

Australia's favourite travel news magazine

Traveltalk

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We're back!
38-PAGE SPRING ISSUE



COMPETITION Win an Ultimate Winery Experience
SPECIAL FEATURE Aussie VIP's reveal their holiday faves
MONEY MATTERS How to protect your travel cash
DOMESTIC TRAVEL Top spots for serious stargazers

Plus: The new venture connecting you with the right travel agent

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COVER IMAGE: Having fun in the Caribbean. Picture Courtesy iStock

Waiting for a silver lining

THERE'S AN old saying that goes: "Don't worry, we'll laugh about this one day!"

Only the most parochial Pollyanna can have found anything to raise even a smile about over the past 18 months.

Just as it seems we've turned a corner and can at last look forward, a new COVID strain emerges and plunges us right back into lockdown. It's frustrating, demoralising and mentally exhausting.

Our industry has been particularly badly hit with the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA) estimating 15,000 jobs have been lost in the travel sector so far.

Furthermore, AFTA says the suspension of the travel bubble with New Zealand and combined flow on of border closures and restrictions make the need for more government support for travel agents and businesses even more compelling.

We at *Traveltalk* have not been immune to the effects of COVID, with a temporary pause in magazine operations. But with the inextinguishable optimism that is a hallmark of those who work in the travel industry, we are back – bigger, brighter and bolder than ever.

Rather than dwell on what's happened, we've dedicated this issue to looking ahead with hope and enthusiasm for a return to international travel. And we're not alone.

In this edition you'll hear from some of Australia's leading travel industry figures who'll be answering one simple question: where's the first place in the world you want to go once border restrictions are lifted?

Their answers will hopefully inspire you to start planning your own adventures as we approach the end

of 2021 and a (hopefully) brighter 2022. We'll also give you plenty of information and travel ideas throughout the magazine so you can make the right choice once we're back in the air, on the sea or travelling throughout this amazing country.

Of course, we know that some people may be slightly reluctant to book a holiday, having been through the nightmare of repeated cancellations and the potential minefield of the refund process. But as usual, *Traveltalk* has got you covered.

We've got the inside scoop on a new website that lets consumers browse the very best travel agents in the business. You'll also find a great article explaining in layman's terms how to protect yourself and your travel cash in case of future disruptions.

Needless to say domestic travel has been popular of late so we've got details on a number of exciting trips you can do across Australia, including a 'sparkling' feature on the best spots to go stargazing.

Overseas travel may be some time away but that doesn't stop us dreaming, so we've got some suggestions in Ireland, New Zealand and Saudi Arabia. We also look at two areas of travel likely to be extremely popular going forward: wellness and experiential.

And as if that wasn't enough, one lucky reader is going to win a fantastic experience deep in the heart of wine country.

It's great to be back with you again and we remain committed to the hard working men and women of the travel industry. They've been doing it tough recently and we hope that by bringing out this issue it gives them at least something to smile about.

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WHERE IN THE WORLD...?

IT WOULD be a massive understatement to say we've all had enough of pandemics, lockdowns and the whole COVID-19 saga.

So in a bid to provide some much needed cheer, we asked several leading travel industry figures where in the world they would like to go first once border restrictions are lifted.

Hopefully their answers will inspire and encourage you to look forward to happier times when we are all travelling again.



DENNIS BUNNIK
Joint CEO Bunnik Tours
and CATO Chairman

Personally, I can't wait to go anywhere, but if I had to choose just one location it would be Colombo, Sri Lanka to visit our extended Bunnik Tours family.

Sri Lanka has really suffered through the pandemic, particularly in the last few months, and to be able to get there in person and thank our incredible team for their hard work and dedication in assisting our clients throughout this trying time would mean the world to me.

Of course, while I'm there I'd love to support the local tourism industry as much as I can as well, so some time spent exploring Galle, Kandy and the tea plantations wouldn't go astray either!



SULADDA SARUTILAVAN
Director at Tourism Authority
of Thailand Sydney

Once international borders re-open, Phuket is my first choice as it is ready to welcome international travellers since July 2021.

I trust that Phuket is ready in terms of its natural beauty, warm hospitality, safety and hygiene.

I can't wait to spend time with my family enjoying beautiful beaches around Phuket and the nearby islands, visiting Buddhist temples for merit makings, having Thai-styled seafood at local restaurants and exploring shops and cafés around the Old Town on foot.

If I have time, I would also have my health check-up and pamper myself at one of the wellness spas.



KELLY SPENCER
Flight Centre General
Manager Australia

As soon as restrictions ease, I'm looking forward to hitting the Greek Islands – Mykonos in particular.

Being a Gold Coast girl and a beach bum at heart, Mykonos has some of the most spectacular beaches in the Mediterranean. And with no end of beachfront restaurants, cafes, bars and clubs, Mykonos Town certainly knows how to put on a party.

The people are friendly and make you feel very welcome no matter who you are or where you're from. Great sun, great sand, great food and great people – I'm there!



JOEL KATZ
Managing Director Australasia,
Cruise Lines International
Association (CLIA)

In the past couple of months, communities in Alaska have welcomed the first cruise ships to return since the beginning of the pandemic, so I hope to join them as soon as we can travel from Australia.

I think Alaska is one of those incredible destinations that need to be experienced by sea as well as by land – spectacular mountains and glaciers around intricate ocean passages and steep-sided bays.

After all that we've experienced in lockdown, this is where I'd like to go to recharge on fresh ocean air and reconnect with the vast spaces of remote and rugged nature.



GAI TYRRELL
Managing Director Australasia,
Globus family of brands

Never mind *Arrivederci, Roma*, it'll be *Ciao Roma!* for me, straight to my favourite city in the world!

Even more than the historic sites, Colosseum, Trevi Fountain, Pantheon... I love to wander, eyes wide open, getting lost in the gloriously frenetic life of modern Rome.

I also like the other side of the Tiber River, Trastevere, home to Basilica of Santa Maria, 220 AD, possibly the oldest church in Rome. I easily spend all day walking, checking out the fab restaurants, markets, hunting down a *Tramezzini al tonno e uovo* (that's world's best tuna and egg sandwich!).

My favourite pastime is spotting the crazy car parking – the spots those Romans can squeeze into blows my mind!



ANDREW WADDEL
General Manager, Tourism
New Zealand – Australia

There is no doubt there is pent up demand for the unique nature of travel: we yearn for exploration and to travel to new places and the transformative experience it brings.

Travel enables us to '*whiria te tangata*' or weave the people together, something that Australians and New Zealanders take for granted being close neighbours. Not now.

There is something otherworldly and magical about New Zealand that is different to Australia, the dramatic landscape, majesty of it, the rawness, and at its heart – the openness of its people.

The West Coast region in the South Island is at the top of my list – the Franz Josef Glacier and Hokitika Gorge are natural wonders which stay with you long after you return home.



MICHELLE BLACK
Managing Director,
Viking ANZ

Antarctica, for so many reasons. Firstly, I don't know what I am going to love most, watching breathtaking icebergs float by or being captivated by the abundance of wildlife; whales, seals and those very cute penguins.

And I cannot wait to do it from onboard our new expedition ships. I don't see myself as an intrepid explorer so discovering the White Continent from the luxury comfort of our ship is how I want to tick Antarctica off my bucket list.

A seat around the lava rock fire-pit on our Finse Terrace with a glass of red wine definitely has my name on it for 2022!



CHRISTIAN HUNTER
Managing Director,
Travellers Choice

That question is easy for me to answer, definitely Africa. It was the last international destination I visited pre-COVID and is my “happy place”.

I love the wilderness, the people, the diversity and most of all, the uniqueness of the experience where every day can deliver a new and different outcome.

The wildlife is spectacular and seeing it first-hand is a truly amazing experience that you can never tire of.

The most difficult question to answer would be “where in Africa?” Put me on the spot and I’d say the Maasai Mara in Kenya.



Tanjung Rhu, Langkawi, Malaysia



TOM MANWARING
Chair, Australian Federation
of Travel Agents

I like to travel. I’ve been in travel for 50 odd years, 30 with an airline and now 20 running my own travel business. But you know, I think the world’s your oyster literally in Australia too. We love touring Australia.

My favourite overseas destinations? I’m a Pisces so generally this revolves around water and good food and wine. So it’s Greece for me and my wife and the islands of Greece, just chilling out there in the warm Mediterranean waters, having grilled fish, some nice wines....and ideally a siesta in the afternoons.

On the other side is probably Hawaii. The islands are very calming and you come back rested and ready to go. On top of that you can do some shopping and all the other things but primarily just chilling out.

I guess the third level for me would probably be parts of Italy. The northern parts are fantastic, as is the south, especially Sorrento and Portofino.

They’re just magnificent areas where you can have fabulous food and meet warm, wonderful people. Everything revolves around a glass of wine and a good chat and laugh and just relaxing.



TUAN RAZALI TUAN OMAR
Director, Tourism
Malaysia Sydney

Naturally the first place I want to visit once international borders re-open is Malaysia.

I can’t wait to indulge in the explosive flavours of Malaysian food and stroll into memory lane with the history reflected through street art and heritage buildings found in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang.

An escape into the rich rainforest of Malaysia to enjoy all things adventurous, such as the longest canopy walk, a stay at the longhouse with the natives and immersing in the natural Jacuzzies while glamping, will be liberating.

I would conclude my trip in Langkawi, so I can flip flop, drop and soak in the beauty of its crystal clear waters, white sandy beaches and wellness spas to rejuvenate and be Zen again.

I remain optimistic to dream now, travel later as Malaysia awaits to amaze me. Let me share my inspiration from an award-winning video called ‘AMAZING’ that captures the true essence of Malaysia Truly Asia.

» [youtube.com/watch?v=2VgN8VdGuGk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VgN8VdGuGk)



AS SPRING arrives, our Aussie wine regions burst to life with seasonal colours and flavours.

The warmer weather and longer days will draw you to embrace the great outdoors, so why not start planning your special wine weekend at one of the premium wineries that make up the Ultimate Winery Experiences Australia collective?

From Victoria’s Mornington Peninsula to Western Australia’s Margaret River, this curated collection offers immersive winery experiences based around world-class wines, warm and knowledgeable hospitality and culinary excellence.

Go beyond the cellar door for exciting behind-the-scenes adventure, intimate tours and cellar tastings.

Curl up on a picnic blanket and feast on artisan fare while taking in sweeping vineyard views or learn how to blend your own unique wine.

Meet the winemaker and savour first-hand the rich diversity that our country’s many wine regions have to offer.

DISCOVER THE DIFFERENCE
Australia’s signature wines have as

much personality as their makers. Approachable, unpretentious and gutsy are words that could be used to describe our world-renowned wines and equally the people behind them.

Walk into almost any cellar door from Margaret River to the Hunter Valley and you are likely to find yourself chatting to the winemaker and several family members, often second or third generation vigneron.

But the relaxed and democratic nature of those in the industry belies Australia’s reputation as one of the most outstanding wine-producing countries. For wine-loving travellers this is just one of the appeals.

Most of Australia’s wine regions are accessible from the major cities. Each region is diverse and the wineries – big, small, new and old – each have a unique personality which enhances the experience for visitors.

Australia is home to some of the oldest vines in the world that date back to the 1850s. Our wine regions produce more than 100 different grape varieties. Today’s wines express the diversity of the people who craft them and the unique regional characteristics of their origins.

HOW TO WIN

Traveltalk is giving one lucky reader a \$300 voucher to spend on an Ultimate Winery Experience.

The winner could visit one of 26 premium wineries throughout Australia and go beyond the cellar door for an experience of their choice, from masterclasses and behind-the-scenes tours, to wine blending and food & wine matching.

For your chance to win, simply tell us, in 25 words or less, of a memorable travel experience that involved wine.

To enter and for terms and conditions, head to our website:

» www.traveltalkmag.com.au



LAUNCHED IN APRIL 2013, Ultimate Winery Experiences Australia aims to raise Australia’s profile as one of the world’s leading wine tourism destinations.

As a group, the members of Ultimate Winery Experiences Australia are committed to tourism and work

collaboratively to showcase the best and most unique winery experiences available in the country.

The group has members across six states including New South Wales, Tasmania, Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. A number of special events are planned at member wineries from now until December.

» www.ultimatewineryexperiences.com.au



COLOUR IN THE CAPITAL

NATURE LOVERS are sure to have a blooming good time on a new tour that coincides with the annual Floriade festival in Canberra.

With the 11-day 'Canberra & the Sapphire Coast' trip from Bunnik Tours, guests on the October departure will encounter more than a million flowers in Commonwealth Park, along with live entertainment, arts and crafts.

The tour includes a private, behind the scenes look at Parliament House, complete with a meal prepared by the in-house chefs. Paying tribute to our brave fallen soldiers at the Australian War Memorial, the group will have the honour of attending a Last Post Ceremony in the Commemorative Courtyard, a truly memorable experience.

Heading for the coast, the tour enters the Eurobodalla region in the south of NSW before arriving into Bermagui on the Sapphire Coast. Travelling this scenic stretch, guests will stop at a number of main towns, including Merimbula, Eden and Pambula.

The tour has various departure dates from November through to November 2022. It is priced from \$4,495 per person twin share.

The company has also released its first tour to Victoria, a 13-day experience discovering the many gems this region has to offer, from its rich gold mining history to its landscapes and world famous coastline.

'Highlights of Western Victoria' is priced at \$5,995 per person twin share and has departures running from September until April 2022.

» www.bunniktours.com.au



Capertee Valley, New South Wales

ACTIVE TRIPS FOR FOLKS ON THEIR BEST SPOKES

AUSTRALIAN CYCLE TOURS has added new itineraries to its range to meet the increasing demand from active guests looking for new ways to travel.

The new trips have been crafted to appeal to beginner cyclists looking for more luxurious experiences, through to experienced cyclists wanting more challenging holidays.

The four-day 'Capertee Valley in Comfort Self-Guided Cycle' is an introductory level tour offering premium accommodation, with two nights in a deluxe B&B and the third night in a boutique hotel.

The route follows quiet country roads in the world's widest and longest enclosed valley – the Capertee Valley – close to the World Heritage listed wilderness of the Wollemi and the Gardens of Stone National Parks.

Priced at \$1,520 per person, the experience includes e-bike hire including helmet and panniers, daily luggage transfer, transfer Mudgee to Capertee, various meals and access to Australian Cycle Tours navigational App and maps.

More challenging is the seven-day 'Central West Trail Self-Guided Cycle Tour', a 380km circuit trail passing through farmland, vineyards and forest from Mudgee, through the towns of Goolma, Wellington, Dubbo, Ballimore, Mendooran, Dunedoo and Gulgong.

Featuring accommodation in atmospheric country pubs and motels along the way, the tour costs \$1,990 per person.

» www.australiancycletours.com.au



Cradle Mountain Overland Trek, Tasmania

EARLY BIRD CATCHES THE TOUR

INTREPID TRAVEL has given Aussies a greater chance to book its best selling domestic tours after revealing a new 2022 early bird line up.

Travellers now have a range of new tour dates for trips which have been fully booked for months – 'Cradle Mountain Overland Track' and 'Larapinta Trek'.

"Domestic travel has been something that has been on the rise over the last year," said Brett Mitchell, Managing Director at Intrepid Travel.

"We want to ensure local travellers can book something to truly look forward to which is why we have decided to launch our 2022 trip offering in advance."

On the six-day Cradle Mountain trip, travellers will join two expert mountain guides as they make their way through rainforest and eucalyptus groves, across alpine moors and through valleys. Prices start from \$2,190 per adult in a multi share room.

The Larapinta Trail in the Northern Territory is one of Australia's greatest multi-day walks. Highlights of this five-day trip include exploring the Ormiston Gorge in the West MacDonnell Ranges, cooling off in a waterhole and enjoying the view at the summit of Mt Sonder. Prices start from \$2,420 per adult in a multi share room.

"It's fantastic to see so many Australians getting out into the local community and experiencing Australia's domestic offering."

» www.intrepidtravel.com/au

SAVINGS ARE NOT A LUXURY

CRUISE TRAVELLER is offering 25 per cent savings on a new luxury rail, sail and stay adventure through the Kimberley and Central Australia in August 2022.

Available until September 30, the discount means couples can save at least \$7,100 and solo travellers \$14,625 on the exclusive, slow travel 'Icons of Australia' tour.

The new 16-night package begins on August 25, 2022, with a night in Broome before guests board Ponant's 264-guest ship, *Le Soleal*, for a 10-night expedition voyage to Darwin.

Boasting French-styled elegance, *Le Soleal* offers a fine dining restaurant and grill restaurant, panoramic lounge, theatre, library, open-air bar, pool, an expert expedition team and personalised service.

The adventure continues inland with a three-night rail journey aboard *The Ghan Expedition* from Darwin to Adelaide.

Guests will enjoy all-inclusive dining, fine wines and beverages as well as off train experiences in Katherine, Alice Springs, Manguri and Coober Pedy, including dinner under the stars at the historic Telegraph Station in Alice Springs.

» www.CruiseTraveller.com.au/icons



Aussies starry-eyed about space flights

IT WOULD seem that 18 months of pandemic and lockdowns have got many Australians looking out of this world when it comes to a return to travel.

Research by Booking.com has revealed that 39 per cent (*) of Aussies are excited about the prospect of space travel in the future.

While only billionaires have so far joined the 62-mile high club, Aussies can still get a taste of celestial wonder with our country offering some of the best dark skies in the world.

Here, Booking.com reveals six Aussie destinations offering some of the best opportunities for stargazing on the planet.

1. FLINDERS RANGES, SA

A five-hour drive from Adelaide is the Flinders Ranges National Park. With little to no air pollution in the area, the Ranges are covered in a bright blanket of stars all year round.

Where to stay: Situated in the Flinders Ranges, Wilpena Pound Resort takes glamping to the next level. Guests are perfectly positioned to explore the National Park and sleep under the bright, starry night sky.

2. MOUNT WELLINGTON, TAS

One of the best places to see the Aurora Australis come to life is on Mount Wellington, Hobart's highest mountain.

Where to stay: Located eight kilometres from Hobart in Ferntree, Pipeline Chalet Mount Wellington provides spacious, open plan living

where a fireplace will keep you warm while stargazing under the moonlight.

3. DAMPIER PENINSULA, WA

The Kimberly region in Western Australia provides a memorable off-the-grid experience.

Where to stay: Kooljaman at Cape Leveque is a low impact choice run on solar power and local bore water. Set on the shores of the Dampier Peninsula, it is the perfect stargazing playground.

4. MUDGEES, NSW

Set just outside of town, The Mudgee Observatory boasts dark skies away from all the lights, making it a perfect location to view the starry night sky as it was intended.

Where to stay: A short drive from the Observatory, Evenslea offers luxury boutique accommodation, with its lush surroundings providing a relaxing environment.

5. CHARLEVILLE, QLD

A two-and-a-half hour flight west of Brisbane is Charleville in outback Queensland. The town is home to

the Cosmos Centre, where guests are transported through indigenous astronomy to discover elements such as a giant emu in the sky.

Where to stay: Two kilometres from the Cosmos Centre, The Rocks Motel has city style with all the country charm and hospitality expected of the largest town in southwest Queensland.

6. ULURU, NT

One of the top recommended destinations for stargazing by Booking.com travellers. Learn all about the stars and explore the vast night landscape with the use of telescopes and binoculars during one of the offered stargazing tours.

Where to stay: Emu Walk Apartments are just a short walk from Uluru Resort centre. The property offers luxury modern, fully serviced apartments with all the practicalities of home.

**Research independently conducted among a sample of adults who have taken a trip in the last 12 months/plan to take a trip in the next 12 months. In total 22,000 respondents were polled (including 1,000 each from Australia).*



TWO METEOR showers will light the sky in October: the Draconid meteors between the 8th and 9th and the Orionids shower to peak around the 21st. There will be a partial eclipse on November 19 and a total solar eclipse on December 4.



Spring feast is a roo beauty

SEALINK KANGAROO Island has launched their new spring wilderness dining experience.

'The Feast Kangaroo Island' is a progressive culinary adventure inspired by the stars. It is designed to connect diners to the spirit and essence of the location through its local produce, storytelling, a hint of theatre and the unexpected.

Guests will be surrounded by candlelight as they dine in a secret venue hand-crafted by old sugar gum trees and corrugated iron.

The evening explores historic cooking techniques and features produce cooked over a fire and on

coals, leaving the palate experiencing different tastes and flavours inspired from the land and sea.

'The Feast Kangaroo Island' dinner experience is priced at \$145 per person. It is available from October 14 to November 1 and November 11 to November 29.

Returning in December, guests will also be able to dine among the dappled light of a 100-year-old fig tree at 'The Enchanted Fig Tree' experience.

Visitors begin their culinary experience with a welcome cocktail beside a mulberry tree or in the property's rustic shearing shed before dining under the gnarled

limbs of the fig tree. Head Chef Stephanie Vass has handcrafted a special six-course menu that is inspired by fig mythology, the island's location, the sea, land and earth.

Lunch or dinner at The Enchanted Fig Tree is \$155 per person including a welcome Kangaroo Island spirit gin cocktail.

SeaLink has also put together two-day/one-night Kangaroo Island packages, departing from Cape Jervis or Adelaide, and including lunch at The Enchanted Fig Tree.

» www.sealink.com.au/specials

Top start to the Top End

ABERCROMBIE & KENT has added a new small group journey to its Australian portfolio.

The 11-day 'Top End to Uluru' adventure reveals the Northern Territory from north to south.

Starting with an in-depth exploration of Darwin, guests discover all the major sights from historic Fanny Bay Gaol and Government House to the Botanical Gardens and the waterfront.

The journey ventures into wild and untamed Arnhem Land to Davidson's Safari Lodge at Mt Borradaile, where indigenous rock art is revealed by a local expert giving traditional insights.

The grand finale awaits at Uluru with a walk around the base and a dusk visit to Kantju Gorge before guests experience the internationally-renowned Field of Light installation.

The 'Top End to Uluru: Outback Wanderings' tour has two departures next year from May 20-30 and August 5-15, 2022. It is priced from \$15,520 per person twin share.

The company has also expanded its air safari collection with a new 10-day journey by privately chartered aircraft from Brisbane through the Queensland Outback to Hayman Island and returning to Brisbane.

There are encounters with Aussie stockmen at Longreach's Stockman's Hall of Fame, first-hand experiences of station life at Moble Homestead and 95-million-year-old dinosaur relics at Winton to explore.

Six departures are planned for 'Queensland Outback: An Air Safari' next year stretching from April to September. Prices start at \$17,950 per person twin share.

» www.abercrombiekent.com.au





Maruku Arts. Photo courtesy Archie Sartracom

EXPERTS PROVIDE SOMETHING SPECIAL

WORLD EXPEDITIONS has expanded its 'Special Interest' domestic range, with three new itineraries, each of which will be escorted by a well-known expert.

The itineraries include a new culinary adventure in Tasmania, to be escorted by chef and television personality, Peter Kuruvita.

There's also a new cold climate gardens tour, to be escorted by acclaimed Australian author and presenter, Mary Moody, and a broad immersion into the culture and craft of the Northern Territory, to be hosted by international textiles expert, Barbara Mullan.

"The new itineraries are packed with experiences designed to develop travellers' knowledge and appreciation for their special interest and, of course, there's huge appeal with sharing the adventure with an expert," said Sue Badyari, World Expeditions CEO.

On the 11-day 'Peter Kuruvita: Tastes of Tasmania Gourmet Experience', food lovers will have a chance to go behind the scenes and meet the people involved in producing some of Tasmania's finest produce.

Guests will also enjoy some of the state's best known destinations, including Freycinet Peninsula, Wineglass Bay, the Bay of Fires and Cradle Mountain National Park.

Tour highlights include an exclusive

seafood seduction tour, visits to boutique vineyards and breweries, a truffle hunt, a tasting experience with a master cheesemaker and cooking demonstrations by Peter.

The tour departs Launceston on March 16 next year and costs \$9,950 per person twin share.

The 'Culture and Crafts of Central Australia with Barbara Mullan' itinerary departs Alice Springs on May 3, 2022, and costs \$5,250 per person twin share.

The 'Gardens of the Blue Mountains & Central West, with Mary Moody' tours will depart October 27 and May 2, 2022, and cost \$4,195 per person twin share.

» www.worldexpeditions.com



Peter Kuruvita. Photo courtesy Jaseimages



Caledonian Sky

TOAST TO OUR COAST

APT HAVE launched a new range of small ship expedition cruises designed to show off Australia's unique coastline.

The domestic itineraries are onboard the 99-passenger MS Caledonian Sky and are available from November through to March 2022.

Four of the eight tours are sailed intra-state, which means passengers need not be concerned about border closures. Travellers can explore their home states in a new way while supporting local businesses.

"There is no doubt that our industry is suffering in many ways right now and at APT we are trying to do everything we can to help," said Chris Hall, APT Managing Director.

Key itineraries include the five-day 'Coastal Victorian Discovery', eight-day 'Tasmania's Wilderness Coast', eight-day 'South Australian Coastal Frontier' and eight-day 'South West Coast Explorer'.

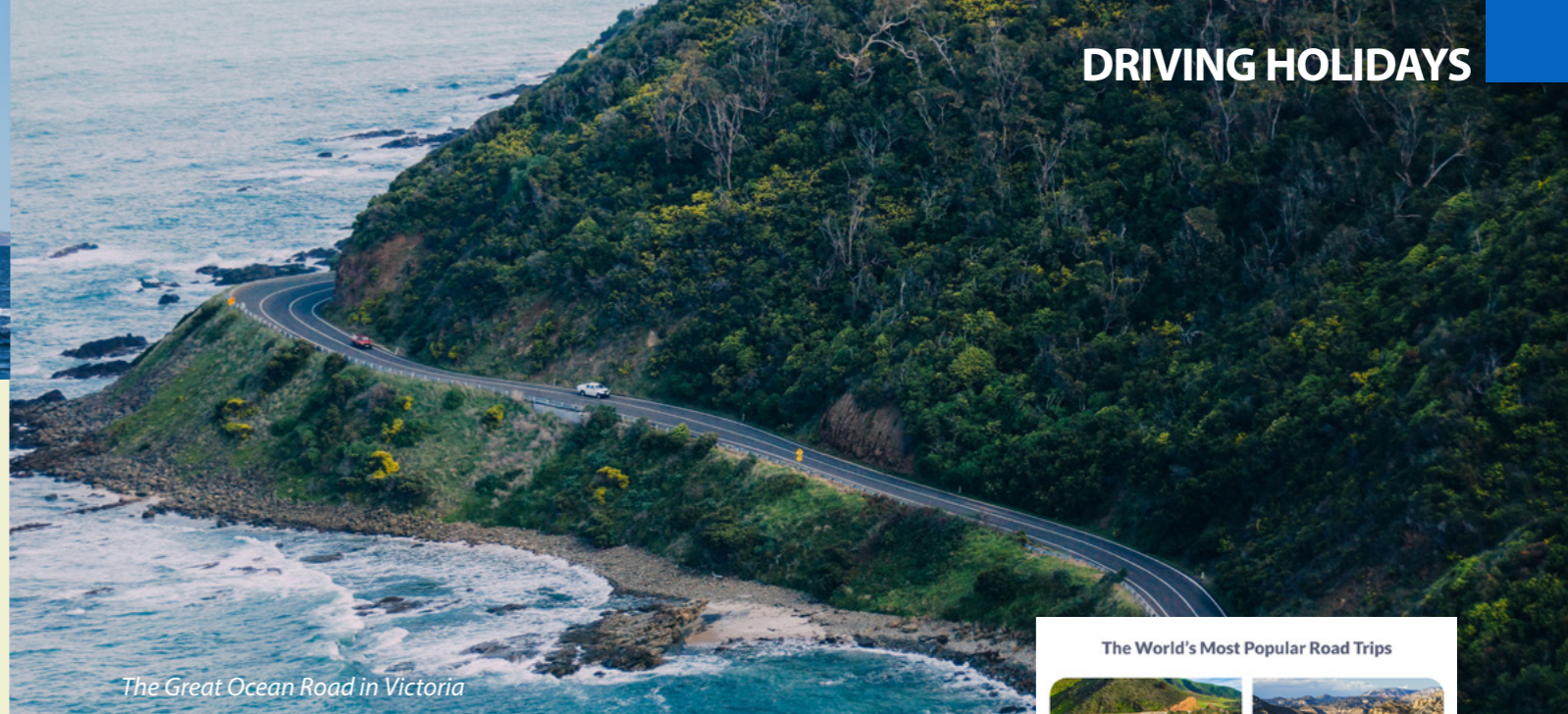
The return expedition journeys sail from Melbourne, Hobart, Adelaide and Fremantle. APT has included a discount of up to 15 per cent off the price across all suites categories when booked by October 31.

Other trips are a seven-day 'Tasmania Exploration' from Melbourne to Hobart from \$6,796, a 12-day 'Tasmania & South Australia Expedition' from Hobart to Adelaide (or reverse) from \$12,595, and a 17-day 'Tasmania & the Great Southern Coast' journey from Hobart to Fremantle from \$15,976.

All prices are per person twin share and include discount.

"We know the ongoing challenges with border closures are deeply impacting us all, but we are determined to look forward, as we know from the success of our cruising on the west coast this year, people want to travel."

» www.aptouring.com.au



The Great Ocean Road in Victoria

We're on the road to somewhere

ONE OF Australia's greatest driving experiences has made it into the top 10 on a list of the world's most popular road trips.

The Great Ocean Road came in at number nine on the chart compiled by online driving resource Zutobi. The 243-kilometre, National Heritage-listed stretch of highway in Victoria registered some 677,000 annual searches last year, making it also Australia's favourite road trip.

Other Aussie drives to make it into the top 50 were Cape Tribulation in Queensland, Perth to Esperance in Western Australia, the Tasman Peninsula in Tasmania and Adelaide to Darwin.

With restrictions on flights across the world, many people are now more interested in a driving holiday and research into road trips is on the rise.

Using Google search data, Zutobi established which road trips are the most popular across the globe and which ones interest residents of different nations the most.

Here are the top five most popular road trips:

1. Big Sur, USA. (7.4million global annual searches)

The most popular road trip in the world is the Big Sur Coast Highway in California, with more than a million

more searches than its next closest rival.

This popular section of 'State Route 1' features a windy coastal cliff edge road flanked by the Pacific Ocean on one side and mountains on the other.

2. Route 66, USA. (6.4million searches)

'Get your kicks on Route 66!' These famous lyrics from the 1940s written by Bobby Troup have helped cement the legacy of one of the most famous roads in the world.

The route stretches from Santa Monica to Chicago for a total length of almost 4,000 kilometres, but as it is no longer the main path across the country, it has become a quieter, more scenic way to cross America.

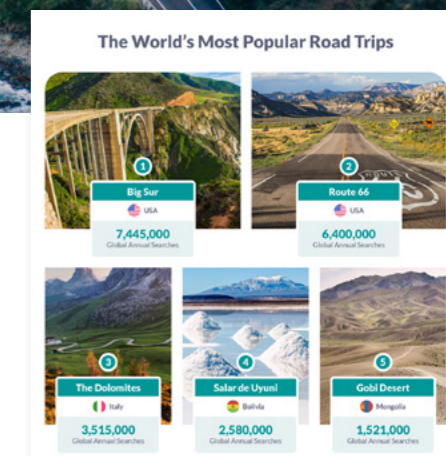
3. The Dolomites, Italy. (3.5million searches)

Some of the greatest driving roads in the world are in northern Italy and the Dolomite mountains are no exception.

Specifically, the Great Dolomites Road is a journey between Bolzano and Cortina d'Ampezzo that travels right across the mountain range and allows drivers to take in memorable views along the way.

4. Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia. (2.5million searches)

Salar de Uyuni is one of the most



striking landscapes on the planet, featuring the largest salt flats in the world, and sits at a high altitude among the Andes mountains.

The only way to travel this vast white emptiness is by car and tourists frequently cross the flats in 4x4s. More than two and a half million people searched for the Salar de Uyuni in the past year.

5. Gobi Desert, Mongolia. (1.5million searches)

Moving from one incredibly barren landscape to another on the other side of the world, the Gobi Desert road trip was searched for more than 1.5 million times in the past year.

The desert covers parts of Mongolia and China and is one of the most sparsely populated parts of the planet, therefore those planning to drive through it have to plan ahead and take with them a lot of fuel and provisions.

Apart from the Great Ocean Road, the rest of the top 10 featured Badlands National Park (USA), Costa Smeralda (Italy), Big Island Hawaii (USA) and NC 500 (Scotland).

» www.zutobi.com



EXCITING TALES OF BUMPER SALES

Kununurra, Western Australia
Picture courtesy Tourism Australia

IN A major boost for the Aussie travel industry, Globus and Cosmos have both recorded their biggest day of sales since the pandemic began.

The boom coincided with the launch of the 2022 Australia and New Zealand touring program.

"It's incredible to see such an amazing response to the announcement of our 2022 itineraries," said Gai Tyrrell, Managing Director Australasia of Globus family of brands.

"To record such strong sales despite the current COVID-19 restrictions is so encouraging and a reminder of how much Australians are ready to get out and keep exploring their own backyard."

All tours saw strong sales, particularly 'Contrasts of the Kimberley', which has already booked out 50 per cent of its available departures, with 'Naturally New Zealand', 'Rugged Tasmania' and 'Gems of the Red Centre' also filing up quickly.

"These tours were built from the ground up, with members of our team experiencing some of these trips first-hand to gather feedback direct from our guests, enabling us to adapt our itineraries to give them more of what they love."

To celebrate the launch of the 2022 season, GFOB is offering five per cent off Cosmos and 10 per cent off Globus tours for all new bookings made by September 30.

» www.globus.com.au | www.cosmostours.com.au

WHAT A REFRESHING CHANGE

ABERCROMBIE & KENT has drawn on more than 35 years of experience to bring travellers a refreshed portfolio of travel ideas.

The collection offers a selection of what is possible in some of Australasia's most popular destinations, including cosmopolitan cities, coastlines and remote islands to

mountains, vineyards and the outback.

Curated experiences, local connections and favoured accommodation options can be stitched together to craft privately tailor-made journeys and flexible small group adventures.

There are golfing getaways, eco walks, private cycling tours, fly fishing forays,



Karangahake Gorge, New Zealand

outback air safaris, urban encounters and hands-on conservation initiatives.

Tours include indigenous immersions in the Northern Territory, tasting Tasmania's oysters straight from the sea, a luxury expedition cruise in the Kimberley or an exclusive science adventure aboard a yacht in the Great Barrier Reef.

» www.abercrombiekent.com.au



Llanthony Priory, Monmouthshire, Wales

TIME FOR A MASS EXODUS

EXODUS TRAVELS have added 27 new trips to their range of UK self-guided walking and cycling programs.

New regions have been added including Cornwall, Bath, Norfolk, Pembrokeshire, North Wales and Northern Ireland.

In addition, linear trips from Oxford to Bath, along the Thames Path, the Cotswold Way and Wainwright's famous Coast to Coast route are now on offer.

Australian travellers can already book 2022 trips and take advantage of the Book with Confidence guarantee, which gives you both flexibility and financial security should plans have to change.

"We know Aussies love to travel independently in the UK and see this as a perfect opportunity for them to do so with Exodus self guided once international travel reopens again," said Lou Day, Exodus General Manager Australasia.

"The one I'd personally love to do is 'Walking the Antrim Way' in Ireland and I can't wait to have the opportunity to get over there myself."

» www.exodustravels.com/au



FANS GO WILD FOR REMOTE ADVENTURES

LINDBLAD EXPEDITIONS has launched its 2022/23 ReWild brochure featuring 21 new expeditions into the most remote corners of the world.

From transiting the Northwest Passage to crossing the Pacific from Taipei to Tahiti, each new adventure provides travellers enhanced opportunities for discovery.

The company has embraced the concept of 'rewilding' as a commitment to protecting the environment and working to bring it back to its natural state.

Lindblad Expeditions works in partnership with National Geographic on its ship-based voyages to inspire people to explore and care about the planet.

The organisations work in tandem to produce innovative marine expedition programs and to promote conservation and sustainable tourism around the world.

The partnership's educationally oriented voyages allow guests to interact with and learn from leading scientists, naturalists and researchers while discovering natural environments, above and below the sea, through state-of-the-art exploration tools.

Destinations include Galápagos, Antarctica, Arctic, Baja California, Alaska, Pacific Northwest, Costa Rica & Panama, the Amazon, Europe, Cuba, Southeast Asia & Pacific, South America, Mediterranean and the Caribbean.

» au.expeditions.com



REVOLUTIONARY TOUR OF CUBA

ARCADIA ARE providing Aussie travellers the opportunity to go behind the scenes and gain a rare insight into life in modern Cuba.

Led by renowned historian Michael Bustamante, the new expedition takes a deep dive into the history of the Revolution, with specially curated meetings with Cubans from all walks of life.

Travelling across the island from east to west, groups stay in the country's most atmospheric luxury boutique accommodation.

"Throughout our journey, we have arranged exclusive meetings with local journalists, artists, entrepreneurs and even Che Guevara's son to give us a unique insight into daily issues faced by Cubans and their diverse hopes for change," said David Mannix, Co-Founder, Arcadia Expeditions.

The 16-day 'Cuba: Revolution Past & Present' expedition is limited to just 12 people. It is priced at \$15,500 per person and has two departures: May 9-24, 2022, and May 8-23, 2023.

» www.arcadiaexpeditions.com

LUKE SAYS JAB FOR JOBS NOW

CELEBRITY chef Luke Mangan has become a powerful advocate for the safe restart of domestic cruising and for the hospitality sector.

The Aussie is also a passionate supporter of the national vaccination program and is encouraging everyone to get the shot as it becomes available to them. He calls getting vaccinated a 'job for jobs'.

Luke has had the second of his two shots and posted this message to encourage others.

"Ok guys, I got my 2nd jab today! If you can and want to, go for it. Let's get this thing over and done with!

"Let's get small businesses back, tourism back, hospitality back, life back! Stay safe, everyone."



Sture Myrmell, President, Carnival Australia and P&O Cruises, and Luke Mangan

Mars discovered on water

VIKING HAS celebrated the "float out" of its newest ocean ship, marking a major construction milestone and the first time the ship has touched water.

The 930-guest *Viking Mars* will debut in early 2022, spending her maiden season sailing itineraries in the Mediterranean and in Northern Europe before embarking on voyages in Asia and Australia.

Following a two day process that will set *Viking Mars* afloat, she will then be moved to a nearby outfitting dock for final construction and interior build-out.

The ship will be named by her ceremonial godmother, Lady Fiona Carnarvon, the eighth Countess of Carnarvon.

"We are delighted to celebrate this important milestone and we look forward to welcoming *Viking Mars* to our award-winning ocean fleet next year," said Karine Hagen, Executive Vice President of Viking.

The ceremony follows the launch of Viking's latest ocean ship, *Viking Venus*, in May. *Viking Neptune* is due to enter service next year.

» www.vikingcruises.com.au



Australia's turn to solve the mystery

UNIWORLD HAS announced additional inventory on its popular mystery cruise just for Australians.

The company's first-ever mystery cruise for 2022 sold out within 24 hours, with a second departure again fully booked within a day.

Uniworld are now offering the opportunity to be part of a third departure – only being marketed in Australia and New Zealand.

"We were astounded by the interest for the Uniworld Mystery Cruise and were disappointed we didn't get a chance to truly share this with the Australian market when it sold out so fast," said Alice Ager, General Manager, Uniworld Australia.

The new sailing also departs in October next year and pricing starts at \$9,399 per person. In the weeks prior to departure, guests will receive a series of clues as well as a packing list to prepare.

"Our guests are looking for something to get them back out there exploring – they want something to look forward to, that's a bit of fun and completely different. I think this will sell very well."

» www.Uniworld.com/au/Mystery

PLAN NEEDED TO END AUSSIE ISOLATION

AN AUSTRALIAN bubble involving domestic-only cruises for local residents should be the first step to reviving the cruise industry Down Under.

That's the viewpoint of Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), which has called on the Government for a detailed plan for cruising's revival domestically.

The organisation says Australia has been left isolated as the only major cruise nation in the world not making progress towards revival. This comes after Canada announced it had brought forward the end of its cruise suspension to November 1.

"Like Australia, Canada has taken a very conservative and risk-averse approach to cruising, but they've worked hard with industry to develop a detailed pathway towards resumption and economic recovery," said Joel Katz, CLIA Managing Director Australasia.

"By contrast, the Australian Government has made no progress towards establishing a framework for future cruise operations, despite the availability of comprehensive new health protocols at the international level."

Mr Katz said the suspension of cruising had already cost Australia more than \$6 billion since early 2020 and had put more than 18,000 jobs at risk, including travel agents, tour

operators, farmers and food suppliers, transport workers, entertainers and technical support providers.

"Around 600,000 people have already sailed successfully in countries where cruising has resumed, bringing back economic opportunities for local communities while also maintaining the most stringent health measures to be found anywhere in tourism," he added.

With these measures in place – including 100 per cent testing of all passengers and crew before boarding – CLIA has called for Australian governments to agree upon detailed plans for a careful domestic cruising revival.

This would initially begin within an Australian bubble, involving domestic-only cruises for local residents.

"As Canada has recognised, it will take months of careful planning to revive cruise tourism.

"We need governments to progress urgent discussions now on how we can achieve similar success when the time is right in Australia and restore economic opportunities for communities around the country."

To this end, CLIA has launched the next phase of its 'Ready, Set, Sail' campaign, aimed at seeking meetings between Australian politicians and the people most affected by the ongoing cruise suspension.

The organisation is urging travel



Joel Katz, CLIA Managing Director Australasia

agent members, cruise suppliers and other industry stakeholders to meet personally with their local MP's to help highlight the human cost of the suspension and reinforce efforts to achieve a pathway to resumption.

It has created a new online toolkit which provides resources needed to seek face-to-face or virtual meetings with state and federal representatives.

The kit provides step-by-step instructions for contacting MPs and explaining the key issues, as well as a fact sheet and info-graphic to leave for MPs' consideration.

"CLIA and cruise lines have been lobbying hard among political leaders and will continue to do so," said Mr Katz.

"The grassroots involvement of travel agents, suppliers and other stakeholders will help support our efforts and highlight the devastating personal impact of the cruise suspension."

» www.cruising.org.au



Le Commandant Charcot. Picture courtesy PONANT/Stirling Design International

Taking command of lucky 13

PONANT HAVE taken delivery of *Le Commandant Charcot*, the first hybrid electric polar exploration ship powered by Liquefied Natural Gas.

Her design includes all the latest 'green' technologies, such as 100 per cent waste sorted onboard and waste treatment.

She will be fitted with facilities and equipment for research, providing the scientific world with a platform for observation, research and analysis to study water, air, ice and biodiversity in extreme polar regions.

"Delivery of *Le Commandant Charcot* is both a culmination and the beginning of a new kind of odyssey for the company," said Hervé Gastinel, CEO of PONANT.

"We are welcoming into our fleet a ship that will offer so much more than just a voyage of exploration, but rather a truly inspiring and fascinating discovery of a still little-known polar world."

The 13th ship in the fleet, *Le Commandant Charcot* will be sailing in the world's most remote regions: the Geographic North Pole, Northeast Greenland's National Park, circumnavigation of the Svalbard archipelago, the Bellingshausen Sea, Charcot and Pierre I Islands, Weddell Sea and the Larsen Ice Shelf.

» au.ponant.com

Aussies get a standing Ovation

IN A major boost for the local cruise industry, Royal Caribbean has announced a new season of Australian domestic sailings onboard *Ovation of the Seas*.

Ovation will sail from Sydney starting on December 13 through to March 31, 2022, offering a mix of two- to 10-night sailings visiting some of the country's most famous cities and regions.

"We continue to encourage and assist federal and state governments to establish a clear pathway for the return of cruising and hope that by December we will have guests holidaying with us once again," said Gavin Smith, Vice President and Managing Director, Australia and New Zealand, Royal Caribbean International.

Ovation will make 24 sailings, visiting ports such as Eden, Hobart, Adelaide, Brisbane, Port Douglas, Kangaroo Island, Airlie Beach, Cairns or Port Douglas.

Guests will enjoy excursions to the Great Barrier Reef, Willis Island and the NSW South Coast.

"We are very encouraged by the great response we have had to our 2022/2023 season as guests plan ahead and remain confident and excited about a return to cruising in Australia."

» www.royalcaribbean.com



LIGHTS UP ON SILVERY MOON

THE LATEST ship in the Silversea fleet has embarked upon her inaugural season following an official christening ceremony.

A VIP guest list attended the event as *Silver Moon* was named in Greece, the ninth ship in the company's fleet. She set sail from Athens on June 18, undertaking a series of 10-day voyages in the Greek Isles.

"This is an extraordinary milestone in the history of our cruise line," said Roberto Martinoli, President and CEO of Silversea Cruises. "She represents our industry's strength and resilience."

Silver Moon is joined by new ship *Silver Origin* now sailing on all-new itineraries in the Galapagos Islands. Silversea's third new ship since 2020, *Silver Dawn*, is scheduled to depart on her maiden voyage in November.

» www.silversea.com



IN BRIEF

Avalon Waterways has returned to European rivers, kicking off its 2021 season with a sailing from Paris, its first cruise since December 2019.

The Paris to Normandy itinerary aboard *Avalon Tapestry II* saw Avalon's Managing Director, Pam Hoffee, onboard the Suite Ship to welcome guests back and re-introduce them to the Seine's vineyard-filled valleys, medieval towns and contemporary architectural wonders.

» www.avalonwaterways.com.au



Above: A Japanese Hagi homestay
Right: Salaam Baalak city tour in New Delhi



Hello to the new G whiz

Here SEAN MARTIN, the newly appointed Managing Director, Australia and New Zealand, G Adventures, discusses what travel will look like for Aussies in a post-COVID world.



Sean Martin, Managing Director, Australia and New Zealand, G Adventures

Q: What attracted you to the role at G Adventures?

A: Like so many in the travel industry, I was made redundant in February after 15 amazing years at Flight Centre Travel Group. Leaving the industry wasn't an option for me and the opportunity to join G Adventures was a no-brainer.

The company's values completely align with my own and I genuinely believe that we have the best trips out there, which really excites me.

Plus being a part of reshaping how we travel to make the world a better place on the other side of this pandemic is something I want to be a part of.

Q: How has the company been impacted by the pandemic?

A: Like it has been for all travel businesses, this has been the most challenging period in our history. What the pandemic has done, however, is enable us to reset and ensure we come out of this in a better place.

The local communities we support have been equally affected and we can't wait to get back there so we have more travellers visiting and in turn supporting these communities which rely so heavily on tourism for their economic development.

Q: What will the future of travel look

like for Australians?

A: I believe Australians will be more interested in active holidays that immerse them in a destination. They will be looking for holidays that are different and provide lifelong memories.

We are going to have to accept a new normal in living with the virus like the rest of the world has and from there we will see increased complexity in booking and travelling, so educating the customer and building their confidence to travel is going to be of paramount importance.

Q: Will consumers need travel agents more than ever post-COVID?

A: Without a doubt – there will never have been a better time to be a travel agent.

Travel will be more complicated than ever before and people will be less confident. There will also be fewer travel agents, so all of this plays straight into the hands of a reliable and knowledgeable consultant.

Q: How can agents win back consumer confidence?

A: Being on top of the ever-changing government and supplier regulations and conditions is critical. Customers will expect more of their agents and

look to them as experts on all that is required to travel as we navigate our way out of this pandemic.

Agents will also do well keeping on top of top of new and emerging destinations, as well as what is popular for post-pandemic travel.

For example we are seeing a lot of interest for our trips in the 'Stans, more so than before the pandemic which is an interesting outcome!

Q: Will experiential travel become the "new black" once international travel returns?

A: It's my hope that experiential travel will become the new norm for many travellers.

Having been locked in our own country for so long, I believe we'll see a real hunger to experience travel more authentically. This will give customers a true cultural experience in their destinations, while also helping to support local communities.

These are the real life-changing experiences that travel can provide. We know that once a customer travels with G Adventures once, more often than not they realise there is a better way to travel and they don't look back.

» www.gadventures.com

Changes needed to protect your money

URGENT REFORM and regulation is needed to protect Aussie travellers losing money and receiving inconsistent refunds for cancelled travel.

That's the opinion of the Australian Lawyers Alliance (ALA), which is calling for changes to Australian Consumer Law in light of events surrounding COVID-19.

"The pandemic, and associated travel restrictions, have made it very clear that Australian Consumer Law does not protect consumers sufficiently," said Ms Victoria Roy, travel

lawyer and spokesperson for the ALA.

"Many Australians wrongly assumed that the law would protect them from losing their money when government restrictions forced them to cancel their travel plans."

Findings outlined in the *CHOICE Consumer Protection for Australian Travellers* report released recently showed that Australians have received inconsistent refunds and credits when travel was stopped by the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Under s.267(1)(c) of the Australian



Ms Victoria Roy, travel lawyer and spokesperson for the ALA

Consumer Law, if the travel service cannot be provided due to an event such as government enforced border closures or restrictions on movement, the usual statutory guarantees regarding provision of services do not apply.

"The booking is simply cancelled without any recourse against the travel company.

"This means that the consumer's right to a refund depends on the booking terms and conditions. In many cases this does not mean a full refund or being entitled to a credit note despite being legally prevented from being able to take their planned holiday.

"Reform to the Australian Consumer Law is needed to close this gap, provide clarity and ensure that Australians are able to receive a refund

“Regulation of travel credits and vouchers to support the travel industry while being fair to consumers is also needed.”

when they are forced to cancel travel plans."

Ms Roy added that further steps could be taken to make sure travellers are protected.

"Regulation of travel credits and vouchers to support the travel industry while being fair to consumers is also needed," she said.

"We would like to see that consumers who receive travel credit instead of a refund are protected by guarantees that future prices won't be inflated, are given a reasonable validity period, are protected against future insolvency, and have the ability to transfer credits to another person.

"Law reform, plus the enforcement of these regulations, will help give Australians the confidence to book travel again."

➔ www.lawyersalliance.com.au

Tales from the front line

WITH AN estimated 15,000 jobs lost in Australia's travel sector, it's no surprise the government is being urged to provide more support for agents.

Here, two business owners explain the devastating impact the pandemic has had on their livelihoods and that of their staff.

Glenn Checkley, Managing Director, Travelonline

"We are a Brisbane based online travel agency specialising in family holidays. We have 25 staff and have been in business for more than 25 years.

Since the lockdowns in Sydney were announced, our weekly turnover has fallen by more than 80 per cent and more importantly, the seasonally important June/July school holiday period was totally wiped out. Hundreds of bookings for families from Sydney and Melbourne heading to the Whitsundays, Port Douglas and Queenstown NZ, were all cancelled.

I'm sure we are not the only business based in a non-lockdown area who are severely impacted and not receiving support.

We need JobKeeper and rent support back, even if it requires strict turnover reduction tests to ensure the waste of Jobkeeper 1.0 isn't repeated. At the moment businesses like ours are the forgotten businesses."

Carole Smethurst Managing Director, Bicton Travel

"At least this time last year we were able to sell domestic travel but now with the yo-yoing of state border closures, consumers just aren't confident in booking travel.

We are in a worse state now than we were at this time last year – at least then we were receiving some government assistance.

Consumers were happy to shift bookings for 2020 travel forward to 2021 but now they no longer want to do that. They want to cancel because they're not confident that they will be able to travel.

I had 29 staff pre-COVID. I'm now down to five full time and three casuals and I will do whatever is necessary to keep my team together. JobKeeper would allow me to breathe."



Agent wins a key refund case

A TRAVEL agent has won her appeal against having to refund a consumer in full for bookings made on a holiday cancelled due to COVID.

The decision was handed down in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal Appeals Panel.

The panel's decision was to set aside orders that Wendy Kiss of Helloworld in Gosford, NSW, refund a consumer in full for bookings even though the travel providers, Air Canada and Momento Travel, had offered credits and a partial refund.

The panel highlighted that where a travel agent accepts payment as agent only and the booking terms and conditions make that plain when travel arrangements are made between the client and the agent, the client has no recourse to the travel agent.

As such, the panel found the money received by Ms Kiss was received as an agent for the travel providers and that she had only acted to facilitate the making of the reservations.

"I understand that consumers get frustrated and want their money back but it's not the travel agent sitting on the money that is the problem," said Ms Kiss.

"I felt I had to keep appealing given the principle of the matter and the flow-on ramifications for my agency

and every other agency if we didn't get a fair and reasonable outcome."

AFTA funded Ms Kiss' initial appeal against NCAT's decision that the contract was frustrated and provided her with the support of a consumer law expert.

» www.afta.com.au

IN BRIEF

THL HAVE launched an expanded and improved digital asset management platform for the travel industry.

The thl Content Hub is a one-stop shop for thl brands across Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

It features the latest vehicle specification sheets, fleet sheets, liability flyers, child seat information, floor plans, vehicle information and images. There's also video and social media content, logos, brand guidelines, training and support materials and a 'Latest news' section.

» www.hub.thlonline.com



SCOMO URGED TO SET HARD TIMES

A LEADING industry body has called on the Prime Minister to give hard timelines on his COVID exit plan to save the struggling travel industry.

The Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) wants transparency around the trigger points for each phase of the plan, to allow the industry to protect their businesses until international borders open.

"What the Federal Government is not taking into consideration is that businesses in the travel industry cannot continue to borrow financially, in order to keep their doors open for an indiscriminate amount of time," said Dennis Bunnik, Chairman of CATO.

"We need more than a commitment to create a plan – we need dates and scientific numbers.

"The travel industry needs clear trigger points regarding vaccination levels for easing both domestic and international border restrictions.

"We need a simple and easy-to-access Vaccination Passport for non-restricted domestic travel – this can be used to incentivise vaccinations so that Australians can see the positive benefits of getting the jab. We also need approval of a seven day home quarantine option for returning, fully-vaccinated international travellers."

Bunnik also highlighted the fact that there needs to be more public messaging about planning ahead for travel and not waiting till the borders open before deciding to be vaccinated, as this may prolong travel further for consumers.

"The Government needs to protect the remaining high-skilled jobs in the travel sector through extending grant schemes and improving eligibility.

"In tandem, it needs to work with the travel industry to prepare for a return of international travel to avoid massive skills shortage and enable Australians to travel safely."

» www.cato.travel

* THE AUSTRALIAN Federation of Travel Agents has also written to the Prime Minister, asking for wider support for travel agents.

"Without the ability to sell to the domestic market travel agents are faced with a situation where the product of travel has lost its value and will need assistance to survive," the letter states.

"Even before the resurgence of COVID-19 through the Delta strain, travel agents of all sizes were experiencing revenue declines of over 90 per cent, while simultaneously completing unpaid and gruelling work like processing refunds.

"Consumers need travel agents now more than ever in managing cancellations, refunds and credits and, once international travel resumes, will need them to navigate the confusion of travel requirements and restrictions.

"Fundamentally, travel agents are resilient and hardworking Australian businesses, and if you help support them during this pandemic, they can be one of the cornerstones of Australia's economic recovery post-COVID-19."

» www.afta.com.au

This finder is a real keeper

Like many travel agents, ANNA SHANNON was stood down when Coronavirus decimated the industry, but her love of travel and the industry never wavered.

Now she has launched a new company designed to help consumers find the right travel agent while also providing a great platform for agents to increase their business.

In this exclusive interview with *Traveltalk*, Anna discusses why Travel Agent Finder could be the perfect match for consumer and agents alike.

Q: What inspired you to set up Travel Agent Finder?

A: I started working on the concept in January, hoping it would be a way to help the travel industry and a way to help my former clients find new agents in the future.

I have spent the last decade building amazing travel experiences for my clients and their loved ones and I don't want this to end for them, most of them are now like family to me.

So this passion project combined my love of helping small businesses with my digital marketing skills and it just felt right.

I am looking forward to using my skills and experience to help agents market themselves and their businesses. It feels good to be back in the industry and working on something that contributes to rebuilding, bigger and better than ever.

Q: What are your hopes for the business?

A: In the future, I see Travel Agent Finder as an Australian traveller's first port of call when looking for a specialist or new travel agent.

I want to change the way Aussies find a travel agent, in a way that makes more sense to both the travellers and agents.

Agents get direct leads for the exact trips they love to book, travellers get a passionate and experienced agent, have an amazing trip and become a repeat client, hopefully telling all their family and friends and rebuilding our reputation as a crucial part of travel planning.

By offering agents a central place to showcase their amazing passion, strengths and expertise, we can rebuild our industry as the authority for all things travel and show Australia



Anna Shannon, Founder, Travel Agent Finder

that we cater for everyone and can provide value.

There is plenty of business to go round if we work together to get the right people to the right agents, it's a win-win.

Q: What benefits will consumers get from using TAF?

A: Consumers will have the option to search for the agent that matches their criteria, whether this be destination knowledge and personal experience, travel style, office location, reviews and recommendations, or customer service and personality.

Our travellers will want expert advice on the new world of travel restrictions and quarantine rules.

They want to connect with someone on a personal level, who they know has their back, wherever they are in the world. And they are happy to pay agents for this personalised experience.

Q: And what can you offer agents?

A: Having your profile listed on Travel Agent Finder will give you exposure to travellers seeking out your expertise.

I have so many ideas on how I can help agents increase their online exposure, improve their social media, or use our social media to drive traffic to them because they will (hopefully) be way too busy to take care of their own social channels once those borders open!

I truly see endless possibilities with this platform and can't wait to launch it to a wider community.

Q: How important will travel agents be post-COVID?

A: Every traveller needs their go-to person to help them navigate travel in uncertain times and it makes sense that many who previously did not use a travel agent to book their holidays will now want to.

Yes, Google and the Internet are a rabbit hole of endless resources and information, but at the end of the day, that's part of the problem. There is TOO much available and this leads to decision fatigue. Agents know because they go.

Travelling in the new world of pandemic madness is scary. As much

“Every traveller needs their go-to person to help them navigate travel in uncertain times and it makes sense that many who previously did not use a travel agent to book their holidays will now want to.”

as we are all desperate to get on a plane and get back to doing what we love, the everyday traveller is just as nervous and worried about being responsible for their family trip, as they are excited to start it.

The whole world of travel has changed and there are too many variables and too much uncertainty to feel secure and confident you are doing the right thing.

We as agents know how quickly everything can change and the knock-on effects of one policy change to the rest of a trip itinerary.

It's our job to keep on top of these things – travellers can research the hell out of everything with their

friend Google, but when it comes to a last-minute change, they want to be calling us for advice and options. You can't phone Google.

Q: Finally, how resilient is the travel industry?

A: One positive I've seen come out of COVID is camaraderie among previously competing agents, which I've never felt before.

I know that as travel returns, the competition will also return, but I hope that some of that support sticks around and that by working together through new initiatives like this, we can all be successful.

» www.travelagentfinder.com.au

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GETTING BACK TO THE FUTURE

It's been estimated that some 15,000 jobs have been lost in the travel industry since the pandemic began. Here, we speak to TOM MANWARING, Chair of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents, to see what the future has in store for our embattled industry.



Q: What effect has the pandemic had on Australia's travel agent community?

A: It's had a disastrous impact and effect for our travel agency members and the industry at large.

When you don't have planes flying and no ships cruising, there's no income for travel agents. In fact, the income is only earned by handling refunds time after time after time.

So even with domestic touring, there's no money in it for travel agents and certainly not enough to earn a living. That's why we have been so focused on securing support from government at all levels.

Q: Has the government been supportive?

A: We are very grateful for the Federal Government's COVID-19 Consumer Travel Support Grants, which so far have provided \$258 million to travel agents and businesses, but we need ongoing support until international travel resumes.

It's also why AFTA is urging all Australians to #GetTravelReady #BeTravelReady and get vaccinated because the key to unlocking travel internationally is that 80 per cent vaccination threshold.

We have ongoing discussions with the government about support until the end of 2021 because that is a lockdown period. That will take us to almost 22 months of lockdown for our industry and is support that is very much needed.



Tom Manwaring, Chair of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents

In short more support is needed in a more consistent way. And in a faster fashion.

Q: Despite the situation in Australia, your membership renewal figures have been encouraging.

A: We have a renewal rate of 80 per cent for 2021. These funds will allow AFTA to continue to function at the level of pace and advocacy that we're currently doing at a federal, state and territory level as well as with other bodies that impact our sector.

Q: How important will travel agents be to consumers in a post-COVID world?

A: We believe – and it's been proven overseas – that we are even more important as an industry to the consumer than pre-COVID.

Never before have the travelling public globally been more confused or needed more support in making sure they have safe, consistent and reliable travel arrangements.

Keeping consumers consistently updated with information as they travel through their itineraries is what we do. And we're part of that shared experience, one phone call away – in fact, without a travel agent you're on your own.

It's more important than ever that you're getting the right expert advice, at a very small fee, considering the amount of funds that are spent on travel are \$47 billion a year.

Q: How will AFTA's role develop as we recover from the pandemic?

A: It's an interesting question. AFTA has morphed across the decades. We continue to evolve. We are always looking at our membership and whether we are catering for them.

We want to get into a position where we're not chasing our tails like we have been with COVID. The charter and constitution review already announced is evidence of that.

AFTA wants to continue to partner with like-minded and larger bodies like ACCI and BCA and even into the mining and agricultural sectors because everybody benefits from travel and tourism.

It's a wholesome industry which touches everybody's lives in Australia and that's why AFTA will continue to gain more share of voice in Canberra and at a state and territory government level.

www.afta.com.au

THIS TIME IT'S PERSONAL

Here, BARRY MAYO, Chairman – TravelManagers Australia, reveals how Personal Travel Managers have coped with the pandemic and looks ahead to the new landscape of world travel.

Q: What effect has the pandemic had on your business?

A: From having a multi-million-dollar turnover pre-pandemic, TravelManagers had nine months of negative trading before returning to positive trading for much of the first quarter of 2021, only to revert to negative trading again as various states have closed their borders to interstate travellers

Q: Many consultants had to find other jobs because of COVID. Has this been the case with your PTMs?

A: The large majority of our PTMs are in semi-hibernation mode, managing existing bookings, monitoring outstanding refund requests and travel credits, processing the occasional enquiry for future travel.

However, as with many other participants in the travel industry, some of our personal travel managers have found work outside the travel industry to pay bills, put food on the table and meet mortgage



Barry Mayo, Chairman – TravelManagers Australia



commitments while, in most cases, still servicing their clients.

Q: Can the home-based consultant model survive and flourish post-COVID?

A: TravelManagers is extremely confident. Current enquiries from potential recruits indicate there is significant recognition among many experienced and well-established travel agency owners and consultants of the economic and service advantages that the home-based consultant model offers.

It's been the pandemic that brought this home, encouraging them to explore this opportunity.

Q: Has the government done enough to support agents?

A: While there has been limited federal and state government support this doesn't reflect an 18-month ongoing battle for travel agents to survive without income!

Q: Do you think consultants will move to a "fee for service" model once travel resumes?

A: TravelManagers has been a long-time advocate for charging a fee for service where commissions are not applicable or not at a level to cover the cost of consultation.

This applies whether it is a 'plan to go' or 'commitment deposit' to providing a full schedule of fees covering services such as frequent flyer redemptions, amendments to bookings and any other non-

remunerated services PTMs offer their clients.

Q: How important will travel agents be to consumers in a post-COVID world?

A: A learning for many travellers resulting from disruptions created by COVID-19 is the benefit of booking with a live person who is dedicated to their wellbeing and protecting them against all eventualities.

There have been stark differences in experiences between travellers booking directly with an airline or via an OTA when compared to travellers who have a PTM acting on their behalf, ensuring the most convenient and cost-effective outcomes.

Whether during travel, pre-travel or post-travel the benefit of dealing with an experienced and knowledgeable PTM who knows and understands their client as opposed to being an anonymous enquirer at the end of a call centre phone or email has never been more pronounced.

There will be a period of time following the reopening of the international border where changes and updates will be ongoing as the world adjusts and deals with the pandemic at different stages of recovery in various countries.

It will be vital to be across this information and PTMs will more than ever continue to add value in reliably delivering this knowledge.

www.travelmanagers.com.au



Sir Richard Branson (centre) and VSS Unity

Aussie Scott is the new rocketman

A MELBOURNE banker is preparing to take a giant leap into space after winning a seat on a future Virgin Galactic mission.

Scott Copeland, 52, who won the 'Virgin Australia Ultimate Upgrade to Space' competition, is now officially part of the spaceline's Future Astronaut Community.

The father of three from Templestowe in Melbourne's north east will follow in Sir Richard Branson's footsteps and is set to fly to space as one of Virgin Galactic's early customers.

"I still pinch myself every day that my dream of entering space is close to reality," said Mr Copeland.

"When I won the Virgin Australia competition in 2014, I committed to finding my primary school teacher from 1979 who at the time said I should reconsider my dream of flying to space. Remarkably, I was able to locate her 35 years later to share this incredible story.

"Dreams really do become a reality

and my story is a testament to that. I can't thank Virgin Australia and Virgin Galactic enough for changing my life."

Since winning the competition, Mr Copeland, who is a self-confessed "space enthusiast" has travelled to the Mojave Desert in California to tour the Virgin Galactic facility with other future astronauts and see the spaceship VSS Unity.

To further indulge in his passion for space travel, he has also visited the Johnson Space Centre in Houston, Texas, as well as the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida.

People from all across the globe witnessed the recent spaceflight mission which saw Sir Richard rocket into space on VSS Unity.

Some 600 people have independently purchased tickets on future Virgin Galactic passenger spaceflight missions.

"Sir Richard's success presents so much hope for all people around the world at a time where we need it



Scott Copeland

most. Hope for humanity, hope for the future and hope to dream big," said Jayne Hrdlicka, CEO Virgin Australia Group.

Virgin Australia has been awarded 'Best Cabin Crew' for the fourth consecutive year at the AirlineRatings.com Airline Excellence Awards.

The airline was also named among the top 20 in the world, achieving a seven-star safety rating and demonstrable leadership in innovation and passenger comfort.

"This award acknowledges our commitment to delivering experiences our guests love and is testament to what makes us Australia's most loved airline," added Ms Hrdlicka.

www.virginaustralia.com



VINCENT MAKES IT SEVEN UP

CRYSTALBROOK COLLECTION has unveiled its latest property, set beneath the Story Bridge in the heart of Brisbane's Howard Smith Wharves.

Formerly known as The Fantauzzo, Crystalbrook Vincent is the seventh property from the brand to open in three years.

"I'm very proud of what my team has achieved in the past three years to now lead Australia's largest independent five-star portfolio," said Ghassan Aboud, Owner of Crystalbrook Collection.

The hotel will retain its partnership with namesake Vincent Fantauzzo. More than 500 pieces of the acclaimed Australian painter's artworks feature throughout the six-storey hotel.

The hotel boasts 166 rooms, Fuime rooftop bar, Polpetta restaurant, a rooftop pool and a 24-hour fitness centre.

crystalbrookcollection.com/Vincent

IN BRIEF

The Louise, a luxury lodge in South Australia's Barossa Valley, is set to join the Baillie Lodges family this month.

The company's growing portfolio of upscale lodges also includes Longitude 131° at Uluru-Kata Tjuta, Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island and Silky Oaks Lodge in the Daintree in Tropical North Queensland, which is currently under renovation ahead of reopening in spring this year.

The company's flagship property, Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island, was destroyed in bushfires in 2020, with rebuilding plans underway.

www.baillielodges.com.au

LIFE'S JUST A BEACH AT DYNAMIC TRIO

OUTRIGGER HAS acquired beach resorts in Koh Samui, Phuket and Khao Lak in Thailand.

The resorts consist of 372 rooms in three of the most sought-after beach locations in Asia.

The properties will be refreshed before reopening by year-end as Outrigger Koh Samui Beach Resort, Outrigger Khao Lak Beach Resort and Phuket Manathai by Outrigger.

"This acquisition trio demonstrates our confidence in Thailand's tourism industry and commitment to the global expansion of Outrigger's leisure resort portfolio," said Jeff Wagoner, President and CEO of Outrigger Hospitality Group. "Our past success in Thailand stemmed from celebrating unique cultural aspects of the destination which is something that we plan to continue at all three of the new properties."

www.outrigger.com/Thailand



Outrigger Koh Samui



Aiden by Best Western, Lorient, France

BOUTIQUE BRAND MAKES AUSSIE DEBUT

BWH HOTEL Group is introducing its newest lifestyle brand to the Australian market.

Aiden by Best Western is a new collection of modern, suburban boutique hotels, each showcasing a personality that reflects the eclectic spirit of its neighbourhood.

The group has approximately 4,700 hotels in more than 100 countries and territories worldwide and offers 17 brands across Australasia, which range from economy through luxury to meet the needs of travelers of all types.

Due to open this month, Aiden Darling Harbour in Sydney is housed in a refurbished, eight storey 1930s art deco building located on the western side of the harbour, opposite Pymont Bridge and next to the Harbourside shopping complex.

"Aiden exudes creative positivity and is exactly what Sydney needs right now," said Graham Perry, Managing Director of BWH Hotel Group for Australasia.

www.aidendarlingharbour.com.au/

GET THE JOB AND NAB A FAB PRIZE

QANTAS HAVE launched a reward campaign for COVID-19 vaccinated Aussies to recognise their role in helping the country get out of lockdown.

Fully vaccinated Australian-based Frequent Flyers who are 18 and over can claim their reward through the Qantas App by choosing one of three options:

- * 1,000 Qantas points
- * 15 status credits (which help Frequent Flyers move up between Silver, Gold and Platinum tiers)
- * \$20 flight discount for Qantas or Jetstar

Members will then be automatically entered into a prize draw to win a year's worth of flights, Accor hotel stays and BP fuel.

"Getting vaccinated is an important step that every Australian can take that brings us that little bit closer to life as we knew it," said Alan Joyce, Qantas Group CEO.



Lough Neagh eels

The plateful eight

Steeped in history and sometimes mystery, here are eight fun facts you may not know about Irish food.

1. Smoked salmon fit for royalty

Smoked salmon from the oldest smokery in Ireland, Belvelly Smokehouse in Cork, is so delicious it was served at Queen Elizabeth II's 80th birthday.

Frank Hederman, the smoker of choice for many international top chefs, has dedicated 38 years to producing the world's finest handmade smoked salmon at Belvelly Smokehouse. He advises "No lemon!" when enjoying this delicacy.

2. Five thousand year old butter

The world's oldest butter was discovered in a peat bog in 2013 by a turf-cutter in Tullamore, County Offaly in the Irish Midlands.

According to the Cavan Country Museum, butter was an item of luxury back then, often used to pay rent and taxes, and was stored in bogs as a way of preservation.

3. Oodles of eels

Europe's biggest wild eel fishery in Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland produces a whopping 700 tons of wild eels each year. These eels migrate to the area as elvers from the Sargasso Sea in the North Atlantic Ocean.

Available in many restaurants across Northern Ireland, they are usually smoked, jellied or fried.

4. The Irish stew and the Titanic

The famous Irish stew made with lamb, carrots, potatoes and onion was frequently featured on the menus for

third-class passengers on the *Titanic*. The stew would be consumed as part of the passengers' high tea, which was also their second and final meal of the day. Their main meal of the day was lunch.

5. Literary stew

The Dublin coddle, a warm and hearty stew often made with leftovers such as bacon, potatoes, onions, sausages, herbs and even barley, was a favourite of famous writers Jonathan Swift and Sean O'Casey.

The dish was also mentioned in many of the works of novelist and literary critic James Joyce.

6. Cockles and mussels

The long Irish tradition of feasting on mussels, cockles and other shellfish at the local pub is harmonised in Dublin's popular folk song, *Molly Malone*.

A song about her short life as a fishmonger selling cockles and mussels on the streets of the Dublin, her iconic statue and wheelbarrow live on forever on Suffolk Street by St Andrew's Church.

7. Release the fairies for good luck

In order to ensure good luck, traditional Irish folklore dictates that a deep cross must be cut into the top of soda bread doughs before baking them. This is to let the fairies out, warding off any evil spirits, therefore protecting the household.

8. How many blaas?

Waterford may be world famous for its fine crystalware, but for foodies, it is also home of the soft and fluffy blaa bread rolls.

Traditionally had for breakfast with ham, cheese and onion, more than 12,000 blaas are baked in Waterford daily.

» www.ireland.com

Chiva-Som Health Resort, Hua Hin, Thailand



IT'S ONLY NATURAL

Experts are predicting a boom in health and wellness travel once international borders open up, with travellers desperate to re-connect with nature for their own peace of mind.

In this exclusive interview with *Traveltalk*, Dr JASON CULP, Research & Development Director at Chiva-Som, explains why the pandemic may have served as a wake-up call for us to look after our health and wellbeing.

Q: Do you think being in lockdown and being cut off from the outside world has given us a greater appreciation of nature?

A: Absolutely! More often than not we get lost in our typical daily routine and do not pay much attention to the lack of natural surroundings in our lives.

The social restrictions and lockdown have forced people to take a step back and have only amplified our feelings of seclusion and now people are ready to escape confinement and rediscover the great outdoors.

Q: What kind of impact can nature have on our wellbeing?

A: Nature helps to restore physical energy and peace of mind. Research has shown that spending time in nature can help reduce physical ailments, such as high blood pressure and inflammation.

People who spend more time in nature tend to have better mental and emotional balance, which is exactly what is needed to help restore any physical imbalances as well.

Q: Mental health has been a particular concern during lockdown. How can nature help us here?

A: Nature reminds us that life is full of adventure and boundless discoveries. It breaks the monotony of our daily routines and helps us escape the walls of our artificial environments.

Sometimes, this can help alleviate the feelings of being stuck, stagnant and trapped in our circumstances, thus restoring hope and a positive outlook on the future.

Q: How important is it for us as human beings to turn off the electronic gadgets from time to time?

A: Taking a break from electronics restores a sense of connection with the physical world.

Social engagement with friends and family (outside of social media platforms) has been shown to be an essential part of maintaining both our physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Q: When international travel returns, do you think experiential and wellness travel will be more popular than ever?

A: The upcoming predicted travel trends include getting back to nature as well as indulging in authentic and adventurous experiences, while

learning about new cultures and traditions.

Additionally, the pandemic has served as a wake-up call for the importance of supporting and preserving health. Therefore, the urge to travel for promoting health and wellbeing will most likely be greater with post-pandemic travel.

Q: Where are some of your favourite spots to reconnect with nature?

A: The mountains and forests are the places that I seek out when I wish to restore my energy and reinvigorate a diligent spirit. The beach is best for me to calm my mind and take a time-out from the daily routine.

The Chiva-Som resort in Thailand and upcoming Zula Wellness resort in Qatar are both great examples of helping guests better connect with the true beauty of their natural surroundings without the distractions while learning more about the importance of health and wellbeing in a relaxed, serene setting.

» www.chivasom.com

DID YOU KNOW?

Ireland produces enough milk and dairy per year to feed 52 million people.



Smoked Salmon



Waterford Blaa



Be among the first to visit

IT'S A rare thing; a new destination, opening to international travellers for the first time in recent history.

AIUla is located in the northwest of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, approximately 500km south of Petra in Jordan. The ancient city was a beacon of hospitality for thousands of years, at the crossroads of the incense trading route.

Home to more than 200,000 years of human history, today, AIUla is a living museum, with breathtaking landscapes, work-of-art rock formations, an incredible oasis and a fascinating immersion into the heritage, culture and mysticism of the Arabian Peninsula.

Ready, Set, Explore

With plenty to see and do, a minimum three-night stay is recommended to fully explore AIUla.

Hegra

Hegra is Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site and an ideal starting point.

The Nabateans established Hegra as their principal southern city (with Petra as their principal northern city) in the mid-first century BCE.

Today the stunning site is home to more than 100 monumental façade tombs and extensive tomb inscriptions.

Dadan

Centuries older than Hegra, the ancient city of Dadan was built meticulously from stone astride the valley's oasis. Dadan was one of the most developed 1st millennium BCE cities in northern Arabia. The city's construction defies belief!

On the Oasis Trail

At the heart of the community of AIUla is the oasis, lush greenery of 2.3 million date palms, running like a river through the desert landscape.

For centuries the oasis provided sustenance to the local community. Visitors are welcome and encouraged to explore the oasis and take in the aromatic air filled with dates, oranges, and mint. An easy and immersive three-kilometre walk through the oasis takes visitors from Dadan to Old Town.

AIUla Old Town

Explore the labyrinth of mud brick buildings, take a walking tour with a rawi (local storyteller), explore the bazaar, browse the shops for spices, dates and pottery.

There are numerous restaurants to choose from, then walk off lunch heading up to the top of Musabin Nusayr Castle, a 10th century citadel that overlooks Old Town.

Star Gazing

Al Gharameel best showcases AIUla's vast dark skies and is an idyllic location for stargazing. Visitors can book an evening tour and learn of the connection between the constellations and local culture. A truly breathtaking experience!

Archaeology

Ongoing archaeological work

continues to fascinate visitors to AIUla with excavations continuing to contribute to a better understanding of the significance of the Arabian Peninsula.

Evidence of the oldest domestic dog was discovered recently by Australian archaeologists, pre-dating other examples by more than 1,000 years.

Adventure Experiences

AIUla offers adventure experiences for every type of traveller: from guided bike tours, to ziplining, to after dark hiking experiences.

From the air, take a helicopter, hot air balloon or antique biplane to take in the monumentality of the landscape.

Where to Stay

AIUla has an exclusive range of accommodation options: from luxury semi tented villas to boutique eco-friendly desert resorts.

Most of the hotel properties are surrounded by AIUla's trademark sandstone mountain outcrops, situated in prime positions to enjoy the great outdoors and starry night skies, and to enjoy the vastness and quiet of AIUla.

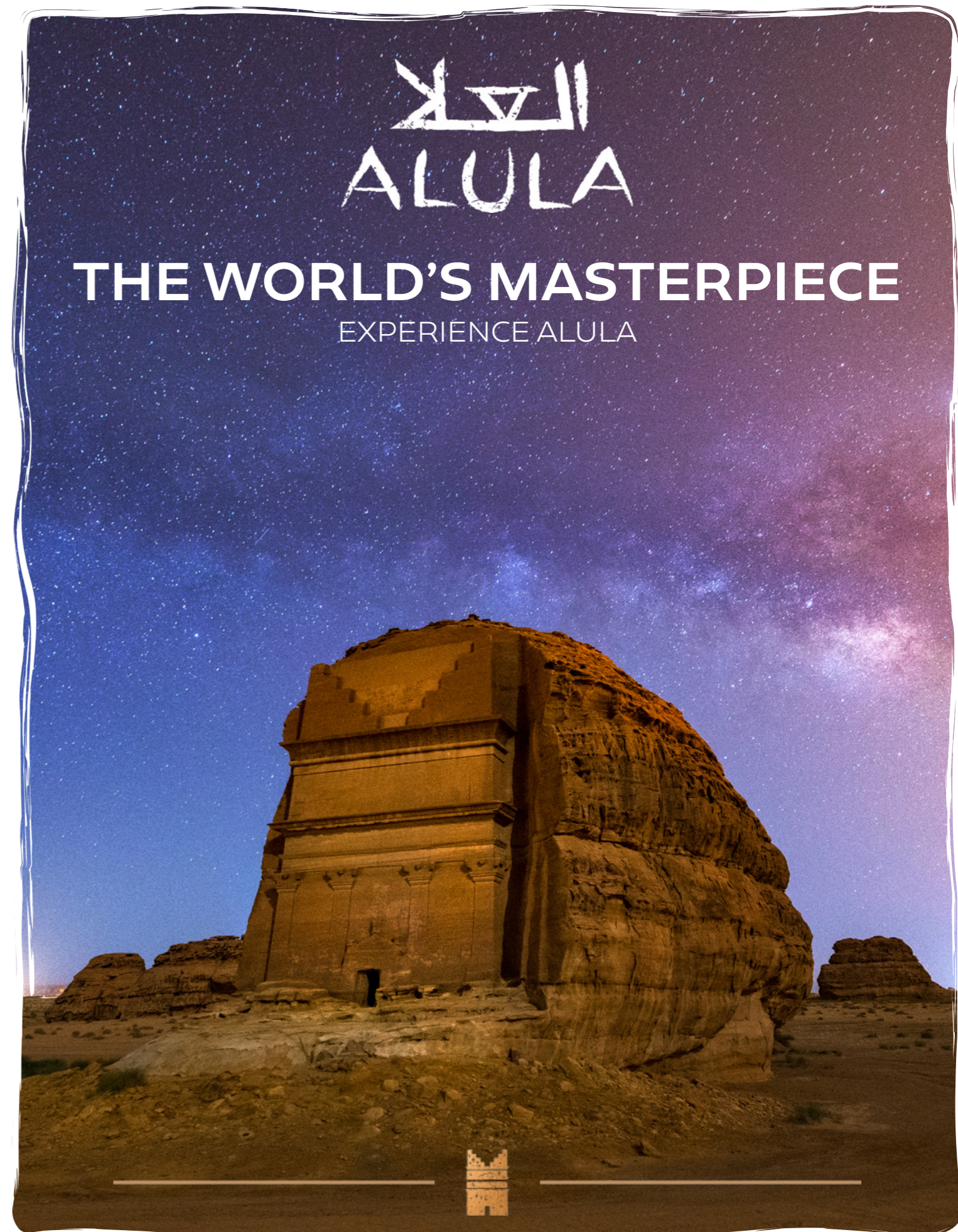
Additionally, a range of exciting new luxury hotel developments are currently underway including Aman Hotels, who will open three new properties in AIUla in 2022-23.

For a complete visitor's guide, videos and more, head to:

» www.experiencealula.com

Trade enquiries welcome. Please contact alula@walshegroup.com

» [CLICK HERE to subscribe to AIUla's quarterly trade newsletter](#)



www.experiencealula.com

Trade Enquiries: alula@walshegroup.com

Experience AIUla @ExperienceAIUla

A hard Hobbit to break

It may have been all too brief, but the recent travel bubble with New Zealand gave Aussies the chance to venture overseas, even if it was just across the Tasman.

Traveltalk editor JON UNDERWOOD is one of those hoping the bubble won't stay closed for too long. Here, we look back on his visit to The Hobbiton Movie Set, one of the biggest tourist attractions in the country.

I'VE ALWAYS wanted to go off on a really big adventure.

Lock the front door, jump the stile at the end of the lane and head off into the wild blue yonder with a rag tag bunch of compadres.

Yes, I'm jealous of Bilbo Baggins.

But while I'm unlikely to join a band of dwarves fighting a fire-breathing dragon, I can at least visit the place where it all began: Bag End in The Shire.

Well, ok, it's actually a film set just outside Matamata on New Zealand's North Island but it's where Sir Peter Jackson filmed *The Lord of the Rings* and more recently *The Hobbit* movies.

The Hobbiton Movie Set now stands as a permanent monument to Middle-earth and is proving to be one of the country's major tourist

attractions, with visitors coming from 120 countries worldwide.

Hobbiton has been built on a 500 hectare beef and sheep farm but is well away from civilisation to give it that authentic medieval feel.

And 'authentic' is the key word for CEO, Russell Alexander, whose father was first approached by a location scout in 1998 after he flew over the land in a helicopter.

"They wouldn't tell us the name of the movie at first," explains Russell. "My dad hadn't even heard of *The Lord of the Rings*."

Six months of negotiations followed until the deal was done, although the Alexander's were sworn to secrecy. Security guards were posted to keep prying eyes away as a 500-strong construction crew descended on the farm.

It has taken time for word to get around but more than 600,000 people came through the gate in 2019 pre-COVID.

The tour begins from The Shire's Rest in Hinuera. Guests are transported via mini bus and there's not a glimpse of the place until you disembark, walk through a cutting and then there it is laid out before you.

The element of surprise and wonder is duly achieved, seeing the place for the first time as movie-goers did in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The first thing you notice is the remarkable attention to detail over the near five-hectare site. Authentic materials from the period prevail with homes designated for individual hobbits.

There's a hole for the blacksmith, the carpenter, the potter, even the village drunk, complete with to-scale accessories and tools.

And there's something of a social scale here, too, with the smaller holes at the bottom of the hill for the less affluent, ranging to the larger holes at the top for the more prestigious residents.

What you also notice is that there

are no gimmicks, no animatronics and no characters dressed up as hobbits – it is life just as it would have been led in The Shire.

"I'm a bit paranoid about not making it into a theme park," Russell says. "That's what America does well and I totally respect that but what we do in New Zealand is something different and unique."

I spent a thoroughly enjoyable couple of hours wandering the narrow lanes and seeing some of the 44 hobbit holes they have constructed. Some are big enough for humans to walk inside but here the magic ends. The insides are just empty shells – the interior shots in the movies were done on a film set in Wellington.

There are some other movie secrets to be uncovered along the way. I won't spoil all of Russell's stories but suffice to say all is not as it seems, with 200,000 artificial leaves flown in from Taiwan and trees constructed from steel and silicon.

Highlights of the tour are Bag End, home of the most famous hobbit of all, the 'Party Tree' and the chance to sup a pint of locally-brewed ale in The Green Dragon.

Visitors can also partake of evening dinner tours, with a banquet in The Green Dragon followed by a guided trip through the set. There's also a special Beer Festival taking place on November 19 and 20 and A Hobbiton Christmas on December 17. Early risers can take advantage of the Second Breakfast Tour, which provides a hobbit-worthy feast on Sunday mornings in the Millhouse.

So does replicating a place featured in one of the most beloved and read books in the world add extra pressure when it comes to creating a real-life Shire?

"The underlying thing is that this is a passion and if you are passionate about what you are doing and trying to achieve, the responsibility doesn't really come into it," says Russell.

"But it is very humbling and the best thing we can do is to keep doing what we do well. People don't come to a country just for two hours. We are only one piece of the jigsaw."



“I’m a bit paranoid about not making it into a theme park,” Russell says. “That’s what America does well and I totally respect that but what we do in New Zealand is something different and unique.”



FAST FACTS

GETTING THERE: The Hobbiton Movie Set is in Matamata, a two-hour drive from Auckland.

■ hobbitontours.com

ACCOMMODATION: A number of farm stay options are available in the Matamata region, offering country-style accommodation.

■ farmstay@hobbitontours.com

WHEN TO GO: Tours depart at least five times daily from 9.30am. Tours last two hours and cost \$NZ89 (approx. \$AU84) for adults. A family pass (two adults, two youths 9-16 years) is available for \$NZ225 (approx. \$AU212).

» www.hobbitontours.com;
www.newzealand.com/AU





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. Where is famed Australian writer Henry Lawson buried?

- a. Melbourne
- b. Adelaide
- c. Sydney
- d. Brisbane

2. Which of these is the capital of Laos?

- a. Vientiane
- b. Kathmandu
- c. Lhasa
- d. Hanoi

3. The Clippers are an American basketball team based in which city?

- a. Los Angeles
- b. Chicago
- c. New York
- d. Boston

4. Lake Constance borders which three European countries?

- a. Spain, Portugal and France
- b. France, Germany and Belgium
- c. Italy, Austria and Switzerland
- d. Germany, Austria and Switzerland

5. Is Angola north or south of Namibia?

- a. South
- b. North

6. The sol is the national currency of which South American country?

- a. Bolivia
- b. Brazil
- c. Peru
- d. Surinam

7. In which Australian city is the famous MONA museum?

- a. Perth
- b. Darwin
- c. Canberra
- d. Hobart

8. Where was *Game of Thrones* star Kit Harington born?

- a. London
- b. New York
- c. Edinburgh
- d. Cape Town



11

9. Where is the largest airport in Asia?

- a. Beijing
- b. Hong Kong
- c. Bangkok
- d. Tokyo

10. Which planet is closest to the sun?

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

11. Who wrote *The Great Railway Bazaar* about a four-month train ride?

- a. Freya Stark
- b. Jan Morris
- c. Paul Theroux
- d. Ilija Trojanow

12. How many American states start with the letter K?

- a. One
- b. Two
- c. Three
- d. Four



13

13. According to *Guinness World Records*, which city has the world's fastest elevator?

- a. Paris
- b. London
- c. Dubai
- d. Shanghai

14. If you were attending a concert at Gewandhaus, which city would you be in?

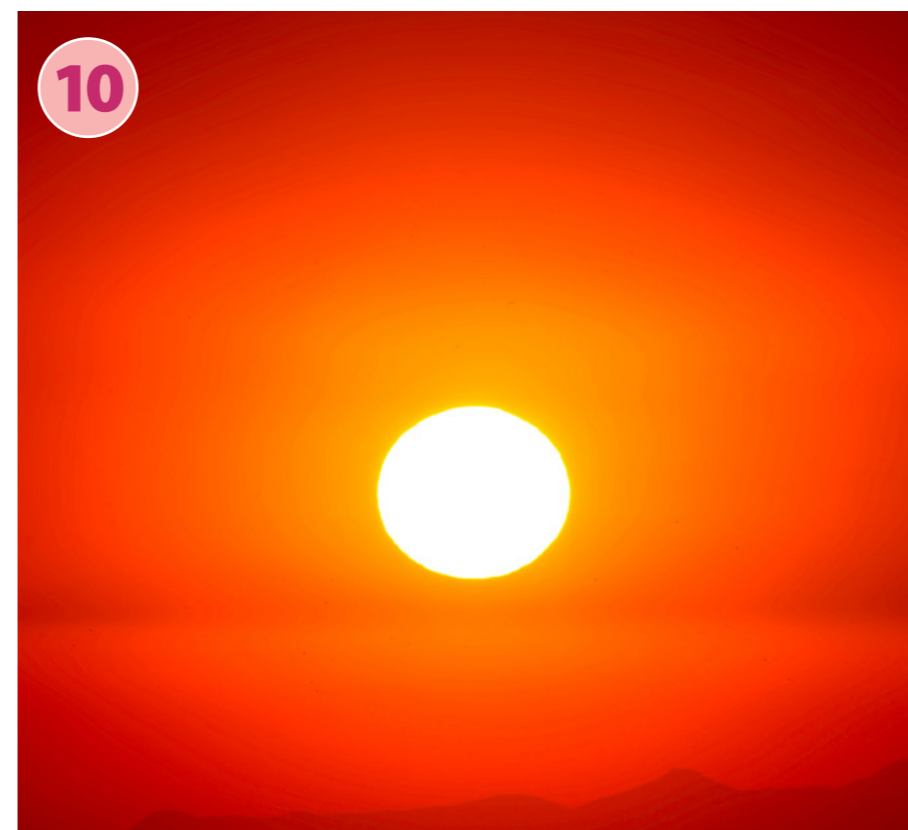
- a. Leipzig
- b. Vienna
- c. Berlin
- d. Prague

15. *Midnight in Chelsea* is a song by which famous pop star?

- a. Ed Sheeran
- b. Harry Styles
- c. David Bowie
- d. Jon Bon Jovi



6



10



2

For more quiz action, head to our website www.traveltalkmag.com.au or look out for *Traveltease* every Thursday.

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



Roys Peak, Wanaka, New Zealand. Photo courtesy Miles Holden / Tourism New Zealand