

# Passion Play, river cruising reinvigorate bookings to Germany



*The paddle steamer "Goethe" near Oberwesel on the Rhine (credit: GNTO)*

Demand for Germany is expected to pick up again in 2010, powered by strong bookings for the once-in-a-decade Oberammergau Passion Play and surging demand for river cruising.

By Jenny Burns

**F**OLLOWING a difficult 2009 which saw the number of Australians visiting Germany drop by 4.9 per cent, 2010 is already looking very positive.

Official figures show that Australian overnight stays were up by 14 per cent in December 2009, 18.4 per cent in January 2010 and 16.2 per cent in February.

In 2009 Australians accounted for 483,000 overnight stays. Projected growth figures for 2010 were between two to three per cent; however given the strong figures to date it's anticipated the figure will be far higher, especially due to events such as the Oberammergau Passion Play.

The strong interest in European river cruising amongst Australian

travellers is also providing the destination with a major boost.

Albatross Travel Group managing director Euan Landsborough said Germany was performing outstandingly well. "We've had tremendous success with our Oberammergau programs and along with our regular summer program of tours we have well and truly exceeded our quite robust sales objectives," he said.

"It's easily our best year ever. We are back to good old times with strong early demand for our market leading European White Christmas tour program."

Lufthansa Australia general manager Kai Peters is also reporting a strong return of demand for Germany and Europe in 2010.

"Our competitive economy and business pricing attracts leisure and corporate travel alike," he said.

"River cruising and German-European multi-city tours are very popular with Australian travellers and we already have bookings for 2011 in this segment.

"Lufthansa's extensive network of 156 European destinations offered jointly with Austrian and Swiss (International Air Lines) provides our Australian passengers with an outstanding timetable in respect to flight connections."

According to Globus Family of

Brands marketing manager Australasia, Christian Schweitzer, Germany is traditionally a popular destination for Australians, but the once-in-a-decade chance to see the Passion Play performed in Oberammergau has encouraged many more to make 2010 the year to visit the country.

"Australian passenger numbers on the top selling German tours for both Globus and Cosmos – Globus' 10-day 'German Highlights' tour and Cosmos' 12-day 'Highlights of Germany' tour – have experienced significant growth in 2010 and it's no coincidence that both tours included visits to Oberammergau and the chance to see the Passion Play," he said.

Creative Holidays general manager, product, sales and marketing, Andrew Yell said Europe was a booming market out of Australia and Creative had experienced consistent growth and increased demand year on year.

"Germany has been a strong stand-alone region to date, with forward sales looking good for the rest of 2010," he said. "The top selling regions in Germany are the big cities of Frankfurt, Berlin and Munich; however demand for regional Germany continues to grow steadily with more and more travellers taking the opportunity to experience the wonderful charm of provincial Germany.

"The popularity of Germany

can be attributed to a number of things including the fascinating and complicated history of the region, its food and beer as well as a heavy emphasis on cultural pursuits. Great art, architecture, nightlife and scenery (to name just a few) means there is such diversity in appeal across the country, making it perfect for young and old, those after a city stay or for travellers after a more outdoor experience."

In 2010, the attraction of Oberammergau is being complemented by other key themes including 200 years of the Oktoberfest, International Building Exhibition (IBA) Urban Redevelopment Saxony-Anhalt 2010, 300 years of German porcelain, 60 years of the Romantic Road and 175 years of the German railways.

Looking beyond 2010, a health and fitness theme will tie in with the FIFA Women's World Cup to be held in nine German cities from June 26 to July 17, 2011.

The 125th anniversary of Germany's automotive industry is also expected to provide a powerful stimulus for visitors with Tourismus-Marketing GmbH Baden-Württemberg (home of the new Porsche Museum, together with the Mercedes-Benz Museum) just one of those seeking to promote this aspect extensively. And the 200th anniversary of the birth of Franz Liszt will provide a cultural note.



A380 – the 'quietest' First Class in the world

## Lufthansa offers 'very special flight experience'

LUFTHANSA has taken delivery of its first Airbus A380 which, according to airline chief executive and chairman, Wolfgang Mayrhuber, marks the dawn of a new era in flying for the airline's passengers.

"Passengers can look forward to a very special flight experience on board the A380," he said.

"In co-operation with Airbus, we have developed many technical solutions regarding the cabin design and furnishings which are being given a world premiere in this aircraft. Our

innovations in terms of cabin air, light systems, sound insulation and in-flight entertainment make our A380 unique."

Lufthansa has configured the aircraft with 526 seats.

"The entirely new First Class cabin with eight generously proportioned seats on the upper deck reflects the concept of individuality and offers the ultimate in comfort and technical innovation, which further enhances the travel experience," Mayrhuber said.

"Also on the upper deck is the

award-winning Lufthansa Business Class cabin with 98 seats. On the main deck, 420 seats in an impressively spacious Economy Class cabin provide an unprecedented level of passenger comfort."

Australians first had the chance to experience the aircraft on June 11 when it entered service on the Frankfurt-Tokyo route.

The A380 will also be used on the Frankfurt-Beijing route from August 25 and on the Frankfurt-Johannesburg from October 25.

## DriveAway's 2010 Germany bookings up

GERMANY is performing very well as a self-drive market according to DriveAway Holidays sales and marketing chief executive Chris Hamill.

"Our bookings are ahead of last year and are out-performing 2007 and 2008," he said.

"Up until a week ago the dollar was excellent against the euro – increasing consumer confidence. I continually need to thank the airlines as their great fares are a big contributing factor to our success on the continent."

Hamill said Germany also continued to thrive due to its proximity to Eastern Europe.

"Poland, Czech, Slovakia, Slovenia are booming and many suppliers do not allow vehicles from Western Europe to be driven into these countries except if they are collected in Germany."

A further boost was the recognition that the Romantic Road of Germany was one of the great driving experiences. Hamill said Germany was one of the most economical places in Europe to rent a motorhome.

"Our partner Mc Rent is offering some great deals for the European summer," he said.



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## Agent's insight sees Germany's 'hidden secrets' on itineraries

DESTINATIONS such as Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Lake Schwerin and Elbsandsteingebirge (the Elbe Sandstone Mountains) may not be household names in Australia, yet they could well feature on an itinerary designed by German Australian Travel director Janka Henke.

These destinations are amongst Janka's extensive list of hidden secrets in Germany – secrets she knows much about.

Born and raised in Germany, just near Dresden, Janka came to Australia in 2002 with a great knowledge of her homeland.

The purchase of the then named German-Austrian travel agency (the name changed to German Australian Travel in 2007) provided the perfect opportunity to share that knowledge with Australian travellers.

While the agency sells all destinations around the world, it's Janka's knowledge and first-hand experiences that see many Australians interested in a German holiday contacting the Brisbane agency.

"We have found that many of our customers

are so delighted with the itineraries we have designed for them in Germany they ask us to arrange their holidays to other countries," Janka said.

"We customise our itineraries to suit our clients' needs and our clients really appreciate our local knowledge."

Berlin and Bavaria remain favourite destinations with most Australians and while they feature in many itineraries, Janka also likes to recommend some lesser known destinations and experiences.

Many of these areas are located in the former East Germany which Janka got to know well while growing up (as a result of the travel restrictions facing East Germans).

"There are some truly beautiful regions complete with magnificent forests and waterways and fascinating historical cities that many people still don't know about," Janka said.

"There are also wonderful experiences, around the Cottbus area for example there are gondola rides that explore the waterways."



New Elbe bridge, Hamburg (GNTO)

## Hamburg attracts more interest

MAGIC Cities Germany is encouraging agents to look at including more German cities in the itineraries of Australian travellers.

"Berlin and Munich continue to be favourites with Australian travellers while we are seeing an increase in numbers to Hamburg this year," said Magic Cities Germany managing director Dorothea Niestert.

"We would like to see agents also include other cities which offer so much such as Cologne, Dresden, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Hannover, Leipzig and Stuttgart.

"What many travellers don't realise is each of these cities is very different and offer totally different experiences.

"While we encourage Australians to continue to include Berlin and Munich it would be great if they could also include a couple of extra cities.

"Getting around Germany is so easy

and convenient – it's very easily done."

Niestert said Berlin and Munich had always been very popular with Australians. She believes one of the reasons for the increase in Hamburg's popularity is the number of cruise ships visiting.

"River cruising is growing all the time in Germany," she said.

Niestert, who was in Australia as part of the Magic Cities Germany road show, said she was very pleased with visitor numbers from Australia.

"The Australian market performed well for us – there wasn't the decline we experienced in some other markets," she said.

"I think the continual work we do here promoting Germany, together with the product we offer including our many special events and our great culture, appeals to Australian travellers."

# Embrace train travel in Germany, says Rail Plus

RAIL Plus is urging agents to take full advantage of the German rail system.

“The corporate market is embracing trains in Germany particularly with the ease of flying into Frankfurt and having the station at the airport,” said Rail Plus national sales and marketing manager, Greg McCallum.

“It’s also a great service for leisure travellers. The station is under the airport so it’s incredibly convenient.”

McCallum said speed was a feature of the ICE trains in Germany which travel at up to 300kmph (the ICE

name originated from trial trains known as “InterCityExperimental”. Convenience was another major benefit, he said.

There are 16 daily services between Frankfurt and Munich with a travelling time of 3 hours 10 minutes, 17 services between Frankfurt and Hamburg taking 3 hours 36 minutes, 20 daily services between Frankfurt and Stuttgart taking 1 hour 14 minutes and 15 daily services between Frankfurt and Berlin taking 4 hours 8 minutes.



# Toga set to open two more apartment hotels in Hamburg and Berlin

TOGA Hospitality is set to open two more Adina hotels in Germany.

The Adina Apartment Hotel Hamburg Michel will open in October 2010 while the Adina Apartment Hotel Berlin Hackescher Markt will open in January 2011.

Adina Apartment hotels are already located in Berlin, Frankfurt, Budapest and Copenhagen.

Adina Apartment Hotel Hamburg Michel is located minutes from Hamburg’s landmark St Michaelis (‘Michel’) Church and close to the

city’s entertainment district Reeperbahn – St Pauli. The hotel will feature 128 one, two and three-bedroom apartments including studio rooms and three conference rooms, including a theatre-style room with capacity for 150 people.

Adina Apartment Hotel Berlin Hackescher Markt is located in the heart of the historic Mitte district, close to Berlin’s famous Hackescher Hofe area. The hotel will feature 145 one, two and three-bedroom apartments including studio rooms.



Adina Berlin Checkpoint Charlie

Like all Adina properties guest rooms feature a separate lounge/dining area, a fully equipped kitchen and laundry, individual climate control air-conditioning, broadband and cable television including in-room movies.

Toga Hospitality chief executive officer, Rachel Argaman, said apartment hotels were a wonderful way for savvy Australian travellers to experience vibrant European cities. “They provide the space which we’re so accustomed to as well as flexibility and privacy,” she said.

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# River cruising still the 'hot trend in travel'



St. Kunibert church and Rhine bridges, on the Rhine, Cologne (image credit: GNTO)

CREATIVE Holidays' new 2010/2011 program includes Uniworld's luxury European river cruising itineraries, many of which cruise along the Rhine.

"River cruising is a hot trend in travel right now and exploring Germany by cruise is a unique and relaxing way to explore some of the countries most interesting destinations," said Creative Holidays general manager, product, sales and marketing, Andrew Yell.

"The all-inclusive nature of Uniworld's river cruise packages means they are great value for money for such a luxury product.

"We recommend agents propose Uniworld's itineraries to travellers returning to Germany for their second or third visit and to those seeking a different experience or keen to

enjoy a relaxed pace of travel."

Cruises on offer include the eight-day "Castles along the Rhine" which is priced from \$2203 per person (twin share) valid for booking and travel until November 7, 2010.

"This unique river cruise takes travellers on European waterways from Basel to Amsterdam, travelling through regional German riverside towns including Cologne, Rudesheim, Speyer and Breisach," Yell said.

"Clients can celebrate the fairy tale beauty and romantic spirit of the Rhine, on board the River Amsterdam, unpacking their bags just once and exploring more medieval castles than any other river in the world on a ship adorned with the most luxurious amenities and full of fantastic cuisine and activities."

## Renault Eurodrive – good availability, 'well priced deals'

RENAULT Eurodrive is reporting strong demand for cars by Australians heading to Germany.

The strength of the dollar against the euro, early bird specials, delivery fee reductions and travellers' interest in visiting Germany, have resulted in the strong demand.

Earlier in the year the company modified delivery fees for its two German depots located in Frankfurt and Munich. At the same time there were no problems with car shortages according to Renault Eurodrive managing director, Paul Hodges.

"While some car rental brokers are predicting massive price increases of up to 40 to 50 per cent because of continuing vehicle shortages in Europe we have no such problems," he said.

"Unlike some rental companies that have been impacted by finance squeezes as a result of the GFC, our vehicles are brand-new ex-factory and we have adequate supply at our disposal.

"We have been offering early bird specials for collection in Europe anytime prior to December 31 this year. The demand for these cars has been very strong and while our early bird deals expire on June 30 I would urge agents to contact us as we do have good availability and very well priced deals available."

Hodges said Australia ranked in the top three as hirers of Renault Eurodrive lease vehicles.

"Lease periods vary from three weeks to six months with the average lease period almost 50 days," he said.

## Albatross guarantees departures in Christmas, New Year programs

GERMANY features heavily in Albatross Travel Group's European White Christmas Tours brochure.

Fourteen Christmas and New Year programs are on offer with all departures guaranteed.

According to Albatross Travel Group's managing director, Euan Landsborough, tours with the higher German content are selling more quickly. The tours mostly commence with stays in gateway cities such as Munich, Vienna and Frankfurt and then as Christmas approaches they move to the mountains.

"The programs always include numerous visits to medieval towns bursting with wonderful Christmas markets and events such as sleigh rides, Christmas concerts and even steam train rides through the picturesque mountains," Landsborough said.

In other news Albatross is introducing a new 14-day "Black Forest, Bavaria and the Tyrol" tour in its European summer 2011



Heidelberg Castle (image credit: GNTO)

brochure. Commencing in Frankfurt the tour includes two sets of three night stays and a five-night stay in the Tyrol. The tour includes a trip on the Black Forest High road and the Alsace wine route. There are also tours to Bavaria's fairytale castles, monasteries and medieval towns while Salzburg, Hitler's Eagle's Nest and Lake Koenig are included.

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