

AUNZ REPORT

JULY 2025



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ABOUT TSUSA

Global Partner Programming

86,053 Australians visited the USA in June, down -10% year-on-year. This brings the year-to-date total to over 468,000 visitors, a decline of -2% YoY. The softer result continues a trend we observed in May and follows a brief rebound in April, which was buoyed by the timing of the Easter holiday period. (Source: i94 arrivals)

Texas gains ground

Texas saw a +11% increase in June arrivals, likely driven by strong perceived value and increased air access into Dallas and Houston. Texas is emerging as a viable alternative to traditional gateways like California, thanks to its affordable hotel rates and growing appeal as a culturally distinct destination. Travel South USA, will benefit from this gateway and value message as the easiest direct route into the region from Australia.

Port of Entry	June 2025	% Change YoY
Texas	7,476	+11%
California	40,245	-11%
New York	8,886	-11%
Florida	1,875	-12%
Hawaii	10,280	-18%
All other ports	17,291	-9%

Why the dip? Australians typically book 3–4 months ahead, so June travel reflects decisions made in March. While media coverage of political events and a high-profile incident involving an Australian journalist in LA may have influenced sentiment, the key drivers appear to be economic:

- The AUD was trading at just 0.65c in June (up slightly from 0.62c in April but still low)
- U.S. prices remain high, especially when converted to AUD
- Asia offers greater perceived value, drawing price-sensitive travellers

Travel South Visitation

4,147 Australians listed Travel South as their first intended address in June, up 4% YOY.

NZ Visitation to the USA

In June, 22,867 New Zealanders travelled to the USA. Year-to-date, 113,000 Kiwis have visited the U.S., a decline of 2% YoY. Despite economic headwinds and rising living costs, New Zealand's visitation remains above average relative to its population.

Market Context

Outbound travel from Australia remains strong overall. Between January and May 2025, 5.3 million Australians returned from overseas holidays—up +13% YoY (ABS). But the USA's market share has slipped: it is now the **6th most visited international destination** for Australians, behind **Indonesia, New Zealand, Japan, India and China**. This time last year, it ranked 5th.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Annual Plan & Budget
- International Showcase Invites
- Gold Coast and Brisbane Meetings
- Gold Coast Trivia Event
- Continued Global Week Coverage
- Media Meetings
- Media Pitching

Australia		July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	FY 26 Total
10 Partners AL KY LA NC SC TN WV MO MS ROTS	Travel Trade								
	Trade Meetings	15							15
	Number of Agents Trained	6							6
	Media Meetings	4							4
	Total number of articles published	10							10
	Impressions	14,403,597							14,403,597

II. COMMUNICATIONS & PR

- Annual Plan & Budget
- Continued Global Week Coverage.
- Media Meetings.
- Earned media Coverage Book
- Global Market Media Place 25 media Coverage Book

COVERAGE:

The New Zealand Herald

5 things that surprised me about the American South



By **Varsha Anjali**

Multimedia Journalist · NZ Herald · 1 Jun, 2025 06:00 AM · 5 mins to read

Listen (05:45)

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A mural of the legendary fighter Muhammad Ali in Louisville, where he was from. Photo / Go to Louisville

From soulful soul food to friendly locals, the American South is full of surprises, writes Varsha Anjali

Well, bless my heart.

I went to the American South to forget – or to be forgotten. Not like a tourist seeking wanderlust or one who treats a country as if it's their unpaid therapist. More like the way of a thick fog, where the minute details always smoked up the brain, and the sky saw too much.

But I only had seven days in Mississippi and Kentucky. Still, I noticed a whole lot. I felt a whole lot. These are the things that surprised me the most.

1. The best fried chicken really is in Kentucky



Royals Hot Chicken. Photo / Go to Louisville

Sometimes things seem so obvious that it simply isn't true. This isn't one of those times.

Royal Hot Chicken in Louisville, Kentucky, makes you think there should be fried chicken tastings like they do for other culinary delights like wine, tea, and (believe it or not) water.

At risk of sounding hackneyed, I found their Nashville-style hot chicken an artistic experience. Visually, it looks exactly as you'd hope. Big with lots of texture. It smelled like an attractive gentleman chopping wood, occasionally giving me the eye.

When it came to the taste, things started to get complex. You can choose five spice levels, from no heat right up to gonzo, which they affectionately describe as "endorphin-ringing heat". I went for the second tier: "some heat". I tasted several intense notes in the spice. I didn't know that spice had notes.

I am happy to conclude this was way better than KFC.

2. Southern charm will indeed leave you charmed

It had been less than 24 hours before I posted on my Instagram stories: "I think Southern charm is one of the nicest things I've experienced in my life." Did that make me basic? Maybe. Did I mean it? Yes. But, of course, Southern charm has its nuance.

I was enjoying some gumbo soup at Fairview Inn's Library when two middle-aged customers, Lula and Pierre, walked in. They immediately started conversing with the staff: asking their names, what they do outside work, what they studied, how they felt about what they were learning.

Then they did the same with me. It was warm and genuine. One of our guides from Jackson, Mississippi, told me that being exceptionally friendly and polite is simply part of their upbringing.

"We just met, but as a visitor, if you were here longer, I'd invite you for dinner with me and my wife. And if you needed a place to stay, that wouldn't be an issue at all," he told me. But Southerners can also lay it on "a little too thick".

"Going abroad or different parts of the US, we learn we need to rein it in," he said.

3. The meal sizes are truly humbling

Knowing about a stereotype and experiencing it are different things.

Remarkably, even though I knew to expect large portions when in the US, it still managed to astonish me over and over again.

One breakfast at a cafe in Biloxi, I enjoyed biscuits (notice the plural) – a southern treat similar to scones but with more butter, salt and deliciousness – served with gravy and cheese grits. A food writer in our group, Peter, ordered “the Southern”. It came with waffles, fried chicken, bacon, butter, cheese toast, berries, pickles and preservatives. He was humbled.

4. Soul food really does revive your soul



Bully's Soul Food Restaurant in Jackson, Mississippi. Photo / Varsha Anjali

The food from the iconic soul restaurant in Jackson, Bully's, revived me when I felt like a ! I had the vege plate, which came with some fried corn, fried okra, fried green tomatoes, collard greens and cornbread. Fried food usually doesn't make me feel good but this brought deep biochemical satisfaction.

But it's more than comfort food. The deep history of slavery, multiculturalism and resilience is simmering underneath each mouthful.

"That's why it's called soul food – it's good for the soul," a colleague muttered. Aha! Genius.

5. How deeply locals care about how the world sees them

Reputation has always been a currency and a curse.

When I asked the Southerners I met what they think is the biggest misconception about where they live, the most common reply was, "that we're ignorant and intolerant".

In the midst of political division, many locals I chatted to made a point to express, without any prompting, their open-mindedness.

"We're not all like that, and I hate that it's a super conservative version that gets played out in the media," a guest named Tim told me at the Fairview Inn.

Checklist

USA

GETTING THERE

Fly from Auckland to Houston, Texas, then take a domestic flight to the southern state of choice. Popular local carriers are United Airlines, American Airlines and Delta.

DETAILS

<https://travelsouth.visittheusa.com/en-au/>

New Zealand Herald Travel visited courtesy of Travel South USA.

Varsha Anjali is a journalist on the Herald's Lifestyle team. Based in Auckland, she covers travel, culture and more.



Jackson, Mississippi: The pulse of blues, gospel and soul music



By Varsha Anjali

Multimedia Journalist · NZ Herald · 22 Jul, 2025 10:00 AM · 6 mins to read

Listen (07:01)

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Jackson mural depicting the city's icons: Medgar Evers, Eudora Welty, Thalia Mara and David Banner. Photo / Travel South

In the Deep South, Varsha Anjali visits the recording studio dubbed the "last soul company" where the artist who sang one of her favourite songs made her claim to fame.

I was driving alone one evening on State Highway 32 close to [Taupō](#) when I heard Dorothy Moore's *Misty Blue* on 95bFM for the first time. I felt deep grief and deep love though no one had died and no one had broken my heart. I never forgot that honey sound, that anguished longing. Some 50 years after Moore released that R&B and soul version of the masterpiece, I travelled to her hometown - and to the studio where it all began.

At first glance, the city of Jackson in [Mississippi](#) probably appears the same as how people initially saw Moore: unassuming. The land is mostly flat (this is jarring as a Kiwi), the structures are surprisingly sparse, and the streets are noticeably broad. It's all beige and grey until the fringe clashes with the folding hills of the Piney Woods. But looks are deceiving. Especially in Jackson.



Dorothy Moore poses for a studio portrait in 1976 in the United States. Photo / Gilles Petard, Redferns, via Getty Images

"Mississippi's race history and all that has plagued us. It's not good, it ain't true anymore," a local - a white man - told me at the Fairview Inn, his oil-slick fingers clutching his lager.

I knew he meant it with the best intentions, but I owed it to artists like Moore to learn. [Civil rights history](#), hardship and resilience in Jackson helped develop the sounds I became enamoured by.

Nestled in a heat-sodden corner of Jackson lies another beige building with a small sign revealing the unpretentious site of one of the most influential record labels in American



At first glance, Couch fit the unassuming Jackson mould, donning a plaid shirt, plain navy trousers and neatly combed hair. Something of a Regular Joe. But when he opened his mouth, he didn't just speak. He bellowed with warmth. And with that endearing Southern drawl, he was drooling swag. The man was magnetic.

Couch, who inherited the business in 2013 from his father Tommy Couch Sr - a co-founder - loosely showed us around the legendary spaces steeped in history while guessing what we might value seeing. In truth, we wanted to see it all. And we got to.

Those walls were baked with stories and wired with sound. There were frames of the artists who had recorded there scattered all over, including Paul Simon, Jean Knight, King Floyd and ZZ Hill. It wasn't until I was inside the recording studio that the realisation landed - gently, but permanently: Donna Moore was in this room.

It was silly - and I'm almost embarrassed to admit it - but I was giddy. I was the schoolgirl with a crush, but instead of with a boy, it was with the mic, the drum kit, the fancy digital audio workstation, and the glass that separated the artist from the producer.

"It was pretty much an international record," Couch said of *Misty Blues*. "A really big soul ballad."

That ballad became Malaco's first major hit after they took a gamble and spent their last bit of cash to sell it under their label. It sold millions of copies, was nominated for a Grammy and reached the top 10 in the charts in Aotearoa, Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada.



The company celebrates the “biggest gospel catalogue in the world”. Couch explained to me that a lot of the music was created, and about 40% of it was acquired through purchasing other companies along the way, then continuing to work with those artists in that catalogue.

Like many other industries, Malaco had to change drastically to keep up with digitisation. For them, it paid off. “It got good,” Couch said. “It’s easy to reach people.”

It wasn’t as simple as that, of course. They changed their whole operating model. “We knew what the bottom was ... so we based our business around that,” Couch said.

“We’d say, if we bring Little Milton in and make a record, we’re gonna sell 33,000 records. Now, we may be wrong and sell 100,000. But we’d never sell 30 [thousand].”

While the scene isn’t what it used to be, its influence on contemporary music and the cultural landscape is visceral. In 2017, Google made a commercial using a sample of the 1980 gospel hit *Jesus Can Work It Out*. Through placements in movies, films, TV and big-time musicians like Kanye West and Drake are incorporating the sounds from Malaco’s collection. “Which used to hurt our feelings,” Couch admitted, “But we’re very thankful”.

Malaco may be the “last soul company” and it’s not going anywhere soon. “The catalogue has been so well put together, so our everyday business is going to be fine if we never put another record out. But we like music and we’re in the music business, so we can pick and “Nobody in the world has been around as long as we have,” said Couch. “We’re independent and we do it our way. And it works.”

“A lot of other companies look to us to see what we’re doing and how we’re doing it and really seek our advice ... it’s just a lot of pride in the fact that we never should have been able to have made it a year. And we’ve been here almost 60.”

Checklist

MISSISSIPPI, USA

GETTING THERE

Flying with United Airlines from Auckland, there are two stopovers in San Francisco and Houston, before reaching Jackson, Mississippi. Malaco Records is a 30-minute drive northwest of the airport.

DETAILS

visitmississippi.com

The journalist travelled as a guest of Travel South USA.

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The last soul company

In the Deep South, Varsha Anjali visits the recording studio where the artist who sang one of her favourite songs made her claim to fame

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Nestled in a heat-sodden corner of Jackson lies another beige building with a small sign revealing the unpretentious site of one of the most influential record labels in American music history.

Its website said it made "black music for black people". But this didn't mean the artists couldn't be white.

"Malaco has always been, for a long, long time, a very traditional African-American music company," so began Tommy Couch Jr, president of Malaco Records, as he stood beside a huge black-and-white wall poster of Rob Bowman's book *The Last Soul Company: The Malaco Records*

Story.

"We judge the music by the consumer, not the colour of the artist that's playing it, because there are a lot of black guitar players that are blues singers that do not sell to an African-American consumer," he explained.

"Just from the business side, we judge by where it's gonna end up... who's consuming it."

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DETAILS

vistmississippi.com



How New Zealand helped shape the woman creating a 'game changing' museum in the US



Alan Granville

June 23, 2025 · 3:00am

Share



Jo Haas fondly remembers back at her time in New Zealand in the 1970s.

Jo Haas is a woman on a mission.

The Kentucky native is out to transform the way we think about public spaces by creating the world's most accessible museum.

Due to open in 2026, The Dot Experience in Louisville will be actively encouraging visitors to feel every exhibit. This won't be your typical stuffy look-but-don't-touch-style institution, you won't find collections trapped behind glass and security ropes here.

This interactive museum has a simple mission, to showcase the voices and experiences of the blind and low vision community and to change perspectives of those who are sight-impaired. Wheelchair users, those with hearing difficulties or have sensory issues are front and centre of plans, not relegated to after-thoughts. Inclusivity is key.

For Haas, the "game changing" project will be the culmination of years of working in museums and scientific centres, and she can pinpoint where a lot of her drive and empathy comes from - her formative years living in Invercargill and Te Puke.

She was only six when her parents Roger and Joan decided to seek a new life in New Zealand in 1973. The couple had previously holidayed here and had "fallen in love with the pace and the environment and the sense of community", Haas told *Stuff Travel*.



Jo with her sister Laura, brother Ray, and mum Joan in Te Puke, February 1975.

JO HAAS

Roger was a physician and was stationed in Invercargill Hospital, so the family of six moved into its grounds.

Haas has happy memories of her time there after “a lot of adjustment”. There were many trips around the South Island, visiting the likes of Dunedin and Queenstown, as well as a winter stay up at Chateau Tongariro.

She attended St John's Girls' School and remembers the “importance” of the uniform: “The hat that looked like a little bump on your head with a tartan band around it, and the school logo on a silver pin, then you had your dress on, and your overcoat and gloves.”



Jo with sister Laura in St John's Girls' School uniforms.

JO HAAS

She remembers some of the food options with less enthusiasm.

“Every so often we ate with the boarding students, and sometimes I didn't like the ‘pinky pudding’. I had to sit at the table, and my sister was like, ‘just eat the pudding’, and I was like, ‘I don't like it’.”

She even had two pet sheep, Bo and Bertha: “They lived in our house. It was hilarious. Where else would you have that?”



Jo with her pet sheep, Bo and Bertha, in October 1974.

JO HAAS

She said the family was seen as “exotic” in the deep south.

“People were so kind and curious. My sister and brother hosted a big Halloween party in that first year and nobody in New Zealand knew what Halloween really was. Everybody was so welcoming and so interested in who we were and why we were there.”

The family then moved north to Te Puke where Roger worked in several medical practices, but the pull of family back in the US meant the clan returned to Kentucky.



“I think my father realised that one of the things he and my mom loved about New Zealand was the sense of community and family, because those were such core values for them. But what moving to New Zealand meant is that we were very far away from family and so it was his decision then to bring us back.”

One thing she returned to the States with was a “beautiful” Kiwi accent: “I held on to that for a very long time.”

Haas said her brief time in NZ helped shape her future.

“Even if you don’t remember it all, you know just the adventure of it. I embody that. It’s one of the things I carried with me through my life.”

Through the resulting years, Haas has worked in a variety of scientific centres and museums “establishing corporate culture, nurturing organisational growth”, something she said comes naturally to her.



Jo Haas is working to create a unique attraction at The Dot Experience.
APH

The Dot Experience will be run by the American Printing House (APH). This institution has been at the centre of creating books in braille for blind and low vision students since the mid-19th century.

“Every child who is blind or low vision or has an educational need in the classroom, whether it’s a braille book or a piece of technology or educational hands-on materials to make some lesson come to life ... APH is providing almost all of those materials exclusively.”

APH is also developing a common electronic braille protocol called eBraille with several other countries.

“We do print things, but we also do more than that,” said Haas.

The Dot Experience will allow visitors to visit the APH factory, as well as learning about historical figures like Helen Keller.

At the core of the attraction is a simple mantra, Welcome Everyone, and it’s meant looking at basic operations from a new perspective.

“Having spent 37 years of my life in museums ... these are ways I had never thought before. These are ways that I had never worked before, and I’m a pretty open-minded, inclusive kind of person.”

There is still plenty of work to be done before the museum opens, but the sense of excitement in the voice of Haas is irresistible. Not just content with changing people’s perceptions, she is hoping to help empower those who may have been overlooked in the past, to “help people see that they can affect their world in a positive way”.



The Dot Experience will honour the likes of Helen Keller.

APH

New Zealand may also make a reappearance in her life, as sister Laura is planning a visit with her husband, so she is keen to tag along.

Asked if she had a message for those who may remember the family, she said: "If the O'Hagans are out there ... they were a big family friend, so if there are any descendants of the O'Hagans please pass along my hellos to them.

"Tell people thank you for helping me be the person I am today, and I'm extending that kindness in a whole new way through this project at APH.

"I am sure that the spirit of Invercargill and New Zealand is alive and well."

Then smiling, she said: "I'm guessing that stores are now open on Sundays?"

Details

The Dot Experience, 1839 Frankfort Ave, Louisville, Kentucky thedotexperience.org. Opening 2026.

Getting there: Air New Zealand has direct flights from Auckland to Houston. Louisville is another two-hour flight.

Carbon footprint: Flying generates carbon emissions. To reduce your impact, consider other ways of travelling, amalgamate your trips, and when you need to fly, consider offsetting emissions.

The author was hosted by Louisville Tourism and Travel South USA.

- Stuff

Museum really will welcome everyone

Jo Haas is creating the world's most accessible museum. Growing up in New Zealand helped shape her dreams, writes **Alan Granville**.

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One thing she returned to the States

DISCOVER

Party central

Every year, New Orleans puts its glitter on for one of the world's biggest carnivals. Here's how to navigate the event

LOUISE GOLDSBURY



Mardi Gras World. Opposite: colourful houses; king cake; festive balcony

day before "Fat Tuesday" (which will be February 12 in 2026).
kreweofmuses.org

Attend a ball

Each krewe hosts a private ball, but Orpheus, Endymion and Bacchus sell tickets to the public (from \$US220/\$334). The wildest after-party is the Endymion Extravaganza, held in the Superdome. This year's world-famous entertainer was Katy Perry. Orpheuscapade is a black-tie dinner and concert at the Convention Centre, sometimes attended by the krewe's founder Harry Connick Jr.
endymion.org

Bourbon Street beads

The eight blocks of the Bourbon Street entertainment district are always full of revellers drinking and dancing. During Mardi Gras, they come to catch beads from people on the balconies above bars and hotels. Cornet (700 Bourbon Street) is the best venue to enjoy the fun from a comfortable distance, if you don't want to get amongst it. VIP tickets (from \$US150) include unlimited drinks, buffet food and all-day balcony access to come and go as you please.
bourbonstreetbalconyrentals.com

Follow the tourist trail

Diverted by gaudy displays of conspicuous consumption, the original meaning of this Christian tradition is lost in the chaos and merriment. To learn about the history, Mardi Gras World offers a short documentary followed by a guided tour of the warehouse where artists and architects build the floats. A 20-minute walk leads to Vue Orleans observation deck, overlooking the Mississippi. Head to the 34th floor for 360-degree views and interactive displays about the city's culture and characters.
mardigrasworld.com
vueorleans.com

King cake connoisseurs

Bakeries sell creative variations of king cake, a seasonal treat often served at parties. The ring-shaped cinnamon pastry is filled with cream cheese or fruit and covered in purple, green



SURVIVAL TIPS FOR 2026

Mardi Gras season starts on January 6 (Twelfth Night, the Christian holy day of the Epiphany) and ends on Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday and the fasting period of Lent. This movable date falls on February 17 next year. To prepare for 2026, start planning now.

1. Book accommodation within walking distance of parade routes, as taxi rides may be impossible or triple the usual fare.
2. To join a float, contact a krewe for earlybird specials.
3. For fine dining restaurants, make online reservations in advance.
4. Pack your most comfortable shoes and outrageous outfits, or buy festive clothes on arrival. The traditional colours are purple, green and gold, but anything goes.

A convoy of women reclined in motorised bathtubs rolls down the street, followed by a bus-sized rubber ducky and a towering, neon-lit stiletto. It's just the start of another parade at the New Orleans Mardi Gras. The season runs for several weeks, from January until the day before Lent, with the festivities escalating each week. Over the final 12 days, an incredible 70 parades are organised by social clubs known as krewes, members of which ride on elaborate floats through the closed-off streets. This year's biggest parade drew 3000 members from the krewe of Endymion in a procession of 37 floats. Cheering crowds line the kerbs to catch colourful beads and other trinkets thrown by the riders. Among the most coveted "throws" are the Muses krewe's shoes, Zulu krewe's coconuts and Tucks krewe's toilet plungers. By the end of the night, a spectator can amass bags full of free souvenirs.

neworleans.com

Ride on a float

Dressed in a circus-like, sequinned tracksuit with mandatory mask and hood, I join one of the Orpheus floats. For five hours, I toss hundreds of toys, tambourines and T-shirts to the screaming fans, as we make our way along the parade route at night. The next day, my whole body aches from this unexpected workout, so it's not recommended for the unfit. Only some krewes welcome non-members to join a float. Participation fees range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, which covers the cost of costumes and throws. Contact a krewe via its website to apply for one of the wackiest experiences of your life.
kreweoforpheus.com

Find a shoe fairy

The all-women Muses krewe spends months decorating boots and high heels to hand out before and during the parade. I have been invited by my American friend, a Muses member for 25 years, to dress up as a shoe fairy for the day. Wearing wigs and wings, we randomly surprise people who have staked out a vantage spot since early morning. Witnessing their excited reactions is a highlight of my week. For a chance to snag some fabulous footwear, arrive early for the Muses parade on the Thurs-

TRAVEL + LUXURY



and gold icing. A plastic baby figurine may be hidden inside, and whoever finds it in their slice is crowned the king of the evening. Bananas Foster king cake is a boozy version, made with banana liqueur and butter rum, available at Brennan's restaurant.
brennansneworleans.com

French Quarter dining

Po' boys (sandwiches) and beignets (sugar-powdered pastries) are the city's signature snacks, but don't miss New Orleans' world-class dining. Mr B's Bistro is beloved for its southern hospitality and Creole cuisine. Time your visit for the Sunday jazz brunch. Irene's is Italian with a local twist, and everyone raves about it. A piano bar enhances the cosy ambience.
mrbsbistro.com
irenesnola.com

Accommodation

I stay at the Sheraton on Canal Street, which has its own parade-viewing grandstands and spacious rooms with river views. Ritz-Carlton is down the road, where non-guests are welcome to enjoy live jazz and cocktails in the Davenport Lounge. On a walk around the upscale Garden District, I discover the 18-room Henry Howard Hotel, named after the architect who designed the original townhouse in 1867.

marriott.com
ritzcarlton.com
henryhowardhotel.com

Louise Goldsbury was a guest of New Orleans & Company.
neworleans.com

Communications & PR

Media Contacts (phone calls, emails, personal meetings)

Contacts	Interest/Status	Follow-up/Next step
Stuff.co.nz	New role change: Emma handles the digital side of stuff.co.nz and Juliette handles the print/magazine side. They want pitches and famil invites to be sent to them both so they can assess whether the content or opportunity is better suited to their digital or print traveller audience. Main editorial opportunities are to send What's New, What's On info – only really unique or interesting news - for them to place in their column. Additionally, any insider tips or commentary on travel and destination experts.	They let us know they don't currently have any on-staff writers or freelancers travelling to the USA however, they will reach out if that changes for story opps.
Dilvin Yasa, Freelancer	Interested in quirky angles if she's writing about places that have already been covered lots. I.e. she took her kids to Vegas and wrote a piece about family travel Currently seeking small, unique destinations to visit. She is freelance but works as a columnist for Escape, going into the office once a fortnight. The team at Escape are having conversations in the office about how much they should cover US content, understanding the need to feature stories and continue to promote US travel. Friends with travel freelancers, regularly get together and discuss their travel plans, and story ideas. As part of Escape, she monitors emails sent in from the Escape audience.	N/A
Vanessa Brown, News.com.au	Best way to work together on anniversaries is via a quirky or interesting angle and spokesperson. Have a new gallery format, they are finding this is good for newsworthy angles e.g. this region has seen a 100% increase in Australian visitation + gallery.	N/A
Josh Kuskopf, the TODAY show	Very keen to work with American Destinations for broadcast pieces if the footage and experience is worth it. They need stellar on-ground footage. They are also key keen on live broadcasts. Recently did a great partnership with Hawaii. Competitions are huge engagement driver for them.	N/A

Rosie Robinson, Coast FM,	Jase, Toni and Sam have the top breakfast show in New Zealand. They can do shows internationally across a few days, pre-record components across a weekend on-site. Pull in all hosts socials alongside the stations as part of it – huge value add and awareness driver Very lean team for these trips.	Very interested in doing this from the South if there is interest.

III. TRAVEL TRADE

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

Contacts	Interest/Status	Follow-up /Next step
Cinzia Giacchi Partnerships Director Vinyl	Update on Vinyl purchase of concrete playground and integration with new brands within the company.	N/A
Kristy Prince North American Product Manager Adventure World	Discussion on the South and invitation to come to Travel South International Showcase.	Ongoing
Lee Ann Hoskin National Product Director Envoyage	Update and information on the South including an invitation to Internal Showcase. Lee Anne is new to the role, but keen to explore further. Scheduled meeting in August to provide more details.	Ongoing
Chris Watson Owner Chris Watson Travel	Support and reporting information for Chris Watson nomination for NTIA's for Best Marketing Campaign with Travel South for Where Music Was Born.	Ongoing
Tim Holden Global Partnerships Manager Flight Centre	Update on the South and invitation to International Showcase.	Ongoing
Adam Townsen Head of Product Travel Associates	Update on the South and invitation to International Showcase. Unfortunately, no-one from Travel Associates can attend this year.	N/A
Gordy Baynes Showpony World Travellers NZ	Meeting and update on World Travellers New Zealand, who are now buying their product from Infinity Holidays.	Ongoing
Visit USA Meeting	Attendance at Visit USA Meeting	N/A
Anna Mc Creadie Event Manager Good Food and Wine Festival	Meeting with Anna to discuss Sydney Good Food and Wine Festival exhibition and sponsorship options for June 2026.	Ongoing
Tracey Flower Personal Travel Specialist MTA Travel	Referral and training on The Smoky Mountains region for client trip.	N/A

Samantha Lang Luxury, Leisure & Cruise Travel Advisor Main Beach Travel	Training and information on client trip to Nashville and Tennessee over the Christmas period.	N/A
Rose Febo Travel Advisors Travel Managers	Training and itinerary support for solo traveller heading to the South. Recommended cruise's and coach touring	N/A
Melanie Evans Senior Travel Advisor Travel Associates	Training and support on southern itinerary including Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama.	N/A
Wendy Allen Travel Advisor MTA Travel	Training on Travel South USA, itineraries and touring options.	N/A
Carolyn Ahearne Personal Travel Manager Travel Managers	Training and additional information on the Appalachian trail	N/A

CAMPAIGNS & ACTIVITY

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The USA is Calling: Ready to Explore?

From the bright lights of New York City to the natural wonders of the Grand Canyon, the USA offers something for every kind of traveller. Whether you're cruising the Alaskan Inside Passage, road-tripping down the Pacific Coast Highway, or joining a guided tour through the Deep South or Wild West, now's the time to start planning your next great USA adventure.

[EXPLORE THE USA](#)

Top USA Tours You'll Love

Explore our hand-picked selection of tours and cruises designed to show you the very best of the USA — your journey starts here.

New Orleans, Louisiana

New Orleans: More than jazz and Mardi Gras

Everyday Energy: Vibrant streets full of life and colour

Haunted History Tours: Explore the city's mysterious past

Craft Cocktail Bars: Sip on expertly crafted drinks

Colourful Parades: Experience lively street celebrations

A soulful city like no other—full of culture, music, and magic.

Nashville, Tennessee

Nashville: More than just country music

Hidden Speakeasies & Indie Gigs: Discover secret bars and vibrant live shows

Smooth Nightlife: From cozy jazz spots to lively dance floors

Rich Vibes: Music, energy, and unforgettable nights

Nashville is the place for anyone who loves great tunes and good times.



Historic Highlights

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Washington, D.C return

From \$6,295*pp

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Canyon Country Adventure

8 Days

Phoenix to Las Vegas

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Mississippi Delta Explorer

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New Orleans to Memphis

Viking Mississippi

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Hawaii: Inter-island

7 Days

Honolulu return

Pride of America

From \$4,406*pp (twin share)

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Classic Road Trips – Freedom to Roam

There's something magical about the open road. Classic USA road trips let you travel at your own speed, stopping whenever something catches your eye (and trust us — there's plenty).

Pacific Coast Highway: California dreaming on Highway 1

Southwest National Parks Loop: Red rock canyons, wild west towns and star-filled skies

The Blues Highway: Follow the music from Memphis to Chicago, blues clubs, BBQ & small-town soul.

Follow the rhythm of the USA's music history, passing through St. Louis, Memphis, and the Mississippi Delta. Stop for BBQ, blues clubs, and small-town charm on this culturally rich road trip.

Fuel up, queue the playlist, and hit the road — your way.

■ Resource Centre Updates

What's On:

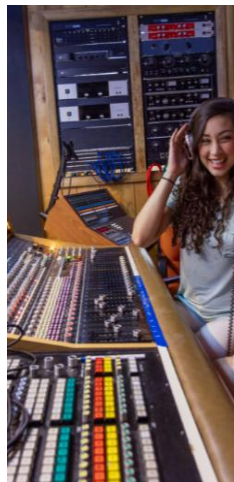


September 19, 2025

Bourbon & Beyond

Celebrate bourbon, music, and gourmet food at Bourbon & Beyond, the world's largest bourbon and music festival. Enjoy tastings from Kentucky's top distilleries, celebrity chef demos, and performances from leading artists across rock, country, and blues.

(more...)



October 4, 2025

Shoals Fest

Set along the Tennessee River in the heart of the Muscle Shoals music region, ShoalsFest celebrates the area's rich musical heritage with two days of unforgettable live performances. Curated by Grammy-winning artist Jason Isbell, the festival showcases top acts from rock, Americana, and country, alongside local food vendors and a welcoming Southern atmosphere.

(more...)

Whats New:

💡 **The MICHELIN Guide lands in the American South**

The MICHELIN Guide has announced its first-ever regional edition for the American South, marking a major milestone for the area's culinary scene. This new guide will spotlight restaurants across Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia (via the existing Atlanta Guide), moving beyond major cities to uncover the rich food culture of the region. Travel South USA is proud to support this historic initiative, which celebrates the South's diverse flavours and exceptional culinary talent on a global stage.

[LEARN MORE](#)

🔔 **JuneBug**

Downtown New Orleans welcomes Junebug, the latest late-night dining spot from the team behind Devil Moon BBQ and Brewery Saint X. Led by Chef Shannon Bingham, the menu blends French and Creole influences, offering everything from savoury snacks to indulgent sandwiches and inventive twists on classics. The playful yet elegant décor pays tribute to the city's jazz legends, making Junebug as much a feast for the eyes as it is for the palate.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Market Update

Economic & Market Update

announcements were made in July:

- **RBA holds interest rates steady**
The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) kept the official cash rate on hold at 3.85% in July. A split vote by the RBA's rate-setting committee saw the majority opting to pause cuts for now, adding to ongoing uncertainty for Australian households. While many economists expected a rate reduction to follow May's cut, the RBA noted it needed more evidence of inflation stability which it expected at the end of July. [Source](#).
- **Inflation has fallen to its lowest level in years**
Prices rose by 2.1% in the year to June, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This matches the May inflation rate and marks the lowest annual increase since March 2021. The trend suggests inflation is stabilizing, which the RBA was hoping for before their August meeting. [Source](#).
- **4.2% The unemployment rate this month**
The rate of unemployment rose slightly for the first time in 2025, now sitting at 4.2% according to ABS figures. While the increase is marginal, it signals a potential cooling in the labour market. [Source](#).
- **Travel demand is still high, despite cost-of-living pressures**
Australians continue to prioritise travel. International airline capacity in July was up 7.8% compared to the same time last year, with increased flight options and destinations fuelling holiday bookings during the winter school holidays. [Source](#).
- **Exchange rate remains a headwind for international travel**
The Australian dollar traded at an average of USD 0.65–0.654 in July, up marginally from June's ~0.644 but still low by historical standards. This constrained AUD continued to erode travel value and remained a key barrier for Australian outbound visitation, particularly to pricier destinations like the U.S.

Tour Operators & Travel Agencies

- **HLO sees strong appetite for USA leisure travel:** Helloworld's wholesale brands Viva Holidays and Ready Rooms have bucked a global downturn in U.S. travel sentiment, recording a 77% increase in bookings to the country in the first half of Jul. The pleasing result followed a financial year 2025 growth of 48% for US bookings - increases achieved in a climate that Helloworld conceded still involves "complex" sentiment toward the major North American market. **"Right now, we are seeing a clear message that the appetite for leisure travel to the US continues to be strong,"** Helloworld's Chief Operating Officer and Executive Director Cinzia Burnes said. [Source](#).
- **AMEX ceases packages:** American Express Travel will stop selling combined flight and hotel packages from 31 Jul as part of what it said is an overhaul of its online booking experience. According to Skift, the rejig comes as part of a more comprehensive process designed to make it easier to book entire trips through its website. [Source](#).
- **Flight Centre Luxury & Independent Division Huge Growth:** FC's independent brands portfolio including Envoyage, Link Travel Group, and Luxury Travel Collection grew from **\$30 million** in 2018 to over **\$2 billion** currently with **2,500** members globally across **5** markets. [Global Ball Update](#)
- **Flight Centre's Corporate Traveller Market Success:** FCM Travel is one of **3** global players capable of servicing enterprise customers across **50-70** markets. FCM focuses on "brilliant basics" providing consistency across multiple markets, countries, and languages. Corporate division emphasizes AI integration, automation of ordinary tasks, and global online booking tool launching in coming months. [Global Ball Update](#)

- **Flight Centre's Sales Target for 2030:** FC has the goal of reaching **\$9 billion** in sales by **2030** with **3,000** shops or billboards globally. [Global Ball Update](#)
- **Air New Zealand has launched a US fare sale on to 28 Jul:** One-way low season fares ex AKL, for travel 20 Oct-07 Dec, start from \$826 to LAX, \$861 to SFO, \$921 to HOU and \$1010 to NYC. [Source.](#)
- **Chat GPT travel agents have launched in Australia:** Chat GPT's much-hyped AI Agent functionality has now rolled out in Australia. The new tech allows users of the OpenAI app to give it specific agent tasks, such as comparing the prices and booking tours, hotels, and flights. [Source.](#)
- **BCD Travel and AI travel tech firm Oversee have expanded their partnership following a successful pilot that enhanced agent workflows and SLA adherence:** Oversee's AI-driven platform will now be rolled out across BCD's operations to automate tasks like booking requests, exchanges, and shell PNR creation. [Source.](#)
- **Traveloka has launched in Australia:** Traveloka is inviting local travel agents, wholesalers, and tour operators to diversify their offerings via its all-in-one platform covering flights, stays, transport, and in-destination experiences. The company aims to ease common travel pain points through local supply networks and is open to API integrations and partnerships with the Australian travel industry. [Source.](#)
- **Expedia TAAP Rolls Out New Tools to Empower Travel Advisers:** Expedia TAAP has launched a suite of platform upgrades aimed at boosting flexibility, efficiency, and earnings for travel advisers. Key features include extended "book now, pay later" options, easier booking modifications, expanded payment methods, and a built-in service charge tool, reaffirming the value of human expertise in a tech-driven industry. [Source.](#)
- **Sabre: Content Fragmentation Driving Up Agency Costs:** A Sabre survey reveals that 91% of travel agencies rely on four or more booking systems, leading to rising costs and reduced efficiency. In response, Sabre has launched *SabreMosaic*™, a unified, AI-powered travel marketplace designed to streamline content access, automate workflows, and improve customer experience through a single platform. [Source.](#)
- **New AI platform "to transform" content creation for luxury travel advisors:** Pixi is ground-breaking technology that enables hotels and suppliers to become discoverable, giving travel advisors immediate, on-brand access to the content they need to inspire, quote, convert and market. It's a cloud-based platform that functions as a visual command centre for luxury travel brands. [Source.](#)
- **Social media duo The Inspired Unemployed have officially launched ARRIVAL, a curated travel brand offering immersive small-group adventures.** The brand features more than 50 immediately bookable multi-day experiences in destinations such as Italy, Tanzania, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, with prices starting from AUD \$999. [Source.](#)
- **Minor Hotels has consolidated the booking process and resources for its 560 properties into a new platform designed for B2B clients, including agents.** Known as Minor Pro, the new global offering brings together rates, booking tools and inventory channels for the entire network into one system for sellers. [Source.](#)
- **Ansett is back! It's now a travel brand powered by AI:** Ansett has relaunched with aspirations to build Ansett into the ultimate digital travel agent with hundreds of generative AI agents that will do everything from pricing holidays to offering customer support to creating and publishing advertising material to inventory optimisation, and more. [Source.](#)
- **Helloworld Lifts FY Earnings Forecast:** Helloworld has upgraded its 2024/25 underlying EBITDA guidance to \$58–\$62 million, up from \$52–\$56 million, citing improved margins, cost controls, and gains in its Webjet stake.

Despite softer long-haul demand, mid-range destinations like Japan and Fiji are performing well, with ReadyRooms bookings up 110% and cruise sales also showing strong growth. [Source.](#)

Traveler Insights

- **Why Aussies still trust travel agents over TikTok and AI:** Travel agents remain the top choice for many Aussies when booking holidays, new research from Passport Card Australia has found. Despite the rise of TikTok trends and AI tools like ChatGPT and Gemini, two in five (39 per cent) Australians still rely on a travel agent to book their next getaway. That's more than double the number using TikTok (15 per cent) or AI (14 per cent). [Source.](#)
- **More than two-in-three Aussies have cashed in on reward points in the last year, with travel one of the most popular verticals to spend them on:** New research by comparison website Finder also revealed that an average of one in 10 Aussies are using loyalty points on flight rewards seats. Hotel stays (8%), points plus pay for flights (9%) and flight seat upgrades (5%) rounded out the top ways Aussies redeemed their hard-earned points. [Source.](#)
- **Spike in Xmas Bookings:** A surge in international flight bookings in Jul for travel over the Christmas holiday period represents a 30% increase on the same period in Jun last year. Bookings for travel between 13 Dec and 10 Jan 2026 saw a 47% jump for international flights for Jul 2025 vs Jun 2024. [Source.](#)
- **9Travel survey indicates Hawaii is the most desired U.S. city to visit next for readers:** New statistics have revealed a major shift in the overall travel sentiment towards the US, after many travellers swore off visiting the country following Trump's re-election and resulting policies. Hawaii, New York, Alaska, California, Florida, Colorado and Utah were the top picks, in that order. [Source.](#)
- **Australian students wishing to travel to the USA for study hit with new fee:** Australians wishing to travel to the United States to study will be hit with the new US\$250 (A\$380) 'visa integrity fee', part of President Donald Trump's 'One Big Beautiful Bill'. While Aussies travelling to the US for less than 90 days on the ESTA will be exempt, student visas F-1 and F-2 will be slugged with the new entry tax. [Source.](#)
- **Global corporate travel growth has slowed in 2025 due to trade tensions and economic pressures, according to the GBTA:** While travel spend is still expected to reach US\$1.57 trillion with 6.6% growth, this is down from previous double-digit increases. Trade policy uncertainty, including U.S. tariffs, is cited as a major factor affecting business travel trends worldwide. [Source.](#)
- **Arkansas Tourism Hits \$17.4B Thanks to Outdoor Boom:** Arkansas's tourism economy soared to \$17.4 billion in 2024, fueled by a record 52 million visitors and a booming outdoor recreation sector now surpassing agriculture in GDP impact. With over 102,000 tourism-supported jobs and \$7.3 billion from outdoor activities alone, the state is proving that natural assets and strategic planning make for serious economic growth. [Source.](#)
- **1/3 of Aussie's use AI for Travel Planning:** In a survey of over 1,000 Australian adults, three in ten (28.8%) respondents said they relied on AI tools to lock in travel deals, scout destinations and find activities, (11.5%) are specifically using AI for destination recommendations, (10.3%) are seeking out deals, (9.4%) look for recreational activities and accommodation, (9%) use AI to create itineraries, (8.2%) search for flights and transport, (3.2%) use AI to understand currency conversion. [Source.](#)

Air Lift

- **Qantas officially welcomes new Airbus jet & expects it to be a game-changer.** The new aircraft is the first of 28 A321XLRs Qantas has on order and represents "a pivotal step" in the carrier's fleet renewal program. [Source.](#)

- **One World Airline Alliance:** The airline alliance that counts Qantas as a member has set the goal of integrating all 15 carriers into its technology platform by the end of the year. When all oneworld members are connected, it will open up a host of traveller benefits, including cross-airline boarding passes on multi-airline itineraries. [Source.](#)
- **American Airlines is bringing back its Flagship Suite experience on flights between Brisbane and Dallas this October:** Beyond the DFW-to-BNE route, American will offer the suites on select flights from **DFW, Chicago (ORD) and Philadelphia (PHL).** [Source.](#)
- **Hawaiian Airlines is ramping up its winter 2025–26 schedule with additional services on high-demand routes connecting Honolulu to Sydney, Los Angeles and Seattle.** The Honolulu–Sydney route will increase from five flights per week to daily service between 18 December 2025 and 31 January 2026. The move is expected to benefit Australian travellers looking for a tropical escape or to reconnect with family during the peak summer period. [Source.](#)
- **Qantas NRL Charter:** Qantas has again scheduled a series of charter flights to take rugby league fans to and from Las Vegas as part of the NRL’s third season-opener in 2026. The Flying Kangaroo will operate one Boeing 787 Dreamliner from Brisbane on 25 Feb and three more from Sydney on 24 Feb and 25 Feb for the event on 28 Feb, returning on 01 Mar and 02 Mar. [Source.](#)
- **Qantas has a red sale on for Australia to USA flights:** Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane flights to Los Angeles starting at AUD\$1,099 and to Dallas for \$1,599. [Source.](#)

Media

- **News.com.au also relaunches commercial video proposition via Tubi:** News Australia has unveiled *All Screens for All Australians*, a refreshed video advertising solution integrating News’ short-form video products with Tubi’s ad-supported streaming service. The offering spans mobile, desktop, tablet, and connected TV, giving brands unified access to over five million video viewers. Key innovations include a new adaptive video player, targeted CTV segments, and enhanced ad formats such as the First Ad Takeover. News Australia reports one billion videos consumed on its network in the past year, with Tubi viewing hours rising 30% since their partnership began in March. [Source](#)
- **Man of Many launches 8 new newsletter verticals:** Man of Many, Australia’s largest men’s lifestyle publication, today announced the launch of a comprehensive user sign-in system and eight new niche newsletter verticals. One of these verticals being ‘Compass’, which is for Lifestyle & Travel stories. [Source.](#)
- **Google escalates fight to keep kids on YouTube:** With Australia’s Online Safety Act amendments set to block under-16s from social media in December, Google is pushing back against the inclusion of YouTube in the ban. The tech giant launched an ad campaign framing YouTube as “where teens come to learn” and warned the government of potential legal action, arguing the platform is misclassified as social media. The government remains firm, with ministers rejecting pressure from Google, and the eSafety Commissioner reiterating that no platform should receive exemptions. A YouTube Creator Day at Parliament House is scheduled to further lobby policymakers. [Source](#)
- **ABC overtakes News Corp in online readership:** ABC News has pulled ahead of News Corp’s news.com.au in digital audience rankings, reaching 13.9 million Australians in May - over two million more than its rival. The shift follows leadership changes at news.com.au and reflects growing trust in the public broadcaster’s online offering. [Source](#)
- **Australia leads the world in Reddit usage:** Australia now has the highest global penetration of Reddit, with 33% of internet users over 16 accessing

the platform monthly—almost triple the global average of 11.9%. Reddit’s ad reach in Australia extends to 94% of the population aged 13+, and the country ranks as a top-five market for the platform. Despite a slight quarterly dip in ad reach, Reddit’s mainstream adoption and advertising potential continue to grow. [Source](#)

■ **Tourism Australia unveils next phase of ‘Come and Say G’Day’:**

Tourism Australia has launched the second iteration of its *Come and Say G’Day* global campaign, featuring Ruby the Kangaroo alongside celebrities tailored to key markets, including Robert Irwin (US), Nigella Lawson (UK), Yosh Yu (China), Sara Tendulkar (India), and Abareru-kun (Japan). The campaign, rolling out in phases across China, India, the US, UK, Japan, Germany, and South Korea, aims to deepen emotional connections with travellers through market-specific storytelling. The push builds on a 10% rise in holiday consideration from the first campaign phase. [Source](#)

■ **Urban List releases 2025 Travel Trends Report:**

Urban List’s *Where To, Really?* report, based on a survey of 4,041 Australians and New Zealanders (primarily Millennials and Gen Z), reveals how travel motivations and behaviours are evolving in 2025. Respondents are highly engaged travellers, with a strong preference for real, meaningful experiences over curated, trend-driven itineraries.

- **High travel intent:** 83% plan at least one domestic trip, with 49% planning 2–3 trips and 27% planning four or more.
- **International appetite:** 69% intend to travel overseas in the next 12 months, and 36% are planning multiple international holidays.
- **Trip preferences:** 72% prefer shorter breaks (3–5 nights) over extended holidays.
- **Motivations:** Cultural immersion and food experiences are top drivers, with 78% stating food and drink scenes heavily influence destination choice. Wellness travel is also significant, with 52% seeking destinations offering relaxation and rejuvenation.
- **Travellers are rejecting “performative” travel** and moving away from Instagrammable itineraries in favour of emotionally resonant, authentic experiences.
- **Food is a deciding factor**, placing culinary storytelling at the heart of destination choice.
- **Cultural curiosity is peaking**, with travelers seeking deep engagement with local communities, traditions, and heritage.
- **Wellness is broadening** beyond spa escapes to include nature, disconnection, and slow travel.
- **The short-break boom continues**, opening opportunities to market modular itineraries, weekend escapes, and regional travel.
- **Travel is seen as emotionally essential**, not just recreational — a way to reset and reconnect with oneself, others, and the world. [Source](#)

Actions

- Brisbane Sales Calls and Meeting
- Gold Coast Road Tripping Trivia
- Good Food & Wine Festival Planning
- Trade & PR Newsletter
- International Showcase Invitations
- Media Meetings
- Media Pitching