

Australia's favourite travel news magazine

Traveltalk

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DOMESTIC TRAVEL

Get ready for a backyard blitz

AGENT TALES

How YOU are coping with COVID-19

We're all in this

Traveltalk
TOGETHER

Plus: Recipes, puzzles and a great competition!

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A message from the Traveltalk team

AS AUSTRALIA appears to be winning the battle against COVID-19, it is perhaps time to assess what we have learned – both individually and as a society – from this unprecedented situation.

Certainly we have seen the good, the bad and the ugly of human behaviour. Our health workers have continued to put their own lives at risk to treat those affected, while at the same time some beachgoers have failed to heed health advice and grown-ups have gone toe-to-toe in supermarkets over toilet roll.

Yet sometimes from chaos comes order. Apart from corona, *Communication, Connectivity and Compassion* are the buzz 'C' words for 2020.

Self-isolation has forced families to spend more time together, perhaps re-discovering ways to interact and connect that our fast-paced, materialistic, pre-corona society had long since forgotten or neglected.

Previously unacquainted neighbours have struck up conversations over backyard fences, old friends have reacquainted through social media portals and 'virtual' has become the new reality for travellers and businesses alike.

The environment has also benefited. With a shortage of food on the shelves, we've gone back to home baking and making those leftovers last, thereby reducing wastage. Recipes are being swapped and shared like holiday snaps. Our skies are clear, oceans unruffled, wildlife undisturbed.

Homeware stores have been doing a roaring trade with people keen to grow their own veggies or complete those DIY projects that were previously abandoned or postponed. Our homes have never looked neater or our gardens more perky.

Bike sales have gone through the roof as desperate parents try and get their kids to do some physical exercise while in lockdown. For a society tackling obesity and the brain-melting gaming era, surely this can only be a good thing and set good foundations for post-covid activity?

Not everyone is happy about this exercise boom, however. Apparently dogs are being carried home because of "walkies-fatigue", having never been walked so much, so far or so regularly!

And of course, the travel industry has been particularly damaged by COVID-19, with agents doing an outstanding job to protect their clients' interests, all the while seeing their own livelihoods impaired. Hopefully the predicted boom in domestic travel post-corona will start to pump some lifeblood back into the industry ahead of a return to international travel next year.

So just what can we hope for the future once corona virus has been defeated?

The famous Greek statesman Pericles once said: "Time is the wisest counsellor of all". And if history has taught us anything it is that humans are slow learners – but we often get there in the end.

Perhaps after this cataclysmic event, when we've all had more time to stop, think and reflect on what's really important, we will all be a little wiser, a little kinder and more connected to our family, friends and each other.

Now that's a world well worth living in. ■

GET THE ABC ON DC



AGENTS CAN earn a spot on a famil trip to Washington DC and win monthly prizes by signing up to a new online training program.

Washington, DC Special Agent Academy is designed to train and engage with agents around the world who are interested in becoming experts on the destination.

The program's initial rollout consists of three courses, or "operations," with several missions covering a variety of topics.

The first operation covers the city's monuments, memorials, museums and historic neighbourhoods. Later operations cover sports, dining, educational tours and the unique offerings available in the greater Capital Region.

"Travel agents play a huge role in inspiring potential visitors to Washington, DC, which is why additional education will benefit the destination," said Elliott L. Ferguson, II, President & CEO of Destination DC.

Certified agents will receive a digital certificate and badge, be entered in monthly giveaways for DC memorabilia and can enter to win a slot on an upcoming famil tour.

■ washington.org/special-agent-academy

Take the \$2,500 trivia challenge

PUT YOUR knowledge of Thailand to good use and see if you can win a \$2,500 prize in a new trivia competition.

The 'Amazing Thailand Trivia Challenge' will run until May 27 with a Webjet travel voucher on offer for the winner. The competition has been organised by the Sydney office of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

There will be four challenges in four categories for entrants to complete including 'Thailand in General', 'Thailicious', 'Attractions' and 'Stay Active & Healthy'.

The campaign can be accessed via all social assets Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and AmazingThailand.com.au

"Being at home doesn't mean people can't be inspired to start planning their next escapes," said Ms. Suladda Sarutilavan, Director of TAT Sydney Office.



GOLFERS CLUB TOGETHER FOR SISTERLY CHARITY

A TRAVEL industry golf day has helped raise \$25,000 for the Love Your Sister organisation founded by actor Samuel Johnson.

Held at the Mornington Golf Club in Victoria before social distancing rules came into force, the event was organised by Kellie Browning, TravelManagers' Business Partnership Manager (BPM) for Victoria and Tasmania.

"Cancer affects everyone at some point in their life, whether directly or through someone they love," said Browning.

It was the fourth year in a row that the charity, founded by Johnson in memory of his sister Connie, has been the recipient of TravelManagers' annual golf day. The event has now raised more than \$75,000 for cancer research.

"This kind of money means the world to our researchers and I thank TravelManagers for their true commitment and extend my love to them at this particularly challenging time," said Johnson.

■ travelmanagers.com.au



Win \$300 OF FANTASTIC MAISON de SABRÉ PRODUCTS!

MAISON de SABRÉ refines the art of personalised leather goods with its signature premium collection of cases, wallets, clutches and pocket accessories.

Every piece can be monogrammed and provides a canvas for self-expression and self-identity.

Refined, classic and timeless designs are effortlessly MAISON de SABRÉ; choosing to ignore the fast-fashion runway trends and focus on creating pieces to love that outlast seasons.

Using premium top and full grain leathers across the entire range, only the finest materials are sourced from North America to hand-craft the iconic pieces.

Plush pebbled bovine leather is used for its distinctive appearance,

texture and olfactory experience. As one of the highest leather grades, it's the continued push for quality that characterises MAISON de SABRÉ.

MAISON de SABRÉ's ethos, "Make Your Mark" is a movement at the heart of the business.

The hashtag #MakeYourMark encourages customers to own their identities and be fearless and unwavering in their determination to seek out and achieve their dreams.

The question is, how will you #MakeYourMark?

We have some great MAISON de SABRÉ's products to giveaway. A phone case, a card holder and a \$150 gift card. TOTAL VALUE: \$314.

TOTAL VALUE: \$314



To win these stylish accessories, simply head to our website (www.traveltalkmag.com.au) and tell us in 25 words or less what is the first thing you're looking forward to doing once social-distancing is over? Good luck!



Groceries up for grabs

SPARE YOURSELF a trip to the supermarket by taking part in a new incentive that offers a trolley worth of groceries as a prize.

The new 'One Badge Wonder' promotion is from Brand USA Australia and will run until June 23.

Agents can win weekly prizes of \$450 Coles Group and Myer gift cards by entering the weekly competition via the USA Discovery Program. This is an online training platform designed to grow agents' knowledge of the diversity of USA destinations to through and beyond the gateways.

To qualify, agents must have registered for the program and have completed at least one badge – either Specialist or Regional Expert Badge. The more badges that agents complete, the more chances they have to be in the draw to win a shopping gift card.

Only badges completed within the week will qualify for each weekly draw, of which there are eight in total.

"Our USA Discovery Program is an awesome program to build knowledge about the USA and to keep travel inspiration alive during this challenging time," said Jo Palmer, Brand USA Director Australia & NZ.

For further USA inspiration and content including last year's feature film *America's Musical Journey*, agents can download the free Go USA TV app and Brand USA also has an online Trip Planner tool.

■ TheBrandUSA.com

LEARNING TO WIN PRIZES

A NEW e-learning platform is about to be launched which offers participating agents the chance to win gift cards and a spot on an exotic famil.

The Abu Dhabi Specialist Program will educate travel trade industry professionals with all destination-related information about the emirate through a series of online courses.

Launching in Australia on May 11, the scheme will feature incentives such as four weekly prizes of \$250 gift cards per week for six weeks and a final prize of a five-star holiday to Abu Dhabi, when it is suitable to travel.

"This training and education platform ensures that all participating industry partners have easy and quick access to the latest content on Abu Dhabi, thus making the destination promotion aspect of their job much easier," said HE Saood Al Hosani, Acting Undersecretary at DCT Abu Dhabi.

The courses encompass information related to key attractions in Abu Dhabi, local events and accommodation options.

■ abudhabispecialist.com



How YOU are coping with COVID

We know that travel agents are facing tough times as the corona virus prevents any kind of travel both home and abroad. Over the next few pages, agents give us an honest and open assessment of how this unprecedented situation has affected both their business and their lives.

JAMES CRACKNELL

OWNER OF WINDSONG TRAVEL IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

Q: How has corona virus impacted your business life?

A: We have had to put into place flexibility policies for all our 19 staff to be able to be productive during this time.

Corona has not only impacted the offices but also the families of our staff, so we have had to create a balance with home life vs work life. This for many of our staff means contributing out of hours rather than heading to work as normal.

Q: What reaction have you been getting from clients?

A: Positive and lots of well wishes; everyone has been working tirelessly throughout this time and our clients have

seen this and the feedback has been amazing.

Of course, people are worried about the security of their monies so if you can address this worry from the beginning people calm down and realise you are on their side and doing your best and react accordingly.

Q: How are you passing the time in self-isolation?

A: It has been in phases. Firstly, it was about how to protect your business and making the tough decisions. Secondly, it was how the government help can assist and benefit your business and understanding its legislation.

Thirdly, how long is this going to last and what are the security and longevity plans of my business? Lastly, now



I'm comfortable with how things are proceeding, it's about trying to wind down and spend some special time with my family.

Q: How do you think the travel industry will recover from this crisis?

A: It will become bigger and stronger for those bricks and mortar agencies who have worked tirelessly for their clients.

Clients remember incidents like these and become our biggest advocates. We have already picked up many new clients – especially online bookers who have contacted us for help to get home when they couldn't do it themselves.

I hate these times, however it usually weeds out many of the weak links in our industry but importantly also showcases the brightest stars.

Q: Can any positives be taken from this situation?

A: It takes away the madness of the 'hanging on by your fingernails' ride that the travel industry is for me most of the time. I now have the time to look into my business rather than just at it and see the opportunities we have into the future.

It's also an incredible opportunity to reset and reflect personally on both home and work life. I was having a conversation with my son explaining that it's like I'm on the third or fourth week of a holiday and finally slowing down...this can only be positive!

■ windsongtravel.com.au



Carol Evans, Bay Travel & Cruise (Travellers Choice)

CAROL EVANS

OWNER/MANAGER OF BAY TRAVEL & CRUISE, MELBOURNE.

Q: How has corona virus impacted your business life?

A: Unfortunately I had no choice but to make two of my four staff redundant. The remaining two are working in the shop three days a week, refunding and cancelling bookings.

Our bookkeeper is working three days a week from home, while I am working a few hours every day in the shop and a few hours from home.

Although customers cannot come through the door, we are communicating through calls and email. At this stage, we've certainly not welcomed any new customers.

“ But if we can hang in there, I think we'll see the industry bounce back – you cannot hold Aussies down, they love to travel. ”

Q: What reaction have you been getting from clients?

A: Our clients have been nothing short of amazing and incredibly supportive. We are refunding when we can but clients are happy to receive future credits and keen to travel in the future.

Q: How are you passing the time in self-isolation?

A: I am doing all the jobs at home I never had time to do. Having lots of walks and doing yoga every day. I am also connecting with friends and family on group chats on a regular basis. It is a gift of time.

Q: How do you think the travel industry will recover from this crisis?

A: Some agencies will not survive and I think some owners who are close to retirement may take this opportunity to close.

But if we can hang in there, I think we'll see the industry bounce back – you cannot hold Aussies down, they love to travel. Corporate travel will certainly take a hit, however. Companies will see how well they are coping with video conferencing calls.

Q: Can any positives be taken from this situation?

A: Clean air and a small window for our planet to breathe. Hopefully we will stop taking so much for granted and appreciate what we have and work towards sustainable and ethical travel.

Crime must be down. Pick pockets would be struggling with social distancing. Everyone is staying at home which makes it pretty hard for house burglars.

■ baytrav.com.au

Tales from the frontline



DANA BROWN is a travel agent with TravelManagers but also runs the extremely popular Wild Hearted World platform designed to inspire people to travel. Here, she expresses hope for the future as agents wait for the pandemic to pass.

BY NOW you would have read countless articles on how the travel industry has been affected by COVID-19. Each one raises your blood pressure slightly higher to match your overwhelm.

Your eyes have skimmed over countless tales from other agents on how they're experiencing work during this pandemic. But no-one knows what that frontline is like for you, except you.

Yes, your colleagues and peers understand better than someone not in the industry. But their life circumstances, clients and how they operate are not identical to your own. There is no comparison for any of us.

Between continually evolving policy changes and little to no parallel among supplier terminology, there is no denying it is tough out there in the trenches. I'm not even going to mention the brunt of emotions that some have worn in the heat of the moment.

With a slew of corona ridden weeks behind us – and a future of complete uncertainty ahead of us – where do we look now?

The first place we shouldn't look at is other people's opinions. You all know 'Karen' from Facebook, the expert that knows nothing about anything. Filter your

intake like you do Karen and coffee, and save yourself the angst.

Travel is going to bounce back, it always does. It is certain it will look different and that could be a blessing.

When state boundaries and international borders will reopen is the million-dollar question that no-one has a definitive answer to.

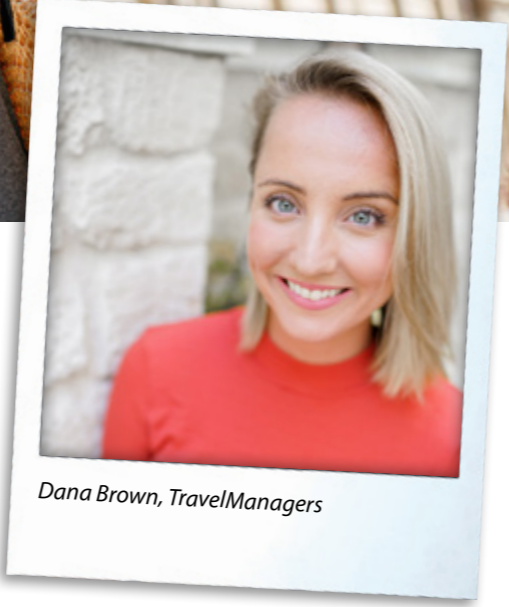
So, for now, we wait.

We continue to mop up the messes created, we wonder when a new booking will come in and at the same time, how our income and livelihood will bounce back.

Individually, we examine our lives and businesses and attempt to move forward in a way that feels good for us.

Some will focus on aligning themselves with new business practices for the inevitable rebound of travel. Others will look at how their employers have treated them and either double down with pride, or choose not to return as they see the cracks that turned into gorges.

One thing we all have in common is that if you haven't taken up another job, we are finding ourselves with a lot more time on our hands. A time that many have wished for has been granted and that excuse of 'not having time' has been arrested.



Dana Brown, TravelManagers

What you choose now is up to you.

Attend online workshops and webinars, complete training modules, sleep for a month, spend time with your loved ones – even if it has to be remote.

What is needed for one person is opposite for the next. If you're anything like me, you will want all of these things. Which one will depend on the hour and day you ask me!

Most importantly, now is a perfect opportunity to focus on your social media and building connections with your clients so you stay front of mind.

Remember that when those bans are lifted, we are going to be busier than ever – but this time in a jump for joy kind of way (except for those reissues and changes, let's forget about those for now).

Our freedom will return and the world will open back up. I for one will be seeing you on the flip side with an Aperol spritz in hand, preferably from a sun lounger on the Amalfi.

@wildheartedworld
 ■ wildheartedworld.com



Not happy, Michelle

MICHELLE DESMARCHELIER felt so strongly about the way agents were being portrayed in sections of the media that she took to Facebook to vent her frustration. Here is an abridged version of what the TravelManagers representative for Berowra in NSW wrote to her fellow agents and consumers.

I'M NOT happy as this morning my news feed is revealing the travel industry as a whole being sadly misrepresented in mainstream media once more and it's making me sad and a teeny bit cranky.

Firstly, I want to say even the (minority) poorly managed agents are not all evil villains trying to screw you to the ground for the last dollar. Many of us (myself included) don't even earn a wage, we get paid when you travel.

In my lifetime we've never had a global pandemic where the world has shut down entirely, so not only for the travel industry but for every other person who runs or works within a business anywhere, we're all walking on virgin ground trying to plan our way out of this.

Suppliers and airlines are scrambling to stay afloat and writing and re-writing terms and conditions and refund policies on a very regular basis to ensure the viability of their businesses at the other end of this crisis, not helped by travel insurance companies generally washing their hands of the whole thing, leaving us quite literally the frontline when it comes to protecting our clients' funds and trying to push for our own survival by encouraging 'postponing not cancelling'.

If that isn't feasible for our clients then aiming to recoup as much money as we possibly can without sinking our own businesses or those of our supplier partners and also many airlines.

Unprecedented times indeed!

I have never been an advocate of charging 'service fees' over and above the income I earn: obviously I'm not in this game to make a million dollars, my goal is to ensure the best travel experience for you and in turn have you advocate for my services to your friends and family.

As you can imagine, right now in these 'unprecedented times' I'm also being faced with handing back a lot of money to clients, for income already earned, and in many cases the supplier is only able to understandably refund the NETT back to me in order to keep their own income earned as they've paid out to hotels and tour operators etc. etc.... leaving a bit of a gap.

Yes some agents have resorted to charging fees to secure their income. I've not gone down this path, rather I'm asking my clients to accept that I'm able to refund the NETT amount of each booking and retain my income already earned.

It's important to note here that when it comes time to re-book, I'll be re-booking at the NETT amount and not earning any further income.

Twice the work, no income, but these are unprecedented times and we need to do what we can to get people travelling again.

I can't think of any other industry that works in this way, can you? If something breaks it simply breaks and we replace it without trying to recoup the money already spent on that item.

For those of you who value service and entrust your holiday in the safe hands of a travel professional, then I urge you to please not quibble about the few extra dollars you could have saved had you done it yourself or spend unnecessary time trying to ground everyone down to the lowest dollar.

Rather think of this extra cost as your travel professional's "income" and your safety net, or the analogy I like to use: You can cut your own hair too, but it's not going to be perfect and risk-free and wouldn't you rather pay a professional to do it properly?



Michelle Desmarchelier, TravelManagers, Berowra

Do you agree with Michelle? Would you like to share your story? We'd love to hear your thoughts. Contact us at editorial@traveltalkmag.com.au



AFTA CALLS OUT 'FAKE' MEDIA REPORTS

MEDIA OUTLETS who misreport the facts on the handling of refunds and credits by travel agents are being reported to the Press Council.

The Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA) has been correcting errors of fact in mainstream reporting on a story by story basis as well as proactively raising awareness through strategic engagement of mainstream media.

This campaign has now been extended with a 'The Facts on Travel Agents and Refunds' newsroom brief sent to every mainstream TV, print and radio newsroom in Australia.

"We continue to work hard with supportive media, both trade and mainstream, to showcase the fact that travel agents right around Australia are going above and beyond to support clients and non-clients," said Jayson Westbury, Chief Executive AFTA.

"We have also been very careful not to give oxygen to stories or outlets where there is a clear agenda to misrepresent a situation including publishing first and seeking clarification and comment post-publication.

"Where this has happened (and thankfully this is limited) we have advised the facts and made a formal complaint to the Press Council."

Mr Westbury said that many newsrooms were forced to rely on inexperienced freelance journalists during the corona virus crisis.

"All travel agents across Australia should know that AFTA is doing all that we can to hold strong on a positive media strategy at this dreadful time of COVID-19, but we are not able to control stories that are released by some media outlets at this time."

Meanwhile the continuing lockdown has forced the hibernation of the AFTA Chargeback Scheme (ACS). All ATAS accredited agents who opted in as an ACS participating agency, who have made an eligible transaction via an eligible card until April 30, will continue to have protection intact for those transactions.

ACS will be placed into hibernation from May 1 with a claims process being implemented and introduced over the coming months as necessary.

"We are in difficult times and AFTA is well aware of the risks and challenges faced at this time and will continue to work with stakeholders with a view to finding equitable solutions as more serious circumstances present during this pandemic," added Westbury.

■ afta.com.au

TASKFORCE PLANS INDUSTRY RESPONSE

A TOURISM Restart Taskforce has been created to coordinate industry response to COVID-19.

Set up by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), the taskforce will feed into the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission and the Austrade Tourism Incident Response Coordination group.

Through ACCI it will feed into the Business Liaison Group in Treasury and the Department of Industry recovery group.

"Our tourism and hospitality industry has had a knockout blow causing widespread damage to hundreds of thousands of businesses and livelihoods across the nation," said Denis Pierce, Chair of the Australian Tourism Export Council, who will be a member of the group.

"This forum provides a vehicle to move our industry through this troubled period as a united voice."

■ tourismdrivesgrowth.com.au

IT'S TIME TO TICK THE BOX

TRAVEL AGENTS can use this period of downtime to brush up their skills and add some extra qualifications to the CV.

Travel Training Australia (TTA) is offering agents the chance to qualify for Certificate III in Travel (*), by completing Tick the Box, a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program designed specifically for the travel industry.

Tick the Box is an alternative pathway to traditional study and recognises the existing skills and knowledge agents already have to do the job.

Through the RPL process, it allows participants to achieve a nationally accredited, industry endorsed qualification. The 4-Level program is 100 per cent online with no classes to attend.

A no obligation, free initial RPL assessment is available on request. TTA also offers a suite of accredited short travel courses to refresh existing skills. Affordable payment plans and government funding is available for eligible QLD applicants.

■ traveltrainingaustralia.com.au

* This course is delivered on behalf of The Learning Collaborative. It is the responsibility of TTA to recruit, enrol, support, train and assess students undertaking this course. The Learning Collaborative, in consultation with TTA, is responsible for support and certification of all students enrolled in this course.

USE YOUR INITIATIVE & STAY CONNECTED

MAINTAINING AN emotional connection with consumers through the pandemic will help travel agents emerge stronger post COVID-19.

That's the suggestion from GlobalData, a leading data and analytics company, who believe that introducing simple initiatives will help retain customer loyalty.

"Post COVID-19, the competitive landscape will be even more challenging," said Johanna Bonhill-Smith, Travel & Tourism analyst at GlobalData.

"Travel agencies that operate through a multi-branded strategy are already at a strategic advantage as they are likely to encounter quicker financial recovery due to servicing a wide market base.

"Smaller, independent agencies are naturally at greater risk of collapse and yet it all depends on the company response to this exogenous event of COVID-19."

The company highlighted Intrepid Travel, who recently released an initiative named '#BeTogether' where travellers, agents and hosts alike are encouraged to write a letter reminiscing on a previous travel experience, which is then in turn published across the company's social media channels.

"In light of the current situation, the prospect of identifying a new market opportunity will seem ludicrous to many as all companies simply strive for survival over the next few months," adds Bonhill-Smith.

"Yet this is now the time for strategic evaluation, where any opportunity for increasing brand recognition should ultimately be a key priority."

■ globaldata.com





New York

Time for some togetherness

A NEW marketing campaign has just been launched aimed at galvanising the global travel and tourism community.

The initiative encourages people from around the world to share the hashtag #TogetherInTravel along with a video to demonstrate their passion for travel and spread a message of solidarity.

Run by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the promotion also includes a microsite, TogetherInTravel.com, to host the video and user generated content and stories.

"Dreaming is part of our zest for life and our new campaign encourages thoughts of the brighter days ahead," said Gloria Guevara, President and CEO of WTTC.

"Travel and tourism is a critical sector to the global economy, accounting for one in four of all new jobs worldwide and contributing 10.3 per cent to GDP."

Ms Guevara added that the travel industry touches everyone, building communities, reducing poverty and improving the social impact of everyday lives.

"The concept for the #TogetherInTravel campaign was borne out of a desire to rally everyone who is passionate about travel, to unify those who are working hard to rebuild the sector and to spread a message of solidarity that we are one global community and one where travel brings us closer, at the right time.

"Our message is that everyone can still stay inspired with future travel ideas and bookings – and in the meantime be part of a virtual space for sharing, connecting and collectively inspiring."

■ TogetherInTravel.com; we.tl/t-fn2UlxLe6N

CATO MAKING POLICY PLANS

THE COUNCIL of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) believes it is in the "best interest" of consumers that future travel credits are issued rather than cash refunds.

CATO says this will ensure maximum returns for each of its clients and help to preserve cash flows through each part of the travel supply chain.

The organisation has engaged the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to assist with policy development for COVID-19-related travel cancellations.

The aim is to clearly define the role played by Australian-based tour operators and wholesalers that supports the longevity of the outbound travel sector.

"The ACCC is dealing with thousands of consumer enquiries around refunds for international travel," said Brett Jardine, CATO Managing Director (pictured below).

"CATO is eager to ensure a viable, common-sense approach that can be supported by the ACCC in dealing with future travel credits or consideration of refunds in extenuating circumstances."

■ cato.travel



Left: National Geographic Endurance. Right: Emerald Azzurra



New ships ahoy!

Existing cruise ships may be anchored during the pandemic but that doesn't mean new vessels aren't being built in anticipation of travel's return.

Emerald Cruises

THE FIRST images and footage of two new ships from Emerald Cruises have just been released.

The company, sister to Evergreen Cruises & Tours, has unveiled a time-lapse video of super yacht *Emerald Azzurra* as she's being constructed in Vietnam. Work on the 110-metre ship is on schedule and she will set sail from August 2021, embarking on 47 itineraries throughout 2021 and 2022.

"Whilst there are some delays in equipment delivery from Europe and China, we continue to work with the shipyard on how to minimize impact on delivery," said Glen Moroney, Owner and

Chairman of the Scenic Group.

"The entire Emerald Yacht Cruises team are excited to see the project progressing and look forward to welcoming guests onboard this magnificent yacht as it begins cruising the Mediterranean in 2021."

Once launched, *Azzurra* will explore destinations including the Red Sea – Israel, Jordan and Egypt – and the Mediterranean – Greece, Croatia, Italy, France, Cyprus, Turkey, Malta and Spain.

Emerald Azzurra will become the first vessel owned by the new Emerald Yacht Cruises brand and will sit alongside Emerald Waterways as the two brands which make up the Emerald Cruises portfolio.

Meanwhile the ninth addition to

Emerald Waterways' Star-Ship river fleet is set to sail in 2021.

The 180-guest *Emerald Luna* features the signature indoor heated pool that seamlessly transforms into an evening cinema, the panoramic Sun Deck and beautifully appointed suites and staterooms.

■ evergreentours.com.au

Test of Endurance

TWO YEARS in the making, *National Geographic Endurance* is a next-generation expedition ship, purpose-built for polar navigation.

She should have welcomed her first guests last month but her debut has now been postponed. In the meantime, Captain Aaron Wood and members of his team have hosted a video, offering a sneak peek of the 126-guest ship.

The virtual tour includes the Bridge and the Observation Lounge, cabins and suites, and new features like the glass-walled yoga studio, infinity Jacuzzis and the first igloos at sea. The video tour can be found on Vimeo.

A fully stabilized, highly strengthened, ice-class Polar Class vessel, it is designed to navigate polar passages year-round and safely explore uncharted waters, while providing exceptional comfort.

Its patented X-BOW design delivers a powerful wave-slicing action, providing a smooth ride in adverse conditions and reduces spray on deck for superior observation. She carries a full suite of expedition tools and offers a variety of experience-enhancing amenities.

■ au.expeditions.com





The Wild Forest Aquapark and theatre on MSC Grandiosa (below). Pictures courtesy MSC



Lynne Clarke, Chairman of MSC Cruises



Above: Bucharest. Right: Iron Gate Gorge



GETTING READY FOR OCEAN'S 21

The cruise industry has come to a virtual standstill following the spread of COVID-19. Here, Lynne Clarke, Chairman of MSC Cruises, gives her opinion on how the industry will recover.

Q: How has corona virus impacted your business life?

A: Technology has allowed us to be flexible and fluid, therefore working remotely is really exchanging one desk for another. We travel extensively and have worked in a similar manner while working in different locations.

Virtual meetings have allowed us to maintain regular team contact. Structure and discipline is vital to the success of working remotely and personally my daily job tasks diary has become a critical component of my daily life.

Time management is a lot easier, as there are not the normal disruptions of the office. Meetings are punctual. Therefore there are many positives. That being said it will be good to feel the spirit of team comradery again.

Q: What reaction have you been getting from MSC passengers?

A: Naturally everyone has been affected differently. The future cruise credits have been well received and people are excited to rebook. Forward bookings are positive.

Q: How are you passing the time in self-isolation?

A: I have become a lot more appreciative of the simple things in life and enjoying the tasks I have set myself.

I am obviously like the typical person, as have cleaned my house, including the attic and garage, done a huge purge on things. What is not used is out. Marie Kondo would be pleased.

I cook and bake, have resumed bush walks and very seldom partake of the fruit of the vines. Have resorted to doing handstands and cartwheels in the park as well!

Q: Do you think the cruise industry has been targeted unfairly for criticism?

A: Blame games are unconstructive and do not pave the way for the journey forward. We have to remember cruise was not the cause or the source of COVID-19.

The important aspect now is to work with the authorities and make necessary changes that will allow us to resume and offer passengers the delights of the world of the cruises.

Q: How will the cruise industry recover from this crisis?

A: The industry had already incorporated health and safety measures a number of years ago, such as deep cleaning, sanitisation, thermal screening, medical facilities, etc.

We will enhance these protocols by working with relevant authorities, such as the medical and health authorities. There will also be new innovations, so working in a true partnership manner of co-operation and transparency we will recover.

Absolutely, cruises will recover from this crisis: this is reflected in forward bookings. The health and safety of passengers is of paramount importance and we will start when all the protocols are in place and we receive the go ahead from the relevant authorities.

Q: Are there any positives that can be taken from this situation?

A: We can all look to take positives from any situation. COVID-19 has affected the economy drastically and as long as we can learn from this tragic situation and adjust accordingly and make the necessary changes to allow people to feel safe then that is a positive.

From a humane aspect, we have become more giving and caring and appreciative of what we have, and if we can maintain this as well, that is indeed another positive.

■ msccruises.com.au

Back to the future

WITH AN eye to the future, Avalon Waterways has unveiled five new Danube River ports as well as three new 2021 European river cruise holidays.

The new getaways feature Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, while the Danube offers travellers a path through 10 countries along with fairytale villages, capital cities and cliff-side castles.

The new Danube River ports are:

*** ILOK, CROATIA:** Surrounded by wine-growing hills, Ilok is the easternmost town in Croatia. Here, Avalon Waterways will invite travellers to delve into the town's 1,000-year-old wine-making tradition and explore Ilok's cultural heritage, protected by a medieval fortress

*** GOLUBAC, SERBIA:** Sitting high above the Danube River, just outside the Iron Gates, is the medieval Golubac fortress, one of the best-preserved in Europe. Here, guests will be invited to learn about the area's tumultuous history and its ties to the Habsburg Monarchy and Ottoman Empire

*** CONSTANTA, ROMANIA:** An incredible port city on the Black Sea, Constanta offers sweeping views and a seaside getaway. Here, travellers will be able to explore the city's Natural History & Archaeological Museum for a glimpse into early Romanian cultures

*** YBBS, AUSTRIA:** Established in the 1300s, Ybbs acted as an important port for trade in the Middle Ages. Today, it serves as the entry point for the Danube to lower Austria. Avalon Waterways will be the first international cruise operator to stop in this village and invite guests to experience the area

*** HAINBURG, AUSTRIA:** This quaint Austrian village sits 32 kilometres outside Bratislava and has a strong Habsburg history. Here, Avalon guests will have the opportunity to experience the area's wetlands, castle and even its strong Roman past.

Avalon Waterways' new 2021 Danube itineraries – including those that feature the new ports – are:

+ New nine-day 'Balkan Odyssey' (from Bucharest to Zagreb)

+ New nine-day 'The Danube from Croatia to the Black Sea' (from Zagreb to Bucharest)

+ New 16-day 'The Danube from Germany to the Black Sea' (from Deggendorf to Bucharest).

"On our all-new Balkan Odyssey cruise, travellers will embark on an adventure along the Danube and Drava rivers for an unforgettable journey through time and tradition," said Pam Hoffee, Managing Director of Avalon Waterways.

"This itinerary is perfectly bookended with two nights in both Bucharest and Zagreb and represents our Danube expansion, giving travellers more ports and more possibilities for their river cruise exploration."

■ avalonwaterways.com.au

CRUISING LOOKS AFTER ITS HEALTH

A NEW health framework to uphold the safety of cruise guests and prepare for future operations in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis is being created.

The initiative is the work of the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) and its members, working with medical experts and international health authorities.

"While cruise operations are suspended, we are using this time to define the new landscape we will work within and make sure we're ready when the time comes to sail again," said Joel Katz, CLIA Managing Director Australasia.

"Many teams of people around the world are working in tandem with experts to ensure we learn as much as possible from these unprecedented events and exceed community expectations in our response."

■ cruising.org.au





Where to find that loving feeling

There's a cast of thousands to greet JON UNDERWOOD as he checks into one of Malaysia's most renowned hotels.

ARRIVING AT Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort & Spa in Penang, we're initially greeted by Suleiman, the seemingly omnipresent Director of Communications.

He's followed by Elaine, the convivial General Manager. Then the restaurant manager. And the Director of Marketing. And the assistant wing manager.

I eagerly await the arrival of the head gardener but he's clearly busy attending to the 12 hectares of manicured gardens surrounding the property.

While cynics may be tempted to dismiss this extended reception as overkill, for me

it's an instant and simple affirmation of what "Rasa Sayang" actually means: "loving feeling".

Suffice to say the hospitality our group subsequently received was everything you'd expect from a five-star resort which has been a Malaysian standout since it opened in 1973.

Suleiman has been there for most of those 47 years and is proud of the number of repeat guests, some who have been returning for decades.

The hotel has 304 rooms split into two wings: the Rasa and the Garden. I'm in the former and my room (2230) is spacious, scrupulously clean and offers views of the aforementioned gardens that separate the property from neighbouring Batu Ferringhi Beach.

I love discovering new and unique features in hotel rooms and 2230 doesn't disappoint.

In the huge walk-in shower that would comfortably house a basketball team, there's a pull-down shower with two mini-heads that looks like something from the space shuttle. The soaking tub on the private balcony is also an especially nice touch.

The bathroom yields further design gold with two large, space-saving mirrors that fold out when required, with a similar technique employed for the TV in the living room. Simple but effective.

Truth be told, the furniture, fittings and

design of the lounge/bedroom could do with a refresh and Suleiman tells me such plans are in the offing. Removing the long desk that separates the two areas will free up more space while some lighter tones will definitely *zjoosh* up the overall feel.

Once settled, it's time to explore the property and while guests in the Rasa Wing have access to a private pool, it's the beach that's calling me. A range of water sports are provided and I'm offered my first chance to try paragliding.

Alternating between excitement and abject fear, I'm strapped into my harness and before you can say 'Mary Poppins' I'm feeling the wind beneath my wings (actually, a blue and gold parachute).

It's a tremendous experience and I can't help but belt out a few choruses of 'I believe I can fly' as I soar above the Straits of Malacca.

Back on terra firma, I'm now ravenously hungry and Rasa Sayang has plenty of dining options, including the casual Spice Market Café, offering a host of dishes from around the world designed to please all tastes.

Gourmands will make a beeline for the award-winning Ferringhi Grill, considered Penang's finest restaurant. Here you can enjoy such treats as escargots in garlic and parsley, Wagyu prime beef and Yorkshire pudding (Fridays and Saturdays), traditional Crêpes Suzette and white chocolate mousse.

After all that food, the CHI Spa was a good place to relax, with traditional Asian therapies at its core. Here you can try yoga, or head out onto one of the floodlit tennis courts or health centre for something more energetic. There's even a par-3 pitch and putt golf course for some family fun.

I thoroughly enjoyed my stay at Rasa Sayang and definitely left with a loving feeling... although that could have been all the Crêpes Suzette!

■ shangri-la.com



CROWNING GLORY IN LA LA LAND

AUSTRALIAN RESIDENTIAL developer Crown Group has taken the next steps in its first move into the U.S. market.

The firm plans to develop a mixed-use, high-rise condominium and hotel tower in LA's burgeoning Downtown district. The 43-storey tower is expected to be completed in 2024.

■ crowngroup.com.au



Brands expand Down Under

MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL has announced plans to open two new properties in Australia. Courtyard by Marriott Sydney, Auburn and Four Points by Sheraton Sydney, Blacktown are set to open in 2023 and 2024 respectively. They mark the planned expansion of both brands in Australia.

"These latest signings reflect Marriott International's strong commitment to the travel and tourism industry here in Australia," said Richard Crawford, Senior Director of Hotel Development, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, Marriott International.

"During these unprecedented times, our ongoing goal remains to grow our business and to strengthen our offering in this region."

The Auburn property will have 203 rooms and will be sited within close distance to the Parramatta River and Sydney Olympic Park. It will be handy for all the sights of south west Sydney, including the Royal National Park and the beaches of the South Coast.

The 206-room Blacktown hotel will provide easy access to attractions including the Blue Mountains, the new Sydney Zoo, Raging Waters Sydney water park and to the soon-to-open Western Sydney International (Nancy Bird Walton) Airport.

"With these signings in Auburn and Blacktown, we are strategically expanding our footprint into growth corridors outside Australia's metropolitan areas."

■ courtyard.marriott.com; four-points.marriott.com



Needy shelter under Oaks

THE HOMELESS and those in need are being given emergency housing by Oaks Hotels in a selection of properties across Australia in response to COVID-19.

The initiative is in partnership with charities and government bodies and will see 1,000 rough sleepers and victims of domestic violence provided with a room and food supplies.

The length of accommodation will be determined on a case-by-case basis following the advice of the government and charity partners. Daily support and medical assistance will be provided by those government bodies involved.

Unison is one such non-for-profit organisation that has been working with Oaks to provide temporary housing for people at risk or experiencing homelessness and disadvantage throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in Melbourne.

"Unison has certainly seen an increase in demand as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and it's great to see more doors opening to provide a safe place for people," said James King, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Unison.

■ oakshotels.com; unison.org.au



WHAT'S THE REAL TRUTH COMING OUT OF AFRICA?



Cameron Neill, General Manager of Bench Africa

Here, CAMERON NEILL, General Manager of Bench Africa, makes an impassioned plea for travellers to check the facts about the effects of the COVID-19 crisis across Africa.

I'VE BEEN seeing an upswing in mainstream media reports about the potential catastrophe that's waiting to happen in Africa, predicting that "Africa could collapse" as a result of COVID-19.

Although these are all potential outcomes in a worst-case scenario, they don't reflect the truth about what is really happening on the ground.

Worse than that, they paint yet another negative image of Africa that isn't based on any real facts.

We watched this unfold with Ebola, when African countries thousands of kilometres away were negatively portrayed

by the mainstream media, despite the fact that they had no cases or direct flight paths in which the disease could spread.

Meanwhile, European countries that were closer and had actual cases of Ebola were ignored. The media seems to depict Africa as one big country, ostensibly presuming that it's the same all over Africa, which is simply not the case. African statistics are reported by continent, but for some reason data is broken down country by country everywhere else.

It has saddened me to read about the cases of anti-African racism around the world, in countries such as Japan and

China with assumptions that Africans are now spreading the disease.

These sorts of headlines not only fan the tired old trope of Africa being a backwater but completely ignore the reality on the ground.

So, let's clear up a few things. As I write this Africa, the continent, has about 40,000 cases. For comparison, that's less than Belgium and on par with the Netherlands. That's 140,000 less than the UK. That's more than a million less than the U.S..

This is 40,000 total, for the continent. A continent that is the world's second largest, made up of more than 54 different countries. That's incredible.

The largest centres for the disease in Africa are in the north, in places like Egypt, Algeria and Morocco. There are some bubbles in West Africa and South Africa

has about 7,000 cases (a similar number to Australia despite a population three times as large). East Africa is in the hundreds, places like Botswana and Namibia are barely in double digits.

We cannot deny that there are serious issues that face Africa with this disease. Poverty, lack of clean water, HIV/AIDS sufferers with a compromised immune system, a lack of medical facilities or access to them and other issues that combine to make fighting the disease harder once it gains a foothold.

That is precisely why so many African countries took this incredibly seriously from the outset. They rolled out established processes created to stop the spread of Ebola and implemented them quickly and efficiently to prevent corona virus from entering and spreading.

At a time when Australians could waltz through airports in Sydney without worry, or disembark a cruise ship with a nasty cough, African countries already had checkpoints, hand washing stations at bus depots and most importantly temperature monitors and thermal imaging at airports, even the little ones.

Sadly, all we heard about was the issues they faced and how it was all going to go downhill.

When we read that "Africa is going to fall apart" and "Africa is the most dangerous place to be right now" then we need to recognise the casual bias and remember that this impacts real people on the ground relying heavily on tourism, otherwise this will stick.

People will flock back to Italy and the U.S. and forget about the horrors that transpired but my trepidation is that there will be those who hesitate in going to Africa because of a stain merely of something that could have happened.

We still hear about hesitations to visit Rwanda (one of the world's 10 safest countries) because of the 1994 genocide and yet Croatia is seen as safe, despite the genocide that occurred there one year later.

Currently, the borders across Sub Saharan Africa (where most people travel) are largely closed. If trips are coming up in the next two months, they'll need to be postponed due to airline uncertainty and entry restrictions but I urge you all to keep an eye on the situation as it unfolds and make decisions based on fact, not conjecture.

■ benchafrica.com.au

Welcome to the future of air travel



SPACED OUT queues at the airport, no middle seat on the plane and a free health check on arrival.

This is what the future of air travel could look like in a post-pandemic world.

According to David Chadwick, Director for Identity and Biometrics for Unisys, Asia Pacific, increased security measures over the next 12 to 18 months will redefine our traditional perception of what a 'risky' traveller looks like, placing a greater need to understand who a person is, what their health is like and critically, where they have been.

"When the government lifts the travel bans, the airport experience will be very different to what it is now," said David.

"Security processes and experiences will centre on keeping people safe and healthy; for example, there might be a separate queue for somebody who is certified as being resistant or vaccinated against COVID-19.

"This will require travellers to provide more information to border security and will mean we will have an increased dependence on technology to identify risks."

According to David, there are two major impacts COVID-19 will have on airports and the future of air travel:

Room to move

The recovery of the airline industry will be a gradual return. To keep people safe



David Chadwick, Director for Identity and Biometrics for Unisys, Asia Pacific

from the spread of illness, airlines may choose to offer only window and aisle seats to maintain social distancing.

When it comes to the airport, all efforts will be to make the security process as contactless as possible including regained focus on programmable bag tags and true usage of e-boarding passes.

Airports will invest in screening systems that do not require laptops and liquids to be taken out in trays – these trays are a major source of spreading germs. Often a bottleneck of the security screening process, this will enable faster screening and a better experience.

Travellers who qualify as healthy and who have a 'low-risk' travel history might be offered an express ticket through the airport. Think of your health as your ticket to more comfort and a more streamlined airport experience!

Your passport won't just prove who you are: it will prove how you are and where you've been

While we may see a greater reliance of some traditional security practices, such as passport stamps at the border, technology is expected to play a much bigger role in the border experience moving forward.

Digital identity apps, biometrics tools and connected government systems that allow borders to access medical records or the locations a traveller has visited, could be used to mark them as a 'safe' or 'unsafe' person.

While the process of travel will involve greater scrutiny of each passenger, they are changes that Australians are likely to embrace.

According to the Unisys Security Index, six in 10 Australians support the use of biometrics such as fingerprint or facial scans to verify their identities when boarding a plane or going through airport security.

"Australians are relatively comfortable using digital identities to engage with government when it comes to maintaining their physical security," says David.

"Currently, there is strong support and an appreciation that the government are making choices to benefit our wellbeing. To stay safe, most Australians acknowledge that we must share more personal information."

■ unisys.com



Putting on a runway show

ENGINEERS AT Hawaiian Airlines are maintaining the fleet in readiness for a return to air travel. More than 50 of the airline's 61-jet fleet are currently resting on the tarmac in Honolulu.

Some planes have been flying, maintaining essential connectivity for the local community and shippers, including complimentary

flights to neighbouring islands for healthcare providers.

"Even though we are flying a reduced flight schedule, the clock keeps ticking and mostly does not care if an airplane is in the air or not," said Jonathan Yang, Director of Line Maintenance at Hawaiian. hawaiianairlines.com



Aviation is Virgin on new era

AN AVIATION expert has claimed that the collapse of Virgin Australia might be the start of a new era for the airline industry.

Kate Quigley, Associate Professor in Aviation at the University of South Australia, suggests the impact of the COVID-19 crisis forces operators to develop new, more resilient business models.

She believes that strong interest from major investors such as Wesfarmers and the Macquarie Group has created a sense the current situation may be the start of a story, rather than the end of one.

"The aviation industry has always been challenging, as there are large costs involved in keeping a fleet of planes in the air, and that often requires a very high level of debt," said Assoc. Prof Quigley.

"So, I wouldn't be surprised to see some other airlines around the world go the same way as Virgin Australia, because the only way those companies can make debt repayments is to have their planes flying, and that is impossible at the moment.

"However, where one operator drops out, there becomes more space for other operators to work in, and for those companies with clever, innovative ideas, there is a really exciting opportunity to reshape the aviation industry for the better going forward."

■ unisa.edu.au



Park Regis Kris Kin Dubai

The tools that could help you survive

In this exclusive article for *Traveltalk*, Fiona Godfrey, Global Director of Revenue Generation for StayWell Holdings, offers her thoughts on how businesses should be planning for a post COVID-19 future.

IN SOME ways, those working in hotels are possibly better versed in unexpected crises than many other sectors – not that it’s a title anyone actually wants.

In recent history, hotels have been the sites of terror attacks, high profile deaths and murders, and pinpointed as key to the spread of previous health epidemics.

That’s not to say that anything could have prepared any of us for the incomprehensibly swift and devastating impact of COVID-19 on our industry, but it has proven that many of the tried and tested methods of dealing with a crisis do still ring true – even when the current crisis is of unparalleled proportions.

There is no denying that COVID-19 has had – and continues to have – an incomparably negative impact on the tourism industry and that impact is not yet

even fully realised. Many of us in tourism are currently hurting and we’re already hurting badly. It’s unrealistic to think that we won’t continue to hurt for a long time, even once the global handle on the virus itself is firm – but just like economic strain we have encountered in the past, this will pass.

So what do we do in the meantime? We take comfort in knowing that the tools we have had to use in the past are just as relevant today – and one could argue are even more important than ever.

With no clarity around when we can expect to see a return to increased international travel and even a more relaxed approach to being out and about locally, the only thing we can currently do is prepare for recovery.



Fiona Godfrey, Global Director of Revenue Generation for StayWell Holdings

BE TRANSPARENT

Transparency and communication is key – with staff, with colleagues, with suppliers, with guests – with anyone with whom you do business.

The reality of this epidemic is that economic losses will be suffered and your business is not alone. People are anxious and people are stressed – not just about the health implications of this outbreak, but the economic implications.

Be as honest as you can be about what you are doing to keep the business moving positively and if things aren’t looking good, be as open as you can be so people aren’t left feeling blindsided if difficult decisions need to be made.

BE STRATEGIC

In times of crisis, revenue generation takes a backseat to ensuring the health and wellbeing of staff and guests is at the fore of everything we do. And to do that, it is vital to remain rational, calm and strategic.

Executive teams need to be scenario planning now if they haven’t already. Strategically assess the current situation and what the future could look like. Don’t be afraid to be optimistic, but be prepared to be rational and worst case scenarios must also be planned for.

Timing of current travel restrictions give all of us an initial timeframe to work within, but variations must be considered.

Look at cost controls, your business mix, where you can cut costs and where you can maintain an income – but don’t put any measures or promotions into place that will be difficult to remove later such as extreme discounting that could lead to brand damage or guests resisting your full price down the track.

THINK LONG TERM

Continue to think long term. That means as much as is possible, maintain some level of marketing so you are top of mind as the shift in consumer behaviour begins – and it will.

As much as possible, postpone – don’t cancel. Work with key suppliers, event organisers and your guests and clients to see what can be postponed rather than cancelled from holiday bookings to conferences to big F&B bookings.

Be flexible and understanding in regards to cancellations to maintain customer loyalty and future patronage.

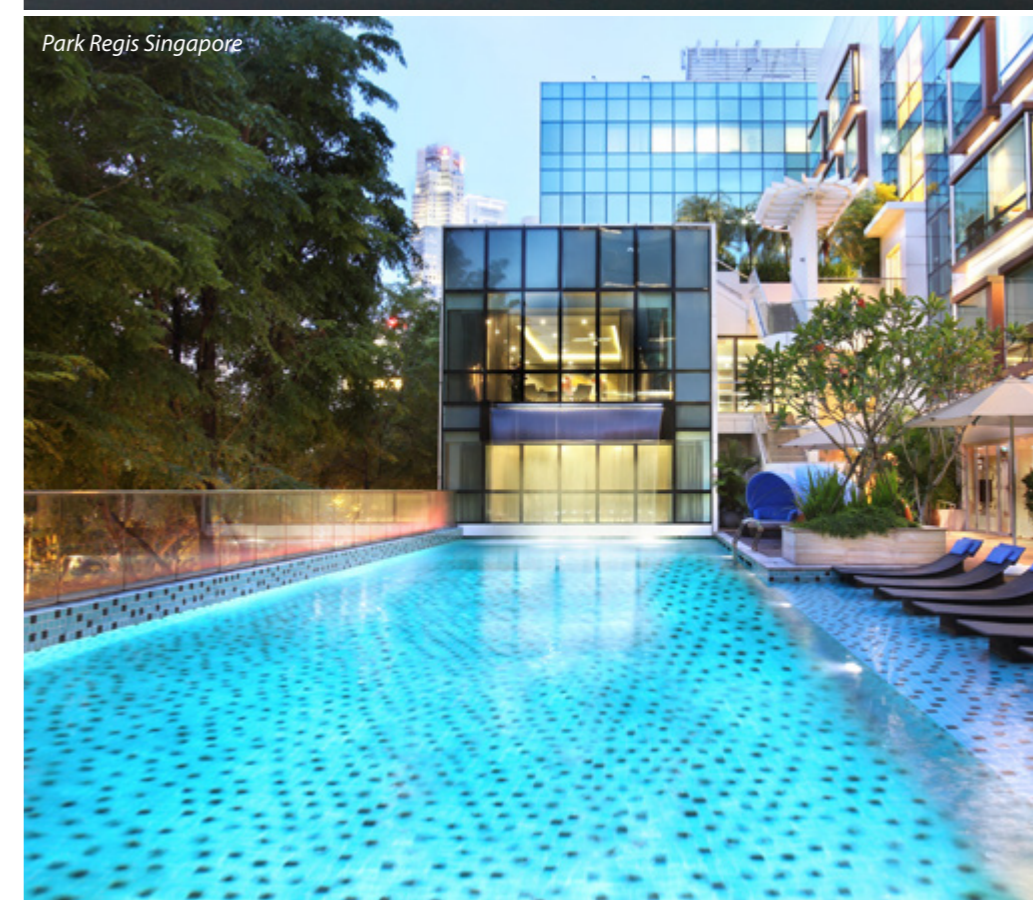
Focus on your long-term goals – these should still be in place and being worked towards, even if they need to shift slightly, and focus on keeping your staff and guests as happy as you can. They remain the lifeblood of our industry and your business, even when it feels like the blood is draining from it!

Travel and tourism is firmly entrenched in our way of life. It is an important contributor to economic growth, provides employment for millions – including developing and vulnerable communities, and is key in our growing awareness of sustainability and conservation.

We are part of a vital and wonderful sector. We have lived through turbulent times before...and we will survive this too. staywellgroup.com



Leisure Inn, Pokolbin Hill



Park Regis Singapore



SPECIAL OFFER

StayWell Holdings has launched a Book Now and Pay Later offer, encouraging people to start planning for a holiday next year.

The company has hotels and properties across Australia, Asia, the Middle East and Europe, giving travellers the chance to plan a trip abroad, stay local, or do both.

The fully flexible offer extends to participating StayWell Hotels, including The Prince Akatoki, Park Regis and Leisure Inn Brands. It enables people to book now but pay later, plus receive 20 per cent off the best flexible rate, and offers a 48 hour cancellation window.

To take advantage, book by June 30 and stay by May 31, 2021.

■ staywellgroup.com/explore-with-us



Unwrap the gift of time

Here, we chat to Christian Hunter, Managing Director, Travellers Choice, about how his organisation has been coping during the COVID-19 crisis. Along with great advice on how travel agents can spend their downtime, he also suggests why agents may be even more important once restrictions are lifted.

Q: How has corona virus impacted the corporate operations of Travellers Choice?

A: Travellers Choice is predominantly a marketing services company and of course in the current environment there are few travel products to promote.

Instead we have found other ways to provide support – from sourcing vital information and ensuring our members have access to the latest supplier updates, to helping them address specific issues around the likes of refunds and customer queries.

In addition, we've been helping members stay connected with their customers using the many digital channels we provide.

Q: What impact has it had on your network as a whole?

A: Like every other travel agency business our members have effectively spent the last month undoing all of the hard work they did over the previous 12 months – which has meant unravelling forward sales, repatriating clients from overseas, organising refunds, etc.

And there have been some amazing stories of how our members have supported their customers in this time of need. Just as impressive has been the support members have shown each other.

The sense of community and camaraderie has been particularly evident through our private Facebook group, TC



Christian Hunter, Managing Director, Travellers Choice

Connect, where we've seen members sharing contacts and supplier information, working together to decipher ambiguous fare regulations, or just finding ways to lift others' spirits.

It's been inspiring to see them work together as one.

Q: What reactions have Travellers Choice agents been getting from their customers?

A: Consumers have been scared, frustrated, confused and angry. And while our members have been able to help many customers, they have also on occasion had to deliver some unwelcome news in relation to cancellation policies and suppliers not providing full refunds.

As a result they have experienced the full gamut of emotions – from legal threats to customers bringing in gifts and even offering financial support.

Q: Are you concerned that the Travellers Choice brand will be irretrievably damaged by this crisis?

A: Not in the slightest. I think it could be quite the opposite in fact.

There is potential for Travellers Choice members to emerge from this crisis with an even stronger brand because of the way they have gone the extra mile to support their customers.

Some extraordinary stories are being

told and they are resonating in the community. The way Travellers Choice itself has responded has also been deeply appreciated by our members and that is helping forge an even stronger bond.

Q: How do you see the travel industry recovering from this crisis?

A: In a word: slowly. You don't need to be Einstein to see that it will take a long time for international travel to come back.

It will clearly start with domestic travel because that is likely to be the only product available. Then there will be an inevitable expansion to include selected international destinations, possibly New Zealand or the South Pacific.

The cruise sector has of course taken some hard knocks, but it has a loyal passenger base and I'm confident they will play an instrumental role in its recovery.

Q: Do you think travel agents will be even more relevant once this crisis is over?

A: I sense they will be. Some consumers will have used a travel agent and been looked after, others may have booked online or directly and had a less positive experience.

Experiences will of course be spread across a broad spectrum, but I think the value that travel agents bring will have never been clearer.

“If there is one positive it's that travel agents have been given something they've never had before – the gift of time.”

Q: Are there any positives that can be taken from this situation?

A: Let's be honest, it's a pretty negative situation. If there is one positive it's that travel agents have been given something they've never had before – the gift of time.

For the next couple of months, very little business will be coming through the door and cancellations and re-bookings will have been taken care of. That means agents have a rare opportunity to work on their business; to do the things they've been too busy to do before.

It could be training, database management, devising rebound strategies or becoming a domestic travel expert.

What matters is that when business comes back we are all primed and ready to seize the opportunities. It's the only positive I can find – and trust me I've been digging around for something!

Q: Finally, what are your tips for passing the time in self-isolation?

A: Take the opportunities that are there. Stay focused, be disciplined, get up and – even though you are at home – go to work.

Use the time you've got wisely. And of course look after yourself – mentally and physically – and be kind to each other.

■ travellerschoice.com.au

EXPLORING A LOST WORLD



Nightfall Camp glamping. Photo courtesy Tourism and Events Queensland

1 FIND THE LOST WORLD...

From Tamborine head down to the pretty village of Canungra, then through Beaudesert on a journey of discovery to the Lost World Valley via Christmas Creek Road and the Darlington Connection Road.

Take it easy on these narrow back-country roads and be careful coming to single lane bridges. Watch out for wallabies, whose road manners are sadly lacking.

Now you enter another world, full of surprises – The Lost World Valley. Get ready for the ultimate Arcadian dream, with the natural beauty of the World Heritage-listed Lamington National Park, towering cliffs and the rainforest at your doorstep.

WHERE TO STAY

Just past Lamington is the legendary Nightfall Camp, a fully-inclusive luxury glamping experience in a peaceful riverside location. There's also Wongari Eco Retreat with deluxe cabins and at Darlington you'll find Worendo Cottages with spectacular views and Wild Limes monthly cooking school (book well ahead). worendo.com; wongari.com.au; nightfall.com.au

With Australia's borders set to be closed for the foreseeable future, domestic tourism is expected to receive a massive boost.

Traveltalk will be dedicating several pages each issue to home-based activities to get you thinking about post-corona travel. Here, PHIL HAWKES discovers the green behind the Gold Coast and offers some great itinerary options.

HOW AUSTRALIAN can you get when you combine green and gold?

That's what you experience when you take a holiday on the popular Gold Coast... then rent a car for an invigorating few days of mountain greenery, verdant valleys and the dramatic views of the Scenic Rim.

This is an ancient volcanic land, the traditional country of the Yugambeh peoples, with a World Heritage-listed rainforest and six national parks in an area of more than 4,000 square kilometres. Here, you're in a different universe away from so called "urban civilisation".

Starting or finishing your trip on the Gold Coast does make sense for its airport access and good value car rentals.

And there's plenty to enjoy if you like the surfing life on the best beaches in Australia, a wide variety of restaurants (try Labart Bistro, not to be missed) and modern malls like Robina and Pacific Fair. These places are always popular with visitors. destinationgoldcoast.com

Not so familiar is Tamborine Mountain in the Gold Coast hinterland. In less than an hour you can be taking a leisurely stroll along Gallery Walk at Eagle Heights with its cafés, arts and craft shops; tastings at wineries like Witches Brew (where there's a pleasant walking track to the Witches Falls), or lunch at Cedar Creek Estate, North Tamborine.

There's also the Tamborine Mountain Distillery with award-winning liqueurs to try and the highly regarded Witches Chase Cheese Factory. You will never go hungry or thirsty at Tamborine! visittamborinemountain.com.au

From here, there are some great drives and stays around the Scenic Rim. You're really spoiled for choice so here are four different itinerary suggestions.

2 COMBINE HEALTHY ACTIVITIES WITH GREAT CUISINE

If these are your top priorities, head straight for Spicers Peak Lodge at Maryvale, via Aratula (a good coffee stop), Cunningham's Gap and a gravel access road to this remote mountaintop location.

The Lodge is set on 3,000 hectares of World Heritage listed national park and a main feature is the range of walks from two- to seven-kilometres that suit all fitness levels... you'll appreciate the exercise before enjoying gourmet cuisine at the much-awarded Peak Restaurant, or relaxing in the Anise day spa.

Spicers also offer luxury glamping accommodation at their Canopy Tents in a secluded, private location ideal for groups of up to 20 people and fully catered. spicersretreats.com



Spicers Peak Lodge Dam at night.



Hiker at Mt Barney Lodge. Photo courtesy Tourism and Events Queensland

3 GO FAR OUT AT MOUNT BARNEY

Mount Barney is about as far as you can go before you hit the border of New South Wales.

Again, passing through Beaudesert, take the Mount Lindesay Highway to Tamrookum, where it's possible to visit 4Real Milk, Australia's first 'robotic' dairy farm producing milk like your grandparents used to enjoy. It's pasteurised, but the real thing in quality and creamy flavour (check opening times).

From Tamrookum take the turnoff to Kooralbyn and head for the village where you'll find a golf course, a 1970s-style Ramada Resort and your lunch venue Valley Kitchen.

Hosts Toni and Andy discovered Kooralbyn seven years ago and now their little cafe attracts visitors from all over the region for the food and fine Toby's Estate coffee. Worth the detour. valleykitchenkooralbyn.com

The last town on your route to Mt.

Barney is Rathdowney with its famous pub affectionately known as Rathy's. It would also be a good idea to stock up with food and drinks at a local store if your accommodation at Mt. Barney doesn't include an evening meal.

Aim to arrive at Mt. Barney with plenty of time for a healthy walk to admire the magnificent mountain scenery, watch for wildlife and birds and enjoy the drama of sunset morphing into dusk.

WHERE TO STAY

Barney Creek Vineyard Cottages offers memorable views of Mt. Barney and gnarled grapevines. There are romantic cottages plus family accommodation 'far from the madding crowd'. barneycreekcottages.com

Mt. Barney Lodge Country Retreat attracts families, hikers and active people in the homestead, a cabin or a campsite. mtbarneylodge.com.au

4 RETREAT TO THE RAINFOREST

A short distance from Canungra on the Lamington Plateau, a winding gravel road takes you to O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat.

Owner Shane O'Reilly, whose family built this award-winning mountain-top lodge nearly 100 years ago, suggests that no trip to the Scenic Rim is complete without a stay, or at least a day trip, to enjoy nature in a relaxed environment... especially if you've been on a road trip adventure for a few days.

At O'Reilly's you can choose between a studio or mountain view room, or a luxury villa with the attached Clubhouse and Lost World Spa for some 'recovery TLC' prior to returning to what we call "civilisation". He has a point!

However if you do feel in the mood for some more exercise there's a range of activities including a zipline for thrill seekers, Segway tours, and of course plenty of wonderful walking trails. oreillys.com.au

■ visitscenicrim.com.au

Helicopter flying over the Bungle Bungle Range, Purnululu National Park. Below: Humpback whale. All pictures courtesy Tourism Western Australia



THE WAY TO GO OUT WEST

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

Enjoy up close and behind the scenes encounters with wildlife including the entertaining orangutans and numbats at **Perth Zoo**.

At **Peel Zoo**, Ranger Red is taking followers behind the scenes with daily videos on its Facebook page and is also running an animal adoption program.

Caversham Wildlife Park is featuring a Closure Chronicles series on its Facebook page, with daily updates of the animals ranging from koalas to quokkas.

Western Australia is well-known for its 'humpback highway' and having one of the longest whale-watching seasons in the world.

Local tour operator **Whale Watch WA** is bringing the giant and gentle creatures into homes with the launch of virtual tours on its Whale Watch TV channel.

Whale lovers can also hop onboard a free virtual tour to the Perth Canyon to see a family of blue whales, or spot some friendly humpbacks in Augusta in WA's Margaret River region, with more videos to come. facebook.com/PerthZoo; facebook.com/peelzoo; facebook.com/CavershamWildlifePark; whalewatchwesternaustralia.com

Thanks to technology and the entrepreneurship of the tourism and hospitality industry in WA, there are now many nature, wildlife and cultural experiences that can be sampled from the comfort of your living room, giving you ideas for your next holiday in the west.



Olio Bello, Margaret River

EXPLORE ABOVE AND BELOW THE SEA

Located in the Margaret River region, the **Busselton Jetty** has taken virtual experiences to new depths, by offering a range of free and paid virtual tours including:

- * Daily at 2pm (excluding public holidays) – \$11 – live streams with the jetty's marine science team, guiding visitors through the different levels of the jetty's Underwater Observatory, including a Q & A.

- * A series of 11 free online tours and workshops including virtual running, cycling, dancing, yoga and personal training, marine education, jetty history, 360 degree virtual tours and night tours of the jetty where you'll hear about what things fish get up to in the dark! busseltonjetty.com.au/virtualtours

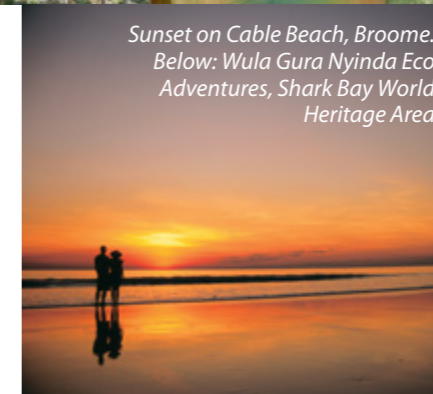
CULTURE

Postcards from our Backyard is a series of stories about the lifestyle of Aboriginal tour operators from around WA.

Developed by the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC), viewers can learn to make fire with Josh Whiteland from **Koomal Dreaming** in the Margaret River region, go on an adventure with Darren Capewell from **Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Adventures** in Shark Bay and catch bushtucker with Johani Mamid from **Mabu Buru Broome Aboriginal Tours** in the Kimberley. facebook.com/WAITOC.AboriginalCulture

Talented artists from the **Waringarri Arts Studio** in Kununurra in WA's Kimberley region continue to produce art works inspired by their country and culture from three outstation communities that have been set up as a precautionary measure to keep artists safe.

Shop for artworks, including those created during the On Country program, at waringarriarts.com.au/shop



Sunset on Cable Beach, Broome. Below: Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Adventures, Shark Bay World Heritage Area



THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

The **Stargazers Club of WA** has launched a series of Facebook Live events, teaching followers how to make the most of the evening stars, with a focus on naked eye stargazing.

WA is one of the best places in the world to see the night sky, given its isolation and vastness. facebook.com/stargazersclub/live

Local tour operator and social guide **So Broome** is making it easier for those to experience the Kimberley town via a series of events broadcast on Facebook.

Witness a famous sunset over Broome's Cable Beach, or see the natural phenomenon Staircase to the Moon, which occurs when a full moon rises over the exposed tidal flats of Roebuck Bay. Dates and details on the So Broome Facebook page.



Dining Experiences – Koomal Dreaming

UP IN THE AIR

Kimberley Air Tours, who run aerial tours to some of WA's most ancient and unique landscapes in the Kimberley region, has launched a new online air tour – 'Kimberley Air Tours from the Couch'.

Owner and chief pilot Leigh Rawlings takes guests on three aerial adventures including Kununurra, Lake Argyle and the Ord River Irrigation Area; the Bungle Bungle Range in World Heritage-listed Purnululu National Park and the Argyle Diamond Mine; and the Mitchell Falls and Kimberley coastline.

Shot from the perspective of sitting in a window seat and with commentary, each 20 minute tour is \$25. kimberleyairtours.com.au

Kimberley Wild Expeditions are giving their Facebook followers an online version of their 13-day 'Kimberley Explorer' tour. facebook.com/KimberleyWildExpeditions

HAVE A WINE TIME

Margaret River's 'Wine Unearthed' podcast series explores the people, natural environment and the wineries of this well known region.

Get inside the mind of a big wave surfer, hear from the family who convinced Sting to sing at their winery and meet an Aboriginal cultural custodian.

Download from Apple Podcasts or Spotify, or at margaretriver.com/wineunearthed

Further south in WA's **Great Southern**, there's a range of wineries, distilleries, breweries and cideries that are ready to home deliver. greatsouthernwine.org.au

One of Perth's favourite Middle Eastern restaurants, **The Hummus Club**, is now sharing one of its most popular recipes and menu items online following the launch of crowd funding initiative – In Perth We Trust.

Take a virtual hummus masterclass with the master of chickpeas Ziad Zammar and Executive Chef Emily Heron. All proceeds go to paying suppliers and staff, and keeping the business alive until the time is right to re-open. chuffed.org/project/in-perth-we-trust



Cooking up a storm

**TASTE
OBSESSION**
SINGAPORE



Singapore is home to more dishes than you can eat in a lifetime. From Michelin-starred delicacies and international cuisines to scrumptious creations by home-grown chefs and timeless hawker favourites, Singapore is where you can taste it all.

Experience the smell, flavours and comfort of some of the Singapore Tourism Board's favourite dishes (and drinks) through the Taste Obsession Singapore Home Edition.

HAINANESE CHICKEN RICE

The Hainanese may only constitute 5% of the Chinese population in Singapore, yet that didn't stop this dish from being Singapore's unofficial national dish.

The original Hainanese cooking method of poaching the chicken before immersing it in an ice bath has been preserved. Today, the Singaporean version, created over 70 years ago, comes with a unique tangy chilli sauce dip, with the use of tender and young chicken.

Whether you are eating this at a hawker centre or at some of Singapore's best hotels, you can be assured of succulent, flavourful chicken that is paired with a portion of fragrant rice, cooked in chicken stock and ginger.

Now it's your turn to share your creations with your colleagues, and tag us at #VisitSingapore.

www.visitsingapore.com



HAINANESE CHICKEN RICE

Serves: 4 people
Cook time: 90 minutes
Prep time: 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS:

- 1.5kg chicken
- 1 tablespoon of chicken stock powder
- 1 spring onion, cut into 2cm pieces
- 4 slices of peeled fresh ginger
- Coriander leaves, sliced tomato, sliced cucumber to serve
- Iced water
- 125ml vegetable oil
- 6-8 finely chopped garlic cloves
- 800g long grain rice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- ¼ teaspoon sesame oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

(A) Chicken

1. Bring 2 litres of water and stock powder to the boil in a large saucepan.
2. Stuff chicken with spring onion and ginger. Place, breast-down, in stock.
3. Reduce heat to a rapid simmer and cook, covered, for 40 minutes or until just cooked through.
4. Plunge the chicken into the iced water for 1 minute to cool. This will also help create a springy texture.
5. Set stock and chicken aside.

(B) Rice

1. Heat oil in a saucepan. Add garlic and stir-fry until fragrant.
2. Add rice grains and salt, and stir-fry for 2 minutes.
3. Pour in enough reserved stock to sit 1cm over the rice.
4. Bring to the boil and continue boiling until steam holes form in rice.
5. Reduce heat, cover and steam for 30 minutes until cooked.
6. Slice chicken and place on serving plates.
7. Drizzle with soy sauce and sesame oil, and top with coriander.
8. Serve with the rice, tomatoes and cucumber.

HOKKIEN MEE

Serves: 5 people
Cook time: 10 minutes
Prep time: 45 minutes

INGREDIENTS:

- 200g pork belly or shoulder, cut into thin slices
- 200g prawns, peeled
- 2 medium squid, cleaned and cut into rings
- 1 teaspoon fish sauce
- ¼ teaspoon white pepper
- 200g fresh yellow egg noodles (also known as Hokkien noodles)
- 200g rice noodles (also known as rice vermicelli or bee hoon)
- 500ml chicken stock
- 300g bean sprouts
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a large wok, heat the oil until it shimmers. Stir the garlic until golden brown and fragrant.
2. Add the pork and fry well. Then add the prawns and stir-fry for 2-3 minutes.
3. Add the squid and season with fish sauce and pepper. Stir fry until the squid turns opaque. Remove all the ingredients from the wok and set aside.
4. Add the noodles and the stock and bring to a boil. Simmer for 5 minutes, or until the noodles are cooked.
5. Add the bean sprouts and cooked ingredients. Stir-fry briefly to combine and heat through. Add the chives and toss.
6. Sprinkle with fried shallots and serve hot with sambal belachan (optional – for those who want it spicy) and a small lime.



ROJAK

Serves: 4 people
Cook time: Nil
Prep time: 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS:

ROJAK:

- 100g pineapple, rind removed
- 100g cucumber, sliced
- 50g dough fritters, already fried
- 150g roasted peanuts, grounded
- 50g bean sprouts (blanched)
- 1 unripe green mango (optional)
- 1 square firm tofu or tau kwa (pressed tofu) shallow-fried until golden brown and sliced into 8 pieces
- 1 teaspoon red ginger
- 1 tempeh (optional)

INGREDIENTS:

SAUCE:

- 1 tablespoon grounded *gula melaka* (palm sugar) or brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon *hay koh* (black prawn paste)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 75g peanuts, dry roasted and crushed
- 2 tablespoons tamarind pulp, soaked in 125ml water, squeezed and strained to obtain the juice
- 1 dash pepper
- 1 teaspoon *belachan* (spicy dried shrimp paste – optional)
- 2-3 large red chillies

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. To make the paste, grind the chillies, *gula melaka* and *belachan*, tamarind juice, *hay koh*, and salt to a smooth paste in a blender. (for non-spicy option, leave out chillies and *belachan*).
2. Transfer to a bowl, add the peanuts, stir and set aside.
3. Place the rest of the ingredients into a serving dish.
4. Add the paste and stir to mix, then serve.



FORAGER'S GARDEN

INGREDIENTS:

- Cocktail
- 30ml Brass Lion Gin (or equivalent)
 - 30ml tonic water

Pandan Kombucha

- 4-5 sprigs of pandan leaves
- 1L water
- 200g of Trigona honey

Glassware

- Whisky chunk ice
- 15ml pandan kombucha
- Edible flowers
- 10 – 12 calamansi
- 25g wild ginger flower
- Handful blue pea flowers
- Rocks glass

INSTRUCTIONS:

Kombucha infused with blue pea flowers:

1. Break the fresh pandan leaves.
2. Make a pandan tea and boil down with water and a touch of honey for approximately 15 minutes at low heat.
3. Ferment with kombucha scoby for about 4 – 7 days in a warm environment.
4. When ready, roughly cut calamansi and ginger flower.
5. Then reduce the kombucha for approximately 45 minutes with a handful of blue pea flowers, torched ginger flower and calamansi.

Cocktail:

1. Pour 15ml of pandan kombucha into a mixer.
2. Add 30ml of Brass Lion Gin (or equivalent) and shake.
3. Pour mixture into a circular rocks glass over a whisky chunk ice.
4. Add 30ml of tonic water and decorate with edible flowers before serving.





FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Here, MARK SNOXELL, founder of media and marketing agency Exposure Downunder, highlights his favourite Sri Lankan cuisine.

MY LOVE affair with Sri Lanka started over a decade ago in Adelaide when I had the good fortune to see Chef Peter Kuruvita in action.

Many months later I embarked on a private cooking tour of Sri Lanka and have been specialising in Sri Lanka ever since.

Many people would describe Sri Lankan cuisine as Indian. Maybe Southern Indian, but I'd like to say, no. Most Aussies know there's a difference between Thai and Vietnamese food. It's like that.

Firstly you need to think about the environment of Sri Lanka. It is a tropical island paradise. With that comes an abundance of wonderful fresh exotic ingredients such as seafood, coconuts, cinnamon (which originated in SL) and palm sugar.

Sri Lankans love their herbs and spices. It's usual for dishes to have a lot and they



not only differ from district to district, but also home to home.

An example of this is dhal (lentil curry). It's served at most places, though every time it's a new taste sensation and usually a good one. I say that you know how good the whole meal is going to be by simply tasting the dhal.

I don't think I have ever met a Sri Lankan who isn't passionate about food. Despite using lots of spices and herbs, the food is

never overbearing, nor heavy.

Unlike a lot of Indian dishes, Sri Lankan ones are not laden with ghee, so you're more than happy to indulge with a few more mouthfuls!

The "feel good" and healthy element to Sri Lankan food is very important to locals with many of the recipes having an Ayurvedic influence for wellbeing.

Goraka, which is used like tamarind, has medical qualities and is used frequently,



especially in seafood dishes to give them a pleasing zing.

The importance of rice is evident in the Sri Lankan culture, where rice cultivation has played a key role in shaping the culture with 'rice and curry' being a staple in every household, including for breakfast.

Note that it is 'rice and curry', not 'curry and rice'. This is because rice is seen as the most important part of the meal.

In ancient times there were approximately 400 types of rice grown on the island. Today there are mainly five (whereas India tends to use basmati) that are prepared in many different delicious and nutritional forms.

Milk rice (coconut milk) or 'Kiribath' is a crowd pleaser made for any auspicious occasion as a sign of good luck and prosperity.

For many visitors, rice is very much welcomed as it acts as a mild mediator to tame the usual fiery curries that accompany it. Although the traditional Sri Lankan curries are mainly vegetarian due to the Buddhist influence, today dishes vary from vegetables, cereals, meat, fish, sambols, pickles and chutneys.

'Polos Ambula' is a favourite among the locals and is made with young jackfruit, loaded with spices and cooked for several hours, ending up having the consistency of pulled pork (and makes a mean slider).

There's also a term in Sri Lanka called



"short eats", which is basically a good reason to have sweet and savoury snacks throughout the day with a good cup of Ceylon tea!

Also, unlike India, if you see something you like the look of, go for it! I'm always arriving back to my hotel room laden with small packets, perfect for midnight munchies after drinking the local arrack.

Talking about comfort food, kottu (stir fried sliced flat bread) and vada (lentil fritters) are popular street foods found in abundance across the island. They are often made during the evenings and through the night, to be found on small roadside vending stalls for day break.

Other than the main Sri Lankan food by the majority Sinhala community, the country is also enriched by many different cultures.

The Arabic influenced mutton biriyani has its own character (vs that from India) and has been localised by Sri Lankan Muslims, while the infamous crab curry

comes from the Tamil community in the northern region of Jaffna.

The Dutch and Portuguese also have had a strong influence as lamprais, which I'll sum up as the ultimate picnic wrapped up in banana leaf!

When visiting the indigenous Vedda tribe, make sure you get some of their wild bee honey. It's the perfect accompaniment to fresh buffalo curd, which is easily purchased in small clay pots by friendly locals.

But of all dishes, the most recognised is hoppers.

Hoppers are usually served at breakfast. These crispy, bowl-shaped pancakes are addictive; made with rice flour and coconut milk and best enjoyed hot from the pan with an egg cooked inside with some chutney and sambol on the side.

You will understand why I always try to have some on the way to the airport before returning home. I always hate to leave. Sri Lanka – it truly was love at first bite!

■ ttsrilanka.com; exposuredownunder.com





When virtual becomes reality

Here's a round-up of some of the latest virtual offerings designed to keep us amused, informed and entertained during lockdown.



MAKE MANGAN'S MAGNIFICENT MONDAY MEAL MASTERCLASS

CELEBRITY CHEF Luke Mangan is hosting a series of cooking classes designed to show viewers how to create some of his famous dishes.

Mangan, the long-standing P&O Cruises chef, will bring a taste of his popular Salt grill restaurant to home kitchens on Monday evenings.

The cooking classes are part of P&O's mission to provide its guests with a taste of the high seas during this period when most Australians are spending increasing

amounts of time at home.

"Many of us are spending increasing amounts of time at home and this provides a great opportunity to get in the kitchen, test our culinary skills and try out new recipes," said Mangan.

"Home cooking is a lot of fun and can be a great way of bringing the family together at dinner time."

The virtual cooking class can be viewed on P&O Cruises Facebook and YouTube page.

■ pocruses.com.au

YOGA AND GOLF TIPS

IRELAND IS home to some of the best yoga retreats and wellness escapes found anywhere in the world.

But while everyone stays on social lockdown, creative Irish yogis, wellness and mindfulness specialists have moved to the online world to continue to encourage regular exercise routines and support positive mental health.

With many offering free and low-cost classes and services, you can hook up with a host of Irish yoga and mindfulness teachers from all over the country.

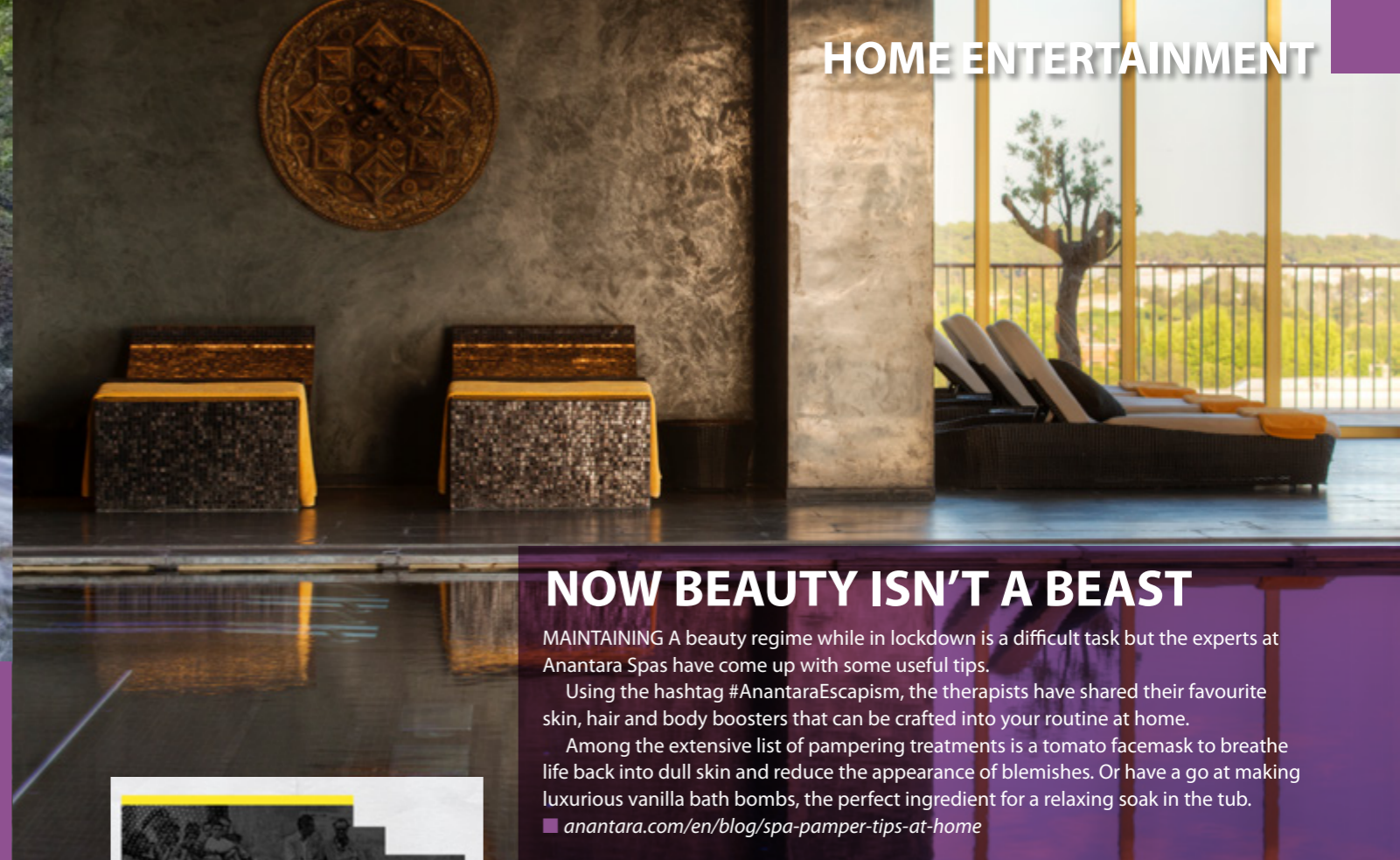
Normally based in Belfast's trendy Cathedral Quarter, Flow Studio has now switched to providing live online classes that guide you through breath-centred flows and help you navigate the new normal.

To experience the Celtic vibes of Ireland's Ancient East, try the membership-based Yoga Sacred Ireland. Its real-world County Wicklow studio has been described as one of the most beautiful in Ireland.

Yoga Ireland in County Kildare is run by Catriona Mc Cormack, a reiki master and yoga teacher for more than 26 years. Here you'll also find free sessions for kids and older people.

Finally, golfers should head to the Twitter page of three-time Major championship winner and current Ryder Cup captain Pádraig Harrington, who is offering tips on how to improve your game.

Picture courtesy Tourism Ireland
■ ireland.com



NOW BEAUTY ISN'T A BEAST

MAINTAINING A beauty regime while in lockdown is a difficult task but the experts at Anantara Spas have come up with some useful tips.

Using the hashtag #AnantaraEscapism, the therapists have shared their favourite skin, hair and body boosters that can be crafted into your routine at home.

Among the extensive list of pampering treatments is a tomato facemask to breathe life back into dull skin and reduce the appearance of blemishes. Or have a go at making luxurious vanilla bath bombs, the perfect ingredient for a relaxing soak in the tub.

■ anantara.com/en/blog/spa-pamper-tips-at-home



THE PRANCING HORSE OFFERS FANS A RIDE

CAR FANS can get their Ferrari fix during lockdown through a series of podcasts looking at the history of the famous brand.

Entitled 'The Origins of a Legend', the podcasts are available for audio streaming on Spotify or smartphone. They are designed to take Ferrari fans on a real journey through time, decade by decade.

The series of seven episodes will highlight the most significant moments from the Prancing Horse's extraordinary history while also revealing some lesser known anecdotes.

This journey into the past begins in 1947 – the year of Ferrari's first victory when Franco Cortese won the Rome Grand Prix at the wheel of the 125 S. It continues with the launch of the famous Ferrari 166 MM in 1948 and triumph the following year in the 24 Hours of Le Mans, all the way up to the present day.



The acai crunch bowl

IT'S CRYSTAL CLEAR AT HOME

FIND OUT how to luxe your interiors, brew the perfect kombucha or make a killer pumpkin hummus.

Australian hospitality company Crystalbrook Collection has launched their #AtHomeWithCrystalbrook initiative to bring tricks of the trade into your own home.

From poolside yoga in Cairns to décor tips in Sydney and rainforest walks in Byron Bay, Australians can now travel to each of Crystalbrook's luxurious hotels from the comfort of their living room.

For those looking to enhance their cooking skills, Byron at Byron's Chef Minh will be hosting virtual cooking classes so you can make your own sourdough, or a delicious home kombucha for a health kick.

Riley's restaurants in Cairns will share Greenfields' acai crunch bowl recipe, Paper Crane's pad ka prao or Rocco's roasted pumpkin hummus.

There's something for the youngsters too with the kids' version of At Home With Crystalbrook featuring educational content supporting the company's approach to sustainability and responsible luxury.

■ crystalbrookcollection.com/at-home-with-crystalbrook



Buttered poached lobster from Luminae

COOK LIKE A CELEBRITY

CELEBRITY CRUISES is releasing daily recipes and step-by-step cooking videos from their world-renowned restaurants.

Learn how to kick-start your day with the humble yet delectable eggs Benedict from Luminae Restaurant, try the spicy ahi tuna from Sushi on Five, or add the marinated tomato salad from Le Petit Chef to your own repertoire.

Between recipes, Celebrity will be sharing fitness-focused videos led by crew members, as well as ways to keep the children entertained with Camp at Sea projects.

■ facebook.com/CelebrityCruisesAUSNZ



SMALL IS STILL BEAUTIFUL

G ADVENTURES HAS launched the world's first live virtual small group tour.

The tour of Italy last month was part of G's suite of new Virtual Travel Experiences, which have been designed for armchair travellers to connect with the world around them, to discover new places and cultures.

"Travelling is about tackling distance, breaking down barriers and bringing people from around the world together," said Adrian Piotto, Managing Director G Adventures, Australia and New Zealand.

Other Virtual Travel Experiences include virtual walking tours and virtual backdrops for Zoom.

■ gadventures.com/blog



A ONE-STOP CURIOSITY SHOP

ABU DHABI has launched a new virtual exploration platform, offering original education and entertainment content in one comprehensive hub.

The platform, #StayCurious, promises an interactive, 360-degree experience that transports viewers to a world of sunshine, impressive scenery and non-stop entertainment from the comfort of their homes.

There are five pillars of content, which are set to be complemented with more experiences in the future:

Stay Adventurous: a hub of virtual tours and experiences, providing visitors with valuable insights into Abu Dhabi's history, heritage and diverse offerings.

Stay Indulgent: brings some of Abu Dhabi's best culinary offerings to the user's dining table through a series of cooking workshops and master classes with top chefs from the emirate.

Stay Enlightened: an invitation to users to expand their knowledge through a number of dedicated free virtual courses and education content from top institutions, including Grow with Google, Coursera, History of the Emirates and Maktaba Digital Library.

Stay Creative: the platform will utilise the newly launched "CulturAll" virtual experiences to inspire audience through a rich exploration of Abu Dhabi's cultural offerings.

Stay Entertained: a hub that links to a series of virtual events and activations, set to be launched in the coming weeks to keep audiences entertained and engaged while at home.

"#StayCurious is an opportunity for people to dream, imagine and fulfil their curiosity and reaffirms our love for exploration and learning more about one another," said H.E. Ali Hassan Al Shaiba, Executive Director of the Marketing and Communications Sector at DCT Abu Dhabi.

■ #StayCurious can be accessed online via staycurious.ae

GHOSTS, FAIRYTALES AND KILTS

TRAVEL BACK in time to the days of kings, queens, lairds and ladies on Scotland's Castle Trail, the only one of its kind in the country.

Virtually explore 19 sites ranging from crumbling medieval keeps, old cliff-top rises, romantic fortresses and regal mansion homes, to fairytale castles with their own green, grey or white ladies as resident ghosts.

They tell the story of kings, alliances and vendettas, wars and the families who have made Scotland. Whether you're a history buff, architecture-lover or just love a fascinating story, you will enjoy exploring Scotland's Castle Trail.

■ ebooks.visitscotland.com/scotlands-castle-trail



USE THE WEB TO EXPLORE THE ANTARCTIC AT HOME

PONANT HAS introduced a new series of free lectures on Facebook crafted for the adventurous.

Each week's lecture will showcase a PONANT expedition team member, such as naturalists, scientists and a photographer, each contributing their areas of specialisation and expertise relative to the destinations or environments being reviewed.

Throughout May, the focus will be on the Antarctic region including South Georgia and the Falkland Islands.

In addition, viewers are invited to ask questions and submit their own photos to these experts ahead of the lectures, which start at 5pm (AEST).

"I am excited to announce the launch of

our inaugural range of virtual expedition lectures to provide travellers, adventurers and travel agents with an opportunity to gain insight into what sets PONANT on another level," explained Monique Ponfoort, PONANT Vice President Asia Pacific.

"This series of virtual lectures, easily accessible live on our Australia and New Zealand Facebook pages, will provide comprehensive information to stimulate mental planning during these restricted travel times.

"Each week, a specialist guest presenter will draw on his or her expertise, sharing their knowledge and passion with viewers as if they were on a true expedition voyage!"

■ facebook.com/PonantAU





HOW SMART ARE YOU?

Our popular *Traveltease* quiz runs every week on our website, but we thought we'd give everyone a chance to see how much they know about travel. Can you get the correct answers without Google?

1. What is the smallest country in the world?

- a. Monaco
- b. Nauru
- c. Tuvalu
- d. Vatican

2. The hippo is responsible for more human deaths than any other animal in Africa.

- a. True
- b. False

3. The Richter scale is used to measure what?

- a. Tornados
- b. Tsunamis
- c. Hurricanes
- d. Earthquakes

4. Where is the largest railway station in the world?

- a. Mumbai
- b. New York
- c. Tokyo
- d. Moscow

5. Which planet is closest to the Sun?

- a. Mercury
- b. Venus
- c. Earth
- d. Mars

6. If you were visiting Windhoek, which African country would you be in?

- a. Botswana
- b. Namibia
- c. Angola
- d. Zambia

7. What was the first name of the engineer who designed the Eiffel Tower?

- a. Claude
- b. Philippe
- c. Gustave
- d. Maurice

8. In which country is the Tugrik the national currency?

- a. Belize
- b. Swazi
- c. Mongolia
- d. Tunisia

9. Which of these rock bands is NOT from Seattle?

- a. Foo Fighters
- b. Soundgarden
- c. Pearl Jam
- d. Talking Heads

10. Which of these countries is NOT part of the African Great Lakes region?

- a. Burundi
- b. Kenya
- c. Rwanda
- d. Angola

11. Who was the first woman to climb Everest?

- a. Junko Tabei
- b. Arlene Blum
- c. Lucy Walker
- d. Fanny Bullock Workman

12. The Northern Lights are also known as what?

- a. Aurora Borealis
- b. Magnus lacus Asphar
- c. Mons igneus
- d. Ferriviaria

13. How many U.S. states begin with the letter T?

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4

14. According to Guinness World Records, the hottest temperature on earth was recorded where?

- a. Death Valley, California
- b. Aziziyah, Libya
- c. Dallol, Ethiopia
- d. Wadi Halfa, Sudan

15. Which female explorer set a record for the fastest trip around the world in 1890?

- a. Nellie Bly
- b. Gertrude Bell
- c. Isabella Bird
- d. Freya Stark



5



9



12



11



2



8



14

Answers: 1d; 2a; 3d; 4b; 5a; 6b; 7c; 8c; 9d; 10d; 11a; 12a; 13b; 14a; 15a

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The Pinnacles, Western Australia. Photo courtesy Canva, Kevin Lebre