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1 Independence

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Design Hotels opens Aust office

ANOTHER hotel marketing group is expanding in Australia, with the establishment of a dedicated local office of Design Hotels in Perth.

The announcement follows the signing of the first Australian member of the group, boutique 21-room The Limes in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley, which is due to open later this month.

In a statement earlier this year, Design Hotels executive vice

president Iain Ainsworth said: "We feel that it is time to approach this continent."

Design Hotels was established in Germany in 1993 and now represents and markets a collection of more than 160 hotels across the globe.

Members are independently owned but "united by a commitment to individuality, progressive design and cultural authenticity."

As well as its Berlin headquarters and the new Perth branch, there are other Design Hotels offices in London, Barcelona, New York, Singapore, Bali and Tokyo.

The debut of Design Hotels down under comes at the same time as Preferred Hotels has initiated a major expansion here with the establishment of a Sydney office (TD 08 Apr) and the appointment of Small Luxury Hotels veteran Lynne Ireland as Preferred's area managing director as well as global md of the Preferred Boutique brand.

DJ E-jet simulator

VIRGIN Blue has today commissioned a new \$10m Embraer aircraft simulator at the carrier's Brisbane Airport training facility.

It's the first electric motion simulator to be installed in Australia, and is an exact replica of DJ's first E190 jet.

The initial group of Virgin Blue Embraer pilots were trained in Zurich, but the new simulator will see all DJ simulator training on the aircraft now take place in Brisbane.

Lone Star Macquarie

MACQUARIE Airports is said to be in discussions with Texas authorities about leasing the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport in Austin, the state's capital.

The group confirmed the talks but said they were at a "very preliminary stage."

The airport is a former military facility which opened to commercial traffic in 1999, and last year handled almost nine million passengers.

Express US entry

A NEW US program called Global Entry will allow US citizens and permanent residents to bypass the often long immigration queues when they arrive back in the US from overseas.

From Mon travellers can enrol in the program, paying US\$100 and submitting to a background check, similar to the Registered Traveler program for domestic US passengers.

Separate Customs lines will be established at some airports - initially New York's JFK, Washington Dulles and Houston International - and users will swipe their electronic passport at a kiosk rather than having it read by a Customs officer.

The scheme is being hailed by US travel agents, who say it's likely to make international travel more attractive.

It's aimed at people who take at least four international trips from the US each year, and if successful at the initial three airports is likely to be expanded to at least 17 more.

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