



Seal the deals

It felt fitting this week to bring you *Escape's* roundup of the 50 biggest travel deals right now as the world is, quite literally, on sale. As news continues to emerge – Singapore is now open to vaccinated Australians, and Hawaii and Thailand, too – and as our deals expert, Mercedes Maguire, discovered, there are some unmissable packages and discounts to be had both here and abroad.

Even if you're not ready to travel overseas just yet, the benefits of booking ahead are appealing, particularly at some of the current rates. Travel agents, accommodation suppliers, airlines and cruise operators are joining the party, and the last piece of the puzzle (other than our westernmost state) is for cruising in Australia to get the green light. With high interest and bookings for cruising at pre-pandemic levels, it's clear devoted passengers are more than ready to set sail.

It's certainly a satisfying moment. While there's a long road ahead for the travel industry, the intensity and demand so far has been positive and heartening. Travel agents have never been more in need – we're all seeking the security and reassurance of that professional, expert helping hand. While, unsurprisingly, Fiji has registered an immediate uplift in interest (a recent front page of *The Fiji Times* quoted 40,000 visitors expected in two months), I wasn't expecting Bali to have triggered such avid interest – Virgin reported an increase in bookings of more than 273 per cent in the past two weeks for the Sydney to Denpasar route. It seems nothing will hold a good Aussie back from a suite in Seminyak or a Bintang on a beanbag at Canggu.

Tour operators or agents such as Ignite have also seen record interest in places such as Fiji, Hawaii and Thailand (searches in October were up across these destinations by 2000 per cent) as well as London (London is also currently one of our top search terms on *escape.com.au*), and above average bookings on European river cruises, with younger passengers the fastest-growing category.

It makes sense – river cruises are intimate, and with a smaller number of guests on the ship, it feels safer and less intimidating. They also make life wonderfully easy – no navigating various airports or customs in different countries and multiple tests and confusion. Travel the world via a floating home, wake up in a new place, and get pampered while you're at it. After the year we've had, the less complicated our journey, the better.

Our very own Doc Holiday, Dilvin Yasa, was on the inaugural Singapore Airlines VTL (Vaccinated Travel Lane) flight from Sydney to Singapore this week and you can catch up on her experiences in the island state on *escape.com.au* and in next week's special Singapore edition. Meanwhile, enjoy her report inside today on all you need to know about international travel right now – we hope it helps, in the spirit of our Go Together campaign, in making holiday plans with your loved ones.

Go Together
ESCAPE.com.au

Kerrie McCallum
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Nusa Penida
Indonesia

THE ESCAPE TEAM'S HOTLIST



Italy via Woolloomooloo

David Smiedt / Lists Editor



Italian-Australian cuisine royalty Mario Percuoco's new Il Pontile on Cowper Wharf in Sydney's Woolloomooloo leans deliciously towards seafood. The kingfish crudo

is sublime, but the char-grilled king prawns with gremolata are even better. And just quietly, this precinct offers some of the best people-watching in Sydney.



Christmas by the book

Kerrie McCallum / Editor-in-Chief



Christmas is just around the corner and I'm already feeling festive after reading designer Collette Dinnigan's new picture book, *Santa Loves Australia*. Beautifully illustrated by award-

winning artist Luke Sciberras, it's a gorgeous way to show Aussie kids what Santa thinks of our glorious land, and follows his journey from Uluru to the Great Barrier Reef. A must for any family bookshelf.



Good times

Baz Goodwin / Creative Director



The homegrown Melbourne Watch Company, launched in 2013 through crowd-funding, offers a tip of the hat to Victoria with each of its models. I like the Portsea Calendar Navy, the

company's modern take on a "deck watch". Best of all, its watches are designed and assembled in the heart of the city. You could say it's a little (time) piece of Melbourne on your wrist.



Celebrity power

Jana Frawley / Content Director



Brand-new liner *Celebrity Apex* has just completed its inaugural sailing and I'm obsessed. Goop and Gwyneth Paltrow are its new well-being advisers, the fitness classes are

brought to you by Peloton and F45, and the spa treatments are cleverly called "Ahh-Inspiring". A week or three on board is the perfect vitality boost after nearly two years without setting sail.



@escape.com.au



@escape.com.au



@escape_au

Disclaimer: Please note that *Escape* is printed a few days in advance of Sunday's publication date. We have done our best to ensure the stories in this edition are as current as possible, but apologise if the ever-changing coronavirus news cycle means content is outdated. Check Covid-19 restrictions before making your travel plans.

Editor-in-Chief Kerrie McCallum **Content Director** Jana Frawley jana.frawley@news.com.au **Creative Director** Baz Goodwin **Digital Director** John Hannan john.hannan@news.com.au
Managing Editor Kelli Armstrong kelli.armstrong@news.com.au **Editor** Susan Bugg susan.bugg@news.com.au **Chief Subeditor** Toni Mason **Picture Editor** Jo Bainbridge
Deputy Art Director Jill Henderson **Production Manager** Candi Webber **Writer** Samantha Stewart **Social Media Editor** Rachel Lang **Motion Graphics Editor** Clara Smith
Editorial Coordinator Monika Hecimovic **Editor (Digital)** Rowena Ryan **Content Producer** Simone Mitchell **Managing Director Food and Travel** Fiona Nilsson
Advertising Amanda Spackman amanda.spackman@news.com.au; Sophia Tspidis sophia.tspidis@news.com.au **Cover** Khao Sok National Park, Thailand **Photography** @agirlwhoblooms