

WA scores best beach gong
 A Western Australian beach has been dubbed the World's Best Beach. Dazzling Lucky Bay, a one-hour drive southeast of Esperance with striking white sand, pristine turquoise waters and a mob of resident kangaroos, topped the World's 50 Best Beaches 2023 list, presented by Banana Boat. One to add to your bucket-list.

Whale of a time at the reef
 The Cruise Whitsundays Great Barrier Reef Festival is returning to Airlie Beach and will highlight the annual humpback whale migration. Learn all about the gentle giants and the significant role they play in the reef's ecosystem. Held across August 3-6, the festival includes live music, art, food, eco-workshops and more. greatbarrierreeffestival.com.au

Sky-high new stays in Tokyo
 Pan Pacific Hotels Group has announced the opening of Bellustar Tokyo and Hotel Groove in Shinjuku. The luxury stays are in the Kabukicho Tower, a 48-storey skyscraper that overlooks the city's skyline. Movie buffs can enjoy a state-of-the-art cinema in Hotel Groove. And on the top floor of the Bellustar? A spa with magnificent views. panpacific.com

Compo for delayed flights up in the air

Aussie airlines may have to pay up for airport chaos, writes Alexandra Carlton, but will it help flyers?

Earlier this year I was due to fly home to Sydney from Auckland in time to catch my teenage son's first band performance. We're not talking about a school concert band, but his very first time playing drums with his own band at a local bowling club – a real crowd, real tickets, real excitement.

But as soon as I reached Auckland Airport, that dreaded voice crackled over the speakers. "This is an announcement for passengers travelling on Qantas flight 146 to Sydney..."

I knew it. Delayed.

I put my head in my hands and cried. It's a scenario that thousands of us have faced while flying with Australian airlines, particularly as airlines have struggled to get their operations back to full service since Covid.

People have missed the unmissable: priceless life events like weddings or funerals. Others critical business engagements. Some have simply had a dream holiday destroyed or significantly impacted because of actions beyond their control. And while all carriers have processes in place to refund the costs associated with delayed or cancelled flights in certain circumstances, there's currently no government-mandated scheme offering compensation – in addition to out-of-pocket costs – to flyers for the heartbreak of the stolen time they can never get back.

If my situation had taken place in the EU, it would be a different story. I probably would have been entitled to monetary compensation – something between 250 and 600 euros if the delay was more than three hours. If it was even longer, I may have been entitled to a refund, even if I caught the flight when it eventually took to the skies.

That wasn't an option for me. While Australian consumer law means flights can be refunded if they're cancelled, the airlines are not obligated to do anything if a flight is merely delayed, beyond covering the odd expense like taxis or hotels. Missed your kid's christening or your dad's 75th? Too bad, so sad.

Or is it? This may all be about to change. The federal government is considering adopting a scheme that could mirror the one that exists in Europe. Details are still under wraps, but we'll find out more when its Aviation White Paper is released early next year. If it goes ahead, we might hear a lot fewer "This is an announcement for..." call-outs over the airport speakers as airlines work harder to make sure flights run on time.

At least, that's the simple way of looking at it. In fact, aviation expert Geoffrey Thomas from AirlineRatings.com believes that when it comes to compensation schemes with airlines, we should be careful what we wish for.

"If airlines are forced to pay compensation, they'll pass those costs on to passengers," Thomas says. That will only mean higher airfares across the board.

He also queries whether airline compensation schemes will provide any real incentive to airlines to minimise delays more than they currently do. "Airlines want to run a tight schedule already," he says. "Some of the commentary seems to be 'they just delay



Passengers trapped at airports have missed priceless life events.

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flights for fun and couldn't give a rat's..." The reality is, he says, that it's in an airline's best interests to run its operations as efficiently as possible. One delay at a major city can throw the entire system into chaos for the rest of the day. That's already costing airlines money they don't want to spend. And whatever the incentives, no one can make a flight take off any faster if a runway's closed for bad weather or a pilot's out of action with an illness.

It's not an argument I would have been interested in hearing as I sat slumped at Auckland Airport and watched the minutes tick down on the clock, every second taking me further and further away from one of the most important moments in my son's life. But in hindsight I understand it.

My story had a small silver lining. When we finally touched down in Sydney, I practically

ran people over exiting the plane. I left a friend to collect my bag and sped off to the venue, getting there just as my son and his band stepped off the stage. I didn't see the performance, but I was there for the hugs and cheers and the glorious glow of the aftermath.

And the fact is, a few hundred dollars would have meant nothing to me compared to that.



Alexandra Carlton is a travel and food writer who flies dozens of times each year and is patiently awaiting the invention of a delay-free teleporter.

TAKE TWO...
 RETRO-STYLE MOTELS



KYNETON SPRINGS MOTEL, VIC

Live out all your Palm Springs fantasies without leaving the country with a stay at this eye-catching motel in country Victoria. This Kyneton motor inn offers 20 suites, decked out in fabulous vintage decor. Guests can enjoy a cocktail in the pastel-hued shade of The Patio, then grab a bite from the diner-inspired menu at Cathie's Kiosk. The motel plans to roll out a series of festival-style events in the future. kynetonspringsmotel.com



THE MYRA MOTEL, QLD

If you love a pop of colour, the Myra Motel on the Gold Coast will charm the heck out of you. Its seven rooms are all unique, featuring brightly hued walls and artworks of vintage local scenes. The motel's exterior is highlighted by explosions of colour, from its neon sign, Barbie-pink sun loungers and brightly striped umbrellas that surround a sparkling mineral pool. themysamotel.com

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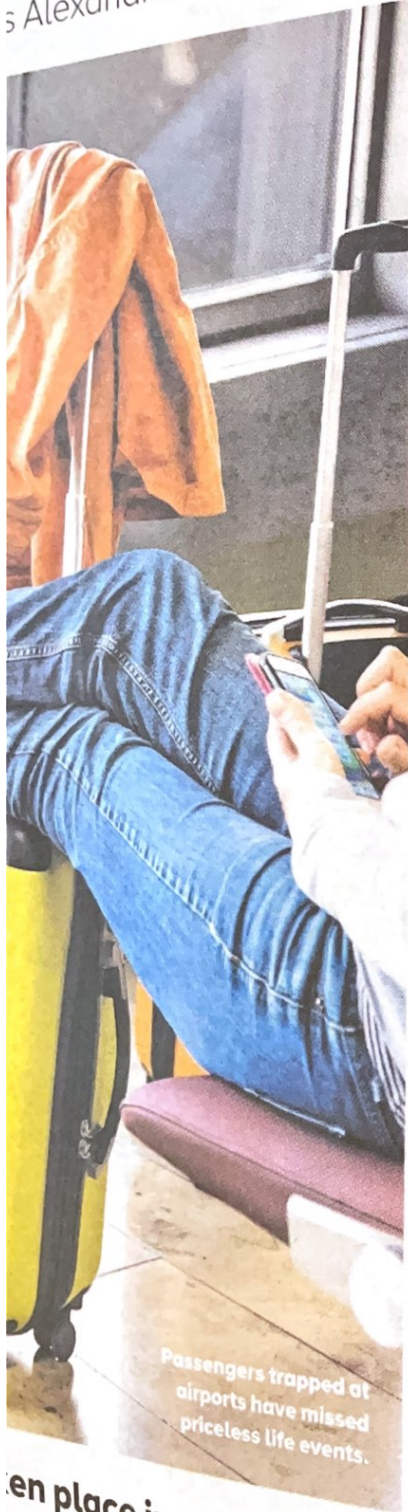
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