



FIRES UPDATE

Statement from the General Manager



08 January 2020

Dear Valued Agents,

There has been a tremendous response globally to the devastating bushfire crisis with donations and messages of support flooding in. Our sympathies are with those who have lost lives and property, and the terrible consequences for the animals and landscapes of the affected areas.

Today I'd like to make a statement to aid you and your consultants in answering concerns from existing customers, or those who are considering booking, so that you can effectively combat some of the extreme media imagery and language which is circulating worldwide. You have been receiving very detailed updates from Chris throughout the fire period, and

he will continue to update you as things change.

Bear in mind our detailed updates from Chris are in reference to what is happening RIGHT NOW, and are not intended to be sent to customers travelling next month or in the coming months. We are working through each alert as it comes and reporting forward bookings for approximately 14 days so we can give people the right advice for each moment as the situation changes.

The key message is that there **is no reason to cancel an entire Australian holiday**. Most of Australia is NOT affected in any way, especially Queensland, Western Australia (except a section of the Eyre highway), and Northern Territory. You all know what a large country this is with vast regions totally unaffected by fire.

As of today, there are NO fires in Australia burning at “Emergency” level. We have had three days of cooler weather, including light rain in most of the fire regions, as well as a bit in Sydney (thank goodness). All active fires are at “watch and act” or “advice” level, which means the fire service is working on them and people in the area should pay close attention to changes in status. Please do not think I am trying to downplay the issue as there are still communities at risk of active fires when conditions change. None of these are in areas where we have tourists.

In general, customers travelling in Australia are pretty calm about what’s happening because they are speaking directly to our team and receiving

very specific information about their own itinerary and the impact of the fires.

FIRE AFFECTED AREAS

Kangaroo Island Western side.

- **Fires** are still burning in the National Park but these are **almost 100 kms away** from the key towns of **Kingscote, Cygnet River, American River and Penneshaw, which are unaffected.**
- We are **proactively contacting customers** with bookings anywhere on KI and our team are currently up to mid January travel dates. We are informing them of the situation and assisting to change their bookings to Eastern KI or amend their itinerary away from the island if they prefer.
- We will work through future cancellations for **closed properties: Southern Ocean Lodge, Hanson Bay Cabins, Hanson Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and Kangaroo Island Wilderness Retreat** in order of travel date and will reach out to you to offer alternatives, so we thank you for your patience while our focus is on assisting passengers already in Australia

NSW South Coast

- The “**tourist evacuation**” which captured the attention of global media was only in place for last weekend due to extreme weather conditions and the need to keep as many people away from the area in case community evacuations were required. **Roads have largely re-opened and Huskisson / Jervis Bay area is currently OK to travel to, although we have already proactively relocated all customers for the next 7 days** and are speaking to everybody with South Coast and Jervis Bay bookings up to the end of January, so they know we are keeping an eye on their travels.

East Gippsland – Victoria

- **Cooler weather** has moved all active fires to “**watch and act**” level or below.
- We have **relocated passengers away from Lakes Entrance and Metung** for the next 14 days and will assess further for those booked later in January. **Metung and Lakes Entrance themselves have not been impacted by fire and businesses are currently operating.**
- Road closures are the main reason for relocations at this time.

ROAD TO RECOVERY

In all three of these impacted regions, resources have largely moved to recovery, i.e. restoration of services to isolated towns and trying to get people back into the evacuated zones once the fires have burned through and it is safe to return. Firefighters have been able to work on containment lines where possible due to cooler conditions. This article in the Sydney Morning Herald provides us some hope that the worst of the catastrophic fire conditions is hopefully behind us. We don't have a crystal ball of course, but it seems things are easing at last.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/weather/signs-heat-may-have-peaked-as-outlook-shifts-to-milder-wetter-weather-20200107-p53pk0.html>

AIR QUALITY:

- www.airvisual.com is a good source of readings of our air quality. It's not great today in Sydney and Canberra, reading at "unhealthy" levels and we have hazy skies, but Melbourne looks excellent. This situation changes every day depending on the wind direction and fire activity nearby. If you look at the 7 day forecast for Sydney, it looks OK.
- Berlin, Paris and Munich all also have air quality of yellow and green.

- Our air quality ratings are affected by the smoke from these fires. These are not normal pollution levels. Passengers travel to cities like Bangkok (red) without thinking about the air quality, so if they are planning a trip to Sydney or Melbourne in a month or two, they can't really judge it by what's happening today while the fires are alight. That being said, if customers suffer from any respiratory issues and this is a concern to them, other cities such as Brisbane are a good alternative option. Or, reduce the nights in Sydney from eg 3 nights to 1. Katoomba in the Blue Mountains has better air than Sydney and it's so close, which tells you how changeable this is.

Sydney air quality and weather daily forecast

Australia, New South Wales air pollution forecast by day



Source: Airvisual

FUTURE BOOKINGS

Our advice to your consultants for concerned passengers with future bookings is as follows:

1. If they are not travelling until later, eg February, March, **wait** a week or two and make a decision closer to the time. Please note full cancellation terms apply to any cancellations for properties that are still operating and not affected by road closures.
2. Talk to us. Send us an email outlining their concerns if you're not confident enough to answer their questions and give reassurance.
3. Amend their itinerary to other states or areas if they don't want to go where fires have ravaged the landscape. Jervis Bay is still spectacular for example, but they would expect to drive past burned out forests on the way there.
4. If they really don't want to go to Australia at all, consider New Zealand for all or part of their trip (eg Queensland + NZ instead of NSW).

5. Change their dates to a later month eg May when the bushfire season has passed

We will keep you informed!! Please urge your customers to listen to our advice which is based on up to the minute FACTS and not media sensationalism. When they travel here, they will have experts looking after them, ready to discuss any issues with them 24/7 via our office and our after hours service.

The greatest things they can do to aid Australia's recovery is to **COME AND SEE US!** Australia, especially the affected areas such as Kangaroo Island, needs all the visitors it can get to **aid economic recovery** in these small communities. **Cancelling an entire trip will hurt Australia even more.** They will still have a fantastic experience in this vast and diverse country.

If you have very challenging customers who still want to cancel, you are **welcome to offer them to speak DIRECTLY** to one of our team here in Sydney. We will call them, or they can call us, and speak to them in their own language if we can. We have **native speakers of English, German, Spanish, Italian, French, Serbian, Dutch, Turkish and even Afrikaans, Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese and Indonesian!**

We want to help you to save every booking we can, so our consultants will work with yours to offer our expertise on alternative routes if your customers are concerned. Apart from the areas listed above, fires are under control or already out in other parts of Australia and pose no current risk.

MISLEADING MAPS & MISINFORMATION

There have been some very alarming images circulating on social media which can be misunderstood to show that all of Australia is burning. Please urge your own staff **not to circulate these further** as they can be potentially damaging to our tourism reputation. The BBC published an excellent article about these misleading images:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-51020564>.

For example, this website: <https://myfirewatch.landgate.wa.gov.au/> shows active and recent fires around Australia and is the source of some imagery. It's alarming when you first go in but zoom in close to each state and the picture is far less alarming. Furthermore, some of the "hotspots" may not even be fires according to the BBC article. What the website doesn't show is the status, i.e. emergency rating of each fire, so it looks like everything is ablaze and on fire. In fact, if you zoom in to e.g. Sydney, some of the little yellow blazes were small grass fires that were immediately extinguished.

Please stay informed by reviewing the state fire service websites given below. Bear in mind that **blackened areas on these maps show burnt areas within an active fire, but don't indicate that the**

entire black area is alright.

MAKING A DONATION

If you or your clients want to donate money to help, you'll find a list of some of Goway's recommended options on our Head Office agent site:

<http://blog.goway.com/gowayagent/australian-bush-fires-donations-for-people-and-wildlife/>

Thank you, and kind regards,

Kathy Turner

General Manager | Goway Inbound | Australia & New Zealand



To stay up to date with the most current information, please refer to these links:

NSW, VIC & South Australia Rural Fire Service - Fire Maps

<https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/>

<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/fires-near-me>

<https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/home.jsp>

NSW, VIC & WA Road Closures

<http://alerts.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

<https://www.livetraffic.com/desktop.html>

<https://mrw-aue-tvImp-appsrv-prd.azurewebsites.net/Home/Map>



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For Urgent Matters Outside of Business Hours

Contact our Emergency Assist Line

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