



### Today's issue of TD

**Travel Daily** today features seven pages of the latest travel industry news, including a special feature from cruise line **HX**, plus a full page from **Ponant Explorations**.

### Sense the Kimberley

**SEE**, hear, smell, taste, and feel the Kimberley with Ponant.

Travellers can fly, stay, and cruise the region with a range of packages - **page eight** for details.

### Largest HX incentive

**HX HAS** launched its largest-ever global travel agent incentive to mark 130 years of operations.

The cruise line is rewarding agents who make three new deposited bookings on eligible HX expedition sailings between 01 Jul and 31 Oct the opportunity to sail for free.

Winners can also take a guest with them - more details on **p6**.

## Harvey launches business

**FORMER** Council of Australian Tour Operators Head of Partnerships, Brett Harvey (**pictured**), has gone out on his own, launching a new enterprise aimed at connecting int'l travel brands with the Australian sector.

Known as Altura Travel Group, the new operation is backed by Harvey's more than 25 years experience in the industry, and is based on the Sunshine Coast.

According to its newly-launched website, Altura is set up to deliver a broad range of services to international travel brands seeking a foothold in Australia.

In addition to sales, marketing and relationship building opportunities, Altura aims to assist with market intelligence and business development, brand awareness and growth, project management and consulting, along with training for tour operators, wholesalers and retail travel agents.



Brands eager to make a splash in Australia can also leverage Altura's event planning expertise along with operational support.

"Altura is more than just a business; it's the culmination of 25 years in travel," Harvey wrote on LinkedIn, adding he is excited by the prospect of helping brands "build impactful partnerships".

"[Altura is] a business built on relationships, experience, and the belief that strategic connections create powerful outcomes."

Harvey moves into his new project following recent roles with Albatross Tours and Via Travel, along with former stints at Intrepid Travel and The Travel Corporation in London. **ML**

### Win a Galapagos trip

**FIVE** travel agents from Australia and New Zealand will embark on a 10-day expedition to the Galapagos Islands as part of a new incentive from National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions.

Departing 10 Mar 2026, the new 'Expedition Masters' is open to advisors who accrue the most points from training exercises.

Points can be earned from watching Destination Webinars presentations on 10, 17, 24 and 31 Aug; completing Expedition 360 training modules, and making new bookings - more info **HERE**.

### Azamara appoints

**JUSTIN** Southern and Fran Gildon have been appointed by Azamara as new business development managers to further strengthen its trade support team.

Southern has taken on a national role, while Gildon will focus her efforts specifically on NSW and New Zealand.

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## TAF inks CATO training deal

**TRAVEL** Agent Finder (TAF) has forged a new partnership with the Council of Australian Tour Operators' (CATO) Touring Academy, introducing a dedicated Touring Specialist badge to its Specialist Badges program.

TAF members who complete the academy's certification can now apply to display their verified badges on their profiles, user displays designed to provide an added layer of credibility and trust for travellers seeking advice on touring and land components.

"This initiative closely aligns with our mission of helping agents market their niche skills and expertise to stand out to travellers," TAF founder Anna Shannon said.

"The new Touring Specialist badge will provide a valuable extra trust signal to travellers searching for a touring specialist agent on TAF," she added.

Reflecting on the new



partnership, CATO Managing Director Brett Jardine said the two organisations are enabling certified agents to visibly showcase their dedication to excellence in land-based touring.

"Completing the CATO Touring Academy's extensive curriculum sets these professionals apart as trusted specialists," he said.

The collaboration arrives after Shannon spoke openly with **Travel Daily** last month about the positive outcomes of resources that help travel advisors gain greater visibility (**TD** 27 Jun).

After completing CATO Touring Academy certification, TAF members can request their badge verification through their member dashboard. **AB**

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## Anderson joins WWT

**WENDY** Wu Tours (WWT) has strengthened its trade support with the appointment of Cara Anderson to manage Queensland and northern NSW territories.

The new member of the sales team is returning to the travel industry, having previously spent more than five years with Flight Centre, before most recently stepping into real estate.

The announcement follows the promotion of long-serving team member Angelina Briscoe to a newly-created specialist role within the business.

Briscoe had led her territory for more than a decade.

## Vietjet's new head

**VIETJET** Air has appointed a new MD, with Nguyen Thanh Son joining the budget carrier.

VJ's new head succeeds Dinh Viet Phuong, and will be charged with leading Vietjet's "next phase of development", the airline said.

Son has been with the airline since its inception, with Vietjet hailing the key role he has played in shaping its business and marketing strategies.

His appointment comes as VJ continues to grow its operations across Australia, with six direct routes connecting Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Perth to key Vietnamese destinations.

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## ESTA doubles to US\$40

**UNDER** the terms of the recently approved 'One Big Beautiful Bill' in the United States, the ESTA fee will almost double from US\$21 to US\$40.

The large increase in the Visa Waiver Program for travellers will place even greater pressure on the country's visitor economy, which continues to struggle during the second term of US President Donald Trump.

In response to the price hike, which is yet to have a date, the US Travel Association lambasted the move as posing self-inflicted damage to a major money-spinner for the economy.

"Raising fees on lawful international visitors amounts to a self-imposed tariff on one of our nation's largest exports, international travel spending," the body's Chief Executive Officer Geoff Freeman fumed.

"These fees are not reinvested in improving the travel experience and do nothing but discourage visitation at a time when foreign travellers are already concerned about the welcome experience and high prices," Freeman added.

The Bill also supported a flagged drastic cut to Brand USA's funding (**TD** 10 Jun), seeing the tourism marketing body's budget slashed from US\$100m to US\$20m.

Freeman labelled the Brand USA cuts as "foolish". **AB**

## Hermes back at TTF

**THE** Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) has brought back former staffer Lindsay Hermes into the fold, this time in the position of National Director of Industry Development.

"I am looking forward to reconnecting with friends and meeting new ones across the sector, as we work together to reposition the visitor economy as strongly as possible in the decades ahead," Hermes said.

He was previously in the role of Manager, Policy, Media & Government Relations at TTF from 2017 to 2021.

## HLO issues shares

**HELLOWORLD** has advised that 100,000 fully paid ordinary shares issued to an undisclosed employee will be released from voluntary escrow on 15 Jul 2025.

The shares were subject to voluntary escrow for a period of 10 months from the issue date.

## Princess incentive

**TO CELEBRATE** the launch of the *Star Princess*, advisors have the chance to win a Mediterranean trip, thanks to an HLO incentive with Princess Cruises and Singapore Airlines.

Sell Princess Cruises & SIA between 01 Jun and 31 Aug 2025 and the top seven agents will go in the draw to win return flights with SIA to Barcelona & seven nights on the new ship.

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## TEQ voyages through history



**VOYAGES** Indigenous Tourism Australia recently invited the Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) leadership team to take part in its award-winning Ngadiku Dreamtime Walk.

Led by a local Indigenous guide, the group heard ancient stories as they meandered down lush rainforest paths in Mossman Gorge, visiting culturally significant sites along the way.

The experience began with a traditional smoking ceremony to cleanse and ward off bad spirits, and finished with a refreshing

treat of bush tea and damper.

"We believe the best way to promote our region is to experience it first-hand," Voyages shared on LinkedIn.

"When tourism leaders walk with us, they help carry our stories to the world."

The tour, operated by Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, is available daily from \$100 per adult - find out more details **HERE**. **JM**

## Eurostar breakdown

**PASSENGERS** on board a Eurostar train were forced to wait nine hours to be evacuated in northern France.

The train bound for London from Brussels was impacted by a power failure between Lille and Calais, leaving guests with no access to power for four hours, including working air conditioning or toilet facilities.

Passengers have since arrived in London on a replacement train, with Eurostar offering refunds.

## South Sea's sunset

**SOUTH** Sea Cruises Fiji has relaunched its iconic day trip and introduced a new sunset sailing experience as a result.

The new cruise sets sail from Port Denarau every sunset on Tue, Thu, and Sat.

The product revamp follows a significant refit of South Seas' vessel *Sabre*.

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Travel Daily

## Solomons eye recovery

**GROWTH** and recovery is on the agenda for the Solomon Islands, from developing its telco infrastructure to bringing local tourism operators up to speed, according to Fiona Teama, Head of Sales and Marketing from Tourism Solomons.

During a visit to Sydney last week, Teama chatted with **Travel Daily** about the country's slow development, as it works towards pre-COVID visitor levels, at which time, tourists were growing 7%-9% year-on-year and hit a record

high of 30,000 in 2019.

Teama described it as "a catch-22 situation" where she appreciates the economic benefits of development, but also wants to maintain the local culture, particularly given its links with China.

"Do we want to develop to be like Fiji?" she pondered.

"We are not sure."

"Fiji right now is looking at Bali and saying, 'No, we don't want to get to that stage - we better protect [ourselves] before we get there.'"

"We're at this stage where we can conserve [our home]."

Teama continued: "We're hoping that whatever happens with the Chinese influence in our country, it remains at a managed rate...we want to protect our reef and our culture."

The latest figures revealed the total international visitor arrivals for the first quarter of 2025 was 11,563, the majority of which was made up of Aussies (28%). *JHM*

## Airbus courts China

**AIRBUS** is looking to strengthen its ties with Chinese suppliers, with the plane manufacturer estimating the country will need approximately 9,000 new planes over the next 20 years.

George Xu, Airbus Executive VP and CEO of Airbus China, believes the country's aviation industry has huge growth potential.

"We will deepen cooperation with various suppliers and cooperate with China's supply chain to achieve a win-win situation," Xu said.

"I believe that China will play a very important role in helping to strengthen the global aviation supply chain in the future."

Around 200 suppliers in China currently support the production of Airbus' commercial aircraft, with the cooperation generating a total value of US\$1 billion a year, according to Airbus China.

## Kakadu upgrades

**UPGRADES** in Kakadu National Park will ensure safe access to the destination's top tourism spots.

The Australian and NT governments are partnering on long-awaited upgrades to key roads in Kakadu, with the first tender to focus on construction of Kubara Road and Maguk Road.

Construction will begin later this year on the new trunkways.

## NCL up for five NTIAs



**NORWEGIAN** Cruise Line (NCL) is celebrating its highest-ever number of National Travel Industry Award (NTIA) nominations, with five honours across three categories.

The company is in the running for the fourth consecutive year to win Most Popular Ocean Cruise Operator, along with Most Popular Reservations/Groups Team, a new category and first-time nomination.

Additionally, three of NCL's high-performing business development managers are vying for Most Outstanding Sales Executive - Cruise, including Brad Hanna, SA, WA & NT; Samantha Morgan, NSW South, ACT, VIC North; and Craig McLaurin, Queensland South.

"These nominations are a testament to the strength of our entire team...and reflect our commitment to being the easiest cruise line to do business with,"

said Ben Angell, Vice President & Managing Director, NCL APAC.

"It's incredibly rewarding to be recognised among so many deserving peers in such a competitive industry and I couldn't be prouder," he added.

The recognition follows a strong start to 2025 for NCL, with first-quarter bookings surpassing the same period last year. *JM*

**Pictured:** NCL's elated reservations team.

## Gate 7 Clicktivated

**GATE 7** has partnered with interactive tourism video platform Clicktivated.

The tech invites viewers to click directly on destinations, experiences or products while watching a video online.

Clicktivated was recently used by Cook Islands Tourism on a campaign which generated strong ROI and an uplift in click-through.

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## Future of great consulting is human

### OPINION

Nicole O'Sullivan  
is the respected  
sales coach behind  
Birds Eye View  
Consulting, known  
for helping travel  
businesses move  
from reactive



selling to confident, consistent  
conversations that stick.

With over two decades of experience  
in sales and leadership across  
retail, wholesale and call centre  
environments, O'Sullivan said she has  
seen it all & is not afraid to call it out.

Got an opinion to share? Let us  
know in up to 400 words via email to  
[feedback@traveldaily.com.au](mailto:feedback@traveldaily.com.au)

**WHEN** I read the headline in **TD**  
last Fri - '56% of Aussies doubt  
the importance of the human  
touch in travel planning' (**TD** 04  
Jul), I was deeply concerned.

Because this isn't just a statistic.  
It is something I'm witnessing,  
day-in and day-out, through  
the lens of my coaching work,  
mystery calls and conversations  
across the industry.

Let me be clear: this is not a  
criticism of travel consultants -  
quite the opposite. The travel  
agents I work with are passionate  
and they care deeply about  
creating memorable experiences.

They are juggling high volumes,  
complex bookings and increasing  
client expectations, all while  
delivering exceptional service.

But despite best intentions,  
what I'm seeing across the board  
is a growing connection gap, and  
it is showing up in ways that are  
quietly eroding trust and bookings.

Here's how it often plays  
out: agents head straight into  
collecting dates, budgets and  
preferences - there is little space  
for genuine conversation or  
emotional connection.

Clients are handed off by email  
and the relationship becomes  
transactional. And then comes  
the frustration when the client  
ghosts, shops around or books  
online. Sound familiar?

If you're finding yourself having

our conversations.

We need to stop defaulting to  
what feels 'efficient', and instead  
lean into what builds confidence  
and loyalty.

True consulting is more than  
asking questions. It's how you  
make a client feel from the very  
first interaction. It's about the  
confidence you bring and the  
clarity you give them about the  
journey they're about to go on  
with you leading the way.

That's not something AI  
can replicate. But if we keep  
consulting like robots, it won't  
need to. This isn't a blame game.  
It's a moment of reflection.

If we want to remain relevant,  
valuable and in demand, we need  
to evolve the way we connect  
and consult. The agents who are  
ready to do that work, to slow  
down, go deeper and rebuild  
their approach with purpose are  
already seeing the difference.

Clients are committing faster.  
Conversations are richer. And  
bookings are sticking.

So, to the travel agents and  
leaders reading this, I say this  
with total respect and a lot of  
heart: if you want to be the kind  
of expert clients never second-  
guess, now is the time to rewire  
the way you sell. Not with band-  
aid fixes or one-off techniques  
but with the mindset, process  
and confidence to bring your full  
value to the table.

Because the future of travel may  
include AI. But the future of great  
consulting? That's still human.

“  
Human touch is no  
longer just a point  
of difference - it's  
your entire value  
proposition  
”

to re-quote multiple times, or  
stuck in endless back-and-forth  
emails without real progress,  
chances are, the client is feeling  
uncertain - not about the trip...  
but about you.

And that's a tough pill to  
swallow, but also an important  
one. Because in a world where  
AI is rapidly gaining ground, the  
human touch is no longer just  
a point of difference - it's your  
entire value proposition.

What we need now isn't just  
more product knowledge or sales  
scripts. We need to relearn how  
to connect. To make space for  
emotion, trust and curiosity in



## Window Seat

**STEP** aside Nostradamus  
because there is a new psychic  
in town, and she is a manga  
author called Ryo Tatsuki.

So spooked are travellers  
by her prediction of a major  
earthquake this month off the  
shores of Japan detailed in her  
1999 book *Watashi ga Mita  
Mirai*, that Japanese airlines  
have been forced to cancel  
flights due to lower demand.

While Japan is more prone  
to earthquakes than just  
about any other nation on the  
planet, a series of moderate  
quakes over the last two  
weeks on the southernmost  
main island of Kyushu has  
Japanese citizens more than a  
little jumpy.

And it is not just the  
Japanese who have been  
apprehensive about travel in  
recent weeks, with regional  
visitors cancelling bookings  
from China, Taiwan and South  
Korea in the wake of hysteria  
brought on by Tatsuki's book.

Though the author has since  
cautioned readers not to take  
her work literally, a viral frenzy  
of fear has already spread  
across social platforms like  
Weibo, RedBook, and TikTok.




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Content produced  
in collaboration with  
HX Expeditions

**TO CELEBRATE** an incredible 130 years of expedition heritage, **HX Expeditions** has unveiled its largest-ever global travel agent incentive: **Sell 3 - Sail for Free**.

As part of its **anniversary celebrations**, HX is rewarding travel advisors around the world with an exclusive opportunity: agents who make three new deposited bookings on eligible HX expedition cruises between 01 Jul and 31 Oct 2025 will earn the chance to sail for free - with a guest - on one of HX's extraordinary 2026 voyages.

A total of 130 prize places (65 cabins for two adults) will be awarded worldwide, including suites on the cruise line's best-selling 'Highlights of Antarctica' itinerary in 2026, offering agents the chance to experience firsthand the transformational nature of an HX expedition cruise.

This unprecedented campaign is one of several new initiatives designed to thank the travel trade for their support.

"This is truly an exciting year for HX," said Amber Wilson, Director of Sales Australia and NZ.

"To celebrate, we're introducing the largest and most exciting trade incentive in our history - a reflection of the strong, long-standing partnerships we've built with the travel trade.

"We want our advisors to experience the product they so passionately promote."

The announcement follows a series of trade-focused

investments, including a **dedicated Australia team** - all designed to empower advisors with smarter tools, greater earning potential, and access to the fastest-growing segment in cruise.

"Celebrating 130 years as the world's first and most experienced expedition cruise company, we're pulling out all the stops for the trade - and we want to thank our partners in a way that truly reflects the scale of this milestone year," Wilson added.

For more information about HX, please visit [www.travelhx.com](http://www.travelhx.com).

For agent bookings, call AU 1300 159 127 or NZ 03 288 2085.



## HX is the polar travel leader

**HX EXPEDITIONS** has claimed the top spot in polar exploration, taking more travellers to Antarctica and the Arctic than any other cruise operator.

Backed by the *2025 Cruise Industry News Expedition Market Report* and powered by 130 years of pioneering adventure, HX's success stems from a deep-rooted commitment to mindful, expert-led travel.

Since 1896, HX has been navigating some of the world's most remote and extreme environments, combining

deep expedition expertise with a strong commitment to responsible tourism.

Alongside its extensive polar offerings - including Antarctica, Greenland, Svalbard and the Northwest Passage - HX explores iconic destinations such as Iceland, Alaska and the Galapagos.

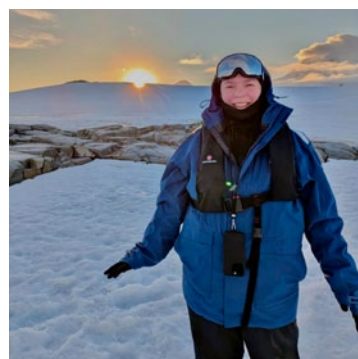
With purpose-built ships, expert guides, and immersive itineraries, HX sets the standard for expedition travel - delivering journeys designed for curious travellers who want to change the way they see the world.

## Say hello to HX's GX team

**HX EXPEDITIONS'** Guest Excellence (GX) team is fully based in Melbourne, offering dedicated support to travel partners across Australia and New Zealand.

With deep product knowledge and minimal wait times, they make booking HX's unique expedition experiences easy.

GX agents (Morgan, Ronnie, Laura, Lu and Jen) are available Monday to Friday, 8am-6pm AEST, and are ready to help with all things HX.



**Pictured:** Morgan Farrell, GX Lead Australia for HX Expeditions, exploring Antarctica.



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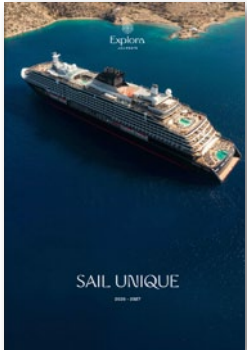
Make 3 bookings between 1 July and 31 October, and you and a guest can sail for free on one of our expeditions.

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### Explora Journeys - Sail Unique 2026-27

Explora Journeys has published a new brochure featuring updated itineraries, experiences and dining for 2026-27. The 48-page publication provides an overview of the luxury cruise line's ships, as well as information on its features and services, and showcases the Journeys collection, which offers a blend of celebrated destinations and less-travelled spots. Readers will discover details of a range of voyages encompassing the Mediterranean, such as the 11-night 'A Journey of Ancient Wonders & Mysteries Along the Silk Road', which departs Venice on 13 Apr 2026 on board *Explora I*. Access the brochure online [HERE](#).



### Trafalgar - USA & Canada 2026/27

Travellers can discover trips across the USA, Canada & Costa Rica, including Hawaii and Alaska, in Trafalgar's latest brochure. For example, take a thrilling all-terrain vehicle tour through Monument Valley, led by a member of the Dine (Navajo) Nation, or stay at the iconic Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel, a historic gem in UNESCO-listed Banff National Park. Also detailed within the brochure is a new nine-day 'Scenic Great Lakes' tour, which includes a private horse-drawn carriage tour of Mackinac Island and a Tuscan meal with a local family at their award-winning cider farm. Download the brochure [HERE](#).



### Sun Island Tours - Med Cruising 2026

Sun Island Tours has just released its 2026 Mediterranean cruising brochure, which showcases a selection of its most popular itineraries in destinations such as Greece; Croatia; Italy; Malta; Türkiye; and more. Vessels range from handcrafted wooden gulets and sleek and stylish small ships to Celestyal Cruises' mid-sized ships. To celebrate the launch of the 51-page brochure (read it [HERE](#)), Sun Island Tours has introduced its biggest agent incentive ever. From now until the end

of Nov, the Australian-based tour operator is giving away a cabin on a Croatia small ship cruise every week - find out more [HERE](#).

## Stay Updated

on the latest travel news

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## SYD funds key safe space



**SYDNEY** Airport has given back to the community by donating proceeds from its 2023 Lost Property Auction (**TD** 06 Feb 2023) to launch the Jacaranda Women's Hub.

Located in Pagewood and delivered by Bayside Women's Shelter in partnership with Bayside Council, the newly opened hub acts as a safe space for local women and families facing adversity.

The facility offers specialist counselling, case management, financial and legal support, parenting programs, and

community-building activities like art, play groups and sewing.

"We're so grateful to everyone at Sydney Airport for supporting the Bayside Women's Shelter board and management's vision to support local women and help build a stronger community," said Bayside Women's Shelter GM, Sallianne Faulkner. *JM*

## SME resource shut

**THE** NSW Government has quietly axed its free small business support program, Business Connect.

The news was revealed as part of the 2025-26 state budget, with the program to be discontinued at the end of Sep.

Business Connect, which was launched by the NSW Government in 2017, offers free expert advice for SMEs & startup companies - a large cohort of the Australian travel sector.

The program is delivered by a network of independent providers, offering up to eight hours of free tailored advice each financial year.

Business NSW has called for intervention on the closure.

## Vanuatu campaign

**THE** Vanuatu Tourism Office has launched a new 'Adventure Passes' marketing campaign.

The refreshed Australian push aims to boost demand and promote Vanuatu as the ultimate destination for adventure, nature, and cultural exploration.

The campaign, which goes live today, will run across digital display, video, audio and social media channels through to 10 Aug, with an estimated reach of more than seven million Aussies.

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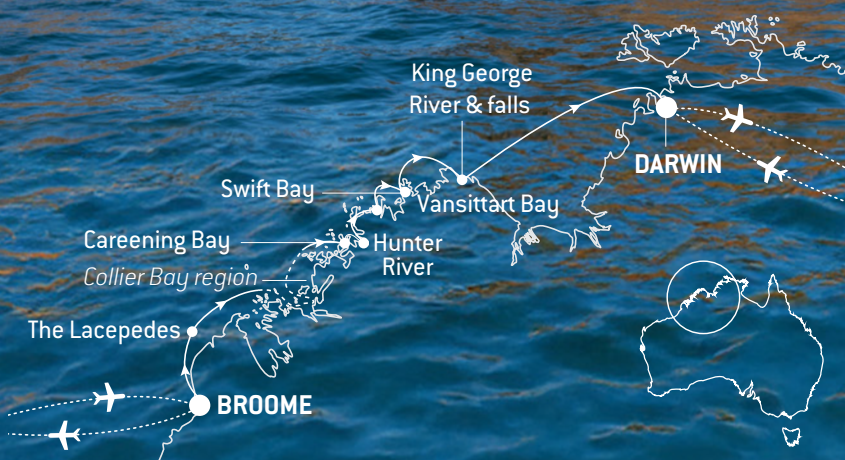
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