

# RAIL BOOM TIMES

## continue as strong \$A sees sales exceed expectations

This year has been a bumper year for international rail sales, according to wholesalers, with the strong exchange rate and ease of rail travel winning over Aussie travellers.

By Jenny Burns

**T**HE popularity of rail travel continues unabated with all major operators reporting increases in sales.

The strength of the Australian dollar and the 'environmentally friendly' nature and ease of rail travel are amongst the major reasons.

Momento Travel Services managing director Kylee Kay said rail had been doing exceptionally well in 2011.

"Canadian Rail, through the national network of VIA rail, is up over 30 per cent year on year, Rocky Mountaineer is also up well over 60 per cent for the 2011 season and Amtrak in the USA has fared very well off a very high base to achieve over 40 per cent growth year on year thus far," she said.

Kay believes the three products are doing well predominantly as a direct result of the strength of the Australian dollar against both the Canadian and US dollar.

"Now has never been a better time to go to North America in terms of value for money and both VIA and

Amtrak already represent a very low cost means of getting around each country with the added benefit on VIA of having sleeper cabins so you can save on accommodation whilst you get there," she said.

"For budget travellers it's perfect timing. For the more discerning or more affluent traveller, there are great deals out right now The Rocky Mountaineer, for instance, is providing couples up to \$1200 in savings and with a rate better than parity, there's plenty of reason now for people to consider that well known 'bucket list' train trip of a lifetime.

"The Rocky Mountaineer deal lasts to the end of November so I expect to see growth continuing along its current path at least until then."

Rail Europe Australasia manager Richard Leonard said rail sales were soaring.

"We had our biggest month on record in June. Australia is up 26 per cent so it is very pleasing for us," he said.

Rail Plus is also reporting strong demand for rail product across the board.

"It's still boom time for international rail and there is no sign of things slowing down," said national sales and marketing manager, Greg McCallum.

"In July, Australians were given access to discounted fares in the UK and Spain, which historically have only been made available to locals.

"Fares are up to 80 per cent cheaper than previous levels, which is really quite remarkable," he said.

According to International Rail Australasia managing director, Jonathan Hume, Europe rail bookings are up 50 per cent on last year.

Italy was doing particularly well and accounted for around 60 per cent of European rail bookings.

"The new high speed trains are fast, efficient and very comfortable," Hume said. "Tickets are fully electronic, so the booking process is simple for travel agents."

"France also continues to be very popular – it is very important to reserve seats well in advance during the peak season."

Germany and Spain were also performing well.

Also in great demand were overnight trains, especially the Artesia Night Train between France and Italy.

"Paris to Rome is the most popular, with accommodation ranging from six-share for the budget traveller, to first class double cabins for the more discerning," Hume said.

"It is critical to book these as far in advance as possible as they do sell out quickly."

Scenic trains such as the Glacier Express in Switzerland were also popular.

The one negative in rail sales was Japan Rail Passes which had suffered dramatically due to the earthquake in March.

"We are hoping the market will start bouncing back towards the end of the year as the ski season approaches," Hume said.

African Wildlife Safaris and Natural Focus Safaris are also experiencing an increase in demand for train journeys.

"Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of their 'environmental footprints' when travelling," said marketing manager Praful Albuquerque.

Image courtesy of Natural Focus Safaris

## E-ticket introduction to further boost rail efficiency

THE introduction of e-tickets is expected to provide an ever greater boost to European train travel according to Rail Plus national sales and marketing manager, Greg McCallum.

E-tickets are being introduced on Eurostar, Thalys (Paris to Amsterdam), TGV's (France) and RENFE (Spanish trains) services.

"These tickets are even more efficient than the airline solution, as you receive your seat number and carriage number immediately upon payment as opposed to having to wait in-side 24 hours before you're able to check in and select your seat number like you do with air," McCallum said.

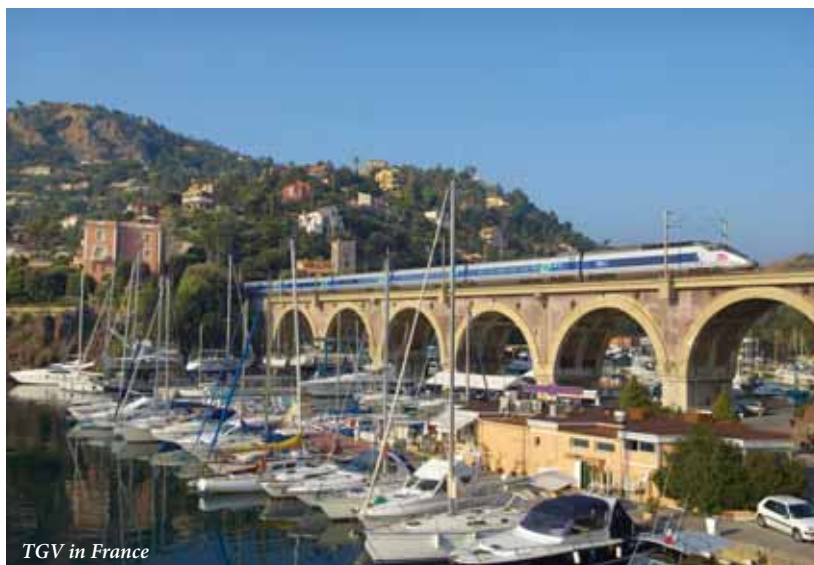
"It's very exciting."

Also boosting European train travel was the completion of a north to south high-speed rail link in Italy.

"There is now over 1000 kilometres of high speed rail connecting Turin in the north to Milan, Rome, Naples to Salerno in the south," McCallum said.

"This is Italy's largest infrastructure investment since the 1940's. Milan to Rome takes just three hours and there are 68 daily services."

McCallum said in terms of desti-



TGV in France

nations Madrid to Barcelona continued to be incredibly popular, inspired by a journey time of just two hours, 40 minutes and 52 daily services.

"Spain's on time performance is a staggering 98.5 per cent, which is second only to Japan's bullet trains at 99 per cent," he said.

McCallum said there was very

popular rule of thumb, that any high speed journey anywhere in the world, four hours or less, would be quicker than flying regardless of the flight time.

"This is due to the common 'door to door' model which the majority of travellers use to judge time efficiencies," he said.

## Cox & Kings adds train journey to Peru tour

COX & Kings is including a train trip on the Andean Explorer as part of its 13-day escorted small group journey to Peru.

The tour explores Peru's wonders including Machu Picchu to Cuzco, Arequipa, the Colca Canyon and Lake Titicaca and is priced from \$2783 per person (twin share).

Departing Lima, highlights include Colca Canyon's snowy volcanic peaks, a full day tour of the floating islands of Titicaca, passing through the Andean peaks on the Andean Explorer train to Cuzco and an overnight stay at Machu Picchu.

The trip to Machu Picchu is valid for sale until December 24, 2011.



Machu Picchu

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## Rail Europe offers discounts and better services

RAIL Europe has announced a number of new initiatives in major European markets.

In Spain, Rail Europe now offers discounts of up to 60 per cent on Renfe trains. "Renfe boasts the most modern fleet in Europe ensuring a comfortable and rewarding experience," said Rail Europe Australasia manager, Richard Leonard.

"With the discounts, convenience of e-tickets and modern, long distance high speed trains, rail travel in Spain is tipped to increase dramatically."

Rail Europe also has access to the Association of Train Operating Companies in the UK – that is 24 rail operators with private services.

"This exciting development allows access to 15 to 60 per cent off advance tickets, the ability to buy anytime tickets with travel on any service on any train at any time and off-peak tickets," Leonard said. "There are huge savings on point-to-point tickets such as London-Edinburgh costing from \$121 in first class and from \$37 in second class."

# Australians contribute to Amtrak's growth

THE popularity of Amtrak, America's rail system, continues to grow with more Australians and Americans using the service.

According to the latest figures released by the railway, May marked 19 consecutive months of year-over-year ridership growth and was the best May ever with more than 2.6 million passengers.

The long-distance trains have experienced year-over-year passenger increases in 18 of those 19 months, making a significant contribution to the extended streak of national ridership growth.

The performance was part of a long-term trend that has seen Amtrak set annual ridership records in seven of the past eight fiscal years, including more than 28.7 million passengers in 2010.

Momento Travel Services managing director Kylee Kay said the number of Australian travellers using Amtrak exceeded expectations by double digit percentages. Momento is Australian GSA for Amtrak.

"These figures show the stability of train travel in the USA and that agents can book Amtrak with confidence," Kay said.

Amtrak put its success down to a number of factors including high gasoline prices which have trended



Above: Adirondack and left: California-Zephyr



of rail travel and effective marketing campaigns were given as other reasons.

With about 33,800 route kilometres in 46 states, the District

higher and continued growth in business travel on the high-speed Acela Express trains with Wi-Fi service.

The increased appeal and popularity

of Columbia and three Canadian provinces, Amtrak operates more than 300 trains each day – at speeds up to 241 kph – to more than 500 destinations.

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## From the romantic to breathtaking – AWS-NFS offers diverse rail deals

AFRICAN Wildlife Safaris and Natural Focus Safaris are offering a number of train trips on several continents.

In Africa, train trips include the Blue Train and Rovos Rail.

"Both trains combine five-star facilities with colonial design and unsurpassed service," said marketing manager Praful Albuquerque.

"Rovos Rail's range of romantic journeys take in the most breathtaking sights of Africa – from the winelands surrounding Cape Town and the picturesque Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe to bustling Dar es Salaam in Tanzania."

Trip options include overnights onboard, stays at popular game reserves or hotels and sightseeing. A three day journey from Pretoria to Victoria Fall or vice versa costs from \$2268 per person for travel from January 1 to September 12, 2012.

Natural Focus Safaris' 2011/12 India brochure includes a range of train journeys in both north and south India. In north India the trains travel through the night with touring conducted by day in air-conditioned vehicles.

"The popular 'Royal Rajasthan on Wheels' sees guests accommodated onboard in



elegant coaches while enjoying sumptuous cuisine, with spa treatments also available," Albuquerque said.

Prices for this eight-day journey start from \$4247 per person (twin share).

Albuquerque said Canada's renowned Rocky Mountaineer train (pictured) was also a firm favourite with NFS' clients.

NFS is currently offering an early bird deal. Clients will receive up to \$1200 in added value per couple (based on GoldLeaf) when they book a qualifying seven-night, 2012 package by November 18, 2011.