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Head in the clouds

DEPARTURE LOUNGE

Susan Kurosawa

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HERE'S proof that age need not weary travellers. Sydney's Lola Harcourt celebrated her 100th birthday last week by being suspended 260m above the city centre. She was tackling Skywalk -- albeit in her wheelchair -- on top of Sydney Tower, the city's tallest building (twice the height of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, apparently).



Illustration: Igor Saktor

Opened in October 2005, Sydney Tower's Skywalk "offers thrillseekers age 10 and over unparalleled open-air views over Sydney from moving glass platforms stretched over the edge of the tower".

Not for the vertigo-challenged, then. "The closest to heaven I'll ever get," was how Harcourt described the experience (with a nudge and a wink, no doubt). "I'm not afraid of anything really at this age."

Her attitude is one common among senior travellers who are determined to give every experience one last shot. How different from the way we travel when we are young.

Journeys during those green years are often no more than reconnaissance missions in which we tick off places we wish to visit and cross off those we have relegated, with the superiority of youth, to tourism's rubbish bin.

Senior travellers have time and inclination (and money, too; few feel guilty about spending their kids' inheritances) and the tourism industry has been quick to cash in by offering soft adventures, experiences aimed at early retirees and even the newish phenomenon of "grandparent holidays" in which nan and pop whisk off the grandchildren on structured holiday treats, from Queensland theme parks to farm stays in New Zealand.

If Harcourt is any example of centenarian travel, some clever entrepreneur could get into the great-grandparent market, too. But there is one puzzling aspect about this turning 100 business. Who is going to send the Queen her telegram when she hits her 100th? At the rate she is going, she will still be on the throne, possibly with wheels attached. Departure Lounge senses a marketing opportunity for Skywalk. More: www.skywalk.com.au.

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GIMMICKS are everything with guidebooks and cashing in on the bestseller status of 1000 Places to See Before you Die, a related title, 500 Places to Take Your Kids Before They Grow Up by Holly Hughes (Frommer's/Wiley, \$30.95), has hit bookstores. It's aimed primarily at a US audience but coverage is even-handed (Sydney's Powerhouse Museum, for example, gets almost equal billing with San Francisco's Exploratorium). There are quite a few Australian outdoorsy options, from swimming with dolphins in Western Australia to exploring South Australia's Kangaroo Island, "where koalas are so common they're almost falling out of the trees". I don't like the sound of, say, a three-year-old being conked out by a koala missile, but the book does include some terrific suggestions (many of which you could try without a child as your stooge).

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IN tune with holidaying with children, Travel & Indulgence will be introducing The Family Tourist column in our September 19-20 issue. Styled in the same format as our popular weekly inclusion The Incidental Tourist, the new column will appear every few weeks and will be written on a revolving basis by The Australian's James Jeffrey and Sarah Bryden-Brown, author of The Lost Art of Childhood and editor of www.kidspot.com.au.

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TRAVELLERS of all ages want to be sure their airline baggage arrives at its allotted destination on time and without tampering. It doesn't seem such a wild hope until you look at the facts. According to James Garrod of Personal Porter, 204,000 pieces of luggage are stolen or lost en route every year. "However far-fetched the idea of a passenger terminal free of checked-in luggage may sound, I do know that the airlines are investigating all avenues to reduce their internal costs and increase profits," Garrod tells Lounge.

"If the revised luggage policies implemented in the past 12 months by the world's airlines are anything to go by, it would indicate that the future landscape will be significantly different to the one we experience today."

Whether or not Garrod is correct, and checked-in luggage becomes an expensive privilege instead of a routine service, we will have to wait to find out. Meantime, we do know that excess baggage fees are stiff,

and who wants to lug a huge bag through airport terminals, many of which come with long corridors and stairs?

Personal Porter organises customs and quarantine clearances and uses DHL couriers for return pick-ups from clients' homes in Australia to their exact destination, be it Aunty Dot's cottage in Cornwall or a suite at the Ritz. More: www.personalporter.com.

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CHANGES have been afoot at Travel & Indulgence. Elizabeth Meryment, who edits the Indulgence pages and writes our weekly Food Detective column, is on maternity leave; Judith Elen will be filling those roles during Elizabeth's absence while Barry Oliver, who worked on the travel section during its previous incarnation in the Review pages, rejoins us as travel features editor. Barry will be responsible for our new daily travel deals updates, starting on Tuesday at www.theaustralian.com.au/travel. Travel & Indulgence also welcomes Sharon Fowler who has replaced Jodie Minus as our editorial co-ordinator. Sharon compiles the Access All Areas and Accessory of the Week columns, and handles our day-to-day administration. Jodie has joined the Illawarra Mercury as education, science and technology reporter.

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AND do take a look at our website from Tuesday. A new "comment on this article" link gives you a chance to share your observations of holiday pleasures and pitfalls and to tell us what you think of Travel & Indulgence's content. Here's to a full century of happy trails for us all.

TRAVEL EDITOR'S PICKS

Lord Howe Island's ultra-cool Capella Lodge has released a range of winter specials, including Bollinger champers for all arriving guests. An Explore and Chill Out deal offers seven nights for the price of five, breakfasts, sunset drinks and canapes, three-course dinners with selected wines, a picnic option, mountain bikes and a \$100 spa voucher. From \$2750 a person twin-share (a saving of up to \$3440 a couple). Deals for three and five nights and for solo travellers are also available; valid May 28 to September 8. Qantaslink has released a range of specials from Sydney and Brisbane to Lord Howe Island with savings of more than 50 per cent. More: (02) 9918 4355; www.lordhowe.com.

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Club Med has an early-bird northern ski special of \$200 off each adult booking made by June 30 for bookings to April 30 next year. The discounts apply to a range of European ski village resorts and Club Med Sahoro in Japan. More: 1800 258 263; www.clubmed.com.au.

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