



Plane sailing

I HAVE my own list to take the stress out of flying which can be caused by getting caught in a traffic jam, parking stations and unreliable public transportation.



My number one rule is to get to the airport well ahead of time so I can chill out with a coffee and download & answer emails.

Smartraveller.com.au, has some words of advice on the 'Common Mistakes That Will Make You Miss Your Flight,' such as planning a too-tight connection. If an airport's website suggests you need an hour's window, go for 90 minutes to be sure.

Not having a valid ID/Passport may sound obvious but check before you leave.

The day before public holidays or the weekends are some of the busiest times for travel so avoid them at your peril.

Check in prior to arriving at the airport. Airlines have solid cutoff times, so check-in online - you can usually do so 24 hours ahead of departure.

Don't get your gate wrong.

Keep an eye on departure boards as flights can change gates and factor in security and immigration delays - Jill.

AIME pre-touring relevance

A survey completed by 93% of the 180 hosted buyers and media that took part in pre AIME tours from 23-24 February, indicated that they either plan to (83%) or may (17%) bring business to Melbourne/regional Victoria in the future.

The survey results also revealed extremely high levels of satisfaction across the board, with 96% satisfied with the accommodation and regional tour hosts, 94% with the transfers, 88% with the choice of pre-tours available and 87% with site inspections and meals.

Feedback included statements such as "I have seen first-hand the different and varied experiences I could offer delegates that they could not find anywhere else," and "There is so much to see beyond Melbourne, which is such a bonus for any event planner and their delegates".

Ceo of Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB), Karen Bolinger, said, "Each year we work closely with our metropolitan and regional partners to come up with a pre-touring program that we believe will not only be enjoyable for our delegates, but will also encourage them to choose Victoria for their next business

event".

"These results show that pre-touring is still very relevant to the AIME itinerary and more



importantly, is generating business for the state, proven by the fact that 60% of respondents said they will definitely bring business to Melbourne/regional Victoria in the future as a result of the pre-touring program.

"As we know in this industry, seeing and experiencing a product personally is a much better sales proposition, especially in the case of a destination like Melbourne and regional Victoria, which offer stunning natural attractions and premier infrastructure ideal for business events.

Hosted buyers that took part included professional conference organisers (20%), travel agents (18%), incentive travel agents (11%) and many others.

Asbestos on Sydney theme park site

MORE than 30,000sqm of asbestos contaminated soil has been found on the site earmarked for Wet'n'Wild Sydney, currently under construction in Prospect in the city's west.

The extent of contamination occupies approximately 60% of the land, 20% of which is friable asbestos - and in dust form is potentially life threatening.

The \$115m park expected to open by December, will feature more than 40 waterslides and attractions such as wave pools & a range of "world's first" rides.

Operator Village Roadshow told our sister publication *Travel Daily* remediation work "was always planned as part of the development" and would not alter the park's design or schedule.

Accor's IMEX reveal

IN Frankfurt yesterday, Accor disclosed that they had reached the landmark figure of 2,000 meeting and event facilities across its global hotel network.

Speaking at IMEX, the French hotel group, which has developed specific Meeting and Events solutions, with different approaches, now plans to extend its MICE offering to 2,250 hotels by 2015, as it prepares to open 250 hotels over the next two years.

With a total of more than 10,400 meeting rooms in 90 countries, including key business hubs, city centres, airports and incentive destinations, Australia, they say has been one of their fastest growth areas for MICE venues, especially since mid-2012, when they added the Mirvac Hotel portfolio to the network.

This acquisition, introduced a range of superior MICE hotels, many of which have been rebranded to Accor's MGallery and Pullman brands.

"Accor not only has the most extensive MICE networks in the Asia Pacific region, but through our events teams are able to offer clients access to a staggering 2,000 venues worldwide, ensuring whatever the size or specification of the event, we can cater for all tastes and eventualities," said Jenifer Dwyer-Slee, director of sales business events.

High growth areas include Asia Pacific 64% & 11% in Latin America.

Durban complex opens

THE first phase of a R220 million transformation of Southern Sun's Elangeni & Maharani hotel into one major complex, has been completed.

Located in Durban's Golden Mile, the refurbishment of the Maharani Tower includes the bedrooms, core infrastructure, the conference centre and public areas; substantial new food and beverage offerings within the Elangeni Tower; the rework of the Porte Cochere and the renovation of the external building facades.

The complex offers 734 stylish bedrooms, two gyms, three swimming pools, one of which is heated, free wifi connectivity, 15 meeting and conference rooms, two fully-equipped business centres and 11 restaurants and bars.





VIP Buyer Program

THE Australian Business Events Expo (ABEE) and Sydney Event Showcase will offer a new VIP Buyer Program in 2013.

The program is supported by event software program Presdo Match.

It caters for up to 80 qualified buyers and approximately 30 exhibitors who are able to pre-schedule appointments with each other.

Exhibitors are guaranteed a minimum of 10 pre-qualified appointments with buyers and to have company logos on web pages and marketing and signage associated with the program.

Presdo Match, is a people directory that pulls data from the network event and matches exhibitors with buyers who have similar interests.

A direct message can be sent to the desired buyer/seller they want to contact and that person is asked to either accept or ignore the request.

Only VIP Buyers will be able to make appointments via Presdo Match but all other information will be made available, for up to one month after the event, to everyone else.

The software will enable exhibitors to build their company profile and create a bigger presence within the industry.

A smartphone app of the software is also available.

To find out more information about the VIP Buyers Program visit - abeexpo.com.au.

Last year, the two day tradeshow was attended by 3,000 visitors and generated \$5.9 million worth of business with the number one reason why visitors attend the Expo being to find new products.

The average exhibitor was seen to generate \$88,000 worth of business from the Expo in 2012 and according to statistics, visitors to the expo have an average event budget of \$418,000.

The VIP Exhibitor Package



is valued at \$1,750 for space bookings of 18sqm.

Exhibitors who confirm their attendance at the 2013 ABEE and Sydney Event Showcase Expo's by tomorrow, 23 May, will receive an iPad mini as part of the package.

Email Andrea Manookian for details amanookian@etf.com.au.

Pictured above at a Sydney breakfast yesterday with 100 past and future exhibitors in attendance is Karen Krieger, event director ABEE and Rob Frank, Verve Creative.

Minor expands into Qatar

CONTINUING with a strategic expansion in the Middle East, the Minor Hotel Group has announced its first hotel in Qatar, the Anantara Doha Island Resort & Spa.

To open in early 2014, the 141 room, five star Arabian Gulf resort, lies just off the coast of Doha, the country's capital.

With rooms ranging from standard to over-water pool villas, it has four restaurants and bars, an Arabic beach club and a total of four pools.

The resort also offers an extensive selection of activities such as a nine-hole golf putting course, a ten-pin bowling alley and cinema.

A ballroom accommodating up to 250 is in addition to two meeting rooms for up to 50 delegates, whilst an outdoor event space has a capacity to host up to 100 people.

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Whitsundays update

WITH a \$20 million upgrade of the town centre starting to take shape, Airlie Beach is moving from its backpacker origins to four and five star apartment developments and a rising number of quality restaurants.

Across the water Paradise Bay Island, closed for 12 months and now with new owners is to reopen this month after a refurbishment that includes its beach bungalows and the addition of a new day spa and swimming pool.

With a maximum of just 18 guests and no mobile phones or internet coverage, guests can arrive by helicopter, feast on gourmet meals with wines to match or explore the Whitsundays on the resort's private catamaran or fast rib boat with a private skipper.

MEANWHILE BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort is to build a multi-purpose conference and meeting venue after receiving a \$250,000 grant through the Tourism Industry Regional Development Fund (TIRF).

The grant will enable the resort to enhance their current accommodation and meeting room and build a new facility with multiple spaces for functions, kids activities, guest programs and conferences catering for 30 to 100 people.



IF Mantra Hotels and Resorts across Australia have their way with conference delegates, doing the Loosey Goosey will become the latest conference energiser on the meetings circuit.

That and the 'Over Achiever', 'the Micro Manager' and 'the Class Clown' are all part of Mantra Ambassador Pat Rafter's breakout sessions with a difference - 'Pat's Pick Me Up Stretches.'

Described as easy but effective, the set of exercises for both body and mind help to re-energise even the most PowerPoint-weary delegate.

"We constantly try to find new ways to surprise and service our guests and the 'Pat's Pick Me Up Stretches' are a great way to create a positive vibe during breakout sessions after delegates have often absorbed a lot of information," said director of MICE for Mantra Group, Paul Wilson.



Dragonfly's outstanding win

SOUTHERN African DMC, Dragonfly Africa was awarded "Outstanding Achievement in Destination Promotion by a DMC," at a formal evening hosted by South African Tourism in the New York Library

- an award that recognises top achievers in promoting tourism to South Africa from North America.

"One destination management company exceeded all expectations in producing the largest number of qualified buyers for the recent Meetings Africa trade show held in Johannesburg, for this important event and in delivering that "wow" experience," said South African Tourism, commenting on the win.





A legendary experience

TOURISM

Portfolio, together with partner airline South African Airways and leading DMC Travel Motives, took a select group of corporate meeting planners on a journey



into Southern Africa this month. The unique itinerary saw the

Australian group doing a walking tour along Victoria Falls, game drives beneath the Drakensberg mountain range, a night in the luxurious Kapama River Lodge and a river cruise in Chobe National Park where they were surrounded by elephants, hippos and buffalo.

Tourism Portfolio business development manager Lisha Singh said the group also tracked another African giant, Nobel Laureate and former South African President Nelson Mandela.

"In Johannesburg we visited Mandela's former home in the legendary township of Soweto, where he lived with his first wife Winnie.

"And from Cape Town we travelled to Robben Island, where he was imprisoned for 18 of his 27 years in captivity.

"Our guide was an ex-prisoner, who recounted how he was treated during his time on the island.

"It was a moving experience in an unforgettable tour," she said.

Pictured on safari, top row from left are: Laura Gibson, Event 7; Karen Sainsbury, Hot Events Australia; Cathy Innes, South African Airways and Lisa Mitchell, Solterbeck.

Bottom row: Karin Bouwer, Travel Motives; Lisha Singh, Tourism Portfolio and Kathe Casas, Destination Event Management.

The freeze on Aurora

WITH the Australian-dollar reaching an 11-month low last week, some experts are forecasting a further strong downward movement in the coming weeks.

As such, Aurora Expeditions are encouraging passengers to book their US dollar cruises now by putting a freeze on exchange rates for all of their upcoming voyages to Antarctica this 2013/14 season.

Book an Antarctic cruise before 14 June and the exchange rate of AU\$1:US\$1 will be locked in across all departures.

See - www.auroraexpeditions.com.au.

Ecruising appointments

AURORA Walker has been appointed by the Ecruising Group, as general manager to oversee its ecruising.travel online cruise specialist division.

Walker, who was most recently team operations manager at Corporate Travel Management, is part of the expansion of the company's senior team, which also welcomed Bertha Harvey, to ecruising.travel business, marketing team from Carnival Australia.

HAVE YOU CHECKED THIS OUT?

A new 'consumer show' has hit our TV screens - "The Checkout" - and apart from pillorying Jetstar on almost every show mainly for their 'booking charges' which are credit-card charges by another name but also for the airlines' seeming uncaring attitude (uncaring, that is apart from its profits). But I digress.

One feature of the show a few weeks back was asking viewers to report exceptionally high broadband charges...and the response was truly educational.

Those of you who have read this column before will know that broadband charges, particularly where they're levied by hotels, are a pet hate of mine.

I'm pleased to report that the situation is getting better, though very slowly.

More independent hotels are offering free wifi and of course Shangri-La Hotels, W Hotels and Aloft Hotels provide free wireless broadband in all their hotels, worldwide (indeed the technical advances offered by Aloft in some of their hotels is truly amazing).

Sydney Airport provides free wireless broadband airside, Hong Kong and Singapore Airports have free wireless broadband throughout (Melbourne Airport please take note).

The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre has long offered free wireless broadband and recently the City of Manchester in the UK has announced that it is providing free wifi across Manchester city centre provided by Manchester City Council.

Every day visitors have 30 minutes free and unlimited access to public sector websites.

If these companies or corporations can do it then why are so many hotels (apart from those mentioned) in Australia and New Zealand so shy of

offering it too?

If you're reading this and you work for a hotel or venue (or airport) that does offer free wifi let the Incentive Association know because it's compiling a directory of such hotels and venues - and you don't have to be a member to have a listing (you do if you want more than that, but membership rates are very reasonable).

The new IA web site goes live at the end of this month and the Free WiFi Directory will be part of this.



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