

RUGBY WORLD CUP drives demand for Oz

Luxury trains in
Australasia

Ultra-long-haul
travel's hidden risks

New dawn for aviation –
Qantas's 'Project Sunrise'

Australasia

Australasia offers South African travellers a rich mix of experiences. Aside from visits to friends and relatives, there is growing interest in self-drive holidays, outdoor adventure, rail journeys and camper travel.

Rugby World Cup drives Australasia demand

CHRISTIAAN SCHULTZ

AUSTRALASIA is becoming a bigger drawcard for South African travellers, attracting growing interest as a holiday destination rather than being booked mainly for visits to friends and relatives (VFR). And with the Rugby World Cup in Australia drawing closer, the destination is also opening up a parallel sales opportunity for agents.

Stacey Rampersadh, Director of Inspirations Travel and Tours (ITT), told *Travel News* that while Australia and New Zealand had traditionally attracted strong VFR demand, ITT was increasingly seeing enquiries for full standalone holidays rather than add-on breaks or city stopovers attached to family visits.



Stacey Rampersadh

“Self-drive holidays across Australia and New Zealand are the most popular and most frequently requested style of trip. Train journeys – particularly The Ghan and the Indian Pacific – are also in strong demand, usually built in as a highlight within a longer stay rather than booked as a standalone trip. Camper hire is a growing category in both destinations, giving travellers itinerary flexibility along with safe, well-equipped camping options,” she said.

Rampersadh added that Australia’s gateway cities and New Zealand’s South Island continued to perform strongly because they offered a mix of iconic attractions and flexible touring options.

“The iconic gateway cities – Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Cairns (as the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef) – remain consistently popular. Even though these are city breaks, they open the door to local heritage and culture, wildlife, exceptional food, wine routes and coastal and beach experiences.

“New Zealand’s South Island is the go-to for travellers chasing dramatic scenery – its concentrated mix of fjords, glaciers, alpine lakes and mountain ranges offers a variety of landscapes within a compact region



Sugarloaf Rock in Western Australia’s Margaret River region. The granite rock rising from the Indian Ocean just offshore is one of WA’s most photographed landmarks. Photo: Unsplash, Julien de Salaberry

that is ideal for self-drive touring. This appeals strongly to South African travellers already comfortable with road-trip style touring.”

Rampersadh highlighted South Australia’s wine and food scene, saying it was a strong fit for South African travellers, particularly those familiar with the winelands.

She also pointed out Kangaroo Island for its wildlife, and said Western Australia, including Perth, Margaret

River and Ningaloo, remained underappreciated in the South African market. Rampersadh also pointed to the amazing wilderness of the Kimberley, a 420 000 sq km area in the far north of Western Australia offering some of the most dramatic scenery in the region.

When it comes to pricing, Rampersadh said Australasia’s reputation as an expensive long-haul destination did not always

reflect the full picture.

“Many South Africans perceive Australia and New Zealand as relatively expensive long-haul options mainly because of high flight fares and headline costs (meals, tours and activities), but when planned carefully, both countries can offer very good value, with plenty of budget-friendly accommodation options and free or low-cost

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Luxury trains in Australasia

FOR clients wanting to explore various cities in Australia and New Zealand, train travel is an exciting and relaxing way to do it.

“You can sit back, relax, watch the scenery, get up from your seat, go to the bar car or restaurant car and arrive at your final destination relaxed,” **Corné Kotze**, Senior Rail Specialist and Product Manager at Travel by Train, told *Travel News*.

Australia and New Zealand have a range of luxury train routes to choose from.

The Ghan offers a balance of comfort and adventure, travelling through Australia’s Red Centre. This train goes from Darwin to Adelaide, and offers off-train experiences in Katherine,

Alice Springs, Coober Pedy and Manguri. These include a bush walk through the stunning landscape near Alice Springs with a local guide, who will share the cultural significance of the area to the Arrernte people. Guests learn about bush tucker, against the towering rock formations and serene waters of Simpsons Gap.

For clients wanting to travel from coast to coast, the Indian Pacific travels between Perth, Adelaide and Sydney. Named for the two oceans at either end of the route, this train’s journey is a 4 352km crossing.

The Great Southern offers a luxurious trip from Adelaide to Brisbane with coastal views, fine dining experiences and premium wines available on board.

Alternatively, The Overland, which was Australia’s first inter-capital passenger train, offers clients a trip through the countryside between Adelaide and Melbourne.

Kiwi journeys

In New Zealand’s South Island, passengers explore the Southern Alps aboard the luxurious TranzAlpine train, travelling from Greymouth to Christchurch, passing through scenic country including Arthur’s Pass, the highest of only three routes traversing the Southern Alps. This National Park is popular for hiking, climbing and wildlife viewing.

The Northern Explorer showcases the rural heart of New Zealand’s North Island on a 681km journey



The Northern Explorer route is a full one-day journey taking nearly 12 hours to complete.

between Auckland and Wellington. This journey travels through the Central Volcanic Plateau, offering passengers the chance to see Mount Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe.

The Coastal Pacific train travels along the Pacific coast between Picton and Christchurch. Along the

way travellers can explore Kaikōura Coastline, famous for its marine life and whale watching, or explore Lake Grassmere which is known for its pink and white salt lakes. The Coastal Pacific train is currently on winter break and will restart on September 1.

The risks of ultra-long-haul travel

AUSTRALASIA (incorporating Australia and New Zealand) remains one of the safest and most desirable long-haul destinations for South African travellers. However, from a travel insurance perspective, both the journey itself and the distance involved introduce important considerations, says **Karen Botha**, Sales Manager at Santam Travel Insurance..

“One of the most significant factors when travelling to Australasia is the long-haul flight, often exceeding 15-20 hours. Spending extended time in a pressurised cabin with limited movement and low humidity can place strain on the body, particularly for older travellers or those with underlying health conditions,” she said.

Botha added that common in-flight medical risks include: reduced circulation due to prolonged sitting, dehydration caused by cabin conditions, fatigue or jet lag



Karen Botha

and increased exposure to common respiratory illnesses. “Simple preventative measures can make a meaningful difference: travellers should move or stretch every few hours, stay well hydrated and always keep essential medication in their hand luggage. “Importantly, most comprehensive travel insurance policies will cover medical emergencies that

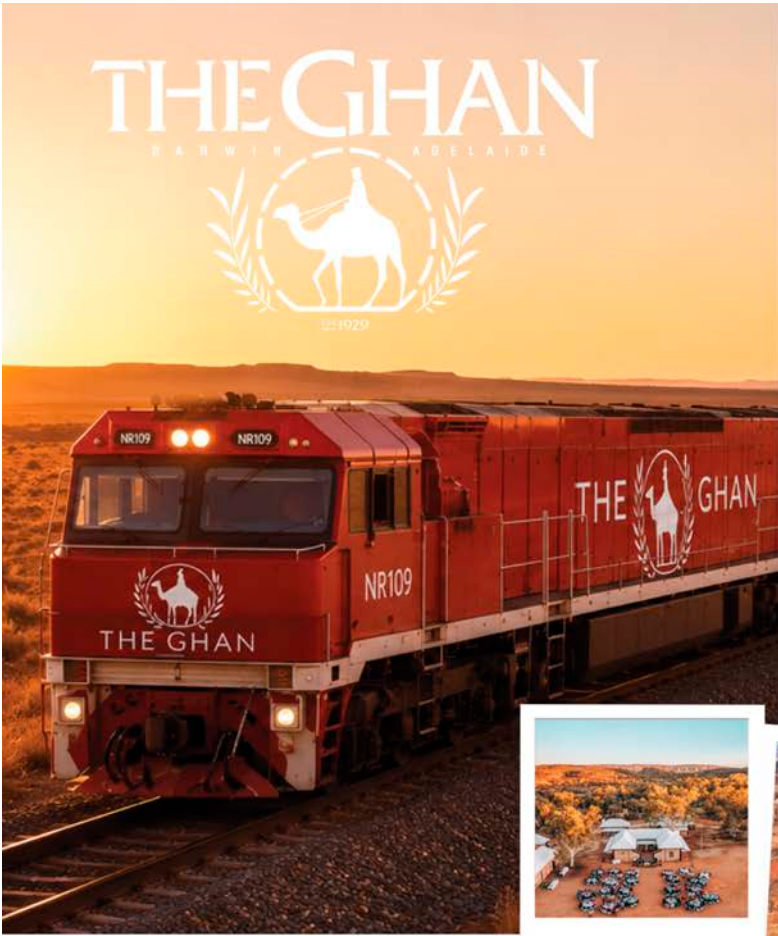
begin mid-flight, provided the policy is active and no exclusions apply. Once passengers land, this typically extends to treatment, hospitalisation, evacuation and access to emergency assistance services.” It is also important that travellers are fit to fly before undertaking a long-haul trip. Travellers should check in with their GP or a travel doctor before departure, advised Botha. From a medical case management perspective, she said one of the biggest challenges with long-distance destinations like Australasia is managing the related risks, including treatment costs and the complexity and cost of repatriation. “In the event of medical repatriation due to serious illness or injury, it is not simply a matter of being declared ‘fit to fly,’ but rather ‘fit to travel on a long-haul flight’. This



For South Africans travelling to Australasia, particularly grandparents visiting family, the distance and duration of the journey make the right travel cover essential. Photo: Magnific

can involve complex medical assessments, specialist support during travel and potential delays in repatriation until the traveller is stable enough to return to South Africa.” These factors make comprehensive medical cover and evacuation benefits critical when travelling such long distances. “Australasia is not a quick holiday destination. Due to the distance and cost of travel, many South African travellers – particularly parents and grandparents visiting family – tend to stay for extended periods. Policies often have limits on how long a trip can be, particularly for older travellers. In some cases, planned travel may exceed the maximum duration of cover allowed. It’s important that

travellers are aware of these limitations on cover periods when they book,” said Botha. Although Australasia is considered a low-risk destination, flights from South Africa are typically costly, making cancellation and disruption cover very important. Unexpected events before departure or during travel can result in significant financial loss without adequate protection. “While Australasia offers a safe and rewarding travel experience, the distance, duration and cost of travel make comprehensive insurance essential. From in-flight medical events to extended stays and complex repatriation scenarios, the right cover provides peace of mind throughout the journey,” said Botha.





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New dawn for aviation – Qantas’s ‘Project Sunrise’

QANTAS’S Project Sunrise is a benchmark in aviation. It’s the iconic Australian airline’s ambitious plan to connect Australia in a single non-stop flight with the longest of long-haul destinations where this was never previously possible.

From October 2027, the airline will operate daily non-stop flights between Sydney and London using its new Airbus A350-1000 ultra-long-range aircraft. Tickets go on sale from February next year. The flight is expected to take 20-22 hours.

It will be the first time the route has been flown without stops. Qantas has been flying between Sydney and London since 1947, when the original route took four days with seven stops in Darwin, Singapore, Calcutta, Karachi, Cairo, Castel Benito and Rome.

These ultra-long-haul services will operate alongside Qantas’s existing Perth-London and Sydney-Singapore-London services.

Qantas announced its plans to launch these direct flights in 2017, dubbing the preparations ‘Project Sunrise’. The Airbus A350-1000ULR was selected to operate the flights and 12 aircraft were ordered in May 2022.

The aircraft is expected to operate more direct routes between Australia



The aircraft will feature six enclosed First suites. Photo: Qantas

and other long-haul destinations, connecting Sydney to New York in around 18-19 hours. The routes offer shorter point-to-point travel times, reducing journeys by up to four hours compared with one-stop flights.

Qantas’s first Airbus A350-1000ULR completed its maiden test flight at the beginning of June. The test flight took off from Toulouse and flew for three hours 43 minutes over France and the French Atlantic Coast.

The flight tested the aircraft’s

primary systems including the aircraft’s specialised fuel system, which includes an additional 20 000 litre fuel tank. It’s that which enables commercial flights of up to 22 hours non-stop.

The successful test flight marked the beginning of a two-month testing campaign, with the aircraft expected to complete around 80 hours of testing and undergo extensive on-ground checks. The first aircraft, named Vega, will be delivered in April 2027, subject to regulatory approvals.

The aircraft

The onboard experience has been designed to support the ultimate in comfort on these ultra long flights. The aircraft seats up to 238 passengers across four cabin classes. With its spacious design, the aircraft has the lowest seat count of any A350-1000 in service, with more than 40% of seats allocated to premium cabins – first, business and premium economy.

It has a Wellbeing Zone and fast and free Wi-Fi in all cabins.

First class

The aircraft will feature six enclosed First suites in a 1-1-1 configuration. The suites feature a two-metre-long flat bed and separate reclining armchair, with a large flexible work and dining space for one or two people. A full-length wardrobe can also be found in each suite, along with several areas for personal storage. The suites offer 50% more space than the A380 suites.

Business class

Fifty-two Business suites will be arranged in 1-2-1 configuration. For the first time, Qantas Business suites will feature a sliding door for additional privacy, as well as an adjustable divider between the centre seats. The suite will include a large dining table and work surface, as well as increased storage options.

Premium economy

The Premium economy cabin, with 40 seats in a 2-4-2 configuration, will offer a blend of comfort and luxury with a 20,3cm winged privacy headrest that adjusts for maximum comfort, and a calf rest for full leg cradling.

Economy class

The 140 Economy seats are arranged in a 3-3-3 configuration. The seats will be Qantas’s most spacious economy-class seats at 83,8cm.

Wellbeing Zone

The A350 will feature Qantas’s first inflight Wellbeing Zone, situated between the Economy and Premium Economy cabins. Available to all passengers, the Wellbeing Zone gives passengers a space to enjoy guided wellbeing content to facilitate movement on board. Passengers seated in all classes can also help themselves to a selection of healthy refreshments.



The Wellbeing Zone is designed to facilitate movement on board throughout the flight. Photo: Qantas

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Rugby World Cup drives Australasia demand

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outdoor experiences that align well with South African travellers' preferences for nature and outdoor experiences."

Rugby World Cup

While ITT has not yet seen a clear spike in leisure bookings linked directly to next year's Rugby World Cup, taking place from October 1 to November 13, 2027, Rampersadh said the event was likely to become a stronger demand driver once flights open and travellers begin firming up plans.

"There's a large South African expatriate community and many supporters may find it more appealing to stay with friends and family than to pay for accommodation. We expect this to shift closer to the event – once flights open for booking and interest typically converts into firm requests or bookings."

She believes many fans will want to make the tournament part of a broader holiday, with interest likely to firm up once flights become available to book. "As a result, we anticipate the real uplift in enquiries and demand to begin around October or November this year."

The World Cup creates a strong opportunity for agents to sell Australia as more than a sports trip.

"Given the cost and flight time of getting to Australia from South Africa, most fans will want to justify the trip with a wider holiday – so agents should secure flights and accommodation as soon as possible, before host-city hotel rates spike, and before availability within easy reach of the match venues becomes a challenge.

"With matches spread across major cities like Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, the biggest opportunity is that the tournament can be sold as more than just a sports trip – combining match attendance with a city break, experience extension or a longer holiday."

Rampersadh provided the following tips for several regions outside the host cities that were likely to benefit from tournament-related travel:

- Western Australia (Perth gateway): Margaret River for wine tourism, coastal scenery and premium food

experiences; and Ningaloo Reef as a high-value eco-tourism draw for snorkelling, diving and whale shark encounters.

- South Australia (Adelaide gateway): the Barossa Valley, an internationally recognised wine region; and the Adelaide Hills for boutique food, wine and countryside experiences.
- Victoria (Melbourne gateway): the Great Ocean Road, one of Australia's most iconic coastal drives; and the Yarra Valley for wine and culinary tourism.
- New South Wales (Sydney/Newcastle gateway): the Blue Mountains, a UNESCO-listed nature destination; and the Hunter Valley, an established wine region.
- Queensland (Brisbane gateway): the Sunshine Coast for beaches and hinterland experiences.
- Reef and island experiences (Townsville gateway): the outer Great Barrier Reef, offering snorkelling and diving on a less crowded reef system.

Because many price-conscious travellers were likely to stay with family, Rampersadh recommended that agents focused less on full packages and more on securing the best flight options and curating value-added experiences around the matches.

Ticket sales

From the Rugby World Cup sales side, SA Rugby Travel, the Official Travel Agent for the tournament in the local market, says South African interest has already been strong.



Illana Pereira



Ningaloo Reef in WA is renowned for its crystal-clear waters, abundant marine life and seasonal whale shark encounters. Photo: Unsplash, Dylan Shaw

"Demand was exceptionally high when sales opened at the beginning of 2026. There were a lot of people who had planned their Rugby World Cup dream well in advance. It has slowed down slightly now, but is still consistent. Through experience in previous Rugby World Cups, we expect demand to rise and peak again 6-9 months out," Illana Pereira, Managing Executive of SA Rugby Travel, told Travel News.

Pereira added that bookings were coming from a broad mix of travellers.

"We always have an exceptionally diverse mix of travellers travelling with us to Rugby World Cups, which elevates the experience for all involved. Our operations are therefore set up to provide specialist services for each type of traveller, whether they are individual supporters, families, friends, groups or corporate companies."

At this stage, SA Rugby Travel is seeing demand concentrate around the host cities, especially Sydney, where all the knock-out matches are being played.

"We are not seeing a huge number of bookings for the other cities hosting pool matches, as unfortunately the pool match opposition are not very strong. So we have ensured we have enough ticket allocation for the knock-out stages to meet the higher demand there.

"There are official Rugby World

Cup Experiences which guests are booking. They include cruises to the Great Barrier Reef, visits to Uluru (Ayers Rock), Sydney Harbour and Opera House tours and trips to wildlife reserves," Pereira said.

Engage clients now

The event creates a straightforward and potentially high-volume sales opportunity for the trade.

"It offers the opportunity to sell easy-to-understand set travel packages in volume. The Springboks enjoy huge support across the depth and breadth of South Africans. We expect between 8 000 and 15 000 South Africans to attend the tournament and travel agents' clients, the ones that travel internationally, are a key target market."

For agents looking to capitalise, Pereira said the immediate priority was education and client engagement.

"Get them excited! Agents should be getting in contact with official travel providers such as SA Rugby Travel and obtaining the wide selection of travel packages on offer, asking questions and requesting training where required to fully understand the offering and the travel landscape around the tournament – then passing this information onto their clients to entice and prepare them to travel!" ■



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