

Tourism isn't roaring back, but opening borders will help



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The virus shut down a \$150 billion source of national income when travel and tourism collapsed. Trends show travellers are wary of booking holidays in advance

Australia is home to more than 302,500 tourism-related businesses – the vast majority of them small family businesses employing less than 20 people, often located in regional areas. With the economic devastation delivered by COVID-19, these businesses need our help more than ever. Last year, a record 9.3 million people from abroad entered Australia. With that market now missing in action, it's up to Australia to support this key industry, which delivers around \$150 billion to our bottom line each year.

When it comes to taking holidays, our track record is strong. Australians took nearly 10 million overseas trips last year, spending \$65 billion. The majority of these trips were for holiday purposes - 5.6 million trips, equivalent to \$43.2 billion.

Tourism Australia managing director Phillipa Harrison sees a real opportunity to get Australians travelling again. Supplied.



“With domestic travel restrictions set to lift before international restrictions, there is a real opportunity to keep valuable tourism dollars in Australia, by showcasing the many wonderful things that exist in our own backyard,” says Tourism Australia boss Phillipa Harrison.

Industry veteran Claudia Rossi Hudson runs the upmarket travel agency her mother started in the 1970s. Mary Rossi Travel is an iconic business on Sydney's north shore. It turns 50 this year, while Mary turns 95. Below, Claudia describes the booking trends she's seeing – with plenty of seed thought ideas.

Q&A with Claudia Rossi Hudson, Managing Director Mary Rossi Travel

As restrictions on movement within Australia gradually ease, what are you seeing?

To be honest, we're not being crushed by hordes of people booking – especially not among travellers aged over 65, which is a core market for us. People are treading warily. Many are cruisers and the cruise industry in particular is taking time to get out there with what cruising will look like in the future.



The Ghan is an important focal point of the reviving internal tourism. Supplied

But that spells a big opportunity for Australia. I'm seeing interest in bookings on The Ghan (the passenger train service that runs on the Adelaide–Darwin railway). I'm also seeing families and friends moving delayed "celebratory weekends" to places like Wolgan Valley One & Only in the Blue Mountains, or Uluru's Longitude 131, but of course the Northern Territory is a bit of a no-go zone at the moment; hopefully that will change soon. Spicer's Retreats are also very popular in NSW and Queensland. People want to go away with their family and friends to celebrate the end of lockdown.

What post COVID-19 trends are emerging in people's holiday plans (aside from the fact we have limited places to go!)

Until the country's borders open up, people are hesitant to book anything even post-September. Even once things open up, the other key trend is you can no longer just jump in the car and go – you need to plan it a bit more. Hotels won't be able to cater to the same numbers as before for big groups - and it's wise to book at restaurants. Even last-minute escapes need to be planned out now.

Your mother is a true pioneer of luxury travel agencies in Australia. What are some favourite Rossi family holiday spots around Australia?

I'm part of a very large extended family and strangely enough, we have been primed for this given our mother is well into her 90s. She turns 95 this year and has only travelled close to home (in Sydney) for a few years now, so we've had plenty of practice. For her birthday this year, we were going to Wolgan Valley One & Only, but that's on hold for now. Last year, we celebrated her 94th at the InterContinental Hayman Island. In 2017, we all went to Lord Howe Island, staying at Capella and Arajilla.

Our favourite "happy place" as a family has always been the Halekulani Hotel on Waikiki in Hawaii. Now that's off limits, we'll be looking to our Australian tried and trusted spots: Lizard Island Resort in Queensland; Freycinet Lodge in Tasmania, and of course walking pretty much anywhere in Tasmania – Three Capes is on my bucket list.



There is perennial interest among travellers to visit Lizard Island. Supplied

One very successful product we've been selling over the past couple of weeks that I also love is Hedonistic Hiking tours. They specialise in Italy, but are based in Brighton Victoria, with a great summer program that covers hiking in the Victorian High Country, and also off Great Ocean Road near the Twelve Apostles. There's a lovely food aspect to it where you walk, come round a bend – and there is a divine picnic made from local produce set-up under a gumtree.