



## Lest we forget

AN invitation from Thai Airways last week, to see *The Railway Man*,

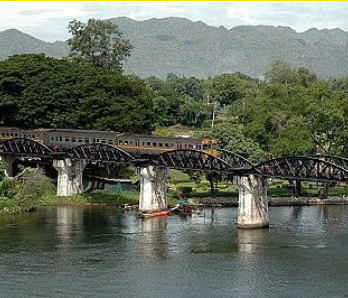


a sometimes confronting, yet ultimately uplifting, true story centred on the building of the Thai/Burma railway by Prisoners of War (POWs) in Kanchanaburi during WWII, when it was under Japanese control.

I have been to Kanchanaburi in the west of Thailand twice before, most memorably in the luxury and elegance of the Eastern & Orient Express.

Like Gallipoli and Sandakan in Borneo, Kanchanaburi has much to recommend it as an indelible place to visit.

There's the bridge the POW's were forced to build, immortalised in the Alec Guinness film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, two museums - the Thailand-Burma Railway Museum and the JEATH War



Museum - as well as the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery.

Beyond this, it is also one of the most beautiful provinces in Thailand with easy accessibility to waterfalls and national parks.

Travel on the Eastern & Orient Express as a group from either Bangkok or Singapore and you can do so with a minimum of 12 aboard any of their scheduled itineraries.

Or take a luxury charter for 80 or more and customise the experience with special activities on or off the train.

It's an excellent incentive idea.

Jill

## Fiji Airways reveals plan



FIJI Airways' five year strategic plan, approved by the airline's board in mid-December, will see an expansion of the airline's route network through key airline partnerships, increased operating profits and passenger numbers, as well as growth in the number of aircraft and available seats.

Fiji Airways managing director and ceo Stefan Pichler said that this was the first time a strategic plan for the airline had been developed bottom up from management and with input from its customers and stakeholders.

"This is our plan, we believe in it and we will make it happen."

This included an increase in fleet size by 25% with the purchase and/or leasing of four new aircraft, including one A330-200, two B737-800s and two ATR72-600s (one as a replacement for an ATR 42-500), by 2017.

Proposed capacity increases across the regions include Asia (144%), Pacific Islands (86.6%), New Zealand (58.9%), Australia (28.4%) and Domestic (12.3%), while the current seat availability to the US remained relatively stable (- 4.7%).

Pichler said the airline would put in place an aggressive financial performance strategy to increase operating profits above \$FJD100m, which had been planned assuming fuel prices

and currency exchange rates at current levels.

"It is our aim to be a world class boutique airline and we must match that with an ambitious but solid financial growth plan which expands on current successes and takes our airline to a new level."

"We need to be sustainably profitable and have a healthy cash flow to pay off our debts and fund new aircraft."

### Alila to open in Oman

THIS month Alila Hotels and Resorts will be taking over management of the completed Jabal Akhdar Hotel from Omran, the Sultanate's tourism-related development, hospitality management and investment company.

The resort, which is expected to open its doors to welcome its first guests in April, will be in line with Alila's philosophies, one that will provide visitors with access to one of Oman's most magnificent yet untapped regions.

The exterior and interior of the resort has been designed using raw materials sourced directly from local suppliers wherever possible, highlighting both Alila's and Omran's commitment to localise resources so as to ensure a direct economic benefit for the local community.

### Sarino for Dockside

INTERNATIONAL hospitality professional Mike Sarino has been appointed to the newly created position of director of sales and events at the Dockside Group.

Sarino, who brings with him more than 20 years' experience in the hospitality and tourism industries, will lead the sales team as it embarks on a series of exciting new projects.

For the past 13 years he led sales, marketing, conference and events teams for luxury hotel brand Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts and more recently as director of sales and marketing at Sofitel Sydney Wentworth.



Managing director of Dockside Group, Christopher Drivas, said, "The timing is ideal as we significantly expand our operations to include our new venue, Dockside Pavilion Darling Harbour, as well as our recent appointment as the exclusive caterer for the new Sydney Convention Centre @ Glebe Island."

### Dubai Mall hours

DUBAI'S shopping festival has seen the Dubai Mall extend its hours.

Retail outlets will be open from 10am to 2am from 16 Jan to 02 Feb and food outlets from 10am to 3am.

Other malls will also extend hours, including the Mall of Emirates and Deira City Centre.



## SeaLink boosts fleet



**FOLLOWING** Captain Cook Cruises' contract wins, including transporting convention attendees to the temporary facilities at Glebe Island, owner SeaLink Travel Group has acquired another vessel to boost its operations.

The *Freedom Sovereign* will perform the contract work, which also includes passenger transfers for the Biennale of Sydney art festival and ferry charters for Harbour City Ferries (Sydney Ferries), as well as providing additional capacity to the Hop On

Hop Off service.

SeaLink Travel Group managing director Jeff Ellison said the company planned to add Manly as a destination for the service.

The vessel can carry up to 200 passengers and is being modified to carry up to 250 people.

SeaLink said the 24m ferry had been funded using debt finance and cost \$3.06 million.

It is expected to begin operations by the end of this week.

The company said two further vessels were under construction and due for delivery in May and June, which would up its Sydney fleet to 14 vessels in total.

SeaLink said it was increasing its investment in its fleet and tourism at a time when Australia was seeing strong growth in international visitors.

## The Greening of Khiri

**DESTINATION** Management Company Khiri Travel, with 11 offices in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Cambodia and an inbound travel company in the USA, has been certified in the Sustainable Tourism Education Program (STEP) run by Sustainable Travel International.

Fulfilling more than 20 criteria to meet bronze level certification, the award designates Khiri Travel as an "eco-certified STEP tour operator."

"By embracing STEP, we've put a measurable commitment to sustainable practices at the core of Khiri Travel's operations," said ceo Willem Niemeijer.

"When we started we implemented not only the required practices, but looked to see what else could be done.

"For example, we changed all our non-recycling batteries to rechargeable ones and installed motion detectors for the lights in restrooms," he said.

## Early bird discounts

**CIBTM**, held in Beijing from 17 to 19 Sep, is offering a discounted early bird booking rate for returning exhibitors.

Companies signing up early can benefit from year round exposure on the website ([www.cibtm.com](http://www.cibtm.com)) via the official exhibitor directory which provides a supplier guide for all hosted buyers attending.

Exhibitors are being encouraged to confirm their participation early, securing the early bird booking rate which is only available to companies returning their signed contract to exhibit by 31 Jan.

Companies interested in exhibiting at CIBTM 2014 should contact Flora Liu, sales manager.

## Up pops Luxperience!

**LUXPERIENCE** 2014 has launched a pop-up event, the 2014 Global Pop-Up programme.

Designed to take travel trade suppliers directly to key markets around the world, it will appear in some of the world's most iconic cities, including in the USA, the UK, China and Brazil.

The initiative will provide suppliers with enhanced opportunities to establish business relationships in strategic markets, prior to Luxperience 2014 taking place in Sydney from 31 Aug to 3 Sep.

A selection of 20 suppliers will be attending each Pop-Up event with 50 elite high-end and corporate travel buyers.

"We are very excited about our 2014 Pop-Up programme," said Lindy Andrews, ceo of Luxperience.

"I believe our approach reflects the global profile of Luxperience, as well as our commitment to provide our suppliers with the best return on investment, by further increasing their exposure to an international audience."

The first Luxperience Pop-Up will take place in New York at 6pm on 26 Feb at the Pranna on Madison Avenue.

Suppliers will be able to showcase their product during an informal cocktail event.



Subsequent pop-ups will take place as follows:

London, UK - 3 Mar at Beaufort House Chelsea. Event starts at 4pm and concludes with dinner.

Beijing, China - 20 Mar at the Waldorf Hotel. Event starts at 6pm and concludes with dinner.

Sao Paulo, Brazil - 5 May at Tivoli Sao Paulo - Mofarrej. A cocktail event starting at 6pm.

For further information on participation at Luxperience 2014 contact [beinspired@luxperience.com.au](mailto:beinspired@luxperience.com.au).

Alternatively you can visit [www.luxperience.com.au](http://www.luxperience.com.au).



**SUCH** is the power of television that a partnership between Qantas and Twentieth Century Fox Television's *Modern Family* and Twentieth Century Fox Consumer Products, will see the Pritchett-Dunphy-Tucker clan take a vacation Down Under for an episode to be broadcast later this season.

The filming of the top rating American comedy series, expected to be watched by an estimated 25 million people, follows in the wake of *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, which provided a 22% increase in inbound flights to New South Wales alone, as well as an overall boost in destination awareness for Australia.

With filming expected to take two weeks, Qantas ceo Alan Joyce said it is a huge coup for Australia to feature in an episode of the multi Emmy award-winning show.

"We are excited to partner with Twentieth Century Fox to promote what Australia has to offer to the world through this special holiday episode.

"The humour of the show is a great fit with Australia's own and as the national carrier we are proud to support this innovative way of encouraging more people to fly here."

The entire *Modern Family* cast will join co-creator and executive producer Steven Levitan for the visit.

## Aro Ha opens in NZ

**THE** \$NZ30 million Aro Ha Wellness Retreat near Glenorchy, Queenstown has opened.

The retreat, perched in the beautiful Southern Alps overlooking Lake Wakatipu, is a Zen-inspired centre specialising in innovative all-inclusive wellness adventure programs.

It offers a mix of yoga, meditation and therapeutic massage and rigorous exercise.



# business events news

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## IBTM Africa's interest

**AN** unprecedented interest from international hosted buyers applying to attend the first IBTM Africa, taking place in Cape Town, 28 to 30 Apr, is reportedly the result of a rapidly growing demand for meetings industry suppliers within Africa.

David Dodgeon of Green Route, who will attend the expo with a group of 16 qualified international buyers, said, "Trade shows are one of the most effective ways of obtaining and securing new business.

"Africa provides a perfect meetings industry destination for a number of reasons.

"The continent offers a huge contrast in terms of culture and history and is well situated in terms of flight routes and global access.

Further information on: [www.ibtmevents.com/ibtmafrica](http://www.ibtmevents.com/ibtmafrica).

## DMS' new division

**DMS** Destination Marketing Services managing director Marissa Fernandez has launched a new outbound leisure travel division.

The division will specialise in destinations in the Middle East, Europe and Central America.

This includes a range of touring options for Morocco offered by partner Activ'Travel - a style of product with emphasis on highly creative and unique itineraries.

"For more than 20 years we've been dealing with the best destination management companies in the world.

"While our focus has always been on the business events market, increasingly our international partners have been urging us to represent them in the leisure sector as well", Fernandez said.

"It is a very logical move for us particularly when you track current demand by small up-market groups for special interest, luxury and occasion based travel.

Heading the new division is Kristie Turner who has worked as a senior account manager with DMS for the past four years.

## Day delegate deals

**RENDEZVOUS** Hotels and Toga Hotels have joined together and are starting the New Year with some special day delegate conference packages.

These include:

Vibe Hotel Sydney – Spend over \$2,500 at a Vibe Hotel (\$65 p/p minimum of 20 delegates) and receive a \$50 gift card (conditions apply).

Valid for new bookings held in February and March 2014.

Rendezvous Grand Hotel Auckland - \$NZ55 p/p minimum of 15 delegates, valid for new bookings and held by the end of Apr 2014.

Rendezvous Grand Hotel Perth - \$55 p/p minimum of 15 delegates, valid for new bookings and held by the end of Apr 2014.

Rendezvous Grand Hotel Melbourne - \$55 p/p minimum of 15 delegates, valid for new bookings and held by the end of Apr 2014.

In addition, those conferencing and staying at a Toga Rendezvous hotel receive a number of low cost inclusions.

Register for Events with Benefits at [www.togahotels.com](http://www.togahotels.com) for additional rewards.



## Getting to Know: Sydney's urban renewal

by: Jill Varley

There's a renaissance taking place in Sydney, one focused on the responsible development of former industrial sites such as Ashmore, Green Square, Harold Park and the Carlton United Brewery, and the protection and enhancement of historic suburbs such as Chippendale, Surry Hills, Redfern, Glebe, Erskineville and Alexandria.

The Mercure Sydney on Railway Square in Central, having completed a multi-million dollar re-vamp and sitting slap bang in the middle of the urban renewal taking place in the Central, Ultimo and Chippendale precincts, has embraced this change and relaunched as the Mercure Sydney Central.

Greg Brady, Mercure Sydney Central's general manager said, "There is a remarkable energy in the area with new constructions such as the Frank Gehry building and the Central Park development (on the former CUB site).

"There are new offices, restaurants and retail outlets opening all the time, and in the longer term, Central will once again become Sydney's hub for a city, light rail tram service."

In the Mercure's enthusiasm to showcase this rapid gentrification, they invited **BEN** on a walking tour with Sydney Architectural Walks.

Undertaken by a group of passionate architects they are guaranteed to surprise and delight and would make an ideal addition to a conference or partner program.

The route and conversation is structured around a number of contemporary projects, people friendly parks, urban sculptures and architectural innovation.

For instance, there's the UTS building whose walls are clad with aluminium sheets, perforated with a binary code, and the eye-arresting Central Park development, a multi-stage \$2 billion urban village with soaring apartment buildings. One of these has walls that spill with vertical living gardens and is topped by a hovering heliostat. This cantilevered assemblage is described as having motorised mirrors that captures sunlight and directs its rays down onto Central Park's gardens all year round.

With so much renewal going on, this area, that not so many years ago was the centre of Sydney, is about to become its centre all over again.

