

Continued growth in Aussie visitors to South America and Antarctica

Despite natural disasters in Chile and Peru, South America's iconic tourist attractions continue to welcome visitors – and Australians are responding in ever-increasing numbers.

By Gary Walsh

SOUTH America and the Antarctic continue to lure more Australian travellers, and the trend is set to continue despite the recent earthquakes in Chile and the earlier floods and landslides near the iconic Inca ruins of Machu Picchu.

In the case of Chile, Turismo Chile says the earthquakes did not affect many areas of interest to tourists such as the north of Chile, Easter Island and Patagonia.

Santiago airport suffered some damage but quickly re-opened. Lan Chile has resumed scheduled Sydney-Santiago services and is actively encouraging Australians to fly to Chile.

The northern part of the Lakes and Volcanoes region, around the city of Concepcion and the Bio Bio River, was most affected but authorities say they are making progress in restoring normality.

The southern part of the Lakes and Volcanoes region was not affected and operations in popular tourist towns including Pucon, Puerto Varas and Puerto Montt continue as normal, according to Turismo Chile.

Turismo Chile points out Chile is a country with a history of seismic activity and the country's preparedness, including its strict anti-seismic building codes and rapid emergency response from government, has minimised damage. It says the country's tourism infrastructure has, overall, fared well.

"Our thoughts and sentiments go out to the families who have lost loved ones," said Turismo Chile executive director Pablo Moll.

"Chileans are a resilient people and we are hard at work to get the country back on its feet quickly. We look forward to continuing to welcome travellers and are making every effort



Uros Floating Island People, on the floating island where they live (Image credit BFirst Travel)

to make them feel safe and secure."

In Peru, operators are confident the measures in place to keep Machu Picchu access open will be successful.

Delfor Pelletti, director of wholesaler South America Tourism Office, argued that a new bus route to the attraction, although taking longer to reach Machu Picchu from Cuzco, had some advantages.

"The Sacred Valley of the Incas is absolutely picturesque and the bus trip through it actually allows passengers to experience a different perspective of it. I would do this trip myself," he said.

The archaeological site at Machu Picchu did not sustain any damage from the floods or the landslides, but was closed at time of writing, without any certainty of when it would reopen. Operators, therefore, were unable to provide guarantees that clients would be able to visit the ruins.

Work on restoring the main rail line from Cuzco to Aguas Calientes was well under way, but the luxury Hiram Bingham train was not expected to resume operation until June.

Pelletti has no doubt that Peru should remain on travellers' itineraries. "The floods were concentrated in the Andes area surrounding Cuzco and did not affect other parts of Peru.

Whilst Machu Picchu is a highlight of the continent itself, Peru is a country rich in culture and history with plenty of other attractions including the colonial city of Arequipa, the mysterious Nazca lines and the wildlife sanctuary of the Ballestas islands."

Intrepid Travel stepped in to help affected local people when it discovered some of its own Peruvian staff had lost everything. The Intrepid Foundation made a \$20,000 donation to Plan Peru's relief efforts, while Intrepid Travel announced an appeal and said it would match public donations up to a total of \$20,000.

BFirst Travel director Marcos Da Silva said no clients had changed or cancelled bookings for Peru after the flooding.

"On the contrary, most of our clients are keen to visit Peru in 2010 and contribute to the local economy," he said.

Overall, Da Silva said new bookings for South America were better in the first quarter of 2010 compared with the previous year, which he said was indicative of a strengthening economy and the value of the AUD.

And Kumuka's Brent Wendorf summed up the overall outlook for travel to South America with the

statement that sales are now ahead of pre-global financial crisis levels.

"Flights to South America are still inexpensive compared to a few years ago, the USD is weak compared to the AUD, there is a lot of economic optimism in Australia, and there's a lot of Aussies who have been sitting idle for far too long and are ready to travel," he said.

Wendorf reports that Peru remains Kumuka's strongest destination, but other areas are also attracting interest.

"Carnivale outside of Rio is definitely seeing an increase in query," he said.

"Brazil bookings are going to go through the roof as the public becomes more aware of its beauty and charm, and for some reason there is always an urgency for the public to want to explore a country before it hosts the Olympics.

"Columbia and Venezuela are definitely less traditional destinations that have seen massive increases in bookings.

"But I think the sleeper for South America is Ecuador. From a grassroots and word of mouth standpoint, Ecuador is always the country that becomes a surprise favourite for a lot of travellers."

South America appeals to 'experienced travellers', says Paul



SOUTH America and the Antarctic are destinations that appeal to "experienced travellers with a bit of money to do it in a bit of style", according to Paul Krejci of Inspired Travel in St Ives, NSW. Walkers heading for Machu Picchu are the other main category of visitor, he says.

Paul has not travelled to South America or the Antarctic personally – nor have any of the other consultants at the agency – but the office stills sells plenty of business to the region. The biggest sellers are Peru, especially Machu Picchu, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, Buenos Aires, Iguassu Falls, and

Left: Mont Fitz Roy, Patagonia (credit: Natural Focus Safaris and David Firth-Eagland)

Patagonia, with a particular focus on the Moreno Glacier and the Torres Del Paine National Park.

Paul says the biggest selling points for the region are the natural scenery and the culture, but he cautions clients to be careful with their personal safety and belongings.

"Robbery is always a problem," he says. "I always go over safety precautions, especially to keep passports and money in a money belt really close."

Paul says he only books LAN and Qantas fares, and obtaining seats has never been a problem, "but it has never been a cheap flight destination anyway".

Contours focuses on Sacred Valley as Peru 'returns to normal' after floods

CONTOURS Travel says the riches of the Sacred Valley of the Incas in Peru are a significant focus for its 2010 program. With access to Machu Picchu set to return to normal after January's floods and landslides, the Sacred Valley, also known as the Urubamba Valley, is a must-see according to director Ted Dziadkiewicz.

"The valley has been the storehouse for agricultural products for the city of Cuzco since the Inca times," Dziadkiewicz says. "Its agreeable climate, fertile plains and geography make it an ideal area for outdoor soft adventure activities. The Incas were attracted not only to the agricultural wealth but also to natural beauty, placing ceremonial sites and royal

estates such as Pisac, Yucay, Ollantaytambo and, of course, Machu Picchu.

"We have designed unique programs that cover all of this and a lot more in our 'Heritage Trails of Sacred Valley' 12-day program. We have included a visit to Pisac Ruins, with an option to walk down to the village. We walk from the salt pans to the Valley, and we are the only operator to show our

clients the pyramid at Pacaritanpu and the best terrace farming in the Patacancha Valley."

Contours also offers what Dziadkiewicz says are unique haciendas in Ecuador such as the Hacienda Pumiloma, fly-drive itineraries around Chile and Argentina, a coffee trail tour in Colombia, and floating on the Orinoco River in its new brochure.



tucantravel.com
take the **adventure** of a **lifetime**



Latin America update...

Chilean earthquake

Our thoughts go out to those who lost their family, friends and homes in the devastating earthquake which hit Chile in February. Our tours still operate through this beautiful nation with some itinerary changes being made as each trip is assessed upon the condition of roads and facilities at the time of travel.

Peru flood update

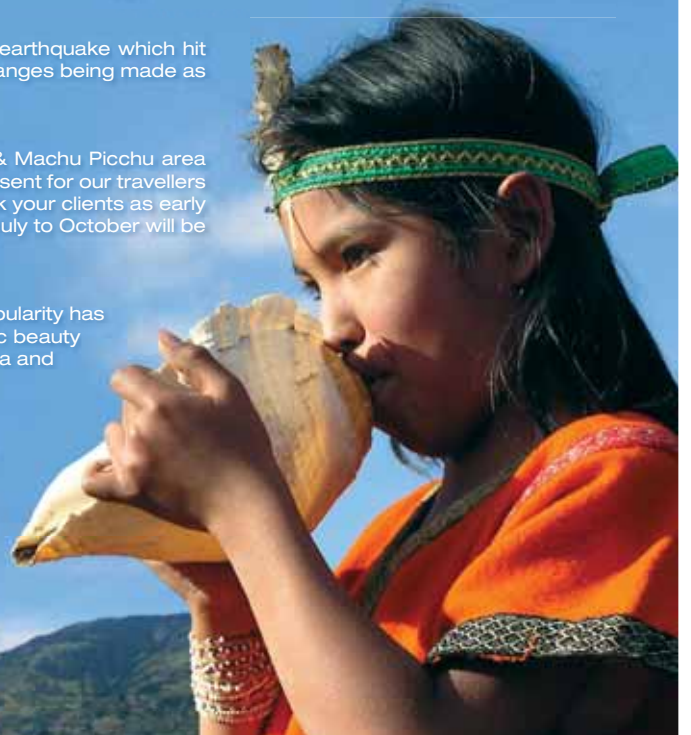
Our Cuzco office advises us that the rebuilding of the rail tracks and roads in the Cuzco & Machu Picchu area destroyed by the January flooding is going well and is ahead of schedule. Dates given at present for our travellers to resume trekking the Inca Trail and visiting Machu Picchu are late March / early April. Book your clients as early as possible as a backlog of travellers wanting to trek the Inca Trail in the high season from July to October will be bigger than ever and permits will be booked out well ahead.

Colombia! We're back

Our overlands re-enter Colombia this month for the first time in many years. Colombia's popularity has surged in the last year with its 'safety issue' looking like it is very much in its past. Its scenic beauty of lush jungles, green valleys and cobblestoned coastal towns is renowned in South America and its set for a major comeback on the tourism front.

Mexican madness

Mexico is also back on the 'in' list with memories of the Swine Flu gone and the airfare wars for the lucrative Los Angeles market remaining hot. Australians are taking advantage of the cheap flights to LAX and the strong Aussie dollar to add Mexico to their trips and we've seen strong growth in our tour sales for the entire Mexico and Central American region in recent months as a result. Why not offer it as a simple add on to your clients and send them somewhere they'll never forget.



Information & Reservations: **1300 769 249** Website: www.tucantravel.com

Discover Chile with LAN Airlines

Connecting Australia to South America, LAN will take you
to all the wonders of the region.

Chungara Lake, Lauca National Park, Chile



For more information call LAN Airlines on 1800 221 572.

Adventure, culture, relaxation.
America is waiting for you.

TACA AIRLINES



Fly to 42 destinations in
**South, Central
and North America**

taca.com
02 8248 0020

southAmerica

Latin America one of Tempo's 'hottest destinations'

A COMBINATION of increased direct flights into Buenos Aires, an array of natural and cultural attractions and great discounts has positioned Latin America as one of Tempo Holidays' hottest destinations, product manager Sue-Ann Hamilton says.

One of Tempo's most sought after packages is "Taste of Buenos Aires", which can be combined with a selection of three to five-star hotels to suit various budgets. It takes in tango dancing, the story of Evita and city highlights such as the Plaza de Mayo.

With the countdown to the 2016 Olympics under way, host nation Brazil is booming, helped by major beautification and infrastructure programs. Tempo has an all-encompassing 11-day "Best of Brazil" package taking in Rio De Janeiro, Iguassu Falls, colonial Salvador and the Amazon region priced from \$3389 per person (twin share). And catering for the surge in interest for Patagonia, Tempo has introduced a new 10-day "Ultimate Patagonia"

package including the Torres Del Paine National Park, cruising the Beagle Channel and Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world, priced from \$4814 per person (twin share).

Hamilton says Tempo Holidays has noticed popularity increasing for more off-the-beaten-track tours such as the Galapagos Islands and Easter Island.

"Ecuador, with its Galapagos cruising, is very popular at the moment," she says. "With the American market not travelling as much there has been some great discounting going on this year. On select departure dates we have 20 per cent off on several vessels which is a terrific incentive to see this fascinating part of the world."

For adventurers making South America the starting point for exploring Antarctica, Tempo Holidays' sister company Bentours specialises in a range of locations that are supported by comfortable hotels and safe modes of travel.

Both Tempo and Bentours are now part of the Cox & Kings Australia group.



Prince Albert II

Silversea expedition vessel ready for Antarctic season

SILVERSEA'S expedition vessel, *Prince Albert II*, begins its next Antarctic season in November 2010, with eight round-trip voyages of 10 to 17 days' duration departing from Ushuaia on the southern tip of Argentina. These itineraries navigate Drake's Passage and the Antarctic Peninsula, taking in the region's spectacular scenery and abundant wildlife. Each day passengers can explore by zodiac with the expedition team, visiting penguin rookeries, scientific research stations, historic whaling sites and the sites of early Antarctic explorers.

At the end of the Antarctic season in March, 2011, the ship will sail a 22-day "Cape to Cape Adventure". Departing Ushuaia, the voyage follows explorers' footsteps to Cape Horn, the Falkland Islands, South Georgia,

volcanic Tristan da Cunha (the world's most remote inhabited archipelago), and Cape Town.

Highlights will include glaciers and iceberg sculptures and wildlife such as penguins, sea lions, seals, dolphins, whales and seabirds including albatross, shearwaters and petrels. Travellers will spend a day-and-a-half exploring the far-flung Tristan da Cunha island group, with activities such as guided walks with the local villagers, a walk to the 1961 volcanic cone and lava flow with the onboard geologist and birdlife spotting with the onboard ornithologist. Weather permitting, *Prince Albert II* will land on either the uninhabited Nightingale Islands or Inaccessible Island, a protected wildlife reserve and World Heritage Site.

NATURAL FOCUS SAFARIS

2010/11 SOUTH AMERICA BROCHURE OUT NOW!

Contact Natural Focus Safaris on
(03) 9249 3777 or 1300 363 302
www.nfs.travel
email: info@awsnfs.com
Order brochures: www.tifs.com.au
We are the experts in tailor-made, independent tours

LAN

LIC NO: 30248

Tucan Travel announces new number one selling tour



TUCAN Travel's "Tango and Samba" tour has become the wholesaler's top seller in 2009.

The 16-day small group adventure tour journeys between the two most famous cities in South America, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires.

The "Tango and Samba" trip offers travellers the extremes of this pocket of South America, with days spent in Brazil's most populated city Sao Paulo, through to a day riding or canoeing as personal guests at a family-run Argentinean Estancia.

Visiting the river side township of Colonia and Uruguay's capital Montevideo with their vibrant café lifestyles, the tour also spends time enjoying the many activities available at the world famous Iguazu Falls such as jet boating to the base of the falls and helicopter rides over the 144 falls as they gush towards the aptly-named Devils Throat.

"It's no surprise that the 'Tango and Samba' has become our top seller," said Tucan's general manager, Australia, Justin Ewin.

"Australians often choose this itinerary for its iconic sights, but then get on the tour and find that it's the small townships and local families they meet that provide them with their fondest memories. It is a gem of a tour."

Priced at \$2160, this tour travels on local transport and stays in hand-picked locally-owned hotels, "providing our travellers with a truly 'Latino' experience and a mass of memories to take home".



Peruvian Amazon Indian - Puerto Maldonado

BFirst off-the-beaten-track tours

BFIRST Travel, which has created a range of new tours for 2010, says demand for off-the-beaten-track destinations in South America is booming.

"They are amazing destinations like the Atacama Desert in Chile; Patagonia in Chile and Argentina and Uyuni Salt Flats in Bolivia," says director Marcos Da Silva.

Among the trips are the 21-day "Treasures of South America" tour which covers Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Peru. Prices start from \$4380 per person. Highlights include Buenos Aires, Iguassu Falls, Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana Beach,

Peru's Sacred Valley of the Incas; Machu Picchu, Cuzco and Lake Titicaca.

The 35-day "South America Explorer Tour" takes clients to Ecuador (both the mainland and Galapagos Islands), Peru (Machu Picchu and the Amazon region), Bolivia (Lake Titicaca), Buenos Aires, Iguassu Falls and Rio de Janeiro. Prices start from \$8690 per person.

The "Brazil Land of Contrasts Tour" is 12 days, and covers the historic Ouro Preto, Manaus on the Amazon River, Salvador in Bahia, Iguassu Falls and Rio de Janeiro. Prices start from \$2050 per person.

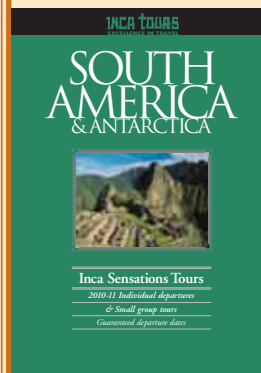
SENSATIONS TOUR of South America

22 days, 4-star, escorted

GUARANTEED DEPARTURE
\$1,000 per person off 6 Sept departure

For brochures or itineraries, please contact:
1800 024 955 or sales@incatours.net
Visit "Agents Only" on www.incatours.net

INCA TOURS Wholesale Excellence LIC NO 21A5698



For a tailor made itinerary to South or Central America
talk to us, 'the locals!'



South America
TOURISM OFFICE
Lic: 32408

Phone: 1300 857 805 email: reservations@sthamerica.com www.southamericatourism.com

LAN Airlines passenger numbers jump

LAN Airlines has started 2010 strongly, with a 17.6 per cent increase in total passenger traffic during January compared with the same period in 2009.

Growth came mainly from the group's international airline operations, where combined passenger traffic in all markets for the month rose by 20.6 per cent over January 2009. Aircraft load factors rose by 4.3 points to 82.3 per cent.

Domestic passenger traffic in Chile, Argentina, Peru and Ecuador rose by 10.9 per cent in January over the same period in 2009, resulting in a 2.7 point increase in load factor to 81 per cent. In Australia and New Zealand, where LAN operates daily services to Santiago, Chile, the airline is increasing its Sydney-based regional management team, adding new positions to help accommodate continuing growth.

LAN has just announced appointments including Johanna Raeder as marketing manager, Australia, New Zealand and Asia; Yendi Benitez as marketing executive, Australia, New Zealand and Asia and Sandra Lucero to a new business analyst role, as well as Andres Fernandez to another new



role, that of market manager, Asia.

LAN general manager Australia, New Zealand and Asia, Rodrigo Contreras, said the airline group was increasing its resources to maximise the opportunities for growth in the Asia Pacific region, where the aviation industry is growing faster than in any other part of the world. "We are achieving healthy growth in both Australia and New Zealand, where we currently operate as an online carrier,

and we are very encouraged by the strong results from our offline sales activities in Asia, where we see great potential," he said.

LAN has released the 2010 version of its popular South America Air Pass, offering flights on a wide range of routes, both within and between countries in the region.

It has also just increased flights on a range of key routes including Santiago to Lima, which now has six

LAN flights each day – five of them non-stop and the sixth flight one-stop – and additional flights within Argentina, and between Buenos Aires and Lima. These follow significant expansion in 2009, including the introduction of domestic services in Ecuador. To help accommodate the growth within South America, LAN has just signed a contract to purchase 30 new Airbus A320 aircraft, to be delivered between 2011 and 2016.

BFirsttravel

LATIN AMERICA

A journey of discovery

BFirst Travel will show you the Latin America only locals know!

explore ★ dream ★ discover

1300 763 338 (Australia wide) or +61 2 9232 0048

www.bfirsttravel.com

Inca cuts prices on some popular tours

INCA Tours is offering significant price reductions on some of its most popular tours in the three, four and five-star level. For example, Inca is cutting \$2000 per person from its \$22,990 luxury-class (five-star) 32-day "Gold Tour of South America" departing on October 1, 2010 and \$1000 per person from the \$13,875 superior-class (four-star) 22-day "South America Sensations Tour" departing on September 6.

Both tours cover the highlights of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Bolivia and involve mainly two and three-night stays in each location. Also on offer is a more modest reduction of \$500 per person off Inca's \$3866 tourist-class (three-star) 14-day "Lima to La Paz Tour", which includes many of the highlights of Peru and Bolivia.

Inca's Ross Pulbrook says 2010 is shaping up to be a much better year than last, with strong forward bookings for the first half of the year.

"Some people are obviously sufficiently confident in the markets to start planning travel again, but bookings are a little soft for the second half of 2010, which implies that some people are taking a wait and see approach and booking closer to the time of travel rather than way in advance," he said.

Business is so strong that the company has taken on a new senior consultant to cope with the increased demand.

Pulbrook says the most sought-after destinations are "the all-time favourites" – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Peru.

Aerolineas on 'recovery path'

WHILE it admitted to undergoing "a challenging period for the last couple of years", Aerolineas Argentinas said with its new ownership, the Argentine government, it was "on a recovery path and operationally a lot more stable". The airline said it was now focusing on improving service delivery, including updating in-flight entertainment systems and meals, as well as achieving consistency with flight schedules. Aerolineas Argentinas has added six new Boeing 737/800 aircraft to its fleet, with a commitment for 12 more to fly the regional routes. Aerolineas will also acquire A330 and A340 aircraft in 2011-2012 to boost its international routes.

"Our flights from Australia and New Zealand now offer more connections to South American destinations with five flights per week from Sydney and Auckland," a spokesman said. "There are continuous negotiations with other airlines in order to obtain bilateral agreements to expand AR services and network."

Locally, Aerolineas and Virgin Blue have signed an agreement to offer quick connections and special fares to South American destinations from Melbourne, Brisbane Adelaide and Perth.



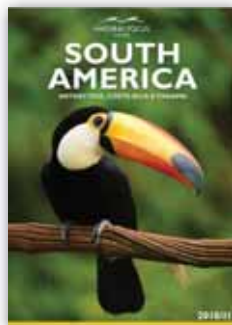
Machu Picchu

NFS expands brochure as diversity wins over Aussies

NATURAL Focus Safaris has released a new South America brochure with a range of new products. NFS's Praful Albuquerque says the region continues to grow as a destination for Australian travellers because of its diversity.

"South America spans so many lines of latitudes – clients can choose between cool temperate zones, like Patagonia, or steamy equatorial forests and tropical beach resorts, or combine both. And there is always plenty to choose from no matter which time of year people want to travel. Parts of Patagonia can even be visited during the winter months with the advantage of few tourists and amazing snowscapes."

NFS's best selling products are Galapagos Island cruises, Peru, Chile, Argentina and Amazon eco-lodges and river cruises. NFS has a Galapagos special priced from \$7451 per person (twin share) including flights from Australia with LAN. The 15-day trip



includes a seven-night cruise.

In spite of the recent setback in bookings to Peru due to the flooding and landslides, NFS predicts that

business to South America will grow strongly in 2010.

"Visitors to South America are starting to explore areas that are off the beaten track, and gaining in popularity are the salt flats of Uyuni in Bolivia, the spectacular Pantanal in Brazil where you have the greatest concentration of fauna including the most

powerful predator in the Americas, the jaguar, and cruising through the Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego regions," Albuquerque says.

"Other areas that are also becoming popular are Argentina's scenic Mendoza and Salta regions in the west and north-west of the country. These areas offer spectacular Andean scenery, historic colonial architecture, archaeological sites and beautiful wineries, ranches and gourmet retreats."

TACA named in Skytrax Awards

CENTRAL American airline TACA flies to 42 destinations in 22 countries in North, Central and South America and the Caribbean, including daily flights to nine major US cities, as well as to Toronto, Canada. In 2009 it was named the best airline in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean in the annual Skytrax awards.

TACA unites the three Americas with flights to destinations such as New York, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Sao Paulo, Lima, Quito, Bogota, Caracas and Santo Domingo. It claims the newest fleet in the Americas, made up of 38 Airbus 319, 320 and

321 planes, and two Embraer E190 aircraft. TACA also boasts one of the best operational records in the region with an on-time arrival rate exceeding 90 per cent. The airline's most popular flights are within South America, including the Lima-Cuzco, Lima-Rio de Janeiro, Lima-Sao Paulo, Lima-Quito and Lima-Buenos Aires routes.

TACA has recently announced a shareholders' agreement for a strategic integration with Colombia's Avianca. The joint venture will create a company with annual revenue of more than \$US3 billion, a fleet of almost 130 aircraft and joint frequent flier membership of more than three million.

Bentours Antarctic programme 2010/11

BOOK EARLY, SAVE UP TO 18% on Bentours Hurtigruten Antarctica Voyages.

Prices start at **AUD\$6,503** pp, twin share. Valid until 30 April 10.

PLUS, an extra 10% off for clients who have travelled on a Hurtigruten voyage in the last 3 years.



For full Terms and Conditions, please visit our website.

www.bentours.com.au

enquiry@bentours.com.au | 800 221 712

SOUTH AMERICA CONTOURS TRAVEL

Call us for a
NEW 48 Page BROCHURE!



287 Victoria St. West Melbourne 3003 VIC, Australia
T (03) 9328 8488 F (03) 9329 7517 Reservations 1300 135 391

LICENCE 3014

www.contourstravel.com.au