

# Strong South American *sales* set to continue

Demand for South America and Antarctica is bouncing back (aided by the strong Australian dollar) – with positive sales forecasts for 2012.



La Libertad, Peru (image courtesy of Contours Travel)

By Gary Walsh

**T**HE continuing strength of the Australian dollar sees South America and the Antarctic remaining firmly on travellers' radar. Early in the year travel was disrupted by the eruption of Puyehue volcano in Chile, but that proved only to be a temporary blow to the Australian market, which has benefitted in recent years from better air services and increasing competition on the ground.

BFirst Travel director Marcos da Silva said prospects for 2012 were sound. "Based on sales growth in the 2010/11 financial year, the market to South America looks healthy," he said. "For example, year-on-year our Peru booking yield grew over 40 per cent in the past financial year. We are also experiencing high demand for 'off-the-beaten track' destinations on the continent. This plays to our strength as a tailor-made destination specialist.

"Based on the current results, I believe 2012 is going to be a good year for BFirst Travel due the strong Australian dollar and growth in requests for tailor-made programs by discerning customers looking for travel itineraries that suit their

individual needs – as opposed to off-the-shelf packages. BFirst Travel specialises in taking their travellers beyond the traditional mass tourism circuit, and exposes them to once-in-a-lifetime experiences, beyond helping them choose the right hotel and standard sightseeing tours."

Inca Tours' Ross Pulbrook also stresses the benefits of looking beyond stock standard South American tours. In a recent address to travel agents, he said: "If you have clients with special interests or hobbies or belong to clubs or organisations, you may like to suggest they consider an overseas trip geared to that interest or activity. We can tailor a tour for them, be it a family, a group of friends, or members of a club or organisation. As specialists in travel to South and Central America, Inca Tours has contacts in a wide range of Latin American organisations and associations.

"Examples of special interest travel are: alpacas, archaeology, art appreciation, astronomy, bird watching, bromeliads, butterflies, bush walking, ceramics, gemstones, llamas, mountain climbing, national parks, opera, orchids, photography, pottery, tango, textiles, train journeys, trekking, volunteer work, white water

rafting and wine tasting. Sporting tours have been popular in the past, especially golfing groups. Skiing too is popular, with Argentina and Chile both having world-class ski runs and resorts. Inca Tours can also organise rugby or soccer tours."

Pulbrook said bookings showed that the global financial crisis was a thing of the past for Australian travellers, and while there had been some volatility in the value of the AUD with Europe's financial problems becoming more critical, business was holding up. But he cautioned that the dollar's strength was not set in stone, so prospective travellers would do well to book quickly to lock in good prices.

The dollar has led to some excellent specials coming onto the market. An example is Abercrombie & Kent's deal to mark its 21st season in Antarctica – discounts of up to \$US2755 per person for clients who book their places for the 2012/13 season before March 31, 2012.

Contiki Holidays has only recently entered the South America market but had already been encouraged to additional departures of all its six tours covering Peru, Argentina and Brazil. Managing director Fiona Hunt said, "Contiki launched South

America following market research, evaluating customer feedback forms and following commentary on social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter, all of which demonstrated a strong demand.

"Although using our successful formula in Europe and the US as a base, we adapted our South America program to fit the style of each destination, which is more akin to our style of touring in Asia. The result is a focus on unique and authentic experiences, which is carried across all elements of the program such as sights, activities and transport. The accommodation featured is a mix of well-located three-star hotels and special stays.

"Groups average around 24-30 passengers, perfectly sized for a local South American experience yet large enough to meet plenty of other young travellers. By adding extra departures to our tours, we're able to keep true to these smaller group sizes and deliver a more immersive experience. I'm confident that South America will continue to be a success within the 18-35 year old market. As the season progresses we will continue to assess all itineraries and add extra departures should demand dictate."

# Buenos Aires tops the list, but South American demand wavers

JENNY Peters, manager of Camden Haven Travel in Laurieton, NSW, says destinations come in and out of fashion with her clients. "A few years ago South America was a very strong seller but seems to have gone off the boil a little in my area at least," she says.

"The best sellers for me are Buenos Aires – everyone wants to see Evita's tomb – Antarctica – the great white continent, people are fascinated by it and have the sense that they too will be an intrepid explorer – Iguassu

and Machu Picchu, which holds a mystique that is difficult to explain. The Chilean fjords are becoming better known."

Jenny's personal favourites are in that group: the Antarctic, Iguassu and Machu Picchu. And she says that in general clients are attracted by "the amazing scenery, the diverse culture, the history of ancient civilisations and the food. Another side of South America is the music which is absolutely addictive and the tango has to be seen to be believed".



Apartments in Buenos Aires



Patagonia

## LAN merger with TAM to be finalised in 2012

A MERGER between Chile's LAN and Brazil's TAM is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2012. The combined entity, LATAM Airlines Group, is designed to become the leading airline in the region.

LATAM will offer passenger and cargo transportation to more than 115 destinations in 23 countries, with a fleet of more than 280 aircraft. And LAN has announced the completion of a \$US80m project to install winglets on its 39-strong Boeing 767 fleet.

The airline says the move has reduced its fuel usage by four per cent along with a significant reduction in its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Enrique Cueto, LAN's executive vice president, said: "Even though the commercial aviation industry emits two per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> worldwide, we are always looking for innovative ways of further reducing this figure."

"The installation of winglets to our entire long-haul Boeing 767 fleet is an investment we are proud

of, as it allows us to have a lower environmental impact."

Earlier this year LAN was named airline of the year in the AirFinance Journal awards in recognition of its financial administration. Chief financial officer Alejandro de la Fuente said: "We are very proud to be receiving such an inspiring award. This is an acknowledgement of the solid, successful and consistent financial strategy LAN has developed."

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Arequipa main square, Peru



## Culinary Peru tour sales take off for BFirst

BFIRST Travel is reporting strong sales for two new products in 2012. The first is "A Taste of Peru", an eight-day trip priced from \$US1799 per person that adds culinary visits to touring the country's iconic sights.

"Peruvian cuisine reflects the diversity of a nation that has blended its native traditions with the cuisine of Europe, the Middle East, China, Africa and Japan," BFirst says. "The result: unique flavours that make Peruvian cuisine one of the finest and most varied in the world."

The culinary adventure begins at a typical Peruvian market where clients can experience

a wide variety of Peruvian product, especially seafood, and enjoy and taste exotic fruits. The tour also visits exclusive Peruvian restaurants such as Gaston Acurio's Chicha Restaurant, where clients can make their own pisco sour and the famous seafood dish, ceviche.

The second journey is a seven-day "Machu Picchu Lodge to Lodge" trek, with the comfort of staying in four quality mountain lodges located in pristine areas before reaching Machu Picchu. Clients will trek from 2100m to 3900m in elevation, traversing mountain passes and exploring more than 15 different ecosystems.



Chichen Itza, Mexico

## Inca cuts 'Gold Tour' price

INCA Tours' signature deluxe tour of South America is set to depart at the end of February, with a \$2000 price cut thanks to the strength of the Australian dollar. The 33-day "Inca Gold Tour of Central America, Chile, Cuba and Mexico" will leave on Wednesday, February 29 and return to Sydney on Sunday, April 1.

Inca says it will be a special departure for a number of reasons; one is that a number in the group of not more than 18 passengers will be past Inca Tours' clients "so impressed with the company that they are travelling

with Inca for the second or third time", says director Ross Pulbrook.

The tour includes many of the highlights of five diverse and vibrant countries, destinations that Inca says are sometimes overlooked: Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico and Panama, as well as three nights in Chile.

The tour will be fully escorted and "conducted at a sensible pace", Pulbrook says, "enabling the group to experience these wonderful destinations properly". The five-star luxury tour is now \$22,350 per person (twin share) ex-east coast Australia.

## NFS to expand Sth American range

SOUTH America is continuing to be a strong performer for Melbourne-based wholesaler Natural Focus Safaris.

Sales and marketing manager Praful Albuquerque has recently returned from South America after attending Travel Mart Latin America and found that there was a great interest in the Australian tourism dollar among South American suppliers.

Natural Focus Safaris plans to expand its range of South America product in its 2012 brochure, expected to hit agents' shelves early in the new year.

The brochure will be its biggest yet, increasing from 88 to 100 pages. New additions include wildlife lodges in the Pantanal, an area renowned for its unique wildlife including anteaters, tapir, capybaras and caimans; as well as new cruises in the Galapagos and the Amazon.

NFS' current special, Patagonia on Sale, offers a saving of \$1039 per person on a new nine-day Patagonia and Chile itinerary for selected departures to February 12. Starting from \$3517 per person (twin share),

highlights include Santiago, Torres del Paine National Park (pictured), and a four-night cruise through Patagonia and the Tierra del Fuego with Cruceros Australis.



The wholesaler also has an exclusive bonus for any new bookings that visit Chilean operator explora's properties in Patagonia and Atacama. Stay a minimum of five nights at explora Patagonia or explora Atacama and NFS will include one free night in Santiago and free return flights from Santiago to Patagonia or Atacama. This represents a saving of up to \$1026 per person couple. The offer is available during selected travel periods only and conditions apply.

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# Tour 'divine, idyllic' Columbia with Contours trip



Selv, Peru

COLOMBIA has shrugged off its edgy reputation and Contours Travel director Ted Dziadkiewicz says the only danger with the country is want-ing to stay. He and wife Judy will lead the company's 10-day "Desert Boots and Denim" tour of Colombia departing Bogota on March 21, 2012 and priced from \$2724 per person (twin share).

Dziadkiewicz says tourism is flourishing in Colombia. "The divine destination of Cartagena and the historical capital Bogota are the most visited areas of the country, closely followed by the coffee region and Medellin.

"These areas received just over two million visitors in 2007 during the long running internal conflict. Now Colombia

has received double-digit growth between 2004 and 2011."

He says Columbia's Caribbean coast is idyllic, while colonial cities such as Popayan, Mompox, Villa de Leyva, Barichara and San Gil are oases of calm. There are also sites such as the Ciudad Perdida, 650 years older than Machu Picchu and only discovered in 1972, and off-limits for much of the time since. This archaeological treasure can be accessed only by a rugged six-day hike.

Travellers can also explore why the capital Bogota is known as the city of gold, and discover the city of Pablo Escobar, the late head of Colombia's drug cartel, who remains a hero in Medellin, where clients can take a "Drug Lord Tour".

EL GRANDE, as the name suggests, is the biggest of the South America Tourism Office's circuit tours, a 28-day trip that explores most of the continent's biggest attractions. Big cities are there – Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago – as are the iconic sights such as Machu Picchu and the Iguazu Falls.

But the journey also includes a four-day cruise of the Galapagos Islands and a side trip to mysterious Easter Island. Add Quito,

## SATO offers iconic 'El Grande' journey

La Paz, Cuzco and Lima, and clients have a very comprehensive tour of the best of South America. The tour departs weekly from Santiago, with fares from \$12,144 per person (twin share) in low season. Land-only fares are from \$7758 per person (twin share) staying in tourist class hotels.

SATO also has on sale a four-night Rio trip

for the 2012 Carnival. The price, from \$1919 per person, includes accommodation, breakfast daily and a ticket to the Sambadrome Parade.

The company also offers the fly-drive "South American Odyssey" in 35-day and 22-day versions. The longer trip begins in Santiago and includes visits to Lima, Cuzco, Machu Picchu, Puno and Laz Paz before returning to Santiago.

Clients on the longer journey then join, travelling to Valparaiso to board the *MS Veendam* for a 12-day cruise around the southern tip of South America to Buenos Aires.

The trip then visits Iguazu Falls and Rio de Janeiro before returning to Santiago for the flight back to Australia. Fares are from \$11,009 per person (twin share) for the 35-day trip and from \$7768 per person for the 22-day version.

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[www.naturalfocussafaris.com.au](http://www.naturalfocussafaris.com.au)

**Coming Soon!**

## APT returns to South America

APT is back in the South America market for 2012 after withdrawing as a result of demand slumping during the global financial crisis. It has returned with a restructured program, based on small group (maximum 24 passengers) touring, offering 63 departures across 16 itineraries.

Three months after launching its 2012 South America brochure in April, APT added another three departures to meet what general manager marketing, Debra Fox, said was "an exceptionally robust customer response".

She attributed the demand to a "fabulously diverse destination", APT's small group sizes, no-rush itineraries, luxury hotels, indulgent train journeys, exotic cruises, and an extensive range of exclusives such as the Hiram Bingham by Orient-Express train, Spanish classes at Café Tortoni in Buenos Aires and an up close encounter with the elusive toucan near Iguassu Falls National Park.

"It appears we have really hit the mark, not only with APT customers who have experienced our fully-inclusive style in Europe, but other discerning travellers considering South America for their next discovery," she said.

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