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The 16 important things you need to know about travel in 2016



Michael Gebicki Dec 4 2015 at 11:00 AM

GIVE FEEDBACK



What was once shoulder season in London is only slightly less packed than peak season. Photo: Getty Images

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SHARE 1 DOLLAR VALUE

Expect more pain than gain. Our dollar is susceptible to the inevitable interest rate rise in the United States and continuing low commodity prices. Currently worth just over 70 US cents, financial gurus are tipping the dollar to dip below that figure in 2016, and a similar drop against other major currencies.

2 PASSPORTLESS TRAVEL

Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop flagged this as a means of eliminating the problem caused by the many thousands of passports that Australians lose every year. Initially intended as a

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trial for travellers between Australia and New Zealand, passportless travel would see travellers' identities and biometric data stored in the cloud. Media reports say the Australian Taxation Office has been duped by identity thieves and paid out tax refunds to bogus accounts, and passportless travel would be a seam of gold for hackers. Given that it is a legal requirement in most countries to hand over your passport when you check into a hotel, would the hotel also have access to my biometric data?

3 WHITHER THE SELFIE STICK

It's everywhere, this abominable accoutrement, weaving in front of you at the Changing of the Guard at Buck Palace and at sunset at Angkor Wat like the antennae of a Morteined cockroach. Many of the world's leading galleries and concerts have banned 'selfish' sticks but they flourish regardless. For those against, Alberto Contador's selfie-stick takedown during this year's Giro d'Italia makes satisfying YouTube viewing.

4 DYNAMIC CURRENCY CONVERSION

With DCC, you have the choice of paying in local currency or Australian dollars. While the Aussie dollar option might sound handy, it adds another layer of fees to your restaurant or hotel bill or that new pair of shoes. Nothing more than a cunning ploy to fleece travellers out of more of their cash, DCC is spreading, but patchily.

5 CLIMATE CHANGE

Melting glaciers, rising seas, coral bleaching – Mother Nature is in for a tough year. The coming El Nino is expected to be the most severe in more than 60 years, bringing drought, high temperatures and effects that begin at the bottom of the food chain, life's basement. One small but poignant example; in the Galapagos, the Humboldt Current, which brings cold, nutrient-rich waters from the south, will be diverted by warmer and less fruitful currents. Seals and sea lions will have to dive deeper for their food, with high mortality rates among males, less able to dive deep than females, and with higher calorie requirements.

6 GREY IS THE NEW BLACK

Australians are travelling overseas in greater numbers than ever, but it's the grey brigade that is making the running. The biggest increase over the past eight years was in the 65 to 74 age bracket,



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The world's first underwater restaurant is Ithaa, part of the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island resort. Photo: Supplied

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where the numbers increased by 1.5 per cent. That's hardly surprising, since the population in that age group increased, but the number of 18 to 24-year-olds travelling overseas fell over the same period by more than 2 per cent.



Expect higher prices for Airbnb, which is facing controversy in some cities. Photo: Alamy



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7 TERRORISM

Two terrorist attacks in Tunisia this year proved that extremist forces within militant Islam have turned their attention to tourists. Even more chilling, if the recent downing of a Russian aircraft over Egypt was caused by a bomb, travel in the Middle East has entered a perilous new phase, with acute dangers for air travellers. It might be time to rewire any plans that involve Middle Eastern airports and avoid those where security is less than rock solid.

8 VOLCANOES

Volcanic eruptions at two places in Indonesia during 2015 grounded flights and brought misery to tourists stranded in Bali. Only those who have taken out travel insurance before the rumblings start have any chance of making a claim for resulting delays.

9 AIRBNB

Prompted by apartment dwellers fed up with noisy parties hosted by Airbnb customers, slamming doors late at night, security breaches and abuse of communal property, city authorities in New York, Berlin and San Francisco are tightening the screws. Many Airbnb clients are also less than enchanted, upset by owners who misrepresent their properties and the requirement to settle the bill in full at booking time, effectively a loan to Airbnb. Expect higher prices as Airbnb owners are forced to pay taxes and comply with tighter legislation.



Many of the world's leading galleries and concerts have banned selfie sticks but they remain a great way to shoot groups. Photo: iStock

10 FEEDBACK FATIGUE

"Thanks for staying in our hotel/joining us on our recent cruise/hiring a vehicle from us. We'd love it if you'd complete this short online survey." This short survey turns into a multi-page marathon and if you highlight any shortcomings, expect to be prodded mercilessly for details. It's also designed to act as a containment mechanism, a circuit breaker for unhappy customers who might otherwise vent their spleen on social media.

11 RISE OF CHINESE TRAVELLERS

According to the China Tourism Research Institute, 61.9 million Chinese tourists travelled overseas in the first half of 2015, an increase of 12 per cent on the same period in 2014. In the year ended June 30, 2015, Australia welcomed almost 928,000 visitors from China, and the increase of almost 22 per cent over the previous year made China the fastest growing country of origin among our visitors. Only New Zealand sends more visitors to Australia, but probably not for much longer.

12 SHIPPING NEWS

Ever-bigger, ever-glitzier, the cruise ships roll down the slipways. With a scheduled launch date of May 2016, Harmony of the Seas will be the world's largest cruise ship at 227,000 tonnes, just slightly more than Royal Caribbean's other two Oasis Class ships. RC is billing this as the next-generation cruise ship, with a water park with a 10-storey plunge, a Bionic Bar with robot bartenders, an ice skating rink, a mini-golf course and a zip line. Over the summer, Harmony of the Seas will waddle through European ports with up to 5400 passengers before heading for Florida and the Caribbean at year's end.

13 IMMERSIVE TRAVEL

Immersive travel offers travellers the opportunity for a more meaningful experience than the one-size-fits-all group tour. Via the internet, travel operators such as SideStory in London and Italian Stories in Italy bring you into contact with local experts, artists and craft workers. It might be galloping around London on a

shoot with a fashion photographer or spending an hour in the workshop of an artisan who makes oars for Venetian gondolas, the only limit is imagination, and the revelations are fascinating. See sidestory.co, italianstories.it

14 UNDERWATER TOURISM

Below the sea is the emergent frontier of tourism. In Hawaii, Atlantic Submarines offers submersible cruises that take you down to a depth of 30 metres, but the centre of the action is The Maldives. There's underwater dining at Ithaa at the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island resort and at Sea in the Anantara Kihavah Villas at Kihavah Huravalhi. Subsix at Niyama Maldives Resort is the first underwater bar while the Lime Spa at Per Aquum Huvafen Fushi is the first underwater spa. While there are plenty of plans on the drawing boards for underwater hotels, the only credible performer so far is in Dubai, where the fun palazzo known as Atlantis the Palm has opened tri-level Underwater Suites.

15 VENETIAN BIND

In a major setback for lovers of Venice, at the beginning of 2015, the city's Appeals Court overturned a ban that prevented cruise ships over 96,000 gross tons from sailing along the Giudecca Canal. The ban, instituted less than one year previously, was greeted warmly by Venetians environmentalists and thousands of tourists, shocked by a megaship intruding on a view still recognisable from Canaletto's paintings of almost 300 years ago. An alternative route to the city's cruise terminal is being considered that would avoid the need for ships to sail past St Mark's Basin.

16 PACKING THEM IN

In 2014 the number of international tourist arrivals worldwide was 1.133 billion. That's almost 50 per cent more than the same figure for 2004, and no wonder that the bucket-list hotspots feel more crowded. Travellers are spreading their travels over a longer period. In Europe, which is consistently the world's most popular destination, what was once shoulder season in the Greek Islands, Barcelona and London is only slightly less packed than peak season. Expect bigger crowds, or head off the well-trodden path in 2016.

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