

# AUNZ REPORT

## JANUARY 2025



Prepared By:

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# ABOUT TSUSA

## Global Partner Programming

The latest arrival figures released report 101,115 Australian visitors to the USA in December, up 7% on 2023, and reaching 85% of 2019 levels. In total for 2024, just over 1M Aussies visited the USA, up 7% YOY, making Australia the 11th largest long-haul international source market for the year (Source i94 arrivals).

In terms of visitation from New Zealand to the USA, in December there were 22,794 visitors, down 7% on last year. In total for 2024, just over 256k kiwis visited the USA, up 2% YOY.

3,662 Australians listed a Travel South state as their first intended address in December, equaling 4% of total USA visitation, and up 8% on last year. In total for 2024, 41,246 Aussies listed a Travel State as their first intended address up 13% YOY. (Source i94 arrivals – first intended address).

The exchange rate averaged 0.62 USD in January.

- Explore magazine as of this weekend (1st Feb 2025) expands into another 14 AU newspapers taking it to 28 newspapers across the country. <https://www.exploretravel.com.au/>
- [delicious.](#), Australia's leading premium food-lifestyle brand, today announced it will move to a new and expanded publishing model in 2025, as News Corp Australia builds out its premium food offering under delicious. in the company's state and regional mastheads.
- [Vinyl relaunches Refinery29 in ANZ](#): Vinyl Group has entered into an exclusive licensing and representation agreement with Refinery29, a global women-focused lifestyle media brand.
  - The agreement marks a return of Refinery29 to the ANZ market with a local editor and editorial team, alongside representation of ANZ inventory across Refinery29's international sites.
- Global market-leading lifestyle and celebrity publication [HELLO!](#) has launched an Australian homepage and geographical reader experience. HELLO! is known for its premium, positive and celebratory reporting and unrivalled showbiz exclusives which have been entertaining audiences since 1988. Over the years, its digital brand has transformed from a small legacy publishing site into an influential global website.
- [En-route](#) is back for 2025.  
*En-route* is a new daily guide to people, style, culture, beauty and self through the lens of those who are fascinating leaders in their industries.
- Meta posted a 21% lift in revenue to \$US48.385 billion in the December quarter, beating analyst expectations. Full year revenue was up 22% to \$US164.5 billion.
  - Ad impressions delivered across Meta social media platforms increased by 6% in the quarter and 11% for the year to December. Average price per ad increased by 14% in the December quarter and 10% for the full year 2024. Source: [Ad News AU](#)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Travel South International Showcase Wrap Up Report
- Canberra Radio Interview
- Chris Watson Trainings
- Auckland Expo Planning
- Finalized media attendance at Global Week 2025. Coordination of flights.
- Where Music Was Born campaign took place, with live activations at different Australian festivals.
- Concrete Playground ‘See the South’ Campaign.

Australia		Jul- Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	FY 25 Total
<b>10 Partners</b>  <b>AL</b> <b>KY</b> <b>LA</b> <b>NC</b> <b>SC</b> <b>TN</b> <b>WV</b> <b>MO</b> <b>MS</b> <b>ROTS</b>	<b>Travel Trade</b>								
	Trade Meetings	172	13						185
	Number of Agents Trained	432	14						446
	<b>Media Meetings</b>	72	5						72
	Total number of articles published	79	11						90
	Impressions	40,116,936							40,116,936

## II. COMMUNICATIONS & PR

- Finalized media attendance at Global Week 2025. Coordination of flights.
- Where Music Was Born campaign took place, with live activations at different Australian festivals.
- Concrete Playground 'See the South' Campaign.
- Earned media Coverage Book
- GMM24 media Coverage Book

## COVERAGE:



**N**o swamp in the known universe hosts more marriage proposals. "We still get a couple a week," says the handsome young gent gently rowing the flat-bottomed dinghy between bald cypress trees that thrust up improbably from the mirrored, black-tannin shallows like giant swamp-creature snorkels.

The 12ha blackwater swamp at Cypress Gardens, 45km north of Charleston, South Carolina, is a cinematic charnelion. It's been the backdrop for a potpourri of films, including Mel Gibson's *The Patriot*, DC Comics' *Swamp Thing* and, recently, Netflix's *Gotham* series. Most famous of all, however, is its four-minute role in the 21st century's most successful, schlockiest and, arguably, stupor romance, *The Notebook*.

Back in 2004, dead-onset critic panned director Nick Cassavetes' adaptation of Nicholas Sparks' novel, unable to grasp the impact of lines like "If you're a bird, I'm a bird". *The Notebook*, channelled its way into cult movie status regardless and, to love-it-forever, it "still isn't over". Its legacy is so indelible that 20 years after its release, multiple brides are still rowed up to Cypress Gardens' Wedding Gardens Garden every week.

Believers will know the "It's like a dream" scene by heart: when dies poor Noah (smouldering, baby-faced Ryan Reynolds) rows old money and equally baby-faced Allie (Rachel McAdams) back into his heart, through an unnaturally massive gaggle of geese. Not a single goose hawks here today, however.

"They were especially trained, brought in for the film, but they flew away, never to return," says Jill Paris, owner of Tidelastic Tours

of Charleston, who's showing the *Notebook* locations, including some usually off-limits to the public, but excluding one seminal site (more on that to come).

The film theme's oak piano notes drift from Jill's phone as we float under the built-for-the-film *Notebook* Bridge. Lavoid eye contact; I'm not crying, you're crying.

Yellow-bellied slider turtles slither away from floating logs. Herons fish for bruch. Tubby 3m alligators swim away from our intrusion, sometimes blocking popular nearby fishing paths. The largest ones, Ally (gator) and 4m Bos, are fenced in an enclosure near the garden's Swamparium exhibit. During filming, cold weather proved more challenging than these magnificent reptiles. Storm scenes were shot in winter's depths so Gosling and McAdams would sprint for their jackets after every "cut".

Grand Southern mansions anchor *The Notebook*'s 1940s

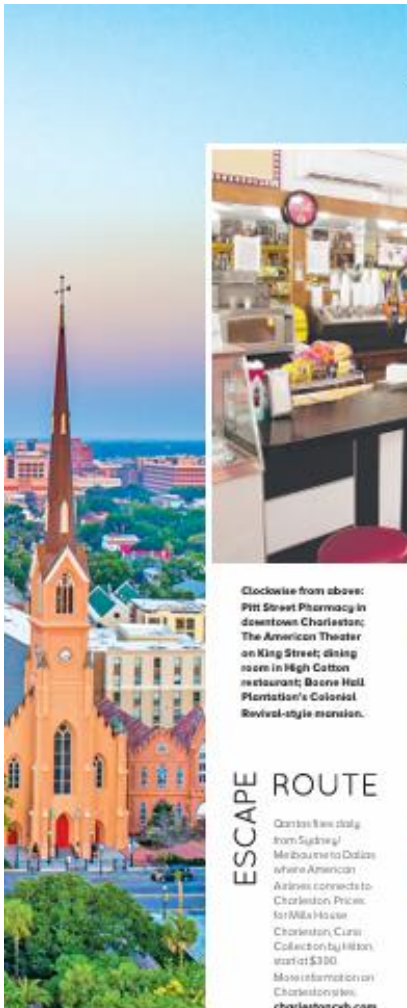
"simpler time" aesthetic. Many, like The Admiral's House on the Old Charleston Navy Base, are off-limits to day trippers. However, you can pay handsomely to get married on the astroturf lawn under a Spanish moss-draped oak tree outside the Neoclassical mansion where Allie follows the armoured and rekindles her love of painting.

The *Notebook*'s second most noteworthy mansion is at Boone Hall Plantation, 20km northeast of Charleston, which doubles as Allie's parents' summer home where Noah, accidentally, crashes his truck through a fence. Its spectacular tree-lined driveway, the Avenue of Oaks, focuses all attention towards Boone Hall's Colonial Revival-style "where" mansion.

Less attention, however, is given to the plantation's nine slave cabins, a visceral reminder of the iniquitable truths behind

Photography: Steve Madgwick (Inset: Tidelastic)

TRAVEL 2020, 61



Clockwise from above:  
Pitt Street Pharmacy in  
downtown Charleston;  
The American Theater  
on King Street; dining  
room in High Cotton  
restaurant; Boone Hall  
Plantation's Colonial  
Revival-style mansion.

## ESCAPE ROUTE

Quentin Tarantino's  
film *Once Upon a Time in  
Hollywood* is set in  
Los Angeles, but the  
filming location was  
Charleston, S.C.  
Collect on by Hilton  
start at \$300.  
More information on  
Charleston.com  
charlestoncvb.com



Southern opulence back then. Movie stars Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively married at Boone Hall in 2012, apologetically in a 2020 interview for doing so at "a place built upon devastating tragedy".

The *Notebook*'s architectural megastar, the once crumbling house that Noah "built" for Allie, is sadly out of time's reach. Set on 50-plus acres of historic property, Maritime Point would reportedly fetch Noah and Allie a monthly rent of \$1,500,000 today, perhaps just covering their old-fella home fees. (Fun fact: It was only made to look like a building because of the film.)

Inevitably, I bump into *Notebook* superfans keen to flex their expertise. The man at Gosling couldn't stand working with McAdams initially (they later dated). Apparently, Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake were almost Allie and Noah (phew, disaster averted). Why did Gosling look so weirdly like Gosling-like? "He wore brown contact lenses to match James Garner's eye color," says Jill Paris. (Spoiler alert: old Duke was Noah all along.)

Down town Charleston's charming historic streetscapes could slot straight into a soap. Local kids still stop by Pitt Street Pharmacy's historic soda fountain at Old Village. Mount Pleasant, some of the much-replicated ice-cream smoothies. Meanwhile, their parents work their butts off to pay the mortgage on this pricey, architecturally frozen-in-time neighbourhood.

King Street is a slow-strolling flashback. I opt not to lie down or dance in the street (it's noon) as Allie and Noah did outside the American Theater (try late at night). This stunning Neo-Anderson-esque Art Deco building is a private event space that, surprise, surprise, hosts weddings. You can walk through Allie's "New York" college (College of Charleston) or drop by High Cotton, the restaurant where Noah catches his first traumatic

glimpse of Allie's new fiancée, the handsome and suitably rich lawyer Len Hammond Jr (Jason Mrazuk).

It's difficult to explain why people still roam the Carolina countryside 20 years after seeing a film that many of us publicly deny liking. I guess *The Notebook* has permeated that deeply into my subconscious and pop culture, sometimes to unhelpful extremes. The late NIA superstar Kobe Bryant paid a tribute to buy the blue rose boat scene dress, when trying to reconcile with his wife. And it has to be one of the most talked-about movie film songs in history (Sparks wrote the follow-up book *The Wedding* in 2003).

Perhaps in this mind-up, crazy world *The Notebook* simply reflects our most universal desires: love always prevails until, spoiler alert, we die peacefully in our soulmate's embrace – except in the Netflix UK version where a flock of scattering birds replaces the death scene.

Cynics may try to dissuade you from trespassing the Carolina Lowlands trying to relive times past. But, as Noah says, "Stop thinking about what other people want. What do you want?"

The writer was a guest of Travel South USA.



After believing his life was a *Truman Show*-esque film until age nine, Steve Madgwick loves "not jetting" to remote film locations, from *Star Wars* to *Lawrence of Arabia*.



## Industry HQ

## Discover the stateside roots of the musical American South + win flights to the USA

Talk about a dream team! Chris Watson Travel, Travel South USA, Gate 7 and Dream Plan Go have teamed up for the 'Where Music Was Born' consumer campaign – an in-person and online opportunity to discover the rich musical heritage of the American South – plus win return flights to explore the US musical heartland.



Discover the musical American South in Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama and South Carolina in the new 'Where Music Was Born' campaign.



Newsroom  
09 Jan 2025

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COMPETITIONS & INCENTIVES

Travel agents are adding unexpected perks. Are you missing out?

INDUSTRY HQ

Mover + Shakers: Flight Centre adds Tiz Gallo as Global MD of entertainment & sports division as brand expands

NEWSLETTERS & SHIMMERS



## GATE 7 AND DREAM PLAN GO LAUNCH WHERE MUSIC WAS BORN US CAMPAIGN



GATE 7 AND DREAM PLAN GO HAVE LAUNCHED THE WHERE MUSIC WAS BORN CAMPAIGN IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CHRIS WATSON TRAVEL AND TRAVEL SOUTH USA.

The campaign is a digital and in-person initiative that showcases the legendary music destinations of Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina, inviting Australians to explore the soul of the American South.

Through a dedicated digital portal, Aussie travellers can discover the soulful charm of the Southern USA through its rich musical heritage. Visitors can explore iconic destinations, learn about upcoming events and festivals, savor mouthwatering Southern cuisine, and immerse themselves in the vibrant atmosphere that make a trip to The South as unique as it is unforgettable. Adding to the excitement is the chance to win one return flight with Delta Air Lines to explore the musical heartland of America.



MORE STORIES



ALICE FRICKY ANNOUNCES WINNER OF FRANCE COMMISSARUS PROGRAM – WHAT'S HOT RIGHT NOW



FREE CHICKEN TO GO ON BACK-ROADS 2025 TOURS



ARABIC TOURISM HOPES TO ATTRACTION'S HEAD OF FIRST NATIONS STRATEGY LAUNCH GANLEY AS CHAIR

# Communications & PR

Media Contacts (phone calls, emails, personal meetings)

Contacts	Interest/Status	Follow-up/Next step
Chester See (@seeshots)	Content Creator	Educated on the region.
Will Salked (@wilkeld)	Content Creator	Educated on the region.
Tim Rose, Nine	Educated on the region, explained the states. Pitched GMM.	GMM not feasible this year, but next year.
Anthony Denis, Traveler.	Updated on publication. Currently have a full slate, not accepting commissions.	Touch base FY25.
Stephen Heard, Editor, Stuff/Sunday Star Times.	Catch-up on current priorities.	Touch base following GMM.

### III. TRAVEL TRADE

Trade Contacts (phone calls, emails, personal meetings).

Contacts	Interest/Status	Follow-up /Next step
Chris Watson Travel Training	Training with Chris Watson Tamworth Office and Cruise and Travel Store. Emily Thornton, Sonaii Witchard, Karen Paffreyman, Tina Paschalidis, Joanne Keenan, Chris Watson, Melissah Mission, Janine Snook and Nicole x 9 Staff	N/A
Belinda Condon Sales Manager Australia – Leisure  United Airlines	Update on United Airlines flights and loadings. UA has the largest capacity to the US from AU/NZ with 51 flights per week out of SYD/MEL/BNE/AKL & CHC.	N/A
Kevin Looney National Sales Manager  Infinity Holidays	Update on Infinity Holidays and the closure of the API connection business segment. Infinity Holidays, as a wholesaler, are still operating with minimal changes other than they are now branched under the Independent Flight Centre business segment.	N/A
Nicole Bennett National Sales Manager Ashleigh Weddhenson Marketing Manager  Delta Airlines	Update on Delta Airlines and newly released news that they will be offering a MEL – LAX x 3 weekly seasonal flight from December 25 to March 26. This is Delta's inaugural flight out of Melbourne.	N/A
Jodie Collins Tourism Board Partnership Manager Luxury Escapes	Update on Luxury Escapes DREAM magazine, which is now in Qantas and Aspire airport lounges and Singapore Airlines inflight entertainment.	N/A
Mary-Anne Guest Head of Product  Phil Hoffman Travel	Discussion on a Nashville, Memphis and New Orleans fam for Phil Hoffman Travel group post Helloworld owner manager conference in May. Reached out for support from the TS & partners for industry rates and attractions passes.	Ongoing
Capital Radio Interview 2CC Announcer: Leon Delaney –	On air. 15 min radio interview with Capital Radio on the South, what to do and where to go focusing on themes of Music, Food and Road trips – Referrals went to Weston Cruise and Travel Canberra, Chris Watson's agency.	N/A
Jason Smith PTM – Guys Adventures  Travel Managers	Training an itinerary support for post World Pride itineraries to the South.	N/A
Steve Brady Group General Manager  Helloworld Cruise	Discussion on pre-and-post cruising packages for all destinations in the South where ships depart as well as Mississippi River Cruises.	N/A

Clive Fillingham Owner/Manager  Enyovage Rockingham	Training and itinerary support with a client visit to Virginia and North Carolina.	N/A
Hayley Lyson Mobile Travel Agent  I Talk Travel	Training and itinerary support with a client visit to New Orleans, Lafayette, Nashville and Memphis.	N/A
Roslyn Elsley PTM  Travel Managers	Training and itinerary support with hosted group to New Orleans, post cruising.	N/A
Helen Rolton PTM  Travel Managers	Training and itinerary support with a client visit to South Carolina, Tennessee and Mississippi.	N/A

# CAMPAIGNS & ACTIVITY

## ■ Where Music Was Born Product Website

[Home](#) [Holidays](#) [North America](#) [USA including Hawaii](#) [Where Music Was Born](#)

## Where Music Was Born

\$2,799 \*pp

Family, couples, events and self drive

12 days

USA including ...

North America

[More](#)

Discover the soulful charm of Southern USA through its rich musical heritage, a journey that promises unforgettable experiences.

Why not go in the draw to win a trip - [Click Here](#)

From the jazz-filled streets of New Orleans to the birthplace of country music in Nashville, every corner resonates with the rhythms of history and culture. Its dynamic live music scene – spread across hidden bars to world class festivals – will make a trip to the American South as unique as it is unforgettable. Experience the ultimate self drive itinerary or let our award winning team custom design a trip for you to discover the birthplace of music!

### Day 1: Nashville to the Great Smoky Mountains

- **Accommodation:** Black Fox Lodge, Pigeon Forge
- **Included Experience:** Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede Dinner Show

### Day 2: Explore Pigeon Forge

Pigeon Forge is a charming town in the heart of the Smoky Mountains, offering breathtaking views, Appalachian culture and plenty of attractions. Its proximity to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park makes it ideal for outdoor adventures, from hiking to wildlife spotting.

**Top Attractions:**

- **Dollywood:** A theme park inspired by Dolly Parton's heritage.
- **Great Smoky Mountains National Park:** Explore trails, waterfalls and scenic overlooks.
- **Ole Smoky Moonshine:** Sample authentic Tennessee moonshine.

**Top Dining Options:**

- **The Old Mill Restaurant:** Classic Southern dishes.
- **Mama's Farmhouse:** All-you-can-eat comfort food.
- **Puckett's Grocery & Restaurant:** Southern classics with live music.

### Enquire Now!

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We've done all the prep. All you have to do is pack.

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Travel South USA | AUNZ

GPP Monthly Report

### Day 3: Pigeon Forge to Chattanooga

- **Accommodation:** Holiday Inn Express Downtown

#### Why Visit Chattanooga?

Nestled along the Tennessee River, Chattanooga combines natural beauty, rich music history and vibrant cultural attractions.

#### Top Attractions:

- **Tennessee Aquarium:** Home to river and ocean wildlife.
- **Lookout Mountain:** Featuring Rock City, Ruby Falls, and the Incline Railway.
- **Songbirds Guitar & Pop Culture Museum:** Explore vintage guitars and music history.

#### Top Dining Options:

- **The Bitter Alibi:** Creative dishes in a relaxed setting.
- **Community Pie:** Famous for wood-fired pizzas.
- **St. John's Restaurant:** Elegant Southern dining.

#### Music Highlights:

- **The Signal:** A premier live music venue.
- **Nightfall Concert Series:** Free summer concerts.
- **Moccasin Bend Brewery:** Craft brews with live music.

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### Day 4: Chattanooga to Nashville

- **Accommodation:** Hyatt Place Nashville Downtown (Chris' favourite 4-star hotel)

#### Explore Nashville: Music City USA

The heartbeat of American music, Nashville blends honky-tonk charm, vibrant live music and incredible food.

#### Top Attractions:

- **Country Music Hall of Fame:** Celebrate country music's legacy.
- **Grand Ole Opry:** Experience legendary performances.
- **Ryman Auditorium:** Known for its impeccable acoustics.

#### Top Dining Options:

- **Hattie B's Hot Chicken:** A Nashville staple.
- **The Loveless Cafe:** Renowned for biscuits and fried chicken.
- **Puckett's Grocery & Restaurant:** Southern food and live music.

#### Music Highlights:

- **Honky Tonk Highway:** Bars with live music every night.
- **Bluebird Cafe:** Intimate performances by top artists.
- **Third Man Records:** Founded by Jack White.

### Day 5: Backstage Tour of the Grand Ole Opry

#### Day 6: Nashville to Memphis via Jackson or Nutbush

- **Accommodation:** Hyatt Centric Beale Street
- **Included Experience:** Admission to the Memphis Music Hall of Fame

##### Explore Memphis:

The birthplace of blues, rock 'n' roll and soul, Memphis is rich in music history and Southern culture.

##### Top Attractions:

- **Graceland:** Elvis Presley's iconic home.
- **Sun Studio:** The "Birthplace of Rock 'n' Roll."
- **Beale Street:** Memphis' vibrant music hub.

##### Top Dining Options:

- **Central BBQ:** Famous for smoked meats.
- **Gus's Fried Chicken:** Spicy and crispy fried chicken.
- **The Arcade Restaurant:** Retro diner serving classic Southern dishes.

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#### Day 7: Explore Memphis

- **Included Experience:** VIP Graceland Tour

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#### Day 8: Memphis to Tupelo

- **Accommodation:** Tru by Hilton

##### Explore Tupelo:

The birthplace of Elvis Presley, this charming town offers rich music history and Southern hospitality.

##### Top Attractions:

- **Elvis Presley Birthplace and Museum**
- **Tupelo Hardware Company:** Where Elvis got his first guitar.
- **Natchez Trace Parkway:** Scenic drives and hiking trails.

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#### Day 9: Tupelo to Clarksdale

- **Accommodation:** Hampton Inn Clarksdale Downtown

##### Explore Clarksdale:

Known as the birthplace of the blues, Clarksdale is steeped in Delta music history.

##### Top Attractions:

- **Delta Blues Museum**
- **The Crossroads:** A legendary music landmark.
- **Hopeon Plantation and Shack Up Inn**

##### Top Dining Options:

- **Ground Zero Blues Club:** Southern food with live blues.
- **Abe's BBQ:** A Clarksdale institution.
- **Yazoo Pass:** Gourmet coffee and light fare.



## Where Music Was Born Campaign

SATURDAY JANUARY 16, 2025 northerndailyleader.com.au

**WHEN SOMETHING GOES PAIR-SHAPED...**  
 Courage in marriage despite the statistics  
**GARRY LINNELL**

**Summer Fun**  
 EXTRA PUZZLES + BRAIN TEASERS

**The Northern Daily**

# LEADER

**ECHOES OF THE INCA**  
 MACHU PICCHU AND THE GENIUS OF A LOST EMPIRE

INSIDE: explore

**WEIGHT OF NUMBERS** Extra officers brought in to support Oxley Command for the duration of the festival

## Police beef up for festival

**Emma Donnelly**

MORE than 150 extra police will support Oxley Area Command during the 2025 Tamworth Country Music Festival to ensure a safe and secure event for the arts, spectators and the local community, authorities came rates down.

The announcement was made on Friday, day one of Australia's largest 10-day music festival, which runs until Sunday, January 26, and features 700 artists and more than 1000 events.

To oversee the expected huge crowds, general duties officers from Oxley Police Districts and Western Ranges will be assisted by 100 additional specialist police officers. They will represent teams from the Operations Support Group (OSG), Dog Unit, Licensing Police, Bicycle Unit, and Traffic and Highway Patrol Command in a high-visibility police operation focused on anti-social behaviour and alcohol-related offences.

Acting Superintendent of the Oxley District, David Abernethy, said the extra resources would be important in keeping the community safe during the festival.

"That is exactly what we are here to do for the next 10 days and make sure everyone has an enjoyable time... while aiming to keep crime rates as low as we can," he said.

*Continued page 2*

**WHERE MUSIC WAS BORN**  
 WIN A TRIP TO THE USA!

**ITINERARY**

- Dollywood at Pigeon Forge
- Chattanooga's Choo Choo
- Nashville's Grand Ole Opry
- Graceland in Memphis
- Tupelo the birthplace of Elvis
- Clarksdale ground zero for Blues
- Greenwood Soul of the Delta
- Jackson capital of Mississippi • 12 Day Car Hire
- 11 Nights in 4 star hotels • Breakfast Daily

Embark on an unforgettable journey through Tennessee and Mississippi, the heart of Southern USA's rich musical heritage. From the soulful roots of the blues and the spirited rhythms of jazz, to the storytelling of country, this region has shaped generations of music lovers and musicians alike.

**FROM \$2799**  
 per person, twin share

Scan the QR code below for your chance to win a trip to explore the USA through 'Where Music Was Born'!

**Sponsored by:**

Chris Watson Travel | 1300 552 032 | info@chriswatsontravel.com.au  
 298 Peel Street TAMWORTH NSW 2340

*The American South*

## WHERE MUSIC WAS BORN

WIN A TRIP TO THE USA!

**ITINERARY**

- Dollywood at Pigeon Forge
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 298 Peel Street TAMWORTH NSW 2340

ANY/7456024



Window display at Chris Watson Travel Tamworth & Cruise Co Canberra

■ Where Music Was Born In Person Activations







- IPW Post Fam Media Interview – Joshua Hewett Helloworld

## Southern charm: Q&A with Helloworld's Joshua Hewett on tapping into the allure of the US South

Helloworld Travel Land Contracting Manager North America Joshua Hewett attended [Travel South USA International Showcase](#) for the first time last year, enjoying the renowned Southern hospitality, exploring North Carolina on a famil and liaising with suppliers to inspire new products to bring to market in 2025.



Helloworld Travel Land Contracting Manager North America Joshua Hewett at Travel South International Showcase 2024 in Atlanta, Georgia. Images: Supplied



Fresh from his trip, he explains why the American South resonates with Australians, what travel advisors and travellers need to know and what's in the Viva Holidays product pipeline for 2025.

### How was your first experience at the Travel South International Showcase?



We haven't done a campaign with Travel South USA, but we have with some of its partners. We work closely with Brand USA and through this partnership we have developed cooperative campaigns in the South, looking at driving consumer awareness, inspiration and enquiries to these destinations.

We recently undertook a very successful campaign with New Orleans, which focused on both consumer advertising and trade education and we saw an uplift in destination awareness and product development. There will be more campaigns in the pipeline for Southern destinations – so watch this space.





The North Carolina Super Farm check out street art on a People First Tourism walking tour in Raleigh.

The warmth and hospitality of Southern culture are legendary – visitors will be struck by the genuine friendliness and manners, which create a welcoming atmosphere and make the South feel unique.

By positioning Southern hospitality as an unforgettable cultural experience through tailored itineraries that include small-town charm, historical tours, music, arts and Southern cuisine, travel agents can offer Australians the chance not just to visit the US South but to feel its warmth and charm that will make their trip more than just a holiday.

### **What do you want more advisors and travellers to know about the US South?**



Bluegrass & Bourbon Trail in Owensboro, Kentucky, Image: Brand USA

That the US South is easily accessible to Australian travellers. It often only requires one stop via the US West Coast or through Texas. Once clients are in the South, they can easily pick up a car rental booked through Viva Holidays and embark on one of our iconic US road trip itineraries, such as our 10-day Bluegrass & Bourbon Trail that starts and ends in Memphis. Clients can discover the tastes and sounds of Tennessee and Kentucky, enjoying American bourbon and Southern treats along the way.

Helloworld offers three self-drive itineraries and three escorted coach tours in the US South through our partner, American Tours International (ATI). The self-drive packages are also completely customisable through the Viva Holidays team.

### **What were the highlights and standout experiences of your Travel South International Super Fam in North Carolina?**



Josh (right) on his Hyattsville tour of Charlotte - one of his fave! highlights.

I travelled on the Travel South USA 'Racing, Tasting, Celebrating and Shopping through North Carolina' three-night itinerary from Charlotte to Raleigh with stops in Lexington and Greensboro.

One of the activities I really liked was the Rydables tour in Charlotte, where we toured around the city centre on stuffed animal electric vehicles. It was something new and unique and a concept I think will appeal to leisure travellers.



The Travel South USA Super Fan group at the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte.

The NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte was also a highlight. I'm not a NASCAR follower, but the Hall of Fame was so well curated and includes a simulator, so it's a great experience for visitors, whether you're a fan or not.

Lexington was another highlight: a small town with so much charm that's famous for barbecue, which was really good, and the Lexington pig statues around town.

Visit North Carolina and its partners created a great overall itinerary that was a small snapshot of what the state has to offer. It has inspired me to go back to experience more of the state at another time.

**What partnerships and relationships have you gained by attending Travel South International Showcase as a buyer?**



The Travel South USA Super Fan group at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh.

The Showcase allowed me to meet with many suppliers who would not attend the larger nationwide tradeshows. I was able to secure or gain new contacts for touring and hotels in Nashville and New Orleans to help build on our directly contracted product. From discussions with the tourism boards, we will look at expanding our product range through DMC partnerships.

### **What Travel South USA products are you most excited to bring to market in 2025?**



Big thrills at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee are on the horizon for Viva Holidays. Image: Travel South USA

We've been inspired by all the partners we've met to build on our product offering across the US South, whether that's expanding product in regions we already offer, such as Nashville, Memphis and New Orleans, or the development of new regions like Alabama and other parts of Tennessee. Just to name a few, we're looking at regions like Mobile and Birmingham in Alabama and Pigeon Forge and Dollywood in Tennessee.

We look forward to adding some more experiences to really get customers excited about the US South.



Josh at the World of Coca-Cola in Atlanta, Georgia during Travel South International Showcase 2024.

To book Viva Holidays' exciting Travel South USA packages, log in [here](#). For accommodation, sightseeing, activities and transfers, visit [readyrooms.com.au](https://readyrooms.com.au).

For high-value itineraries not serviceable via Mango, contact [specialists@vivaholidays.com.au](mailto:specialists@vivaholidays.com.au)

Discover more info and inspo at [industry.travelsouthusa.com](https://industry.travelsouthusa.com)

Home » Industry HQ » Travel Advisors » Travel Inspiration

## Just peachy: Travel South International Showcase 2024 wows the travel trade in Atlanta, Georgia

Travel South International Showcase 2024 has wrapped its latest travel trade event, spotlighting suppliers from 12 US South states from 2-5 December in Atlanta, Georgia. *Karryon* was one of only eight travel trade media worldwide to attend the highly anticipated annual event, capturing the heart and soul of the South.



The Australia and New Zealand travel trade and media contingent at Travel South International Showcase 2024. All images: Travel South USA



More than 450 travel professionals gathered at the new Signia by Hilton Atlanta Georgia World Congress Center hotel in the Peach State for three intensive days, featuring 9,542 appointments, plus plenty of informal networking, live music and that inimitable Southern hospitality.

The international delegates included Australasia's largest-ever contingent with eight buyers from Australia and New Zealand's biggest agency and wholesaler groups.



Gene T's Perry Brand takes a selfie with (from left) Joshua Hewitt (Helloworld Travel Limited), Andrew Minto (Home and Afar Travel), Kevin Looney (Infinity Holidays), Melissa Misao (Chris Watson Travel) & Travel South USA President & CEO Liz Bittner at Travel South International Showcase 2024.

Travel South International Showcase is the South's premier marketplace, linking international travel partners with destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and suppliers from 12 states for one common purpose: to promote travel to the US South.

## Accolades and ambassadors



Infinity Holidays Director of Sales Kevin Looney (centre) with Travel South USA Chair Stephen Foutas & President & CEO Liz Bittner at Travel South International Showcase 2024.

The event kicked off on Sunday 1 December with the Kentucky Bourbon Reception, setting the scene for the annual Honors Night, applauding the global ambassadors and their pivotal role in promoting the authentic travel experiences of the American South.



Travel USA Founder & Director Andrew Gay (centre) with Travel South USA Chair Stephen Foutas & President & CEO Liz Bittner at Travel South International Showcase 2024.

Infinity Holidays, Luxury Escapes and Travel USA (NZ) were three of the 2024 TSUSA Ambassador Award recipients, representing Australia and New Zealand's contribution to promoting and selling the South.



Luxury Escapes Partnerships & Contracting Manager - Tours Megan Fox (centre) with Travel South USA Chair Stephen Foutas & President & CEO Liz Bittner at Travel South International Showcase 2024.

In addition, Travel South USA CEO Liz Bittner received a standing ovation in recognition of her 20 years at the helm of the 12-state organisation.

No stranger to the Australian and New Zealand travel trade after last year's sales mission Down Under, Bittner also took to the dancefloor with Australia's Chris Watson during a live music performance from Nashville legends David Tolleriver & Friends.

## | Showcasing the South



Cycling out of Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta.

Travel South International Showcase 2024 officially opened the next day, starting with themed, guided Atlanta City Tours.

Delegates saw the sights of the city on biking tours of the Atlanta Beltline, made biscuits on a market tour, checked out Cabbagetown street art and received a behind-the-scenes peek at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium, to name a few of the nine curated options.



On the Cabbagetown street art tour.

Travel South USA CEO Liz Bittner also spoke directly with global trade media, sharing the latest brand insights, including the challenges of connecting local operators to a global audience increasingly interested in experiencing local culture, shopping at small businesses and visiting new destinations.

"If Travel South USA region was a state, we would be the fifth most-visited state in the US - 85 per cent of our international visitors come from the top 15 countries," she said.

"Our objective is to disperse tourism across the region and highlight authentic accommodations, attractions and experiences that travellers can't find anywhere else."



Travel South USA President & CEO Li Bitner dances with Chris Watson at Travel South International Showcase 2024.

Later, Monday's Opening Night Celebration saw the delegation take over the Atlanta Aquarium for a memorable night of Southern flavours and aquatic sights.

Marketplace sessions started after the All Y'all Welcome Breakfast, introducing new Travel South USA Chair and Director of Missouri Division of Tourism Stephen Foutes and special guest, the Coca-Cola Polar Bear (Atlanta is the home of the beloved beverage).



Morehouse College Glee Club brought uplifting gospel to start the day.

And, of course, it wouldn't be a Travel South USA event without live music. Rhythms of the South performances spanned rap with Arrested Development's Todd "Speech" Thomas, legendary Nashville songwriters David Tolleriver & Friends, Atlanta's own Morehouse College Glee Club and cool jazz from Kansas City chanteuse Eboni Fondren.

## **\$10 billion ambition**



Brand USA President & CEO Fred Dixon shared the US global perspective for 2025.

New Brand USA President & CEO Fred Dixon also addressed the Travel South International Showcase 2024 crowd with a global travel update and forecast, singling out Travel South USA's significant economic contribution and ambitious goal to reach USD\$10 billion in visitor spending by 2025.

"As of October this year, we are on track to reach an incredible USD\$8.4 billion in international visitor spending in the South – that's about 96 per cent of pre-pandemic spending," he said.



Chris Watson Travel's Messiah Mission (left) on the marketplace floor at Travel South International Showcase 2024.

"As we look ahead to 2025, we're forecast to exceed our 2019 baseline and hit a new milestone and that's a testament to our region's resilience, the destinations of our great partners and the strength of our tourism industry as a whole."



Lu Biehn celebrates 20 years as President & CEO of Travel USA at Travel South International Showcase 2024.

Next year, Travel South USA turns 60 and, together with Brand USA, has set an ambitious goal to reach USD\$10 billion in international visitor spending by 2025 with a vision to offer richer, more engaging experiences.

Dixon said an additional hotel night or attraction can easily achieve an extra USD\$1 billion in revenue.

"One more day, one more destination, one more attraction and one more travel experience – the possibilities are endless when we think about how we can collectively work together to offer richer, more engaging experiences," he said.

## **Southern success story**



David Toller & Friends bring a bit of Nashville to the stage.

Travel South USA International Showcase 2024 wrapped on 4 December after another full day of pre-scheduled trade appointments and a full-day media tour with the Y'all Ball at Terminal West, brimming with live tunes, Southern cocktails and cuisine.

The itinerary officially concluded with the Travel South USA International Showcase Super Fam program departures, running famils for delegates in seven states and visiting 26 different destinations.



The Atlanta CVS International Sales team, including Director of International Sales Brandon Barnes on left, making sure Travel South International Showcase 2024 delegates are moving in the right direction.

From 5–8 December, famil groups travelled to other areas of Georgia as well as neighbouring states of Alabama, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia.

Stay tuned to find out more about the Alabama and North Carolina fams soon.

Next year's Travel South International Showcase will be held from 2–5 December 2025 in Kansas City, Missouri – home of the new Travel South USA Chair Stephen Foutes.

For more info, head to [industry.travelsouthusa.com](https://industry.travelsouthusa.com)

[Home](#) > [Industry HQ](#) > [Interviews](#)

## Exclusive: Travel South USA Chair Stephen Foutes on storytelling and selling the South

At the recent [Travel South International Showcase 2024](#), *Karryon* sat down with new [Travel South USA Chair](#) Stephen Foutes to learn how the organisation works with the international travel trade to connect travellers to authentic Southern culture and why he's touched by Australians visiting his home state.



Travel South USA Chair Stephen Foutes at Travel South International Showcase 2024 in Atlanta, Georgia.  
Image: Cassie Tannenberg



Stephen Foutes' enthusiasm for his home state of Missouri and the US South is obvious. And as a former journalist, he knows the power of storytelling.

With just over 13 years at the Missouri Division of Tourism, including his current role as Director, he's well placed to highlight the South's unparalleled experiences as the newly installed Travel South USA Chair.



Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum in Hannibal. Image: Visit Missouri

Born in Mark Twain's hometown of Hannibal, Foutes has lived in Missouri all his life, growing up in rural Bowling Green in Pike County and attending college in the equally small university town of Fayette.

He was a reporter with the local Jefferson City newspaper in Missouri's capital before joining the Missouri Division of Tourism in 2009.

A framed map of Missouri on his bedside table is the last thing he sees at night and the first thing that starts his day each morning.



Road tripping Highway 79 amid the fall foliage in Pike County. Image: Visit Missouri

"I love our state, and I love that we've had the opportunity to join Travel South USA. We've been a member for about 10 years, and there are so many similarities between our cultures across the South – our food, our music, our history," he said.

"While we're very cooperative, we're also very competitive," he added of the 12 individual states that make up Travel South USA.

**“The South offers music, history, culture and civil rights, so for anybody who wants to experience authentic American history and culture, the South is the place to go.”**

*Stephen Foutes, Travel South USA Chair*

## **| Amplifying the regions**



*Dred and Harriet Scott Statue overlooking the courthouse in St. Louis. Image: Visit Missouri*

Foutes said travel advisors and trade representation in international markets are pivotal in showcasing the diverse offerings available in the US South, particularly the small towns and regional experiences.

“When we have voices in those international markets who can amplify what we’re trying to do, you can’t overestimate how important that is to us,” he said.

“It can be very difficult for states or cities within our states to have contracted representation in many international markets.

“It’s a blessing to be involved with an organisation like Travel South USA professionally and be able to work collectively with those trade partners, operators and reps.”



*Travel South USA 2025 Board with new Chair Stephen Foutes (on right). Image: Travel South USA*

Travel South USA launched a new Tourism Exchange platform to surface new and niche products across the South, linking live inventory and rates between suppliers and distributors and bringing offline businesses online.

“Connectivity matters, and making those connections, however small, can have a huge impact,” Foutes said.

“We also need to understand how consumers will use AI in their travel planning and how we as travel marketers can use emerging technology to reach consumers in different ways.”

## Travel South USA’s \$10 million goalpost



Travel South USA has a lofty goal of USD\$10 billion in visitor spending by 2025. Image: Travel South USA

During his one-year term as Travel South USA Chair, Foutes is tasked with continuing the tourism recovery momentum to realise the 12-state collective’s ambitious target of USD\$10 billion (around AUD\$16 billion) in visitor spending by the end of 2025.

Australian spending in the Travel South USA region is projected to reach USD\$351 million in 2025, up from \$157 million in 2022.

“Before I even came on board, Travel South USA established a lofty goal of achieving \$10 billion in international spending by the end of next year, so that is our driving goal. We’re now in that last 12-month stretch to try to make that happen,” he said.

## What travellers want to experience in the South



Barbecue Missouri-style served with Wonder Bread and fries at Arthur Bryant's Barbecue in Kansas City. Image: Visit Missouri

Foutes' other main focus is meeting the shifts in consumer demands and market dynamics by adapting to the current travel landscape and technology and highlighting the unique experiences available across the US South.

"The South offers an unparalleled level of variety for travellers," Foutes said, checking off his list. "If you want beaches, check; you want mountains, check; you want outdoor experiences, check; you want major metropolitan areas and fine dining; check."

"The South offers music, history, culture and civil rights, so for anybody who wants to experience authentic American history and culture, the South is the place to go."



Music is a major part of the US South experience. Image: Travel South USA

Foutes said the annual Travel South International Showcase, which connects international travel partners with destination marketing organisations and suppliers, facilitates a regional approach to navigating changing consumer demands.

"Travellers don't see the borders like we do. When a traveller goes from Arkansas into Missouri, they may see a sign that they're entering a new state, but that really doesn't matter to them," he said.



At an activation booth during the Salute to America July 4 celebration in Missouri's capital, Jefferson City. Image: Stephen Foutes

"A regional partnership like Travel South USA shows consumers how they can have a unique and authentic experience in the American South, regardless of which states they visit."

Road trips, such as the Road Trips USA self-drive itineraries, highlight this style of borderless travel, connecting cities, themes and experiences across state lines.



Springfield is the birthplace of Route 66 sign. Image: Visit Missouri

"If you try and give consumers something they don't want, they will find it elsewhere. Rhythms of the South, connecting Memphis, Nashville and New Orleans, recognises that people who travel for music are going to make that loop, right?"

"Travel South offers a great opportunity to make those kinds of easy connections for travellers to find."



Behind the mic at the post-match interview room on a tour of CPKC Stadium in Kansas City, the world's first purpose-built stadium for a women's professional sports team, the KC Current. Image: Stephen Foutas

With sports tourism also a burgeoning area, Foutes said several Travel South states are poised to leverage their involvement when the USA hosts the FIFA World Cup in 2026. Other upcoming opportunities include the 100th anniversary of Route 66 in 2026.

"In Missouri, we're a little bit unique in that we have a section of Route 66, so 2026 is a big opportunity for a lot of our states, whether they have Route 66 or are getting a World Cup match," Foutes said.

"It's an opportunity to inspire travel to these locations because people are coming to the Southern region for those events. If they've got a 10- or 15-day holiday, travellers have an opportunity to explore beyond the gateways."

### **| Why the US South loves Aussies**



Travel South USA Chair Stephen Foutes is ready to show off the 'Show Me' State in 2025. Image: Cassie Tannenber

With Missouri hosting Travel South International Showcase 2025 in Kansas City next December, Foutes looks forward to showing off the 'Show Me' state to international buyers, including Australia.

"If an international visitor from Australia is coming to Missouri, they've made a significant journey to make that trip, right? Just the notion that this faraway continent of people has an interest in our state is maybe cheesy, but it's heartwarming for somebody who loves the state," he said.



Infinity Holidays' Kevin Looney (centre) receives an Ambassador Award from Travel South USA Chair Stephen Foutes (left) and President & CEO Liz Bittner (right) at the Travel South International Showcase 2024 Honors night. Image: Travel South USA

"Thinking about folks who are a 23-hour flight away would be interested in coming to see us is pretty awesome and a great opportunity for us to have them stay longer in our market, to spend more money, to have more experiences.

"We just want to make sure that no matter where people are from, they feel welcome and that feel like they know they're going to have an authentic experience."

Read more about a Missouri travel experience firsthand with Infinity Holidays' Kevin Looney [here](#).

Find out more at [travelsouthusa.com](https://travelsouthusa.com)

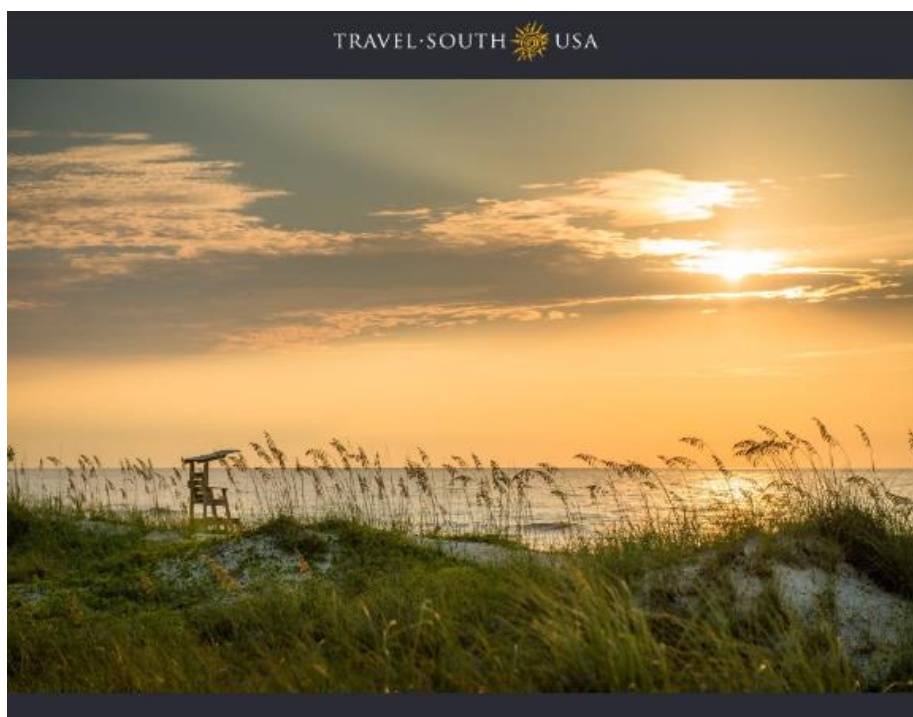
# Newsletters

## TRADE Newsletter –

Recipients: **4090** Open Rate: **1016 (24.84%)**

## PR Newsletter –

Recipients: **372** Open Rate: **192 (51.61%)**



Summer in the South is a season filled with warmth, vibrant energy, and endless possibilities. From sun-drenched days spent soaking up the beauty of rolling landscapes to lively festivals where community spirit thrives, every corner of the South comes alive with music, flavour, and adventure.

Whether you're hiking waterfall trails, tasting soulful BBQ, or dancing under blue skies, the South offers a perfect blend of outdoor exploration and authentic experiences that make Summer truly unforgettable.

**Summer in the South**



## TENNESSEE

### WildSide

WildSide is an adventure park located on 900 acres of rugged mountain terrain near Pigeon Forge, offering nearly 30kms of trails and 500m of elevation change. The park provides guided UTV tours and mountain biking experiences suitable for all skill levels, with bike rentals available on-site. WildSide is reopening on February 6th ready for a jam packed season.

Adventure Park Madness



## MISSOURI

### The Landing at Current River

One of Missouri's cherished Summer traditions is a float trip on the scenic rivers of the Ozarks, with The Landing at Current River as a favourite destination. The lodge offers balcony views of the crystal-clear Current River, float trip rentals, and dining at The Blue Heron Restaurant. With float trips ranging from 6 to 27kms, it's the perfect way to immerse yourself in the natural beauty of the Ozarks.

Float Therapy



## ALABAMA

### Sunny Charm

Summer in Alabama is unforgettable because of the sense of community and Southern hospitality that fills the air. Small-town festivals, with their savoury BBQ and homemade peach cobbler, create a vibrant atmosphere where people come together to celebrate life with music, dancing, and shared moments. From concerts to exploring the historic waterfront, Alabama invites you to connect with its rich culture and experience the warmth reflected in its friendly smiles and timeless traditions.

Southern Summer



## WEST VIRGINIA

### Explore and Unwind

West Virginia's waterfall trails offer breathtaking landscapes and a chance to explore 43 stunning falls. The nation's first waterfall trail, launched in 2022, has welcomed over 100,000 participants from around the world. With a mobile passport, you can check in at participating locations and earn exclusive West Virginia Waterfall Trail gear this Summer. Almost Heaven is nothing short of jaw-dropping enchantment.

Waterfall Trails



## RHYTHMS OF THE SOUTH

### Atlanta, Nashville, New Orleans

Summer in Nashville, Atlanta, and New Orleans is packed with music, flavour, and fun. Nashville hosts the lively Music City Hot Chicken Festival, Atlanta features their famous Georgia aquarium and festivals like Peachfest, and New Orleans celebrates Pride Weekend and the New Orleans Wine and Food Experience. Each city offers unique Summer experiences that are not to be missed.

Music, Flavour and Fun



## MISSISSIPPI

### Scenic Landscapes

The outdoors are calling. Visit Tishomingo State Park for a hike including swinging bridges, distinctive geological formations, and waterfalls. Enjoy fresh water fishing on Grenada Lake, known for its trophy-sized crappie or wetland trails along the Gulf Islands National Seashore. For a day trip, head to Ship Island, a short ferry ride away, where you can swim in crystal-clear waters, explore historic Fort Massachusetts, or simply unwind on pristine beaches.

Nature's Playground



## KENTUCKY

### Smoky Delights

Summertime in Kentucky means barbeque, with festivals like the W.C. Handy Blues & Barbeque Festival and the Bluegrass Barbeque Festival drawing enthusiasts from everywhere. Featuring a variety of flavours, from tangy vinegar-based sauces to rich, smoky blends, alongside live music, craft beer, and vibrant culture. For year-round barbeque, the West Kentucky Barbeque Belt offers delicious options across 13 cities.

Barbeque Galore



## NORTH CAROLINA

### The Great Outdoors

West Jefferson is home to the first-ever fly fishing trail in the United States, offering anglers the chance to fish in the pristine waters of the New River, the second oldest river in the world. The 50 to 55 degree waters create prime conditions for fishing from May to June, when fish are active and plentiful. The New River State Park also provides opportunities for kayaking, tubing, hiking, and relaxing riverside picnics in a stunning Appalachian setting.

Fly Fishing Heaven



## LOUISIANA

### Cool Treats

Louisiana offers a Summer getaway for every taste, from thrilling water adventures at state parks to exploring fascinating museums like the National WWII Museum in New Orleans or the Shreveport Aquarium. Don't miss iconic treats like sno-balls, available statewide with unique flavours and toppings, perfect for cooling off after paddling, fishing, or visiting cultural landmarks.

Summer Adventures



## SOUTH CAROLINA

### Happy Campers

Discover your ultimate escape while camping in South Carolina's state parks, where adventure and serenity meet. Explore breathtaking mountains, cascading waterfalls, blackwater rivers, and pristine sandy beaches. With 47 parks showcasing stunning landscapes, vibrant history, and endless recreation, your perfect camping experience awaits.

Wilderness Bliss

## FIND OUT MORE

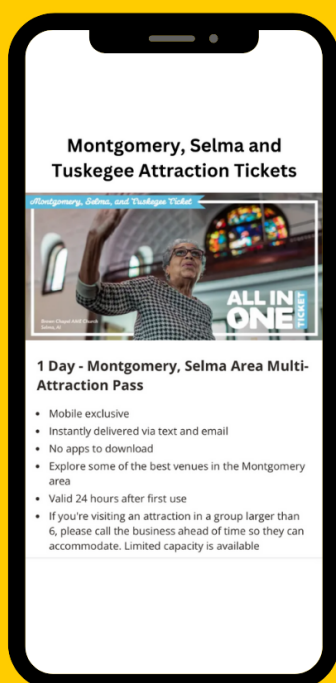


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Inserted into Trade EDM:

## Tourism Exchange USA - Get Connected Today!



Tourism Exchange USA, in partnership with Brand USA and Travel South USA, is an innovative B2B marketplace connecting bespoke, authentic, and previously hard-to-find tourism experiences of the American South—including accommodations, tours, and attractions—with global travel trade professionals. By expanding visibility of the rich cultural, culinary, and historical experiences found throughout the region, Tourism Exchange USA and Travel South share a mission in Making the USA Bookable.

One of the unique products available on The Exchange, along with other tours, experiences, and accommodations across the region, includes the Alabama All-In-One Pass, which gives your clients the chance to save more and explore more in Birmingham, Gulf Shores/Orange Beach, Huntsville/Florence/Muscle Shoals, Mobile, Montgomery, and East Alabama. Passes start at just \$13, with multi-day options available for no more than \$89.

Not registered yet? Get connected to Tourism Exchange USA and access product with no upfront costs by contacting [Distributors@TourismExchangeUSA.com](mailto:Distributors@TourismExchangeUSA.com) today.

All travel agents and counselors are welcome!

# Market Update

## Economic & Market Update

- The following Economic announcements were made in January
- There will be a federal election this year. The prime minister will call it, but it will be no later than 17 May - almost exactly three years after the last election.
- The annual rate of inflation increased in the December quarter to 2.4%, according to new figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This is down from 2.8% in the September quarter. It is the lowest inflation rate recorded in more than three years. [Source.](#)
- The cash rate has been at 4.35% since November 2023, which is its highest level in about a decade. Higher interest rates make it more expensive to borrow. The next cash rate announcement is on 18 February. [Source.](#)
- Black Friday sales boost retail spending, despite cost-of-living crisis. Australian retail turnover rose 0.8% for the month, according to figures released on Thursday morning by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). All retail industries saw growth for the month, with department stores up 1.8%, clothing, footwear and personal accessory retailing increasing by 1.6%, and household goods up 0.6%. This prompted fears that the Reserve Bank may pause any pending interest rate cuts. [Source.](#)
- The latest arrival figures released report 101,115 Australian visitors to the USA in December, up 7% on 2023, and reaching 85% of 2019 levels. In total for 2024, just over 1M Aussies visited the USA, up 7% YOY, making Australia the 11th largest long-haul international source market for the year (Source i94 arrivals).
- In terms of visitation from New Zealand to the USA, in December there were 22,794 visitors, down 7% on last year. In total for 2024, just over 256k kiwis visited the USA, up 2% YOY.
- 3,662 Australians listed a Travel South state as their first intended address in December, equaling 4% of total USA visitation, and up 8% on last year. In total for 2024, 41,246 Aussies listed a Travel State as their first intended address up 13% YOY. (Source i94 arrivals – first intended address).
- The exchange rate averaged 0.62 USD in January.

## Tour Operators & Travel Agencies

- Itravel has added a new Queensland mobile agent as the network sees membership jump by 24% in 2024. [Source](#)
- Signature Travel has strengthened its portfolio across the US and Australia welcoming 13 new US members and 5 from Australia to the group. [Source](#)
- Travel Specialists have been named as the third fastest-growing role in Australia. [Source](#)
- Envoyage Travel is just getting started with shop openings. [Source](#)
- Infinity Holidays has made a number of redundancies after it shut down its hotel API business. [Source](#)
- The Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO), has recorded more than 11,000 course completions since it launched to the market mid-last year. [Source](#)

- Travel Managers has finished 2024 with a healthy 12 per cent year on year increase in sales. [Source](#)

## Traveler Insights

- Australian passport prices have risen again to over \$400, which is more than any other country in the world. [Source](#)
- Aussie travellers favourite hotspots have been revealed with visitors to the United States marking a 13 per cent increase year-on-year. [Source](#)
- Nearly 50% of Aussies put travel at the top of their 2025 savings goals. [Source](#)
- The latest research from Skyscanner has revealed that 3 in 5 Aussies are using travel as a means to boost morale for the year. [Source](#)
- Australian visitation to the United States is forecast to eclipse 2015 highs by 2030, data from Brand USA has shown. [Source](#)
- Global passenger demand, measure in revenue passenger kilometres, rose by 8.1% in November 2024 compared to November 2023. [Source](#)
- Australian's are hunting down their next holiday, with nearly half (49%) saving for travel rather than mortgages. [Source](#)
- The number of overseas trips taken by Aussies in November was 7.4% higher than the same month in 2019, new ABS figures show. [Source](#)
- The US has recently opened applications to its "US Trusted Traveller Program" - a fast track service that allows select Australians to fast-track security and custom lines at US Airports. [Source](#)
- Open AI has launched a travel agent functionality that can actually book travel plans. Currently in beta in the US, no dates for an Australian launch as of yet. [Source](#)

## Air Lift

- Delta Air Lines is promoting it's new 3 Brisbane to LAX plus fresh cabin designs and a luxurious lounge. [Source](#)
- Qantas has revealed what passengers watched, ate and tuned into most in 2024. [Source](#)
- Airlines will be forced to offer passengers a full refund if flights are delayed more than 3 hours. [Source](#)
- Qantas has held on to 10<sup>th</sup> spot in an annual review of the APAC's most reliable airlines. [Source](#)
- The world's most punctual airlines for 2024 have been released with Delta Air Lines scoring 83.46% OTP. [Source](#)
- Airlines are predicted to hit two major milestones in 2025 as fares fall 44 per cent in a decade. [Source](#)

- Air New Zealand has launched its New Year sale with fares starting from AUD \$1,258 to the US. [Source](#)
- Hawaiian Airlines is welcoming sports lovers with a new baggage policy. [Source](#)
- Air New Zealand has pipped Qantas as the safest full-service airline, according to the latest annual list compiled by AirlineRatings.com. [Source](#)
- A plane every three week as Qantas readies for major expansion in 2025 and beyond. [Source](#)

## Actions

- **Auckland Travel Expo**
- **Trade & PR Newsletter**
- **Where Music Was Born Campaign**
- **Global Week Media Finalized**
- **Concrete Playground Partnership**