

Consumer

SAVINGS PLAN COPERTO IN ITALY

Restaurants in Italian tourist areas will sometimes add a stiff coperto, a cover charge, but if it's not listed in the menu it's not legal. The coperto is illegal in Lazio, which includes Rome, but the pane e coperto (bread charge) is not.



Going Places

Deals & advice

By Sue Williams



FAMILY

GREECE

Take the children to beach resorts, ancient ruins and medieval streets in Rhodes and, if booked before January 31, save 10 per cent on a five-night stay at the Atrium Palace. Travel April 26 to October 29 for \$2350 for two adults and one child, and \$2876 for a family of four. Ph 1300 558 987. See tempoholidays.com

FIJI

Children under 12 fly from \$99 ex-Sydney with a six-night stay at the Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort. Save \$2400 per family with a deal from \$1890 a person, which includes a room with a view, meals, transfers and two children under 13 staying free and either a free nanny service or spa treatments. For sale until January 29 for travel February 1 to March 20. Ph 131381. See hootholidays.com.au



TOUR

SCANDINAVIA

Thrill to the stories – and sights – of ancient Viking kings and Sami culture on a 20-day Nordic Adventure through dramatic fjord and glacier landscapes, with 7.5 per cent off if booked and paid for by February 23. Priced from \$4898 a person twin-share for departure April 16. Ph 1800 002 006. See trafalgar.com

EGYPT

Visit the Pyramids of Giza and the mysterious Sphinx, then sail along the Nile to historic Aswan, Luxor and Edfu. Departures are weekly on Wednesdays and, for bookings made before January 31, the price per person twin-share for the 12-day package travelling January 11-April 5 is \$4575, saving \$500 a person. Ph 1300 237 422. See benchafrica.com.au



CRUISE

EUROPE, NEW YORK

One cruise not enough? A new, luxury fly/cruise 37-night package offers a chance to sail aboard Cunard's Queen Elizabeth, Queen Victoria and Queen Mary 2 in one holiday around Europe and to New York in 2018. From \$10,999 a person twin-share, including flights, hotels and \$US1270 spending credit per cabin. Ph 1300 764 509. See cruiseexpress.com.au

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Book a 14-night cruise deal by February 28 and receive up to \$185 onboard credit per stateroom twin-share. The Dawn Princess departs Fremantle May 14 to Singapore, and the \$1899 a person includes meals, entertainment, two nights' accommodation post-cruise and a one-way Qantas flight back to Perth. Ph 1300 362 599. See creativecruising.com.au



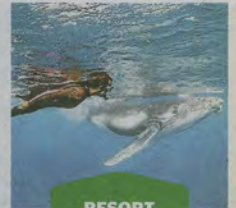
HOTEL

PARIS

Choose romance, and rent a private, fully furnished one-bedroom apartment on the third floor of a 19th century building in central Paris, close to the Louvre, from \$1425 for five nights. Sleeping two, it has a view over a quiet street, a balcony and cable TV and high-speed Wi-Fi. Ph 1300 858 304. See frenchtravel.com.au

SYDNEY

Take a break five minutes from the golden sands of Bondi Beach and save up to 20 per cent with a special deal for two nights or more at the Adina Apartment Hotel. Book and stay by January 31 from \$276 a night. All apartments are self-contained and there's a pool, hot tub, gym and free Wi-Fi. Ph 13 8642. See TFEhotels.com



RESORT

TONGA

Swim with whales in the turquoise waters off Tonga with a saving of \$800 a couple for bookings by January 31. The eight-day eco tours staying in new beachfront island fables run on September 11 or 18 when the humpbacks gather. Priced from \$3600 a person twin-share, with flights extra. Ph 0405 594 253. See majesticwhaleencounters.com.au

PHUKET

Relax for eight nights at the four-star beachfront Phuket Graceland Resort & Spa from just \$819 a person twin-share, with daily breakfast and late checkout. Valid for sale and travel until March 31, the resort has four pools, a gym, bowling centre, day spa and kids' club. Ph 1300 799 783, deal 4438475. See escapetravel.com.au

How to bed down a great rate

THE BIG ISSUE

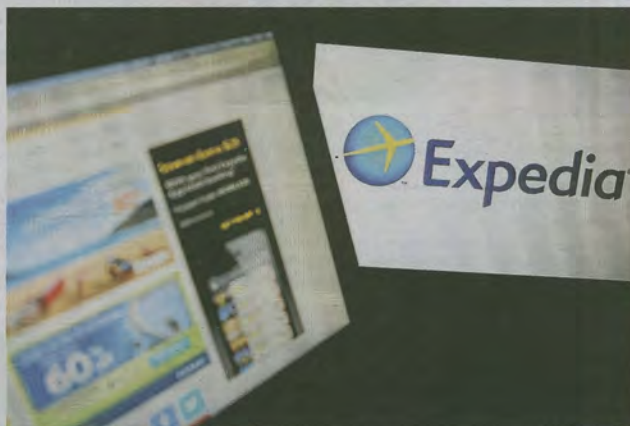
Book direct with the hotel and you might get a better price and a better room.

When you book a hotel room through an online travel agent such as Expedia or Booking.com, their slice of whatever you're paying is between 15 and 25 per cent. It can even creep higher if the hotel wants more favourable exposure on the OTA's website.

The person behind the check-in desk gets to see that the guest has made their booking through an OTA, which is the reason those who book through an OTA are more likely to be assigned to a lesser room than those who book direct with the hotel.

The big players are Expedia, which owns Hotels.com, Wotif, Hotwire.com, trivago, Orbitz, HomeAway and Venere among others, and Priceline, which owns Booking.com, KAYAK and agoda.com plus several more. Between them Expedia and Priceline now control the lion's share of the online hotel booking market in Australia.

Contractual arrangements prevent hotels from offering a lower rate on their own website than those advertised on OTA websites. This is known as parity pricing and it's essential for the success of the OTA's business model.



Fees please: Accommodation booking sites get a slice of your rate. Photos: Bloomberg

Their argument is that they enable hotels to enhance and promote their business, their percentage is their reward for doing so and they would not be in business if hotels could undercut them by advertising a lower rate than that on the OTA's website.

However, in September the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission ruled that hotels can offer a lower price than that on the OTA websites but only to guests who make their booking by calling the hotel direct.

This applies only to hotels within Australia. **T** Michael Gebicki



EXPERT OPINION

Hidden Italy

Simon Tancred went to Italy as a backpacker in 1980, later lived and worked in Italy as an academic and started Hidden Italy walking tours in 1993.



Q. Many Australians are revisiting Italy and looking for fresh experiences. Any suggestions?

A. There are whole regions of Italy that are barely a blip on the tourist trails and just as beautiful and fascinating as the classic destinations. For example, Valle d'Aosta, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Le Marche, Abruzzo, Basilicata and Calabria. Base yourself in a provincial centre (as rich in history as the cities but without the fuss). Cremona, Mantova, Udine in the north, Parma, Ferrara, Ascoli Piceno in the centre, Lecce, Matera and Alghero in the south. Go in the off-season. In winter Milan, Venice, Florence and Rome go local and abound with exhibitions and concerts. Five exceptional retreats in out-of-the-way places are Hotel Bellevue in Valle d'Aosta, La Subida in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Sextantio in Abruzzo, Palazzo Magherita in Basilicata and Su Gologone in Sardinia. See hiddenitaly.com.au

THE QUIZ ANSWERS from page 5
1. Brisbane 2. Rogue One: A Star Wars Story
3. Hawke City 4. Fried rice 5. The Kimberley, WA
6. Hawaii 7. Montenegro 8. Scuba diving (55
Vongolia is a wreck off Townsville) 9. Fear of travel
10. Happy new year