



AUNZ REPORT

JANUARY 2026

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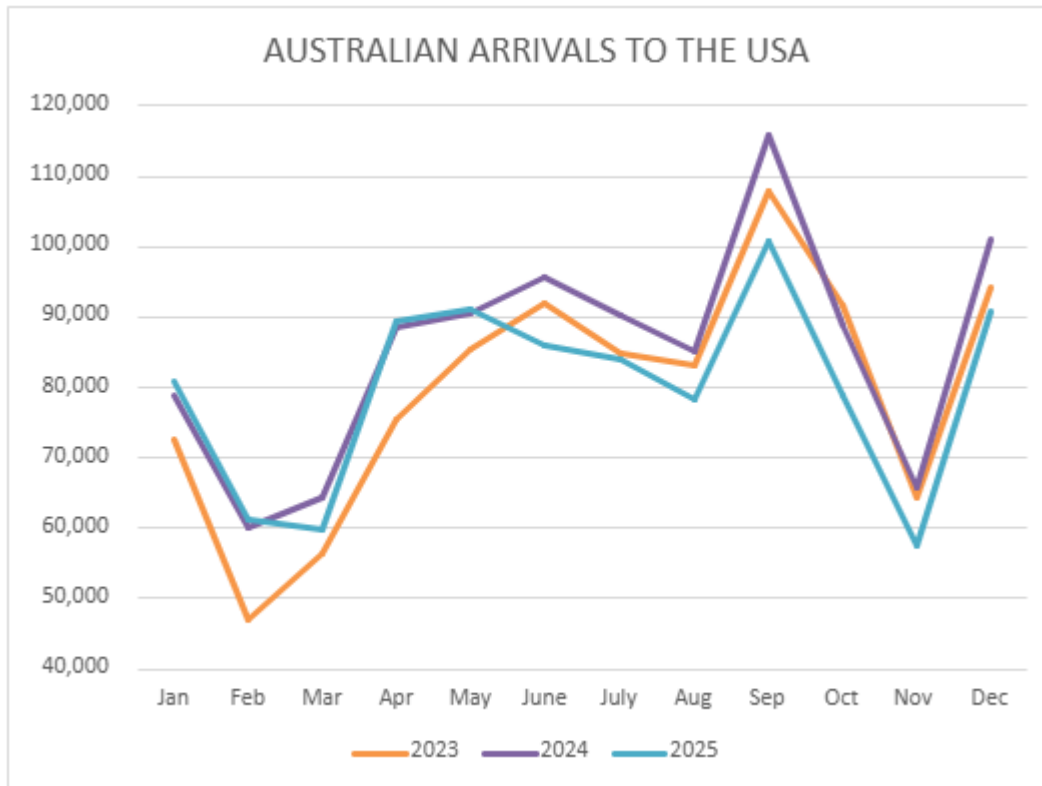


ABOUT TSUSA

Global Partner Programming

Visitation to the USA.

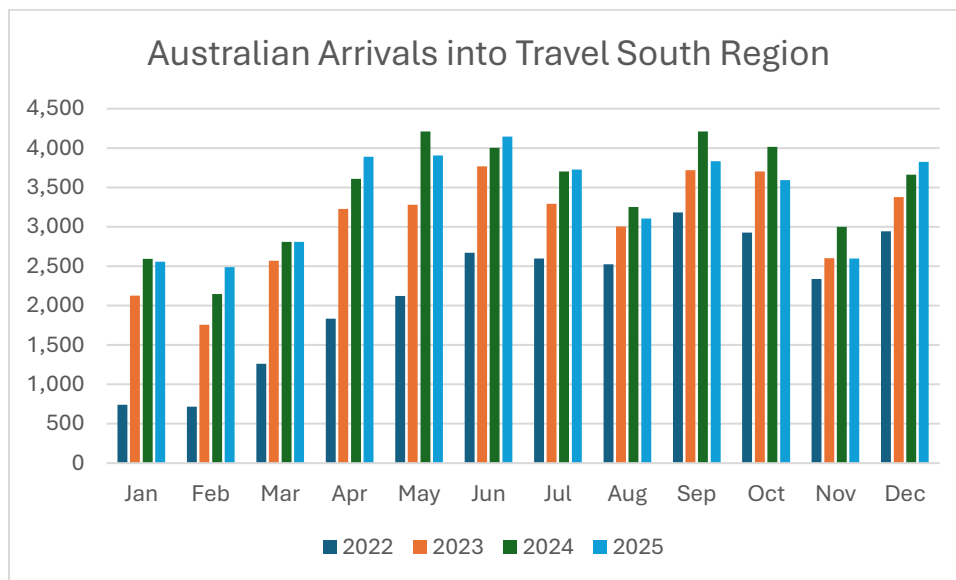
December arrivals reached 90,830, down -10% YoY. 2025 arrivals now site at 958,576 down -6% YoY. Australia ranked 11th among long-haul markets for the full year





Visitation to Travel South States

December saw a 4.4% increase in arrivals into the Travel South region. Australian YoY arrivals are currently down -2 % (December 2025)



Ports of Entry – Australia to the USA:

- **Texas** continues to outperform other regions on a year-on-year basis, supported by increased airlift, comparatively stronger value, and ongoing interest in cowboy and Western culture.
- **Hawaii** remains the weakest-performing entry point, as high prices continue to push Australian travelers toward Asia and other closer-to-home destinations.
- **California** continues to dominate in terms of overall market share; however, increased airlift into New York and Texas is putting pressure on this position, alongside ongoing value and price sensitivity driving a year-on-year decline in visitation.
- **Florida** benefited from cruise-led demand and multigenerational travel.
- **New York** recorded a smaller year-on-year decline, supported by strong direct airlift, though growth remains constrained by value considerations that are less pronounced in markets such as Texas.

Port of entry	December arrivals	2025 total arrivals	2025 YoY difference
California	45,822	444,274	-9.1%
Hawaii	10,199	122,018	-15.7%
New York	8,474	86,962	-5.3%
Texas	13,037	102,262	+17.5%
Florida	2,602	31,186	+4.2%
All other ports	10,705	171,872	-5.9%

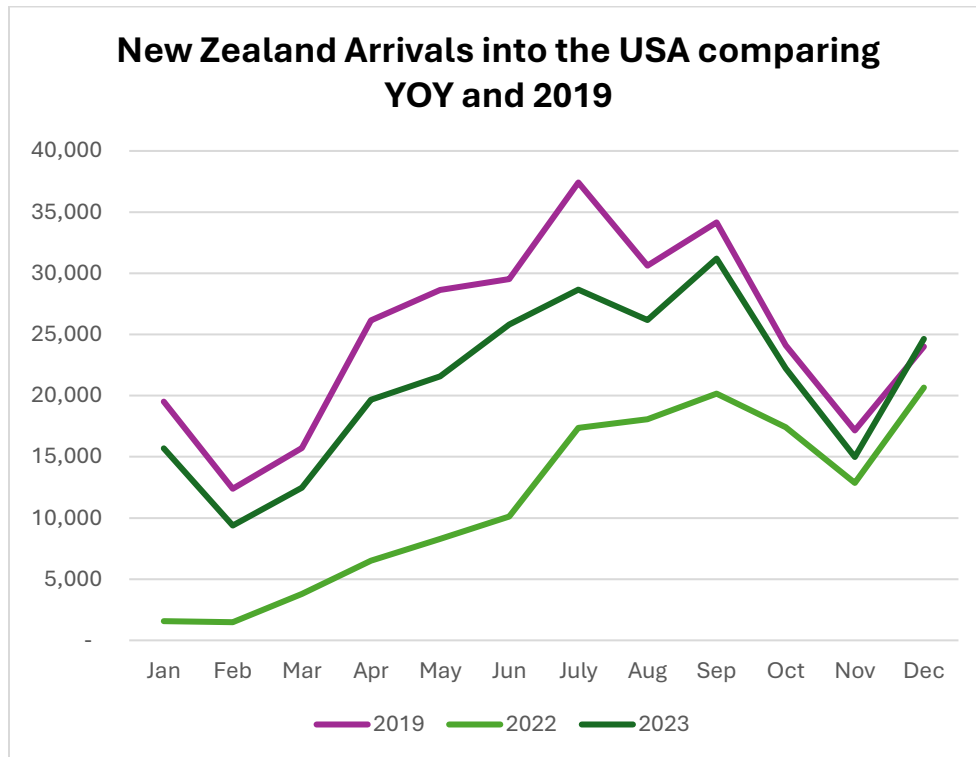




New Zealand:

December saw 18,596 arrivals from New Zealand down 18% YoY. Total arrivals for 2025 were 230,074 down -10% year-on-year.

The decline is closely linked to New Zealand's weaker economic conditions and ongoing price pressures, which are dampening long-haul travel appetite.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- International Showcase Report
- January Newsletter
- Where Music was Born - Helloworld & Chris Watson Travel Campaign
- H2 Press Office Pitching
- IMM scheduling and preparation





		Q1 TOTAL	Q2 TOTAL	Jan
9 partners AL/KY/LA /MS/MO/ NC/SC/TN /ROTS	Australia			
	Trade			
	Trade Meetings/Trainings	69	178	7
	Number of Agents Trained	114	226	0
	Travel Trade Newsletter Recipient	4068	15,920	3811
	Trade Newsletter Open Rate	28.37%	27.27%	25.85%
	Managed Media			
	Media Meetings	15	39	6
	Total number of articles published	38	36	5
	Impressions	41,719,406	6,136,659	1,408,038
	PR Newsletter Recipient	364	1,057	346
	PR Newsletter Open Rate	47.80%	43.82%	49%
	Social Posts			
	Facebook Page			
	Followers	9,200	9,200	9,192
	Likes	9,200	27,600	9,192
	Facebook Posts			
	Reach	515	1,113	135,600
	Views	1,073	2,069	47,004
	Likes	8	14	0
	Comments	0	0	0
	Shares	0	0	0
	Instagram			
Reach	21	18	9,300	





	Views	527	762	24,600
	Followers	18	32	25
	Likes	25	20	5
	Comments	0	0	0
	Shares	0	0	0





II. COMMUNICATIONS & PR

- GMM 2026 Continued Outreach
- H2 Press Office Pitching
- IMM scheduling and preparation
- Earned media Coverage Book
- Global Market Media Place 25 media Coverage Book





COVERAGE:

KARRYON

"The South has my heart": Travel South USA Ambassador Chris Watson Travel's MD on the appeal of the South

Chris Watson is no stranger to the US South, having visited all 12 states in [Travel South USA](#) and hosted countless tour groups on bespoke itineraries. With [Chris Watson Travel](#) honoured as a Travel South USA Ambassador for significant contributions to promoting the region, he shares why his heart belongs to the South.



Chris Watson Travel Managing Director Chris Watson (in Nashville, Tennessee) shares why he has big love for the American South. Image: CWT/Jake Davey





Gato 7 Head of Tourism Development Penny Brand and Chris Watson Travel's Chris Watson and Melissa Missio celebrate the ambassador acknowledgment. Image: Penny Brand

This is one of the best trade shows for our business, and Travel South 2025 was one of the most successful yet, exceeding expectations due to the networking and educational opportunities and new contracts and product development discussions.

Chris Watson Travel (CWT) has a long association with the US South. What does it mean to be recognised as a 2025 Ambassador?



Travel South USA CEO Liz Bittner with CWT's Chris Watson and Melissa Missio, Gato 7 Head of Tourism Development Penny Brand & Travel South USA Chair Mark Ezell at the Travel South International Showcase 2025 honours evening.

We have invested in Tennessee for more than 20 years and focused on the US South as a whole for the last five years, so it is a huge honour to be recognised with this award. We love all the Travel South USA destinations and receiving this award is one of our proudest moments as a team. It shows the respect the South has for us and our commitment to Travel South USA.

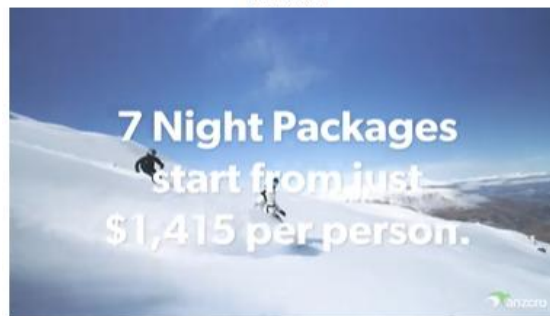




Gate 7's Penny Brand and CWT's Chris Watson at the gala evening in Kansas City, MO. Image: Penny Brand

The award reflects the team's dedication to promoting and growing the region as a destination of choice, taking hundreds of clients there through tours and FIT itineraries each year. The accolade encourages us to find even more hidden gems of the South to share with our clients.

▼ ADVERTISING ▼



What has you excited for 2026 after attending the Travel South International Showcase?



Chris Watson and Melissa Missio (front) with a tour group at the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville, Tennessee, this year. Image: CWT/Jake Davay

I don't want to give away too much of our plans, but we are excited to launch a new brand specialising in US South experiences. Our attendance at Travel South Showcase 2025 will help us create new tours to new destinations and introduce more clients to hidden gems.





Our recent Travel South USA campaign achieved our biggest-ever growth of 62 per cent and the sales figures were so large, we employed another team member to assist with our US tours and itineraries. We hope to replicate this success in a new 2026 campaign.

What are some of the lesser-known but must-see destinations in the US South that would appeal to Australian travellers seeking unique experiences?



South Carolina's Myrtle Beach is a hidden gem for Aussies to discover. Image: Travel South USA

How long do you have? My list could go on and on. For starters, Norfolk, Virginia is a beautiful destination with so much to see; Huntsville, Alabama with its arts scene; Lafayette and its surrounds in Louisiana have amazing food, Cajun culture and community events; and Muscle Shoals, Alabama, for its musical heritage. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, while already popular with American tourists, is another place that Australians fall in love with when they visit and experience the destination firsthand.

With strong music heritage in cities like Nashville, Memphis and New Orleans, how can Australians experience the US South's musical legacy and diverse genres?



CWT clients enjoy exclusive access to iconic music venues, such as Nashville's The Bluebird Cafe. Image: CWT, Jake Davey

From blues to bluegrass, Australians can experience so much music in the US South, not just in Nashville, Memphis and New Orleans. As well as a Travel South USA Ambassador, we are also the leading music tourism operator in Australia, and our team is always happy to help advisors and clients. As I mentioned earlier, watch this space for new launches.





How does the US South's natural beauty compare to other regions, and what opportunities does it present for packages?



Bourbon, bluegrass and horses in Kentucky.

Within the South, you can experience mountains, rivers, beaches and forests all in one day. There are fewer crowds, it's greener and the air feels cleaner, promoting dark sky tourism opportunities, unique accommodation and historic outdoor experiences, such as Kentucky's equine industry, for tailored itineraries, packages and road trips that appeal to different travellers' interests.

How can Australians experience Southern hospitality, and how can travel advisors market this as a key selling point for tours and experiences in the region?



Welcome event at Ole Red on CWT's hosted 2025 Nashville tour. Image: CWT/Jake Darvey

The best way is to experience it firsthand with in-depth knowledge, curated itineraries and support from Travel South USA. Organisations such as Travel South USA, Brand USA and Visit USA will all assist advisors with learning and education – knowledge is key and builds trust with clients.

Identify clients who may have already visited the US, or those seeking authentic experiences – the US South will appeal to Australians who want meaningful experiences and connections when they travel.

To book tailored Travel South USA tours and exclusive itineraries, visit [chriswatsontravel.com.au](https://www.chriswatsontravel.com.au)

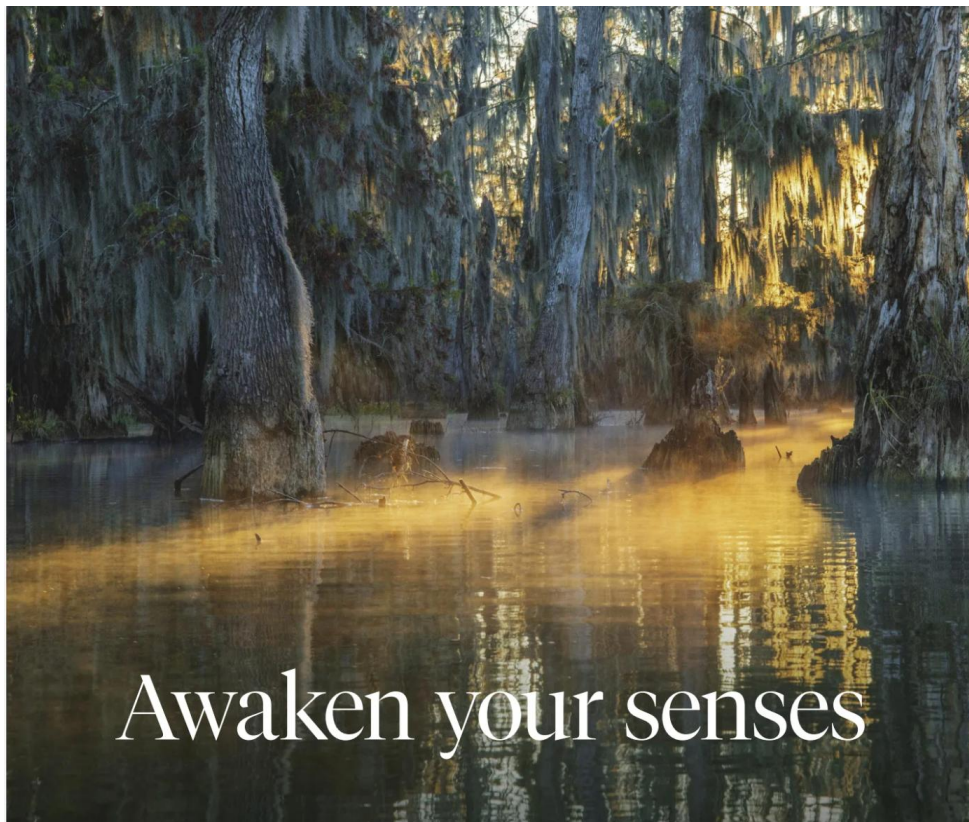
Chris Watson is also an inaugural Karryon Travel Advisor Board member.

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





TRAVEL INSIDER



Awaken your senses

Louisiana thrills with its intoxicating mix of Cajun flavours, lively jazz and bayou adventures. From the sultry streets of New Orleans to crustacean culture in Lafayette, this gumbo of music, food and history will enliven your spirit.

SEE
Explore other-worldly landscapes

Louisiana's mystical, untamed bayous, forests and waterways call for exploration. Take a kayak tour through the Atchafalaya Basin (above; mcgeesswamptours.com), the largest river swamp in the United States and 30 minutes east of Lafayette, where cypress groves appear to levitate above misty waters and alligators snooze lazily on the banks. Travel three hours north-west of New Orleans to Kisatchie National Forest to hike trails and spot deer, armadillos and wild turkeys. And don't forget to look up – the majestic bald eagle soars over this area.

FEEL
Embrace the carnival spirit

Home to more than 400 festivals each year, Louisiana knows how to party. From the glitter-soaked parades of Mardi Gras (opposite top; explorelouisiana/mardigras) and the rhythms of Jazz Fest (nojazzfest.com) in New Orleans in spring to autumn's popular Festival Acadiens et Créoles (festivalsacadiens.com) in Lafayette, celebration is a way of life in the South. Whether it's savouring a traditional 'po' boy, honouring Tennessee Williams or relishing a blues performance, the state's extensive events calendar ensures there's no shortage of fun to be had.





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TRAVEL INSIDER | EXPLORE LOUISIANA



SMELL
Breathe in fragrant floral scents
in a historic neighbourhood

New Orleans' Garden District is pure Southern charm. Streets lined with magnolias and historic mansions swathed in ivy make this uptown area an alluring part of the city. Matching the district's mood with its sumptuous decadence, the Hotel Saint Vincent (right; saintvincentnola.com) is a 19th-century beauty reborn with modern flair. Lounge by the courtyard pool and sip a Creole Cocktail in the guest-only Chapel Club before stepping inside ROOM 120 for local music, poetry and storytelling.



TASTE
Devour mudbugs for supper

With a thrilling blend of French, Spanish, African and Creole influences, Louisiana's cuisine is not for the flavour timid. From gumbo with smoky andouille sausage (left) to rich, savoury jambalaya and sugar-dusted beignets, every bite reflects the state's melting-pot history. Experience the authentic Southern spirit at the annual Mudbug Madness Festival (mudbugmadness.com), a celebration of crawfish held across May's Memorial Weekend in Shreveport in the north-west of the state. Or embark on a crawfish farm tour in Jeff Davis Parish (jeffdavis.org), 45 minutes from Lafayette, to learn about the crustaceans' habitat and harvest. You'll also see alligators up close - and even get to hold a hatchling.

HEAR
Tune into zydeco for breakfast

Start your day the Louisiana way with coffee, crawfish étouffée over grits and high-vibe tunes at Buck & Johnny's (buckandjohnnys.com) legendary Saturday morning zydeco breakfasts in Breaux Bridge, a 20-minute drive from Lafayette. Don't forget to wear your cowboy boots and join the locals to two-step to the lively mash-up of Creole, Cajun, blues and rock'n'roll. With so many musical influences, rhythm reigns across the state: think joyful Cajun reels at Fred's Lounge (fredsloungemamoula.com) in Mamou and the Blue Moon Saloon (bluemoonpresents.com) in Lafayette or swinging jazz at New Orleans' Preservation Hall (preservationhall.com).



Fly to Dallas Fort Worth with Qantas and American Airlines, and onwards to New Orleans. Start planning at qantas.com

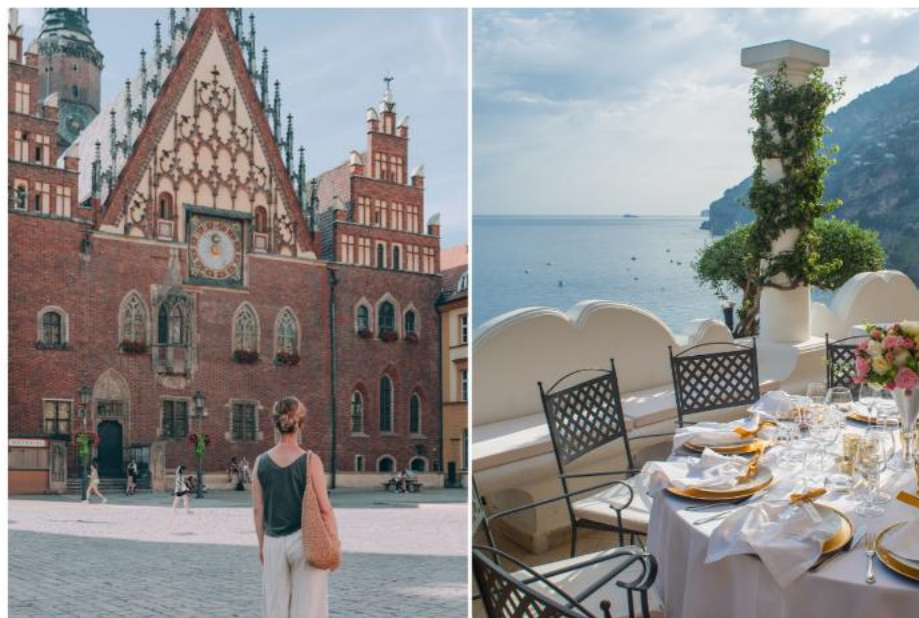


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The 16 best destinations for food lovers to visit in 2026, according to the Michelin Guide



1 of 18

Attribution: Supplied

By [Kristine Tarbert](#)

January 15, 2026 - 12:52pm

For many travellers food is one of the biggest motivators when choosing a holiday destination.

If you're after some inspiration, the Michelin Guide has just published its list of the 16 best food destinations worth travelling for in 2026.

From old favourites to new places benefiting from exciting openings and major events are some of the most mouth-watering places to visit this year.





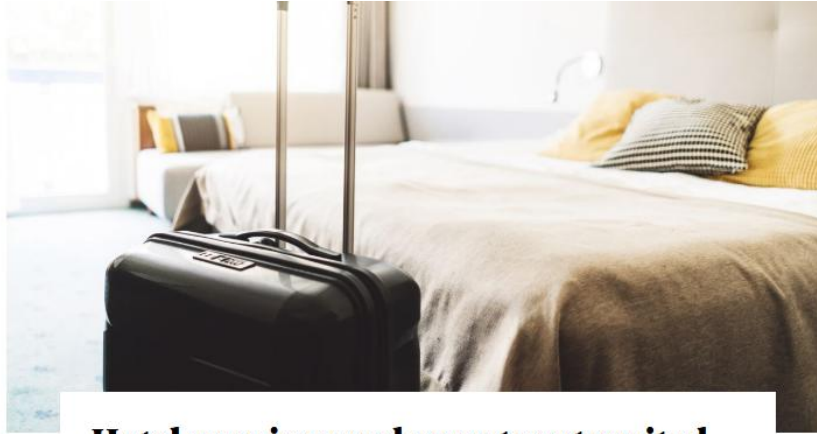
14 of 18

Attribution: Getty

The American South

Think places like Alabama, Atlanta, [Louisiana](#), Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee, with experts saying the region is benefiting from a "new culinary clarity".





Hotel openings and news to get excited about in 2026

By [Sarah Swain](#) | 3 days ago

Staying in a hotel, either on a city break or a longer holiday is a treat for anyone.

Companies are rolling out new resorts and hotel in Australia and around the world.

Here are some of the most exciting new hotels and resorts to dream about visiting in 2026.





Songteller by Dolly Parton, Nashville, USA

A new hotel from legendary songstress Dolly Parton will open in June 2026.

The new Songteller hotel in downtown Nashville, will have 245-rooms and aims to "celebrate Dolly's life, music, and legacy through an immersive, themed experience that only she could inspire."



Six 'sisters suites' are on offer for groups and girls getaways. (Supplied)



A new hotel fro legendary songstress Dolly Parton will open in June, 2026. (Supplied)

The hotel will feature the Dolly's Life of Many Colours Museum rooftop bar, live entertainment.

Six 'sisters suites' are on offer for groups and girls getaways.

The hotel will also have two venues: Parton's Live, offering songwriter sessions with shared plates and cocktails, and Jolene's, a rooftop.





ESCAPE

This southern US city has great vibes and is overlooked by most Australian tourists

American varsity towns make great travel destinations, but most Aussies will never experience their college spirit.

[Ash Jurberg](#)

🕒 2 min read January 30, 2026 - 6:21AM **ESCAPE**

[Add to favourites](#)

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Standing on my seat, I screamed along to “Callin’ Baton Rouge”, a song I’d learned just hours earlier.

Around me, 13,000 LED bracelets pulsed purple in sync. The middle-aged man in front of me stood on his seat screaming like a teenager at a Taylor Swift concert. I’ve been to AFL grand finals and World Cup soccer matches, and this was just as intense. Yet this was women’s college basketball. No university sporting event in Australia could draw a crowd like that.





At 52, I was experiencing American college life for the first time. My wife, Cece, went to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. She insisted for years I needed to see college life first-hand. That three-day visit opened my eyes. College towns are travel destinations Australians completely overlook.

Everywhere I looked, people wore LSU's colours of purple and gold. Strangers yelled "Geaux Tigers" to each other on the street. Here was a city unified by a university.



I've been to AFL grand finals and World Cup soccer matches, and this was just as intense. Picture: Ash Jurberg.

Breakfast on game day at Chimes, a local institution, showed the culture spans all ages. At the bar, college students sat with faces painted purple and gold. In the corner, three generations of one family filled a booth in matching basketball gear. Octogenarians wore sparkly gold jackets and glitter eyeshadow, channelling coach Kim Mulkey's famous rhinestone-covered outfits. Taking in the scene, I ordered fried crawfish and boudin balls. Different from my standard avo on toast.

By game time, I was wearing a new LSU basketball shirt. Not because Cece insisted, but because I wanted to be part of the tribe. Tickets cost just \$20 (about \$30) and were readily available. A full marching band played while cheerleaders tumbled. When "Callin' Baton Rouge" played, the entire arena sang in unison. At the first-half buzzer, LSU's point guard sank a three-pointer, and the arena erupted. I high-fived the middle-aged Swiftie in front of me.





Football dwarfs even basketball. Death Valley, LSU's football stadium, seats 104,000 people. On game days, up to 250,000 people pack the campus for the game and tailgating. Fans set up barbecues and eskies days in advance, inviting strangers to join their pre-game parties. Cece insists the tailgating is better than the game itself. Even without tickets, you're part of game day.

The mascot takes it to another level. Beside the stadium, a Bengal tiger named Mike lives in an enclosure. Cheerleaders used to ride atop Mike's trailer as it was wheeled through the stadium and parked beside the opponents' locker room but concerns about his welfare ended his trips to games in 2015.



Death Valley, LSU's football stadium, seats 104,000 people. On game days, up to 250,000 people pack the campus for the game and tailgating.

The experience extended beyond game day. Walking the campus felt like entering the American college world I'd only seen in films. Tour groups explored the sprawling grounds. Fraternity and sorority houses lined the lakeshore. Music and laughter poured from open windows. I joked about crashing a party, but Cece reminded me I'm not 18.





I might have missed my window for frat parties, but the alumni culture had no age restrictions. Cece's former roommate, Callie, drove five hours from Shreveport to meet us at their favourite bar. She brought her husband, Jacob, and introduced us to other LSU graduates. I felt like an honorary Tiger. That welcoming spirit isn't unique to LSU. College towns across America share this same passion.

More Coverage



[Louisiana's 5 spookiest experiences for travellers](#)



[I spent 3 days in New Orleans, this is the ultimate itinerary](#)



An hour from New Orleans, Baton Rouge fits easily into any Louisiana itinerary.

An hour from New Orleans, Baton Rouge fits easily into any Louisiana itinerary. Campus hotels welcome visitors year round, and locals at any bar will teach you the chants.

I'm already planning my return to watch LSU play at another college town I'd never have thought to visit. Geaux Tigers!





COMMUNICATIONS & PR

Media Contacts (phone calls, emails, personal meetings)

Contacts	Interest/Status	Follow-up/Next step
Alexis Buxton-Collins Freelancer (Qantas, Escape, Explore, NZ Herald, AFR)	Met with Alexis to discuss his travel plans for the next few months. In terms of USA, he's keen to travel to the USA, but noted US content is a bit slower to get secure commissions although media outlets are still taking stories.	N/A
Sarah Pollok Magazines Editor, NZ Herald	Met with Sarah Pollock to get a read on how US content is being perceived in the NZ market. She said that they will always cover USA content, but there is some hesitation for Kiwi's travelling to the USA mainly still around the border narrative. Sarah mentioned that when she speaks with Qantas and other airlines, New Zealanders are booking trips to the USA just less far in advance. She was very positive about receiving US content, and said she thinks it's now more important than ever to be sharing real stories of what its like on the ground in these destinations to support tourism.	N/A
Marcus Hurley, Man of Many	Shared MOM's new vertical The Monthly Escape. A new monthly native travel platform focused on converting inspiration into bookings. Each month, a curated selection of travel offers is featured across Man of Many's website, a dedicated EDM to 130,000+ subscribers, and social channels. Partners supply a travel offer, imagery and booking link, with Man of Many managing all editorial and amplification. The platform reaches high-intent travellers at scale, delivering a monthly reach of 18.5 million, with flexible one, three or six-month participation options available across 2026.	Catching up in March
Steve Madgwick, Freelancer	Walked through current priorities for Travel South plus GMM 2026	N/A
Michael Turtle, Time Travel Turtle	Walked through current priorities for Travel South plus GMM 2026	N/A





Ricky French, Freelancer	Has quite a lot of famils currently and is unavailable during GMM.	
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III. TRAVEL TRADE

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

Contacts	Interest/Status	Follow-up /Next step
Melissah Missio Chris Watson Chris Watson Travel	Supporting for WMWB Campaign and activation at Tamworth Country Music Festival.	N/A
University of Thaslam Tennessee	Presentation on importance of 'Tourism as an Economic Engine - How Smart Destinations Marketing Creates Real Community Impact with 21 attendees.	N/A
Blake Newell Marketing Manager Envoyage	Envoyage are maintaining their growth with 1800 worldwide (AU, NZ, South Africa, USA & Canada) 1200 AU Independent, 1000 Envoyage (540 Businesses). They make up 20% of FCG Leisure TTV of 20%. US Sales have slowed slightly but they have seen growth from Infinity Holidays system. Their Nation Conference is 14-17th August in Cairns. Their preferred booking systems are Infinity Holidays and RoomRes.	N/A
Cola Maurirere Operations Manager Travel @ 60	Haven't done much to the USA yet but planning on attending IPW in 26 Target audience is strong with good repeat clients More mid-market products, but planning on growing luxury brands Mainly focused on Touring (30%) and cruise (70%) but want to aim for 50/50 Have big ambitions for expansion into USA and are prioritising developing tours for 2027/28.	Ongoing
Ali Hughes North American Product Manager Jordan Carpenter Marketing Manager Helloworld	Update on Helloworld sales, with them very happy with January as US bookings up 19% YoY Ultimate Journeys USA is new touring product they will be pushing with 14 pax (max 20) Still working with ATI (escorted / self-drive) plus multi state Self-drive itineraries in the South.	Ongoing
Monique Roos Senior Commercial Specialist US Commercial Services	Discussion and meeting with Monique Roos on using the US Consulate General residence for the Travel South Mission in June. She has sent the request to the residence.	Ongoing





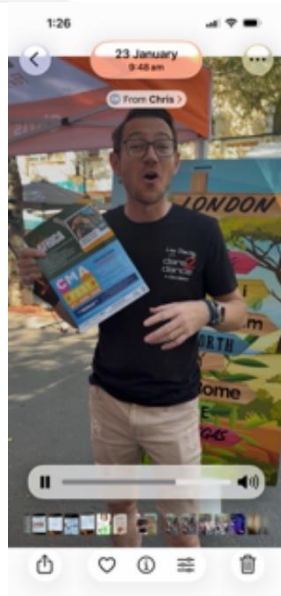
<p>Adam Townson Head of Product</p> <p>Travel Associates</p>	<p>Magazine on hold but they are celebrating 28yo anniversary in 2029 Still High-end client base with 80% repeat pushing their "One of a kind' itineraroes Australia's most loved and trusted travel advisors 60 TA across AUS and NZ (6 in NZ) Strategy: Core Growth / New Growth (Reserve) / Loyalty (world 360)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical client / 65yo plus ((Net worth 7 millions) • Henry's (high earner not rich yet, net worth \$2m) • Ultra High Net Worth (\$46m) - Reserved by TA <p>Average transaction per month \$240000 300+ advisors Travelers stay: 2-3 weeks in the US Self-drive or Tour or cruise (3 nights stay average)</p>	<p>Will reinvide to IS in 2026</p>
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CAMPAIGNS & ACTIVITY

Where Music Was Born – Chris Watson Travel



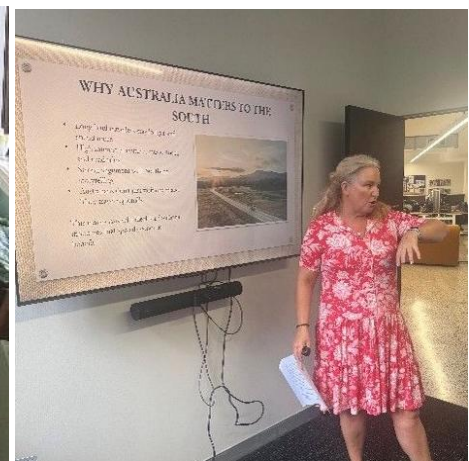




Thaslam University of Management and Entrepreneurship

Presentation to Thaslam University on the importance of “Tourism as an Economic Engine in the South”

How smart destination marketing creates real community impact.





RESOURCE CENTRE UPDATES

What's On:



February 23, 2026

Hilton Head Seafood Festival

Hilton Head Island's premier seafood celebration returns with a week-long feast of Lowcountry flavors. Sample fresh coastal dishes, enjoy chef demos, wine and cocktail tastings, live music, waterfront events and cultural experiences. From seafood tastings to culinary master classes and lively entertainment, this festival is a tasty tribute to Southern heritage and hospitality.

(more...)



February 1, 2026

Mardi Gras in Louisiana 2026

Louisiana celebrates a month-long Mardi Gras season leading up to Fat Tuesday on February 17, 2026, with parades, balls, music and colorful traditions across the state. From New Orleans' Carnival season starting January 6 with krewe parades and festivities to lively celebrations in Lafayette, Baton Rouge and Lake Charles, there's a party for every style of reveler. (more...)

What's New:

January 2025

Louisiana Hot Sauce Trail

Turn up the heat with the new Louisiana Hot Sauce Trail, a mobile exclusive pass celebrating the state's bold culinary heritage. Explore curated hot sauce makers, restaurants and retailers, redeem special discounts, and earn prizes along the way, with the pass delivered instantly to your phone.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Kansas City Hosts FIFA World Cup 26

Kansas City is gearing up as a proud host city for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, welcoming global soccer fans to GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium. The city will host six matches including group play, a Round of 32 game and a quarterfinal, showcasing world-class teams and energizing local culture.

[LEARN MORE](#)







Newsletters – What’s New and Noteworthy in the South for 2026

TRADE Newsletter – Recipients: **3811** Open Rate: **985 (25.85%)**

PR Newsletter – Recipients: **346** Open Rate: **166 (47.98%)**



What’s New & Noteworthy in the South for 2026

From bold new attractions and milestone celebrations to Michelin-recognized dining and global sporting events, the South is stepping into 2026 with unmatched energy. Across its cities and states, travellers will find powerful cultural storytelling, innovative museums, reimagined landmarks, and unforgettable food journeys. Whether following flavour trails, celebrating America’s history, or experiencing world-class festivals and events, the year ahead promises rich discoveries, vibrant communities, and memorable adventures at every turn.

[Learn More](#)





LOUISIANA

Turn Up the Heat in Louisiana

Spice lovers can explore all seventeen fiery stops across Louisiana, from bold small-batch hot sauce makers to iconic factory tours like Tabasco. The trail serves up unforgettable experiences, including quirky, only-in-Louisiana attractions such as the Hot Sauce Shrine at the Abita Mystery House. Each stop delivers flavour, fun, and history, inviting travellers to taste, learn, and feel the heat while discovering the state's rich culinary culture. Perfect for road trips, foodies, and adventurous Southern explorers.

[Read More](#)



MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi Takes Center Stage in 2026

From MICHELIN-recognized restaurants along the Coast, in Oxford, and in Jackson to new cultural trails and festivals across the Delta, Mississippi's travel scene is thriving. Travellers can look forward to immersive museum openings, milestone anniversary celebrations, vibrant food-focused events, and community-driven arts festivals statewide. With rich flavours, deep history, and welcoming towns at the heart of every experience, 2026 is shaping up to be a standout year for exploring Mississippi from coast to countryside adventures.

[Read More](#)



MISSOURI

Missouri Welcomes the World in 2026

In 2026, Missouri is set to welcome international travellers as Kansas City hosts the FIFA World Cup. The city will stage six matches alongside a large public Fan Festival on the lawn of the National WWI Museum and Memorial. Fans can watch the games together, enjoy live entertainment, and savor Kansas City's most delectable dishes, creating an unforgettable celebration of sport, culture, and Midwestern hospitality.

[Read More](#)



KENTUCKY

The Kentucky African American Heritage Trail

Discover more than fifty meaningful sites that honor the resilience, creativity, and lasting impact of Black Kentuckians. Walk the historic grounds of Camp Nelson, step inside Paducah's iconic Hotel Metropolitan, and explore the global legacy showcased at the Muhammad Ali Center. This powerful trail brings history to life through museums, landmarks, and stories of achievement, inviting travellers to reflect, learn, and celebrate Kentucky's vibrant, multifaceted past and living culture.

[Read More](#)





TENNESSEE

New Year, New Adventures in Tennessee

From west to east, Tennessee is welcoming the new year with exciting openings and fresh experiences. Memphis unveils the new Memphis Art Museum, adding a bold chapter to the city's creative landscape. In Nashville, Dolly Parton's SongTeller Hotel brings music-inspired stays to life downtown. Meanwhile, the Smokies shine brighter as Anakeesta introduces enchanting new Firefly Experiences. With art, music, and mountain magic, Tennessee offers endless reasons to explore statewide.

[Read More](#)



NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina Is Raising the Bar in 2026!

From stylish new hotels across the state to national culinary recognition, the year ahead is packed with standout moments in North Carolina. Travellers can look forward to the NC Zoo's new Asia exhibit, the reopening of the iconic Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, and immersive outdoor art experiences. Major events add even more excitement, from elite golf tournaments in Asheville to global soccer matches in Charlotte. Innovation, culture, and unforgettable adventures await statewide.

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ALABAMA

History, Flavour & Discovery in Alabama

With America 250 celebrations highlighting Alabama's role in the nation's story, the state is unveiling new exhibits, guided experiences, and fresh historical perspectives. National recognition from the Michelin Guide adds culinary excitement, while a growing lineup of outdoor adventures and heritage trails invites deeper exploration. From meaningful history to unforgettable flavours, 2026 promises a rich blend of discovery, culture, and Southern pride across the Heart of Dixie.

[Read More](#)



SOUTH CAROLINA

A Culinary Journey Through South Carolina

Follow the flavours from Greenville to Charleston and discover why South Carolina is the South's most exciting dining destination in 2026. Michelin-starred restaurants, Bib Gourmand favorites, and beloved neighborhood cafés line the route, transforming a scenic drive into a true culinary adventure. From innovative chefs to time-honored Lowcountry traditions, the state's evolving food culture shines at every stop. Each mile offers new tastes, warm hospitality, and unforgettable moments worth savoring.

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RHYTHMS OF THE SOUTH

Atlanta, Nashville, New Orleans
Atlanta shines with expanded civil rights storytelling, a reimagined Centennial Yards, and global energy as it hosts FIFA World Cup matches with citywide fan festivals. Nashville celebrates America 250 with new Dolly Parton attractions, the Music City Grand Prix, Michelin-starred dining, and expanded international air service. In New Orleans, immersive new museums, Michelin-recommended restaurants, refreshed landmark hotels, and larger cruise departures elevate the Crescent City experience.



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FIND OUT MORE:



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SOCIAL CONTENT UPDATE

Gate 7 Private AU/NZ Travel Trade Community – 662 Members

Penny Brand
Admin Group expert Top contributor · 2 February at 09:18 · 🌐


If your clients still think Mississippi is just a drive-through state, it's time to gently correct them. The food scene here is having a *moment* and even Michelin agrees. From the Delta to the Gulf Coast, Mississippi is serving up food with serious heritage and zero pretension.

We're talking:

- Soul food recipes passed down through generations
- Delta tamales (a Mississippi original, not Tex-Mex)
- Slow-smoked barbecue that locals will argue over endlessly
- Gulf seafood that goes straight from boat to plate
- Chefs blending Southern traditions with modern technique — without losing the soul

What makes Mississippi such a great sell is that the food isn't staged or shiny. It's honest, deeply local, and tied to music, history and place. You don't just eat well here, you understand the South better because of it.

<https://guide.michelin.com/us/en/article/dining-out/a-culinary-road-trip-through-mississippi>



GUIDE.MICHELIN.COM
A Culinary Road Trip Through Mississippi

4 · 1 comment

Like Comment Send

Connected Travel with Kathie · Follow
Hi Penny , do you cover NC and SC by any chance?
2d Like Reply

Comment as Gate


Penny Brand
Admin Group expert Top contributor · 29 January at 08:24 · 🌐

Travel South USA is seriously levelling up its culinary credentials, with the Michelin Guide now shining a light on the South in a big way. We're talking world-class dining, regional storytelling on a plate, and experiences that go well beyond "good local food".

One standout example is Auburn University's 1856 Culinary Residence, now featured in the Michelin Guide. It's a brilliant case study in how the South is blending innovation, local produce, and deep cultural roots to create dining experiences your clients genuinely can't replicate elsewhere.

If you're selling the South as more than a road trip or music trail, this is your proof point. Food is becoming a headline experience and this is the perfect intel for clients who plan trips around reservations, not just attractions.

<http://guide.michelin.com/.../auburn-university-1856...>



GUIDE.MICHELIN.COM
Auburn University is Home to the First Teaching Restaurant in The MICHELIN Guide

5 · 1 comment

Like Comment Send

Tracey Lee Flower
Fabulous 🍷
6d Like Reply

Comment as Gate





Penny Brand
Admin Group expert Top contributor · 18 January at 01:17 · 🌐

What a day 🍷🍷🍷🍷

Crawfish Haven & Mrs Rose's B&B, just outside Lafayette in Vermilion Parish, has easily been my favourite experience so far. Crawfish 🦞 hunting, followed by a proper, traditional boil. It doesn't get more Louisiana than that.

Owner and host Barry Toups also runs a charming bed and breakfast on site, making it a fantastic base for clients wanting to explore the region. So delicious!

👍 12 💬 Comment 📄 Send

Penny Brand
Admin Group expert Top contributor · 17 January at 03:00 · 🌐

Marksville, Avoyelles Parish in central Louisiana is a French Creole town well worth a visit. It's where Solomon Northrup, author of 12 Years a Slave, spent his years as a slave and was eventually freed. It's also home to the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe. Their reservation has an on site museum (\$4 entry) and includes one of the 389 burial mounds recorded across Louisiana. Further north, Poverty Point is the largest and most significant in the state. There's also an RV park & casino resort 'Paragon' and excellent brewery restaurant 'Broken Wheel'.

Nearby Bunkie, on the historic Jefferson Highway, delivers old town charm in spades. The Main Street is lined with antique stores, an old school lolly shop, and a town square dominated by a giant American flag. If you're visiting around the second weekend in June, time it for the Bunkie Festival of Corn. It's exactly as wholesome and local as it sounds.

👍 5 💬 Comment 📄 Send

Penny Brand
Admin Group expert Top contributor · 16 January at 01:25 · 🌐

Baton Rouge is a must stop on any Louisiana itinerary. Stay downtown at Hotel Indigo or the boutique Origin Hotel, right by the mighty Mississippi and within easy walking distance of the Capitol and Old Capitol buildings.

This is a city layered with history, from plantation homes to Louisiana's striking State Capitol. A visit to the Capitol Park Museum is a must for a deeper dive into the stories, culture, and complexity of the state.

For sports lovers, Baton Rouge delivers. Tour LSU's legendary "Death Valley" football stadium, or head to the Marucci Campus for a behind the scenes look at the brand behind the Official Bat of Major League Baseball.... They even do cricket bat testing 🏏

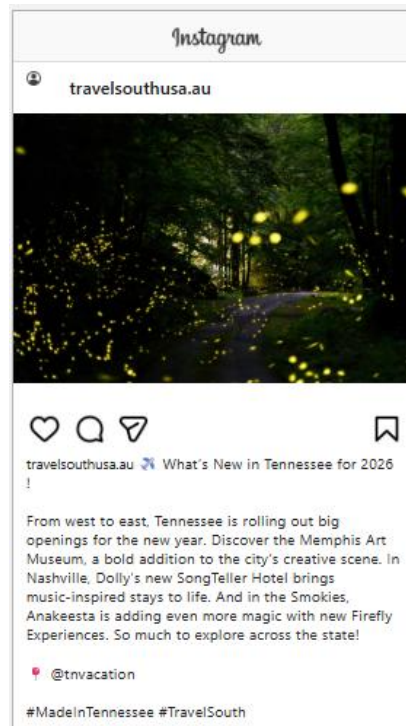
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Instagram:







Instagram

travelsouthusa.au



travelsouthusa.au ✨ North Carolina Is Raising the Bar in 2026!


From stylish new hotels across the state to national culinary recognition, the year ahead is packed with standout moments. Highlights include the NC Zoo's new Asia exhibit, the reopening of Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, immersive outdoor art, and major events—from elite golf in Asheville to global soccer in Charlotte. Innovation, culture, and unforgettable experiences await in every corner of the state.

@visitnc

#VisitNorthCarolina #TravelSouth

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travelsouthusa.au 🌍 What's New in 2026 Across the South!

- 📍 Atlanta: Experience expanded civil rights storytelling, a reimagined downtown at Centennial Yards, and global excitement as the city hosts FIFA World Cup matches with fan festivals citywide.
- 📍 Nashville: Celebrate America 250, explore new Dolly Parton attractions, cheer on the Music City Grand Prix, and savor Michelin-starred dining with new international flights bringing the world to Music City.
- 📍 New Orleans: Discover immersive new museums, Michelin recommended dining, refreshed iconic hotels, and bigger cruise departures from the Crescent City.

@discoveratlanta @visitmusiccity @neworleans





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📍 @alabamatravel

#SweetHomeAlabama #TravelSouth

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📍 @discover_sc

#DiscoverSouthCarolina #TravelSouth





Facebook:

 Travel South USA (AU, NZ) 6 January · 🌐

🔥 Turn Up the Heat on the Louisiana Hot Sauce Trail

Spice lovers can explore all 17 stops across the state—from bold small-batch makers to iconic factory tours like Tabasco. Along the way, discover quirky, only-in-Louisiana stops like the Hot Sauce Shrine at the Abita Mystery House 🌶️. Every stop adds flavor, fun, and a little heat to your journey.

📍 @explore.louisiana

#ExploreLouisiana #TravelSouth



 Travel South USA (AU, NZ) 8 January · 🌐

🌟 Explore the Kentucky African American Heritage Trail

Discover more than 50 meaningful sites that honor the resilience, creativity, and impact of Black Kentuckians. Walk the historic grounds of Camp Nelson, step inside Paducah's iconic Hotel Metropolitan, and experience the global legacy of the Muhammad Ali Center. This trail brings powerful stories to life and invites travelers to celebrate Kentucky's vibrant, multifaceted past.

📍 @kytourism

#KentuckyTourism #TravelSouth





 Travel South USA (AU, NZ) 15 January at 10:00 · 🌐

📍 What's New in Tennessee for 2026!

From west to east, Tennessee is rolling out big openings for the new year. Discover the Memphis Art Museum, a bold addition to the city's creative scene. In Nashville, Dolly's new SongTeller Hotel brings music-inspired stays to life. And in the Smokies, Anakeesta is adding even more magic with new Firefly Experiences. So much to explore across the state!

📍 @tnvacation

#MadeInTennessee #TravelSouth



 Travel South USA (AU, NZ) 22 January at 10:00 · 🌐

🌍 What's New in 2026 Across the South!

📍 Atlanta: Experience expanded civil rights storytelling, a reimagined downtown at Centennial Yards, and global excitement as the city hosts FIFA World Cup matches with fan festivals citywide.

🎵 Nashville: Celebrate America 250, explore new Dolly Parton attractions, cheer on the Music City Grand Prix, and savor Michelin-starred dining with new international flights bringing the world to Music City.

📍 New Orleans: Discover immersive new museums, Michelin recommended dining, refreshed iconic hotels, and bigger cruise departures from the Crescent City.

📍 @discoveratlanta @visitmusiccity @neworleans





 Travel South USA (AU, NZ) 13 January at 10:00 · 🌐

📅 Mississippi Shines in 2026

From MICHELIN-recognized restaurants along the Coast, in Oxford, and in Jackson to new cultural trails and festivals across the Delta, Mississippi's travel scene is thriving. Expect fresh museum experiences, major anniversary celebrations, vibrant food events, and community-driven arts festivals statewide. With so much to taste, explore, and celebrate, 2026 is shaping up to be a standout year in Mississippi.

📍 @visitms

#VisitMississippi #TravelSouth



 Travel South USA (AU, NZ) 20 January at 10:00 · 🌐

🌟 North Carolina Is Raising the Bar in 2026!

From stylish new hotels across the state to national culinary recognition, the year ahead is packed with standout moments. Highlights include the NC Zoo's new Asia exhibit, the reopening of Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, immersive outdoor art, and major events—from elite golf in Asheville to global soccer in Charlotte. Innovation, culture, and unforgettable experiences await in every corner of the state.


📍 @visitnc

#VisitNorthCarolina #TravelSouth





 Travel South USA (AU, NZ) 29 January at 10:00 · 🌐

 A Culinary Journey Through South Carolina

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 @discover_sc


[#DiscoverSouthCarolina](#) [#TravelSouth](#)



 Travel South USA (AU, NZ) 27 January at 10:00 · 🌐

 History, Flavor & Discovery in Alabama

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 @alabamatravel

[#SweetHomeAlabama](#) [#TravelSouth](#)





Market Update

Economic & Market Update

The following economic announcements were made in December:

Visitation to the USA.

November i-94 arrival data (released December)

Australia:

- 57,478 arrivals in November, down 13% YoY
- Australia ranked 12th among long-haul markets for the month
- Year-to-date visits: 867,737, down 6.1% YoY
- Value and proximity continue to shape Australian travel choices, with close-to-home destinations across Asia, New Zealand and Bali dominating October volumes as travellers prioritise affordability, shorter flight times and high-impact cultural experiences.
- Cultural distinction is a key demand driver. Destinations offering a strong sense of place, food, heritage and seasonal experiences (notably Japan, Vietnam and Indonesia) continue to outperform more commoditised long-haul markets.
- Singapore recorded a sharp YoY spike in October, driven by the timing of the Singapore Grand Prix and a significant increase in air capacity, alongside strong stopover and short-break demand from Australia.
- The USA and UK softened YoY, reflecting ongoing value pressure in long-haul travel, higher airfares and increased competition from closer, better-value destinations in Asia.
- Thailand experienced its first YoY decline of the year, signalling a shift in competitive dynamics rather than a drop in overall Asia demand.
- Vietnam continues to gain share at Thailand's expense, supported by expanded air capacity and aggressively priced fares, making it one of the most cost-competitive destinations for Australian travellers right now.





Top 10 countries year-to-date January to October:

Rank	Country	Visits	Percentage growth YOY
1	Indonesia/Bali	1,507,000	+6%
2	New Zealand	1,209,410	+7%
3	Japan	803,180	+21%
4	USA	615,000	-1.4%
5	China	585,170	+19%
6	UK	564,770	+3%
7	Thailand	540,320	+11%
8	India	502,310	+11%
9	Vietnam	444,110	+20%
10	Fiji	344,100	+0.4%

Tour Operators & Travel Agencies

- TravelManagers has launched Corporate Travel Specialists (CTS), a new business travel brand giving advisors a clear pathway to expand into corporate travel alongside leisure-focused offerings. [Source](#)
- Tauck operational shift: Tauck will close its Australian sales office in 2026, moving local sales and reservations into its global network to consolidate operations and support long-term growth. [Source](#)
- Keith Prowse Travel named Football Australia's official travel partner for FIFA World Cup 2026 & 2027 experiences: they will provide exclusive experiences for supporters to follow the Socceroo's and Matilda's to North America and Brazil. [Source](#)

Traveler Insights

- Virtuoso's 2026 Luxe Report shows luxury travel shifting to ultraluxe all-inclusive, meaningful experiences, wellness, private buyouts, slower itineraries and sustainability, driven by insights from 2,400+ advisors. [Source](#)
- Australian Cruise Booking Behaviour Shifts for 2026, New Data Shows: Australians are prioritising comfort and value, with 48% booking balcony cabins, 11% suites, 45% choosing bundled fares, average lead times of nine months, and Asia cruise bookings up 45% year-on-year. [Source](#)





- Australians lead global summer travel in 2025, with 80% planning trips, 61% holidaying, average budgets of AUD\$5,180, and longer stays averaging 2.1 weeks, including extended three- to four-week trips. [Source](#)
- The US Government is proposing a new rule requiring international travellers to disclose five years of social media history, amid ongoing declines in inbound travel demand. [Source](#)
- Wellness tourism is shifting from spa-led pampering to purpose-driven transformation, with personalised, preventative and longevity-focused experiences driving growth as the global wellness economy is forecast to reach US\$9 trillion by 2028. [Source](#)
- Australian International Travel rises by 1M trips in 2025: Fresh Tourism Research (TRA) data confirms outbound travel soared to new heights in 2025, proving that travel remains a priority for Australians. [Source](#)

Air Lift

- United Airlines made history on 13 December 2025 with the first-ever nonstop Adelaide-San Francisco flight, directly linking South Australia with the USA via a thrice-weekly seasonal service. [Source](#)

Media

- **'Surprising, compelling and powerful': Industry reacts to Nine's radio sell and QMS buy.** Nine has made its biggest strategic pivot in years, walking away from radio while doubling down on digital outdoor. The company has sold 2GB, 3AW, 6PR, and 4BC to [Arthur Laundry](#) for \$56 million, using the deal to help fund its acquisition of QMS and to tilt the business further toward screens, data, and scale. CEO [Matt Stanton](#) framed the move as a clean reset for the group who are aiming to be more digitally powered. But while Nine sees a neat trade – microphones out, billboards in – the industry is still digesting what it means for audio, outdoor, agencies and the balance of power across Australian media. [Source.](#)
- **Wellness out, 'maximalisation' in: The 2026 travel trends reshaping how Aussies book holidays.** Karryon's 2026 travel trends analysis reveals a clear mindset shift from minimalism to what the industry is calling "maximalisation", where travellers are increasingly prioritising rich, layered journeys over simple escapes. Instead of single-destination trips, holidaymakers are seeking modular itineraries that blend city and nature, luxury and local immersion, and fast-paced exploration with downtime. This shift is driving demand for multi-stop itineraries, high-value experiences and accommodation that functions as a destination itself, with properties integrating local design, community activities and memorable on-site experiences to meet savvy travellers' expectations.
- **Social media and AI continue to play a dominant role in travel decision-making,** with half of all travellers still choosing destinations based on social platforms alone, underscoring the importance of compelling digital storytelling in shaping perception and demand. Beyond maximalisation, enduring thematic interests such as sustainability in practice, nature-led "coolcations," multi-generational travel, and cultural experiences (from artisan workshops to markets and festivals) are shaping how Aussies plan holidays for 2026. [Source.](#)





- **Gourmet Traveller pivots luxury experiences under new editorial leadership.** Under new editor David Meagher at the helm, Gourmet Traveller is sharpening its focus on high-end travel, lifestyle, and experiential storytelling, including greater multi-format content across print, digital, video, and events. AU/NZ audiences are increasingly receptive to aspirational, immersive travel experiences. Luxury and premium destinations now have a higher likelihood of media coverage if positioned as curated, multi-sensory experiences rather than standard destination copy. [Source](#).
- **Expedia Unpack '26: What Travel Behaviour Will Look Like in 2026** Expedia Group's Unpack '26 – a global travel trend report based on platform data (Expedia, Hotels.com, Vrbo/Wotif/Stayz) and insights from 24,000 travellers across 18 countries – reveals how people will explore the world in 2026. It identifies several major behavioural trends reshaping trip planning and travel choices next year, offering useful planning and editorial hooks for destination marketers and travel media alike.
- **Expedia Key Trends Driving 2026 Travel**
 - **Set-Jetting:** Travel inspired by film and TV locations continues to grow, with 81% of Gen Z/Millennial travellers saying screen content influences where they go – positioning screen-inspired travel as a multi-billion-dollar market.
 - **Hotel Hop:** More than half of travellers are booking multiple stays within the same destination to explore different neighbourhoods or experiences, a trend particularly strong with younger travellers.
 - **Fan Voyage:** Immersive, local sporting experiences are rising in popularity, with travellers seeking front-row, culture-rich experiences beyond mainstream sports itineraries.
 - **Slow & Nature-Led Escapes:** “Farm charm” and slow-paced destinations reflect continued interest in unplugged, nature-oriented travel supported by strong growth in reviews and booking interest.
 - **Readaways & Regional Retreats:** Trips focused on reading, relaxation and quality time (boosted by social media trends) indicate mindful and restorative travel motivations for 2026. [Source](#)





Actions

- International Showcase Report
- Melbourne Sales Calls
- Auckland Sales Calls
- Mission Planning
- Trade & PR Newsletter
- GMM 26 Final Targets
- IMM

