

Peru a standout as *'unprecedented'* specials drive South American sales



Lake Titicaca, Peru (image courtesy of Intrepid)

Interest in South America continues to grow, boosted by the strong Australian dollar, affordable fares and hotel deals as well as exceptional specials in the market.

By Gary Walsh

LAST year was a difficult one for parts of South America. A serious earthquake in Chile had limited impact on tourism, but floods and landslides in Peru closed the iconic World Heritage site of Machu Picchu and the Inca Trail for many weeks. Machu Picchu will be in the news this year as well – but for all the right reasons.

This year is the centenary of the discovery of the famous Inca ruins by American Hiram Bingham and many operators are planning special tours to mark the occasion. Inca Tours' marketing manager Ross Pulbrook says ordinary Peruvians are excited by the anniversary, with many new hotels and quality restaurants being opened in Cuzco and the Sacred Valley of the Incas.

Pulbrook says South America is winning a great response from clients this year for three main reasons: the strength of the dollar, the end of the Global Financial Crisis, and the realisation that South America is a safe and value-for-money destination.

"Over the last month we have conducted 15 information evenings on our South America group tours

and private tailor-made tours. The response in terms of numbers has been overwhelming, with between 30 and 50 attendees at most shows," he said.

"As a result of the Australian dollar's strength we are offering reductions on our set departure small group tours of between \$1100 and \$2000 per person. This is only fair as we in the travel industry don't hesitate to surcharge when the dollar drops, so it is only appropriate to offer price reductions when our dollar is good or hits parity with the USD."

BFirst Travel director Marcos Da Silva said 2011 was shaping as "another good year for us. We are experiencing a constant increase in demand for travel to Latin America since the second half of 2010. I believe the growth of interest is due to a combination of factors including more affordable air travel and accommodation, the strength of the Australian dollar, airfare deals and unprecedented last-minute specials."

He said the growth in last-minute specials has created a new type of client, who made bookings later than was traditionally the case. "The issue with this is the difficulty of measuring more accurately forward booking numbers," Da Silva said.

"Nevertheless, the result of the last-minute trend is always a nice surprise: more departures than we had predicted. By way of an example – nowadays it is not uncommon to receive inquiries and booking requests for 30-day journeys in Latin America within two to four weeks of the departure date."

Sujata Raman, Abercrombie & Kent managing director, predicted heightened interest in Peru this year because of the centenary of its discovery. "Machu Picchu is also one of the three Latin American 'new' wonders of the world and should be at the top of everyone's bucket list," she said. "Despite a year of challenges including natural disasters within the region and financial trials, Latin America is back and firing on all cylinders. There's a destination to suit all interests and at any time of the year."

Contours Travel director Ted Dziadkiewicz said business was growing throughout the region, with Cuba a standout. "Parity of the Australian dollar with the US dollar has certainly helped, making the product more competitive and, of course, everyday expenses for travelling clients are a lot cheaper – food, drinks, souvenirs – and clients can afford to stay longer, so we are looking for a good year."

Peru is the major focus for Intrepid Travel clients in South America. "We are seeing two key markets travel with us," general manager South America, Mary Moses said. "We have the youth market, who are travelling on our 'basix' overland trips and seeing South America over a six-week period.

"The other key market is people travelling to Peru for two weeks to trek the Inca Trail and see key sights such as Machu Picchu, and then they are adding on other countries like Chile, Argentina, Bolivia or Galapagos Islands either at the beginning or to the end of their trip. The general trend is that our travellers prefer to do an organised group tour in Peru and they are keen to experience the cultural aspects that Intrepid Travel offers in its trips."

APT general manager marketing, Debra Fox, said South America was emerging as a must-see for APT's market of "discerning baby boomers."

"Due to the demand for this premium style, fully escorted holiday, we decided to release our 2011 dates early. Bookings so far have been strong, with one of our tours almost sold out already," she said.

sellingSthAmerica

Vast South America 'worth taking time to see', says Lois

THE first thing Lois Job, director of Travelscene on Clarence in Sydney, points out to clients looking to experience South America is its vastness. "I try to explain how huge the continent is," she says, "how many countries make up South America and that it is worth taking time to see, even if you need to make two trips to do it properly."

Most prospective travellers know about Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Iguassu Falls and Machu Picchu, she says, "so that's where clients often start. Then we begin looking at all the other options available to them and expand their horizons".

Lois' own experience of South America is a brief visit to Santiago and then a more comprehensive trip through Peru – Lima, Iquitos on the Amazon, Cusco and Machu Picchu. It was enough for her to fall in

love with Peru, and with South America generally.

She says the appeal of the continent is a mixture of things. "It depends of course on the individual traveller. There is great variety in the cultures, pre-European history and post-European arrival are both very interesting. The sights are stunning, and of course I have not even included famous places like Iguassu, the harbour at Rio, the Atacama Desert and the Nazca Lines. The food is great and the people I saw and met, in the countryside especially, were friendly."

Job says while there are excellent adventure options available in South America, most of her clients are "in the moderate to luxury grouping. They like their adventure in comfort. This can be done with careful planning and clients have a wonderful trip."



Copacabana beach, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (credit: Gary Walsh)

Experience 'fashionable' Buenos Aires with Tempo package

TEMPO Holidays' "Taste of Buenos Aires" package is a four-day introduction to the city in which tango was born. It is priced from \$528 per person (twin share), based on a classic double room at Dazzler Tower San Martin Hotel and includes return private airport transfers, three nights'

accommodation, three breakfasts, a private half-day city tour, dinner and tango show including drinks and hotel pick up and drop off for all excursions and transfers.

The package is valid for sale and travel until August 31. Highlights of the tour include the Plaza de Mayo,

El Cabildo Cathedral, Casa Rosada, colourful La Boca and the famous Recoleta Cemetery where national icon Eva Peron, better known as Evita, is buried.

Tempo says the Argentine capital is a fashionable and stylish city with a grand European appearance brimming

with romantic cafes, cosmopolitan restaurants, beautiful boulevards and an impressive 4000 monuments. "Argentina has shown huge growth as a result of increased flights and cruises over the past year, and Buenos Aires is a great gateway city to South America. (It) has something for everyone."



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16-day Rio de Janeiro to Valparaiso cruise Departs: 22 November 2011	12-day Valparaiso to Buenos Aires cruise Departs: 08 December 2011	17-day Buenos Aires to Valparaiso cruise Departs: 20 December 2011																																				
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Conditions: Prices are per person twin share and quoted in Australian Dollars. Prices include cruise NCFs and taxes and are subject to change at any time up until the sailing date and may be charged onboard. Holland America Line reserves the right to re-instate the fuel supplement for all guests if the NYMEX oil price exceeds US\$70 per barrel. Prices are correct as at date of issue and are subject to availability, currency fluctuations and surcharges until final payment is received. All fares are based on Promo code RHU for 22NOV11 & 08DEC11 and RHS 20DEC11. 48% saving based on signature fare for South America Explorer Cruise Cat BB & South America Passage Cruise Cat BB. Other conditions may apply. Lic No: 2TA003774.

Cruise Traveller promotes Chilean fjords



MS Hanseatic

THE Chilean fjords region between Punta Arenas and Ushuaia in Southern Patagonia is an area unknown to all but a few expedition vessels. Cruise Traveller managing director Craig Bowen says the region is unique for its landscapes, uninhabited islands, deep fjords and narrow passages teeming with wildlife.

“We are pleased to represent Cruceros Australis, the very best product exploring Patagonia. This could easily be a pre- or post-Antarctica adventure or combine with great land product such as Explora lodges in Patagonia,” he said.

For Antarctic journeys, Cruise Traveller’s options include *MS Fram*, which operates 12-day voyages to the Antarctic Peninsula from Ushuaia. Clients with more time or seeking a more luxurious form of travel can experience the *MS Hanseatic*, the only five-star expedition ship, as rated by the Berlitz Cruise Guide, sailing within the waters of Antarctica. A selection of 19-day voyages is available with the comfort of outside suites, some with balconies, indulgent dining and 24-hour cabin service.

Scenic Tours has 10 Sth American itineraries on offer

IN ITS seventh year of operation in South America, Scenic Tours is offering 10 comprehensive itineraries for the destination. Many departures are guaranteed, but limited availability and with ‘Earlybird Two’ offers expiring 90 days before departure, bookings need to be made quickly.

Tour costs include all airfares in South America, airport taxes, tipping, accommodation, most meals, airport transfers and sightseeing. Scenic says it chooses the finest hotels available in each destination.

CONTOURS Travel is selling a new fly-cruise option for Antarctic travel that means clients only have to cross the infamous Drake Passage once. The new high-season trip will sail from Ushuaia to the Antarctic Peninsula and return by air from King George Island to Punta Arenas in Chile. The journey will also be available in the reverse direction.

Contours releases new fly-cruise Antarctic option

minimum of four and a maximum of 18 people.

December 29 and all January departures for the 2011/12 season. On all other dates the standard 11-day trip from Ushuaia and return will apply.

Contours director Ted Dziadkiewicz says his company’s new Contours Collection small group program is selling well despite its

late introduction in November last year. The program was created in conjunction with John Anderson, the founder of Contiki Tours, and designed for but not exclusively confined to travellers in the 45-65 age group.

All tours are fully escorted and there are guaranteed departures with groups of a

Itineraries are designed to provide as much time as possible in each destination, with free time built in for independent exploration.

Accommodation is in four and five-star hotels, with a focus on character-filled, historic hotels and lodges that are eco-friendly and sustainable.

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*Conditions: Prices are per person based on twin share accommodation. Antarctic Discovery is valid for sale until 14 Feb 2012. The advertised price is for departures: 03 & 12 Jan, 14 Feb 2012, based on I grade Inside cabin. Quest for the Antarctic Circle is valid for sale until 08 Mar 2012. The advertised price is for departures: 25 Feb & 08 Mar 2012, based on Category 2 - Outside Cabin. Prices are subject to change. Standard Bentours Terms and Conditions apply. Tempo Holidays trading as Bentours International A.B.N. 51007331213 License No 2TA08293

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southAmerica

Tauck launches new Peru and Bolivia journey



Machu Picchu, Peru

TAUCK is offering a brand new 13-day "Empire of the Incas: Peru and Bolivia" tour in 2011, which departs from April through to October. Commencing in the colonial centre of Lima, the 13-day itinerary begins with a tour of the city's historic buildings, including lunch at a beautifully preserved colonial mansion that has been owned by the same family for 17 generations.

After three days in Lima, clients fly to the Sacred Valley of the Incas for a two-night stay, including a visit to a well-preserved Inca settlement for a taste of life in the 15th Century. They

then travel by rail to Machu Picchu before travelling on to Cusco, the historic Incan capital.

A rail journey through the Andes follows, along with two nights on the shores of Lake Titicaca, before clients drive along the Bolivian coast and take a private hydrofoil to Sun Island. The tour concludes in lively La Paz, the highest capital city in the world.

Priced from \$4990 per person (twin share), the tour includes meals, accommodation, entertainment, sight-seeing, gratuities and touring with a dedicated Tauck director. Bookings are through Travel the World.

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Aerolineas Argentinas explores non-stop Buenos Aires flight option

AEROLINEAS Argentinas, which is coming off a very successful 2010, is exploring the feasibility of introducing non-stop flights between Sydney and Buenos Aires. AR currently operates via Auckland in both directions, unlike its competitor on the route, Qantas.

The airline carried 22 per cent more passengers globally in the January-October period than in 2009 and increased revenue by almost 50 per cent. Next year it will become the first South American airline to join the SkyTeam alliance, which will add 38 new destinations to its network.

Aerolineas Argentinas has also begun a new arrangement with Virgin Blue that it says will offer more options for passengers travelling from any destination within Australia with DJ to SYD and/or AKL and connecting with Aerolineas Argentinas to South America.

All Aerolineas Argentinas fares now allow same-day connections to Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro from Ezeiza Airport in Buenos Aires on Gol Airlines, with no change of airport required. For those who do have to move between Buenos Aires' two airports, Aerolineas Argentinas is now offering a free transfer.

Special advance preview of APT tour

APT has released a special advance preview of its 2011 departures ahead of its 2011/12 South American touring and cruising program. The signature tour is the 21-day "Very Best of South America" tour, priced from \$10,995, departing on November 6, 2011. The itinerary includes a welcome reception by APT owner Geoff McGeary, who will personally host the group for four days in Buenos Aires.

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Aurora releases new fly-sail Antarctic options



Polar Pioneer foredeck

AURORA Expeditions has launched its Antarctica brochure for 2011/12, showcasing new fly/sail options to the Antarctic Peninsula and celebratory voyages to East Antarctica and Commonwealth Bay to celebrate the centenary of Sir Douglas Mawson's Australian Antarctic Expeditions.

Each of Aurora's centenary voyages visits three regions: Macquarie Island, where Mawson set up a communications base, the East Antarctic coast, a vast region where the polar plateau offers a dramatic backdrop to Mawson's Hut, and New Zealand's sub-Antarctic islands.

These 26-day voyages are Aurora

Expeditions' most adventurous in scope, with extended sea crossings and the chance to explore the pack ice edge, where much of Antarctica's marine life, including whales, seals and penguins, can be found. The voyages will visit Mawson's Hut and the abandoned French base at Port Martin, and the working research station of Dumont d'Urville. Prices start from \$US17,475 per person (twin share).

Fly/sail options have been introduced on South Georgia and Antarctica Peninsula voyages, designed to reduce sea time. The 17-day voyages are priced from \$US11,685.

Inca's 'Sensations Tour' proves a favourite

INCA Tours' most popular escorted small group tour continues to be its 23-day four-star "South America Sensations Tour", which now outpaces the operator's signature tour, the 32-day five-star "South America Gold Tour". Marketing manager Ross Pulbrook said the Gold Tour was still operating twice each year and continues to be fully escorted from Australia, but was departing with fewer clients.

"Our private FIT tour arrangements also continue to do very well and are especially popular with small groups of friends – two, three or four couples – choosing to travel together on a private tour," Pulbrook said.

The "Sensations Tour" covers many of the highlights of Peru, Bolivia, Brazil and Argentina and involves mainly two and three-night stays

in each location. The maximum number in any group is 18, which Pulbrook said allowed for personalised service throughout. All tours, transfers, entrance fees, local guides, hotels and flights are included in the tour cost.

The tour operates in March and September each year, which Inca believes are the best times to visit the destinations included. The brochure price of the "Sensations Tour" is \$14,995 per person (twin share) ex-Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, but due to the strength of the AUD Inca is offering a price reduction of \$1100 per person on the September 5 departure.

In addition, also thanks to the strong dollar, Inca is including a free two-night stopover in Santiago on the September tour, including breakfasts, transfers, guide and a city tour.

Tucan launches new brochure, website

TUCAN Travel has launched a new brochure and website dedicated to its adventure product. There is a range of different types of trips: Discovery Tours use private transport and comfortable hotels, Adventure Tours use public transport and basic hotels, Overland Expeditions use overland trucks and stay in campsites and hotels, Budget Expeditions using overland trucks and stay in campsites and hostels, Independent Travel uses varied transport and stays in a choice of hotels and expedition cruises on which clients sleep onboard the ship or boat.

Tucan Travel has also abandoned the policy of local payments in response to feedback from a customer survey which found 81 per cent of clients preferred to pay for their tour in full before they travelled.

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'Smorgasbord' of Antarctic experiences from 50 Degrees North



Twin Otter-Patriot Hills



SPECIALIST Antarctic and Arctic operator 50 Degrees North has some unique tours to the Antarctic interior, flying in from Punta Arenas in Chile. All tours spend one or more nights at the Union Glacier camp at 79° 45' south latitude and 82° west longitude, 800m above sea level and 1140km from the South Pole.

Tours from there include flights on ski-fitted Twin Otters to the geographical South Pole, spending a few nights next to an emperor penguin colony. The company says the tours are not physically strenuous and are suitable for anyone in good health.

The Antarctic Odyssey program is designed, 50 Degrees North says, to offer a smorgasbord of Antarctic experiences in one package, including cross-country skiing, hiking, light climbing, snow-machine assisted tours and camping trips as well as a sightseeing flight.

SATO: South America is 'back on the travel agenda'

SOUTH America Tourism Office says South America is back on the travel agenda this year after a period of economic stability. SATO said it had strong sales figures in 2010 and was looking to continue growth as the demographic extended from mainly retirees to young professionals.

"The average traveller is younger,

more informed about the destination, where they want to travel, of their particular interests, and prefers to concentrate on one or two countries at a time rather than try to cover all of the highlights of South America in just the one big trip," director Delfor Pelletti said.

"This is perfectly suited for FIT

travel as we tailor-make itineraries to fit passengers' particular needs and time frame. Our tours are also guaranteed departures and will not cancel if a minimum number is not reached."

In 2011 SATO will complement its FIT product with a number of escorted tours catering for special interests including "The Essence of

South America", departing September 11, a 21-day highlights tour covering the most famous sights of the South America, priced from \$8190 per person, and the "Great Rail Journeys of South America", departing September 26, a 30-day adventure trip featuring seven iconic train rides, priced from \$11,432 per person.

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Book early and save with BFirst Travel

BFIRST Travel has introduced a range of early bird specials for the South America and Antarctic markets. Among the offers is a 10 per cent discount on available cabins on any 2011/12 departures of the Classic Antarctica Air and Antarctic Experience Air-Cruise trips, which can mean savings of about \$US1800 per cabin.

A similar discount on 2011/12 departures of the Antarctica Dream and Air-Sail Antarctica trips means savings of about \$US1400 per cabin, and there is also a five per cent discount for all new 2011 bookings at an

Explora Lodge and/or an Explora Travesia program with deposit paid by March 31.

BFirst Travel also has two airfare specials on the Sydney-Buenos Aires route, flying, it says "with a premium airline". A premium economy fare is priced from \$A2899 including taxes subject to availability/seasonality. Booking conditions apply. A business class special costs from \$A4999.

BFirst also points out that for 2011 the prices displayed on its website are in USD, allowing clients to pay when the exchange rate is in their favour.

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