



Italy air disruptions

UP TO 27,000 travellers across Italy could face disruption during a nationwide air transport strike set to take place on 16 Feb.

Unions representing pilots, flight attendants and ground staff across multiple domestic carriers - including ITA Airways - are participating in the strike. *JM*



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EXPLORE SALE

Liberty Tours goes under

LIBERTY Tours has ceased trading and is no longer processing bookings, providing services, or making payments to creditors, a message from founder and group CEO Steve Cairns (**pictured**) has confirmed.

"We sincerely thank our clients, suppliers, and partners for their support and relationships over the past nine years," Cairns said.

"If your enquiry relates to an outstanding matter, please note that the company has no available funds or assets from which payments can be made."

The company - which was based in Barangaroo in Sydney - had offered packages combining flights, hotels, transfers, cruises,

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features nine pages of industry news, including a special feature from **AAT Kings** and our **Luxury page**, plus a full page from **Inspiring Vacations**.



trains, and guided sightseeing to a range of int'l destinations.

The business had been ATIA-accredited until 21 Jan, when Liberty Tours breached 2.5 of the ATAS charter. *AB*

Encounter cleared

CARNIVAL has confirmed that the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) found no problems during its inspection of *Carnival Encounter* while the ship was docked in Darwin on Mon.

The inspection was carried out after allegations were made by the Maritime Union about the living conditions for crew. *JM*




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Lunar NY savings

INSPIRING Vacations is offering 8% off all tours as part of its Lunar New Year sale, which must end by the close of today.

Travellers can save on journeys like the 20-day 'Essential Egypt & Jordan' small group tour, now available from \$9,655.

See **page 10** for more info.

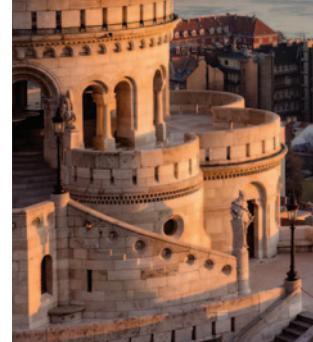


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Uniworld's "power brand"

UNIWORLD Boutique River Cruises president & chief executive officer Ellen Bettridge believes her line and its new sister brand, Luxury Gold, are a perfect match.

The two are forming a "power brand" (TD 20 Aug) which will see their itineraries sold alongside each other, with the pair sharing a similar guest demographic.

"It was an easy decision for



Uniworld to take on Luxury Gold," Bettridge elaborated.

"If you look at who the Luxury Gold customer is and who the Uniworld customer is, it's the same customer."

Luxury Gold will fall 100% under Uniworld from next year, Bettridge explained, with most of the touring brands' capacity already sold for 2026.

"The take-up of the product has already been very strong," Bettridge added.

"We put out one e-mail and we've already got over \$500,000 in business, and it was mostly past guests," she enthused. MS

VN to Amsterdam

TRAVELLERS will soon have a new way to get to the Netherlands, with Vietnam Airlines set to launch its first-ever flights to the country from 16 Jun.

The flag carrier will offer three services per week to Amsterdam on its Airbus A350 aircraft, with inbound flights timed to meet onward connections on VN's domestic and regional network, including Ho Chi Minh City. JM



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Dopper exits Express

EXPRESS Travel Group's general manager of partnerships Alisha Dopper has departed the role for a new chapter in an industry outside of travel.

Dopper (pictured) had been with the now-Helloworld-owned business for more than eight-and-a-half-years, working out of its Melbourne office.

"It's hard to capture a journey that has shaped so much of my professional growth, but I'm so grateful for the opportunities, challenges, and experiences along the way," Dopper said.

"I can't thank Tom Manwaring enough for trusting me with so many incredible projects and encouraging me to step into new spaces," she added. AB



Quarmby walks on

FORMER Tourism NT chief of Tony Quarmby has joined Tasmanian Walking Company as its group general manager of sales and marketing.

Quarmby had been with the Top End's tourism body for close to eight years before exiting in Mar last year, and after that worked in a strategy role with Develop East Arnhem Land for 11 months.

The former NT executive takes over from Kate Duffy. AB

Dunemann feels fine

LAUREN Dunemann has accepted the role as head of B2B partnerships at Fine Tours Group.

The travel executive arrives with plenty of luxury experience under her belt, having most recently served as buyer manager for the high-profile Luxperience event.

Prior to that, Dunemann was luxury product designer for Flight Centre Travel Group's Travel Associates Australia division. AB

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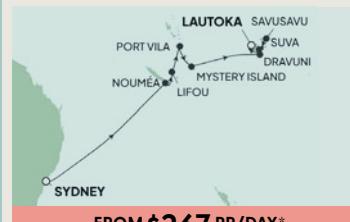
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NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE

Wednesday 11th February 2026

FCTG secures IT future

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group (FCTG) has partnered with Indian-based IT services firm TCS to help future-proof the company's global digital operations.

TCS will use its technology, data, and AI expertise to assist in the development of a strategy to enhance FCTG's platform standardisation and improve its service delivery.

"Strengthening our technology



backbone is an ongoing priority, and we look forward to collaborating with the TCS team to deliver tangible benefits to our people and, ultimately, our customers and shareholders," said Graham Turner, Flight Centre Travel Group chief executive officer (**pictured**).

A spokesperson from TCS added: "The partnership will streamline and consolidate core systems, unlock greater value from existing technological investments, and improve performance across FCTG's global enterprise technology stack." **JM**

McLachlan on Ama

MAT McLachlan Battlefield Tours has revealed its signature river cruise in Sep 2027 will take place on AmaWaterways' new ship, *AmaSofia*, which launches later this year (**TD** 03 Jun 2024).

The tour operator's 'Riches of the Mekong and Vietnam War' cruise in Aug 2027 will also take place aboard the upcoming vessel, with sales for both sailings now open (**TD** 14 Jan). **JM**

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Scenic loyalty launch

SCENIC Group has officially launched its new global loyalty program (**TD** 02 Feb), which merges Scenic Club and EmeraldEXPLORER into one streamlined platform.

The new Scenic & Emerald Rewards will combine the existing status points from the previous two programs into a single consolidated balance, providing members with one account and making it easier to earn and redeem rewards on each booking.

Free to join for all guests returning from their first journey with the group, the platform introduces a four-tier structure with Gold, Diamond, Emerald and Chairman's Club.

It also features a new MyRewards component, which allows members to earn 1% of their eligible new booking value as an actual monetary amount.

All existing members have been automatically transitioned into the new program. **JM**

Cuba is out of gas

FUEL shortages in Cuba are threatening to halt the majority of tourism to the country, with Air Canada the first major carrier to suspend flights amid the crisis.

The Canadian airline said it will operate empty flights to pick up around 3,000 customers in Cuba and return them home.

Only a week after declaring that international flights would not be affected, Cuban officials have warned fuel won't be available at Jose Marti International Airport in Havana until at least 11 Mar.

The reason for the acute oil shortage is largely due to the sudden halt in imports from Venezuela and Mexico following intense pressure applied by the US Government to cease supply.

Currently, major American carriers such as Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and American Airlines have not commented on future services to Cuba - the main way Australian travellers visit the Caribbean destination. **AB**

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AmaWaterways

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Attend Ponant & win

PONANT Explorations is launching its 2026 Discovery Sessions in Mar and Apr to showcase the offerings across its fleet and engage with partners.

The info sessions come with two new incentives for attendees, with agents who make a Ponant booking following a discovery event going into the draw to win a family on a sailing to either the Kimberleys or French Polynesia.

Agents can also win a \$200 dinner voucher, with winners drawn from a barrel on site following every session.

Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Canberra will host the upcoming workshops - register [HERE](#) to attend. *JB*



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Signature marks 70 years

SIGNATURE Travel Network is marking its 70th anniversary this year with a lineup of celebratory events to honour its legacy.

The luxury travel advisor network will bring its annual conference to Orlando, Florida for the first time in more than two decades, which will take place in Nov with a full hotel buyout at the Orlando World Center Marriott.

The conference is expected to attract record attendance from both US and international members, and will include several new elements, including an immersive experience celebrating Signature's 70-year legacy.

There will also be fundraising events for the network's nonprofit arm Travel Elevates, and a closing evening at Universal Orlando's Islands of Adventure.

"As we celebrate this milestone, we honour a legacy shaped by expertise, innovation, and the collective strength of more



than 15,000 travel advisors who bring their passion to every journey they create," said Karryn Christopher, Signature president.

"As we look to the future, we continue to build on this foundation, embracing new opportunities and technology, strengthening our preferred partnerships, and shaping experiences that inspire, connect, and endure."

Signature Travel Network closed out 2025 with record-breaking sales (**TD** 23 Jan), and welcomed New Zealand's House of Travel to the fold at the beginning of this year (**TD** 27 Jan). *JM*

UTC lands new client

THE Unique Tourism Collection (UTC) is now representing Argentina and Uruguay travel specialists Furlong Incoming in the Australian and New Zealand market, leading sales and marketing in the region.

UTC will be responsible for driving bookings on Furlong Incoming's programs across the two South American nations through several promotions, events and sponsorship deals. *JM*

Good travel habits

MARRIOTT International has launched 'Good Travel with Marriott Bonvoy', a collection of hands-on, community-minded guest experiences across its 80 hotels in the APAC region.

The two Australian experiences include a Sydney by Kayak tour at Sydney Harbour Marriott and volunteering at St. Johns Crisis Centre at JW Marriott Resort & Spa, Gold Coast. *JM*

**2026 Europe River Cruising
Fly Free Economy***



Wednesday 11th February 2026

DMCs meet with agents

DESTINATION Marketing Services (DMS) has wrapped up this year's series of its Connect showcases (**TD** 23 Jan), which brought together agents and tourism operators across Australia & New Zealand to meet with destination marketing companies around the globe.

Feedback from exhibitors revealed the event attracted a crowd that was eager to grow their travel knowledge.

Once again, the events



were accompanied by a panel session from the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE), which this year delved into the four major challenges faced by the travel industry today, including rising costs, international instability, political considerations, as well as attracting and retaining talent.

The insights provided by SITE also revealed that travel trends of the younger generation call for the need to push greater customer-centric, personalised incentive experiences. **JB**

The DMS team pictured, including Sienna Fernandez, Marc Ryan, Marissa Fernandez and Christian Fernandez.

No phone? No probs

UBER has partnered with global financial tech platform Adyen to introduce Uber Kiosks, allowing international travellers without a mobile plan to book rides.

The kiosk has debuted at New York City's LaGuardia Airport Terminal C, with plans revealed to roll the concept out across major airports around the globe. **JB**

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Virgin flies AHEAD

EMBRAER has signed a long-term agreement with Virgin Australia for the Aussie carrier to use the Aircraft Health Analysis and Diagnosis (AHEAD) system across its E190-E2 fleet.

AHEAD will help VA make predictive decisions about potential maintenance issues before they become critical.

By collecting in-flight and ground data, the platform applies analytics and algorithms to support proactive upkeep.

Virgin Australia's first E190-E2 jet touched down in Perth last year (**TD** 09 Sep 2025). **AB**



Window Seat

ANY traveller who has uttered the line, "this room is like a prison-cell", now has the chance to stay in an actual prison-cell.

A couple based in McCreary in the Canadian province of Manitoba bought the decommissioned jailhouse a couple of years ago before deciding it would make a good accommodation option.

Several areas have been updated for guests, like the breathalyser fingerprinting room, which is now the living room, and the guard station, which has been converted into a kitchen area. **JB**



QF Jo'burg change

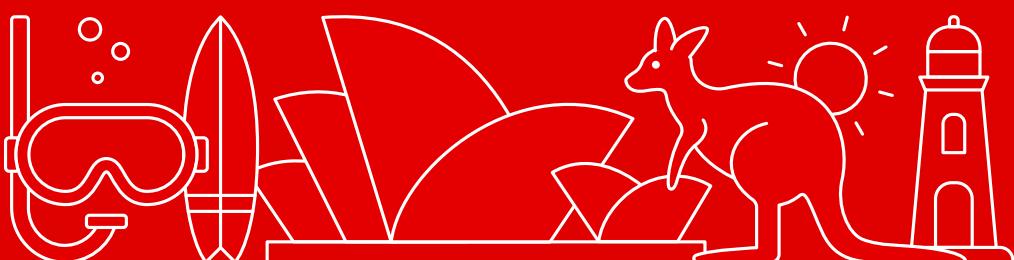
QANTAS is planning to dial down the frequency on its direct Sydney to Johannesburg route for the majority of Aug, according to GDS screens.

From 01-26 Aug, the carrier will operate three flights a week instead of four, using A380s. **AB**

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*Sale ends 11:59pm (AEDT) 16 February 2026 unless sold out prior. Select routes, travel dates and terms and conditions apply.

Wednesday 11th February 2026

ATIA UPDATE

from Dean Long, CEO



AS SHARED at Beyond Borders last Oct, ATIA remains firmly committed to championing member voices and ensuring our committees made up exclusively of members are operating at their best.

A key part of this commitment is keeping our Accreditation Advisory Committee (AAC) vibrant and representative, so it continues to set the benchmark for accreditation in our Industry.

We've recently refreshed the AAC (TD 10 Feb), as the initial two-year terms for several founding members drew to a close.

This scheduled update means the committee continues to reflect the diverse experience and expertise of our membership.

We owe a big 'thank you' to Debra Fox and Steve Hui for their exceptional service, dedication and professionalism while helping lay the strong foundations of the AAC - their contributions have been invaluable, and we are grateful for the legacy they leave.

Thank you also to everyone who put themselves forward in the nomination process.

The impressive calibre and

engagement among nominees underscores how deeply our members value accreditation and Industry leadership.

We warmly welcome four new Industry leaders to the AAC: Rebecca Day (Stuba), Stephen Brady (Helloworld Travel Ltd), Kylee Ellerton (Frank Ford Travel), and Judy Tanner (Aurora Travel Services).

Their willingness to volunteer their time and expertise is a powerful reminder that ATIA is, above all, a member-led organisation.

My congratulations also go to Scott Darlow, Chad Carey and Gina Norman, who join David Walker and committee members Ken Morgan, Brett Dann, Lauren Gray and Karen Deveson for another term.

This blend of fresh perspectives and continuity ensures the AAC continues to be the benchmark for professionalism and consumer trust.

The AAC will guide accreditation settings, support the A30 Industry Led Protection Scheme, and help keep the ATIA Accredited mark strong and credible.

We encourage all members to respect and value the important work of the AAC it's your committee, working to protect and elevate our Industry.

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S Korea allure growing

SOUTH Korea welcomed more than 300,000 Aussies and Kiwis last year, reflecting the country's growing tourism appeal.

According to the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) Sydney, the majority of travellers to the destination were aged between 21 and 30, a shift from pre-COVID trend which had skewed older.

Apr marked the country's highest monthly visitation from Australia, with many seeking out the cherry blossoms, food scene, and vibrant culture.

"It's great to see more Australians and New Zealanders discovering Korea and exploring its culture, food and unique experiences," said Hyeongjoon Kim, director of KTO.

Kim credited the robust visitor numbers to the increase in direct flights to Seoul from major hubs, as well as the country's increasing cultural pull from K-drama, K-content and K-pop.

Family holidays are also rising,



recent data from KTO and PassportCard Australia suggested, with pop culture moments such as *KPop Demon Hunters* boosting Korea's appeal to younger travellers (TD 30 Oct 2025).

"With the Australian dollar performing strongly, Korea can offer great value, and we are excited to inspire even more travel to Korea in 2026," Kim said.

Throughout 2025, South Korea recorded a total of 18.9 million international visitor arrivals, and has set a target of 30 million annual inbound visitors by 2028, bringing forward the previous 2030 objective. JB

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For new bookings made by Mar 31, 2026, or until sold out, the deals are available on selected AAT Kings operated guided holidays for travel from 01 Apr 2026 to 31 Mar 2027.



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Mandarin expands

MANDARIN Oriental has expanded its business in Southeast Asia with the addition of the Sireya Desaru Coast resort, now known as the Mandarin Oriental, Desaru Coast.

Located along the southeastern shoreline of Johor, Malaysia, Mandarin Oriental, Desaru Coast is tucked within 128 acres of ancient rainforest and a 1.5km beachfront, accessible from major international airports and cities in Malaysia and Singapore.

The group will undertake significant improvements to the resort including the lobby, arrivals area and rooms, with celebratory deals on now. *DF*

Virtuoso looks to bolster cruise division

GLOBAL luxury and experiential travel network Virtuoso has announced the appointment of Thatcher Brown (**pictured**) as special advisor to the chief operating officer, Cruise.

The move aims to bolster its investment in the rapidly evolving and highly valuable market.

It is the second stint at Virtuoso for the Florida-based Brown, who has a storied career in the travel sector, especially in cruise.

His previous positions have included chief commercial officer & head of joint yacht operations at Marc-Henry Cruise Holdings, chief commercial officer of the luxury division at MSC Cruises, as well as president of Dream Cruises and MD for Crystal Cruises Asia at Genting HK.

Most recently, he did a short spell as CEO at Crescent Seas,



spending six months in the role.

In his latest newly created role, Brown will be tasked with providing leadership perspective and strategic oversight to support the long-term growth of Virtuoso's cruise vertical.

His focus will include strategy, structure and future product positioning, with an emphasis on strengthening global partnerships that support Virtuoso's

worldwide membership and ensure the category is well positioned for sustained success both in the near term and over the coming years.

Virtuoso chief operating officer Brad Bourland said, "By pairing Thatcher's deep industry expertise with strong execution leadership and senior oversight, we are shaping a truly global cruise partnership model.

"[This is] one that leverages Virtuoso's worldwide footprint to connect our partners with the right agencies and advisors, reach more high-value travellers, and drive long-term growth.

"This work strengthens the value we deliver today while positioning Virtuoso and our partners to lead the next chapter of cruise across our global network," he added. *DF*

H4U travel launches ultra-lux private jet tour with Michelin-starred dining

AUSTRALIAN boutique luxury travel specialist H4U Travel has announced the launch of 'Flavours of Asia by Private Jet', an eight-day, seven-night culinary journey designed for luxury travellers seeking the world's most exclusive food, wine and travel experiences.

Departing in late Apr 2026, the tour is fully hosted and combines private jet travel, Michelin-starred dining and Michelin-key hotel experiences, as well as behind-the-scenes



chef activities, with numbers on the tour limited.

Travellers will board an exclusively chartered Gulfstream G550 private jet and explore

Asia's most iconic culinary destinations, from Singapore to Saigon and Macau.

Highlights of the tour include six Michelin-starred tasting menus curated exclusively for the tour, market tours, wine tastings, private cocktail masterclasses and more.

It includes stays at properties including Fairmont Singapore, Hotel des Arts Saigon - MGallery, Grand Lisboa Palace Macau and Raffles Hotel Sentosa.

Bookings are open [HERE](#). *DF*

Venice has a new star

STARHOTELS Collezione has announced the opening of the Gabrielli Luxury Apartments in Venice, set in a secluded area just steps from the lagoon.

The six residences are spread across three historic buildings adjacent to Hotel Gabrielli, with each apartment featuring a separate living area, bedrooms, equipped kitchens and luxury bathrooms with artisanal designs throughout.

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The Torien Rooftop and Bar has opened at Pattaya Marriott Resort and Spa in Thailand. The Japanese-inspired concept sits on Jomtien Beach, providing panoramic views of the Gulf of Thailand. The cuisine on offer mixes luxury dining with Tokyo's street food culture, with signature dishes such as Wagyu Katsu Sando made using traditional Japanese charcoal grilling arts, and accompanied by select sakes and highballs.



TFE Hotels is set to launch its apartment-style hotel brand, Adina, in Tasmania later this year. The 48-key property will feature a mix of studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments with fully equipped kitchens and an aesthetic inspired by Tasmania's forests. Guests will also have access to the Belvedere restaurant and bar, conferencing facilities, pool and gym.



The Mulberry Group has launched five food and beverage concepts within the newly opened **Hannah St. Hotel** in Melbourne. There is the classic lobby bar Bar Hannah, which serves classic bar food and snacks, as well as the hidden bar,

Carriage Lounge, Terrace Lounge on the rooftop, street-front cafe

Hannah St. Coffee, and the Couquette Corner Bistro & Bar.



Island Shangri-la Hong Kong has unveiled its Hong Kong Suite on the 50th floor, overlooking Central and Victoria Harbour. The suite features painted fabric walls, art pieces and antiques that capture traditional Hong Kong and Asian aesthetics. The suite

also includes a king-size bed and well as a day bed by the window alongside a dressing room, walk-in wardrobe and an en suite bathroom with marble finishes.



The Hoxton, Shoreditch has celebrated 20 years of operations with the refurbishment of several spaces across the London hotel. The lobby pays homage to Shoreditch's industrial heritage with brick-clad walls and custom patchwork glass tables, blending

Victorian motifs with wired glass, along with velvet lounge chairs and low-slung sofas. The refurbishments have also introduced the 'Cosy Up' category of rooms, which include mustard sofas and drinking areas.



Getting a feel for France



A GROUP of Australian Virtuoso travel advisors were hosted on a recent famil by Emotions in France, the specialist FIT division of Lafayette DMC and a Virtuoso preferred partner.

The eight-day trip saw the group travel through several regions, spending time with local partners and experience providers, including hoteliers and guides.

"Rather than simply moving from place to place, we spent time with the people who bring destinations to life," said one of the famil participants and founder of Wayfinder Travel, Sarah Webster.

"It was a reminder that meaningful travel is rarely about spectacle - it's about depth, rhythm, and connection.

"What stood out most was the care behind how Emotions in France designs travel," she added.

"Over the eight days, that approach gave me full confidence in how my clients will feel once they're in France or Monaco, supported, relaxed, and fully present."

Launched last year, Emotions in France targets the higher end of the individual travel mark, managing complexity behind the scenes to deliver seamless, high-touch itineraries.

Luxury agents can connect with the Emotions in France team by contacting emotions@emotionsinfrance.com. JM

Pictured: The group admiring views of the Garonne river.

Airnorth maintains

AIRNORTH has signed a new multi-year support agreement with Embraer, with the latter to provide comprehensive maintenance, repair and spare parts support for Airnorth's Embraer E170 and E190 fleet.

"Reliability is everything for a regional airline like Airnorth... and this agreement gives us confidence that our Embraer fleet is backed by world-class OEM support, with fast access to components and technical expertise," Airnorth Supply Chain Manager Bradley Norrish said. AB

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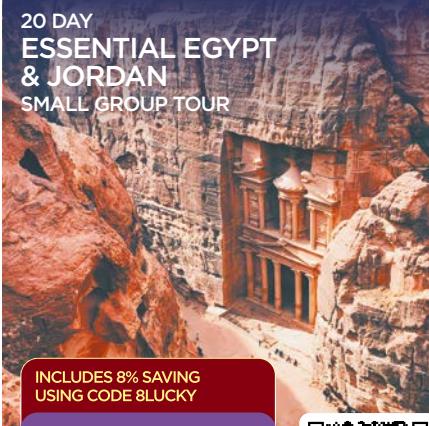
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