors.

Spending by foreign tourists continues to grow and elevate tourism exports to the No.1 position for service exports with \$3.8 billion received in December 2015. This is a remarkable 65 per cent of all export services contributing to our economy for that month. Income from international visitors now matches Australia's total rural exports and is biting at the heels of iron ore with many commentators suggesting inbound tourism will become Australia's largest export within the next 12 months.

Yet there remains a tendency to take our industry lightly, failing to see it as a slightly different model, but equally as profitable as traditional 'hard' exports. It's time governments, policy makers and investors recognised the contribution tourism is now making to the Australian economy and begin to transition from a short term economic base of manufacturing and mining to the long term and growing export services sector.

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Lufthansa Business Class

Andrew and Cinzia Burnes have taken the reins of Helloworld, with shareholders voting in favour of the merger between the Burnes' AOT Group and Helloworld. In his first major interview since becoming CEO Andrew Burnes gives an insight into the rationale for the deal and his big plans for the future. By BRUCE PIPER.

HELLOWORLD, THIS IS ANDREW BURNES

IT'S been a tough few years for Helloworld Limited. The company has undergone a massive transformation, with the launch of the new brand in 2014 seeing the demise of the former much-loved Harvey World

Travel, Travelscene, Jetset and Travelworld franchises. While the consolidation of the brands was seen as necessary to position the business for the future, it has not been without its detractors – not to mention a significant exodus of members to other agency groups. Then there was the huge write-down of goodwill last August, when the company was devalued by more than \$200 million – a figure larger than its entire stock market capitalisation.

With all that baggage, why on earth would Andrew and Cinzia Burnes – the founders and owners of the highly successful – and private - AOT Group – want to merge their company with Helloworld? According to Burnes, the pair are absolutely committed to the future of Helloworld and believe it has massive potential – and that's why they have effectively staked their future on its success.

Q: Why did you do the deal?

AB: The motivation to do the deal with Helloworld was our fundamental belief in the strength of Helloworld's distribution businesses in the retail, wholesale and corporate segments and a belief in the fact that bringing both AOT and Helloworld together would create an organisation in which the value of the whole was much greater than the sum of the two parts. I have worked with various parts of the Helloworld business over many years and although Helloworld has faced a number of significant challenges over the last few years, not least of which has been the

‘I completely and totally believe in the future of Helloworld’

rebranding of the retail network, the business is still very sound. We have over 1,600 members of our agency network in Australia and New Zealand, a very powerful wholesale business particularly with Qantas Holidays, Sunlover Holidays and Viva! Holidays in Australia and Go Holidays in New Zealand, and the QBT and AEX corporate businesses in Australia and New Zealand continue to go from strength to strength. Insider Journeys is going very well in Asia and our Fiji businesses are doing well. AOT is the largest ITO in Australia and New Zealand and our TTF business is going very well in Fiji.

From my perspective, in the retail space some retailers and most OTA's are constantly focused on price. But price is only part of the equation and I am very confident that across the Helloworld network our fundamental customer proposition is cutting through with the travelling public who really do understand that it's not just about getting a well priced deal but it's also what happens when you step outside the door of the plane that really matters.

Q: Do you think you can turn Helloworld around?

AB: Well that's an interesting question because I don't think Helloworld needs turning around. But we do now need to focus on growing our profitability now that the brand transition is complete and we have got the network established both in Australia and now in New Zealand. I am very fortunate in that many of the hard yards in this business have already been done and so I'm in the very cheerful position of being able to ensure the business reaps the benefits of the hard work that's gone in over the last few years to get us into the position we are in today.

Q: I presume you are planning changes, can you give us some hints as to what you expect to do?

AB: I think we have to get some alignment of our interests throughout the business. The online team at Helloworld has done a fantastic job of creating a very viable and successful portal with helloworld.com.au but there is no question that the success of that portal has alienated some of the agents in our networks. So what we are going to be doing is trying to get better alignment between what's going on with our

online portal, helloworld.com.au, and our agents' interests. That's something we are already undertaking.

Another thing I can tell you is that we are going to have more Helloworld product out in the marketplace for our agents to sell through enhanced consumer offerings via both digital and traditional media channels.

‘In terms of returning to previous brands, I have got a very short answer to that and it's no. They were great brands but we've moved on and we are not going back’

This is not something we've done too much of in the past but I believe we need to put out our own footprint across the products that we promote via our retail networks and do the best job we can to drive business into the door of our retail partners, onto the phone of our retail partners and onto our retail partners' online sites.

Q: You mentioned a share scheme for members/franchisees – what are your plans?

AB: It's too early to talk about that at the moment but I have a fundamental belief that our franchisees should have a reasonable stake in the company as I think that better aligns the interest of both the company and the franchisees. So it's something we are giving very serious thought to at the moment but I don't have anything further to add to that at this time.

Q: Any thoughts about the Helloworld brand and the model of members, associate members, affiliates. Would you consider returning to any of the previous brands?

AB: The answer to that – well I think the model we have is right. There are members who want to carry the full Helloworld branding and with just under 300 of those now in Australia, with another 60 coming online in New Zealand. Then there are those who have the associate relationship with us which is a very strong relationship but is not built solely around the Helloworld brand at a store level.

Plus of course there's the members

Continues on next page

Inbound	Wholesale	Online	Corporate
  	         	   	      

Continues from previous page

of our buying group which is a much lower touch model but through which we have over 900 members participating. I should also mention our Helloworld for Business agents, who provide a fantastic network of corporate travel agencies targeting particularly the SME sectors across Australia.

On terms of returning to previous brands, I have got a very short answer to that and it's no. They were great brands but we've moved on and we are not going back.

Q: What are your plans for Helloworld online, and the technology agreement with Orbitz?

AB: As I said earlier, the plans for Helloworld online are to get some better alignment between the interests of that portal and Helloworld Limited in the use of that portal with our agencies. I think Jeremy Reitman

‘We do now need to focus on growing our profitability now that the brand transition is complete and we have got the network established both in Australia and now in NZ’

and his team have done an outstanding job with helloworld.com.au but it has created some conflicts and we are looking to resolve those as soon as possible.

As far as the Orbitz agreement goes, this is providing the technology that we needed to launch and develop helloworld.com.au. As you know, Orbitz has been bought by Expedia and we are currently

having discussions around the future use of that technology and where we go, given Expedia's ownership of Orbitz.

Q: What are your plans for Wholesale – Qantas Holidays, Viva! Holidays. Clearly the Travel Corporation believes there's no future for traditional wholesaling – what do you think?

AB: Let me say that I think we've got some great wholesale businesses and they are continuing to do very well not only with the support of the agents in the Helloworld network but with the support of the broader agency community here in Australia and in New Zealand with Go Holidays. I can't speak for what the Travel Corporation think about the future of traditional wholesaling but I can certainly say, from my perspective, I believe it has a future and I think if you ask our friendly competitors in Brisbane, I'm sure they would tell you the same thing.

Retail	Industry services
   *  *  *  *  * <p>*Legacy brands</p>	  

Q: World Aviation has gone from representing many airlines some years ago to just a handful. Do you think this can be rebuilt?

AB: As far as World Aviation goes, it certainly is not as big as it was but the whole airline representation business has changed on a global front over the last decade quite significantly. We still have some very good partnerships in that business and I certainly think it's worth pursuing but I wouldn't be surprised either to see some consolidation in that space in Australia and New Zealand in the next couple of years.

Q: Any thoughts on Air Tickets? And what about the corporate travel business?

AB: Air Tickets is a huge part of the Helloworld business. It has got outstanding technology, it is extremely well run and it's providing a great service to the agents who utilise it so all I can say from that perspective to you right now it's onwards and upwards for Air Tickets. There has always been lots of competition in travel, including consolidation, and there will continue to be lots of competition because it's such a great industry but we are extremely good at it across the board at Helloworld and we will continue to remain very competitive in this space.

In relation to QBT and corporate, winning the Whole Of Australian Government deal was an outstanding achievement for the QBT business and to Helloworld generally. The federal Government is an important customer of Helloworld and we look forward to continuing to service them with the efficiency and competitiveness that won us the business we have in the first place.

Q: Are you friends with the Helloworld Board again after they rebuffed your earlier approach?

AB: Look Bruce I've always been friends with the Board but as you know there have been a number of changes on the Board and I am particularly grateful for the efforts that Brett Johnson put in as our chairman and to Rob Marcolina for stepping in as acting chairman and for getting the deal through to completion. We now have a Board of five and we are actively looking for a non-executive chairman and an independent chairman and an Independent non-executive director and I am looking forward to working with our new Board as the year unfolds.

‘We are going to have more Helloworld product out in the marketplace for our agents to sell through enhanced consumer offerings via both digital and traditional media channels’

Q: Integration of AOT – are there synergies? Any plans to move Head Office to Melbourne?

AB: In relation to integration with AOT, well of course there are synergies and a lot of these were set out in an explanatory memorandum that was sent out to shareholders prior to the EGM to vote on the merger. I am pleased to say that all the synergies set out there are achievable in a reasonable timeframe and I am confident we will also find some more as we move forward but in the meantime we are focused on what we have committed to deliver and that's going well.

As far as plans to move Head Office to Melbourne, both Melbourne and Sydney are great cities and I am enjoying going between the two at the moment. Ultimately we have a national business and we will make a decision at some point in the future as to whether we continue to have our corporate headquarters in Sydney or move it to Melbourne. If we make any decision on that, the first people to know will be the members of the Helloworld team and the second person to know, Bruce, will be you.

Q: Any closing comments?

AB: Let me finally say that I completely and totally believe in the future of Helloworld and I would not have merged the AOT Group into Helloworld and effectively staked my future on it had I not seen not only the great opportunities that I believe there are for Helloworld, but also seen the tremendous businesses and commitment of the people at Helloworld.

It's a very exciting opportunity I for myself as the new CEO and for Cinzia as an Executive Director of the business and I know the team at AOT is looking forward to being a part of the merged entity. The other thing I can say is that I am really enjoying working with the very professional management team that we have at Helloworld and of course we have at AOT. The level of cooperation between both organisations has been outstanding.

TRAVELPORT INCUBATES INNOVATION

HOW can big companies come up with fresh ideas? As organisations grow larger they inevitably become tangled in bureaucracy, procedures and hierarchies which often err on the conservative, safe side. While this creates stability, in the fast-paced world of technology this can also lead to a lack of innovation which can be fatal – particularly given the digitally disrupted environment in which we now live. Travel technology specialist Travelport is tackling this problem head-on with an in-house “incubator” which aims to capture new ideas from both inside and outside the company, nurturing them into life, with the potential to create the next Uber or Airbnb.

Within Travelport this process is being overseen by Jason Nash, the company’s Global Vice President of Marketing and Product Incubation. Recently in Australia, Nash spoke to *travelBulletin* about Travelport Labs, which follows a mantra of “ideation, acceleration and incubation”. The organisation operates a series of four-month long classes in so-called Lean Startup techniques – new business models which encourage agile development and fast product testing and evaluation, with the aim of quickly working out and implementing new solutions – or perhaps quickly rejecting ideas that look good initially but don’t pan out in a practical sense.

Initially available to internal Travelport staff, the program has now expanded to include the option for outside entrepreneurs to participate, with the company helping to fund their ideas in return for a small stake in their businesses. “These really are startups at the beginning of a journey,” Nash said, with Travelport providing up to \$45,000 per enterprise to help out. Once they join the class, participants are able to tap into a range of experts in areas such as design, wire-frame development, product evaluation, marketing and software – and the four month class period culminates in a Demo Day where they present to senior Travelport staff as well as venture capitalists who may

potentially fund further commercialisation of the ideas.

“The program aims to give us access to bright young things with bright ideas,” Nash said. “Often large businesses lose their best people because they are frustrated entrepreneurs – or ‘intrapreneurs’. Travelport Labs allows us to explore ideas that would probably get killed off in the centre. We’re looking for disruption; we want to identify big ideas,” he added. Those within the company who enrol in the program are expected to

‘Travelport’s in-house ‘incubator’ aims to capture new ideas from both inside and outside the company, nurturing them into life’

have 60% of their time freed up to work on their ideas, so they don’t completely lose touch with their day-to-day activities.

Interestingly, Travelport doesn’t insist that participants utilise its technology, although it’s most likely that solutions developed are in the travel space, and those in the class

are certainly exposed to Travelport solutions. One of the participants in a recent class is a business called ‘Unboundly’ comprising three founders who noticed while they were travelling as students that it was possible to significantly reduce the cost of their flights by accessing low cost carriers. Unboundly bundles up LCC content to produce fares up to 50% cheaper than US-based OTAs.

Another solution being developed within Travelport’s incubation program is a system to help airlines with unforeseen schedule changes. Addressing the current extremely manual process involving the issue of paper vouchers for meals and accommodation to disrupted passengers, the ‘Travelcare’ project has already produced a prototype solution, described as a ‘minimally viable product’ which initially targets just the crew, with the aim of further development into a full-blown answer.

And it’s not just new products – Travelport’s long-standing Viewtrip system is also being subjected to the lean startup regime. Agile techniques are now seeing the Viewtrip platform revamped, with new releases every two weeks and a significantly more consumer-focused solution.

Travelport is looking for the next big idea, with applications for upcoming classes currently being solicited on the Travelport Labs website at travelport.com/labs.



‘These really are startups at the beginning of a journey’

Jason Nash, Global Vice President
Marketing and Product Incubation
Travelport



TRAMADA ON TOP OF AUTOMATION

SINCE its debut early this year, Tramada System's Payment Gateway has gathered a great deal of interest among the travel industry for its ability to streamline the booking process.

The new technology ensures that manual credit card transactions are a thing of the past, with Payment Gateway having the ability to automatically generate invoices and receipts in one simple process.

Partnering with Mint to present the system,

Tramada chief executive Jo O'Brien says Payment Gateway makes time for agents to do what they're best at – sell.

"Travel agents should be able to process things quickly and be able to move on to work on upselling and cross selling and things that are going to make the business more profitable," she remarked.

Having only launched in Feb this year only a "handful" of clients have experienced the gateway first hand, however O'Brien says

that she expects user numbers to "grow exponentially over the next six months".

"I'd be surprised if any of our clients didn't adopt it really," she remarked confidently.

Another Tramada innovation to debut this year is connect BI, a business intelligence solution that aims to enable travel agencies to report on their client data in real time, customise their own reports and share these reports with their clients.

A key difference between the 'connect BI' and competing applications is that businesses do not have to wait to get the data they need. Connect BI works in real-time, delivering analytics and data instantly.

"The data that travel agents have is very valuable," she said. "And the analytics that we wrap around that means they can run much more successful businesses by having access to real-time data and information so that they can make their decision.

"The most important thing is that we support travel agents to run better businesses so that they can have their people selling and maximising their revenues...and that's where automation, business intelligence and process improvements come in," she said.



IDEAS THAT TRAVEL

FEBRUARY 17 saw Qantas together with TEDxSydney achieve a new milestone. Aboard QF73 from Sydney to San Francisco, the two organisations combined to launch 'Ideas That Travel', the world's first technology talk in the sky.

Four of Australia's technology and science innovators entertained their fellow passengers via a live-streamed broadcast at the nose of the plane on the Qantas in-flight entertainment system, with topics including the future of design, quantum physics, robotics and artificial intelligence.

Qantas spokesperson Olivia Wirth said "One of the reasons we re-launched flights between Sydney and San Francisco was to support growing business travel driven by the tech boom and we're looking forward to playing our part in strengthening ties between innovators on both sides of the Pacific."

Pictured are Qantas flight staff together with Olivia Wirth, and Edwina Throsby, TEDxSydney Head of Curatorial.



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HOBART BECKONS

By Sarah Piper

WHILE the apple isle has not always been on everyone's radar (some international visitors may not even realise that it's part of Australia), Tasmania is a top spot to look at hosting your next business event.

Tasmania has a high appeal as a destination, with a slew of recent international accolades, resulting in great draw power for delegates attending.

There are so many great reasons to pick Tasmania as the destination for your next conference or event. The friendliness of the locals in Hobart, the beauty of the location, the internationally acclaimed food and beverage offerings and the incredible diversity of product are all big winners for delegates.

Here are our top picks for activities that will add the wow factor to everyone's conference going experience, all just a quick trip from Hobart.

SALAMANCA MARKET

ONE of the best places to really get up close and personal with the fantastic food offerings that Tasmania provides is at the Salamanca Markets. Held every Saturday in between the graceful plane trees and mellow sandstone facades of the historic warehouses of Salamanca Place on the fringe of the CBD, the markets include stalls with fresh fruit, organic veggies as well as fine

Tasmanian art and craft such as hand worked glass, creative design in Tasmanian timber and stylish clothing. A free shuttle service operates between the city centre and the markets every Saturday.

PORT ARTHUR

ONLY a 90 minute drive from Hobart, Port Arthur is a must for visitors. Allow delegates to touch some of Australia's convict history as they explore the unforgettable location. Tours are offered around the historic site, to the Isle of the Dead or Point Puer, and for something out of the ordinary, check out the Historic Ghost Tour or Paranormal Investigation to experience reputedly one of the most haunted places in Australia.

MONA

A VISIT to Hobart isn't complete without checking out the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), a mere 15 minutes from Hobart. The museum houses Australia's largest private art collection, often with thought-provoking and infamous exhibitions. As well as incredible art, the museum site also includes the winery of Moorilla Estate, meaning there's something for everyone. Moorilla offers guided tours of the vineyard and winery, as well as cellar door tasting of their gravity assisted winery. MONA offers a range of function areas meaning it's a great option for a unique entertainment space.

MT WELLINGTON

TASMANIA is known for its scenery for a reason - it's spectacular. Delegates can get amongst the stunning views in Wellington Park, whose crowning glory is Mt Wellington, also known as Kunanyi. If visitors are feeling particularly active they can hike to the top of the mountain, but a more relaxed option is to drive to the scenic Pinnacle at the top. The views from the top are incredible (though also weather dependent). On a clear day you can see all of Hobart and across the Tasman Sea and into the wild South West National Park, World Heritage Area.



Moorilla Estate and MONA, photo Tourism Australia



Mt Wellington, looking down over Hobart, photo Tourism Australia



cievents expands into HK

FLIGHT Centre has expanded the portfolio of its cievents business events operation, with the acquisition of Hong Kong-based Maya Events. The move is part of wider Asian plans for cievents which will also establish a new Singapore headquarters in April. Established in 2005, the purchase of Maya Events will see Flight Centre in Hong Kong offer a full suite of services to existing and prospective clients in the “rapidly expanding MICE sector”.

Core services offered by Maya include event management and coordination, decoration and production, creative services, content, design, printing, AV, lighting and special effects. cievents global general manager, Natalie Simmons, said the deal gives the business a “stronger presence in an important market and also a platform for further growth in Asia”.

Meeting room of the future

THE International Association of Conference Centres (IACC) has launched a major initiative which aims to research solutions for “tomorrow’s meeting rooms”. IACC will partner with Meeting Professionals International to conduct a survey of members, with the results of the poll to be published globally and presented at the IACC Americas Connect conference in April.

Contributors involved in the project include Microsoft, PSAV, Sydney’s MGSM Executive Hotel & Conference Centre and Benchmark Hospitality International. IACC CEO Mark Cooper said the project had the potential to “transform the meeting experience through a global collaboration of leaders in conference room design”.

Strong start for Sydney

BUSINESS Events Sydney says the NSW capital’s status as a leading global business event destination has been confirmed by an exceptionally strong start to the year, with more than \$62 million in business secured in so far in 2016.

“Just six weeks into the new year, already we have secured more than 18 major international business events that will bring more than 14,400 delegates who’ll spend around 77,900 delegate days in our state,” said BESydney CEO Lyn Lewis-Smith.

Four major association events are worth more than \$24 million including the IEE Panel of Conference Organizers 2017 and the International Congress on Insurance: Mathematics and Economics 2018.



AACB VIEW

Andrew Hiebl, executive director
Association of Australian Convention Bureaux

A FEDERAL BUSINESS EVENTS BID FUND

MANY will remember the result of the federal election in 2010 – the first hung parliament since 1940. The Australian Labor Party formed a minority government with the support of three independent MPs and one Australian Greens MP

What many won’t know is that with this election result went Australia’s opportunity to introduce a national business events bid fund. In opposition, the Coalition tourism policy in 2010 included a Business Events Bid and Boost Fund for key international conferences of \$17.5m over four years.

It is now time to bring this policy back to life.

Australia’s convention bureaux do well in attracting international conventions despite our distance from the major markets of Europe and North America. In 2014, Australia hosted 260 international meetings, ranking it 13th in the world.

However, Australia’s market share is declining in the face of both improved convention facilities and more aggressive bidding elsewhere in the world.

The difference is the emergence and growth of government bid funds across the last decade. Once shrouded in secrecy, bid funds are now increasingly commonplace. As large conventions are extremely costly to stage, international associations are looking more and more to support from governments of potential host destinations.

Despite some state/territory funding available, Australian convention bureaux are increasingly losing international opportunities to competitors with hefty government cheque books available, used to secure this highly competitive business.

In total over 50 destinations have official bid funds including Abu Dhabi, Singapore,

Malaysia, Kyoto and Seoul. New Zealand has already identified this issue in line with the direct and indirect benefits that hosting international conventions bring, having made available NZ\$40 million over four years to attract these lucrative events.

Further, VisitScotland estimates that their annual bid fund of £2 million, matched by city councils, has brought in £200 million worth of business since its inception in 2012.

In Australia, we are used to this practice within major events, sports, culture and the arts. Why not international business events? As an industry, we should call on

‘If Australia wants to be able to compete more effectively with its Asia-Pacific rivals, it will need its own national business events bid fund’

both sides of politics to commit to a federal business events bid fund of at least \$10 million per annum to reverse the decline and increase our market share.

If Australia wants to be able to compete more effectively with its Asia-Pacific rivals, it will need its own national business events bid fund. We should aspire to return to the top 10 of the International Convention & Congress Association rankings, not achieved since 2009, with an Australian city in the top 20. In doing so, we can also deliver a little bit of economic prosperity for Australia along the way!



business events news

- 21 Jan** EEAA: exciting year ahead
- 25 Jan** Sunshine Coast to take off
- 28 Jan** Welcome theme unveiled
- 01 Feb** IACC: top meeting trends
- 08 Feb** Luxperience pop-up event

Headlines Jan - Feb

- 11 Feb** NZ event arrivals spike
- 11 Feb** IACC: future proofing
- 15 Feb** FLT Hong Kong expansion
- 18 Feb** SkyTeam UNICEO pact
- 18 Feb** ICC unveils 2017 MICE season

CAREER IN FOCUS

JO PALMER

Managing director of Gate 7



1. What does your role involve and how long have you been in your current position?

I'm the managing director of Gate 7, a tourism representation business promoting destinations and iconic tourism product to consumers, travel industry and media across Australia and New Zealand. My role primarily involves managing my team of amazing people to help them be the best they can be and to drive innovative marketing programs for our clients.

‘I do think that study is important in giving some fundamental frameworks to work with and build on. Ironically some of the subjects I least enjoyed have been the most useful.’

2. How did you start out in your career? Were you always destined to work in the travel industry?

My first role was on the telephones at the Australian Tourism Commission in Germany, answering travel agent enquiries about Australia. I have always loved the experience of working with people from different countries and cultures, so I do feel like travel was a great fit for my passions from the get go.

3. Did you complete formal qualifications, and do you think they are important?

I love learning and yes, I did complete formal qualifications; I have a Degree in Economics and a Post-Graduate Degree in Tourism Marketing. I do think that study is important in giving you some fundamental frameworks

to work with and build on. Ironically some of the subjects I least enjoyed have been some of the most useful; statistics and accounting for example.

4. What do you love about your job?

There are so many things I love about my job. I love the opportunity to be touching different parts of the world every day, and to promote incredible life enriching experiences. I love the opportunity to work with passionate people and to provide experiences and frameworks at work to help them reach their full potential. I love the challenge of creating and shaping what we do every day to keep up with moving trends and demands. And I really enjoy the thinking that goes into making work and processes flow seamlessly and efficiently.

5. What were some of the greatest challenges you've had in your career?

One of the greatest challenges has also been one of the most exciting developments, as I guess is often the case. Winning the opportunity to represent Brand USA in Australia and New Zealand was an incredible honour and I am grateful for that every day.

The challenge is this also brought with it new levels of complexity in the scale of opportunity and in stakeholder management. I think a sense of humour, together with a sense of being centred and knowing that you are doing the very best you can every day, really helps conquer these periods with steep learning curves.

‘I think a sense of humour, together with a sense of being centred and knowing that you are doing the very best you can every day, really helps conquer these periods with steep learning curves.’

6. What factors were central to your success?

I think being brave enough to have a go and back myself and my team. I know that we are passionate, creative, smart and hard working. I give us permission to be unattached to the outcome, as long as we know that we've sincerely given things our very best shot.

7. Did you have a mentor, and if so, how did you find them?

I have been inspired by many. I've never had a formal mentor, but one of my bosses played a very big role in inspiring me to do what I do now. Over the past few years, I've also engaged coaches who have been amazing at helping me navigate this growing business and focus on what's important.

8. What are the keys to good business?

Passionate, engaged people. Focused systems. Strong stakeholder relationships.

9. What advice would you give to others in the industry who would like to follow in your footsteps?

Have fun! Be nice. Think holistically.

FINDING THE RIGHT TALENT

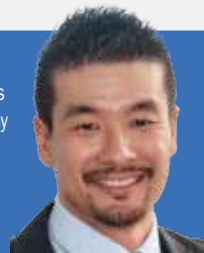


benefit from a more passive candidate.

Also, don't forget to track and evaluate the source of each referral as part of your sourcing strategy. Look retroactively at the source of each candidate and eventual hire, and rank the quality of each source. For example, if three of the top five candidates were sourced through employee connections via LinkedIn, then LinkedIn should be a strategic priority and you should consider upgrading some of the employees' LinkedIn accounts. If none of the top 50% of your candidates came from a specific job board then you should stop wasting time and resources on that job board.

It is highly important for a company to identify their external and internal recruitment plans through the establishment of talent acquisition sources and methods they can turn to at any time. The methods should address short-term and long-term strategic recruitment needs. The long-term recruiting strategy, both external and internal, should feed the short-term and immediate recruiting needs of the organization through the development of candidate pools. Short notice recruitment is not an easy exercise to go through. Mitigate the pain by working smarter not harder, so you can focus on the necessity to keep external and internal recruiting methods fresh and innovative at all times through proactive strategic talent acquisition.

Andrew Chan, is the founder and CEO of ACI HR Solutions (ACI). He has worked in many facets of the travel industry, from being a travel agent, working with airlines as a BDM, in hospitality in sales and marketing and as the CEO of TMS Asia Pacific. At ACI he is responsible for the firm's operations and strategic direction.



BUILDING an effective talent sourcing strategy is a critical part of business in today's talent short market. This is especially important to SMEs where attrition and vacancies can impact harder than to multinational organisations. The much heralded term, "war for talent" is very much the modern reality facing today's employers, and this is something that is unlikely to change in the near future. The simple fact is that there are not enough Generation Y and Millennial talents entering the workforce to replace retiring Baby Boomers.

Not many companies have put dollar figures to their staff attrition and talent acquisition, but replacing staff is an expensive exercise, and impacts directly a company's bottom line. The reality is the average cost of losing an employee equates roughly to their annual salary (higher for executive level and sales staff). This includes funds spent on recruitment, hiring, training, orienting, and supporting new employees, and other related costs such as lost management time and energy spent replacing the staff. Then there is the often unmeasured cost of having a lengthy vacancy in the business. This can be opportunity costs such as not having enough sales people, or reduced customer service levels due to being short on operational staff.

So having an effecting talent sourcing strategy will save you both time and money!

Start by having well written and up to date job descriptions that clearly market the benefits of working for your company, as well as the exciting opportunities and challenges that the candidates can expect if they join.

Don't forget, your company's marketing

‘The reality is the average cost of losing an employee equates roughly to their annual salary’

efforts should not solely be focused on customers alone, but give a little thought to potential employees. Anticipate answering in-demand candidates' most likely questions – "what sets your company apart from others?" And, "why should I work for you?"

If you don't already have one, start with a robust employee referral program. If you have hired great people in the past then this is the group you want to continue to 'clone' and leverage their social networking connections. As the job profile is circulated you will hit passive as well as active candidates. Your strategy should clearly define the route to take based on the timing and strategic nature of each hire. If you need someone urgently you will need an active candidate and if the position is more strategic you will likely

NCHL LAUNCHES “FULL ATTACK” ON AUSSIE MARKET

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) is dropping its General Sales Agents (GSA) in Australia and New Zealand markets and moving its luxury brands to the newly established NCLH Asia Pacific headquarters.

Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas will join Norwegian Cruise Line in Sydney by 01 April, replacing Wiltrans, Cruise Office and New Zealand's Cruise Holidays with “about a dozen” new recruits in field sales and in the contact centre.

“You never get a kind of full attack on the market unless you have your own office and your own dedicated people,” Steve Odell, Managing Director NCHL Asia Pacific told *travelBulletin*.

NCHL initiated the process by setting up an office and moving Norwegian Cruise Line over late last year, with the intention to add the luxury brands at a later date.

“It's about having your own dedicated employees, people who are only selling your brand and making sure that you give a very focused corporate attention to selling the products,” Odell said.

The new sales and call centre staff will work across both Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas, with back-office functions to be shared between the brands.

Opening the office has brought about 50 new jobs to Sydney and the cruise

business, a move which has been welcomed by travel agents.

“With 50 new people, we're really giving a lot to the local cruise industry in terms of potential to sell and make money,” Odell said.

Agents are set to receive “a whole lot more support” and the company is stepping up its investment in marketing and sales.

‘We're a very trade-focused company and what we're trying to do is broaden our distribution and get more agents selling our brands’

“Between the brands we're going to have ten sales people in the field supporting travel agents every day, we're not going to be so anonymous...we're a very trade-focused company and what we're trying to do is broaden our distribution and get more agents selling our brands.”

NCHL is planning a corporate roadshow of all three brands in April, which will stop off at major cities around the country “to introduce

their personalities formally and to get to all the local markets in a more face-to-face way”.

The company is also ramping up for the debut of *Seven Seas Explorer* in July – touted as the most luxurious ship ever.

“Luxury is always trying to push itself to the next level, so a lot of this is about choice and freedom and flexibility,” Odell explained.

“What we're trying to do at this level is move on to bigger and better rooms and suites. For example, the Regent suite, which is the biggest one, is 3,900 square feet. It's going to have a spa of its own in the room. It's got a garden area outdoors. It's being billed at the world's most exclusive address.”

The 6,000 tonne vessel will have five main dining venues on offer, providing more choices and more space, whilst keeping the passenger numbers at a low 750.

The cruise line is also pushing for a younger generation of cruisers by positioning Norwegian as “hip, fun and a party”.

“It's about being seen in the right places with that market, a lot of the activity for that generation of cruiser is done online so we're putting a lot more of our marketing funds into online activity,” Odell commented.

Despite the push, 98% of NCHL's business is still driven through agents. “Everyone does direct business but our mantra is travel agent business,” Odell concluded.

SEADREAM OPENS 2017 BOOKINGS

SEADREAM Yacht Club has released 80 new itinerary options in the Caribbean and Mediterranean in 2017.

Many of the journeys include visits to new ports, made accessible by the small size of SeaDream's vessels. For an example, company president Bob Lepisto pointed to Porto Cervo in Italy's northern Sardinia. “It will be like holidaying on your own

personal yacht,” Lepisto said.

The 2017 season will see the boutique ships visit “some of the most colourful and contrasting ports of Southern Europe” as both mega motor-cruisers sail the waters of the Amalfi Coast, the Aegean and Greek Islands, the Balearic Islands, the Adriatic Sea and Croatian Coast, and the French and Italian Rivas, Malta and Turkey, Lepisto said.





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*Prices are per person twin share in USD based on Classic Balcony Stateroom and must be booked by 31 March, 2016

FRENCH NEWBUILD FOR UNIWORLD

GUY Young, the president of The Travel Corporation's Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection, says the 2017 debut of its new SS *Joie de Vivre* will give it "the best ship on the Seine". The vessel, which is currently under construction in Holland, will be fitted out with the same meticulous attention as Uniworld's other vessels, which have attracted massive investment from the Travel Corporation's owners, the Tollman family.

In Sydney recently to announce the new ship, Young highlighted the importance of Australia to the business. Australia is the second biggest market for Uniworld, and Aussie guests "add wonderful flavour" to the company's voyages. Faced with strong competition in both the US and Australian markets, Uniworld is focusing strongly on the quality of its product rather than simply numbers. "It's not about growth at any cost – our goal is to be the best, not the biggest," Young said. "We invest far more than our competitors in our vessels," he said, with Uniworld's SS *Catherine* sailing on the Danube with an onboard art collection worth more than \$2 million.

Uniworld boasts a higher guest to staff ratio than other lines, Young said. "We are

positioned at the very top end of the market".

SS *Joie de Vivre* will set sail from Paris on the 28th of March next year, with a ten day itinerary taking in destinations such as Giverny, the beaches of Normandy, Le Havre and more. She will have 64 staterooms including ten suites – five of which will offer triple accommodation, perfect for family groups. The ship is 125 metres long – the maximum possible on the Seine, with on-board features including a dedicated wine tasting room, a spa, fitness centre and an infinity view swimming pool which can also be covered for a unique dining experience.



Guy Young in Sydney last month



Pandaw expands Mekong fleet

LUXURY river cruise operator Pandaw has cited strong demand for a decision to add a new vessel to its Upper Mekong fleet, with the *Yunnan Pandaw* set to debut in September this year. A sister ship to Pandaw's existing *Laos Pandaw*, the *Yunnan* will sail between Vientian, Laos to Jinghong in China on a 14 night itinerary.

Built in Pandaw's traditional teak and brass, the *Yunnan Pandaw* will have an ultra-low draft and high powered engines. The 16th ship in the Pandaw fleet, she will have 12 air-conditioned main deck and two upper deck staterooms each with private bathrooms.

PANDAW



Explore the mighty rivers of Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, China and India!



Since 1995 Pandaw has pioneered the great rivers of South-East Asia with their famed river expeditions. Each Ship is a replica of a colonial river steamer, hand crafted in brass and teak. Today Pandaw is operating 15 ships. With a maximum of between five to thirty cabins these small ships offer a boutique cruise experience in great comfort.

Enjoy Asian hospitality with charming local experiences for a one-of-a-kind exploration of history, culture and gastronomy.

All Inclusive Boutique River Cruises: Cruise, daily excursion, full board, local soft drinks, beer and spirits, and tipping for crew.



CLIA VIEW

Brett Jardine, commercial director
CLIA Australasia

BENEFITS FOR CLIA MEMBERS

WHO would have thought that your annual CLIA Membership would translate into thousands of dollars worth of savings each year? As part of a major overhaul of our membership program, travel agents can now receive a range of exciting new benefits.

Under the revamped program, which came into effect on January 1, CLIA member travel agents can enjoy direct

benefits from CLIA member cruise lines as well as everyday discounts from scores of major retailers across Australia and New Zealand, ranging from supermarkets and cinemas to hotels and restaurants and

including big names such as Woolworths, Coles, Westfield, JB Hi-Fi and Target.

With access to core training modules and key electives now included in CLIA's travel agent membership fee, it's far more accessible for agency staff to become cruise specialists.

We wanted to make it easier for agents to improve their cruise knowledge and make the most of our booming cruise market, and we're thrilled with the new structure.

It couldn't come at a better time with the summer cruise season hitting its peak.

In February alone 27 different ships made an extraordinary 45 calls to Sydney - while in March, 17 ships will make 33 calls to the harbour city in just 30 days.

The diverse array of vessels range from boutique luxury ships to magnificent ocean

liners. This season has seen some of the most impressive vessels afloat cruising our waters with several of the world's most intimate and luxurious ships turning heads in Australia. The luxury end of the scale opens up a whole new market for cruise agents.

With the 15th Annual Cruise Industry Awards now behind us, the focus for CLIA is the delivery of our third Cruise3sixty

down under on Friday May 6. Cruise3sixty Australasia will feature an inspiring line-up of local and international presenters as well as an extensive B2B trade show showcasing major suppliers and the latest developments in the fast-growing cruise industry.

We're expecting a cross-section of cruise focused professionals from right across Australia and New Zealand including front line travel consultants, owners, managers and CLIA Executive Partners. Cruise3sixty is without a doubt the best opportunity of the year to meet face-to-face with your peers in the cruise industry as we navigate a prosperous course for the future.

With senior cruise industry executives in attendance from around the world we will be incorporating the launch of the 2015 source market report as part of the morning session. With Australian cruise passengers exceeding the one million mark in 2014, we know the 2015 results are highly anticipated. Tickets are available at www.cruising.org.au

‘We wanted to make it easier for agents to...make the most of our booming cruise market’

COMMUNIQUE FROM...

KAREN CHRISTENSEN

General Manager & Director
Sales/Marketing, Australasia

TIMELESS TREASURES

Silversea offers a choice of the most exclusive all-inclusive fares available on selected 2016 voyages to the Mediterranean.

These fares include **Silver Shore Select Excursions** at every port of call and **complimentary Wi-Fi** for each guest.

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Select from combinable Mediterranean voyages of 7-17 days departing from May to November 2016. Silver Privilege fares start from **\$4,450pp**.



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For a copy of Silversea's 2016 brochure, visit tifs.com.au. For more information or to book call **1300 306 872**.

Terms & Conditions apply.



CRUISE WEEKLY

HEADLINES JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2016

- 21 Jan** MSC campaign launch
- 21 Jan** Regent's \$125m refurb
- 28 Jan** Coral Expeditions into Asia
- 28 Jan** Princess' \$450m renos
- 02 Feb** Oceania & Regent go local
- 02 Feb** Uniworld to add *Joie de Vivre*
- 04 Feb** CLIA announces finalists

- 04 Feb** 158 struck down by gastro
- 09 Feb** Duffy content on capacity
- 11 Feb** HAL pegs growth in Aus
- 16 Feb** New Brisbane port advances
- 16 Feb** *Le Soleal* swings by Sydney
- 18 Feb** CLIA Aus Masters on *Eden*
- 18 Feb** Ecruising launches 33 Degrees

INDUSTRY IN FOCUS



These personal travel managers were welcomed to Hawaii by the bronze statue of Duke Kahanamoku on a recent famil hosted by Hawaiian Airlines and Viva Holidays.



Julie Reid, United Airlines director of Australia and NZ sales and Alison Epsley, United's MD of Japan and Pacific sales were all smiles at the celebration of 30 years of UA servicing the Australian market.



The Voyages team proudly received the Qantas Australian Tourism Award for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Tourism for the second year in a row at a prestigious gala award ceremony in Melbourne.



These Bunnik Tours team members loaned a hand recently to put together prosthetic arms for the Helping Hands Program in Sri Lanka.



Travel agents Michelle Fitzgibbons and Kelly Carr from Worldwide Destinations had the honour of selling the very first booking on Scenic's new luxury yacht Scenic Eclipse, to Clive and Sandy Webster.



These agents flew the flag for MTA at the recent Adelaide AFTA Travel EXPO.



&Beyond recently hosted a Botswana Explorer educational, which these lucky participants got to enjoy. They took in the Okavango Delta, Chobe National Park and Victoria Falls.



Agents from Ignite Travel and Cove Travel got a chance to get backstage at the special performance of BURN THE FLOOR, soon to be performed on Norwegian Cruise Line ships.



It's a tough job, but someone's gotta do it, as these personal travel managers found on a recent famil staying at Club Med Cherating Beach in Malaysia.



Spencer Travel Southside celebrated the opening of their new office in Kogarah with a new Club Med In-Store Boutique, designed to inspire customers with a world of possibilities.



Infinity's dedicated Expo team put their expertise to the test at the recent Flight Centre Expos held around the country. All Infinity businesses were located in the same spot creating a 'blue zone', which was a great hit with the customers.

GETTING GUIDED AROUND Scandinavia

It may be one of the most beautiful places in the world but the notoriously expensive Scandinavia isn't the easiest to travel around if you're on a budget.

AMANDA WOODS gives us her tips on making the most of a holiday here.

WHILE those who are happy to camp, stay in hostels and do most of their own cooking can keep costs to a minimum, travellers who prefer to spend their nights in hotels and eat out can find their expenses climbing when exploring Scandinavia.

In Denmark, Australians are the second biggest international spenders with a daily average of 2,013 DKK (A\$427) behind Brazil on 2,351 (A\$498). In Norway the average spend for countries outside Europe is 2,795 NOK (A\$457) while the average Chinese tourist spends a whopping 8,130 NOK (A\$1,330) per day. Meanwhile in Sweden the average tourist spends 800 SEK (A\$135) a day on top of their accommodation costs.

Travellers who are concerned about the cost of their trip can find some peace of mind by choosing a tour or guided holiday.

While the level of inclusions such as meals can vary between tours and companies, travellers can take comfort in knowing most of their holiday needs have already been pre-paid, allowing them to

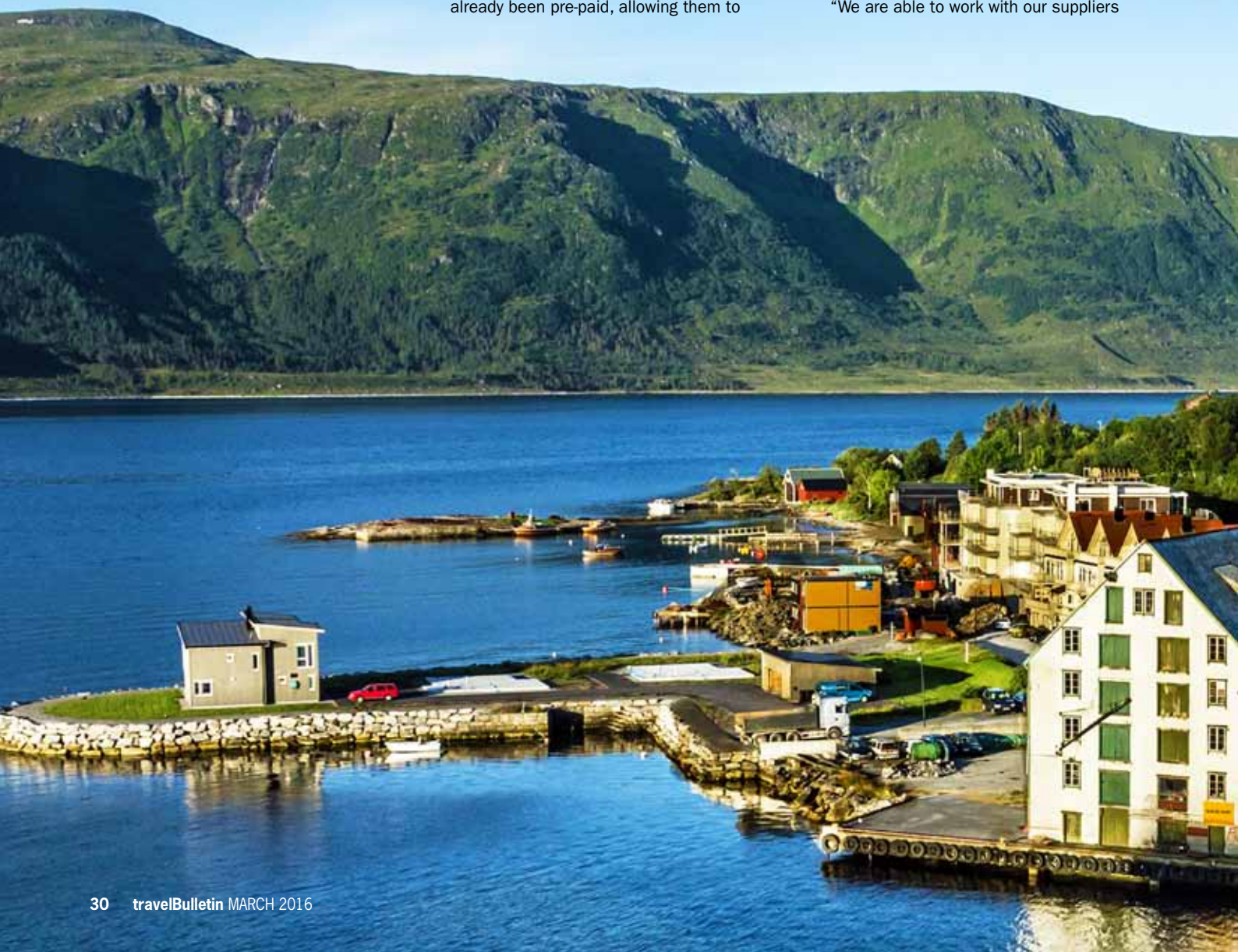
budget for any extras accordingly.

Then there are the potential savings.

As Matthew Cameron-Smith, Managing Director of Trafalgar and CostSaver explains, travellers can benefit from the buying power that comes from being part of a large organisation at The Travel Corporation.

"Guided holidays can help travellers save money in Scandinavia as the majority of the trip variables are already locked in. Our team works extensively to curate itineraries that include centrally-located hotels, many meals comprising of full breakfast daily and exclusive Be My Guest dining experiences, local sightseeing with Local Specialists and Cultural Insights to give you a deeper understanding of a destination.

"We are able to work with our suppliers



and lock in accommodation venues up to 12 months in advance, negotiating lower rates than what our guests would pay if they were travelling on their own, enabling us to extend those savings to our guests when they book their holidays with Trafalgar or CostSaver.”

The results include a 12-day Highlights of Scandinavia tour from \$232pp per day with CostSaver and a 14-day Scenic Scandinavia Tour with Trafalgar from \$313pp per day.

Damian Perry, CEO of Bentours says all inclusive travel options can provide better value-for-money compared to ‘pay-as-you-go’ travel.

“Costs are kept down by great partnerships with local teams with local expertise often negotiating inclusions and benefits in addition to removing layers of costs. These inclusions give peace of mind over the cost of their holiday and make sure the travellers receive great value locally.”

Between the range of companies offering Scandinavian tours there are packages that focus solely on one country, while others explore Norway, Sweden, Denmark and beyond. There are fully guided holidays, self-drive package holidays, foodie tours, Northern Lights tours and more.

Perry says Australians have been reasonably unfamiliar with Scandinavia until

recently, but now interest in the region is booming as people look for new experiences and destinations.

“Bentour’s most popular tour is Norway in a Nutshell, with prices starting at \$948 for 4 days.” Perry explains. “Norway’s appeal lies in its clean air, livability and sheer beauty. Its crowning glory is its fjord heartland, sparkling waterways and huge mountains that plunge into the sea.”

‘Now interest in the region is booming as people look for new experiences and destinations’

When booking a guided holiday or tour travellers should consider how many meals are included in the price and how much money they will need for extra food, incidentals, shopping and souvenirs.

And considering a McMeal at McDonald’s costs around \$16 in Norway, this is one kitty that will need a little padding.

Perry suggests budgeting around \$30-50 per person for additional meals in Scandinavia.

“On many tours we include three meals a day, while others will include a breakfast. We encourage travellers to experience local

eateries, local experiences and choose meals and activities that match their desired spend.”

Meanwhile Cameron-Smith says it all comes down to the experience you want to have.

“I always suggest budgeting a little more than necessary, that way you can treat yourself to an impromptu dining experience in one of the cities’ best restaurants if you like. However sometimes you may find the best dining experiences come from eating at a small, local café or pub. It’s at these places you’ll be able to mingle with the locals and gain an insight into the Scandinavian culture.

“I always recommend asking your Travel Director where they suggest you eat in each destination. They’ll be able to make the best referrals from local favourites, quick and easy eateries to more luxury dining experiences.”

For those who prefer to go it alone tourism websites such as VisitDenmark.com have suggestions on free things to do and money saving tips.

Each Scandinavian city also has their own version of a City Pass card that can save money through access to city tours, museums and galleries with some also including public transport and offering discounts at restaurants.

With a little forward planning and budgeting, travellers who thought they couldn’t afford Scandinavia may find it’s within reach after all.

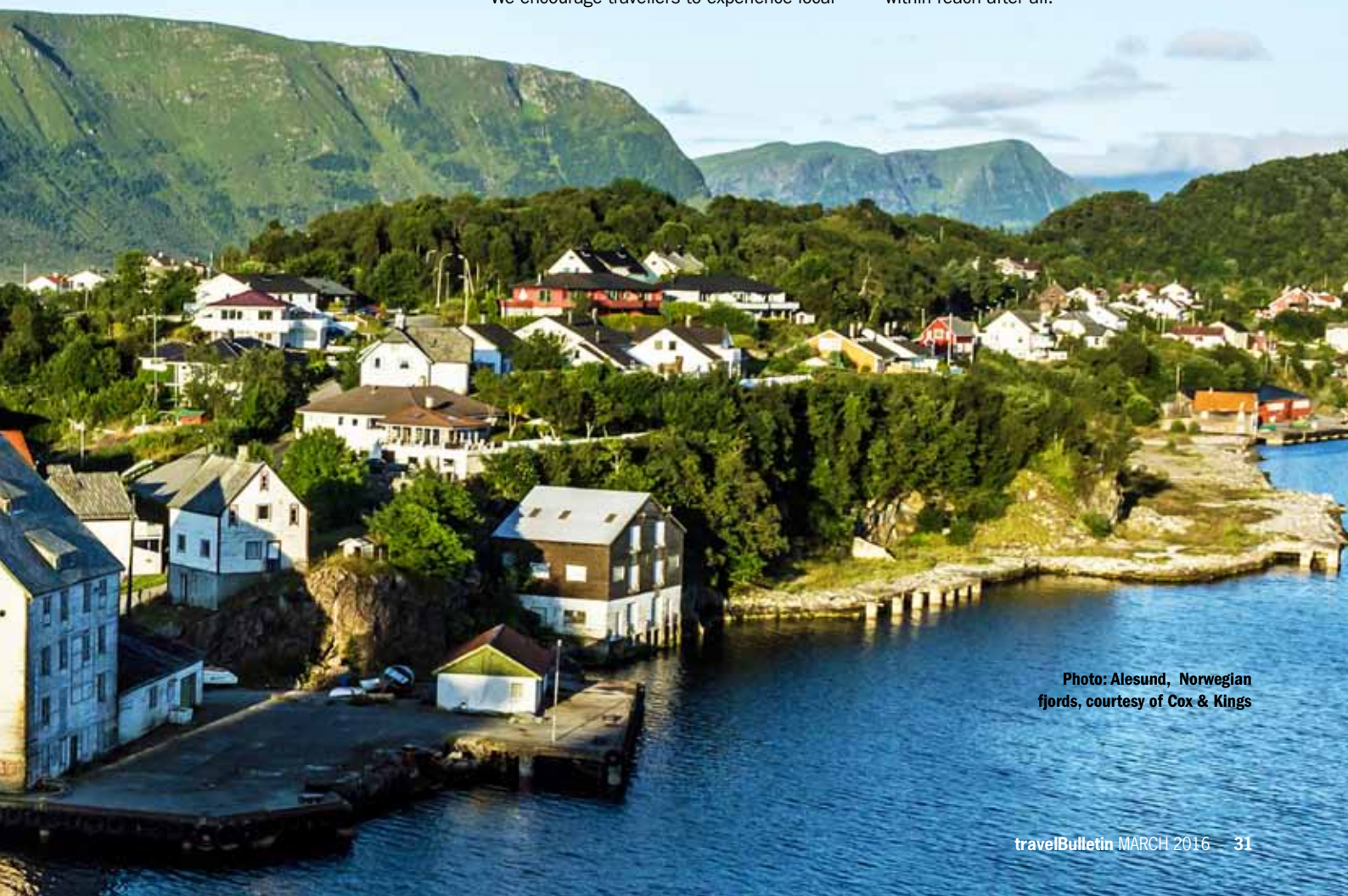


Photo: Alesund, Norwegian fjords, courtesy of Cox & Kings

EUROPE: STRAIGHT UP AND DOWN



Blue Lagoon in Iceland

By Jasmine O'Donoghue

TRAVEL in Europe is heading to the extreme, with the Nordic regions, Spain, and Portugal going berserk with bookings.

Whether motivated by world events, or simply on the merit of Iceland's spectacular Blue Lagoon or Porto's majestic architecture, troves of travellers are making their way to these regions.

Insight Vacations has witnessed business dropping in areas like Turkey and Egypt and popping up in other regions.

"By no means is Turkey a dead destination, we still carry a very large number of people to that destination but the loss that you can see is immediately replaced with destinations like Spain Portugal and Scandinavia," says Insight Vacations CEO, John Boulding.

"It's not necessarily true that people are turned off but some people are choosing to go to these other destinations."

Insight Vacations has capitalised on this growth with the introduction of a seven-day Scenic Iceland & The Northern Lights tour. "Iceland is really geared for winter, that's what they do best. There's the hot pools, the blue lagoon and the geological wonder of these great waterfalls, and scenic delight, along with the main attraction which is the northern lights," Boulding says.

‘It's really about opening up Europe a little bit wider and just showing people places they haven't been before’

The opportunity extends to agents Boulding says, who he urges to "push hard" on Europe.

"The euro is not a strong currency at the moment so it's not as though it's moved too far away from the par with what was the Australian dollar a little while ago so it's still very good value in Europe, especially if you've prepaid."

That opportunity is not going unnoticed by other tour operators, with Back-Roads Touring launching the eight-day 'Essence of Iceland' in its latest brochure for UK and Europe.

"For us, it's really about taking people where they want to go and I think whilst we have fantastic numbers on our core tours...there has been a little bit of a change in recent years, with people looking for something beyond that," says Hazel McGuire, Back Roads Touring General Manager.

"It's about breaking away from those traditional European countries - while France is still growing massively - we're looking into those locations that leading up to even 10 years ago, there was still a little trepidation to be visiting, whether they be Visa difficulties or what have you. It's really about opening up Europe a little bit wider and just showing people places they haven't been before."

This is echoed by Steve Odell, Senior Vice President and Managing Director Asia Pacific at Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, who sees the traveller in Europe looking for more smaller ports and more intimate choices.

"The Baltic is having a very good year, cruises out of Copenhagen up to St Petersburg are doing really well. I think people want a mix of culture as well as nice relaxing resorts with beaches," Odell says.

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SWITZERLAND'S WONDERS

WITH its rolling green hills, glassy lakes and snow-capped mountains, Switzerland has long been a destination that speaks to both soft explorers and adventure-seekers alike.

The moment you touch soil in this scenic mountainous country, an abundance of outdoor activities beckon.

For nature-lovers, a visit to the Marmot Trail is a must. Located at Avers near Splügen, the three kilometre long dirt road is home to marmots, a species of large squirrels that hibernate through winter.

Another way to observe the fuzzy rodents in the wild, as well as witness the majestic ibex,

is to depart on a guided tour.

The marmot and ibex excursion in Pontresina is expertly guided and available from mid June through to the beginning of October. Simply reserve a spot at the valley station of the Languard Pontresina cable car and make sure you pack some good walking shoes.

To take in spectacular panoramas by rail, a series of scenic journeys and themed routes have been carefully curated by Swiss Travel Systems. The most famed routes include the Bernina Express or Glacier Express, where some of the most untouched and raw

landscapes are exposed.

To test your limits and feed the adrenalin-seeker within, embark on a trip to Interlaken and the wider Jungfrau Region to try your hand at paragliding, hiking, canoeing, skiing or snowboarding.

An assortment of quirky accommodation offerings are also part of the outdoor experience, take the Four Tree Houses "Les Nids" for instance, where travellers are given the chance to stay five to eight metres off the ground in "nests".

As an unusual alternative to a hotel, these "nests" are capable of housing two to four people, and are fashioned as little houses which come complete with glass windows, a kitchen, shower, wood stove and toilet.

To embrace the best of what Switzerland has to offer, the Grand Tour is recommended.

Trips to both iconic and lesser known places have been expertly woven through the country's lush landscapes.

The tour highlights both the highest point at 2429m (Furka Pass) as well as the lower point of 193m (Lake Maggiore), and will take you on a journey through 11 UNESCO World Heritage sites, five alpine passes and across the four main language regions.

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EVERGREEN EURO EXPANSION

INTENT on pioneering new programs in the premium river cruise segment, Evergreen Tours is fast tracking expansion of its acclaimed European 'Star-Ship' fleet in 2017 with vessels for Southern France and Portugal.

Evergreen Tours will complement its 14-night Amsterdam to Budapest and seven-night Amsterdam to Basel cruises on sister brand Emerald Waterways 'Star Ships' - also part of the Scenic Group - with new week-long sailings on the Saone & Rhone Rivers of France and Portugal's Douro River.

General Manager Angus Crichton explained the strategy to *travelBulletin* as to why Evergreen is "taking the risk" with two new ships in two new markets. It is to appeal to repeat travellers and fill a void for time sensitive travellers.

"Usually growth is one ship a year or one region for a company. We decided in typical Scenic Group fashion, let's go big. Let's go big and do it properly rather than waiting for one region to happen, and then sit back and wait for the next."

Enter the 70 suite & stateroom *Emerald*

Liberté which will launch in Lyon on 01 April 2017 and the 56 cabin *Emerald Radiance*, debuting in Porto on 08 April 2017.

Liberté and *Radiance* are ships six and seven of the Emerald Waterways fleet, both based on the four 182 suite & stateroom Emerald 'Star Ships' (which will expand to five when *Emerald Belle* enters service in coming months). The proportionally smaller vessels offer the same facilities but are made smaller to in order to negotiate their respective waterways.

Liberté and *Radiance's* core itineraries are seven nights in length and depart on Saturdays. Crichton says guests will be able to seamlessly combine Rhine and Rhone, Rhone and Douro and Rhine and Douro cruise options to create 15 night, dual-river itineraries.

Europe product Andrew Kelleher says after assessing the market, it was apparent there was no easy way for customers to cruise Southern France and the Douro inside 15 days. Now Evergreen has tailored the product to enable passengers to make same-day

flight connections between Lyon and Porto. Kelleher admitted that other companies offer the similar combinations, however they do not operate on a like-for-like product or with the level of frequency Evergreen is going to offer. "We're providing a much broader range of dates for guests," he said.

Emerald Liberté will operate between Lyon and Arles with stops at Chalon-sur-Saone (to access Beaune), Macon, Tournon and Avignon. Guests on the France cruises will visit villages, museums, sample wines, eat cheese, visit the Papal Palace in Avignon, sweat a little on an Emerald Active bike ride and enjoy a fancy 'You're Invited' meal with a highly recognised chef.

The 112-passenger *Emerald Radiance* will operate roundtrip from Porto on the Douro - a region likened by Kelleher as a "narrower & steeper Rhine Gorge". There will be excursions each day in to Regua, Pocinho, Pinhao and a highlight, a full day trip to Salamanca from the port of Vega de Terron.

‘We decided in typical Scenic Group fashion, let's go big’

In Portugal, the 90-metre *Radiance* also features a new suite category at the rear of the vessel where the pool/cinema of other Star Ships are located. Crichton explains that due to Portugal's restriction to day-time cruise only, there's no engine noise by night, enabling the development of two 330sqft Horizon Deck Balcony Suites at the ship's stern. The new stateroom offers two outside views - a first in the Emerald 'Star Ship' fleet - a single pane glass at the rear and drop down balconies on the side.

OLD AND NEW FOR VENTURE HOLIDAYS

VENTURE Holidays has released its new look UK, Europe and Morocco brochure for the 2016/17 season.

The program covers accommodation, sightseeing, group touring, cruising, cars and trains.

New to the brochure are Norwegian Cruise Lines European cruise itineraries, travelling around both the Mediterranean and Northern Europe. New sightseeing tours in Paris and London have also been added. Tours in Paris add an authentic local flavour, with a market visit and cooking class, a St Germain pastry and chocolate tour among the additions.

For more active travellers, Venture is offering five to eight day walking and cycling tours in the UK.

"Keeping the brochure fresh by introducing new product, but keeping old favourites in, is something that we have paid particular attention to. The new product this year, we hope, will cater to the current demands in the market," said product manager David Dunkley.

The brochure can be downloaded at www.ventureholidays.com.au. Hard copy brochures are available via Brochure Flow and Templar SA.



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Foodie delights in Italy with Insight

AUTUMN is one of the best times to visit Italy. The climate is still very mild and pleasant in most parts of the country, there are a huge range of seasonal festivals and cultural events that travellers can participate in, and all without the press of thousands of other tourists as the crowds are much smaller. Foodies will be delighted by all the *sagre* (festivals celebrating all things food and wine) that pop up across the country. Coinciding with wine and olive harvest season, the festivals celebrate Italy's authentic and organic produce. There's a festival available for every palate, whether it's signature Italian truffles, wine, chestnuts, chocolate, porcini mushrooms or polenta.

Experience the gastronomic delights and cultural festivities that Italy has to offer in



autumn on Insight Vacations' Country Roads of Italy guided holiday. Clients can enjoy authentic regional flavours including a visit to Orvieto restaurant, where guests can explore the art of Italian cooking with Chef Lorenzo

and master the skill of making fresh pasta by hand – followed by dinner and a glass of Orvieto Classico wine.

■ For more information visit insightvacations.com or call 1300 727 767.

Q&A

Europe has been a perennial favourite with Australian travellers, but the world is a big place and there is so much to explore. *travelBulletin* caught up with personal travel manager from Adelaide, Lucrezia Caruso to get her tips on how to make selling Europe fresh.



What are the main drawcards for Australians travelling to Europe?

The main drawcard is being able to visit so many countries so close together – it is appealing for any traveller to visit 4 or 5 countries – offering different cultures, landmarks and flexibility. The weather is always a plus when booking travel to Europe during the Australian winter months.

What kinds of travellers go to Europe?

All sorts from the young adventurous to couples & families to mature age – no specific age categories and it's almost impossible to stereotype the European traveller.

What should an agent consider when selling Europe?

Always the budget. Never aim to offer something that is not affordable for the time frame. I present quality rather than quantity – that way clients have the experience of a lifetime.

Which destinations are the most popular?

Probably Italy, Spain, Croatia & Greece.

Are there any attractions that you consider to be the bread and butter of Europe?

Italy is always a must & Greek Islands during the summer months are never missed – very easy destinations to sell - the images say it all!

Have the recent terror attacks had an effect on bookings?

None whatsoever. I had two families travelling to Paris soon after the recent incident and they were still quite happy to travel there, without any hesitation.

What are the biggest challenges for agents in selling holidays in Europe?

The biggest challenges are safety and building the confidence to travel with ease. I've found the biggest to be when selecting coach touring. I will always select a guaranteed departure - previous experience has proved to be a disaster when a tour is cancelled due to insufficient numbers. We are then left to re-arrange the client's whole itinerary which is costly and time consuming at such short notice & never the best outcome. When selecting any tour with any company, I begin with selecting

a guaranteed departure and use this as a base to build the itinerary to avoid disappointment.

Are FIT holidays more popular than all-inclusive packaged options?

No not necessarily. Coach touring is popular as many passengers prefer structure, especially first time travellers. They are excellent value for money however, FIT has always been popular for all ages as selecting the duration at each destination is becoming essential. The main feedback I receive regarding coach touring is "the amount of time spent in major cities is not long enough". It is also a personality thing, some clients cannot bear to be on a coach tour for 20 days, in and out of cities and early morning starts – whereas I have some clients that would not dream of doing it independently. Knowing that someone is always there to assist and hold their hand through their experience puts them at ease. My sales for Europe travel would be 50/50 FIT versus all-inclusive packaged options.

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*Conditions apply. For FULL terms and conditions refer to Evergreen's 2017 Europe River Cruising Preview brochure. All prices based on per person twin share. Valid on new bookings only. Not valid in conjunction with any other offer. All prices based on land and cruise components only. EFRC price based on 21/10/17 departure in Cat E Stateroom & includes Early Payment Discount with FULL payment made 12 months prior to departure date. EPDC price based on 28/10/17 departure in Cat E Stateroom & includes Early Payment Discount with FULL payment made 12 months prior to departure date. Fly Free Offer is applicable when booking and depositing a 15 Day or longer 2017 European River Cruise on the Riviera Deck. Free Deck Upgrade Offer is applicable when booking and depositing a 15 Day or longer 2017 European River Cruise for two people on the Vista Deck, receive a Free Deck Upgrade to the Horizon Deck in Category R or P 2017 at 2016 Prices. Fly Free and Free Deck Upgrade Offers valid until 30th April 2016 or until sold out or upon the release of the full Evergreen Tours Europe River Cruise and Tours 2017 Brochure, whichever comes first. Flights must be booked by Evergreen, are based on a specific airline and in particular booking class of Evergreen Tours choice. If the specific airline and/or class is not available Evergreen Tours reserves the right to use an alternative airline of their choice. Airport & Airline taxes are included up to \$950pp and based on departure city & subject to change. Port Taxes are included and based on departure city & subject to change. A non-refundable booking deposit of \$500 per person per cruise/tour must be paid within 5 days of making a booking. If a flight deal is applicable, a second non-refundable deposit of \$2,000pp is due by 30 September 2016 or the date specified in Your booking advice (which is when flights are open to booking); whichever date occurs first. Subject to availability at time of booking or until sold out. Surcharges may apply on credit card transactions. Prices, Dates, Taxes & availability correct at 10/2/16 & subject to change. Evergreen Tours (a division of Scenic Tours Pty Ltd) ABN 85 002 715 602. Booking code EVMA171.

BITE SIZE IS BETTER

By Gary Walsh

FOR a segment of the market that all involved agree is exciting, fulfilling for clients and is growing exponentially, small group travel certainly divides opinion. And the main point of contention is just how to define 'small group'.

Paul Hole, founder of Insider Journeys (formerly Travel Indochina) is one operator who believes some in the industry have misused the term. "Companies who operate with group sizes of 20 and 25, and even undefined maximums, use the language in an attempt at 'me-too' marketing. Clients see through it – but when travel agents do not and send clients in good faith who return disappointed it is a problem," he says.

Insider Journeys has a guaranteed maximum of 16 clients, with Hole suggesting that "the tipping point for what can be described as a small group is typically recognised as 18. We need to call for all companies who use the language to disclose that they have a guaranteed maximum and what it is they are calling 'small group' to maintain the credibility of the segment.

"Today's travellers are no longer satisfied with just visiting the must-see attractions while holidaying. They want to take away more from each destination – they want life-changing experiences. Experiential travel is what it is all about, not just ticking places off a bucket list," Hole told *travelBulletin*.

Wendy Wu Tours' general manager of marketing and product, James Hewlett, says there is no standard definition of 'small'. "Some would say that it is less than 10, others 18, others less than 30," Hewlett

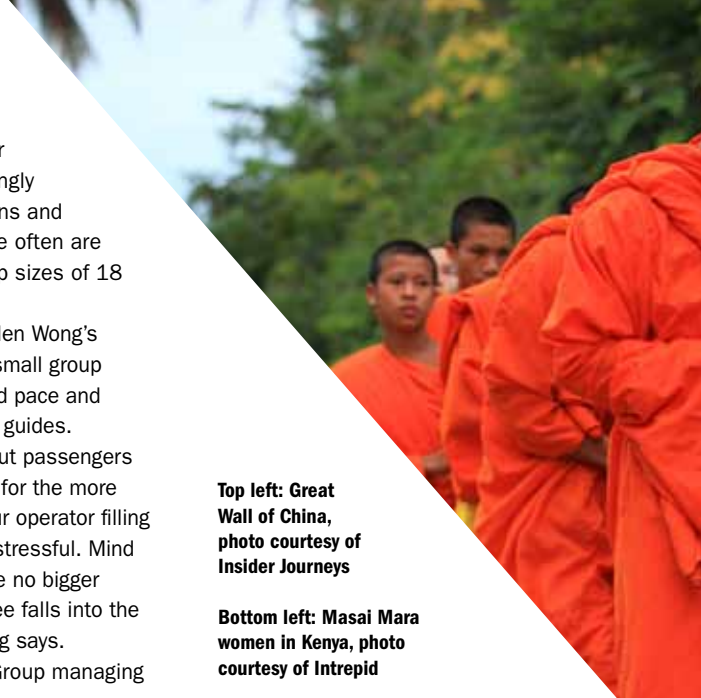
said. "Small groups can access a greater choice of local small-scale experiences, restaurants and other facilities that may not be able to cater for larger groups. The trend is increasingly towards more remote locations and active participation and these often are better suited to smaller group sizes of 18 or fewer."

Helen Wong, founder of Helen Wong's Tours, says the popularity of small group tours stems from their relaxed pace and more personal attention from guides. "Prices are generally higher but passengers are prepared to pay the extra for the more personal experience. As a tour operator filling a smaller coach can be less stressful. Mind you, our larger group tours are no bigger than 25, which to some degree falls into the smaller group segment," Wong says.

James Thornton, Intrepid Group managing



Top left: Great Wall of China, photo courtesy of Insider Journeys



Bottom left: Masai Mara women in Kenya, photo courtesy of Intrepid

Top right: Trekking in Thailand,
photo courtesy of Intrepid

**Bottom right: Luang Prabang
in Thailand, photo courtesy
of Insider Journeys**



director, says: “Our small groups generally have an average size of 10 people and a maximum of 16. They’re small enough so the traveller feels like they are exploring a destination independently but big enough to create a good social dynamic. In small groups, you are able to form meaningful connections with others in your group. When groups sizes are 40 or 50 you feel like you’re meeting someone new for the first time every day.”

Thornton says “more immersive experiences” are possible in a small group. “We won’t push you into a big coach where you’ll see everything through a window. We won’t fit you into a massive, impersonal restaurant designed for tourists. Instead, we’ll take you on local transport, where you’ll meet the locals, and you’ll dine on street food in small markets and authentic local restaurants.

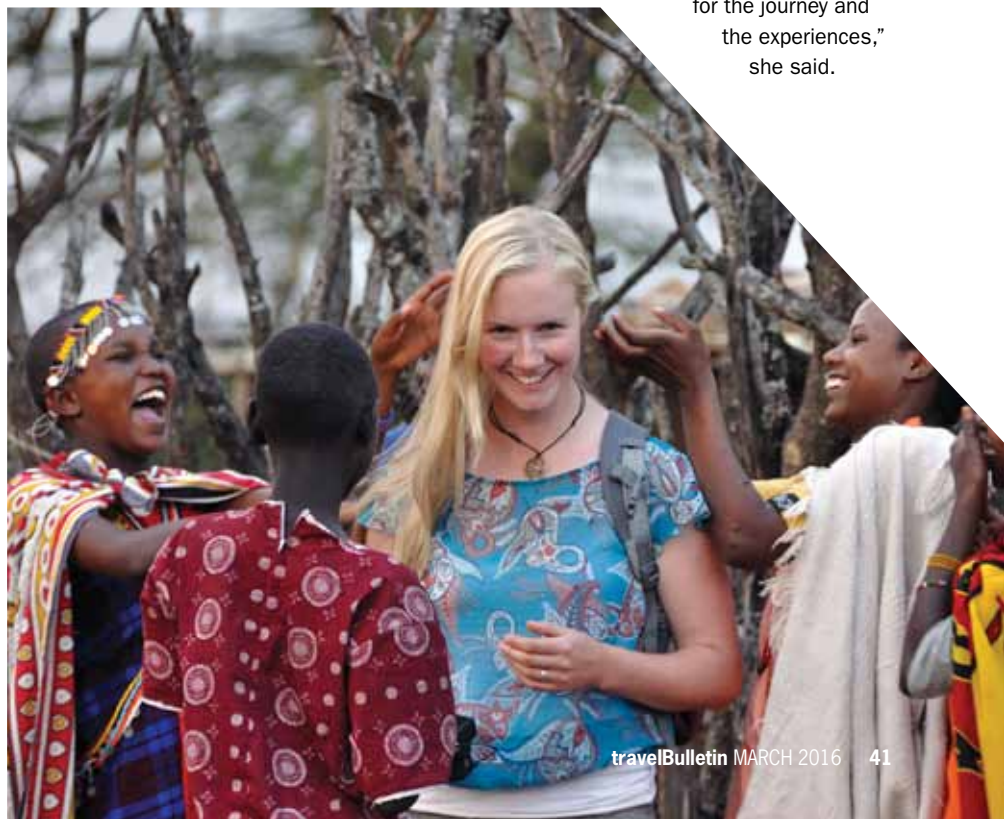
“Our philosophy has always been

to experience things the local way and we’ve always had small groups, so our clients can rest easy in the knowledge that our expertise will provide them with the best experiences. Also, experiences like homestays, cooking classes and market crawls – anything that provides immersive local interaction – are something our travellers love, and we are continually striving to create more and more of these experiences.”

Sujata Raman, Abercrombie & Kent managing director, says small groups can access places and events that larger groups can’t manage and that would be too cost-prohibitive to visit on a private travel basis. “More and more, we’re finding our guests seek authenticity over the standard trappings of luxury travel. Great accommodation, exemplary guiding and efficient transfers are a given. Our most popular itineraries are small group journeys to either new and exciting destinations or itineraries offering unique experiences and interactions.”

Raman says clients are more likely to find like-minded travellers in small groups. “The very fact that you’re on the same itinerary already gives you a starting point for conversation. Different people have different reasons for choosing the itinerary. Some may have a family connection to the destination with a relative having lived there. Some are interested from a historical perspective.

Some may be relishing a particular experience in the itinerary that would be their personal highlight. The opportunity to meet people with these varying reasons for travel enhances everyone’s appreciation for the journey and the experiences,” she said.



Back-Roads Touring releases winter program

By Bonnie Tai

WITH multigenerational travel predicted to make a comeback this year, it appears that it's not only those in their 'naughty forties' who are looking to explore the road less travelled, as made apparent by a younger crowd joining Back-Roads Touring on its touring programs in Europe and the UK.

"We've got the mum and dad who might be in their 60s and 70s and their adult children in their 30s wanting to travel together, but they want to do it in such a way that appeals to both," commented the group's Head of Sales, Hugh Houston.

"We broadly say our demographic is 40, but interestingly, we are getting a lot of younger people becoming interested in travelling with Back-Roads just because of the proposition we offer."

As the name suggests, the boutique operator takes travellers on an adventure off the beaten path, exploring what Houston calls, "the real Europe" and the "real UK".



Hugh Houston and Hazel McGuire from Back Roads Touring, with the new Christmas Markets and Winter Lights 2016/17 brochure.

Continuing its tradition of crafting charming countryside tours, Back-Roads has unveiled its new 2016-17 cool-season brochure, titled Christmas Markets and Winter Lights.

New itineraries this year include: the eight-day 'Imperial Cities: Prague, Vienna & Budapest tour', the six-day 'Christmas Time at Court House Manor', and the eight-day 'Essence of Iceland journey'.

"It's about breaking away from those traditional European countries, and opening up Europe a little bit wider to show people

places they haven't been before," according to Back-Roads general manager Hazel Moore, who's pictured with Houston during a visit to Australia last month.

The tours are leisurely paced and offer exciting culinary experiences.

"We make sure that you have those great food moments, letting people taste, as well as cook, some of the local delicacies from the countries they're visiting," she said.

The brochures are on the way to agents' offices now.

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ORMINA LAUNCHES RATE CARDS FOR BESPOKE ACTIVITIES

ORMINA Tours is launching a series of individually priced services and excursions via Rate Cards – starting with ‘2016 Venice’.

The rate card includes confirmed nett rates for all major services and activities in each city, ranging from airport transfers through to special interest activities such as a ‘Venetian Mask Decoration Class’.

The Venice rate card is the first of many that Ormina Tours will be launching over the next 12 months, giving agents the tools needed to create a bespoke itinerary for their clients.

“We have many agents that utilise us for one off services like airport or port transfers but there are so many other services that their clients may need so we are making it easy for agents by providing them with pre-determined rates for tailored activities,” Ormina Tours general manager Ross Ioppolo said.

“While we quote nett in the relevant local currency, all payment is done in AUD which makes the booking seamless for agents,” Ioppolo explains.



INTREPID BRINGS ISSUES ‘IN FOCUS’

TRAVEL wouldn't be as intoxicating if it weren't for the stories it shares and creates. Intrepid Urban Adventures has launched a series of ‘In Focus’ tours designed to offer insight into local issues and the efforts to resolve them. Rather than hearing a story about a social project from a third-party guide, travellers will witness it and see first-hand how a particular issue is being addressed.

The ‘In Focus’ tours range from a Kolkata Solar Slum Tour, which takes travellers behind the scenes of Pollinate Energy, a social enterprise bringing solar light to India's urban poor, to a Kathmandu cooking class, presented in partnership with Seven Women, a social enterprise that empowers marginalised women in Nepal through literacy classes, skills training, and income generation programs.



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G Adventures



Photo: G Adventures

HOT PRODUCT

PEREGRINE ADVENTURES is currently offering savings of up to 25% on 2016 Arctic voyages booked by April 15. The offer is valid on all Arctic voyages departing this year, such as the 13 day Greenland to Canada trip which explores the historic islands and waterways of Greenland and the Canadian Arctic.

■ peregrineadventures.com

EARLY bird offers on Africa, Egypt and Middle East 2016/17 season tours are still available with **BUNNIK TOURS**. Travellers will save \$250 per person (\$500 a couple) on all eligible trips that are booked with the deposit paid by March 31. See website for trip details.

■ bunniktours.com.au

DISCOVER China from Beijing to Xian with **ABERCROMBIE & KENT'S** Luxury Small Group Journey - China & the Yangtze. Highlights include a visit to the Terracotta Warriors and a Yangtze River cruise. Save US\$1,250 per person when booked before April 30 for May 19, Jun 9, 4 Aug and 22 Sep departures this year.

■ abercrombiekent.com.au

NAT GEO JOURNEYS A HIT

G ADVENTURES' newly launched National Geographic Journeys is proving to be a huge success so far for the company. The program has only been rolled out in Australia for a month and already the numbers have been incredible, according to founder Bruce Poon Tip.

The partnership took two years to nail down after National Geographic approached G Adventures in early 2014. The publishing giant had offered tours in the past, but its round-the-world jet trips were priced at \$200,000, and thus out of price range for the majority of National Geographic's huge 40 million members and 700 million audience who access the brand each month. National Geographic was keen to make the brand more accessible, and Poon Tip said G Adventures is the "perfect company to tell National Geographic's story".

The range of National Geographic Journeys includes 70 trips and 5,000 departures, with National Geographic giving G Adventures access to research stations, experts and scientists all previously off limits apart from with cruise operator and partner Lindblad Expeditions.



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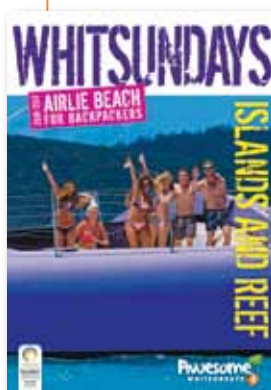
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QANTAS Holidays has released its 2016/17 USA & Canada brochure. It introduces new attractions such as EagleRider motorcycle hire, Wizarding World of Harry Potter (opening 7 April) Universal Studios Hollywood and Exotics Racing in Las Vegas. New to Canada is the Yamnuska Wolf Dog Sanctuary, just out of Banff in Canmore and in Alaska, the Kenai Fjords with glacier dog sledding.



THE Awesome Whitsundays 2016/17 brochure has hit the shelves, featuring four packages for young and independent travellers staying in Airlie Beach. Travellers can see the best of the Whitsundays with deals ranging from one to five nights. Reefsleep is an overnight experience, sleeping on 'Reefworld' pontoon at the Great Barrier Reef. New accommodation options have been added to include Whitsunday Vista Resort and Blue Horizon Resort as well as a choice of two backpacker resorts.



G ADVENTURES has released its National Geographic Journeys with G Adventures 2016 brochure. There's a collection of 70 unique travel experiences with hands-on exploration and special insider access to National Geographic projects around the world. Each tour is led by a local guide from G Adventures and most groups are limited to 16 guests. During the tours, travellers will have the opportunity to connect with local people, cultures and places.



INFINITY Holidays Gold Coast 2016/17 brochure has plenty of new adventures to choose from; there's jet ski tours, seeing the dolphins and a snorkel cruise. It also features the recently opened Elements of Byron Resort & Spa. There's plenty of information on family packages, car hire, transfers, theme parks and tours. Accommodation ranges from Byron Bay, Surfers Paradise, Ashmore and Tweed Heads.



FOR religious tours see Harvest Journeys 2016 brochure offering fully escorted pilgrimages visiting sites such as Israel, Italy, Lisbon, Paris, Greece and Turkey. Tours include the 16-day Journey of Christ, starting in Amman before journeying to Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, Jericho, Bethany and Jerusalem. There is the option of a four-day pre-tour with highlights including Shobak Castle, a guided walking tour of Petra and a visit to Wadi Mujib – the Jordanian 'Grand Canyon'.



QANTAS Holidays new Hong Kong & China for 2016/17 appeals to those looking for something different to do on their next visit to Asia. It details new a gastronomical experience with food tours in Hong Kong including the Kowloon Food Safari as well as revamped feature page for Macau to showcase what it has to offer. Explore China through the multiple intrepid tours featured inside.



THE new Travelmarvel India River Cruising and Land Journeys, Featuring Sri Lanka 2017 brochure is now available. It features the 20-day Colours of India tour made up of a seven-day land tour of the 'golden triangle' cities of Delhi and a 13-day Lower Ganges river cruise. Guests who book a Travelmarvel India 2017 river cruise before 24 March will receive 50% off a cabin upgrade.



AUSTRALIAN Air Holidays has put out its 140 page 2016 brochure offering "flightseeing" and ground touring holidays in remote areas of Australia. The brochure features 30 itineraries in more than 70 destinations ranging from two to 30-days, with highlights such as Bungle Bungle Range, a visit to the Tip of Australia, Uluru and Norfolk Island. The main aircraft used is the high wing Fokker 50, for up to 46 passengers.



BEN PIPER recently travelled to Las Vegas and checked out all that's new and exciting in this ever-changing destination.



WHEN it was suggested to me that I should head to Las Vegas for a boys trip, I was shocked. "As in Las Vegas, Nevada? But I'm not a gambler!" I would soon discover that over the last decade, much of Las Vegas has fundamentally changed. Whilst the idea that "what happens in Las Vegas, stays in Las Vegas" still very much exists, the city has now become a popular tourist destination not for gambling or drinking, but for the countless exciting and family friendly activities as well as high quality dining and entertainment. These were some of my discoveries.

SPEEDVEGAS

SpeedVegas is the newest and most thrilling driving experience in Las Vegas, boasting a 3km 12 turn track, a half mile straight and twelve different types of exotic cars, including Lamborghinis, Ferraris and Porsches. SpeedVegas gives you the chance to drive your fantasy ride around an actual racetrack. Located a short ten minutes from the iconic "Welcome to Las Vegas Nevada" sign, it's the closest and most convenient way to bring daydreams to life and drive amazing cars. With experienced instructors provided, as well as being situated in brand new, custom-designed state of the art facilities, there's no need to be an expert. Just show up and enjoy the drive.

FREMONT STREET

Located 10 minutes walk from the strip in downtown Las Vegas; Fremont Street is a hub of activity and history. Taking you back to where it all started in Vegas, Fremont Street mixes the old and the new, with the world's largest screen directly overhead Las Vegas' first street. You can even take a short flight high above the street on 'Slotzilla' a twelve storey high zip line experience that shoots you down the avenue. If that's not your style, the 'Mob Museum' is just down the street, and takes a fascinating in depth look into Las Vegas' shady history, and the gangsters that used to run the town. There's even an authentic electric chair on display.

RICHARD PETTY DRIVING

If you're looking for an adrenaline rush, or just want to know what its like to be behind the wheel of an actual race car, then look no further than the Richard Petty Driving Experience. Located at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, only twenty minutes from the strip, Drive Petty lets you drive or ride along in a genuine NASCAR stock car, on the same track that the professionals race. Reaching speeds of more than 220km/h, your experienced instructor will guide you along the fastest lines, so you'll feel the rush of the walls and the bank of the track - just like the drivers in the NASCAR series.

DIG THIS

Truly a once in a lifetime experience, 'Dig This' allows you to get behind the joysticks of ten tonne Caterpillar excavators and bulldozers and muck around in a giant sandbox. Located



a short drive from the strip, Dig This offers a unique and oddly satisfying opportunity to let loose with powerful demolition machinery in a safe, fun environment. Digging a huge hole, attempting to move giant tyres with the claws of a digger and then trying to delicately pick up basketballs with a bulldozer is not something that I had ever expected to do - but it's certainly something that I want to do again.

THE LINQ

The Linq Hotel and Casino, located in the heart of Las Vegas Boulevard, offers a stunning outdoor shopping, dining and entertainment promenade. The pinnacle is the appropriately named 'High Roller' observation wheel, where you can enjoy the electric beauty of Las Vegas from over 150 metres up. After you take the ride, the nearby Guy Fieri's Vegas Kitchen and Bar boasts the biggest and boldest meals in all of Vegas. Celebrity chef Fieri takes classic American dishes and puts a unique twist on them, creating a distinctive and satisfying dining experience.

FLIGHTLINEZ

Located in Bootleg Canyon, a short shuttle drive from a number of locations around Vegas, Flightlinez allows you to zip line over the Mojave Desert at speeds of more than 100 km/h. A short hike takes you to the top of the mountain where the first Zipline leaves, but before you strap yourself in, make sure to appreciate the stunning 360-degree views, where you can see Las Vegas in one direction, and in the other the iconic Hoover Dam. Perfect for any adrenaline rush seeker, Flightlinez offers a once in a lifetime chance to fly over the desert with funny, friendly and safety conscious guides, and an absolutely magnificent view all around.

SUNBUGGY

If you've ever wanted to race and chase dune buggies out in the desert then Sunbuggy is the experience that you're looking for. Choose from a variety of different buggies or ATVs and then follow your friendly guide for a thrilling trip up, down and around the winding dunes of the Mojave desert. Located near Las Vegas Motor Speedway and a short shuttle bus from Las Vegas Boulevard, what better way to experience the beauty of the deserts sand dunes than from behind the wheel of a roaring powerful and agile ATV.



MACHINE GUNS VEGAS

Machine Guns Vegas presents a once in a lifetime opportunity to shoot a variety of firearms. 'Only in America' would you be able to get your hands on these powerful weapons, such as the fabled AK47, a double barrelled shotgun or the Glock handgun, and then shoot them at targets downrange. The shooting range ensures safe handling, with friendly and experienced staff to keep you entertained and guide you through every step in the process. By the end of the session you'll be hitting bullseyes and striking a 'cool guy pose' with all the guns available.



SHOWS

While in Las Vegas, you should definitely go and see a show or two. Check out dumbfounding magic of 'Penn and Teller' in the Rio Hotel and Casino, where your mind will be blown when the comedic magic pair make the seemingly impossible happen, but keep a down to earth and funny vibe throughout. If magic isn't quite your style, why not have a look at one of the countless 'Cirque du Soleil' performances, such as 'Michael Jackson ONE' in the Mandalay Bay, where acrobats fly, jump and dance to MJ's greatest hits in a mesmerizing visual masterpiece on stage.



THE AMERICAN INVASION

AUSTRALIA certainly seems to be the flavour of the month when it comes to US-based tourism marketers, with more than 55 American suppliers and tourist offices heading down under last month for the annual Visit USA Expos. The events took place in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane and saw the visitors join with locally based operators to present their wares to hundreds of travel agents.

The organisers added a twist this year by inviting attendees to dress up as their best USA themed character. Those who brought out their inner Elvis, Captain America, Wonder Woman or Marilyn were in the running to win a spot on the 2016 Brand USA Mega Fam, with this huge trip later this year exploring America courtesy of Air New Zealand, which now flies via Auckland to Los Angeles, San Francisco and Houston.

Exhibitors included long-time favourites such as New York's Beacon Hotel, Rocky Mountaineer, Handlery Hotels and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, along with tourism boards from destinations further afield such as Philadelphia, Florida, Utah, Oregon, New England, Texas,



Anchorage and even American Samoa.

During the sessions formal educational presentations were complemented by a free-flowing "marketplace" format. This year's Visit USA Australia Week also included a one-day "International Media Marketplace" in Sydney where the participating exhibitors were able to showcase their destinations and products to local journalists.

Visit USA Australia president Janette Davie said she was thrilled at the strong contingent crossing the Pacific to take part. "We are delighted that so many USA experts came to meet and educate our local sellers. Agents found out what's new and updated their destination knowledge, and we hope they now feel empowered to confidently promote and sell the USA to to their clientele".



Dallas Farmers Market, DIAnn L'Roy

Dallas thinks BIG

WITH Dallas-Fort Worth now easily accessible to Australians via Qantas' A380 non-stop service from Sydney, there are many options in the twin-city metroplex for Aussie visitors. Dallas is constantly growing, with major projects this year including the revitalisation of the downtown Dallas Farmers Market. As well as boosting capacity for this vibrant precinct, the project will see the addition of residential units and 25,000 square feet of shopping – perfect for a bit of retail therapy. It's scheduled for

completion by the end of 2016.

Dallas has also just launched the latest phase of a modern streetcar system which makes it easier to get around. The "hybrid-electric" system can run without an overhead wire – meaning it can cross a 1.6km-long bridge included in the route on the Houston Street Viaduct. Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) says the system joins downtown to the Oak Cliffs Art District, and will later be extended to the Omni Dallas Hotel.

US VISA SYSTEM TWEAKED

TRAVEL for Australians to the USA is generally fairly seamless, with Australia a long-time participant in the US Visa Waiver Program meaning tourists can gain entry simply by registering online through the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA). However recently heightened concerns about security have seen some slight changes which may cause hiccups for some.

Under the change, Australians who are dual citizens of Iran, Iraq, Syria or Sudan – or any Australians who have travelled to those countries since 1 March 2011, will no longer be eligible for an ESTA. Instead they must apply for a non-immigrant visa at a US Embassy or Consulate. The US Visa Information Service for Australia encourages applicants for this type of visa to apply at least three months in advance of their intended date of travel.





EXCITE Holidays is continuing its 'Live Like a Local' campaign, the biggest in the agent-only online wholesaler's history, with a chance to win a trip to Nevada.

Every fortnight a new destination is announced and agents have the chance to win a trip to that location. Nevada follows on from LA.

To enter, agents must book accommodation in that destination, earning themselves an entry into the draw, as well as an extra 1,000 bonus points for every night booked there.

"The purpose of this campaign is to provide travel agents with insider information to help them sell the USA to their clients. Many consumers are already familiar with the USA, but through our campaign we hope to empower travel agents with local knowledge which will help them put together the trip of a lifetime for their clients," said general manager global sales, Andrew Yell.

Visit www.exciteholidays.com/campaigns/usa for more details, and information on finding those off-the-beaten-track experiences and local secrets, as well as downloadable destination flyers.

HOT PRODUCT

EXPERIENCE the road that has been named as the Main Street of America – Route 66, travelling from Chicago to Los Angeles with **TRAFALGAR**. Tick off those typical American experiences from indulging in pulled pork and St Louis-style ribs with real barbeque championship winners, and marvelling at the Grand Canyon. Departing on 15 May, the 15-day Route 66 trip is \$4545 (a discount of \$500).

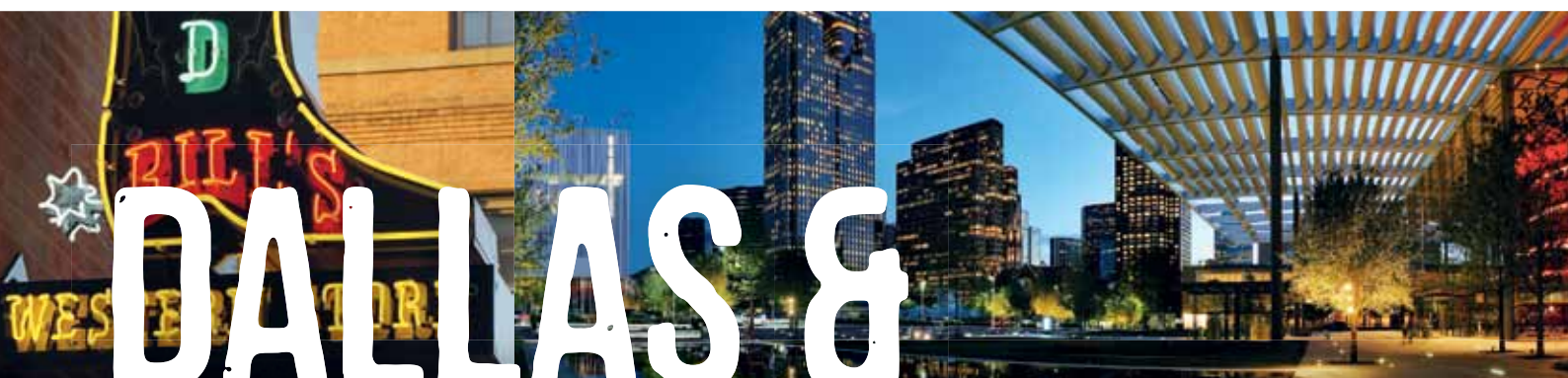
■ www.trafalgar.com/aus

SNAG a deal with **GLOBUS** by encouraging your clients to book before 26 April. Globus is offering 5% off for bookings, plus 5% off for a second tour or if your client is a repeat traveller. The 10-day Sights and Sounds of the South is a great introduction to the confederate states and includes visits to Graceland in Memphis, a recording studio in Nashville, and a behind the scenes tour of a Kentucky Horse Farm from \$3,459 per person.

■ www.globus.com.au

ADVENTURE WORLD has all your wild west dreams covered with its seven-day Handpicked Texas itinerary. Start in Dallas, exploring the city's famous (and infamous) landmarks such as the JFK Sixth Floor Museum. It's then a self-drive across to Wildcatter Ranch for some cowboy fun on the working ranch before heading to Fort Worth to discover the 'city of cowboys and culture'. All this from \$1619.

■ www.adventureworld.com.au



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FOR MORE INFORMATION www.visitdallas.com www.fortworth.com

AUTHENTIC KYOTO

Kyoto is a city that has much to offer. BEN GROUNDWATER explores both the traditional and the new in this fascinating city.

IT'S A hoary old cliché, but today it's true: this really is like stepping back in time. Wandering the streets of historic Higashiyama, you could have stumbled right into the 1700s – or at least a very convincing mock-up. There are no cars, no trains, no dingy chimes or flashing lights. About the only sign of modernity, if you look close enough, is the odd vending machine, boxy and unloved, tucked into the corner of a quiet back street.

This part of Kyoto has remained unchanged for centuries. It's the Japan of misty-eyed dreams of days gone by, with its immaculate temples and manicured gardens. It's the Japan of wood-block prints and Hokusai drawings, a Japan that only really exists now in small pockets like this quiet part in Kyoto.

Higashiyama is something of a fantasy, a heritage-listed and beautifully preserved relic of a time when emperors ruled, geishas entertained, and samurai defended. It's a suburb of winding paved streets, of temples and shrines, of forests and gardens.

It's also a suburb that's very popular with modern tourists, for all of those reasons. They come to wander the streets and soak up the feeling of living in another time. They come to visit places like Kiyomizu Temple, a beautiful series of buildings and shrines with views over the city. They come to see the Kyoto National Museum. They come to stay in "ryokans", or traditional Japanese inns, such as Tamakan, with its formal service and stunning gardens.

They come to Higashiyama for these and many other things, and then, eventually, they leave. But the city of Kyoto doesn't begin and end in Higashiyama, even though the photos in the tourist brochures would probably tell you so. This is only scraping the surface of this amazing city, because once you step outside those historic boundaries you find there's still so much to see and discover.

There are no geishas, for example, wandering through the covered market area of Nishiki, a 10-minute walk across from the Kamo River that delineates the steep

hills and winding streets of Higashiyama from the rest of the city. That doesn't matter though – what you get instead is a bustling area of traditional food stalls, their displays packed with ingredients fresh and preserved, packaged and unwrapped.

Nishiki is as good a place as any to feel the real, lived-in Kyoto, the place where locals go to avoid the crush of tourists across the river. And it represents, as well, one of the Kyoto residents' great loves: food.

‘Kyoto is an amazing place to just explore, a city in which you stumble upon shrines and gardens and temples so numerous they can't possibly be covered by guidebooks or tours...’

This is a city with more Michelin stars per capita than any in the world. The restaurants here range from the smallest, cheapest ramen bars to the most expensive, luxurious "kaiseki" meals. Whether you're ducking into a Gion yakitori bar or a sukiyaki joint on the banks of the Kamo, if you're going for yakiniku – a Japanese version of Korean barbecue – near the central station or sitting down for a formal, multi-course meal at a ryokan, there is always something good to eat in Kyoto.

You could treat that food as delicious fuel for the adventuring ahead, because while Higashiyama is the perfect place to walk off those calories, the rest of the city is built for biking, with wide, quiet streets and flat terrain. There's no shortage of shops offering rentals either, because a bicycle is the ideal vehicle for exploring the rest of the city.

Begin your pedaling journey at Kyoto's central station and head north, past the Kyoto International Manga Museum and on to Nijo Castle, a heritage-listed, fortified palace built in the 1600s. Further to the north you'll find Kinkaku-ji, the famous Golden Pavilion, a beautiful spot nestled by a lake in forested grounds.

Even without these world-renowned

temples and monuments, however, Kyoto is an amazing place to just explore, a city in which you stumble upon shrines and gardens and temples so numerous that they can't possibly all be covered by guidebooks or tours. They just exist, and everyone is welcome to discover them.

Further still to the north, however, lies an attraction that gains a mention in every guidebook, and that every tourist will come to know: the bamboo grove of Arashiyama. It takes a train ride from central Kyoto to reach this outer suburb, a quiet place with streets that are most often filled with an ever-moving line of visitors making their way up the hill and into the forest.

There lies a grove of the most enormous bamboo trees, an eerie, stunning place in which you can walk around for hours surrounded by the thin, swaying trunks of this most Japanese of flora. It's peaceful and serene, a place the noblemen of Kyoto must once have loved to visit and contemplate.

And – as with many areas in this historic city – nothing much has changed since those days.

NEED TO KNOW

Getting there

You can fly direct to Kyoto from Australia, landing at nearby Osaka Kansai International airport, or catch the train to the city, with many lines connecting Kyoto to other cities including Tokyo. Consider a Japan Rail Pass if you plan to do a lot of train travel around Japan.

Getting around

Bicycle is your ideal form of transport, with those easy to ride streets. If that's not your style, public transport is your best bet with a comprehensive transport system including buses, subways and trains.

Currency

At the time of printing, AU\$1 is worth around ¥80. Credit cards are accepted in most hotels and department stores but only some restaurants will take them.



Above: Hanamikoji Gion Kyoto, Hans-Johnson; Bottom left: Park pagoda in Higashiyama, JahnmitJa; Bottom right: Kimono, 2Benny





as a safe destination. In the last twelve months Japan has welcomed more than 375,000 Australians, up a healthy 24.3% on the previous year.

The Japan National Tourism Organisation is making the most of the interest, with the long-awaited launch of a redesigned website targeting the local market. The site, now online at www.jnto.org.au, has a range of

‘In the last twelve months Japan has welcomed more than 375,000 Australians, up 24.3% on the previous year’

new features including an interactive map showcasing touring routes, skiing areas and airports, and improved functionality which allows travel agents to add their own deals and listings which are then publicly accessible by consumers. The travel trade focus also includes the upcoming launch of a new e-learning program for consultants which will also be hosted on the website.

There’s also a social media component, with JNTO Sydney engaging with consumers via the VisitJapanAU Facebook and Instagram accounts.

JAPAN A NEW FAVOURITE

JAPAN is becoming the flavour of the month for many Aussies heading overseas, with tour operators and airlines reporting strong demand across the board. An exceptionally strong ski season has been followed up with sold-out tours during the northern summer,

with some attributing the strength of the market to increased aviation uplift (Qantas launched a new Brisbane-Narita non-stop in August, while ANA returned to the Australian markets with Sydney-Haneda flights in December), along with perceptions of Japan

More bullet trains for Japan

JAPAN’S already famous bullet trains are set to provide even more convenient links across the country.

Extensions are planned for the Shinkansen network which will make it easier to travel between major cities and regions of Japan.

The most recent addition, planned for completion in March this year, is the Hokkaido train which will connect the main island of Honshu to Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan. Known for its ski fields around Sapporo, the Hokkaido train will make it even easier to visit these areas, previously only accessible by plane for most visitors.

An extension of the Kyushu Shinkansen to Nagasaki is also planned for the future but is not expected to be completed until 2022.



EXPERIENCE BEST OF JAPAN

OFF the back of Trafalgar’s Hidden Journeys success, the global guided holiday operator is offering the 13-day Splendours of Japan with Hiroshima tour that uncovers all that Japan has to offer from the eclectic cities of Tokyo, Takayama and Kyoto to Japanese castles perfect for cherry blossom viewing and the marvellous snow-capped Mt Fuji, viewed at 2,300m. Guests will also experience an eye-opening Hiroshima city tour where they

will visit the Peace Memorial Park, and the poignant Atomic Bomb Museum.

Insider Experiences that go beyond the traditional tourist sights on this trip include learning the art of making delicate washi paper with a local family, and enjoying a special Be My Guest Lunch at a traditional ryokan nestled in the peace and quiet of Mt. Yoshida.

■ www.trafalgar.com/aus

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FIVE AUTHENTIC CULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN JAPAN



Kyoto tea ceremony, Moyan Brenn

TRADITIONAL TEA CEREMONY

TEA ceremony or Chanoyu in Japan is a beautifully choreographed art. The ancient ritual is centred around the act of serving matcha, a finely powdered, traditional green tea.

Each action of preparing the tea is deliberate and focused with aesthetics and consideration for guests vital aspects of the ceremony. It often takes place in a beautiful, intimate settings such as a tea room or garden using precious ceramics.

Kyoto, the former Japanese capital city which is known for tradition is one of the best spots to experience Chanoyu. Try En, a small Japanese-style teahouse in the Gion area of Kyoto.

SUSHI

SUSHI is perhaps the first thing that comes to mind when you think Japan. In the early 19th century it was a simple street food using fish freshly caught from Tokyo bay wrapped in dried seaweed on a bed of vinegared rice.

If you enjoy eating it here in Australia, you will be taken with the incredibly fresh sushi and sashimi parcels you will find in Japan. Sushi-no-Midori is a locally famous spot for sushi in Tokyo. Brace yourself for a bit of a queue, but it will be well worth it to watch the swift and finely-crafted work of the sushi chefs and taste the authentic delights.





3

Sake tasting, Kent Wang

SAKE TASTING

THIS rice wine is the national drink of Japan and a favourite alcoholic drink in the country – second only to beer. Shimada Shoten in Osaka is being hailed as a great place for an ‘underground’ sake tasting.

Simply bow and speak the words ‘sake tasting’ to be led down a ladder underneath this seemingly nondescript liquor store. The sake there is top-grade and is served in 60ml tasting glasses. The passionate owner will help with recommendations.

TEMPLES

VISITING the breathtaking temples and shrines is a must when in Japan. Every municipality in will be home to at least one Buddhist temple with large cultural centres like Kyoto having several thousand.

If you’re visiting the seaside city of Kamakura stop by the Kotokuin Temple which is home to the Great Buddha, cast in the 13th century. The incredible statue which sits serenely in the temple’s grounds stands at more than 13 metres high.



4

Kotokuin Temple @ Kamakura, Guilhem Vellut

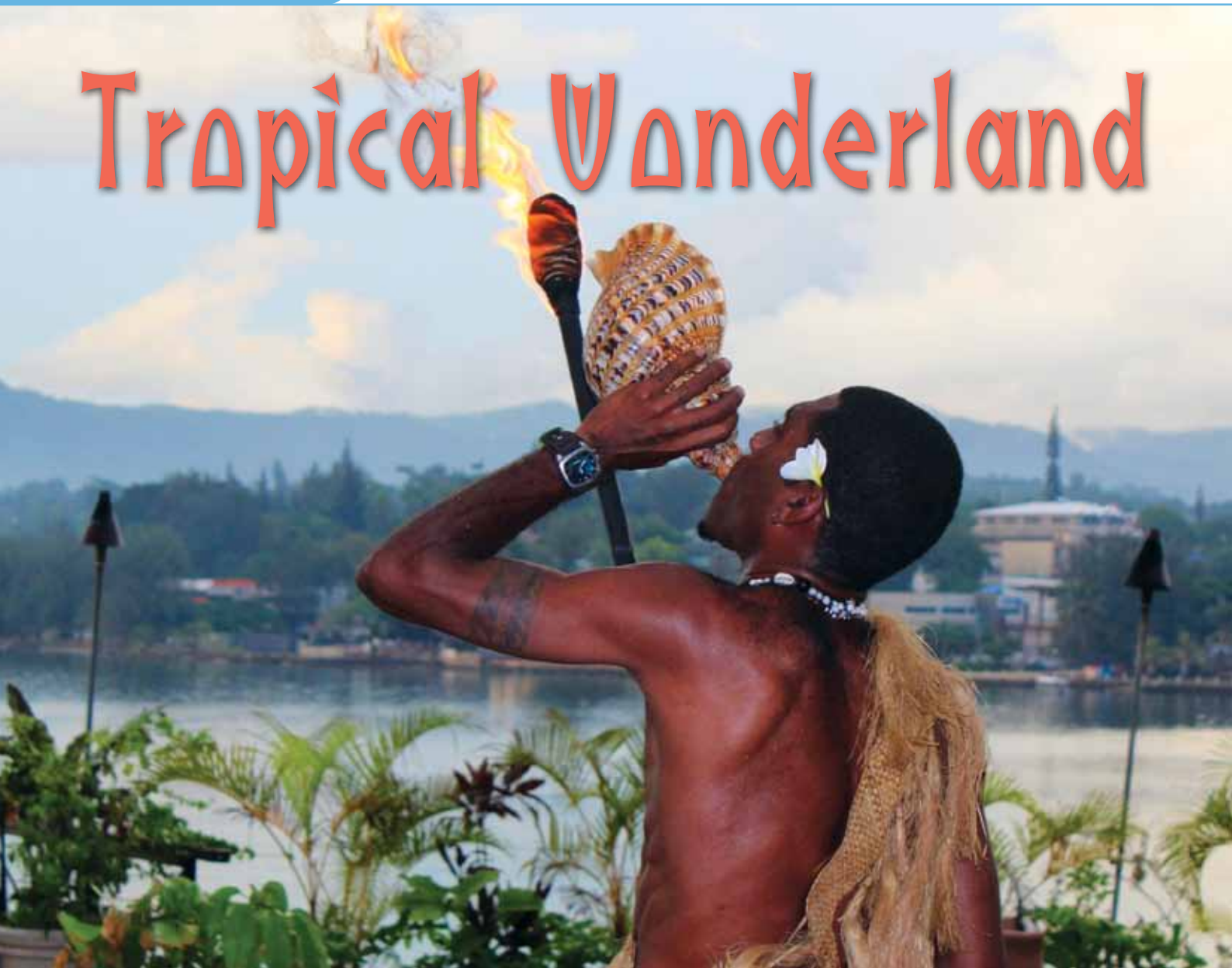


5

HOT SPRINGS

NATURAL hot springs or onsen are popular across the country and form a strong part of Japanese culture. There are more than 3000 onsen which range from indoor, outdoor, gender separated, mixed, developed and undeveloped. Many hot spring baths belong to a ryokan (traditional Japanese Inn) while others are public bath houses. An overnight stay at a hot spring ryokan is a highly recommended experience. Try soothing away your stresses away at Hakone Hot Springs near Mt Fuji, about one hour by high speed train from Tokyo.

Tropical Wonderland



Chilled-out Vanuatu provides the perfect atmosphere to unwind. NATHALIE CRAIG explores the best of Efate and Iririki islands.

YOU know you've touched down in Vanuatu when you step off the plane at midnight and can still feel the humid air clinging to you. An island band strums ukuleles while welcoming us to Port Vila with leis, a sunny greeting even in the dead of the night.

After a 15-minute transfer to the local wharf we board our small boat to Iririki Island Resort. It's an easy few minutes' ride from Efate, the most populous Island to form part of Vanuatu's archipelago. We're greeted with warm smiles and a tropical drink before retiring for the night to our waterfront bungalow.

Few things compare to waking up and drawing the blinds on your first day in Island

paradise to discover the azure waters directly in front of your bungalow.

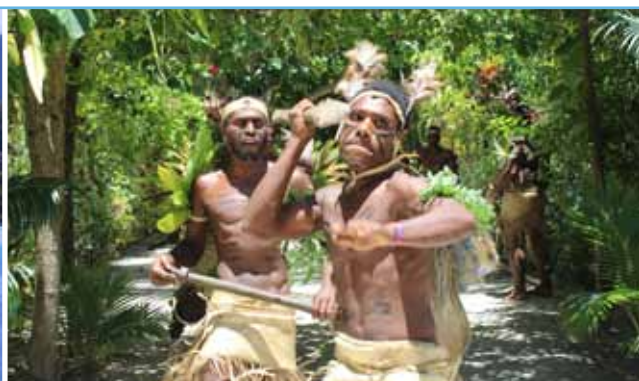
The resort has a free 24-hour boat to take you to the mainland as you please but beware, it wouldn't be difficult to stay at Iririki for the entire week lapping up the resort's several pools and complimentary ocean equipment like sail boats and snorkels to help explore your surroundings.

When your curiosity piques as to what lies across the harbour, a visit to the colourful, bustling Port Vila markets is a must. Women in traditional island dresses sell fresh fruit and vegetables. There's super sweet pineapples, bananas, melons and coconuts. While those cheap coconuts are tempting to buy, see if the stallholder will open it for you before you leave otherwise you may end up like me - helplessly holding a whole coconut until a friendly local offers to break it open on the pavement. The market also has a collection of fun souvenirs, trinkets and clothes.

Another highlight of the mainland is the Mele Cascades. It's well worth the 20-minute uphill hike through lush rainforest. You may even come across some vegetable plantations. Our tour guide stops to show us the biggest avocado I've ever seen. You'll pass some slippery streams, just don't forget to hold onto the strategically-placed ropes! Once at the top, you'll be blown away by the sound and sight of this powerful 35 metre waterfall. And the best part? You can swim there. Feel the force of nature as you lie under the thundering stream of water or swim around the clear plunge pool looking for hidden caves.

For a cultural experience, a tour of Ekasup Village offers a chance spend time with a community living a more traditional village lifestyle while learning about Vanuatu's fascinating culture and history.

Daily tours visit the settlement located



about three kilometres from Port Vila. Villagers share their knowledge on how to prepare local products like using native herbs for medicine, making hunting traps and weaving baskets.

Stay for their traditional Melanesian feast and try local delicacies like lap lap, a tasty root vegetable cake prepared by pounding taro or yam roots into a paste before cooking them with fresh coconut cream and pork, beef or chicken meat – it's addictive. Some of these feasts also provide an opportunity to try the narcotic drink, kava. Consuming this muddy looking liquid made from mixing the powdered root of the pepper plant *piper methysticum* with water leaves you feeling numb around the mouth and brings about a sense of relaxation. It is traditionally served in coconut shells and can be drunk at Kava bars across Vanuatu.

These bars are dotted around Port Vila and visitors are welcome to join in the

‘A tour of Ekasup Village offers a chance to spend time with a community living a more traditional village lifestyle while learning about Vanuatu’s fascinating culture...’

ritual. Locals tell me many on the islands drink kava in place of alcohol. One of my tour guides informs me people are still free to drive after consuming the sedative-style drink but they are just advised to “drive slow” to avoid any serious accidents. When I tell her I’m from Australia she gives me a cheeky smile and says “Oh, in your country there are so many rules. Here the rule is

there are no rules”.

When it comes to communicating in Vanuatu English and French are widely spoken, but Bislama was declared the national language after the island nation gained independence in 1980. Back over on Iririki Island, we were offered complimentary Bislama lessons as part of our stay.

It's a fun language to try and learn with its roots derived from simplified, phonetic English. Sentences and words sound so familiar that it's fast to pick up – and we learn all the important phrases for the resort life like mi wantem bia (I'd like a beer), tankyu tumas (thank you very much) and mi glad tumas (I am very happy).

If Vanuatu had a soundtrack it would be one of its locally-produced reggae tunes to accompany the locals' warm white smiles, friendly hospitality and laid back spirit. After a week I feel blissed out and definitely not ready to fly home.

AIR NZ RETAINS NORFOLK

AIR New Zealand will continue to operate scheduled services to Norfolk Island from both Australia and New Zealand, after retaining its contract to operate the flights in a recent tender process.

Currently the Australian government is in the process of implementing new arrangements for Norfolk Island, which has had the status of its government reduced to something more like a regional council.

Air NZ's previous contract, which commenced in 2012, was with the former Norfolk Island authorities, but the renewal is being negotiated with officials in Canberra and a formal contract is expected to be finalised in



the coming months.

In the meantime Air New Zealand is continuing to take bookings for Norfolk Island Flights, with Paul Fletcher, federal minister for Major Projects, Territories and Local Government, thanking the NZ flag carrier for delivering a "consistently high quality service which is critical for tourism and the local economy".

DOUBLE DELIGHT

A NEW route announced last month by Fiji Airways has opened up the opportunity for a fabulous two-destination holiday.

Effective from early April the Fijian flag carrier will operate twice weekly flights from Nadi to Vava'u, Tonga, with easy connectivity to the rest of FJ's Pacific network including flights from Australia and New Zealand.

Located about 900km southeast of Nadi, the northern region of Tonga has more than 60 islands in pristine condition, surrounded by coral gardens.

As well as activities such as snorkelling, kayaking, sailing, diving, big game fishing and kit surfing, Tonga also offers fantastic whale watching between June and November as humpbacks frolic in Tonga's warm waters.

The new service, operated by ATR72-600 aircraft, departs Nadi at 8am each Saturday and Wednesday, returning the same day from Vava'u at 4pm local time.

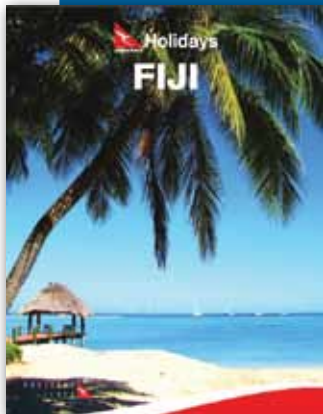
QANTAS HOLIDAYS FIJI

QANTAS Holidays has released its 2016/17 Fiji brochure detailing the best places to stay along with details about package deals, tours and sightseeing on the idyllic archipelago.

It explores Nadi and surrounds, Denarau Island, the Coral Coast, Pacific Coast, Mamanuca Islands, Yasawa Islands and Northern Fiji.

The brochure acts as a quick guide for checking the best times to visit the Islands and the dates of special events such as the July Bula festival and Fiji Day in October. It also presents the range of ideas on how to get

active in Fiji like learning to surf or dive. And when it's time to indulge there's a rundown of the best spa packages.



SAY CHEESE TO NEW CALEDONIA

GET in touch with New Caledonia's French roots at the island's Festival des Fromages de France this June at Le Meridien Noumea.

The annual gourmet cheese festival is the highlight of the year for cheese connoisseurs with a mouth-watering selection of more than 100 speciality cheeses chosen by internationally-renowned cheese master Gérard Poulard. For more than two decades Gérard has travelled throughout the French countryside to discover its history, culture and incredible gourmet delights.

From delicately flavoured goat's cheeses to intense blues there will be tempting French cheese to suit every taste. A selection of wines and great vintages will also be on offer with a sommelier on hand to assist you in finding the perfect combination.

This year's event marks the 13th edition of the French Cheese Festival in New Caledonia. Cost will be approximately \$AUS100 per head, with the official date to be scheduled soon. For more information, keep an eye on visitnewcaledonia.com.

COOK ISLANDS NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS

FOR a powerful cultural experience when visiting the South Pacific, try suggesting to your clients that they time their journey to the Cook Islands during late July to early August to be a part of the constitutional celebrations known as 'Te Maeva Nui'.

It is the most prominent annual event for Cook Islanders and commemorates August 4th 1965, the date the nation gained self-governance and independence. Ten days of celebrations stretch from July 23 to August 4.

A colourful parade marks the opening of the festivities and the period is filled with arts and craft exhibitions, dancing and drumming competitions. There will be an international night with entertainment from the different nations that call Cook Islands home. An Island Day will also be held to showcase the culture, food, arts, crafts and music of their sister islands.

Visitors are encouraged to watch, enjoy and engage in the fun and to soak up the buzzing atmosphere.



Punanganui Markets

Q&A

The islands of the South Pacific are an ideal holiday location for anyone looking for sand and sun. *travelBulletin* caught up with MTA consultant Tracey Flower to get her tips on selling these slices of paradise.



What are the main drawcards for Australians travelling to the South Pacific Islands?

The main drawcards are short travel time, fabulous weather and relaxation and of course the very distinctive cultures and people to be found in each destination.

What should an agent consider when selling the South Pacific Islands?

An agent should always consider the demographic of the client, and what they want out of their destination whether it be adventure, culture, relaxation or a combination of all three.

Which destinations are the most popular?

My most popular destinations would be Fiji, Vanuatu and Tahiti.

What kinds of travellers go to the South Pacific Islands?

Most of my clients travelling to this region would be families, honeymooners and also corporate clients on conferences.

Are there any attractions or destinations that you consider to be must do's?

I consider the Fijian Islands to be a major drawcard of the South Pacific with their crystal blue waters and sandy beaches it's

hard not to relax.

I also love Bora Bora and Moorea in Tahiti and

also some of the more exclusive resorts in Vanuatu. Aitutaki in the Cook Islands is picture perfect.

What are the biggest challenges for agents in selling holidays to the South Pacific Islands?

The biggest challenge would be internet bulk purchasing houses which package up destinations such as Fiji and Vanuatu with extras that may not be attainable from approved wholesalers.

Are FIT holidays more popular than all-inclusive packaged options?

Although the all-inclusive are fabulous options it really depends on the client. I try to sell all-inclusive to clients staying on the islands as most times there is not anywhere else to eat but on that particular island. Some options also include activities so it really is worth looking at but again it depends on the resort and the client.



The Cook Islands

Call of the Wild



Sunset safari in Kruger National Park ©SAT



By Brian Johnston

LIKE everyone else, I'm in Kruger National Park to see animals. What I soon realise is that it's just as worthwhile hearing them. The African bush is a noisy place. Buffalo hoofs rumble across a dusty savannah, giraffes rip and munch on thorny acacias trees, and hippos gurgle in rivers. Baboons occasionally sit on my car bonnet, muttering and clacking their teeth. As the dawn stains the sky red and mopane trees appear against the horizon, the most thrilling sound of all is the roar of a lion.

When it comes to wild noises and sights, Kruger is one of the best places in South Africa for a driving holiday. The national park is home to 147 species of mammal, including rhino, lion, elephant, giraffe, leopard and cheetah. There are 507 bird species, from ugly maribou storks to the stunning lilac-breasted rollers that haunt roadsides. This enormous variety, combined with Kruger's vast size and facilities set up to encourage independent travellers, makes Kruger one of the best game reserves in the world.

Kruger is one of the most accessible of African national parks. The easiest way to visit is on safari in an open-top Land Rover. An accompanying guide provides background information, while a tracker perches on the vehicle's radiator to check spoor and act as a spotter. He'll suddenly point into the bushes, and you see a family of lions lying in the shade.

If you like your independence, it's not difficult to drive through Kruger in your own vehicle, however. Renting a car costs less than taking safaris, and there's nothing to beat driving through the African bush and stopping where it pleases you. Silence falls around the vehicle, and then a big, black hornbill with white wings and a bizarre red face might emerge to scrabble in the dust for insects. A warthog, caked in mud and with an ugly snout, steps daintily out of the undergrowth and wander across the road. It might be an hour before you drive on.

Taking your time is the key to appreciating Kruger. It's forbidden to drive over 40 km/h in the park (fines are rigorously imposed) and anyway driving slowly gives you more chance of spotting wildlife. Take a leisurely pace into account, and don't plan on driving more than 150 kilometres in one day. Waiting quietly at a waterhole is often more rewarding than driving furiously around in the afternoon heat, though any animal sighting is a matter of luck, no matter how hard you try.

That said, your chances of encountering animals while driving aren't entirely random. Early morning and late afternoon are the best

times of day, and animals are particularly active at the crack of dawn. Driving on dirt roads increases your chances of a sighting, since tarred roads are fairly heavily trafficked. The waterholes and rivers in the park's south are good places to see elephants, hippos, buffaloes, crocodiles and giraffes. The grasslands of the central area have herds of antelope, kudu and waterbuck, and are also home to the big cats. The north, which is the least-visited part of Kruger (because it only has two small camps and is furthest from Johannesburg) is the haunt of elephants, buffaloes and leopards.

‘When it comes to wild noise and sights, Kruger is one of the best places... for a driving holidays’

The best months to drive Kruger are July and August, the South African winter. Temperatures are cooler, mosquitoes absent, and the dry weather drives animals towards permanent waterholes where they're seen more easily. However, spring and summer show the trees and flowers at their prime, with abundant bird life and newborn animals. September to February is the best for bird lovers, with large numbers of migrating species and far fewer tourists.

After a day's wildlife spotting you'll find yourself back at camp congregating around the boma, an open-air fireplace where you can cook and swap stories on the day's driving adventures. There are some two-dozen camps in the park; the largest, Skukuza, is the place to rent cars if you haven't already done so at Jo'burg airport. Pretoriuskop is an older camp in grassland ideal viewing for cheetahs, sable antelopes and white rhinoceros, while Lower Sabie is in a prime location for birds, elephants and lions. Berg-en-Dal near the southern edge of the park has fenced grounds, so is one of few places where you can walk. At Olifants Rest Camp you can relax on the hilltop in the evening, high above a river, and watch herds of giraffes and elephants moving across the plain.

Wherever you stay, you'll find a warm crackling fire in the boma, around which guests gather as the evening grows cool. Sunset flares and night falls. Lie back in your chair and listen to stories of cheetah sightings as you gaze up at the African stars. Then suddenly everyone might fall silent, and you can hear the bats and monkeys, and the distant, defiant trumpeting of an elephant, and you're under the spell of Kruger once more.



A hippo in a Kruger waterhole ©SAT



Burchell's zebras ©SAT

Sunset safari along the Olifants Hiking Trail in Kruger National Park ©SAT



Zebra and impala at a Kruger waterhole ©SAT





LEGENDARY PACIFIC COAST THINKING INTERNATIONAL

A NEW campaign will be rolled out across the US this year, starting in California, promoting Australia as a great place for a self-drive holiday.

Australian representatives from The Legendary Pacific Coast (stretching from Brisbane to Sydney) are currently in the US promoting Australia's best drives to affluent, educated and time rich North Americans who are looking to travel and are interested in exploring Australia in a self-drive holiday.

The campaign isn't only focused on driving a motorhome around Australia, said

Legendary Pacific Coast's international marketing manager, Russell Mills. "It also serves as platform to establish a broader fly-drive offering for North Americans around destinations like Byron Bay, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie, Newcastle and Port Stephens, as well as popular overnight destinations on the other touring routes."

The campaign has the potential to be extremely lucrative for NSW and QLD economies, with just a 0.1% conversion of the target audience generating 43,200 room nights and a sales revenue of \$36 million.

Fall in love with WA and maui

MAUI and Tourism Western Australia have partnered together encouraging couples to fall in love with WA on a motorhome holiday.

The campaign runs until the end of March, supported by great motorhome discounts. Maui motorhomes are offering up to 20% off selected vehicles in WA, in an effort to make hiring these vehicles more affordable for everyone.

All WA's regions are unique, from the Coral Coast with its beaches, exotic marine life and national reserves, to the North West with its wilderness and opportunities for an outback adventure.

The campaign runs from now until the end of March. To find out more visit

www.maui.com.au/gofallinlove



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Q&A

Driving holidays are increasingly becoming a popular choice for Australian travellers so *travelBulletin* recently caught up with Driveaway Holidays' Ashleigh Robinson to get her insider's tips.



Which are more popular for Australians: overseas or domestic drive holidays?

We've found that while a lot of people still hire vehicles for domestic travel, international car hire is on the rise.

Which destinations are most appealing for drive holidays?

Destinations that have popular driving routes, beautiful scenery, and ease of road use make up what appeal most for driving holidays. Our top three destinations for international driving holidays are the USA, UK and New Zealand.

What are the biggest selling points when it comes to self-drive itineraries?

Having the freedom of creating your own itinerary and exploring destinations at your own pace are what makes a self-drive holiday the best holiday. Knowing where to go and researching locations depending on the time of year you are travelling really

helps. A self-drive holiday offers your clients the ultimate freedom.

What should an agent consider when selling drive holidays?

The size or category of the vehicle. When you have five passengers travelling in a compact Ford Focus or similar, each with a suitcase and carry-on bag you are in for a tight fit! Travelling in Europe has its own set of regulations. Each country has its own rules so hiring a car in France does not mean you can take it into Germany. Additional charges and fees often apply. Travel from Western to Eastern Europe is also highly restricted. If travelling for a longer duration (21 days or more) the value, comfort and ease of European leasing can't be missed.

What are the biggest challenges for agents in selling drive holidays?

Driving in a foreign country can be a

challenge for clients but as an agent, your reassurance that these challenges are manageable is key in selling a drive holiday. Insurance when taking a rental car is an often discussed factor and something your clients will ask. Although it can seem challenging, DriveAway Holidays has great solutions. All our rates include Collision Damage Waiver (CDW), Theft Protection (TP) and basic roadside assistance (though an excess will apply).

What kinds of travellers are taking drive holidays?

The self-drive market has evolved over time. Families tracing their overseas heritage in the United Kingdom, honeymooners enjoying a drive through Tuscany or a group of friends driving Route 66 in a Ford Mustang. Travellers of all ages are enjoying the freedom of a self-drive holiday.

TEST YOUR DRIVER KNOWLEDGE

Head to traveltrade.newzealand.com to test your skills on the Driving Safely in New Zealand training module.

Join the 100% Pure New Zealand Specialist Program today. You'll gain increased knowledge of the country, its regions and unique experiences, plus exclusive famils and ongoing training provided by Tourism New Zealand.

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Funnies Flashback



We love trawling through the *Travel Daily Window Seat* archives, because we always seem to come across some crackers. Here are some food related gems from 2008:

THE world's biggest hamburger has been created in a Detroit, USA restaurant this week. Dubbed "The Absolutely Ridiculous Burger," the 134-pound US\$350 snack of beef, bacon and cheese is available at Mallie's Sports Bar and Grill. It's not exactly a take-away, with 12 hours of preparation, and orders require 24 hrs notice. Three men are needed to flip the burger, using two massive sheets of steel.

A CORPORATE event in Italy will this week feature a life-sized chocolate model of a Ferrari Formula 1 racing car. Confectioners reportedly spent more than a year creating the car, using almost two tonnes of Belgian chocolate. The car, costing about \$30,000, even has an edible red coating, and will be the centrepiece of a Ferrari party. "It will go on display until the weekend and then will be smashed up with hammers and handed out to party guests," said one of the organisers.

Where in the World?



✓ WIN A DOUBLE MOVIE PASS

THERE some incredible rock formations that are all located around the world. Where is this one? If you think you know, send your answer to comp@travelbulletin.com.au. The first person to answer correctly will win themselves a double movie pass. Good luck!



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Beginning June 3, Air Canada commences the only non-stop flights from Brisbane to Vancouver three times weekly with our 787 Dreamliners, ramping up to daily flights from June 19, 2016. Travellers will have their option of three classes of seating aboard our Boeing 787 Dreamliner. Seating options include International Business Class with fully lie-flat beds, Premium Economy, or Economy Class with touch-screen TVs at every seat.

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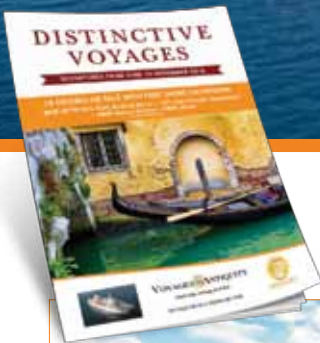


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GRAND EUROPEAN VOYAGE

NICE TO LONDON - 26 DAYS - 02 JUN 2016

Your visits to France and England will offer two very contrasting gastronomic experiences: wine tasting at a Bordeaux chateau and indulging in a cream tea in Cornwall. Visit the D-Day invasion beaches on the Normandy coast of northern France and Winston Churchill's country house.

- FREE economy flights from Australia* to Nice, returning from London
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- 24 day cruise onboard Aegean Odyssey
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26 days from \$14,650* pp share twin, Premium Outside Cabin



THE BEST OF FRANCE & PORTUGAL

LONDON TO LISBON - 23 JUN 2016

Highlights: London, Dover, Honfleur, St Malo, Montoir de Bretagne, La Rochelle, Bordeaux, La Coruna, Oporto, Lisbon

- 12 day cruise onboard Aegean Odyssey
- 2 night pre-cruise hotel stay in London
- 1 night hotel stay in Chateaux Country
- 2 night post-cruise hotel stay in Lisbon
- 8 included tours in 4 countries
- Just 10% supplement for solo travellers

17 days from \$5,950* pp twin share



SPAIN & HIGHLIGHTS OF MOROCCO

SEVILLE TO MALAGA - 26 OCT 2016

Highlights: Seville, Cadiz, Marrakesh, Casablanca, Fez, Tangier, Malaga

- 9 day cruise onboard Aegean Odyssey
- 2 night pre-cruise hotel stay in Seville
- 1 night hotel stay in Marrakesh
- 1 night hotel stay in Fez
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- Just 10% supplement for solo travellers

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