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MAY 2016



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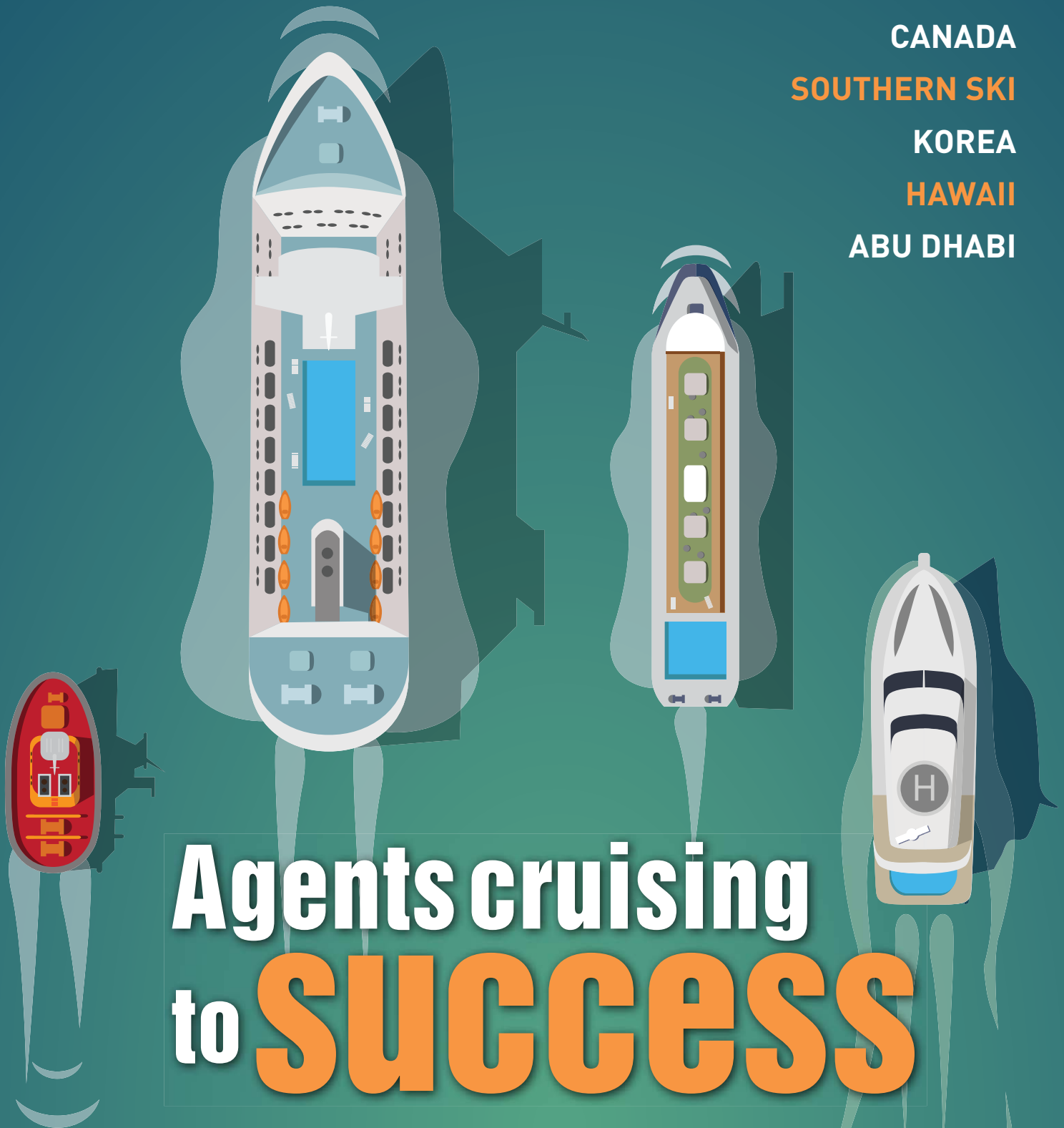
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travelBulletin

MAY 2016

CANADA
SOUTHERN SKI
KOREA
HAWAII
ABU DHABI



Agents cruising
to **SUCCESS**

Helping People,

A Rewarding Lifestyle &

The Freedom to Travel



Three very good reasons why MTA - Mobile Travel Agent Maxine Adams chose to join the company. But ask her the biggest thing that makes her life most worthwhile – apart from never having to set an alarm clock - and the answer is always the same... **Making a real difference in someone else's life.**

"That's perhaps the greatest privilege of all," she says.

"It might be booking someone's honeymoon arrangements or that trip of a lifetime - it might even be assisting someone through an insurance claim or even helping with a family tragedy."

"Its hard to single out just one moment but I have come to realise how much I love to help and the little gestures, cards, notes of appreciation and referrals I receive as a result - and the sense of pride it gives me - always brightens my day."

For Port Macquarie-based Maxine the decision to join MTA seven years ago after following a variety of career paths – from TV programming and scheduling and working as a teacher's aide to running her own small business which proved the catalyst for daring to dream about running her own show.

"Running my own business showed me three key things.

It gave me more freedom to spend time with my family and travel, I wanted to work with people who needed and valued my help, I wanted to have my rewards matched to my efforts and I love travel."

And why MTA?

"That's exactly what MTA had to offer.

I like the family feel to the whole business and the transparent nature of the way things operate – and these reasons have not changed even though MTA has grown significantly."

"But I also value the fantastic work/lifestyle balance MTA provides, allowing me to do the job I love while still allowing me to be an individual."

And what has been the biggest change in Maxine's life since making the decision to join MTA?

"Put simply, I have never been happier – and best of all I can't remember the last time I set an alarm clock."

Ready to go mobile with MTA?

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Agents cruising to success

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From the managing editor Bruce Piper

THE termination of the long term Strategic Agreement between Helloworld and US travel giant Orbitz Worldwide last month hasn't come as a big surprise. Ever since the merger between Helloworld and the AOT Group was mooted last year, newly appointed CEO Andrew Burnes has repeatedly spoken about aligning the interests of Helloworld members and franchisees, with the helloworld.com.au OTA operation seen by some as a direct conflict between agents and head office.

From September this year all that will change, with the launch of a new portal which will match the look and feel of individual agency microsites. Burnes said the new look helloworld.com.au would continue to provide full transactional functionality for air, land, car hire and other travel products and services. However unlike the current arrangement, "the commissions from bookings made on the site will be allocated to agencies in the same way as if a customer walked in the door, called or sent an email booking," he said.

The attempt by Helloworld to move into the OTA market has come at a steep price. The company revealed that it had spent more than \$18 million developing helloworld.com.au so far, with the operation costing about \$6 million a year along with capital expenditure. "These losses will now come to an end as a result of the decision to transition to a new site and end the current agreement," Burnes said. Clearly playing in the OTA space is expensive, with stiff competition meaning margins are wafer-thin.

Helloworld's ReadyRooms online wholesale platform will also be impacted. Created in part to ensure the group's travel agent members don't stray to other suppliers such as Expedia TAAP and Excite Holidays, the new look ReadyRooms will ironically source content from the Expedia Affiliate Network. However this will be bolstered by AOT Group inventory in Australia, NZ and the Pacific which Burnes promised would more than double the number of rooms on offer.

MEANWHILE with travel agents being key to the efforts of operators promoting cruise product, *travelBulletin* and *Cruise Weekly* have commissioned research into consultants' perceptions of the sector. The scientifically conducted study – a first for the industry – garnered a strong response from cruise specialist travel agents and gives some fascinating insights into what travel agents think of the various cruise brands working so hard to differentiate themselves in the minds of Australian consumers. That's the subject of this month's *travelBulletin* cover story – check it out on page 18.

This month's contributors

Steve Jones, Brett Jardine, Jayson Westbury, Sarah Piper, Brian Johnston, Jasmine O'Donoghue, Bonnie Tai, Nathalie Craig, Jan Gott, Andrew Hiebl, Rachael Oakes-Ashe, Ben Alcock, Kerry van der Jagt, Jenny Piper, Bruce Piper

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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

CREATIVE INSPIRATION and FINANCE

Jenny Piper
jenny.piper@travelbulletin.com.au

Suite 1, Level 2, 64 Talavera Rd Macquarie
Park NSW 2113 Australia
PO Box 1010 Epping NSW 1710 Australia
Tel: 1300 799 220 (+61 2 8007 6760)



Ian McMahon's perspective

TENSIONS AT THE VIRGIN BOARD TABLE

IN DECEMBER last year I warned that the make-up of the Virgin Australia board was potentially "a ticking time bomb". As the first quarter of this year ended, the public gained its first insights into the simmering tension around the carrier's board table.

At the centre of it is Air New Zealand, no stranger to disrupting Australian aviation. No single event destroyed more Australian airline value than the Kiwi flag carrier's grandiose but ill-advised decision to exercise an option to thwart Singapore Airlines' buying into Ansett in February 2000.

Air New Zealand was hopelessly under-resourced for the task. By September 2001, Ansett had collapsed, leaving thousands jobless. Air New Zealand itself was only saved by millions of dollars of handouts from the country's taxpayers. Disgracefully, following lobbying by Qantas, a Singapore Airlines offer to rescue Ansett was blocked by the Australian Government.

Out of this chaos, Qantas grabbed two thirds of Australia's domestic air market and a virtual monopoly of premium and business travel while Virgin Blue consolidated a position as a cheap and cheerful budget carrier.

More recently, with former Qantas executive John Borghetti at the helm, Virgin Blue has morphed into Virgin Australia, a full service carrier that is proving to be

a credible competitor for Qantas at the premium end of the market.

This has required huge investment and one of Borghetti's most remarkable achievements has been to persuade three foreign airlines to provide the hundreds of millions of dollars required in exchange for equity and seats at the board table.

Those three airlines – Air New Zealand, Singapore Airlines and Etihad alongside Virgin's Sir Richard Branson – collectively own about 80% of Virgin Australia.

While Virgin Australia returned a very modest profit in the first half of this financial year, the airline still requires further large injections of capital and now Air New Zealand wants out. Its chief executive Christopher Luxon, who reportedly called for Borghetti's resignation, has quit the board and put its 26% stake in Virgin Australia up for sale.

There is furious speculation about the possible buyer of this stake with Singapore Airlines, Sir Richard Branson or one of the several Chinese carriers among those considered possibilities.

My own view is that Singapore Airlines would be the ideal buyer. It has a vital strategic interest in developing a thriving Australian domestic airline and it would also provide a fitting finale to the conspiracy of events that prevented its takeover of Ansett 16 years ago.

Coles moves into travel

SUPERMARKET giant Coles has spread its tentacles into travel, with the launch early last month of a new online travel booking website. Flybuys Travel has been embarked upon in partnership with Corporate Travel Management, with a key driver for the initiative being to create another way for Coles shoppers to redeem their Flybuys loyalty points. Ironically Flybuys was a key partner for Jetset Travelworld Group some years ago, with the agency group at the time hailing the initiative as a key driver of customers into franchisee stores.

In a somewhat worrying trend Coles said it would not charge booking fees, and is using it as a loyalty driver rather than to make money, with spokesman Adam Story saying "we're not relying on this as a profit generator". Corporate Travel Management is supplying the technology behind the site which allows users to earn as well as burn Flybuys points on travel transactions. Managing director Jamie Pherous said the new site "further strengthens CTM as a key global player in the loyalty segment," with the company also working in this area in the US through one of its recent acquisitions, Los Angeles-based Montrose Travel.

Gavin Smith is off to London

AUSTRALIAN cruising leader Gavin Smith has ascended to the global stage, having been named as Senior Vice President, International which makes him responsible for all sales, marketing and commercial operations for Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises and Azamara Club Cruises in Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and

BUSINESS MONITOR

OUTBOUND MARKET

Top 10 destinations, February 2016

Destination	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Jan 16/ Feb 16	Trend Feb 15/ Feb 16
	000	000	000	%	%
New Zealand	109.8	109.2	113.3	+0.2	+5.0
Indonesia	102.6	103.3	76.8	+1.7	+10.2
USA	84.4	79.5	53.0	-0.3	+2.5
Thailand	41.5	41.3	33.1	-2.3	-10.3
Japan	28.1	27.6	29.7	-0.5	+21.4
India	26.1	24.4	24.4	+1.1	+10.4
Singapore	30.2	29.8	24.3	-0.8	+0.1
China	35.8	34.5	24.3	-0.3	+2.3
Malaysia	22.4	23.4	20.9	+2.1	+1.8
UK	52.2	53.4	19.1	+0.2	+13.9
All outbound	810.6	792.1	577.6	+0.1	+4.6

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

INBOUND MARKET

Top 10 sources, February 2016

Source	Trend	Seasonally Adjusted	Original	Trend Jan 16/ Feb 16	Trend Feb 15/ Feb 16
	000	000	000	%	%
China	96.5	89.1	173.6	-0.7	+23.8
UK	59.0	58.3	81.1	+0.5	+4.8
New Zealand	109.2	102.6	79.0	-0.4	+2.3
USA	56.0	56.0	71.3	+0.8	+15.0
Japan	32.9	33.8	42.2	+2.3	+24.4
Malaysia	28.4	28.9	33.2	-0.9	+6.6
Singapore	33.8	32.9	31.9	-1.0	+9.1
Hong Kong	19.6	19.3	29.5	-0.0	+13.8
South Korea	23.3	23.4	28.4	+2.4	+27.0
Germany	16.4	16.4	22.3	+0.3	+3.5
All inbound	652.3	639.4	796.7	+0.1	+8.8

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

MAIN DOMESTIC ROUTES

Top 10 domestic city pairs at February 2016

City pair	Passengers YE Feb 15 (000)	Passengers YE Feb 16 (000)	% change
Melbourne-Sydney	8,352.2	8,696.4	+4.1
Brisbane-Sydney	4,428.1	4,526.2	+2.2
Brisbane-Melbourne	3,309.5	3,387.3	+2.4
Gold Coast-Sydney	2,573.8	2,664.0	+3.5
Adelaide-Melbourne	2,265.2	2,332.2	+3.0
Melbourne-Perth	2,147.3	2,139.7	-0.4
Adelaide-Sydney	1,817.3	1,847.5	+1.7
Gold Coast-Melbourne	1,760.7	1,843.6	+4.7
Perth-Sydney	1,783.4	1,762.8	-1.2
Hobart-Melbourne	1,423.1	1,498.4	+5.3

Source: BITRE

Australasia. Smith is well-credentialed for the role, having been a former president of Carnival Australia, general manager of P&O and general manager of Jetset Travelworld before establishing the Royal Caribbean office in Australia in 2008.

Over the last eight years he has presided over massive growth for Royal Caribbean, which started off with just one vessel, *Rhapsody of the Seas* and will this year see eight massive vessels operating locally including the arrival later this year of *Ovation of the Seas* which will be the newest and largest ship to ever cruise in Australasian waters. In his new international role Smith will be based in London, while his local position as managing director Australasia is being taken over by Adam Armstrong, who has worked alongside Smith as commercial manager since the local office opened.

CTM expands in US again

It's been a busy month for Corporate Travel Management, which as well as launching the Flybuys travel operation in partnership with Coles (see previous story) has announced yet another acquisition in the USA.

This time it is Boston-based Travizon Travel, for which CTM is paying US\$21 million plus an undisclosed one-year earn-out instalment. The purchase gives the company a larger presence in the US, building on other deals including the US\$34 million purchase late last year of Californian group Montrose Travel. Managing director Jamie Pherous projected CTM's North American total transaction value will lift to well in excess of US\$1 billion as a result – making it one of the top ten TMCs in the USA and operating from 20 cities across the country.

CTM has worked closely with Travizon

VISITFLANDERS DOWN UNDER

PETER De Wilde, CEO of VisitFlanders, had to rejig some of his messaging during a visit to Australia last month. The long-planned trip was aiming to showcase the Flanders Fields celebrations which are expected to attract thousands of Australian travellers commemorating the centenary of World War I battles in the region next year. However the terror attacks in Belgium meant a switch in strategy, with De Wilde saying the organisation was aiming to “nurture” the market by providing factual updates on the situation on the ground, before ramping



up to more active promotion as things recover. He told *travelBulletin* he was confident business would pick up, with Australians particularly resilient and the huge investment in tourism infrastructure across Flanders meaning visitors would have a great experience. He's pictured in the *travelBulletin* offices with Lea Winkeler, VisitFlanders project manager for the Great War Centenary.

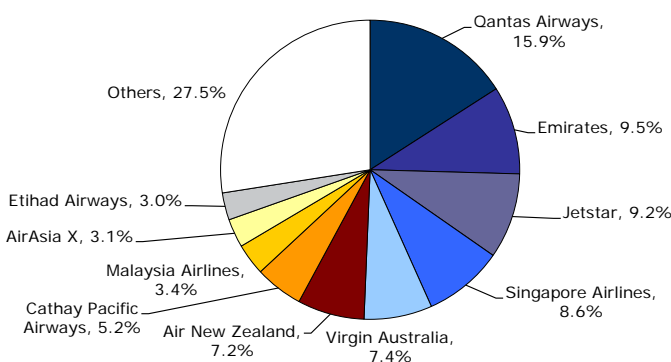
for some years on client programs on both sides of the Atlantic, with Matt Cummings, chief operating officer of Travizon saying “we have watched CTM build a wonderful business based on highly personalised service delivery with best-in-class technology solutions. We consider that CTM is an excellent fit to enhance our service offering

to both current and future clients”. Pherous also confirmed that CTM's USA integration is on track to be completed on schedule by 30th June, bringing all of its operations there onto a single platform. The company's global aspirations continue to expand, with CTM also announcing an alliance with Middle Eastern TMC ITL World.

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNATIONAL AIR MARKET SHARE

International passengers by major airline – year ended January 2016



Source: BITRE

DOMESTIC AIR MARKET – February 2016

	Feb 15	Feb 16	Growth (%)	Yr to Feb 15	Yr to Feb 16	Growth (%)
Total pax carried	4.22m	4.46m	+5.8	57.30m	57.90m	+1.0
Revenue pax kms (RPK)	4.84bn	5.09bn	+5.3	67.57bn	68.30bn	+1.1
Avail seat kms (ASK)	6.48bn	6.87bn	+6.2	88.71bn	89.19bn	+0.5
Load factor (%)	74.7	74.1	-0.6*	76.2	76.6	+0.4*
Aircraft trips (000)	47.7	50.9	+6.7	633.1	638.1	+0.8

Source: BITRE * Percentage points

DOMESTIC ON TIME PERFORMANCE – March 2016

	Departures on Time		Arrivals on Time		Cancellations	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Jetstar	5,567	79.3	5,400	76.9	38	0.5
Qantas	8,375	87.5	8,521	89.0	95	1.0
QantasLink	8,845	85.8	8,913	86.4	268	2.5
REX	5,346	83.1	5,594	86.9	40	0.6
Virgin Australia	11,153	88.2	11,316	89.5	187	1.5
All Airlines	41,565	85.3	42,047	86.3	653	1.3

Source: BITRE

Air NZ flags Virgin selloff

RELATIONS between Air New Zealand and Virgin Australia are probably a little strained at the moment, after Air NZ announced it was looking at options to offload its 25.9% stake in the Australian-based carrier. The shock announcement, which triggered the instant resignation of Air NZ CEO Christopher Luxon from the Virgin Australia board, saw VAH shares plummet almost 10%. Air New Zealand says it's looking at possible alternate uses of its capital, with chairman Tony Carter saying the airline "does not want a large minority equity position in Virgin Australia as it focuses on its growth opportunities". Speculation is swirling about whether one of the other big airline shareholders in Air NZ, Singapore Airlines and Etihad, will take up the additional stake. Worth more than \$300 million, some analysts suggest SIA is a more likely suitor as Etihad is focused on growth in Europe. Meanwhile Air New Zealand and Virgin Australia have reaffirmed their joint commitment to the trans-Tasman alliance which sees them closely cooperate on routes between Australia and New Zealand.

France's best foot forward

ATOUT France director for Australia, Patrick Benhamou, says he is trusting in the resilience of Australian travellers, whom he believes will continue to visit France despite the Paris terror attacks last year. French tourism authorities last month hosted the 11th annual Rendez-vous en France travel industry trade show in Montpellier, with Australian buyers out in force to source new content for their upcoming programs. Benhamou said the appeal of river cruises as well as cycling and hiking tours continues

to grow for Australians, who are perceived as a key market for the country because they spend up big in hotels, bars and restaurants during their visits.

Later this year the French message will be further reinforced with the biggest ever French Workshop in Australia, which will see three major events taking place in true Benhamou style. These include 'A night in Paris' which will feature a swimwear parade, a Moulin Rouge show and the screening of a 3D animated film about Paris on 5 September in Sydney; a Monaco showcase including a Formula One vintage car display in Melbourne; and another Lyon-focussed event in Sydney. Almost 100 French exhibitors will take part in the workshops, showcasing their wares to local travel agents and tour operators wanting to capitalise on the perennially popular destination.

Travel Corporation farewells

LAST month saw the end of an era, with the resignation of John Weeks as non-executive chairman of The Travel Corporation. Weeks, who was CEO of the Australasian business for 16 years before being succeeded by John Veitch last year, said he had made the decision to relinquish his role as chairman to focus on other opportunities. "Having worked closely with John Veitch on his transition to CEO, this is an opportune time to step away, given he is now firmly at the helm and driving continued successful growth for TTC Australia." Weeks' departure became effective on 30 April.

Meanwhile another sad farewell for the Travel Corporation came in the form of the death of Mike Ness, who was the organisation's global CEO for many years and a close confidante of founder Stanley Tollman. Ness had worked in

the business for many decades, with Tollman saying he was a mainstay of the travel industry. "Mike was a wonderful friend and a revered business associate, whom we will all deeply miss," Tollman said.

Advertising spending

ADVERTISING spending figures for the travel sector collated by Nielsen for 2015 provided some intriguing food for thought – and explained why there are all those cruise ads in the paper and on television. Flight Centre, which in 2014 was far and away the biggest spender on mainstream media travel advertising with a figure of almost \$40 million, more than halved its spend last year, leaving APT at the top of the table with a total of \$33 million. The actual amounts paid by the advertisers would have been significantly less, with media buyers typically negotiating big volume discounts, but the rack rate figures provide a good basis for comparison. Flight Centre's spending shift away from mainstream was mirrored by Qantas which spent an estimated \$18.5 million in 2015 – down 35%.

In second place on the 2015 spending table behind APT was deals provider Luxury Escapes Travel, which spent a whopping \$29.6 million to promote its offers. That is perhaps understandable as the company builds its profile amid rumours of a planned public listing, while another cruise operator, Scenic, was in third position – but some way behind – with a spend of \$22.8 million. On the ocean cruise side Royal Caribbean boosted its spending by a hefty 72% in 2015 to a total of \$12.8 million. The various Carnival Corporation brands also spent significantly more, with an aggregate mainstream media figure of just over \$22 million, up 40% on the prior year.

BUSINESS MONITOR

INTERNET AGENCY MARKET SHARES

March 2016, compared with February 2016

Rank	Position	Visits Share	Relative Diff	Rank
1	2	Mar 16	Mar to Feb	Feb 16
1	Webjet Australia	15.39	+0.47	1
2	Expedia Australia	10.73	+1.32	2
3	Wotif.com	8.38	+0.47	3
4	Skyscanner Australia	7.82	-0.06	4
5	Flight Centre	7.45	+5.61	5
6	Lastminute.com.au	3.25	+7.21	6
7	Velocity Frequent Flyer	2.79	+25.6	7
8	Cheapflights Aus & NZ	1.76	+2.53	9
9	Luxury Escapes	1.75	-0.66	8
10	Helloworld	1.37	+4.28	10

Source: Hitwise, a division of Connexity

INTERNATIONAL AIR ROUTES

Top 10 city pairs (at January 2016)

City pair	Passengers	Passengers	% of	% change
	YE Jan 15	YE Jan 16	total	16/15
Auckland-Sydney	1,490,107	1,544,038	4.4	+3.6
Singapore-Sydney	1,362,065	1,462,038	4.2	+7.4
Singapore-Melbourne	1,143,519	1,228,994	3.5	+7.5
Auckland-Melbourne	1,048,517	1,154,589	3.3	+10.1
Singapore-Perth	1,035,149	1,066,615	3.0	+3.0
Hong Kong-Sydney	919,356	1,007,947	2.9	+9.6
Auckland-Brisbane	920,186	970,197	2.8	+5.4
Los Angeles-Sydney	900,171	921,565	2.6	+2.4
Denpasar-Perth	917,020	852,638	2.4	-7.0
Kuala Lumpur-Melbourne	896,137	813,195	2.3	-9.3
Top 10 city pairs	10,632,227	11,022,720	31.4	+3.7
Other city pairs	22,582,167	24,110,710	68.6	+6.8
ALL CITY PAIRS	33,214,394	35,133,430	100.0	+5.8

Source: BITRE

SHARE PRICES

at 20 April, 2016

Flight Centre (FLT)	\$39.72
Helloworld (HLO)	\$2.00
Webjet (WEB)	\$5.88
Disruptive Investments (DVI)	\$0.18
Qantas (QAN)	\$3.52
Virgin Australia (VAH)	\$0.35
Ardent Leisure (AAD)	\$2.11
Air New Zealand (AIZ)	\$2.63
Auckland International Airport (AIA)	\$5.89
Sydney Airport (SYD)	\$6.60
Corporate Travel Management (CTD)	\$14.20
Cover-More Insurance (CVO)	\$1.50
Regional Express (REX)	\$0.695
Sealink (SLK)	\$4.46

ROYAL TREATMENT FOR APT AGENTS



THIS group of lucky travel agents recently enjoyed a seven day APT voyage between Budapest and Nuremberg. The trip included two of APT's "Royal Invitation" experiences, which included a train ride aboard the Majestic Imperator to Salzburg. **Pictured** at Vienna's City Palace are Allirra Franks,

helloworld Glendale; Kate Dale-Miller of RACT Hobart; Lisa Tjandi, helloworld Newcastle; Robyn Evans, RACT Devnoport; Elizabeth Sternback, helloworld Greenhills; Melanie Hogg, APT; Eleni Hoskins, helloworld Newcastle; and Tracy Kay, helloworld Kotara.

Travel Daily HEADLINES

- 22 Mar** Bestjet takes AFTA to court
- 23 Mar** Weeks to step down at TTC
- 23 Mar** Airports lack competition
- 24 Mar** Helloworld product role
- 24 Mar** Australian Escapes back?
- 29 Mar** Escapes back in business
- 29 Mar** FC Corporate ridesharing
- 30 Mar** Virgin shares placed in trading halt
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- 01 Apr** SIA Hols ceases operation
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- 05 Apr** *Ovation of the Seas* to return in 2017/18
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- 11 Apr** Helloworld kicks AFL goal
- 12 Apr** Qantas spreads family love
- 12 Apr** Egypt tourism plan launch
- 12 Apr** Bestjet injunction denied
- 13 Apr** QBT wins PwC account
- 14 Apr** Air NZ sales restructure
- 14 Apr** TFE flags six more hotels
- 15 Apr** SKAL welcomes new guard
- 15 Apr** Australia's China bond
- 18 Apr** CTM Middle East growth
- 18 Apr** Qantas warns of softness
- 19 Apr** Belgium on the front foot
- 19 Apr** Business travellers terror
- 20 Apr** Another US acquisition for CTM
- 20 Apr** Europcar fined \$100,000
- 20 Apr** HLO ends Orbitz alliance

NSW RTO in administration

INLAND NSW Tourism, the regional tourism organisation formed five years ago as an umbrella group for a number of smaller RTOs, was placed into voluntary administration last month, with the board taking the step because it had been "unable to secure grants in time to meet its budgeted cashflow needs". The move highlights the tightrope such RTOs walk when balancing their budgets, with Inland NSW Tourism saying

grants accounted for more than 80% of its income.

NSW Tourism Minister Stuart Ayres is believed to be conducting a review of the state's RTO structure, and naturally said the government is committed to growing tourism in regional areas.

Meanwhile the administrators, Brad Morelli and Andrew Spring from Jirsch Sutherland, said it was business as usual for the organisation which would be "operating as normal under our guidance".

AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS

International passenger through Australia's major international airports - January 2016

Airport	Passengers YE Jan 15	Passengers YE Jan 16	% of total	% change 16/15
Sydney	13,335,237	14,042,627	40.0	+5.3
Melbourne	8,078,995	8,946,403	25.5	+10.7
Brisbane	5,000,082	5,266,269	15.0	+5.3
Perth	4,170,094	4,203,808	12.0	+0.8
Gold Coast	875,866	948,770	2.7	+8.3
Adelaide	963,081	864,674	2.5	-10.2
Cairns	459,734	550,769	1.6	+19.8
Darwin	309,732	261,770	0.7	-15.5
Sunshine Coast*	10,248	15,786	0.0	+54.0
Townsville^	n/a	14,357	0.0	n/a
Norfolk Island	11,421	11,325	0.0	+4.5
Port Hedland~	n/a	6,358	0.0	n/a
All Airports	33,214,394	35,133,430	100.0	+5.8

ATAS ACCREDITED LOCATIONS

3 December 2015

New South Wales	1012
Victoria	735
Queensland	657
Western Australia	322
South Australia	231
Australian Capital Territory	50
Tasmania	40
Northern Territory	23
TOTAL	3070

Got something to say?

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



Steve Jones' Say

THE day before sitting down to write this column I had reason to visit Apple's swanky, glass-fronted store in George Street, in the heart of Sydney's CBD.

It's not a store I enjoy visiting only because it usually means something is up with my iPhone, a device I love and loathe in equal measure. But what struck me - not for the first time - was the sheer coolness of the Apple environment. Not just in terms of the gadgets they sell, but the atmosphere and, more specifically, the design of the store and customer service.

Apple, of course, is not short of resources. It can afford such grand premises and staff it accordingly. But some things cost nothing.

I was greeted at the door, asked how they could help and directed to where I needed to go. Simple, but welcoming.

My local Bunnings, a shop where my DIY knowledge tests the phrase "there's no such thing as a stupid question" to its limits, has been doing it for a while. I have become accustomed to the welcome, yet

never fail to think how pleasant it is.

For a long while now, bricks and mortar retailers have been under intense pressure not only from pure play online competitors but from international rivals whose web presence transcends borders.

And what retailers in Australia are belatedly waking up to is the need to create an improved experience for shoppers, something that will keep them engaged, and critically, keep them coming back.

Fundamentally, we still enjoy the human interaction that physical shopping provides, and the touch and feel of products.

And this, of course, is where travel agents have something of a problem. There is no tangible product to touch and feel and you can't browse in the traditional sense of the word.

But that doesn't mean agents shouldn't be able to create and provide an enjoyable customer experience.

Many do, I'm sure. But too many from my observations look bland and uninspiring,

and this for a product which is anything but bland and uninspiring. The shopping environment often appears out of keeping with what is being sold.

I wonder how many agencies have in-store technology available for consumers to play with? How much thought goes into creating a visually stimulating in-store fit-out? How many run special events where you can learn how to make cocktails from around the world?

At a service level, how many greet their customers at the door and offer them a glass of French wine with a slice of Camembert?

This isn't to say travel agents offer a poor customer service. Many will find excellent deals, have in-depth product knowledge and be extremely attentive.

But today's physical retail locations need more than that. They need points of difference and they need to provide a customer experience.

Let's put the fun back into buying, and selling travel.

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- PENNY SPENCER, TIME CHAIR AND DIRECTOR

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WHERE THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY CONNECTS

BESTJET BATTLES IT OUT WITH AFTA



Bestjet.com



A CASUAL observer of the long-running stoush between Bestjet and AFTA would have to wonder what all the fuss is about. Bestjet is a fast-growing online travel agent which has made the most of its ATAS accreditation to build relationships with suppliers and consumers – but many of its rivals, including Webjet, aren't even members of AFTA let alone ATAS. Although AFTA has worked hard to boost awareness of the ATAS brand among consumers the fact that it hasn't been taken up by one of Bestjet's biggest competitors left many wondering why the OTA didn't just walk away when AFTA declined to renew its ATAS accreditation last year.

Whatever the reasons, it seems clear that Bestjet managing director Rachel James is determined to do anything she can to put a hold on the AFTA decision. It looks to have been lawyers at ten paces, with Queensland Supreme Court documents made public last month indicating a series of appeals within AFTA culminating in the final decision not to renew accreditation – which was then put on hold after Bestjet was granted an interim injunction. However the full hearing of the injunction case saw it lifted by the Court after Justice Applegarth decided the company had not established a “prima facie case” of sufficient merit to justify the injunction.

Bestjet is claiming a denial of natural justice, saying the decision not to renew accreditation constitutes a “breach of contract, oppressive conduct and an unlawful restraint of trade”. The court documents state the non-renewal will mean Bestjet loses the benefits of accreditation and “is likely to lose customers”. It remains to be seen if that is the case, but in the meantime the lawyers are reaping the benefits, with some estimates putting the legal costs of Bestjet's actions so far in fighting the decision at many tens of thousands of dollars.



‘The bottom line was that after a series of appeals Bestjet was unable to convince AFTA that Michael James is not a close associate of the company’

The key issue for AFTA is a clause in the ATAS charter which states that eligibility for participation in the scheme is not available for companies which have “close associates” who may be in a position of authority and who have been involved in a company collapse in the prior ten years.

Rachel James, while the sole shareholder and director of Bestjet, is married to Michael James who was the founder and head of Strategic Airlines/Air Australia prior to its collapse in 2012 with debts of almost \$100 million. Although Rachel James insists her husband has nothing to do with Bestjet apart from being a “Fares and Pricing Analyst” from 1 November 2013 through to 2 December

2015, AFTA clearly doesn't agree, with evidence during the Supreme Court case including a letter dated 15 January 2014 written by Michael James in his position as “Commercial Manager”.

The bottom line was that after a series of appeals Bestjet was unable to convince AFTA that Michael James is not a close associate of the company. Although the judge in the interlocutory injunction case made it clear his decision was not vindicating AFTA's position, the injunction was denied which means the ATAS accreditation of Bestjet has not been renewed. Bestjet MD Rachel James said a date for a final hearing on the case is yet to be decided, issuing a statement saying she was disappointed in the ruling but was “proud of her company's achievements”.

If nothing else the case clearly demonstrates that the ATAS accreditation scheme is definitely gaining significant traction. While consumer awareness is building, some suppliers are certainly using ATAS participation as a key part of their decision making process in whether or not to deal with a particular intermediary.

Wendy Wu, SIAH part ways

SINGAPORE Airlines Holidays was formally shut down last month, just two years after the operation, which packaged a range of destinations in Asia, Europe and Africa with SQ and SilkAir flights, was controversially taken over from Pinpoint by Wendy Wu Tours. The 2014 appointment of Wendy Wu followed a competitive tender process, with Wendy Wu Tours managing director Alan Alcock saying he looked forward to “further growing what is an already very successful product”. Singapore Airlines senior manager of marketing and alliances for Australia, Dale Woodhouse, was also excited at the prospects, saying at the time “we look forward to a long lasting partnership” with the tour operator.

Unfortunately that wasn't to be. The surprise move to close down SIAH was described as a mutual decision by Singapore Airlines and WWT, and was said to allow Wendy Wu to “focus on providing customers with high quality packages to the Maldives, Singapore and the Singapore Grand Prix alongside its core business offerings”. All bookings made under the SIAH program have been honoured and are being managed by Wendy Wu Tours, with SQ saying a decision about re-establishing the Singapore Airlines Holidays program “will be assessed on an ongoing basis”. Meanwhile Wendy Wu insists there will be no reduction in the product available to agents.



The close down will allow Wendy Wu to focus on Singapore and the Maldives.

TRAVELPORT JAPAN ACQUISITION

TRAVELPORT last month announced the purchase of its third party distributor in Japan, bringing the business trading as Galileo Japan, formerly owned by a consortium of airlines, under the company's ownership umbrella. The purchase means the company can now establish a new, consolidated Travelport Japan entity in the country which is one of the world's largest travel markets in terms of flight seats offered for sale.

“The decision to transform from a distribution franchise to a wholly owned operation is commensurate with our goals to further expand our successful business across Asia,” said CEO Gordon Wilson. “Japan is a major travel market and owning our operation here, whilst continuing our other successful strategic partnerships in Japan, will enhance our growth prospects in the country,” he said. Travelport says the move will see it process almost half of all international air bookings made by Japanese travel agencies.



AFTA VIEW

Jayson Westbury, chief executive AFTA

ELECTION FEVER RAMPS UP

THE Australian political landscape is certainly in a fiery mode, with the Prime Minister playing a game of cat and mouse with the Australian Senate in the lead up to the next federal election. The rejection of the government bill to re-establish the Office of the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner (ABCC has given Malcolm Turnbull the trigger for a double dissolution election, and by the time you are reading this issue of *travelBulletin* it's likely an early Jul poll will have been announced.

And why is this all important to the travel industry other than for those crazy political followers like me? Well it drives down confidence and makes people worry when our political situation lacks clear and concise direction and leadership. This results in consumers taking a second look at expenditure - and travel is always on the list of considerations.

What we need is solid robust government that has the mandate to govern and implement the policies that the parties take to the election. So as this month unfolds I am sure we will all keep a keen eye on the robust politics that are bound to follow. Also in May the Government will

announce the 2016 federal budget which by the time you are reading this column may have been handed down.

The travel industry will need to watch out for what may happen to the passenger movement charge (PMC) which is currently set at \$55 per departure. The government made an election promise to freeze the PMC for the current term, but they have not given any firm indication as to what happens after the election.

Further, if there is an increase confirmed in this May budget, it is unclear as to what Labor would do if elected to Government.

The PMC has for a long time been a bone of contention for AFTA with both sides of politics as it is so easy for them to increase and they don't have to do any work to collect it. That is done of course by the travel industry, so it is a very simple tax to increase.

At the current level of \$55 and based on the current outbound forecasts the tax will collect some \$1 billion. The cost of actually processing passengers to the Government is estimated to be around \$250 million annually which means the PMC results in a tax windfall to consolidated revenue of some \$750 million - very tempting to governments of all persuasions in tight economic circumstances.

It seems to me that is over-collection at its worst and AFTA along with all of our travel and tourism industry colleagues continue to make this case to both sides of politics. We shall see what the outcome to all these questions are during the course of this month and AFTA remains diligent in making the case for no increase in the PMC.

‘This incident once again brings home so quickly how situations like this can have an immediate impact on travellers’

AUST'S FIRST HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS OPENS



THE 192-room Holiday Inn Express Sydney Macquarie Park welcomed its first guests last month, marking the entry of the brand in Australia.

Spruiked as offering “everything you need but nothing you don’t”, the new rooms have a comfy bed and pillows, multiple USB and power points, smart TV’s, work spaces, and bathrooms with walk-in showers.

The hotel offers a fitness room, laundry room, meeting room and adjoining café Glass

House Dining and is positioned within walking distance to two train stations, in the centre of the Macquarie Park business precinct.

Macquarie Park is the first of 15 Holiday Inn Express hotels to be developed in partnership with investment group, Pro-invest under a multiple franchise agreement.

“With a strong tourism economy in place, coupled with a receptiveness to a select service accommodation brand in this market and a dynamic partner in Pro-invest, Australia

presented as an ideal opportunity to continue the growth of Holiday Inn Express,” Richard Solomons, IHG Chief Executive said.

The hotel is set to be closely followed by a 226-room Holiday Inn Express to open in Spring Hill Brisbane later this year.

Next in line is Adelaide, with a further 245-room Holiday Inn Express in the centre of the city opening in 2017 and 345 rooms in Southbank, central Melbourne opening in 2018.

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ENSEMBLE GATHERS IN AUSTRALIA

THE Ensemble Travel Group, which established an Australian operation about 18 months ago, has formally launched to local travel agents after customising its platforms and services for the Australian market. Headed up by former American Express Travel executive Trish Shepherd, Ensemble Australia and New Zealand features a “fully transparent value proposition” and a range of air, touring and cruise preferred partners. Two models are available - a full consortia program offering a range of marketing and technology services, as well as an ‘international program’ offering members of other networks access to Ensemble’s range, much of which focuses on luxury product.

The launch function was attended by co-director Lindsay Pearlman who’s **pictured** with Shepherd.

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REGISTER NOW FOR TIE 2016

REGISTRATIONS are now open for the 2016 Travel Industry Exhibition, which is taking place in July in both Melbourne and Sydney. Exhibitors include both “big name” and niche-style tour operators, wholesalers, airlines and tourism boards.

As well as being able to meet with exhibitors to find out the latest and greatest in product and destination information, delegates are able to attend informational seminars with a range of high profile presenters including respected tourism industry analyst John O’Shea from Bell Potter Securities along with sessions on social media and industry issues. The draft seminar program has been released and other highlights include a facilitated panel discussion on developing your career and presentations on exploring your franchising options. Last year’s sessions were very popular, with standing room only for some of the presentations so attendees are advised to get in quick.

The Melbourne show takes place at Docklands on Monday 11th and Tuesday 12th July, with the *Travel Daily* Christmas in July networking night on the Monday. A week later the show shifts to Sydney’s Luna Park on Monday 18th and Tuesday 19th July with another Christmas in July party also taking place. Attendance at both shows is free for trade visitors.

■ Sign up now at travelindustryexpo.com.au



Peugeot’s DriveAway success

DRIVEAWAY Holidays has been named by Peugeot as Australia’s leading outlet for Peugeot car leasing in Europe. Managing director Chris Hamill said the award was well deserved by his team who had “reached record lease numbers on the back of a campaign highlighting the benefits of self-drive holidays in Europe”. The strong performance came as DriveAway consolidated its position in the leasing market last year with the acquisition of Renault Eurodrive last October.

The DriveAway team are pictured above with their precious Peugeot prize, from left: Nathan Baber, Josh Macrae, Joumana El-Chami, Caroline Raffoul, Cameron Edwards, Natasha Wahab, Chris Hamill, and Christine Denoux.



CATO VIEW

Dennis Bunnik, chairman
Council of Australian Tour Operators

CHECK YOUR SUPPLIER NO.

THIS May edition of *travelBulletin* sees the launch of the Council of Australian Tour Operators first ever advertising campaign. It seeks to raise awareness among the travel agency community of the new CATO member registration numbers as well as the benefits of using Australian based CATO members for client bookings.

Earlier this year each member’s registration number was incorporated into their CATO logo. You will start to see these appear on the backs of brochures, email signatures and supplier invoices. They are a sign that you are dealing with a professional business committed to the Australian travel industry.

The adverts focus on the peace of mind gained from dealing with Australian-based CATO members for your client bookings. CATO members deliver knowledge, trust, integrity and support to your clients. This campaign also encourages travel agents to check whether all their suppliers are CATO registered and if they

are not, then ask why.

‘However it is the on-holiday support that really sets CATO members apart’

CATO members are experts in their fields whether that be a specific destination/region or a particular type of travel. More importantly they also know the Australian market and the specific needs of Australian travellers to that region.

However it is the on-holiday support that really sets CATO members apart. In this uncertain world it is reassuring to know that help is only ever a local phone call away. CATO members, through their extensive and long term relationships with in-market suppliers have robust support and crisis management systems in place. When a crisis event happens these systems are immediately implemented to ensure the safety and wellbeing of clients and the dissemination of up to date information relevant to your clients.

CATO recently updated members on the topic of crisis management at a full day forum which included talks by leading industry experts. This included speakers from DFAT, Qantas, Sydney Airport and Covermore Insurance as well as a panel discussion of CATO members. This event also saw the launch of the CATO Crisis Management Plan which was developed by Dr David Beirman.

This forum was the first of a series of planned members’ education seminars as outlined in CATO’s recently updated strategic plan. As part of this plan the organisation’s website will currently being upgraded to include a full search facility by destination, type of travel as well as the new member registration number. Stay tuned for more details.

In the meantime any non-CATO tour operators wishing to join should do so as soon as possible so that applications can be assessed prior to the upcoming AGM to be held in Sydney on Wednesday 15th June. For further details on membership and the AGM please contact Peter Baily.

■ Email: pahbaily@bigpond.net.au or phone **0423 261 875**.



New destinations include Costa Rica (photo: Arturo Sotillo) and Panama (photo: Vladimer Shioshvili)

TEMPO BULKS UP LATIN AMERICA

TEMPO Holidays' is doubling its Latin America portfolio with new destinations, an extended season and a new design and layout.

The new 100-page brochure has added four new destination, including Costa Rica, with its jungle-fringed, deserted beaches and Panama, known for its clear turquoise seas and coffee farms.

Also new is Belize, which is packed with adventure and culture and the final new addition is Uruguay, South America's smallest country.

The brochure showcases an expanded range of product in Peru,

which features as the lead country and Guatemala and Belize make an appearance in some multi country programs.

With demand for hotels high in Cuba, Tempo has added the option of cruising in Cuba, allowing guests to take in the country's white-sand beaches, rolling mountains, cigars and rum by sea.

The brochure has been revamped with the new design featuring and increased amount and larger imagery to inspire travellers and a clean and streamlined layout to make it more reader friendly.

Peace-of-Mind Has A New Number



CATO

Council of Australian Tour Operators

Registered Operator No. TO1234

Nothing helps you sleep easier than knowing you're dealing with suppliers you can trust.

CATO members are experts in their field. They understand your client's needs and importantly, they are based here so are only ever a phone call away.

The CATO registration number - it's a sign of a great holiday for your clients and a peaceful night's sleep for you.

Are your suppliers numbered?

Knowledge Trust Integrity Support

Council of Australian Tour Operators

www.cato.asn.au

SIA ADOPTS AMADEUS REVENUE MANAGEMENT

SINGAPORE Airlines has signed up for the full suite of Amadeus Revenue Management solutions, under a new agreement which will see it adopt the Altéa Network Revenue Management, Amadeus Dynamic Pricing and Amadeus Altéa Group Manager systems. The deal will see SQ move to a “customer-centric” revenue management strategy addressing the new ways travellers shop and air products are sold, and is an extension of the airline’s long-running relationship with Amadeus which already provides its Altéa solution to power SIA’s reservations systems.

Amadeus Asia Pacific executive vice president airline commercial, Hazem Hussein, said the Altéa Network Revenue Management Suite was different to traditional systems because it “takes into account the bigger picture of airline profitability, rather than just the point-to-point price of a seat. Benefiting from the unique deep integration with the carrier’s Altéa system it hooks into a gold mine of information and provides a clear competitive advantage around new merchandising practices such as dynamic pricing, fare families and ancillary sales”.

Hussein said the Altéa revenue management suite understands traveller behaviour and specifically addresses one of the biggest lost revenue opportunities for airlines today: the ‘buy-down effect’, a phenomenon resulting from the introduction of more flexible fare structures that “ultimately shifts bookings in high profit classes to lower yield classes”.

The Dynamic Pricing solution is also claimed to help airlines boost their bottom line, defining the “optimal strategy to maximise revenue across the life of a flight”. Based on real-time shopping session

information (trip context), market information (competitor offers) and the airline’s pricing strategy, it models customer behaviour and willingness to pay, instantly calculating and offering the optimum price. And with group travel bookings on the rise, Amadeus Altéa Group Manager helps airlines better manage group requests from quotation to contract,

allowing them to boost revenue from group business, Hussein said.

The Amadeus Network Revenue Management system can only be offered to carriers which use Altéa for their reservations. “This is because the solution has such a dependency on getting the best customer insight from the airline’s primary passenger service system, and only Altéa can provide this level of information,” he added.

The next step for Amadeus is to work closely with Singapore Airlines to ensure the implementation is completed as seamlessly as possible. Other carriers already using the Amadeus network revenue management solution include Scandinavian Airlines and Eva Airways, with Hussein saying he’s “confident that more airlines will see the benefits of our next generation revenue management offering”.

‘...It takes into account the bigger picture of airline profitability, rather than just the point-to-point price of a seat’

Hazem Hussein, executive vice president airline commercial, Amadeus Asia Pacific



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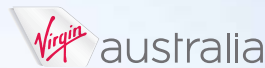
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Agents cruising to

TRAVELBULLETIN and our sister publication *Cruise Weekly* last month commissioned the biggest ever survey of Australian travel agents selling cruising. The intriguing findings unsurprisingly showed the industry continues to reap the benefits of the cruise boom – but also highlighted threats including losing sales to overseas agencies and cruise lines direct. **BRUCE PIPER** unpacks the results.

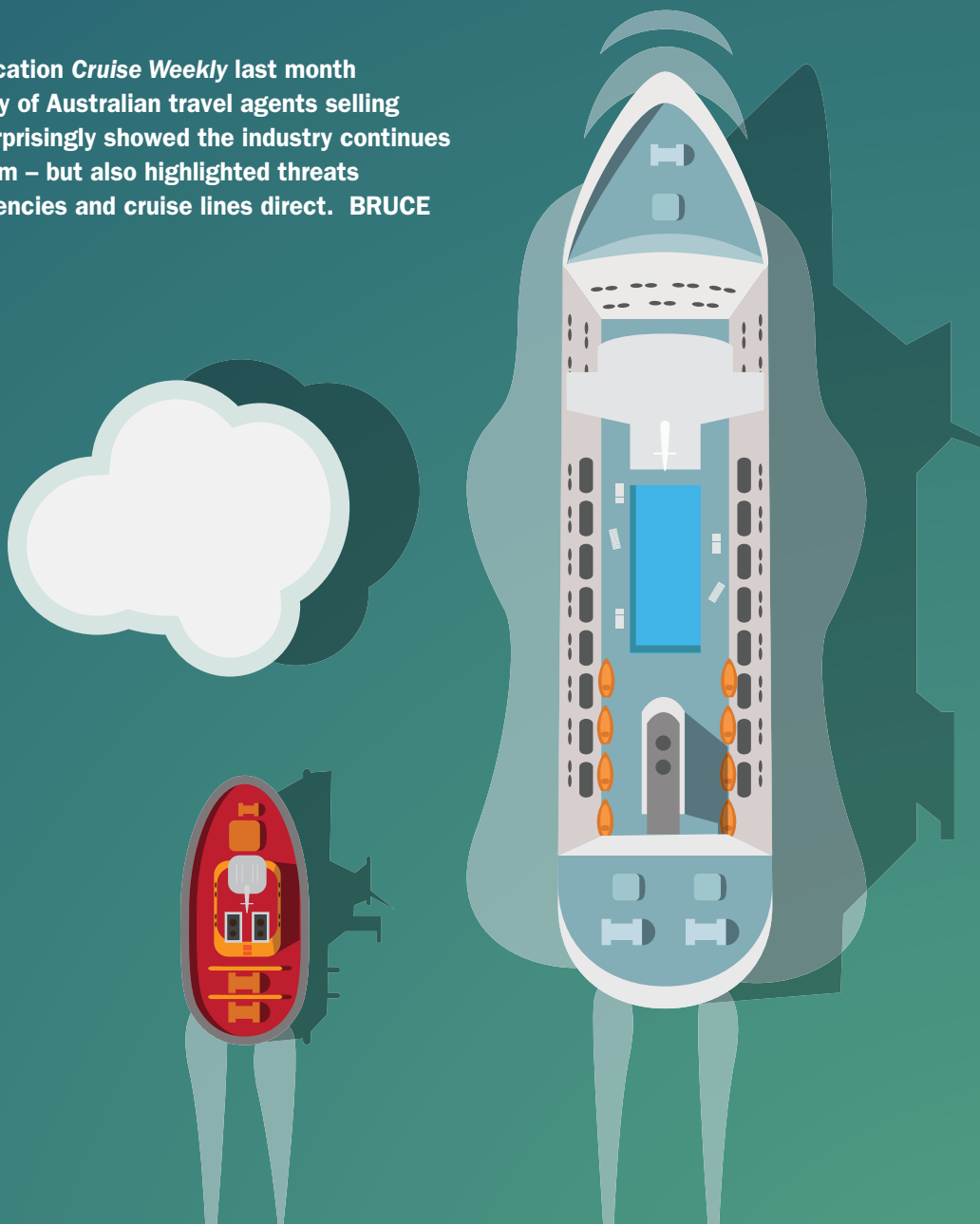
WHAT is the add-on most likely to get a prospective cruise customer over the line? 85% of Australian travel agents put on-board credit at the top of the list, according to our survey which saw a strong response rate from more than 500 cruise consultants. Conducted independently by travel consultancy StollzNow Research, the study came in with a strong confidence level, with the final number (516) collated by selecting only the hands-on client facing cruise selling agents who responded.

Interestingly, on-board credit rated more highly than the plethora of “Fly Free” offers in the market, which garnered a 73% response rate – slightly ahead of a cabin upgrade and earlybird discounts, which were both rated as effective by 71% of the agents. Other lower rated freebies which consultants said drive sales for cruise lines included free shore excursions and reduced deposits, both of which rated as 41% effective in the eyes of the agents.

RIDING THE WAVE

The survey clearly showed the respondents are making the most of the strong growth in the cruise industry. 85% of consultants sold more ocean cruises in the last twelve months than in the previous year, in contrast to just 12% who said their cruise business had stayed the same, and just a handful who had seen a decrease. Growth wasn't as strong for small ship and river cruising, with just under half of respondents saying they had seen an increase, while about 40% said they hadn't experienced any growth in these sectors.

What was particularly noteworthy was the



ABOUT THE STUDY:

- Conducted independently by StollzNow Research in February 2016
- 516 responses giving a confidence level of $\pm 4.3\%$ at the 95% confidence interval
- Data checked and direct cruise sellers removed from sample
- Data validated to check for multiple responses (none found)
- Incentive was game of skill to win one of two GoPros and one of 25 HOYTS movie vouchers

SUCCESS

consultants' perceptions of where the growth in cruise business had come from. The majority (53%) said they had seen customers switch from overseas short-haul land-based holidays to cruise, while the impact of cruise on domestic tourism was also clearly seen, with 51% saying clients had switched from local trips to holidays afloat. Cruise was also seen as significantly impacting coach touring, with 46% of respondents who sell ocean cruise saying their customers had moved across from coach holidays. 34% said cruise clients had switched from other overseas long-haul land holidays – and intriguingly 14% had clients who had booked ocean cruises after first trying a river cruise.

‘More than two thirds of the consultants (69%) said they believed they were losing “some” or “a lot of” sales to direct bookings’

Consultants had on average sold 25 ocean cruise passengers in the four months between September 2015 and January 2016. The average for river cruise over the same period was four passengers, while the small ship average was two sales. More than two thirds of the consultants (69%) said they believed they were losing “some” or “a lot of” sales to direct bookings. 84% said they drive preferences to a cruise line that does not do direct sales – despite the reality that all lines do in fact sell direct. Overseas agencies were also a significant concern, with 50% “extremely” or “very” worried about the rise of foreign competitors, and a further 28% moderately concerned.

The study also looked at the impact of preferred agreements for agents working in particular networks. 16% said they always

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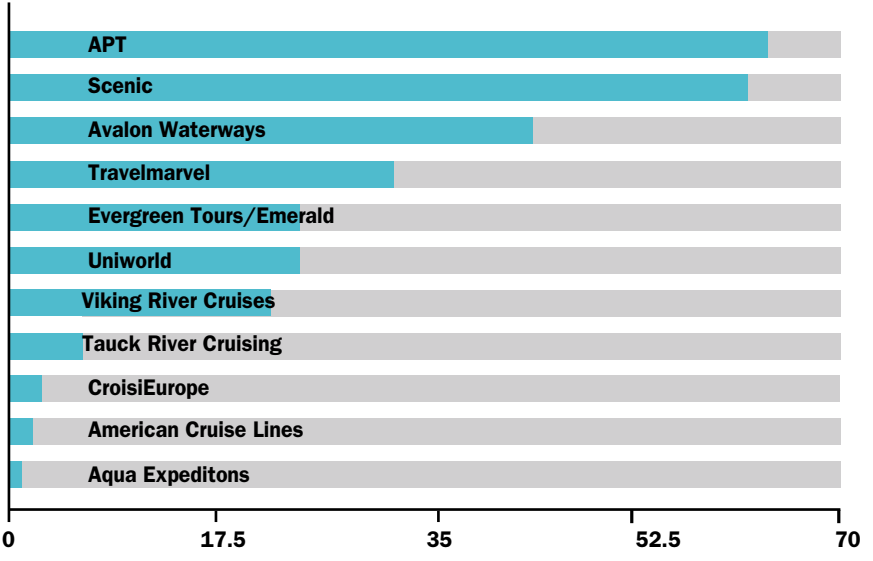
switch clients to a preferred cruise line, while 42% said they did this sometimes. 24% rarely moved their customers across to a preferred partner and 8% said they never switch sell.

PRINCESS RULES

Of the 498 respondents who regularly sell ocean cruise, one theme resounded – the particular strength of Princess Cruises when it comes to travel agent cruise sales. A whopping 87% of the consultants said their customers ask for Princess by name, just ahead of sister brand P&O at 85%. Royal Caribbean was slightly behind, requested by the clients of 81% of the respondents. Carnival Cruise Line was in fourth place, with 70% of agents saying their clients asked for it by name – and then there was a big jump down to Silversea Cruises in fifth place with a score of 57%.

At the other end of the scale just 6% of respondents said their clients asked for

River cruise lines regularly sold



Costa Cruises by name – hopefully reflecting memory loss within the community about the *Costa Concordia* disaster. 20% of respondents said their clients asked for MSC Cruises by

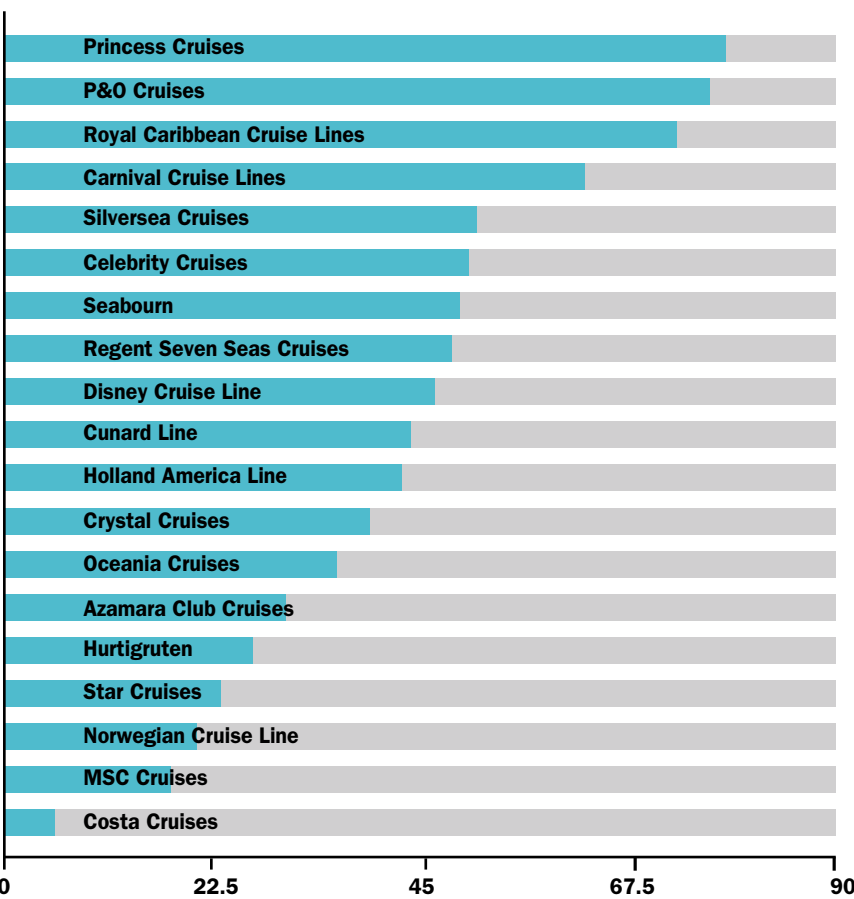
name, with newcomer Norwegian Cruise Line only just ahead, requested by clients of 23% of the agents surveyed. In the middle of the pack were brands such as Celebrity (56%), Seabourn (55%), Regent Seven Seas (54%) and Disney Cruise Line (52%) which were ahead of Cunard at 49%, Holland America at 48%, Crystal Cruises with 44% and Oceania at 40% (see graph left).

It wasn't just brand awareness where Princess was a leader. The survey found Princess was the most commonly sold cruise line by the Australian consultants – ahead of Royal Caribbean in second place, P&O third, Carnival Cruise Lines fourth and Celebrity in fifth position. Princess was also the most highly rated cruise brand when it came to cruise consultant training and development as well as excellence in call centre service.

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

There's no doubt that the bold initiative of Scenic and APT to launch and operate their own river cruise vessels in Europe has created unprecedented demand and awareness of river cruising in the local market. Although on a global scale river cruise passenger numbers are dwarfed by those taking an ocean cruise, last month newly appointed Royal Caribbean chief for Australasia, Adam Armstrong, revealed that last year about 100,000 Australians took an ocean cruise in Europe, not too far ahead of the annual 70,000 Australian European river cruisers. Aussie travel agents are certainly capitalising on the massive promotional efforts undertaken by APT and

Ocean cruise lines asked for by name



Scenic, with other brands also making the most of the marketing push.

As you would expect APT and Scenic were neck and neck when it came to river cruise lines regularly sold by the cruise consultants in the survey. 64% of agents said they sold APT, just ahead of Scenic at 62%, with some daylight between them and the third placed Avalon Waterways at 47%. Fourth place was taken by APT-owned Travelmarvel at 37%, which outstripped Scenic's Evergreen/Emerald Waterways operation which was sold by 28% of the agents. Uniworld was also regularly sold by 28% of the agents, just ahead of Viking River Cruises at 26%. 93% of the agents said their customers ask for Scenic by name, just ahead of APT at 92% (see graph, left).

When it came to other measures, APT and Travelmarvel were clearly top of the pops, with both ranking ahead of other brands in terms of training and development, sales representatives, call centre and customer service.

OTHER SURVEY TAKE-OUTS

The StollzNow study also looked at the rise of expedition and small ship cruising, with both segments sold by some the consultants polled in the survey but in much smaller volumes than ocean or river cruising. When it came to small ship lines regularly sold there was strong awareness of the new Viking Ocean Cruises product, along with Seabourn, Ponant and Lindblad Expeditions National Geographic. The survey also showed strong awareness of the small ship offerings from Scenic and APT.

Other questions related to the visibility of the various cruise lines when advertising in trade and consumer media, with predictably top results for Scenic, APT, Royal Caribbean, P&O, Holland America, Princess and Celebrity.

CLIA AWARENESS

The survey also included some questions about Cruise Lines International Association, in order to gauge perceptions of the peak cruise industry body on the ground. Among the consultants who responded to the survey, a whopping 83% were aware of CLIA's activities, with awareness strongest among home-based agents (98%), followed by Travellers Choice and Magellan, both at 95% which was just ahead of Helloworld at 94%. 90% of iTravel consultants were aware of CLIA, followed by Express Travel Group at 83% and independent agents at 78%.



Although still strong, awareness of CLIA among Flight Centre agents was lowest at 67% (see graph, below).

78% of those who were aware of CLIA said they "always" or "sometimes" participate in Cruise Week promotions, and the organisation also ranked highly among these consultants, with 64% saying CLIA's industry representation was "extremely" or "very" good. CLIA's education was also highlighted as a positive by 54% of the agents.

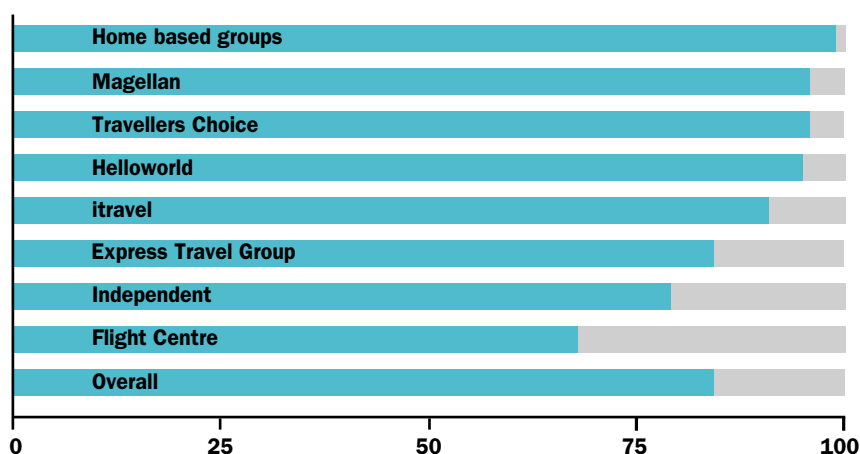
Overall the exceptionally strong response to the study indicates the increasing importance that cruise is having in terms of the Australian travel sector. The ongoing commitment of CLIA to educating consultants has meant there is a strong base across the country of agents who understand that there is indeed a cruise for everyone. In the changing world of travel distribution it is

clear these agents have grasped the helm and assured their future by focusing on this growth area where clients respond so well to marketing initiatives.

Another key factor was the strong uptake of *Cruise Weekly*, with more than two thirds of the cruise sellers saying they read the newsletter on a weekly basis to keep updated with the latest industry trends.

The full results of the StollzNow Cruise Weekly/ travelBulletin cruise agent survey are available for purchase - for details email [Christian Schweitzer on research@travelbulletin.com.au](mailto:research@travelbulletin.com.au) or call 1300 799 220.

Consultant awareness of CLIA



CAREER IN FOCUS

JUSTIN MONTGOMERY

Head of Commercial,
Amadeus IT Pacific



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

I joined Amadeus in January and my role is to grow Amadeus's distribution business across South West Pacific, this includes Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. I look after the commercial functions including sales and marketing and my goal is to deliver the best possible content and solutions to travel agencies and TMCs.

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

I was involved in the hospitality industry from a very young age through my father's business and I decided early on that hospitality and travel was something I enjoyed.

‘I started my career with World Travel Headquarters in their mail room! After a couple of months, I decided that it wasn't for me’

I started my career with World Travel Headquarters in their mail room! After a couple of months, I decided that it wasn't for me. Luckily the mail room wasn't the end of my travel career and I then got a job with Australian Airlines (which merged with Qantas in 1992). I worked across Qantas for many years before moving into the wholesale sector.

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

I started in a retail travel agency and worked

daytime while studying in the evenings to get formal qualifications.

I have undertaken various courses relevant to personal development throughout my career. These include residential courses at the University of NSW and courses with the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Qualifications are important to gain theoretical foundations, but they need to be supported with practical learning on the job. There's no better way to hone your trade than by actually doing it!

4. What do you love about your job?

I love how dynamic travel is and how it continues to evolve. In all my roles, I've been able to work with great people, travel to amazing places while learning new skills. Ongoing learning is essential especially as technology now drives every aspect of the travel sector.

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

I have been fortunate to be able to work with some great companies. One of my most defining challenges was the joint venture startup of Contiki Resorts. It was a vision that I had to bring to life. We started from

scratch including reservation systems, staff hires, marketing, branding, distribution and stakeholder management (including state and federal governments). We developed the product, renovated the resort and started chartering two 737's for weekly flights in five months. It was challenging but all ready to go when the first guest arrived!

6. What factors were central to your success?

With Contiki Resorts it was about building an experienced team that was culturally aligned. Our team had to be adaptable to ensure we hit opening date. One of the most critical factors was ongoing stakeholder engagement with the resort owners and the new board of directors.

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

I haven't had a mentor as such, but have had numerous discussions with many great leaders in various industries throughout my career. I like to observe and adopt styles and behaviours of those professionals that I admire.

‘With Contiki Resorts it was about building an experienced team that was culturally aligned’

8. What are the keys to good business?

I have four guiding principles: know your customers, know your competitors, identify change within the industry, and continue to adapt your business model to meet the change. It is also critical to look after your team well so they will continue to look after your customers.

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

It is important to understand what you want to get out of a role. Be prepared to take steps to learn new skills, as new skills open up new opportunities.



Mark Van Huisstede, italktravel Maitland
Off-piste somewhere in the Alps

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For a confidential chat about italktravel franchise opportunities, call our General Manager of Sales Jonathan Nelson on 0401 779 919, or visit italkagents.com.au

italktravel 

MAKING *CHANGE* FOR GOOD



HAVING been a business owner for a travel agency for 38 years, our family business has been through many changes. Back in those days if you had travelled overseas to Europe or even not so far away, you were snapped up as a travel consultant. I opened my business with a background of air hostessing for Trans Australia Airlines and a love of travelling and talking about where I have travelled. Along with those criteria, and a background in Accounting to take care of the financial side of the business, I started my agency.

Embracing change has always been important to my agency. Back when e-tickets first started our office was asked to trial the electronic tickets. It was very difficult then to convince customers that we no longer gave a paper ticket and many were unsure that the piece of paper we gave them would be acceptable at the airport. We even advertised that we could book flights on the computer and issue electronic tickets. One of the best things of getting electronic tickets was to get rid of the ticket printer. Trying to align the tickets in the ticket printer when it ran amok and printed the tickets between lines, or for some reason skipped a ticket was always the challenge of the day.

Things are always happening and evolving to change the way we work. From computers changing the way we worked to outside influences affecting our business. The collapse of Ansett and 9/11 all in the one week changed so much in the industry for everyone. Many agencies didn't survive after all the charge backs from banks and loss

of business. It was really a case of making sure you looked after the customers you had and keeping an eye on the bottom line of the business and not over extending anything during those difficult times.

‘Over the years I have had to make some big decisions and wondered if they were the right thing for the future of the business. But if you don't make these decisions everything will stay the same’

We have been lucky in that since we opened our business it has been a mix of corporate and leisure. When one side of the business is quiet we have been able to rely on the other side. I think this is very important for agents, not to have all their eggs in one basket. Having staff who want to be part of your business and help build it for you is so important. Family members working in the business also helps make it solid and successful.

We are very committed to our customers, many of whom have been with us for over 25 years. The most important thing is to make sure you always get back to them straight away so they feel important to your business. Never let them wait or have to ring you back.

Decisions, whether they are changing phone systems, changing GDS, moving your shop location, increasing staff levels, changing your trading name, should be done with confidence and sense of doing the right thing for your business. You should not have regrets. Over the years I have had to make some big decisions and wondered if they were the right thing for the future of the business. But if you don't make these decisions everything will stay the same.

It can be very hard work sometimes, refurbishing your office, retraining staff on new systems and having customers get used to a new trading name. If you embrace change your business will move forward. Customers and staff will see you moving forward and the feeling of being with a progressive business cannot be underestimated.

Make sure you have good people and support around you. Belonging to a forward thinking franchise, like italktravel, gives you the ability to market your business in new ways, keep up to date with all the latest technology and be supported by like minded people.

Jan Gott is the owner and operator of italktravel Reservoir, which first opened its doors in 1978.

She has transitioned the business into what it is today and is a mixture of leisure, group and corporate travel. The business is run by Jan and her daughter Sarah and 3 other staff members.





CLUB Med has released a new brochure for 2016 with a selection of key sun and ski resorts from more than 70 of their properties across the world. It outlines Club Med's all-inclusive concept which bundles together accommodation, gourmet meals at a choice of restaurants, full open bar including beer, kids clubs (aged 4+), all sports and activities plus nightly entertainment.



CROOKED Compass has unveiled its 2016/17 brochure showcasing 32 off-the-beaten-track small group adventures for avid travellers seeking something rewarding. Highlights inside include trekking the Alborz Mountains in Iran, exploring the lost world of the three Guyana's and a range of unique India festival tours. For those wanting a little more flexibility and customisation, take a look at the Tours by Design offering.



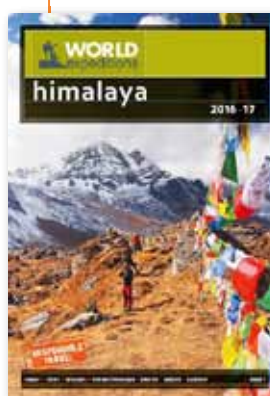
INFINITY Holiday's latest brochure is a collection of All-Australian offerings including two rail journeys, one fully escorted tour and 30 hotels. All hotels are 4.5 to 5-stars with the unique selling points listed for each. Also featured are the 'Top 5 Experiences' highlighting options for romantic and honeymoon escapes, spa retreats, havens for nature and scenery and culinary indulgences.



TAHITI Travel Connection's 2016/17 brochure features Tahiti, Moorea, Bora Bora and other islands such as the Marquesas Archipelago and the Tuamotu Archipelago. Each section begins with the "Must Dos" on the islands, followed by accommodation options. The cruising offering ranges from a passenger/cargo ship, Paul Gauguin Cruises to fully crewed yacht charters.



ABERCROMBIE & Kent's latest brochure has several new luxury itineraries in New Zealand including fly fishing at Huka Lodge, the TranzAlpine Railway, a Milford Sound cruise and a stay at remote Minaret Station. In Australia, highlights include a biking holiday in the Barossa Valley with accommodation at The Louise or adventures in the Top End. Also included are details on a Hosted Journey to the Goroka Festival in PNG.



THE latest brochure from World Expeditions offers one of the most extensive Nepal programs on the market. It reveals itineraries packed with activities including: trekking for all levels (from introductory to challenging), mountaineering and the 1,700km Great Himalaya Trail. Since the devastating earthquake which ripped through the region in April last year, World Expeditions has raised more than \$250k for relief efforts and rebuilding schools.



INSIDER Journey's new 32-page brochure offers private travel packages with personal guides and exclusive concierge services in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka. Included inside is an eight-day Japan highlights itinerary which traverses Japan's most popular cities such as Tokyo and Hakone and a self-guided nine-day Hokkaido Nature Discovery adventure that is home to volcanos, hiking trails and a dynamic food and drink scene.



THE latest brochure from Evergreen has several new itineraries including a 15-day Three Rivers Discovery Cruise in Portugal and France, a 15-day Amsterdam to Nice with Rhine, Rhône & Saône River Cruise, 21-day Amsterdam to Prague & Splendours of Europe River Cruise and 15-day Tastes of Tuscany Tour & Rhine River Cruise.

MAKING THE (ANCILLARY) CONNECTION WITH THE CONNECTED TRAVELER

By Deepak Khosla, President – Asia/ANZ, NIIT Technologies

THE global aviation sector keeps going through highs and lows on the back of fluctuations in fuel prices, demand from emerging economies, addition of new low-cost carriers, and above all the changing dynamics of the travellers.

It is increasingly becoming important for airlines to understand that their relationship with the customer is not limited to just the flight experience but extends beyond. The need for tracking the entire lifecycle of a traveller and create novel ways for engagement is vital. Creating favorable moments of truth from the planning and booking process, to transit and airport experiences, right through to time spent in the air and finally, at the destination is the way to go today. Against this backdrop, customer experience is emerging as a key differentiator for the industry, helping define a brand and moving it ahead of the competition.

STAYING AHEAD OR PLAYING CATCH-UP?

With growing competition and, above all, the rise of the connected traveller, airline travel industry is increasingly focusing on an enhanced experience to drive revenue. These days, customers look to brands for rich experiences as well as delightful associations – be it in transit, at the airport, or in-flight. At the heart of the industry narrative is the always-connected traveller, who is internet-enabled across every leg of the journey. The connected flyer loves to stay

in touch and stay in charge at every step of what is considered “an experiential journey.” The keywords are choice, staying in control, and convenience. And as far as airports and airlines are concerned, ensuring all three is a daunting task.

TECHNOLOGY IS SCRIPTING THE “CONNECTED TRAVELLER” PLAY

The prime mover and often the unseen hand in terms of enabling the connected experience is, of course, technology. Today’s travellers move between multiple devices to accomplish their goals, and the smartphone is the most common starting place for all online activities. Users no longer fall into neat categories of smartphone, tablet or laptop users. Smartphones are most ubiquitous for mobile needs; location-specific searches, account access and time-sensitive transactions. Airlines must therefore create a rich digital experience through responsive websites that work across devices, letting passengers discover what’s new in addition to doing their bookings.

Users now conduct transactions in segments with the ability to save their status and pick up and carry on with transactions on any platform. The user experience must be at the center of all mobile first decisions and initiatives.

For instance, apart from booking flights, many flyers want to be able to top up their baggage allowance, as well as check in and select their seat via a mobile app. They also crave the add-ons like adding a chauffeur option or upgrading their travel class. This requires a rejig of their existing

mobile applications.

Essentially, the nexus of mobile computing, social, data analytics and cloud is helping to bring the one-touch experience that discerning flyers demand. Delivering personalised gifts, like a movie ticket or discount coupon at some point during the journey (airport, in transit, or in-flight) can move the needle of customer delight noticeably.

Meanwhile, there is a quiet revolution brewing, now that an entire range of devices have been implanted with smart sensors. From interactive luggage labels that keep vigil over your luggage wherever it is on this planet to blankets that take stock of your wellbeing. These connected devices can move millions of pieces of data to cloud-based data centers, where predictive analytics tools ‘crunch’ them to give a deeper and more accurate understanding of passenger behaviour. Likewise, analytics can cull insights from zettabytes of mashed-up data from multiple sources: emails, chat, online feedback, call records, and social media posts, and log files. Hugely aided by analytics, airlines are providing travellers with better offers and improving the customer experience overall to reduce the churn.

Through highly personalised services and targeted offerings, a few airlines have shown it is still possible to stay profitable amidst the entire clamour for customer attention. With the likes of Qantas and Air New Zealand soaring back into profit in recent times, there is clearly an opportunity for airports and airlines to do the new and pep up their image, which, in turn, will help them stand out from the crowd of “me-too” players.

OUTBOUND PROCESSING – AUSTRALIA LEADS

AUSTRALIA'S Department of Immigration and Border Protection last month revealed the implementation of a new SITA system which automatically runs checks on all passengers departing the country. The iBorders platform provides real-time integration between airline check-in systems and border management databases run by the department, providing an instant "board/no board" status as passengers attempt to pass through the airport.

The system has been put in place following federal legislation to improve Australia's border integrity, including the Foreign Fighters Act which aims to respond to the threat posed by Australians engaging in and returning from conflicts in foreign states. SITA regional sales director Jay Youtlen told *travelBulletin* the system, developed in SITA's Sydney-based centre of excellence, is an extension of the platform first put in place for inbound travellers leading up to the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. iBorders allows passengers who are pre-cleared for departure to quickly self-process through passport control by using outbound SmartGates in Australia's international airports.

John Gibbon, who's Assistant Secretary Traveller Branch at the Department of Immigration, said the new system delivers a faster and more seamless experience for travellers "while meeting our business needs to manager threats and ensure the integrity of Australia's border". A total of 47 airlines operating in Australia are now fully certified with the iBorders system, which is running about two million transactions a month.

While SITA's iBorders suite has been implemented by about 30 governments across the globe for arriving passengers, it's understood that Australia is the first country in the world to implement such a

system for outbound travellers. SITA's Asia Pacific president Ilya Gutlin said "working in sync with the airlines, Australia now runs advance, automatic checks on every passenger arriving or departing the country, making the journey smoother for authorised travellers while addressing issues with persons of interest".



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Find out more at travelpor-smartpoint.com or email au@travelport.com



LIGHTING UP THE BUSINESS EVENTS MARKET



Field of Light installation at Uluru

By Nathalie Craig

AYERS Rock Resort is enjoying an unprecedented increase in business events bookings, with Bruce Munro's Field of Light installation at Uluru a key factor contributing to the rise.

Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia executive general manager of sales, marketing and distribution Ray Stone told *travelBulletin* the complex had nearly doubled its MICE market this financial year.

"We are running this financial year about 40% ahead of last year for business events bookings at the resort – it's the biggest increase we've had," Stone explained.

The market's natural momentum undoubtedly accounts for some of this but the launch of Field of Light in April has helped this exponential year-on-year growth.

The immersive artwork which features 50,000 solar powered lights will remain open

to the public for a year. It is unlike anything the Northern Territory has seen before, spanning an area the size of four football fields in front of Uluru, with viewers invited to walk through paths weaving amongst the lights.

The awe-inspiring exhibition can be best appreciated after sunset and before sunrise. Guests can experience the phenomenon in several ways, with options including a two hour visit, a Night at Field of Light dining experience as well as a sunrise tour.

World renowned artist Bruce Munro first developed the idea for Field of Light while visiting Uluru back in 1992 and has since executed the concept in locations worldwide, including in his own backyard in England.

"The Field of Light is one of those activities inspired by something much bigger than ourselves – and that is this place, it is magnificent," Munro explained to *travelBulletin*.

"What I would hope is that this will

encourage people not just to just come and see the Field of Light but to come out to a place that will inspire them, hopefully in the same way it inspired me".

From both a straight tourism and business events perspective, Field of Light is giving people that extra push to get to Australia's Red Centre. "It's as if people had been thinking about coming here, hadn't quite made up their mind and this has sort of taken them over the line," Stone explained.

Tourism Australia managing director John O'Sullivan echoed these sentiments to *travelBulletin* expressing his hopes that the artwork would "unlock" the East Asian markets which "haven't yet quite dispersed across the country". "They love light, they love man made installations against natural backdrops," he said.

Stone said definite business events bookings had come through for both this financial year and next based solely on the artwork with several large companies looking for a 'wow factor' for their event.

"Field of Light was it for them," Stone said.

In another first for Ayers Rock Resort there has been two instances where a company has completely booked out the resort's Sails in the Desert hotel for a business events function.

"That's unusual to buy exclusive use of Sails in the Desert which can hold 200 to 400 people," Stone said.

"There's no question in our mind Field of Light is having an effect on the booking pace and that it will be a key element for us over the next 12 months".

The MICE market accounts for about 8% of the resort's total bookings with the Asian sector the fastest growing.





Qld's Jewel underway

APRIL saw construction start on Australia's largest hotel and residential complex – the \$1 billion Jewel development in Surfers Paradise. The luxury building which is set to open in 2019 is predicted to deliver a significant boost to the Gold Coast tourism economy and to further unlock the lucrative high-end tourism market.

The Jewel will have three crystalline towers with 512 residential apartments, a 169-suite, five-star hotel, three levels of basement parking to accommodate 816 vehicles, and retail and dining precincts. The project has been designed to look like three jewels shining on the Gold Coast horizon.

Queensland's Tourism Minister Kate Jones said with Chinese outbound tourism expected to double by 2020 to around 200 million people, the Jewel is a welcome addition to the Gold Coast. "This project will help position the Gold Coast as a destination of choice for luxury accommodation and holiday experiences," Jones said.

Cvent acquired by Vista

EVENT management company, Cvent is set to be acquired by equity firm Vista Equity Partners for US\$1.65 billion. Both companies have entered into a definitive agreement which will see Vista buy 100% of the outstanding shares of Cvent common stock and Cvent will become a privately held company.

Founder and CEO of Cvent Reggie Aggarwal said with the financial backing of Vista, Cvent will "be better positioned to deliver innovative solutions that transform the meetings and events industry, and to offer employees new opportunities for career growth".

The all-cash deal is expected to close in the third calendar quarter of 2016, but is subject to closing conditions, including the approval of Cvent stockholders and required regulatory approvals.

MEA National Awards

THE industry came together to recognise and award its skilled members at the Meetings & Events Australia (MEA) 2015 National Awards Gala Dinner on 19 May. Held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, the centre triumphed time and time again at the awards, taking out three categories and a spot in MEA's exclusive Hall of Fame.

The MCEC won Meeting Venue 500 Delegates or More, Cause Related Event of the Year and In-House AV Services.

David Grant was remembered on the night with The Outstanding Contribution Award.



AACB VIEW

Andrew Hiebl, executive director
Association of Australian Convention Bureaux

AACB LAUNCHES FORWARD VISION

THE 14th of April marked the inaugural Global Meetings Industry Day (GMID), spearheaded by the Meetings Mean Business Coalition based in the US.

In 2016, leaders of the business events industry from across the world came together to highlight the real benefits that face-to-face meetings have on people, businesses and communities.

The AACB kicked off GMID by delivering a copy of its new Forward Calendar report to parliament in Canberra.

‘Business events are unique in that they are the only tourism sector that provides a vision of confirmed future business’

The Forward Calendar is the most comprehensive audit of future business events attracted to Australia ever produced and comes after an unprecedented data sharing exercise between our country's convention bureaux.

Business events are unique in that they are the only tourism sector that provides a vision of confirmed future business. The report provides an unparalleled forward vision of meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions won by our members.

The report lists 296 international business events that have been confirmed for our convention centres, hotels and universities through to 2024. These events are forecast to attract almost one quarter of a million delegates (66%

international) – translating to more than one million delegate days – and generating over A\$663 million (US\$507 million) in direct delegate expenditure.

Key findings of the report also highlight that of the international business events secured for Australia, 30% are in the medical sector with an estimated 90,000 delegates. Following medical, other industry sectors by percentage of events included:

- Professional, scientific and technical services (17.9%)
- Information media and telecommunications (9.8%)
- Administrative & support services (8.4%)
- Manufacturing (7.1%)
- Arts and recreation services (3.7%)
- Financial and insurance services (3.7%)
- Retail trade (3.0%)

Further, 54% of association meetings and conventions include a trade/exhibition component.

This intelligence has been designed for governments and their departments to maximise the beyond tourism benefits that these events offer. Sharing this information with Tourism Australia and Austrade will also help better direct delegate boosting and reverse trade mission initiatives.

Australia is facing a federal election this year and we are calling on both sides of politics to commit to a bid fund to help our convention bureaux secure more international business events for Australia.

With professional development of Australia's workforce directly benefiting from business events through exposure to international expertise, networks and best practice, such an investment by government would directly target industry growth and jobs of the future.

headlines business events news

- 24 Mar Uluru MICE market shines
- 24 Mar VIC on show for events
- 31 Mar BET's new ambassadors
- 04 Apr Barangaroo edges closer

- 04 Apr NT shows off its pearls
- 07 Apr Qld's Jewel underway
- 07 Apr PCO's get familiar with Metro
- 11 Apr Taronga Zoo eco-facility
- 14 Apr AACB delivers new report
- 14 Apr Buyers explore the Nth Island
- 18 Apr Simpler visitor visa rules
- 18 Apr Altogether Perfect shows off Hunter

PONANT DOUBLES EXPEDITION FLEET



PONANT has announced the construction of four new ships, saying the move has “firmly consolidated its position as the benchmark for the new style of luxury expedition cruising on a global scale”. The order was confirmed last month at an event in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where the company’s Asia-Pacific chairman and special advisor Sarina Bratton joined with Ponant chief sales and marketing officer Herve Bellaiche and Fincantieri management to make the formal announcement (**pictured bottom right**).

The letter of intent will see the new ships built in Norway at the shipyard of Fincantieri, a subsidiary of Vard Holdings. This will be the first step in a major project to expand the fleet since Ponant was acquired last year by Artemis, the company owned by France’s Pinault family. The first new Ponant ‘Explorer Class’ ship will be delivered in 2018 – and Bratton revealed that this vessel will be deployed directly to Australia. “This is testament to the importance of and growth from the Australian Pacific region,” she said, with the vessel to remain thereafter in Australasia and Southeast Asia.

Each of the new Ponant vessels will have capacity for about 180 passengers in 92 oceanview staterooms and suites, all with private balconies. Ponant said in contrast to the trend of other lines building ever-larger ships, it has decided to contain the scope of its newbuilds “to ensure optimum balance of ship size, luxury facilities, service levels and guest comfort”. The ships have been “created to appeal to inquisitive travellers eager to explore some of the extraordinary, lesser visited parts of the globe, in luxury,” the company said. The rear marina deck has been designed to be raised or lowered to give convenient access to each ship’s twelve

Zodiacs, with the ability to board two craft at a time.

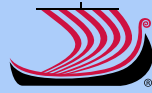
Each with seven decks, Ponant’s new vessels will lack for nothing with a fully equipped spa, gymnasium, observation lounge and choice of dining areas. They’ll also offer interior and exterior bars, an infinity glass-ended swimming pool, Scuba facilities and even an “underwater observation lounge” allowing guests to explore the underwater world without getting wet. In keeping with Ponant’s French flair, interiors will be created by French designer Jean-Philippe Nuel, with a brief to create an “ethnic chic universe inspired by driftwood, natural materials and colours, reflecting the spirit of sophisticated yet authentic adventure”. On-board dining will offer flexible restaurant seating with choices of tables for two, four or six people and delectable French cuisine courtesy of Ducasse Consulting. Guests can also expect 24 hour room service and an open bar policy.

Ponant reaffirmed its commitment to the “buoyant expedition niche,” and will bring

its expertise in Polar exploration to other parts of the globe. Once the four vessels have been delivered Ponant will feature eight expedition ships alongside its flagship *Le Ponant* masted sailing yacht, meaning the cruise line has the ability to cover much of the globe. A new concept of ‘Blue’ and ‘Green’ expeditions will join the existing ‘White’ Arctic and Antarctic itineraries. Blue Expeditions will focus on exploring Oceania’s lagoons and secret islands, while Green Expeditions will take passengers to places as far afield as South America, Papua New Guinea or the Indian Ocean. “The result will be a host of unusual itineraries to get as close as it is possible to local cultures,” the company promised.

The company’s aggressive newbuild program joins other initiatives in the luxury small ship expedition segment including the recent announcement of Scenic’s *Eclipse* and Crystal Yacht Cruises *HMS Endeavour*, both of which will be polar class vessels with around 200 passengers.





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OVATION SEASON EXTENDED

THERE'S no doubting the commitment of Royal Caribbean to the Australian market. The company last month announced the month-long extension of the inaugural down under season of *Ovation of the Seas*, adding an additional four voyages. *Ovation*, which is being described as Australia's first ever newbuild cruise ship, will also return for a second season in the summer of 2017/18, the company said.

Newly appointed RCL managing director Australasia, Adam Armstrong, said "the level of interest for *Ovation of the Seas* has exceeded all of our expectations," with the season already 90% sold out for 2016/17.

"She is a true game-changer...this extension of her maiden season plus her subsequent return in 2017/18 reaffirms Australia's position as one of the most significant cruising markets in the world and Royal Caribbean's position as Sydney's leading cruise line".

Royal Caribbean has now taken delivery of *Ovation* which will make her way to Australia via Europe and a brief sojourn in China before arriving in November this year full of CruiseCo customers on the chartered voyage from Singapore to Sydney. The momentous occasion is certain to garner global interest and raise the profile of cruising in Australia

even higher.

Not so welcome was the news that 2016/17 would be the final Brisbane homeporting season for Royal Caribbean's *Legend of the Seas* which is being redeployed to Europe after the end of the season. Armstrong reassured the industry that Royal Caribbean would continue to visit Queensland ports, and looked forward to the construction of a proposed new cruise terminal at the mouth of the Brisbane River, which would allow the line's larger Voyager and Quantum class vessels to be based in the capital. "We fully expect to return to home-porting in Queensland in the future," he promised.

OCEANIA, REGENT OFFICE NOW LIVE

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line Holdings has completed the integration of its new Australian office, with the Sydney-based call centre last month expanding to also incorporate Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises. The move has seen the local staff expand from its initial six-strong executive team in November last year to now number more than 40 including 18 in the contact centre, assisting with help desk and booking enquiries for all three brands.

According to Steve Odell, Senior Vice President and Managing Director Asia Pacific for NCLH, "the integration has been undertaken to provide a greater level of support to our trade partners, travel agents and cruise passengers, marking an exciting milestone in the growth of our local office".

The expansion of the Sydney call centre coincided with the launch of Australian dollar pricing for Regent Seven Seas Cruises, which Odell, said would make it even easier for the local trade to sell the brand. The company also last month announced an agreement with Fincantieri for the construction of another vessel which will be a sister ship to *Regent Seven Seas Explorer* which is set to launch in July this year. The newbuild is slated for delivery in 2020.

More ships for MSC

THE flurry of newbuild announcements continued last month, with MSC Cruises signing a new letter of intent with STX France for up to four cruise vessels. All to be powered using Liquefied Natural Gas, the first of the ships is scheduled for delivery in 2022 and will be based on "advanced new next-generation prototype" which will form the so-called 'World Class' of MSC Cruises ships.

The deal means MSC now has a pipeline of up to 11 ships between 2014 and 2026, bringing the total value of its investment plan to almost nine billion Euro. The four new ships will each carry about 5,400 passengers.



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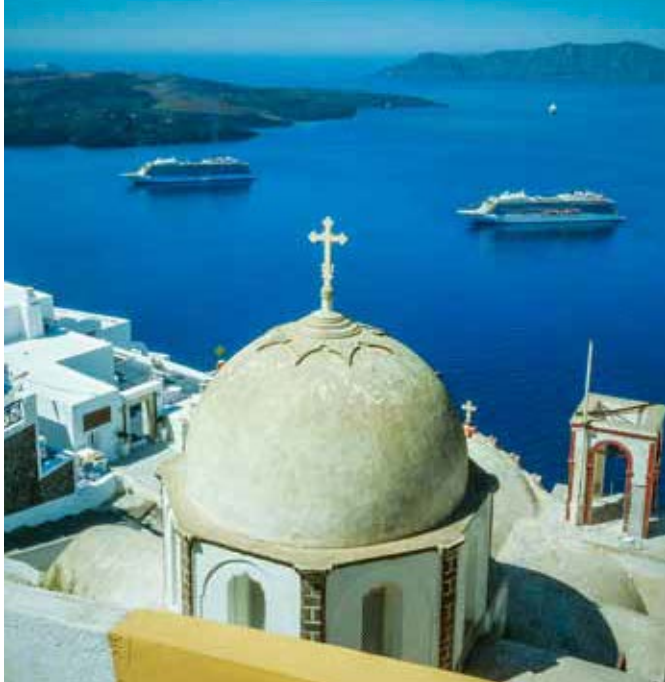
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Viking Sea takes to the water

VIKING Ocean Cruises has taken delivery of its second vessel, with the 465-cabin Viking Sea taking on her first guests in Istanbul, Turkey before voyaging to a christening ceremony which takes place on May 5th on London's Thames River. *Viking Sea* met sister ship *Viking Star* for the first time in Santorini (pictured), and the growth continues with Viking to add a third vessel in twelve month's time.

Viking is touting its voyages as "the thinking person's cruise" with the smaller size of the ships allowing guests closer to their destination, with more time in port, more overnights and fewer days at sea. Every stateroom has a verandah and the on-board ambience comprises "serene Scandinavian spaces where every room is beautiful and functional, quiet and filled with light". All-inclusive fares cover shore excursions in each port of call, all meals on board, all port charges and government taxes and even on-board wi-fi.



CELEBRITY IN THE FAST LANE

CELEBRITY Cruises has announced the roll out of "cutting edge high speed internet capability" across its entire fleet. Dubbed Xcelerate, the system will make it easier for guests to stay connected while on holiday, with *Celebrity Reflection* the first ship to offer the upgrade which will soon roll out across the rest of its large ships (the 100-guest *Celebrity Xpedition* which sails year-round in the Galapagos Islands is not scheduled to receive the upgrade).

Celebrity ceo Lisa Lutoff-Perlo said "Xcelerate is going to give our digitally connected guests a new opportunity to share their amazing travel experiences with the world in real time, whether docked in Europe's sought-after ports of call or gliding through the ocean on all of our large ships, anywhere in the world".

HAAAVE YOU MET TED?

Ted Sykes, President of American Queen Steamboat Company talks famils, bourbon and business.

AMERICAN Queen Steamboat Company, with its fleet of two, offers river cruises on the Upper and Lower Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Columbia and Snake Rivers.

The business is "way ahead of booking curves", with cruises on the Columbia, Snake and Mississippi Rivers this year sold out from February up until May and the company "actively looking" for another vessel, says Ted Sykes, President of American Queen Steamboat Company.

In August, American Queen Steamboat Company will introduce the *Mighty Mississippi*, a 23-day cruise from St. Paul to New Orleans, with a pre-trip that starts at Lake Itasca.

Also new for 2016 is the Five Rivers itinerary, which sails the Illinois, Ohio, Tennessee, Cumberland, and Mississippi.

"We are also doing our Bourbon cruise again, which highlights Kentucky where 95% of the bourbon is produced in five counties. We bring on the current president and son of the founder of Maker's Mark and we'll have two or three other bourbon manufacturers and a lot of small-batch bourbon manufacturers," Sykes said.

Plus, in the mix this year are themed cruises covering Civil War, Elvis, Presidents and Politics and Music for America, which travels between Memphis and Nashville, highlighting country, blues and gospel music.

On the *American Empress* – the largest riverboat in the Pacific Northwest – the company is offering wine-themed cruises featuring wines from the Willamette Valley with wine growers from Washington and Oregon State presenting on board.

Agents who want to nab a place on one of American Queen Steamboat Company's vessels need to keep an eye out 45 days prior to a sailing.

"If we have available space 45 days prior to a cruise, we open it up to fam trips for agents," Sykes says.

"We need to get them familiar with the product. Our big struggle, because of the checkered history of American river cruising, has been name recognition and awareness."

For agents looking for more information, the company has also recently completely reconfigured its website, with access to marketing materials available via a travel agent portal.





CLIA VIEW

Brett Jardine, commercial director
CLIA Australasia

CRUISE STILL HAS ROOM TO GROW

IN 2016 it is expected that there will be 24 million cruise passengers sourced from around the world, and in the next three years CLIA Members will be launching twenty new vessels. These numbers alone suggest plenty of room for continued growth.

In reading some commentary from the recent Seatrade Global conference in Miami, it is clear that Cruise Line Executives are very upbeat about continued growth, and to achieve some ambitious targets the common theme appears to be innovation.

In the opening leaders panel the moderator pointed out that 1.2 billion people travel each year but last year only 23 million took a cruise holiday. This certainly demonstrates the continued growth potential but how reliant will the cruise industry be on international markets such as Australasia and China.

We know that the Australian market has grown to over one million passengers, China is expected to exceed us in terms of total numbers this year (if they haven't already done so) and other markets such as Germany have also experienced strong growth in recent years.

But where to from here? According to Arnold Donald, president and CEO of Carnival Corporation, the Chinese market on its own could match the rest of the world in a relatively short time frame. Other industry leaders were in agreement that we

may struggle to meet this potential demand given the capability of shipyards limits annual capacity growth to six per cent. This adds to the importance of maintaining older vessels at the highest possible standard which of course is good news for cruise lines. The reality is that whilst a new ship is very appealing to the fastidious

cruiser, older ships deliver a much higher return!

On this basis, it would appear a good mix of new and refurbished ships will be needed and this is exactly what was confirmed by NCLH president and CEO, Frank Del Rio. Del Rio was quoted as saying, "It's a

mistake to think only new ships deliver a high return; our smallest, oldest ship has the highest yields, so we are spending half a billion dollars to upgrade our current fleet, taking a more balanced approach to growth."

Other topics discussed by industry leaders at Seatrade included challenges faced around emissions, fuel, health and of course passenger safety. What was refreshing to hear was an identity of the stature of Richard Fain giving credit to the role of CLIA in bringing together the brands when facing industry related issues.

It is also important to note that further recognition was forthcoming from industry leaders around the value of travel agents from whom the bulk of cruise lines distribution is expected to continue.

‘We may struggle to meet this potential demand given the capability of shipyards...’

COMMUNIQUÉ FROM...

KAREN CHRISTENSEN

General Manager & Director
Sales/Marketing, Australasia

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CRUISE WEEKLY

HEADLINES MARCH & APRIL 2016

24 Mar Norovirus hits *Golden Princess*

29 Mar Viking takes second delivery

29 Mar RCI cans 6 Miami voyages

31 Mar NCL unveils *Joy* features

31 Mar *Pride of America* refurbishment

05 Apr Norwegian integration

05 Apr *Ovation* maiden season extended

05 Apr RCI advertising spend surges

07 Apr MyCruises brand launch

07 Apr Four new ships for MSC

12 Apr Avalon's new pace for 2017

12 Apr *Ovation of the Seas* is delivered

14 Apr ACA and Princess partner

14 Apr Ponant newbuild for Australia

19 Apr RCI pulls *Legend* from Qld

21 Apr CLIA declares Cruise Month

INDUSTRY IN FOCUS



Express Travel Group and Qantas hosted these agents on a famil to San Francisco. The group loved their Qantas flight so much they wore their pajamas on a 14km bike ride over the Golden Gate Bridge.



Jeff Hakim, Travel Partners; John Borghetti from Virgin Australia and Tim Murphy, MD of Media Travel were recently snapped at the Etihad function celebrating their partnership with the Sydney Opera House.

Monique Gomel, vice president of global marketing and communications and Robert Halfpenny, local sales director for Rocky Mountaineer Rail at the Travel Marketing Summit.



Bunnik Tours agents were hosted by Celebrity Cruises onboard *Celebrity Solstice* in Adelaide recently to give them a taste of the ship sold combined with a range of Bunnik Tours in Europe and South America.



Martyn Paterson, Outdoor Travel; Kim Vaughan, Tempo Holidays; Atout France director for Australia Patrick Benahmou and Alisa Felillafe, CIT Holidays were all at Rendez-Vous en France.



This contingent from Finland hosted a showcase in Sydney, and while they were here they also meet with local tour operators and travel agents in Brisbane and Melbourne.



These agents practiced their selfie skills whilst exploring Italy by rail on a recent Infinity Rail famil from Venice down to Rome.



The luxuries of Singapore were on the cards for these Helloworld agents who were hosted by British Airways and Starwood Hotels & Resorts.



This group of consultants experienced the best of Switzerland, skiing and their way around Villars-sur-Ollon on a recent Club Med and Cathay Pacific famil.

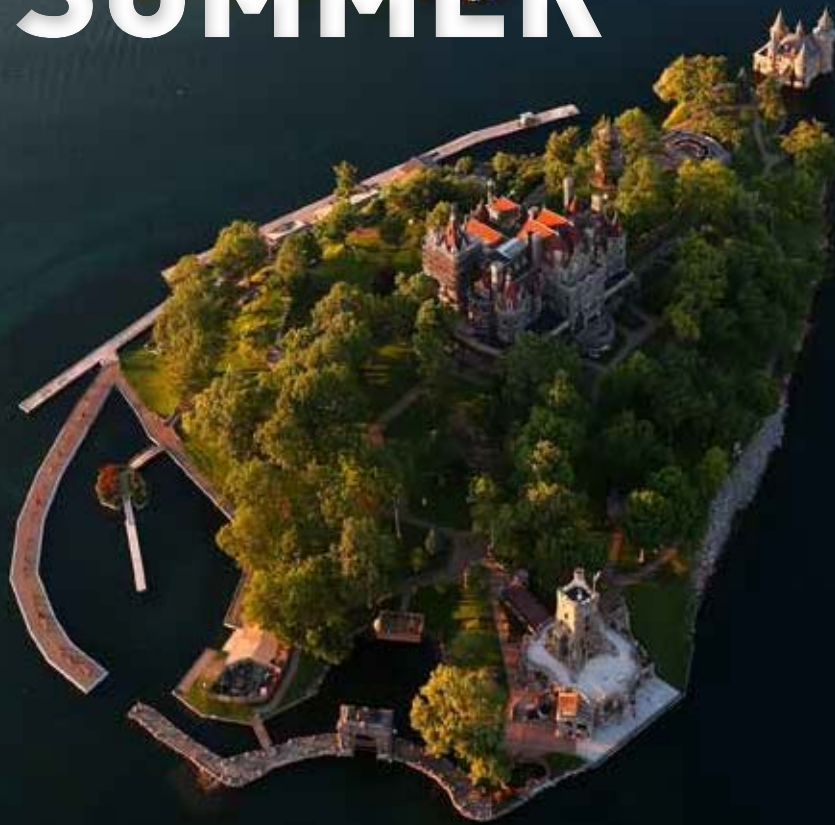


Cook Islands Tourism hosted these agents on their recent mega famil. The consultants participated in cultural experiences and activities as well as soaking up the beauty of the nation.



Cathie Rice Travel staff and clients gathered to celebrate the exciting milestone of 30 years in the industry last month. Cathie Rice opened her store in Bunbury, WA, on 1 April 1986 before being joined by Crandon Keddie ten months later.

THOUSAND ISLANDS OF SUMMER



KERRY VAN DER JAGT enjoys a paddle and a pint in Ontario's Thousand Islands.

IT IS late afternoon when we lower our kayaks into the cobalt-blue water of the St Lawrence River, part of the Thousand Islands and Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve. With the sun on our backs we push off, our bows slicing the mirrored surface, sending shards of glitter in all directions. Gliding into a small rivulet we are soon engulfed by a veil of green, the slosh of water and call of a wren the only sounds.

This is the Thousand Islands, not just a salad dressing, but an actual archipelago of islands found where the five Great Lakes pinch into the St Lawrence River, between the US state of New York and Ontario in Canada. According to legend the salad

dressing was created in the late 19th century when millionaire George Boldt, proprietor of the Waldorf-Astoria hotel, asked his steward Oscar Tschirky to prepare a dish in honour of the islands. "The addition of a pickle was the secret ingredient," says our guide Adam. "The pimples are meant to represent the islands."

From water level the islands don't look so much like pimples, as bunches of broccoli sprouting from bedrock. While the phrase 'Thousand Islands' may have been a good marketing ploy, there are in fact the 1,864 islands, ranging from over 100-square kilometres to islands little more than the size of a bear. "To be counted as an island it must be capable of sustaining one tree," says Adam.

While some of the islands are wild and woolly, with sandy beaches and spots for

“While some of the islands are wild and woolly, with sandy beaches and spots for camping, others are preened within an inch of their lives and topped with luxury homes”

camping, others are preened within an inch of their lives and topped with luxury homes. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the islands were bought by the rich and famous, who built turreted mansions as their summer retreats, but today, the region is a playground for all.

Gananoque is the ideal base, a laid-back, riverside town in the heart of the Thousand Islands, with easy access to the cycle track of the Thousand Islands Parkway, the UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, hiking trails along the Gananoque River and a plethora of great cafes and restaurants. A two-hour drive from



All photos
courtesy of
George Fischer



Ottawa, or three-hours from Toronto, it is one of Canada's best-kept secrets.

The ultimate way to appreciate the scope of the islands is by helicopter, flying low over Boldt Castle, built by George Boldt for his wife Louise, who sadly passed away before it was completed, Singer Castle (yes, that one) and a galaxy of other islands, floating like a platoon of furry green ships adrift in a sea of blue.

For a different perspective there's the 1000 Islands Tower, a 130-metre lookout that stands like a giant barber's pole in the middle of Hill Island, easily reached by driving across the St Lawrence River at the Ivy Lea Bridge. A quick elevator brings visitors to the observation deck with its 360-degree views over both the US and Canadian side. The international border, established after the War of 1812, weaves between the islands, dividing them equally, according to landmass not number. Look for the flag flying outside to tell which is which.

Back on land, Gananoque will keep you busy for days. Start at the Confederation and Sculpture Park, said to be Canada's largest outdoor contemporary art exhibit, displaying works by local artists that reflect the history and environment of the region. From here, walk across the historic King Street Bridge,

where, in 1812, a local militia defended the village during an American raid, before continuing to the Boat Museum and finally, down to the Thousand Island's Playhouse. For six months of the year this riverside theatre puts on live professional performances, with attendees having the option of arriving by boat and tying up on the theatre's doorstep.

For shopping head to King Street, an eclectic strip of antique and flea shops, designer and recycled fashion stores, galleries, wine bars and cafes. Pull up a seat at the Socialist Pig, not a left-wing activist, rather a community-focused enterprise housed in an 18th century axle factory. And joy of joys, the 'Pig' serves 'real' coffee and the best pumpkin pie in town.

While summer (June to September) with its boating, swimming and fishing focus, is the most popular time, autumn (fall) is also

fabulous, when the air is crisp and the leaves burn with russet, red, yellow and gold. Time your trip for Halloween (October 31) for a month long festival of everything pumpkin-related. Don't miss the Pumpkinferno festival at Upper Canada Village.

The ideal end to any day is to finish with a cold beer at the Gananoque Brewing Company, where you'll meet a lineup of local characters - everything from a Naughty Otter lager to the Eager Beaver cerveza, a Black Bear bock to a Hawk pale ale. A thousand Islands - a thousand choices.

For more information check out

■ www.ontariotravel.net

■ www.keepexploring.ca

*The writer was a guest of Destination
Canada and Ontario Tourism.*



AGENT REMINDER: CANADIAN ETA LIVE

THE Canadian Government's new mandatory entry requirement known as Electronic Travel Authorisation (eTA) has officially come into effect.

This means that visa-exempt foreign nationals who fly to or transit through Canada are expected to obtain clearance, with applications to be completed online at cic.gc.ca for CA\$7.00.

eTA's are valid for a period of five years or until the passport expires (whichever comes first), with the clearance only required for

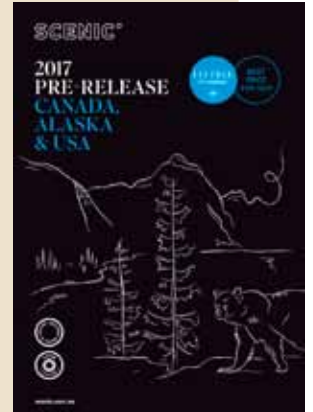
air travel, as those crossing land borders or arriving by cruise ship are exempt.

Clearance is typically granted within moments online and once cleared, travellers will be free to make unlimited trips to the North American destination within the validity period.

The Canadian Government's website highlights a leniency period during the new transition, stating "border services officers can let travellers arriving without an eTA into the country, as long as they meet the other requirements to enter Canada".

Scenic's 2017 pre-release

THE best prices for Scenic's 2017 Canada, Alaska and USA trips are now on display in the new pre-release brochure. Trips range from 18- to 35-days in length, with highlights including Sulphur Mountain, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Maligne Canyon and the aqua blue waters around Whistler.



Highlights include the 18-day Canadian Rockies & Alaskan Cruise, which travels by train, coach and cruise through Canada and Alaska, hitting all the must see attractions of a visit. Head to www.scenic.com.au/request-a-brochure

Q&A

travelBulletin recently caught up with Holidays on Location manager John De Steiger to get his insight on selling the spectacular regions of Canada and Alaska.



Is there much interest among Australians for travel to Canada and Alaska?

Interest in travel to Canada and Alaska remains strong and continues to show growth. Canada has always had an affinity with Australia, as a vast, rugged and scenic country. More than 200,000 Australians visit Canada each year. Alaska has an intrigue due to its history, remoteness and beauty. Canada is the fastest growing destination for Holidays on Location.

Which destinations are most popular?

The west of Canada has traditionally been most popular with Australians, particularly due to its accessibility – so Vancouver, Victoria and the Rockies. In the case of Alaska, its southern coast is convenient for cruising from Vancouver, where in a little as a week, travellers can take a return cruise through the Inside Passage and as far north as Glacier Bay. However second time travellers are tending to look

eastwards and in many cases taking the trans continental VIA Rail journey across to Toronto and other points on the eastern side of the country or flying to Toronto and combining a holiday in Eastern Canada with North East USA.

What should an agent consider when selling Canada and Alaska. Are there any challenges for selling Canada and Alaska?

Because of the northern location of these destinations, agents should be sure that any travel dates are planned carefully so that travel enjoyment is not marred by extreme weather conditions.

What are the must see attractions in Canada and Alaska?

A tough question for a vast country and State! If pushed I would go for Banff National Park, Stanley Park, Northern Lights, bear viewing, Niagara Falls, CN Tower in Toronto. For Alaska – Denali

National Park, Inside Passage cruise, bear viewing. I believe an emphasis on the wildlife is essential for anyone wanting a genuine Canadian experience, and even though sightings can never be guaranteed, the joy of seeing creatures in the wild, particularly bears, can make the trip.

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

The packaged options have undoubtedly led the way for many years, but the more independent travel is growing in popularity, particularly among second or third time travellers. Brewsters Travel Canada offers travel similar to an escorted tour but there is no tour escort and clients have the ability to fully customise their itinerary based on their specific travel interests and budget.



AIR Canada inducts a second trans-Pacific route to Australia next month, launching flights to Brisbane using Boeing 787 Dreamliners configured with Business, Premium Economy & Economy class cabins.

The Queensland service was announced close to 12 months ago and is in line with Air Canada's 'easy as you go' approach to network expansion, says general manager for Australia & New Zealand, Paul McLean.

McLean told *travelBulletin* that Brisbane is a "completely different market" to that of its only other Australasian gateway, Sydney, a route the Canadian airline has operated, also

from Vancouver, since 2007.

"With Brisbane, we are starting to branch out with more of a sixth freedom strategy, which is why you see the same aircraft, the 787, going onto Newark through Vancouver."

Air Canada's Brisbane-New York route - via YVR - is approximately 15mins quicker than that of Qantas' service to the bustling John F Kennedy Airport through Los Angeles and faster again than flying via QF's US Mid-west hub of Dallas/Fort Worth, McLean says.

"There is a mentality in Australia that when you talk about flying to New York, people assume it's via LA," he said.

"We will have a premium service through Vancouver, avoiding Los Angeles and the US Customs there," he says of the BNE route.

McLean says Air Canada has soft pedalled for a while on the Brisbane service "because we are so focused with our tourism partners and our corporate strategy of building bilateral trade and bilateral tourism.

"But we've realised the importance of having a daily [service] and accessing our entire network beyond just Vancouver."

McLean said the industry, especially those in Queensland, have embraced the new service. Outbound passenger loads are looking "pretty good", however he admitted he'd be happier if the mix of volume would be heavier towards the front of the plane.

Competing against incumbent on Brisbane to New York route, Qantas, is a "challenge".

"We'd love to see more of the SME, high-end leisure and business traffic.

"We understand the loyalty dynamic from the country here and they have the Qantas Frequent Flyer program, but I think when you do the math and compare the experience together, we're a premium carrier connecting through a premium airport. Air Canada is just a different way to go. A different alternative."

AC begin thrice weekly flights to Brisbane on 03 June, moving to daily on 19 June.

HOT PRODUCT

Take advantage of **EVERGREEN'S** Last Seats Sale to nab a bargain for your clients. Buy one return airfare and get one return air fare free, including taxes when an 18-day or more holiday to North America is booked and the deposit paid. Tours this deal is available on includes the 22-day Spectacular Rockies Alaska Inside Passage Cruise, from \$10,895. Travel from Vancouver on the Rocky Mountaineer to Banff and then make your way to Seattle exploring Lake Louise, Jasper and Whistler on the way before boarding a seven night Alaska cruise on the *ms Westerdam*.

■ www.evergreentours.com.au

Have the adventure of a lifetime with **WORLD JOURNEYS'** Discoverers Glacier Country small ship adventure cruise. Priced from US\$2,995 for eight days, the trip cruises around Glacier Bay National Park with a ranger and offers the chance to weave through the icebergs on an inflatable and hike and kayak the bay. There are many chances to glimpse wildlife including humpbacks in the Icy Strait, possible bear and sea otter sightings near Baranof Island and the price includes all on board meals, activities from the boat including kayaking and transfers. Book by 20 May and save USD\$300 per couple (\$150 pp) on an Alaska adventure cruise from August 19 -September 18, 2016.

■ www.worldjourneys.com.au

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4 MUST SEE NATURAL WONDERS

Kenai Fjords National Park

Located in Alaska and a meeting place for oceans, ice and land, the national park is like stepping back in time to the ice age. Get on board one of the cruises available through the national park to take in dramatic glaciers, fjords and the abundant wildlife. Guides will help you spot harbor seals, sea otters and even whales.



Dinosaur Provincial Park

This Alberta UNESCO World Heritage Site is known as one of the world's biggest dinosaur graveyards and is popular for its striking badlands topography. Around 40 species of dinosaurs once roamed the area and their bones are now fossilised throughout the landscape. If you're a keen photographer we suggest taking a sunset tour.



Lake Louise

This turquoise lake set to a backdrop of rugged mountains is an icon of Banff National Park. After soaking in the incredible scenery take a hike to one of the alpine tea houses. These historic cabins provide the perfect way to refuel and relax while hiking. For more awe-inspiring views take the year-round gondola at Lake Louise Ski Area, there's an open chair for summer and an enclosed option for winter.



Northern Lights

This captivating natural light display is created by electrically charged particles colliding with gases in the Earth's atmosphere which cause a glowing effect. Seeing these vibrant colours illuminate the night sky is a truly mesmerising experience. Several locations across Canada and Alaska provide prime viewing spots for the aurora with a selection of guided tours available.



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ONE OF A KIWI KIND

Skiing is a much more accessible sport for all than it once was, providing fun for all ages and abilities. But that also means sharing the snow with many more people. RACHAEL OAKES-ASHE gets a taste in New Zealand of what its like to really ski untouched powder (and come home to the most luxurious accommodation to soothe those aching legs).



THE Wallis family are a big deal in the South Island of New Zealand. The patriarch, Sir Tim Wallis, founded the venison and helicopter industry in New Zealand and his four sons now take the reins at the family business, each with a different portfolio to manage.

Matt Wallis is at the helm for the tourism avenue and grew up on Minaret Station, a 50,000 acre working high country sheep, deer and cattle station deep in the peaks of the Southern Alps a short helicopter ride from Wanaka.

Come winter 2016 Minaret Station together with Alpine Helicopters and Southern Lakes Heli Ski will be launching the country's first fly in fly out luxury heli ski lodge for private helicopter inspired by the lodges of Canada where heli skiing began.

Think of Minaret as personal access to real New Zealand with private guides that have lived on the surrounding land since birth.

‘This is small group helicopter skiing on private land with terrain for every level of skier’

There's not much of New Zealand and Australia that I haven't skied in my career so I was thrilled last season to be invited to hit up Minaret Station multi-day heli ski lodge near Wanaka, launching this season.

Why? Because there's nothing else like this in Australasia and if you can find the time and the money then you'll get some serious boasting rights, bucket list kudos and social media envy when you check in here.

The concept is simple. A helicopter flies guests from Wanaka airport across the lake and on to Minaret Station deep in the Southern Alps. You bed down in one of four luxury stand alone chalets with private deck and hot tubs and all connected by risen walkways to the main lodge.

These are not ordinary chalets either, each comes with a stunning view down the valley, complimentary mini bar, Nespresso machine, Geneva iPod surround sound, unlimited wifi access, mammoth beds to lose yourself in, a dressing room and ensuite.

Guests are looked after by a lodge manager and the feel is relaxed slipper chic with open fires in the main lodge, a library and wine cellar and a chef designed menu.

But what of the skiing? This is surely the



www.minaretstation.com

best part. Small group helicopter skiing on private land with terrain for every level of skier.

We were fortunate enough to have Matt Wallis along for our helicopter ride and managed to get three heli ski runs in before breakfast, flying high to a ridge line as the sun rose on the other side.

There is nothing like standing on a mountain peak surrounded by hundreds of thousands of acres of more mountain peaks and not another soul around apart from your immediate posse. The silence and freedom experienced once the helicopter takes off and leaves you and your skis and your guide and pristine untouched snow is overwhelming.

Up to five skiers can fit in the chopper and the chalets can sleep up to eight, with two to a chalet. Should all eight wish to heli ski then it is a case of two guides and one helicopter on a circuit.

It is all terribly civilized and remote in a world away from daily life. But it doesn't come cheap.

A single day without sleepover is NZ\$11,150 for five skiers or boarders and includes private helicopter charter from Wanaka or Queenstown, unlimited heli skiing,

‘There is nothing like standing on a mountain peak surrounded by hundreds of thousands of acres of more mountain peaks and not another soul around apart from your immediate posse’

certified guides, three course gourmet lunch at Minaret Station. That works out to be around NZ\$2,230 per person.

Multi-day heli skiing while staying at Minaret is offered by Southern Lakes Heli Ski (heliskinz.com). The price? It depends on how many days and how many people so they suggest you 'enquire within.'

If you do go and have a spare seat, well, you know where to find me.

■ For more information visit www.minaretstation.com

ACCESS MULTIPLE RESORTS WITH ONE PASS

HITTING the powdery slopes in Australia and New Zealand has never been easier, with the introduction of a series of multi-resort passes, giving winter sports fans instant access to some of the world's best ski destinations.

MOUNTAIN COLLECTIVE PASS

NEW to the Mountain Collective this year is the inclusion of New Zealand resorts: Ski Queenstown, Coronet Peak and the Remarkables for the 2016-17 season.

Situated in the adventure capital of the world, Queenstown, and offering panoramic views at every turn, this bucket-list destination challenges both the beginner skier and the advanced.

The purchase of this multi-resort pass will also qualify ski-fans for two-days at each of its other partner resorts which include AltaSnowbird, Aspen Snowmass, Jackson Hole, Mammoth, Ski Banff/Lake Louise/Sunshine, Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows, Stowe, Sun Valley, Taos, Thredbo and Whistler Blackcomb.

A limited time online sale for the 2016-17 season is already underway, with prices for adults starting at US\$389 (while stocks last). The package grants access to special Mountain Collective lodging deals and 50% off additional days at Mountain Collective Destinations (for single day lift tickets).

VAIL + PERISHER EPIC PASS

THE recent acquisition of Perisher by Vail Resorts has enabled Perisher's Freedom Pass owners to access nine extra ski resorts in the US, which include Breckenridge, Keystone, Park City, Heavenly, Northstar, Kirkwood, Vail and Beaver Creek.

For the 2016/17 ski season, those with a Vail Epic Pass will be also be able to visit Australia's Perisher Ski Resort, situated in the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales.

Perisher is split into four resort areas and offers over 3,000 acres of skiable terrain, all of which interlink: Perisher Valley, Blue Cow, Guthega and Smiggin Holes.

As the largest ski resort in operation in both Australia and the Southern Hemisphere, Perisher offers a wide range of terrains and slopes suitable for a range of skill levels.

Purchase the Epic Australia Pass online at www.perisher.com.au for \$859 and receive unlimited access to Perisher in Australia this winter with no black-out dates.

Kosciuszko Thredbo Pty Ltd

Q&A

Skiing diehards and italktravel owners Julia and Mark van Huisstede sat down with *travelBulletin* recently to give us their hot tips on selling this cool holiday.



Is there much interest among Australians in southern hemisphere ski holidays?

Yes, skiing in the southern hemisphere is still a very popular option, is easy and quick to access the ski fields in Australia & NZ. Aussies love skiing with Aussies and NZ alike. A huge amount of Australians ski, but travelling far overseas (although once there can be reasonably cheap) isn't always convenient with time constraints and airfare costs.

What is the most popular ski destination in the southern hemisphere?

New Zealand is the most popular ski destination in the southern hemisphere for the Australian Market. I would like to see South America increase in interest but for affordability and cultural experience NZ has it all not to mention great choice of mountains, ski levels and its an opportunity to travel overseas. Snow in NZ is generally more consistent too.

What sort of travellers are interested in ski holidays?

Travellers who love to be busy, who are energetic, want to "give something a go" enjoy the social aspect of lodges and meeting new people be it at your accommodation or simply on a chair lift whilst skiing. You need to love the great outdoors and the feeling of freedom as you ski or baord down a mountain, fresh air on your face! but if you're a beginner it also requires a little bit of determination and stamina. For young couples or families skiing provides you with the opportunity to create life long memories and the chance to teach your children a skill for life, its an activity that a family can all enjoy as a whole and enjoy for many years to come.

Which resorts would you recommend for couples, families, and advanced skiers?

Queenstown & Wanaka – they cover all levels of skiing with Wanaka (Treble Cone

& Cardrona) being for most advanced skiers and including Heli Skiing. Queenstown (Coronet Peak and Remarkables) are easily accessed from Queenstown, offer a large choice of skiing styles and activities.

What should an agent consider when selling ski holidays?

What features the destination or resort has to offer when sending clients, in case when the client gets there skiing everyday isn't their thing. Travel insurance is an absolute must in case of injury or illness. What the package inclusions are so that as much is pre paid before they go (lift passes, meals and transports in and out of the ski fields and from the airports as ski fields are isolated). Having the time to sit down with your client and identify their needs, wants, budget is essential.

RESORTS OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Ben Lomond, Tasmania

Beat the crowds and head to Ben Lomond Ski Resort in Tasmania and lodge at the cosy units in the Creek Inn Hotel. About one hour's drive from Launceston the Ben Lomond Ski Resort offers six kilometres of slopes and seven lifts.

As well as ski slopes there are areas for tobogganing, playing in the snow, cross country skiing and snowboarding. Take in the stunning alpine scenery and enjoy the company of friendly locals.



This ski resort isn't for the faint hearted, located on an active volcano in Chile's Lake District. The resort itself is surrounded by dramatic volcanic peaks and lakes. The ski area has 20 slopes and nine ski lifts as well as an international ski school. It is considered a natural wonderland for snowboarders owing to its natural half pipes and gullies. Catch a series of lifts to the top of the smoking crater and then enjoy a long ski down.

Ski Pucon Villarrica, Chile

Mt Hutt, New Zealand

Mt Hutt Ski Resort is an ideal destination for a laid-back ski holiday on New Zealand's South Island. The landscape caters to skiers of all levels with 365 hectares of clear snow available along with one of the highest vertical drops in New Zealand.

Accommodation for all budgets is provided in the quaint country town of Methven about 30 minutes' drive away at the base of alps. Plus, kids under 10 ski free, making it great value for families.



Julian Apse

Heart and Seoul



Locals in traditional hanbok attire at Deoksugung Palace in Seoul
(© Korean National Tourism Organisation)

Korea is often overlooked in favour of China and Japan, but this compact country is crammed with cultural sights and beautiful landscapes, says **BRIAN JOHNSTON**.

SOUTH Korea is a place of awesome natural beauty, where mountains tumble into the sea and dissolve into dazzling offshore islands. It's also a place where history and tradition provide a backdrop to modernity and high technology. Serene temples compete with ear-splitting bars, while glitzy shopping malls sell ancient medicinal remedies and calligraphy brushes. Only one thing is certain in Korea: you'll come away mighty impressed.

Korea's contrasts are best experienced in Seoul. Its splendid fourteenth-century Namdaemun Gate has become a symbol of the nation, surrounded by lanes of hurtling Hyundais. Freeways and flyovers are everywhere, but so too are pagodas and palaces. The jewel in the crown is Gyeongbokgung Palace, where you could get lost among 500 pavilions and other buildings. At the edge of the city, Changdeokgung Palace is another royal residence, still largely furnished and enjoying superb traditional gardens, framed by a backdrop of forested hills.

These are the main sights, but you'll be missing out if you don't explore Seoul's contemporary life. Try Lotte World for the best and worst of present-day culture: amusement rides, skating rinks, a folk museum, cinemas, sporting venues and more shops than you ever thought existed. Later, mingle with university students in the cheap eateries of the Shinchon district, and check out the pulsating nightlife around Gangnam, the upmarket district made infamous by Psy and his catchy song. Before leaving Seoul, a shopping spree beckons. The most colourful



Bulguksa Temple in Gyeongju (© KINTO)



shopping area is Insadong, a street of tiny stores selling calligraphy, antiques, wooden chests and porcelain. There are also plenty of traditional teashops where you can investigate the many varieties of Korean green tea. For more shopping, Apgujeong Rodeo Street offers international brand-name fashions and accessories, and Namdaemun Market has bargain clothes, shoes and sporting goods.

To escape the capital, take to the trains, which are frequent and excellent, though you need to book in advance on weekends or public holidays. You can reach almost every part of the country within four hours, and the trains – as well as Seoul’s subway system – are easy to navigate, with signs and announcements in both English and Korean, and unfailingly helpful staff and passengers.

A first sortie could be the short ride to Suwon, just south of the capital. The city was laid out by King Jeongjo in the eighteenth century and is crowned by a magnificent fortress, now a World Heritage site. Built with cutting-edge technology in its day, Hwaseong is an outstanding example of military architecture, and its massive fortifications run along the hillside and occupy a vast swathe of Suwon town. Inside, there are more than 40 towers and brightly painted pavilions made of stone, brick and wood, linked by scenic walking tracks.

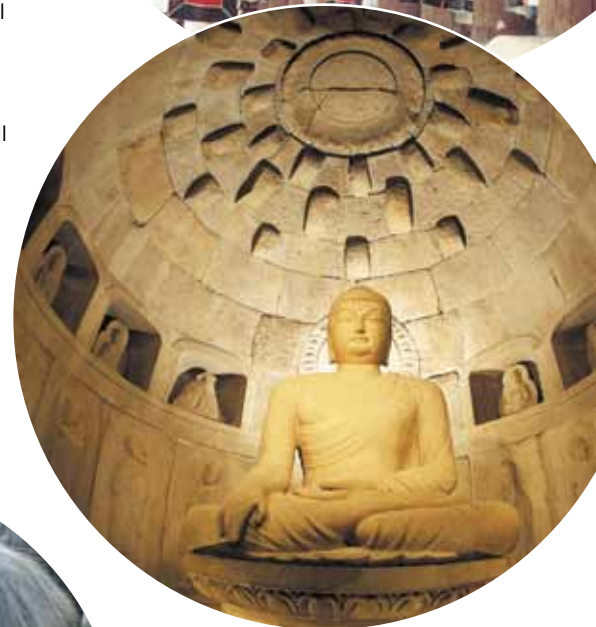
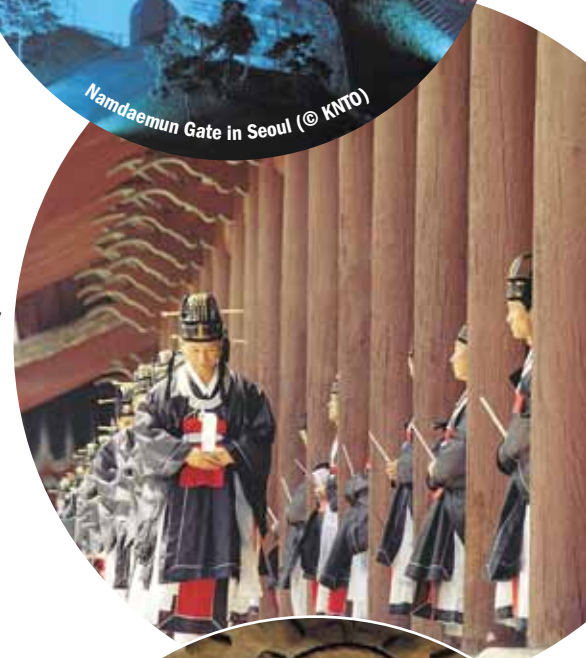
Further south, Gyeongju was the capital of the Silla Dynasty, which flourished between 57 BC and 935 AD. Buddhist monuments, palaces and an astronomical observatory compete with royal burial mounds, whose treasures can be seen in the National Museum nearby. The highlight of Gyeongju, however, is Bulguksa Temple on a hillside out of town. The temple’s Buddha has a smile of serene benevolence, not surprising considering the glorious architecture of the colourful pagodas and the beauty of the surrounding hillsides.

The whole of southeast Korea abounds in cultural relics. Daegu is a centre of ancient Buddhism and Confucianism and has carvings and temples galore, although in true Korean style it’s also the capital of the modern fashion industry. On the coast, Busan is a port city famed for its film festival, offshore islands and sweeping beaches, making it a popular tourism destination for Korean holidaymakers. Downtown Gwangalli Beach

attracts a young crowd to its white sand and hundreds of seafood restaurants, where sashimi is the speciality. Haeundae Beach is a little quieter. Surrounded by cherry trees and pine forest, it ranks as one of the ‘Eight Scenic Spots’ of Korea.

Koreans are great lovers of nature and fanatical about mountain walking. Seoraksan in the northeast of the country is undoubtedly the best national park in Korea; you can hike among spectacular crags and waterfalls one day, and be lying on the beach the next. One of the best ways to appreciate the tranquillity is to opt for a temple stay at one of several Buddhist temples that invite visitors on a temporary retreat.

Perhaps the most favoured destination among Korean holidaymakers (and honeymooners) is Jeju, a balmy semi-tropical island off the southern coast. Rocks, wind and women are said to be the three factors contributing to the island’s beauty. Certainly there are balmy breezes laden with the smell of tangerines, spectacular sea cliffs and waterfalls, and hexagonal rock formations rising out of the waves. And when it comes to rocks, you can always scale Mt Hallasan, Korea’s highest mountain. Actually an extinct volcano, it has a landscape of twisted rock and colourful azaleas, as well as an unexpected lake hidden in its crater – yet another of Korea’s many secret attractions just waiting to be discovered.



Third from top: Royal ritual inside Jongmyo Shrine in Seoul (© Korean National Tourism Organisation)

Above: Inside World Heritage site Seokguram Grotto near Gyeongju (© Korean National Tourism Organisation)

Left: Locals on a rainy day at Bulguksa Temple in Gyeongju (© Brian Johnston)

5 THINGS TO DO IN THE SOUTH

TAKE A GANGNAM TOUR

The Gangnam district made itself known to western countries in 2012 by Psy's Gangnam Style. The district is where the rich and famous gather and Gangnam Subway Station is where the locals meet. For a spot of high end shopping, head to Apgujeong and Cheongdam-dong. The district is also well known for its beauty facilities, offering services from nail art, hairdressers and skin care.



Night in Gangnam, Anton



Myeong-dong Seoul, Doug Sun Beams

VISIT A MEGACHURCH

You've heard of megaships, but have you heard of a megachurch? Yoido Full Gospel Church is a giant Pentecostal church with close to one million members – that's one in every ten people living in Seoul. The church has a 150-member choir and orchestra and seven services on a Sunday, with each capable of holding approximately 26,000 people. There's even a section for foreigners, where headphones provide a translation of the service.



Gyeongbokgung, Jose Carlos Cortizo Perez

GYEONGBOKGUNG PALACE

Built in 1395 and damaged and restored multiple times since, Gyeongbokgung Palace remains the largest of all five Grand Palaces and is arguably the most beautiful. Located in northern Seoul, the palace is spread across 410,000 square meters with over 500 buildings. Highlights include Geunjeongjeon, the Imperial Throne Hall, where the king was formally briefed by his officials and Gyeonghoeru Pavilion, which once appeared on the Korean 10,000 won banknote.

MYEONG-DONG

Myeong-dong is one of the busiest places in Seoul, with a daytime population of between 1.5 and two million people. The district is speckled with large shopping centres, clothing and cosmetic stores and street stalls. By

night, get your fill of street food by chomping down on Korean Grilled Cuttlefish, Steamed Egg Muffin and Tteokbokki (Spicy Rice Cake). Nearby is Namdaemun Market, a market with over 600 years of history.

VISIT A THEMED CAFÉ

Korea takes themed cafés to the next level. Check in to the Air Café for an airplane themed brunch, complete with "economy" seats for parties of two and "business" seats for larger parties. Fortunately, the food is not served in a reheated box. For a taste of the outdoors, pull up a chair at Something Out, a camping-themed coffee shop which also sells camping supplies. Lego fanatics can't miss the Lego-themed Get & Show dessert café and for something a little different, try banana tiramisu served up in a flower pot at Banana Tree.



Get & Show Café, Korea



Yoido full gospel church, Simon Desmarais

UPTICK IN KOREA'S TOURISM

TOURISM in South Korea is picking up again after it copped a blow in 2015 from the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) virus. The outbreak saw almost 200 people infected across South Korea with a death toll of 36.

According to Korea Tourism Organization's (KTO) international visitor arrival statistics, there was a 6.8% year on year decrease in tourist numbers over 2015 which dropped from 14,201,516 in 2014 to 13,231,651 in 2015.

Unofficial figures, which KTO is still confirming are showing a 21% increase in Australian visitors to Korea in March this year when compared to March 2015.

This year also marks the start of Visit Korea Committee's (VKC) '2016-2018 Visit Korea Year' campaign offering benefits for travellers over the next three years in a bid to boost tourism.

The VKC said is aiming to attract 20 million foreign tourists to the country every year through food, hospitality and cultural programs such as K-Food, K-Stay and K-Culture.

"The year 2016-2018 will be a turning point for Korea to become an economy with advanced tourism infrastructure," Visit Korea



Spring of Insadong, Republic of Korea

Committee chairman Park Sam-koo explains.

One of the latest initiatives of the program is a K-Travel bus, a free bus travel package for foreign tourists between Seoul and local provinces.

The 2016-2018 Visit Korea Year committee together with the Korea Tourism Organization will visit Sydney and Auckland for tourism roadshow events on 7 June in Sydney and 9 June in Auckland.



Fly to Korea with Air China

Origin	Destination	Flight	Frequency
SYD/MEL		SYD-PEK:CA174	1/2/4/5/6
	Seoul(SEL)	MEL-PEK:CA166	3/5/7
	Pusan(PUS)	PEK-SEL:CA123/CA125/ CA131/CA135	Daily
	Daegu(TAE)	PEK-PUS:CA129	Daily
	Jeju(CJU)	PEK-TAE:CA145	1/4/5/7
		PEK-CJU:CA711	3/4/6/7

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By Bonnie Tai

MY FIRST “aloha” came in the form of a warm Hawaiian breeze, welcoming me as I stepped off the plane into paradise. It’s early, and my partner and I have just arrived at Honolulu International Airport, after catching Jetstar’s red-eye service from Sydney through to Oahu for a quick 72-hour stop over holiday before journeying onward to Austin, Texas.

We drop our luggage off at the Ewa Hotel, a budget lodging located steps away from the famed Waikiki beach, and find a shaded spot beneath a large palm tree to absorb our new surroundings.

Although it’s still very early at this point, surfers bobbing lazily atop their boards can already be seen floating in the azure lagoon of Waikiki Beach, waiting to catch their first waves of the day.

Removing our shoes, we make our way towards the sea. Crystalline waters gently lap the white sandy shore, and as we dip our toes into the warm tropical waters, we are given a small taste as to why millions of people from all around the globe flock to this slice of island paradise every year.

72 hours in Paradise



Running parallel to Waikiki Beach is Kalakaua Avenue, one of the city’s main strips. Here, we observe a mixture of high-end designer shopfronts amidst casual eateries and souvenir stores. Hawaii is a melting pot of American, Japanese and Hawaiian culture, and the vast choices of dining options on Oahu reflect this sentiment, inspiring an exciting multi-ethnic culinary experience.

With tummies growling and a pretty firm budget to keep in mind, we find ourselves at a no-frills Japanese noodle joint named Ramen Ezogiku. “Irasshaimase!” shouted a chorus of friendly Japanese servers, welcoming us into the establishment. The atmosphere here is relaxed, much like the rest of the island, with multi-generational patrons from mixed cultures gathered around tables, slurping back ramen noodles and loudly chattering away.

What the place lacks in décor, it makes up in a friendly atmosphere and food quality. The pan fried pork dumplings are remarkably fresh, achieving the ideal ‘crunch factor’; whilst the traditional miso broth, hearty and flavoursome. We leave the establishment with full bellies, happy wallets, and a whole new level of appreciation for Japanese soul food.

As evening rolls around, and the sun begins its

descent into the waters, we find ourselves back on Waikiki Beach to try and catch a glimpse of the elusive green flash sunset – an optical phenomenon which occurs on the island, colouring the sky a brilliant shade of green as the last sliver of sunlight falls below the horizon.

Blink and you'll miss it though, because the majestic sight lasts but a few seconds, and we were lucky to see it as many dismiss the phenomena as "just a figment of your imagination". To catch the flash, a pair of polarised sunnies is highly recommended, as staring directly into the sun without can leave you a bit starry eyed after a while.

The next day, we make our way to the Diamond Head track, a historic hike which promises an impressive 360-degree coastal panorama and a chance to experience the island's landmark crater.

Built in 1908 as part of Oahu's coastal defence system, the 1.3 kilometre hike to the summit takes just over an hour, and is suitable for a wide range of age groups. A moderate level of fitness and a pair of sturdy walking shoes is recommended as there are 327 concrete and metal stairs to crush, uneven gravel tracks, and fairly steep inclines to conquer.

We take our time on the hike, exploring eerie old bunkers and discovering a series of secret look-outs which provide us with unimpeded views of dramatic cliffs and aquamarine waters. Catching our first breath at the summit, we're told by friendly locals that we are now standing at an elevation of 761 feet. And if the steep walk up wasn't enough to take my breath away, the views here certainly are.

An endless horizon of blue skies, stretching into infinity rewards us at the peak. Below, calm waters glimmer gently, reflecting brilliant shades of cerulean, turquoise and teal. Perfectly juxtaposed to our right is Waikiki's impressive cityscape, featuring towering skyscrapers dotted elegantly along the seaside – serving as a visual cue of the bustling metropolis which co-exists peacefully alongside the island's laid-back lifestyle.

As we make our descent back down the crater, we share a few nods with passers-by as if to say "keep going. It's hard but it's worth it!", with many exhausted hikers stopping us to ask, "how much longer to the top?". After trading a few words of encouragement, we boost our way back to the bottom, where a food truck serving shaved ice – Hawaii's signature frozen desert – awaited us.

As our final moments in Hawaii drew to a close, and we're but moments away from boarding the flight to our next adventure; I can't help but feel a little home-sick for a place I have only spent 72 hours in. Because in our short time here, we learnt that "aloha" isn't merely a greeting or a word plastered on cheap souvenirs found in your closest ABC store, but a way of life in which you share kindness, wisdom and your authentic self with the community.



HAWAII IS NO “ONCE OFF”

NEARLY half of Hawaii's visitors are lured back to the archipelago at least once within five years of their first visit, Kerri Anderson – Country Manager Australia, Hawaii Tourism Oceania told *travelBulletin*.

“Feedback from our partners both in Australia and in Hawaii is that Australians’ love affair with Hawaii is as strong as ever with strong interest and forward bookings,” Anderson said.

Last year saw a record number of Aussies heading to Hawaii, with a total of 333,998 Australian visitors, a 7.8% jump on 2014.

This year's visitor numbers haven't quite lived up to last year's glory, with a slowdown of growth – which Anderson attributes to the

low AUD – but year-on-year figures so far are still up 0.5%. Oahu continues to be the most popular island with 324,360 Australians visiting in 2015 – up 8.3% on the previous year, followed by Maui, which enticed over 61,000 Australians in 2015.

“Australians particularly like the large number of accommodation options on the island – from high-end five-star resorts, to condos that offer greater flexibility for family groups and longer-staying travellers,” Anderson said.

“Maui also has a huge variety of activities from shopping to relaxing, water sports and adventure and nature experiences.”

Despite shopping continuing to be the

most popular activity for Australians in Hawaii, Anderson says Hawaii is seen as much more than a “fly, flop and shop” destination.

According to Roy Morgan research undertaken by the Hawaii Tourism Authority in 2015, Australian visitors undertook a wider range of activities, particularly outdoors activities, than general long trip travellers.

“Hawaii isn't a “single proposition” destination – each island is very different,” Anderson explained.

“This, combined with Hawaii's culture, people, incredible nature and of course, the famous Aloha Spirit, gives Australians a compelling reason to visit – and once they go, they love it.”



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Fresh feel for Pride

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line's 80,439 tonne *Pride of America* is "essentially a new ship" after undergoing an extensive upgrade during a recent three-and a-half-week dry dock.

Most of this ship's restaurants, bars and lounges were redecorated with contemporary décor, furniture, lighting and flooring, and the ship's pool deck underwent a total refurbishment.

A new wedding chapel was added for those wanting to say 'I do' on board while the suites and staterooms received new bedding, televisions, and furniture.

Pride of America is the only ship that sails year-round from Honolulu on seven-night intra-Hawaii cruises. Her renovations form part of The Norwegian Edge program, a \$400 million investment to further enhance the Norwegian brand.

"ALOHA" TO SURFJACK

THE sprawling beach-side haven of Waikiki has welcomed its latest property, the Surfjack Hotel & Swim Club.

The four-star property features vintage-inspired bungalows, one-, two- and three bedroom suites, and is described as a place where "guests can be immersed in the spirit of 60's beach culture and modern aloha".

The hotel's on-site restaurant, Mahina & Sun's, is produced by celebrated chef Ed Kenney. Its offerings include home-grown cooking with progressive flavours made with organic ingredients sourced from local partners.

A host of live poolside entertainment will

also be on offer at the Swim Club. Private cabanas are also available for hire, with guests given complimentary use of Swim Club totes and beach towels.

Those ready to explore Waikiki can access Surfjack's off-the-track experiences to which consist of paddling out to sea with a local surf historian, foraging for edibles with a local botanist, or hiking through Oahu's lush landscape.

The SurfJack is now accepting reservations, with room rates beginning at US\$229 per night excluding taxes and fees.

■ To book visit www.surfjack.com

MAKENA BEACH & GOLF RESORT CLOSURE

ATC Makena Holdings, owners of Makena Beach & Golf Resort on Maui's owners have announced the 1,800 acre, 310-room resort will close on 1 June.

The resort will be transformed into the Makena Golf & Beach Club, a private beachfront community and private club managed by Discovery Land Co.

The US\$240m project is expected to

take 30 months to complete and will see 50 luxury oceanfront condominium residences built, along with an array of hillside villas, beach cottages, oceanfront condominium residences and custom home sites with ocean panoramic views.

Management said it is working with neighbouring hotels and travel partners to relocate bookings from 1 July and beyond.

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Hawaiian hospitality



Hawaiian inspired meals



Entertainment, blanket & pillow



HAWAIIAN AIRLINES



ADRENALINE-INDUCING ADVENTURES

Hawaii is traditionally seen as a flop and drop destination but there's plenty of activities to keep the most venturesome traveller happy, as **BONNIE TAI** writes.

1 WRECK DIVING IN OAHU

OAHU is home to many wrecks, at least 10 of which are entirely accessible. Perhaps the most famous wreck of them all is the sunken Corsair F4U aircraft, located 15 minutes from the Koko marine. The WWII aircraft first found its way to the bottom of the sea during a routine mission from Pearl Harbour in 1946.

Today, seasoned divers take pilgrimages to the wreckage, where the plane still lies surprisingly intact. As the site is located in particularly rough waters, the Corsair dive is strictly for advanced divers. But for those who dare make the descent, a variety of exotic marine life awaits. Hawaiian stingrays, Galapagos sharks, Moray eels as well as humpback whales are known to frequent the zone.



Corsair Fighter Plane, Matt Kiefer



2 KILAUEA VOLCANO TOUR, BIG ISLAND

DOWN a quick morning coffee, before embarking on a sunrise boat tour to witness Kilauea Volcano spew molten hot rivers of lava into the Pacific.

Located within Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Kilauea Volcano has continued to erupt since 1983 – making it the world's most active volcano.

Kilauea is frequently mentioned in Hawaiian mythology, being the home to Pele, the creator of the Hawaiian Islands and goddess of fire and lightning.

Daily boat departures are available, with attendees advised to check weather and lava flow conditions online, as lava shows up best before sunrise.

3 RAFTING THE MOLOKINI COAST, MAUI

EXPLORE a rarely seen part of Maui on a rafting adventure down the Kanaio Coast, before cruising through La Parouse Bay where spinner dolphins and green sea turtles are known to frolic. Just 20 minutes away by raft is Molokini a world-famous snorkel spot teeming with marine life such as: butterfly fish, wrasses, black and pink-tailed sturgeons, all swimming amidst brightly coloured coral. Molokini is one of only three volcanic calderas in the world, formed approximately 150,000 years ago. The area is a hot-spot for divers and snorkelers, who flock to the majestic attraction from all around the world.



Molokini Caldera, HTO



Ziplining, Josh Friedman

4 ZIPLINING THE TREETOPS, KAUAI

SOAR through luscious greenery, gliding above streams, valleys and rainforests on a zipline tour of Kauai. Zipline adventures are in abundance in Kauai, and with its infinite panoramic mountain views and picturesque waterfalls, it's not hard to understand why this slice of paradise is nicknamed the Garden Isle.

Suitable for a range of ages and fitness levels, speeds of up to 80 kilometres per hour can be achieved when ziplining, with adventurers suspended some 15 metres off the ground. As death-defying as it sounds, ziplining is an extremely safe way to explore Kauai.



KAUAI is an island of immense natural beauty. Hawai'i's Island of Discovery is green, tropical and wild with rainforest-covered cliffs and cascading waterfalls.

KAUAI



O'AHU is home to the State's capital city Honolulu and world-famous Waikiki Beach. Also known as the Heart of Hawai'i, O'ahu offers visitors town and country experiences.

O'AHU

MOLOKAI

LANAI

MAUI



MAUI has quite a small population, making it a great place to escape the crowds. Year after year Maui, the Valley Isle, is voted the best island in the world by travellers and magazines alike.

HAWAI'I ISLAND





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The
HAWAIIAN
ISLANDS



Al Jahill Fort



Sheikh Zayed Mosque



Emirates Palace

Abu Dhabi ~ exotic and unexpected

By Ben Alcock

HAVE had some wonderful, unexpected travel experiences in Abu Dhabi. From the other-worldly atmosphere of the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, to the generosity of local families picnicking near the oasis city of Al Ain, to driving a lap of the Formula 1 race track at Yas Marina Circuit, and enjoying a coffee flecked with real gold, Abu Dhabi never fails to surprise.

And yet, even though dozens of direct flights connect Australia to Abu Dhabi every week, I still sense some confusion. Where is it? What is it? Is it part of Dubai? What's it like? Should I just go to Dubai instead? What's the deal?

In an airport check-in queue recently, I overheard the following conversation between two young Australians struggling with their departure cards:

She: *Where are we getting off this flight again?*

He: *Abu Dhabi.*

She: *That's in Dubai, right?*

He: *No. Write 'Saudi Arabia'.*

I probably should have corrected them at the time, but it seemed more fun to just see how that would play out at the immigration counter a short while later. So, here's a bit of a low-down on a destination on the rise.

LESSON 1: THE CAPITAL

Larger and wealthier than Dubai, and with oil reserves likely to last for generations, Abu Dhabi is Dubai's big sister. About the same size as Tasmania, Abu Dhabi is the largest of the seven emirates that comprise the United Arab Emirates (UAE), making up more than 85% of the country's total land mass. Abu

Dhabi is the capital of the UAE and it accounts for about two-thirds of the country's economy.

LESSON 2: NO SHRINKING VIOLET

Dubai may have demanded the world's tourism attention with its astonishing, gleaming, look-at-me reinvention of the last decade or so, but Abu Dhabi is no shrinking violet. Sure, this is a place developing assets with a real sense of substance, but it is also home to a hotel with an ATM that dispenses gold bars and sprinkles gold on its petit-fours, and the world's largest indoor theme park.

LESSON 3: GET CURIOUS

With a culture that has developed over millennia, there's plenty to be curious about. A terrific place to start is the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque which is open to visitors and offers guided walk-in tours. The mosque is monumental and has a capacity for an incredible 40,000 worshippers. It is a wonderful, welcoming place of worship and discovery, arguably the country's most important contemporary architectural treasure. Join a walk-in tour and ask lots of questions, it's a fascinating window into a people and a culture.

Another window opens at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital – without doubt, one of the most intriguing cultural attractions on the planet. The ancient practise of falconry remains an important expression of social status here, and the hospital receives a daily parade of feathered patients who pop



Sir Bani Yas



Sir Bani Yas

in for a check-up, a beak and nail file, an x-ray, or maybe some colour-coordinated flight feathers. Utterly remarkable.

LESSON 4: GET TO KNOW THE ISLANDS

Abu Dhabi is home to some 200 islands that sparkle along 700 kilometres of coastline. These islands play an important role in the Abu Dhabi story. Take these ones, for example:

Yas Island

Yas is a dedicated entertainment destination 30 minutes from the city centre. It is home to the absolutely world-class Yas Marina Circuit – home of the Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix – which offers a number of behind-the-wheel experiences, and Ferrari World - the world's largest indoor theme park. Ferrari World rises from the landscape like a gigantic red crustacean and houses a number of Ferrari-themed attractions including Formula Rossa - the world's fastest roller coaster which reaches 250km/h in under 5 seconds.

The island is also home to Yas Waterworld with its '238-metre long, world's first, and largest hydromagnetic-powered, six-person tornado waterslide'. On Yas Island's western shore lies Yas Links Abu Dhabi for the golfers. If you prefer malls to balls, then you'll also find Abu Dhabi's largest shopping centre here on Yas.

Saadiyat Island

Saadiyat is being developed as a cultural precinct just seven minutes from downtown Abu Dhabi city. The island is undergoing a remarkable transformation to house an unprecedented collection of galleries and museums designed by the world's greatest architects including Jean Nouvel whose Louvre Abu Dhabi is taking shape by the sea right now. In time, it will be joined by the Frank Gehry designed Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, and the Zayed National Museum by Foster + Partners.

Sir Bani Yas Island

Sir Bani Yas sits 170km southwest of Abu Dhabi, nine kilometres offshore and is one of

eight that make up the Desert Islands of Al Gharbia. It is home to three luxury Anantara resorts and more than 10,000 free roaming animals including Arabian Oryx, gazelles and giraffes, hyenas and cheetahs at the Arabian Wildlife Park. The island is also home to the only known Christian monastery discovered in the UAE. Believed to have been built around 600 AD, and abandoned in 750 AD, it wasn't discovered until 1992.

LESSON 5: SMILE

Arabian hospitality is legendary, a legacy of a time when travellers crossing the desert were welcomed into strangers' homes on their journeys. Encounter a family picnic or gathering in contemporary Abu Dhabi and all it takes is a smile to feel the welcome. Sit down. Join us. Where are you from? You must have some of this. This will very likely be something slow-cooked, fragrant and delicious.

LESSON 6: EVERY POSSIBLE LUXURY

Most cities have an iconic hotel, and Abu Dhabi's is Emirates Palace. This huge property – reportedly the most expensive hotel complex ever built – is spread across 100 hectares, and has a main building that stretches over a kilometre from wing to wing. Its central dome rises more than 70 metres, and crystals, mother-of-pearl and gold dominate the hotel's interior. Perhaps not surprisingly, gold also features on menus here, too. The hotel's famous Palace Cappuccino is sprinkled with 24 carat gold flakes, and the Emirates Palace Camel Burger is a "sumptuous camel mince patty infused with local spices and offset by a touch of truffle mayonnaise on a gold-dusted bun".

Abu Dhabi is like that. One minute you're at a Falcon Hospital face-to-face with a powerful bird gripping your arm through a heavy leather glove as if to make the point, "You think you're holding me, do you?" And the next you're picking flecks of gold out of your teeth. Both are, for me, absolutely Abu Dhabi experiences.



Sir Bani Yas



Shopping in Abu Dhabi



Wadi Adentures



Yas Hotel, all images courtesy of Abu Dhabi Tourism

ABU DHABI STAYING CONNECTED

ABU Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi) has launched a new and improved version of its Visit Abu Dhabi mobile app giving users instant access to all that's new in the emirate via their smartphones.

The app helps tourists be the first to know about what Abu Dhabi has to offer – from attractions and experiences to culture and heritage. An interactive map includes all points of interest including hotels, restaurants, spas and events and is programmed with information on getting to and around the Emirate. It features integrated TripAdvisor reviews for all locations, hotels and restaurants as well as booking options for taxis, hotels, flights and car rental.

Acting executive director of marketing and communications at TCA Abu Dhabi Mouza Al Shamsi says the organisation listened carefully to all the feedback on the app.

“It has been completely redesigned from top to bottom following the latest user experience trends to make the whole experience even more immersive and easy to use,” Al Shamsi explains.

“All of the key features that you're familiar with from our previous versions are still present but now they're even faster, smarter and bursting with functionality.”

Visit Abu Dhabi is free and is available from the app stores for iPhone, Android and Windows phones.



Abu Dhabi's new lounge

ETIHAD Airways has this month opened a new First Class Lounge at Terminal three of Abu Dhabi International Airport.

Exclusive to First Class guests, Etihad Guest Platinum and Etihad Airways Partners Platinum guests, and those staying in The Residence, the lounge is tipped to be “the jewel in the crown” of the airline's global lounge portfolio.

Peter Baumgartner, Etihad Airways Chief Commercial Officer, said the lounge will be “a showcase of intelligent design and innovation, and the world's best premium airport experience”.

The space will combine modern Arabian design elements with luxury and Etihad's hospitality.

“We are confident that it will deliver a product and service which is as highly acclaimed as it is in flight and look forward to unveiling its many unique features with great pride.”

AGENT KNOW HOW

Abu Dhabi Tourism lets us in on all the insider knowledge on how to sell this unique place.

How can agents improve their product knowledge of Abu Dhabi?

Attend the Abu Dhabi Tourism & Etihad Airways Roadshow, come and say hi at various expos we attend, we can then update you on developments in AUH. Get in touch, send Jamie (our Travel Trade Executive for AU & NZ) an email or give her a call to gain advice for your clients – her email is jbunn@tcaabudhabi.ae. Keep an eye open for our learning portal for the trade which will be released this year and visit our website, it is a great resource for all things Abu Dhabi: www.visitabudhabi.ae

What kind of training is available for Australian agents wanting to sell Abu Dhabi, and how can they sign up?

Later this year we will be launching a training portal tailored to the Australian market, we will advertise and promote to the trade as soon as this is available.

Any recommendations for first time travellers?

Definitely a must see is the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, the Falcon Hospital and a trip to the Liwa Desert. For the adventure seekers, Ferrari World, Yas Waterworld, sand skiing and dune safaris are must do's. For a spot of luxury, visit Emirates Palace where you can sip on a cappuccino sprinkled with gold flakes or withdraw gold bars from the ATM located in the lobby.

What makes Abu Dhabi a unique destination?

Abu Dhabi is a truly surprising destination, from its captivating culture and affordable luxury, to its beautiful beaches and exhilarating adventure. With experiences such as a visit to the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, or High Tea at the Emirates Palace with gold flakes dusted on your cappuccino, or riding the world's fastest rollercoaster at Ferrari World, the world's largest indoor theme park, it's no wonder Abu Dhabi is fast becoming a must visit destination. And with the Louvre Abu Dhabi opening at the end of the year and the Guggenheim Museum soon after, it's only going to get better.

And finally, how can agents join a family to Abu Dhabi?

Our families are generally based on Abu Dhabi and Etihad Airways sales, so if you are a strong supporter of each brands this will get you a couple steps closer.



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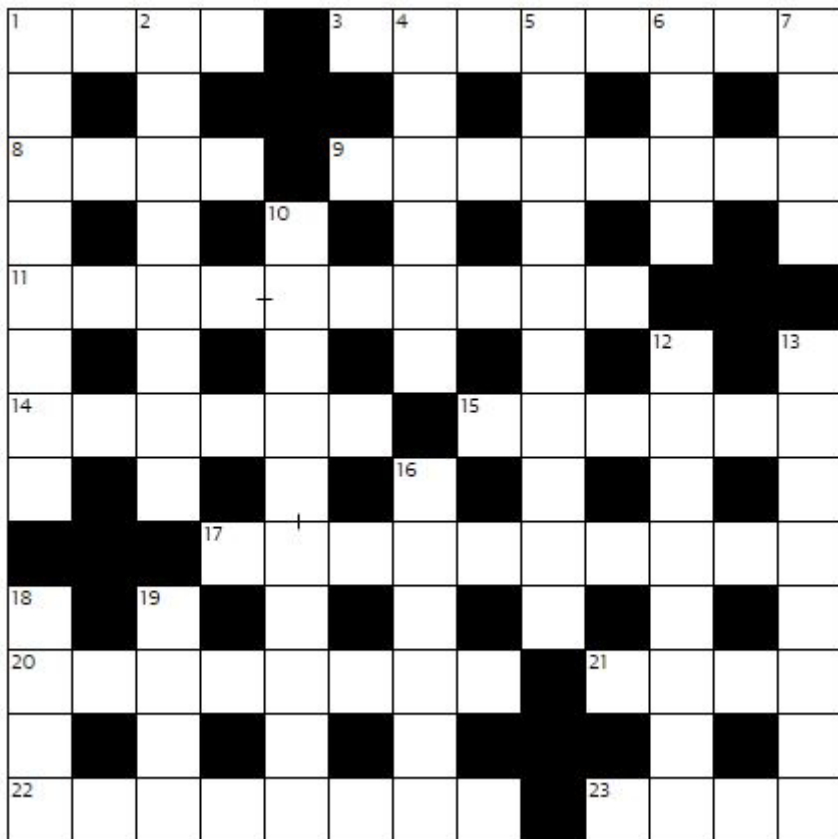


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Flying Reimagined

Terms and conditions apply. The fare level is based on a return Business Class fare from Melbourne for bookings from 1 May – 31 May 2016, and travel from 1 May – 31 December 2016. The fare is inclusive of taxes and surcharges, excludes service fees, and is correct at time of publishing. Flight and day restrictions apply. For detailed terms and conditions, visit etihad.com

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1. Broken - sculpture (4)
- 3. When light first appears (8)
- 8. Double-reeded woodwind (4)
- 9. Accommodation (8)
- 11. Wealthy (4-6)
- 14. Hurried (6)
- 15. View (6)
- 17. Scheming to do wrong (2,2,2,4)
- 20. Raised road across water (8)
- 21. Grain store (4)
- 22. Spoke indistinctly (8)
- 23. Responsibility (4)

DOWN

- 1. One devoted to reading (8)
- 2. Above reproach - perfectly clean (8)
- 4. Entertained (6)
- 5. Close four-part harmony for male voices (10)
- 6. Pitcher (4)
- 7. Touch lightly - a sign of affection (4)
- 10. Jacket, trousers and waistcoat (5-5,4)
- 12. Dedication (8)
- 13. Thoughtful - hard working (8)
- 16. Turn (6)
- 18. People regarded as worthless, especially criminals (4)
- 19. See 10 (4)

Funnies Flashback

We took a trip down memory lane and uncovered these gems from that day in the *Travel Daily Window Seat* archives:

10th October 2003

A Japanese woman of 70 has been charged with fraud after staying at a traditional hotel south of Tokyo for more than a year without paying. She won management's trust by paying for the first two months of a planned lengthy stay. But she hasn't paid a thing since 23 Sep last year, stalling action by saying friends would soon arrive with money. Police said the hotel didn't want to treat an elderly woman harshly, but finally lost patience.

4th April 2001

THERE'S something to be said for wearing fancy dress to work. A US industrial arbitrator ruled yesterday that Walt Disney World employees who parade around the park as Mickey Mouse, Goofy and so on should be paid for the time it takes to dress and undress. It will mean a back pay windfall of several million dollars overall, based on a similar settlement at Disneyland last year.

7th October 2003

DON'T listen to restaurant music or you could end up spending more than you intended. A UK survey has found that diners are likely to spend more (more courses, pricier wines etc) when popular classical music is played in a restaurant than when pop music is played, or when there's no music at all.

Where in the World?

THE world is full of some incredible religious buildings. All you have to do is wander around any European city and you'll be awed by these incredible marvels of architecture (even more astounding when you consider that many were built many hundreds of years ago). But this church is a little bit different from your standard cathedral. If you have any idea where this church is located, send your answer to comps@travelbulletin.com.au and go in the draw to WIN a double pass to the movies.





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Gourmet Traveller Journeys by A&K

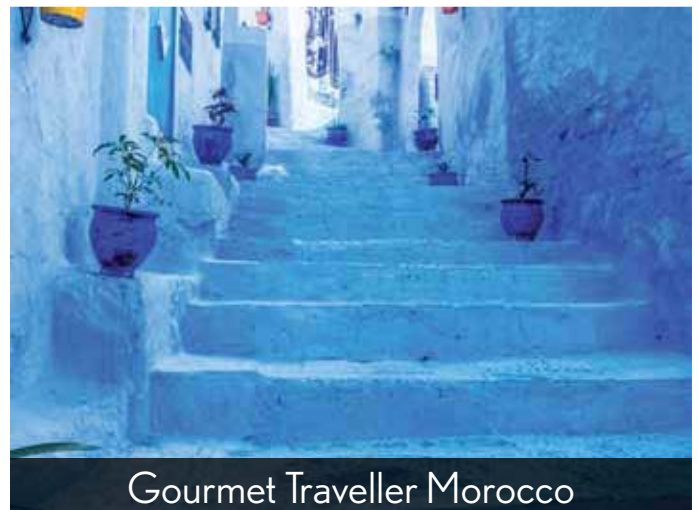
We're pleased to announce a new collaboration with Australian Gourmet Traveller, Australia's premier food and travel magazine. The partnership delivers a hand-picked collection of small group journeys to a range of exotic destinations. Locally escorted in each destination, the Gourmet Traveller Journeys by A&K focus on destinations with both culinary and cultural appeal.



From street food to imperial Mughal cuisine, food in India covers a gamut of flavours, styles and ingredients. Be introduced to many of the different foods of this vast and very diverse country.

15 Days | From \$10,820 per person twin share

Tour Dates: 9 - 23 September 2016



This exclusive journey reveals the diverse influences Morocco has absorbed over centuries. You will dine with locals, explore markets, taste the produce and learn the intricacies of Moroccan cuisine.

13 Days | From \$10,595 per person twin share

Tour Dates: 25 September - 7 October 2016



Your Host
Joining a portion of the tour of India is Gourmet Traveller's Travel Editor, Helen Anderson. One of the country's most experienced travel writers and editors, Helen's lifetime of travel was sparked by a trip to Mumbai in the late '80s - her first overseas adventure. "India is a universe in a nation - fascinating, overwhelming and rewarding all at once," she says. "It started a lifelong love affair with the subcontinent."



Your Host
The September Morocco tour will be joined in part by Pat Nourse, Gourmet Traveller Deputy Editor. One of Australia's leading food writers, Nourse has been a member of the magazine's editorial team since 2004. "I don't know many travellers who aren't dazzled by Morocco," he says. "The combination of wildness and luxury, of culture and bustle make it unlike anywhere else in the world, and the food, of course, is utterly seductive."

Full itineraries can be found at www.abercrombiekent.com.au/gourmettraveller

or Call 1300 853 427 for more information