

A strong \$A and pent-up demand are expected to translate into growing sales for agents in 2011, according to major wholesalers.

Strong European sales predicted for 2011

By Jenny Burns

EUROPEAN wholesalers are predicting a very strong 2011 thanks to the strength of the Australian dollar and pent-up demand for European travel.

Scandinavian and Eastern European countries are expected to do particularly well as a result of new airline services and product, while the "old favourites" such as the UK, Europe, France and Germany are also gearing up for a bumper year.

Viking River Cruises Australia and New Zealand managing director, Teresia Fors, said many travellers put off long haul travel in 2010 due to the uncertain economic times during 2009, but were now ready to go ahead and plan their holidays for 2011.

"Stock markets have stabilised and the current early booking discounts are better than ever, so I see no reason why we would not see strong sales to continue for the 2011 sailing season," she said.

"The demand for river cruising will continue to grow and with obvious limiting factors such as the size of the vessels and the length of the season, booking early to secure the stateroom and sailing of choice is, of course, pivotal."

France was very popular in 2010 and was looking very popular for 2011 as well.

"For 2011 we will have three deluxe vessels for our 'Waterways of the Czars' itinerary in Russia which gives us capacity to meet the constant high demand for Russian waterways," Fors said.

Europe remains the largest repeat high-yield destination for Australian travellers but it would only continue to be so with imaginative and competitive input from wholesalers according to European Travel Experts (ETE) member Euan Landsborough.

Landsborough's Albatross Travel is one of the seven key European wholesalers making up ETE which recently staged its "most successful" consumer expos in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

"We found visitors to those events confirmed Europe's great appeal, with visitors looking for more in-depth experiences behind the tourist veneer," he said.

"For many Australians, Europe is 'the homeland' and roots need tracing and heritage exploring.

"The public is realising that you can go again and again and always find numerous new and fascinating attractions and destinations."

Beyond Travel marketing manager

Bryce Crampton said the opening up of former Soviet states had doubled the appeal of Europe.

"It has taken time for people to become aware of more relaxed rules in the east and the high degree of security that now comforts visitors to the region, but the wonders of places like Prague, Budapest, St Petersburg and Tallinn (Estonia) are now attracting huge numbers of visitors," he said.

Next year promises to be Hurtigruten's biggest year yet, with forward bookings up 145 per cent compared to this time last year according to Discover the World Marketing Australia's sales manager – cruise, Roger Condon.

"Next year will be the perfect time for Australians to start realising their travel dreams," he said.

"With the current strength of the Australian dollar, there has been no better time to explore Hurtigruten's remote destinations and unique environments."

Bunnik Tours managing director Dennis Bunnik is predicting a busy year with early sales up.

"All tours are selling well – especially our new tour, 'Spain, Portugal and Morocco' which has been launched in our 2011/12 holiday planner."

Creative Holidays managing director Andrew Yell said the strong Australian dollar was giving clients the opportunity to travel to destinations they would usually overlook.

"Traditional popular destinations such as the UK, France and Italy are expected to remain the most visited locations; however we are also seeing clients interested in rising alternative hot spots including Croatia, Turkey, Sweden and Switzerland," he said.

DriveAway Holidays chief executive sales and marketing, Chris Hamill, is another very positive about 2011.

"Obviously the Australian dollar plays a major role in consumer confidence and based on the current rates the confidence is there," he said.

"However, the looming topic of 'increasing interest rates' does not go away and the latest increases by ANZ and Commonwealth does not help confidence.

"In saying that, enquiry levels are strong and we can thank key airlines and the larger tour operators for the publicity they are throwing at Europe via their recent TV campaigns.

"From a supply point of view, I feel the past problem of a lack of cars as a result of the GFC is behind us and I am very confident about 2011."



The Arctic city of Tromsø is ideally located in the middle of the Northern Lights zone. (Photo credit – Bard Loken/Innovation Norway and 50 Degrees North)

Wholesalers confident of strong Europe sales for 2012

Early bird deals and the strength of the \$A against the euro are reportedly translating into strong sales figures for Europe and the UK for the 2012 season.



Swallows Nest, a well known landmark perched on a cliff near Yalta, Crimea, Ukraine (image credit: Insight Vacations).

By Jenny Burns

AUSTRALIA's major European wholesalers are confident of a good 2012. Strong demand for early bird deals, together with the strength of the dollar against the euro, are fuelling this confidence.

Globus Family of Brands marketing manager Christian Schweitzer said heading into 2012 all of the Globus Family of Brands were performing well in Europe as the strength of the Australian dollar made already great value tours even more affordable.

"Australians are embracing river cruising like never before, with Avalon Waterways sales up almost 50 per cent compared to last year," he said.

"Our Globus Europe and Cosmos Europe programs are showing growth on 2011 sales figures driven by generous airfare deals and free pre and post tour accommodation offers in popular destinations like Athens and Madrid."

Schweitzer said over recent years Globus had seen an increase in travel to Norway.

"I think this will continue, particularly with the strong Australian dollar making it more affordable than ever," he said.

"It seems that a lot of Australians who have visited the Mediterranean

and more traditional European destinations like France, Germany and Italy, are now keen to discover northern Europe, including Scandinavia.

"Norway is very exciting as it offers a great combination of land tours and fjord cruising. The landscape is exotic and the lifestyle is fascinating. Its fjords and waterfalls are mind blowing and the towns – from picturesque Bergen to Lillehammer, home of the '94 Winter Olympics – are truly captivating. It's a country that really leaves a lasting impression."

According to Trafalgar managing director, Matthew Cameron-Smith, the company is "leading the market" with more than 3600 definite departures secured for 2012 Europe and UK itineraries.

"This is significantly ahead of the same period last year," he said.

"With the new Europe and Britain brochure range unveiled six weeks earlier than traditional launch timings, we have received a huge surge in bookings due to increased client demand and a fantastic response to product enhancements and early bird offers.

"While all Europe and UK regions have exceeded the regular number of definite departures, a stand-out destination for Trafalgar is Italy, with over 500 definite departures secured."

Albatross Tours managing director Euan Landsborough said there had been a very strong start to the season.

"We are well ahead of where we were at this time last year," he said.

"But that is to be expected with Albatross as we are in the midst of a steady growth pattern. These first two months therefore could well just be expanded pent up past demand – people who have decided to go away regardless and were waiting for our new brochure.

"November and December sales will generally be 'new blood' for us and sales levels are therefore pivotal to a successful 2012 season. There is so much uncertainty out there and our core markets, the baby boomers, empty nesters, and self-funded retirees are very apprehensive about another global downturn.

"I expect a soft two months and we will all be busy playing catch up in February and March. This is where our cast iron guaranteed departure promises will be even more attractive to both the public and agents alike."

DriveAway Holidays national industry sales manager Nathan Baber said the company expected Europe/UK to be even better than 2011.

"Enquiries have been very strong and agents are just as hungry as us for the booking," he said.

"To make the most of 2012 we're focusing just as much on our competitors as ourselves, making sure we're offering competitive rates and more inclusions from the start."

Top performing countries included Britain, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy and Germany.

Insight Vacations is also reporting strong demand for its program.

According to managing director, Lorraine Sharp, that demand has exceeded expectations with a number of definite departures confirmed across the range. New tours to Eastern Europe had proved extremely popular while the Insight Gold program was also a winner.

Both Air France and KLM are looking forward to a strong 2012.

The strength of the Australian dollar against the euro and the likelihood of many Australians going to the Olympic Games in London and then travelling around Europe were major reasons.

Boosting Air France's optimism is extra capacity between Singapore and Paris from the end of May 2012.

"The three extra weekly rotations, bringing our total weekly frequencies to 10, will help meet strong demand that we see from the Australian business and leisure markets," said Air France KLM regional manager Australia/New Zealand Tom Reeves.

He said agents were instrumental in the airline's success by being able to promote to clients the true and unique scope of the Air France and KLM global networks, for example the 127 European Union destinations.

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sellingEurope

'Comfortable, convenient' European river cruising a winner, says travel agent

OVER the years Rosemary Preston has seen river cruising becoming an increasingly popular way for her clients to explore Europe.

"Some clients are choosing to river cruise only or are adding it to a coach touring or ocean cruising holiday," explained Rosemary, a team leader at the Sydney agency Cruiseabout Lane Cove.

As a result of a familiarisation with Viking Cruises in Russia in October, she now knows firsthand its many attractions and "what a fantastic way to travel it is".

"River cruising gives people a comfortable, convenient way to visit some of the most picturesque parts of Europe," she adds.

"There's also the convenience of unpacking once, docking close to town, and having more time in port to explore the destination. The level of service on-board, the inclusive nature of the fares (shore excursions, wine with meals), and the smaller numbers are also drawcards.



Viking Prestige on the Danube

"When I outline the benefits of river cruising to my clients versus alternate travel options, river cruising almost always comes up trumps."

Preston has found first-time river cruisers are often drawn to the Amsterdam-

Budapest route, or a portion thereof, with other itineraries becoming increasingly popular.

"The French itineraries are very appealing, but you have to book early," she said.

Emirates to launch Dublin services

EMIRATES will begin daily flights to Dublin from January 9, 2012, marking its first route to the Republic of Ireland.

The service will be operated on an Airbus A330-200 offering first, business and economy class. The daily service will leave Dubai at 7am and arrive in the Irish capital at 11.30am. The return flight leaves Dublin at 12.55pm and arrives in Dubai at 0025hrs the next day.

In other developments Emirates will be launching its third A380 service into Heathrow in January.

Dublin joins Geneva, Copenhagen and St Petersburg as recent European additions.

Emirates regional sales manager Victoria/South Australia/Tasmania and the Northern Territory, Dean Cleaver, said the three new services together with Dublin were showing strong forward bookings, particularly during the European summer.

"Since launching the service to Copenhagen in August, we've noticed that the city seems to be experiencing a popularity boom," he said.

"With its famed skills in architecture, the new Nordic Cuisine movement and its many wonders, the city appears to be on many travellers' to-visit lists."

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'This was a much more relaxing tour than our previous four 'pyjamas tours' with another company.' Jean and John

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Viking prepares for more Longships

VIKING River Cruises will in 2012 receive two more ships in the Viking Longships class, bringing the total of new vessels to six.

The ships are part of the company's \$250 million fleet development program, comprised of several complete refurbishments plus the introduction of 10 new Viking Longships by 2014.

The two new state-of-the-art ships – *Viking Embla* and *Viking Aegir* – will make their debut in July and August 2012, respectively, joining sister ships – *Viking Freya*, *Viking Idun*, *Viking Njord* and *Viking Odin* – to be christened in March 2012.

Each of the ships is 443 feet long, feature 95 staterooms per ship and include two Explorer Suites of 445 square feet.

Finnair to add Dubrovnik flights

FINNAIR will open a direct route from Helsinki to Dubrovnik in April 2012. The route will be flown three times per week from April 2 to October 10 on an A340 aircraft.

"To passengers departing from Asia, Finnair offers very fast onward connections to a comprehensive European route network, which Dubrovnik will complement," said country sales manager – Australia and New Zealand, Geoff Stone.

Creative's 'huge' product expansion

CREATIVE Holidays' 2012 Europe and UK program is set to be its most extensive to date.

"We have 2500 more hotel options brochured than we've had in our portfolio previously," said Creative Holidays' Paul McGrath. "The huge extension to our offering follows strong growth in the area and reinforces Creative Holidays as a leading wholesaler in the European market."

Oceania Cruises launches themed cruises

OCEANIA Cruises is offering themed cruises for the first time in 2012.

The new "Signature Sailings" comprise 10 voyages exploring culinary, wine, music and health and wellness themes.

Activities include seminars, hands-on classes, concerts and wine tastings.

Depending on the voyage, Chef Jacques Pépin, up-and-coming jazz musicians, and noted editors will be special guests.

Oceanic Cruises president Bruce J. Himmelstein said while groups that share the same interests have regularly sailed with Oceania Cruises in the past, Signature Sailings created a special opportunity for guests to experience the cruise in the company of fellow travellers who share their passion for the theme.

Cruises range in price from \$2275 per guest for the "Pearls of the Aegean" to \$4445 per guest for "Tuscan Artistry" while bonus shipboard credits of between \$US300 and \$500 per stateroom are on offer on all but the "Tuscan Artistry" cruise.

The "Pearls of the Aegean" is one of two vitality and wellness cruises on offer. The cruise goes from Venice to



Athens on August 8 on the *Regatta*. The other is the 10-day "Accent on Italy", which cruises from Rome to Venice on October 24 on the *Riviera*. In addition to healthy eating and fitness tips, guests will gain insights

on enhancing their mental wellness to live life to the fullest. Spinning, yoga and Pilates classes are also offered at the Canyon Ranch SpaClub and gourmet Canyon Ranch spa cuisine is available.

Int'l Rail markets new overnight Paris-Italy trains

INTERNATIONAL Rail (IR) has exclusive Australian booking access to the Paris to Italy overnight trains that started service on December 11.

The new Thello service is operated by Italian Railways and travels from Gare de Lyon in Paris to Milan and Venice and vice versa with a range of booking classes ranging from six berth couchette costing from \$155 to an individual sleeper from \$416. Respective fares from Paris to Milan are from \$121 and \$333.

International Rail is also offering

heavily discounted group fares.

IR managing director Jonathan Hume said the services provide from two to four sleeper coaches and from six to 10 with couchettes.

"Having advance access to this new service gives us the ability to assist Australian travellers in early planning for travel in 2012," he said.

However as the train was very popular, and Italy was in great demand with Australian travellers, tickets should be booked well in advance to secure preferred sleeping

accommodation. Hume said Australian agents now had exclusive access to important train services within Italy and across the border to neighbouring countries.

"Through our direct website connection to Trenitalia's new reservations system, travel agents are able to reserve trains that other rail operators are unable to access," he said.

Travel agents could also access advance purchase fares within Italy, all of which are now issued as E Tickets.

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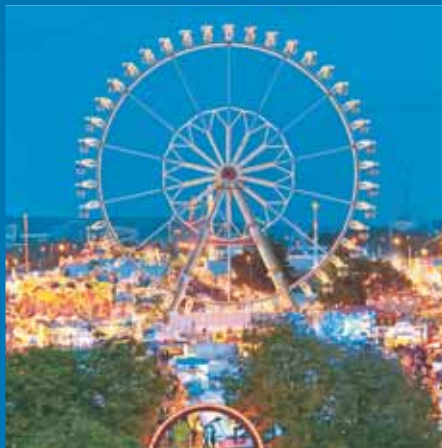
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28 Sep - 14 Oct 2012, www.stuttgart-tourist.de

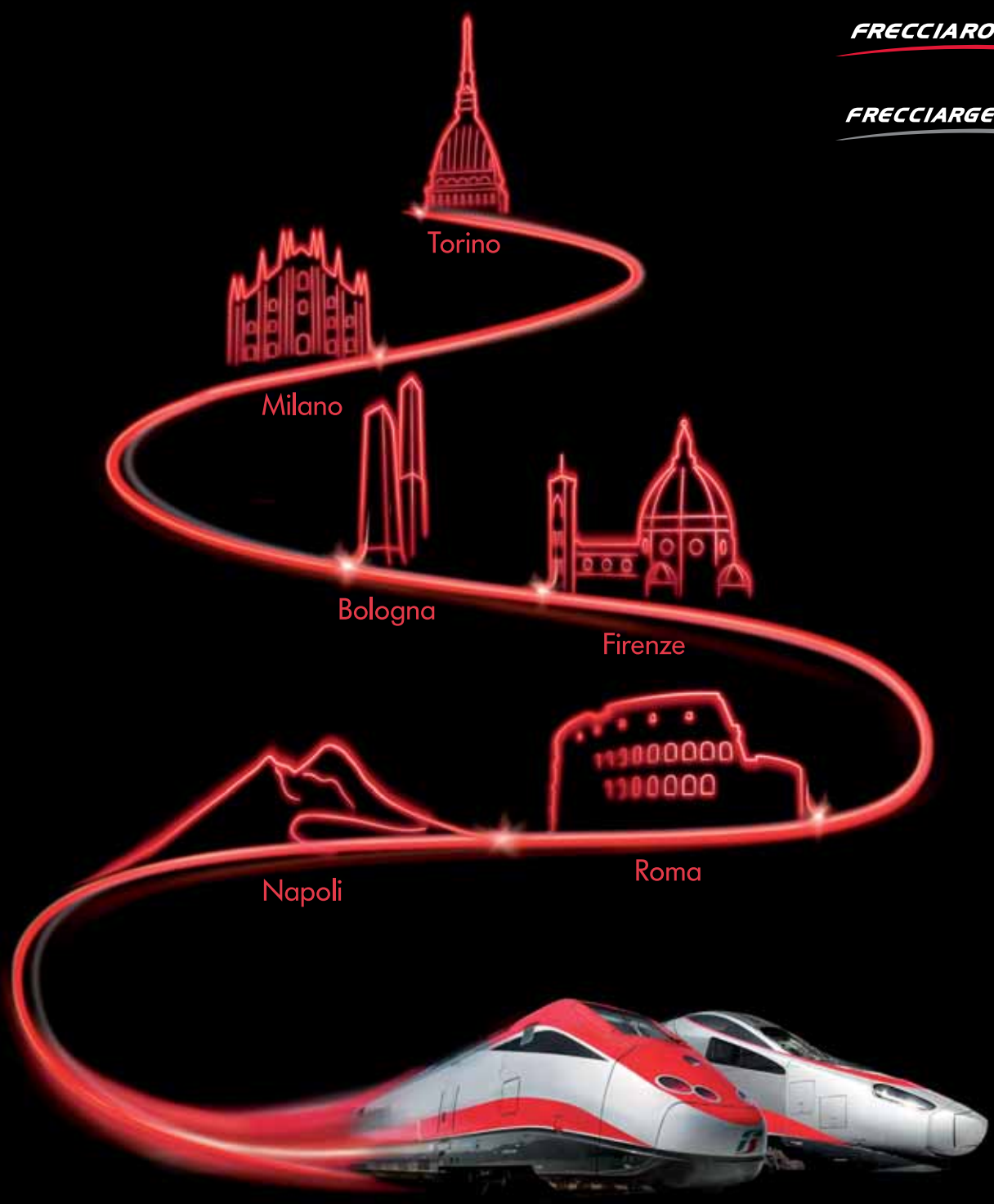


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Albatross launches three new tours

FOLLOWING the success of its 2011 Europe summer season, Albatross Tours has launched three new tours for 2012.

The eight-day “Dutch Floriade” tour has regular departures between May and September. Highlights include three nights in Amsterdam and three more nights near Venlo to attend the ‘held once in every 10 years’ Floriade Horticultural Expo.

The tour is priced at \$2589 per person (twin share).

“Using our vast experience handling Anzac Commemorative tours, we have

also launched a summer long series of eight-day commemorative tours to the Somme and Flanders commemorative sites,” explained Albatross managing director Euan Landsborough.

“The eight-day ‘All Quiet on the Western Front’ tour is led by a highly trained Battlefield Tour Manager and carefully balances visits to the grand sights of Northern France and Belgium, with a sensitive immersion into the life of the early diggers and the devastation of the World War One trench warfare.”

Starting in Paris, the tour is priced

at \$2289 per person (twin share).

Also new is the 16-day “Rhineland, Alsace and the Swiss Alps” tour departing Frankfurt, and priced at \$6189. Highlights include visiting both the Rhine and Moselle rivers, Luxembourg, staying four nights in a chateau in the French Alsace, three nights near Lake Geneva and four nights in the heart of the highest alps.

“Guests will also ride on the Chocolate train, walk in the Bernese Oberland, visit the Black Forest and follow the Alsace Wine Road,” Landsborough said.



Cappadocia, Turkey

Sun Island Tours adds new Turkey, Greece option

SUN Island Tours has introduced a new tour to Greece and Turkey.

The 16-day “Best of Greece and Turkey” includes visits to Athens, Mykonos, Santorini, Rhodes, Marmaris, Antalya, Konya, Cappadocia, Ankara, Safanbolu and Istanbul. Partially escorted and operating with a minimum of two people the tour costs from \$1775 per person which includes seven nights’ accommodation in Greece, eight nights’ accommodation in Turkey

in superior class hotels, arrival and departures transfers in Athens, ferry transportation in Greece, 15 breakfasts and five dinners. The tour is fully escorted in Turkey by an English speaking guide.

Sun Island Tours’ Claudia Vidor said the tour had been introduced to combine two of the most beautiful Mediterranean countries at a competitive price and to complement the company’s extensive offerings in Europe.

Sun Island is also reporting strong demand for its ever popular “Sun Island Dreams” tour.

This nine-night tour includes Athens, Mykonos and Santorini and costs from \$934 per person in tourist class which includes nine nights’ accommodation in Athens and in the Greek Islands, Athens city tour, hydrofoils, transfers and some meals.

Also popular is our three-day “Cooking and wine tasting in Greece” tour, priced from \$716.

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Germany's 'Magic Cities' attract growing number of Australian travellers



Münster in Westphalia: shopping arcades with town hall and tavern (credit: Tourism Germany)

AUSTRALIAN travellers' love of the Magic Cities of Germany shows no sign of abating.

From January to September 2011 Australians accounted for 345,453 bed nights in the Magic Cities of Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, Düsseldorf,

Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hannover, Leipzig, Munich, Stuttgart and Nuremberg. This was a 9.5 per cent increase on the same period in 2010.

This figure doesn't include the Christmas markets which started in the last week of November.

"These markets have become a great drawcard with Australian travellers so we are looking forward to a very strong few months ahead," said Magic Cities Germany Marketing Office Australia representative, Traute Tuckfeld.

Berlin continues to be the most popular city with Australian travellers, a trend set to continue in 2012 thanks to the opening of the new Berlin Airport.

"A number of airlines are planning to fly directly into Berlin which will result in a lot of new connections and thus more flight options for Australian travellers," Tuckfeld said.

Benefiting all of the Magic Cities was the strength of the dollar against the euro.

River cruising is another area that's boosting tourism numbers to Germany especially those cities located on major rivers such as Cologne, Dusseldorf and the historic city of Nuremberg.

"This trend is likely to continue in 2012 with more vessels and thus more cruises on offer," Tuckfeld said.

Strong enquiry for DriveAway's early bird deals

DRIVEAWAY Holidays is reporting strong demand for its range of early bird deals covering car rentals, leasing and motorhomes.

DriveAway national industry sales manager Nathan Baber said there had been a solid increase in enquiry for independent travel throughout the United Kingdom and Europe – and not just car rental.

"Peugeot Leasing enquiry is up around 30 to 40 per cent – meaning clients are planning trips of 28 days or more, with the main travel component being self-drive," he said.

Baber said Peugeot Leasing was great for European travel. "There are over 30 locations in France to collect/return to, or 14 locations outside of France with benefits being travel into Eastern Europe is permitted, anyone over 18 years with a full licence can lease the vehicle, and it's as low as \$40 per day for a brand new Peugeot with a nil excess.

"Motorhomes are also a good performer – and are popular among our 'young at heart' group.

"The European summer this year saw a decent spike in motorhome popularity and given our 2012 early bird release (it's the first time motorhomes have been included), we've seen strong enquiry for next year," Baber said.

Electronic ticket system makes sales easier

SELLING European rail tickets has never been easier thanks to the introduction of the new electronic ticket system "Print your ticket" (PYT) according to Rail Plus national sales and marketing manager, Greg McCallum.

Spain, France, Eurostar and Thalys (pictured) are all moving to PYT.

"PYT has a number of extremely useful features and has allowed access to a whole new range of discounted fares previously only bookable in Europe," McCallum said.

"It's also more flexible, more convenient, and often significantly more affordable."

PYT, which allows agents to print tickets for their clients within Australia, replaces the old systems of tickets being printed by Rail Plus and sent to the agency, or printed via a PNR at the station.

"This has two main advantages, lost tickets can be re-printed, and the tickets printed are ready to use – travellers just have to print the ticket before they get to the station and board the train," McCallum said. "There's no more waiting



for tickets to arrive and no more queues at the station."

As a result of the PYT, agents who had clients already in Europe could book tickets for them in Australia.

"All agents need do is book the ticket and provide the PYT email for the client to print."

Trafalgar adds new family experiences

TRAFAGAR'S 2012 Family Experiences brochure features two new European programs.

New European Family Experiences for 2012 include the 10-day "Sorrento and Sicily Surprise" which takes in the sights of Rome and Monte Cassino, the ruins of Pompeii, the beaches of Giardini Naxos and Sorrento. It's priced from \$2425 per person (twin share), with a young traveller discount (under 18 years) of \$245.

Also new is the 10-day "Greek Island Hopper" which starts in Athens before heading to the islands of Mykonos and Santorini. It is priced from \$2165 per person (twin share), with a young traveller discount of \$250.



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