

# Island escapes to prove more tempting, with value-adds and rising \$A

Competition is tough between island holiday destinations bidding for a greater share of Aussie travellers' business. And agents are expected to benefit as tourism bodies ramp up marketing campaigns and more value-adds are being included in packages to increase sales.



Cook Islands Tourism

By Jenny Burns

ISLAND holiday destinations, domestic and international, will be more enticing in 2010, with new and refurbished properties adding to their attractiveness as holiday options for Australians.

With the Australian dollar riding high, the feedback from overseas island destinations suggests Australians are ready to visit in greater numbers as economic confidence rebounds.

Many hoteliers on these islands have used the downtime provided by the global financial crisis to embark on major refurbishment programs to create enhanced product offerings for returning travellers.

In Tahiti and Samoa, for example, a number of hotels which have proved extremely popular with Australian travellers have undergone major refurbishment programs.

And in a move to protect yield while encouraging more visitors, a number have introduced additional "value adds" to their products, offering such additions as meal deals.

As an added boost, a number of South Pacific tourism bodies are planning campaigns to ensure their destination remains highly visible in the Australian market.

The favourable climate for island holidays is resonating with wholesalers, Creative Holidays general manager

of sales and marketing and product, Andrew Yell, said taking an island holiday continued to be a popular way to take time out for travellers.

"With the close proximity to Asia and the Pacific, many Australians descend onto Vanuatu, Fiji, Thailand and Hawaii for island escapes," he said.

He said the reasons Australians are enthusiastic about island holidays remain the same – warmer climates, white sandy beaches, good value accommodation, shopping, culture and food – but a new dimension is being added to the market.

With better airfare deals available, there is an emerging trend for Australians to consider island holidays for "short breaks" over long weekends, for example, as well as longer family holidays, according to Yell.

With new Air New Zealand services from Sydney to Rarotonga cutting flying time from Australia to the Cook Islands, the destination will be vigorously seeking to attract more visitors to its shores and agents can expect to see plenty of product available through wholesalers who attended last month's Cook Islands Travelmart. (*travelBulletin*, April)

With Air Vanuatu next month adding weekly Melbourne-Port Vila non-stops to its schedules, Vanuatu will be looking to continue the Australian market growth it achieved last year.

Vanuatu Tourism Office Australian representative Georgia Ditton is urging agents to consider suggesting trips to one of Vanuatu's 83 outer islands (see separate story page 42).

"The new range of accommodation and unique activities are really setting Vanuatu apart from competitors and giving visitors a reason to come that goes beyond the price point," Ditton said.

Vanuatu was one of the few destinations globally to experience growth in 2009, according to Creative's Yell.

"Agents should certainly consider Vanuatu a great option for return travellers to the region as it offers value for money, yet has distinctive cultural and scenic differences to Fiji and New Caledonia," he said.

"It is also a destination that captivates many travellers year on year, with a sizeable repeat traveller rate."

Yell also noted that Fiji continues to be a competitive destination, with operators vying for their slice of the Aussie travel market with great value offers.

"Along with an abundance of mainstream offerings, Fiji perfectly caters to key niche markets like golf holidays and weddings," he added.

Yell also has advice for agents with clients who are undecided about island destinations, urging them to consider New Caledonia cuisine, reflecting a strong French colonial

influence. "Gastronomes will devour the finest French food in Noumea, with a huge selection of restaurants, from cafés to fine dining, offering a European flavour to a Pacific paradise," he enthused.

Yell said honeymooners and couples continued to be captivated by Tahiti, with a unique selling point being its over water bungalows options.

"Tahiti really offers the greatest exclusivity and romance of the region, but this exotic destination can be very affordable, with some excellent seasonal all-inclusive packages," he said.

Tahiti Tourism regional director for Australia, Robert Thompson, said that Tahiti rewards agents with good commission on high yield product.

But he added that consumers are also winners. "Many Tahiti suppliers are now offering value adds to their packages such as meal deals which means travellers are getting more value for their spend," he told *travelBulletin*.

The launch of Hawaiian Airlines' flights from Sydney six years ago has been the catalyst for a boom in the numbers of Australians travelling to Hawaii – at least to Honolulu.

But Creative's Yell notes: "At the moment only a small percentage of travellers are taking advantage of the great experiences available on the outer islands of Hawaii, offering agents an untapped market."

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Availability is limited to selected departure periods. Other terms and conditions apply. All flights operate via Port Moresby.

## FJ to re-introduce Christmas Island flights

AIR Pacific will re-introduce weekly flights between Nadi and Kiritimati (Christmas) Island and on to Honolulu on May 25.

The flight will operate with a Boeing 737-700 aircraft with eight seats in Tabua Business Class and 110 in Pacific Voyager Economy Class. The new flights will add a third weekly Nadi-Honolulu service to make travel throughout the South Pacific even easier according to Air Pacific chief executive officer John Campbell.

Campbell said the airline was very pleased to bring commercial airline services back to Kiritimati Island.

"The Republic of Kiribati plays a unique role in tourism and business in the Pacific and linking Christmas Island to both Fiji and Honolulu will be a positive step for many stakeholders," he said.

"It is an exciting boutique addition to our route network, which will be popular among fishing, dive and bird watching enthusiasts the world over."

The northbound schedule for the new flight provides connections from Sydney, Brisbane, Auckland, Tarawa, Tonga and Suva. The southbound flights will provide easy connections back to Suva and next day connections to Tarawa, thereby linking the two principal islands of Kiribati.

## Agents, consider Vanuatu's 83 outer islands

AGENTS selling island holiday to Vanuatu should consider suggesting trips to one of Vanuatu's 83 outer islands according to Vanuatu Tourism Office Australian representative Georgia Ditton.

"The average length of stay in Vanuatu is 11.7 days so there is plenty of time to visit Port Vila and at least one other island," she said.

"In October this year, Air Vanuatu took delivery of a new ATR72 making Vanuatu's outer islands particularly Espiritu Santo and Tanna, even more accessible. A few nights in cosmopolitan Port Vila followed by an authentic experience on islands like Tanna or Espiritu Santo makes for the perfect combination of resort style relaxation and adventure."

Ditton said tour options were expanding on these islands.

"On Tanna visitors can surf down the steep ash planes of the fiery Mount Yasur volcano, swim in underwater caves, visit untouched waterfalls and meet villagers still living in the traditional way," she said.

"While on Espiritu Santo there are new waterfall tours, quad bike tours, hobie cat ocean sailing, waterskiing and kayaking as well as more laid back options such as horse riding, sunset cruises, island hopping and snorkelling."

Ditton said there had also been a steady stream of new hotels and resort developments. Much of this has been in the boutique market with small upscale properties or self contained accommodation which were proving popular with families and groups.



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## Samoa's new marketing campaign

SAMOA Tourism will launch one of its biggest marketing campaigns in Australia in the second half of the year.

Samoa Tourism Authority marketing representative Australia, Lorenzo McFarland, is currently holding talks with major industry partners to plan the campaign.

"Our aim is to ensure 12 months' exposure for Samoa," he said.

"It has never been a better time us to promote Samoa to Australians as an ideal island holiday destination."

"We have recovered extremely well from last year's tsunami, two of our major resorts Sinalei

Reef Resort and Spa and Coconuts Beach Club Resort and Spa have just re-opened bigger and better than ever. All other properties are due to be operational by July."

McFarland said Samoa had much to offer Australians looking for an island holiday.

"Samoa is a true untouched island, we have a pristine environment, great white sandy beaches and a culture that goes back generations and is based on the extended family."

"I often say we are like Fiji was 30 years ago."

An added bonus was airline services with the three direct Virgin Blue/ Polynesian Blue flights direct from Sydney and Brisbane.

## PNG 'never more affordable'

PAPUA New Guinea is an ideal island holiday destination and as an added bonus is more affordable than ever before according to Air Niugini regional manager Australia, Charles Morley. "PNG is an ideal option for those seeking adventure and unspoilt beauty," he said. "The country offers an array of accommodation and holiday options from tourist lodges to international standard resorts and business hotels.

"Whilst the Kokoda Track is still the most popular product, there is also an array of other holiday options including village stays, cultural festivals, adventure lodges, cruising, surfing, fishing and diving holidays through to birdwatching and the magnificent fjords of Tufi and the wonderful oasis that is the Madang Resort.

"With competitive airfares starting from \$513 return from Brisbane (including taxes/surcharges) PNG has never been more affordable."

Travellers could book all inclusive holidays through one of the many wholesalers that specialised in PNG. As an added bonus, travellers who flew on Air Niugini could now gain points with the airline as a result of it launching its own frequent flyer program, Destinations. The free to join program allows individual and family membership and is points oriented, based on the dollar value of travellers spend rather than mileage flown. The airline flies to 20 ports throughout PNG and connects PNG to 10 key destinations through the Asia Pacific regions.

"We offer an international standard of service onboard our Boeing 767 and 757 fleet," Morley said.

"Passengers can enjoy our Bird of Paradise service in both business and economy classes with complimentary meals and beverages, inflight entertainment and duty free purchases. Qantas frequent flyer members can also earn point on selected Air Niugini flights whilst Air Niugini Executive Club members enjoy lounge privileges throughout PNG and reciprocal lounges in Asia and Australia where applicable."



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# Tahiti wins back travellers with value add-ons

AFTER a challenging year caused by the global economic crisis and a reduction in air services, Tahiti is bouncing back as a popular island holiday destination with Australian travellers.

Tahiti Tourism regional director for Australia, Robert Thompson, said the feedback from wholesalers was very positive with many reporting an increase in sales.

And while the downturn was tough there were some positives – especially for consumers, with many suppliers now offering value adds to their packages such as meal deals “which means travellers are getting more value for their spend”.

“A typical holiday to Tahiti may still cost in the \$1800 to \$2000 but

consumers are getting many more inclusions and thus greater value.

“At the same time Tahiti is still a great destination for agents to sell. They are getting a good commission on a high yield product.”

Thompson suggested that many consumers researched Tahiti on the web, but most travellers still booked with retail agents as a Tahiti holiday was best purchased as part of a package holiday.

He urged agents to encourage clients to visit more of Tahiti’s islands.

“Each of the islands has something special to offer,” he said.

To further boost Australian numbers Tahiti Tourism will again run its ‘You Deserve Tahiti’ campaign this year.



## Lord Howe tops visitor satisfaction report

LORD Howe Island has been ranked number one for visitor satisfaction across 62 regions of Australia according to the latest Tourism Research Australia Visitor Profile Satisfaction Report.

The Lord Howe survey stated that overall, 94 per cent of visitors were satisfied with their visit, with 82 per cent very satisfied. Some of the areas where visitors’ expectations were exceeded were ‘nature-based experiences’; ‘something the kids would enjoy’; ‘a place to spend quality time with partner/family/friends’; ‘an adventure’; and ‘discover or learn something new’.

The report said visitors were particularly impressed by the friendly, helpful and hospitable staff and friendly locals.



Walking, North Head, Lord Howe (Credit: Grahame McConnell; Tourism NSW)

## Direct air service expected to boost Cook Island visitor numbers

THE Cook Island is expected to become an even more popular island holiday destination for Australians with the introduction of a new direct service between Sydney and the Cook Islands.

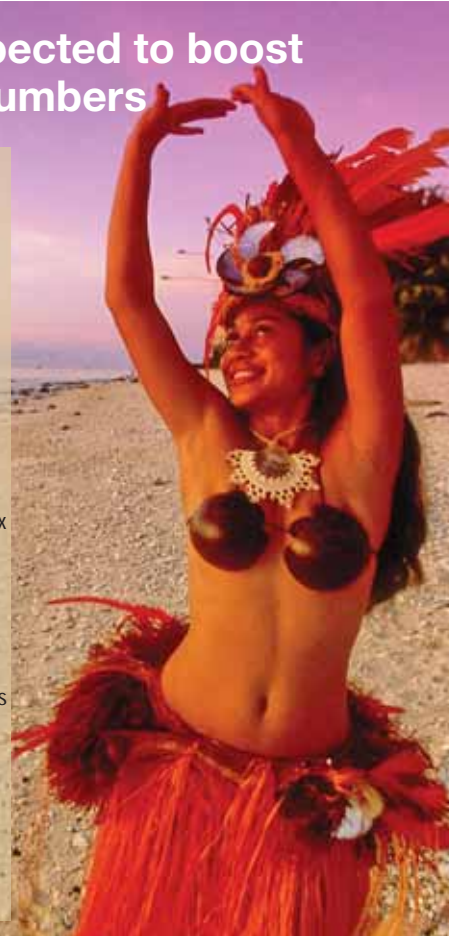
Air New Zealand will operate the service once a week for a four month trial period during the peak holiday season of July to October.

The 17 return services on a Sunday from Sydney and Friday from Rarotonga will be operated by a 223-seat Boeing 767-300 with a configuration of 199 economy and 24 business class seats.

Flight time for the 5000 kilometre journey is six hours from Sydney and seven hours 15 minutes from Rarotonga.

Cook Islands Tourism Corporation Australian representative, Jonica Paramor, said the Cook Islands was a perfect destination for families or couples. As the currency was New Zealand dollars the exchange rate was favourable. The diving was great with a minimum of 100 feet visibility. Getting out and about was also easy and crowds were not a problem.

“You can get your car and moped licence for \$NZ25 and it’s valid for a year allowing travellers to get out into the local population.”



## NF to resume direct flights from Melbourne

AN INCREASE in Air Vanuatu services between Australia and Vanuatu is expected to further boost the appeal of Vanuatu.

From June 24 the airline will recommence services from Melbourne to Port Vila. The flights will operate direct in both directions each Thursday, departing Melbourne at 8.40pm.

“This convenient departure time allows passengers to complete a full days’ work, before heading to the airport and jumping onboard the new direct flight where they can enjoy a

drink and meal,” said Air Vanuatu manager, Australia Malcolm Pryor.

The direct outbound service ex Melbourne will cut down the travelling time to 3hrs 45 minutes compared to over six hours via Sydney.

The return flight will depart Port Vila at 4pm and arrive at 7pm.

Passengers receive a 23 kilogram luggage allowance, meal and bar service and in-flight entertainment.

Air Vanuatu also now operates a direct 737-800 service each Tuesday to Espiritu Santo from Brisbane.

Air Vanuatu has also extended its Super Special return airfare ex Melbourne of \$628, valid for sale until June 30, 2010.

Super Special return fares are also available ex Brisbane to Port Vila for \$496, Brisbane to Espiritu Santo for \$526, Sydney to Port Vila for \$538 and Sydney to Espiritu Santo for \$672 (including taxes and surcharges).

All Super Special fares are available for sale until June 30, 2010, for departures until March 31, 2011 (some blackout periods apply).

## Club InterContinental ready for bookings

THE InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort and Spa’s new Club InterContinental will be ready for bookings from June 1.

To celebrate the opening of Club InterContinental the hotel is offering a special early bird rate for travel booked before July 31, 2010 starting from \$FJ955 (about \$A545) per night inclusive of Club InterContinental benefits and taxes. This rate is subject to availability, for travel between June 1 and March 31, 2011.