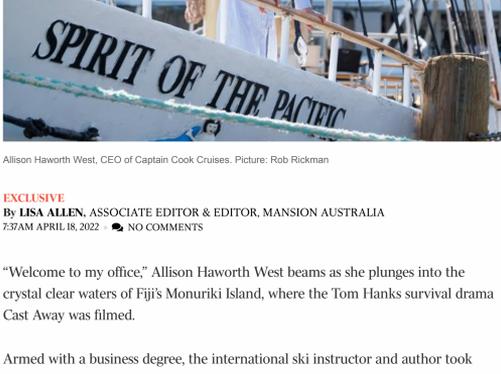


# Aussie business back in cruise control after weathering the Covid storm



Allison Haworth West, CEO of Captain Cook Cruises. Picture: Rob Rickman

**EXCLUSIVE**  
By LISA ALLEN, ASSOCIATE EDITOR & EDITOR, MANSION AUSTRALIA  
7:37AM APRIL 18, 2022 • NO COMMENTS

"Welcome to my office," Allison Haworth West beams as she plunges into the crystal clear waters of Fiji's Monuriki Island, where the Tom Hanks survival drama Cast Away was filmed.

Armed with a business degree, the international ski instructor and author took control of her family's company, Captain Cook Cruises, two years ago.

It would be some time before the newly minted chief executive could visit her fleet of ships or the 150 staff employed by the cruise company throughout the [Fiji Islands](#).

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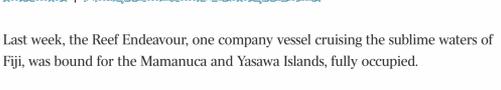
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As the first waves of the pandemic hit, Haworth West was given just four days to close the company's entire operations after the Fijian government put tough Covid measures in place.

As the youngest daughter of Australian tourism royalty Captain Trevor Haworth and his wife, Geraldine, who together built up the company to cruise the waters of Fiji as well as Sydney Harbour (where they had a fleet of 15 ships) and the Murray River, Haworth West always knew that one day she would be heavily involved.

"I took control of the company at the beginning of Covid and I could not come here for two years," says Haworth West. "It was very challenging," she said, especially given the company had little revenue for two years. And while the Fiji government did all it could, there were no initiatives to bolster staff wages.



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Last week, the Reef Endeavour, one company vessel cruising the sublime waters of Fiji, was bound for the Mamanuca and Yasawa Islands, fully occupied.

Haworth West counts that as a portent of good things to come.

Yet she is certainly well versed in the travails of tourism, having watched her father, the founder and head of the company, chart a course through SARS, various wars and the debilitating effects of the 1980s pilots strike on tourism.

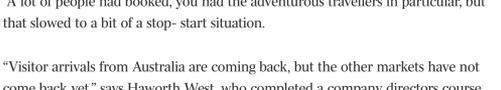
"In tourism, there will always be things that will affect your business," says Haworth West. "I had grown up with our company exposed to crisis after crisis. I have had my intense times in business with the company but Covid is completely unprecedented."

Haworth West oversaw departures for the popular three and four-night cruises, day cruises to the company-owned Tivua Island, which is surrounded by a 200ha coral reef, dinner cruises and charters of the Fiji operations of Captain Cook Cruises drop from healthy occupancies to zero at the height of Covid.

Early in the pandemic, around March 2020, she predicted it would finish by September or October that year.

"I was a year off in my projections," she says.

Haworth West runs the four ships in Captain Cook Cruises remaining operations in Fiji.



Allison Haworth West with members of her Fiji crew. Picture: Rob Rickman.

The Haworth family sold its 15-strong fleet of Sydney Harbour vessels and its Murray River operations in 2012 to Adelaide operator Sealink, now known as Kelsian, for an undisclosed sum.

The recovery has been patchy since Fiji reopened for tourism last December.

"With initial arrivals, there was a burst of activity but, sadly, that came at the same time as Omicron," Haworth West says.

"A lot of people had booked, you had the adventurous travellers in particular, but that slowed to a bit of a stop-start situation.

"Visitor arrivals from Australia are coming back, but the other markets have not come back yet," says Haworth West, who completed a company directors course some 18 years ago.

"People are looking for the dream of white sandy beaches."

And she is right. Tourism research shows that, post-Covid, Australians are willing to spend more on their holidays and are happier to holiday closer to home.

"People want to book travel closer to home, which is compounded by war in Ukraine.

"It's a perfect storm for Fiji," she says.

Yet the pandemic has had its silver linings, says Haworth West, who has tapped into the local and expat market offering discounted cruises and amended itineraries.

She is surprised by the depth of this market.

"Business is business, we had to invent new ways," she says. "Covid has let me be extremely hands-on in the areas of the business I am needed.

"I had to keep inventing new ways to keep afloat – no pun intended. Covid enabled us to adjust and develop itineraries for the local market and some of the adjustments such as creating a shorter cruise to the Lau Islands has seen the local market respond.

"The Fijians know how good it is in the remote areas we go to," says Haworth West, who is also president of the Australia Fiji Business Council.

"The first rooms to sell were the most expensive rooms ... Fiji has grown economically in the past 10-15 years.

"We would like that to continue and we look forward to it."

One of the Reef Explorer's itineraries to Fiji's Lau Islands has been adjusted from 11 nights to seven nights – and this has been of particular appeal to locals.

During the pandemic, Haworth West also negotiated a large charter for Australians who had been stranded on the Kiribati Islands for a year.

"These bits of business helped us maintain the ships, and keep the crew employed," she says

"Fiji has a positive road ahead – one of the great things for Australians is that Fiji is close and safe, it has beautiful clear waters and welcoming people."

*The writer was a guest of Captain Cook Cruises and Tourism Fiji*

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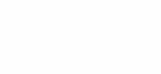
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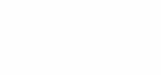
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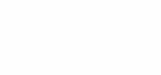
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