

# Tourism boost in Australia

A recent web poll conducted by the Australian Tourism Export Council revealed that international visitors are staying longer and spending more in Australia. More than 60 per cent of tourism operators responded to the poll, which revealed that 5.5 million overseas visitors went to Australia last year; the highest figure ever recorded.

The web poll results have boosted the council's confidence, according to ATEC Managing Director, Matthew Hingerty, who said that these statistics only strengthened the December 2006 Overseas Arrivals and Departures report. He revealed, "Visitor nights and expenditure increased by 12 per cent on the previous year and we now need to focus on developing new products and experiences to appeal to new markets."

Both the UK and the USA posted a marginal rise in visitor numbers to Australia last year, but two of Australia's key markets, New

Zealand and Japan, saw a decrease. Consequently, Hingerty said that he is keen to "encourage those from our traditional markets to come back and stay longer".

Long-term, the predictions are positive. Australia's Tourism Forecasting Committee forecasts that more than eight-million international visitors will travel to Australia in 2015. The committee also indicated that China and India could emerge as significant markets. ●

## Airbus A380 wins over media despite delay

THE LAUNCH OF the new Airbus A380 has hit delays and Juergen Thomas, the man who designed the world's largest commercial aircraft carrier, has said the Airbus underestimated the problems that surrounded its development.

Faulty software and installation hiccups led to a delay in the aircraft's global launch and millions of dollars were lost as a consequence. At a recent media launch, Thomas said, "It [was] a big disaster to me that we have had all these problems."

Nevertheless, in a bid to reaffirm the Airbus A380's reputation as a manufacturing triumph, the aircraft manufacturer invited the media to sample its inflight services first-hand. Over 200 journalists took to the skies to sample the flying environment offered by the A380. One reporter said, "What strikes me is the relative silence, the spaciousness and the amount of light, even in economy class."

Five development-model A380s had flown at the time of going to press and Airbus has orders for 176 of the 555-seater aircraft from 16 customers. ●

## Tiger Airways' bold expansion plans

SINGAPORE-BASED BUDGET AIRLINE, Tiger Airways, is to add another Australian destination to its list of services, following the launch of scheduled flights from Singapore to Udon Thani, in northeast Thailand, earlier this year. The new Singapore to Perth route will fly four times a week, with daily flights planned to commence in November.

The airline has also revealed it wants to launch a domestic Australian airline to compete with local low-cost carriers Jetstar, operated by Qantas, and Virgin Blue. Meetings with the Australian government were underway at the time of going to press.

"There will be significantly lower fares," said Tiger Airways Chief Executive, Tony Davis. "I think people in Australia are fed up. They can't get the same kind of deals domestically that they get when they fly with Tiger Airways internationally." He added, "Asia has [already] embraced the concept of genuine low fare travel." ●

## Ryanair profits through rising prices

LOW-COST IRISH operator, Ryanair, saw a 28 per cent increase in revenue in the third quarter of 2006, owing to a 19 per cent growth in passenger traffic and the carrier's decision to increase ticket prices.

The airline's Chief Financial Officer, Howard Millar, said the seven per cent increase in ticket prices had been introduced because fuel surcharges

were being added to fares charged by competitors.

He said passengers were also being asked to contribute towards charges for wheelchairs and luggage handling, dubbed the "hidden extras". Millar commented, "If fuel prices stay low, other airlines may start to drop surcharges and [this may mean] average fares come down a bit." ●

## Travel Update

- Singapore's Changi Airport (CAI) is looking to acquire a 29 per cent strategic stake in the largest airport in China's Jiangsu Province. RMB 1.08 billion (US\$139 million) will be pumped into **Nanjing Lakou International**, helping to modernise and improve the 10-year-old airport. Having already invested in several major airport deals in Abu Dhabi and Russia, CAI has also set its sights on India.

- The **USA** and **Europe** are to resume talks about transatlantic aviation and the open sky policy. Previous negotiations failed after neither side could reach a decision regarding the restrictions that currently prevent transatlantic flights from flying point-to-point within the USA. Jacques Barrot, Transport Commissioner from the European Union, stressed that, "Some difficult issues are on the table, but failure is not an option".

- Flights between **Canada** and the **USA** are said to have been a major factor in Air Canada and WestJet's record passenger loads for January. Cross-border traffic rose by 6.5 per cent and Canada's two largest airlines reported that higher demand for air travel had improved their network growth at the beginning of the year.

- **BMI** flights from London to Paris face the axe as Eurostar and no-frills competitors pile on the pressure. BMI Chief Executive, Nigel Turner, said demand simply wasn't high enough to warrant a continuation of the service. He reported passenger numbers had fallen by as much as 37 per cent over the past four years. Competition looks set to increase even further with the introduction of a high-speed rail link in November.

- **Brazilian airline TAM** intends to double its flight frequency to the UK following pressure to meet passenger demand. As of October last year, TAM offered a daily flight from Heathrow to Sao Paulo, but after fellow Brazilian airline, Varig, withdrew its services earlier this year, TAM has had to pick up the slack. British Airways is the only other airline that offers a direct passage to South America, serving Brazil and Argentina.

- New York will soon offer travellers another entry point into the USA. The Port Authority of New York, which controls JFK, Newark and La Guardia, has taken over **Stewart Airport**, 60 miles north of Manhattan. The airport currently deals with domestic flights and receives just 300,000 passengers a year. However an airport spokesperson said, "The idea is that Stewart [will] become a relief valve [for New York]."

- Middle Eastern airline, **Etihad**, is looking to offer several alternative flight connections on its Abu Dhabi to Australia passage; flying via Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester. A non-stop service from Abu Dhabi to Australia has also been earmarked. Like the Far East, the Middle East is fast becoming responsible for handling a sizeable chunk of passenger traffic via the UK.

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