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TRAVEL & INDULGENCE



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TRAVEL

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The plane truth about why we love to fly

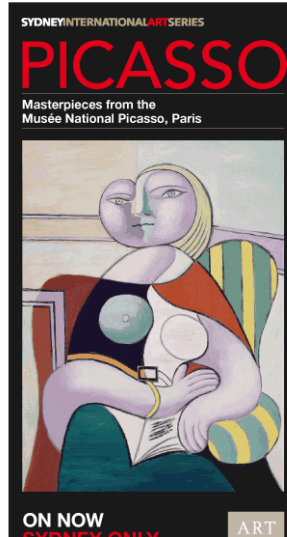
ACCESS ALL AREAS: MERRY KIRKWOOD The Australian November 12, 2011 12:00AM

AUSTRALIANS have been taking flight since 1922 when a Qantas Avro 504K mail and passenger service flew from Queensland's Charleville to Cloncurry with 84-year-old pioneer Alexander Kennedy securing the seat as first passenger -- by paying to join the fledgling company's provisional board.

So began our nation's love for, and dependence on, this form of transport.

Who would have thought that about 90 years later the same company, which rivals KLM for honours as the longest continuously operating airline, would suddenly bring the nation to a halt, as it did last month.

Twice this year, passengers have been inconvenienced when an airline has chosen, or been forced, to suspend services.



ON NOW

ART

LITTLE BLACK BOOK

IAN O'Rourke has degrees from universities in Queensland and Taipei, where he studied Chinese and lived for three years. He co-founded Oovie, the largest Australian network of DVD rental machines, before selling to Hoyts in 2008. More: oovie.com.au.

Must do at least once: Visit Shilin night market, Taipei, where you'll find snake's blood beer, pearl milk tea, fermented tofu and every conceivable trinket; it opens till late and there are always swirling masses of young children, obviously allowed to stay up.

Inviting destination: I recommend a visit to see Japan's snow monkeys outside Yudanaka in Nagano prefecture. We stayed at Uotoshi Ryokan (onsen, or thermal resort), where we slept in a room heated by the hot springs. It was low-budget and great fun, plus the host was extremely helpful.

Best Asian experience: The newish Bangkok airport is such a welcome surprise. It boasts all the usual duty-free shops, but also a wide range of good restaurants with fresh sushi and great Thai food.

Best-spent travel dollars: A pass for Japan's rail network (about \$360 for seven days) allows unlimited rides, including bullet trains. Foreign passport holders can only purchase it outside Japan.

Most inspiring museum: The National Palace Museum in Taipei has more than 600,000 pieces of art and artefacts in a collection spanning thousands of years of Chinese history. It blows your mind.

Best local tip: Taxis in Taipei are super cheap and easy to find.

DEALS OF THE WEEK

Summer sizzler: Catch the cricket season, grab tickets to Love Never Dies at the Regent Theatre, or stroll lively city laneways with a deal from Mercure Welcome Hotel Melbourne, from \$119 a room a night, including breakfast for two if booked before February 22. Valid December 1 to February 29. More: accorhotels.com/vic.

Hike and bike: Act fast to save 10 per cent on earlybird bookings (before November 21) on UTracks 2012 walking and cycling holidays, such as a Haute Pyrenees eight-day self-guided tour through France, starting in Lourdes; from \$2090 a person, including meals, accommodation, bike rental and transfers. More: utracks.com.

In the swing: Book before January 31 for free flights on a Travel Associates 20-day Scotland and Europe Golf package, from \$12,795 a person (with flights from Australia), accommodation in Scotland, a 14-day Europe river cruise and selected meals. Departures May 1 to September 23. More: travel-associates.com.au.

airport security



AT LEAST two million people a year are boarding planes without having their baggage screened.

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BLOW-OUT

JONAH'S Restaurant and Boutique Hotel at Whale Beach is a 50-minute drive or short seaplane flight north from the Sydney CBD. The city's only Relais & Chateaux property, Jonah's is known for its elegant accommodation and award-winning cuisine from the kitchen of Spanish-born executive chef Alfonso Ales. Fresh seafood includes ocean trout from Tasmania served with vegetable ratatouille, iberico ham and basil and pine nut pesto; choose from a celebrated wine selection. And for the rest of November, there's the chance of seeing migratory whales passing. More: jonahs.com.au.

BLOWN AWAY

PALM Beach Fish and Chip Shop on Barrenjoey Road (next to Barrenjoey House) has a devoted weekend and holiday clientele who travel from across Sydney for its fresh seafood. Favourites since the 1950s, such as lightly battered fish and chips (\$15), still sell well but a more discerning crowd goes for the chilli prawns, fresh seafood salads or gourmet burgers, that can be scoffed at outdoor tables offering one of Palm Beach's best views across Pittwater. If there are no empty tables the grassy park across the road near Snapperman Beach is ideal for an impromptu picnic. More: (02) 9974 1110.

ARMCHAIR TRAVELLER

Come Fly With Me: After a controversial screening earlier this year on Nine, Little Britain geniuses David Williams and Matt Lucas are getting another airing in this airport-based spoof. There's a host of typically racist characters but the duo are at their funniest as Keeley and Melody of budget airline FlyLo. Monday, 9.05pm, UKTV.

Sarah Beeny's Village SOS: Foxtel is in a flurry over Sarah Beeny's latest, with repeats through the week. The bodacious property presenter, not content with sorting out Brit homeowners and restoring her own mansion in the public eye, is now tackling whole villages. Tuesday, 7.30pm, Lifestyle.

Susan Kurosawa

ACCESSORY OF THE WEEK

NEW PocketFlex glasses from Venti20 are lightweight, frameless and flexible. No case is required; simply slip them in your pocket. Choose from various optical strengths and a range of eight styles, two with UV-protective tinted lenses. \$35.95. More: 1300 799 667; venti20.com. Sharon Fowler