



River companies compete on drinks

The point of difference argued between APT and Scenic Tours has shifted from balconies to beverages and butlers.

TWO weeks after Scenic Tours declared it would introduce all-inclusive European river cruises next year, with free drinks available all day (*CW*, 01 May), APT has matched the offer.

But APT's "service enhancement" only includes beverages on its 'Platinum' cruises, which target Australians and New Zealanders.

Announcing the change to its recently launched Europe River Cruising 2013 brochure, APT general manager marketing Debra Fox said the company "was delighted to offer Platinum guests a selection of soft and alcoholic drinks for consumption on board at their discretion during the cruise, as the mood takes them".

Fox refuted suggestions that APT was copying Scenic Tours' new drinks service.

"APT innovated this concept with river cruising over two years ago when we introduced it exclusively to the market on our Mekong River cruises," she told *Cruise Weekly*.

"Europe was a natural extension to this concept, which we had been working on for some time to ensure we got the delivery right.

"Our Platinum cruises are the APT-exclusive cruises, rather than departures marketed to the North American market, as our Platinum APT cruises are designed to meet the specific needs of Australian and New Zealand travellers – which is something unique to APT."

Scenic Tours gm, sales and marketing, Michelle Black maintained that Scenic was "proud to be the world's first truly all-inclusive luxury river cruise company operating on Europe's waterways", regardless of nationality.

"We proudly deliver the same superior benefits to every single guest who travels with us," Black said.

"To us, all-inclusive luxury means delivering the ultimate experience of world-class service to every guest."

From 2013, "every guest, on every sailing, in every destination" on a Scenic 'Space-Ship' will receive unlimited complimentary beverages (including regional and sparkling wines, spirits, boutique beers, cocktails, bottled water and espresso coffee), as well as a complimentary in-cabin mini-bar replenished daily, Black said.

Scenic Tours also announced last month that it would introduce private butler service for every passenger cruising in Europe next season.

At this stage, APT has not extended its butler service to all passengers.

"We have two levels of butler service available [in Europe] – Silver and Gold service, depending on the suite type, which services the majority of suite categories on our Concerto class ships, as well as room service dining for both breakfast and dinner available across both Concerto and Aria ships on many suite categories," Fox said.

HAL cancels Nov/Dec cruises

HOLLAND America Line has cancelled two Australasian departures of its *ms Oosterdam* "as a result of the *Oosterdam* going into a recently scheduled dry-dock".

The cruises cancelled include the 28-day New Zealand Discovery and Pacific Treasures cruise scheduled to depart on 21 Nov this year, as well as the 14-day Pacific Treasures voyage departing 05 Dec 2012.

HAL said that all guests currently booked on the cruises have been offered options for similar trips, and any passengers who choose to retain their reservation on board any Australia/NZ voyage in HAL's 2012/13 season, a shipboard credit will be applied to the guests' new booking based on the stateroom category booked on the new cruise.

Agents will have their commission protected on rebooked clients, and will also receive a \$25 per passenger Rebooking Bonus Commission.

Travellers who are unable to book on an alternate cruise date will receive a full refund.

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Brett Jardine - General Manager, ICCA

Technology on ships

FOR most of us there is only one major concern when getting on a cruise and that is ensuring we receive great value!

However there are many areas behind the scenes that do have an impact on the final price paid by the cruiser.

One particular area which many will scoff at is the type of paint used on the surface of the ship's hull. It is a fact that the latest paint technology is assisting cruise lines in making substantial fuel savings therefore reducing overall operating costs.

Most of us have a motor vehicle and the price of fuel in recent times has had an impact on our every-day lives that's for sure – just imagine if you were filling up the tanks of a cruise ship each week instead of the family sedan!

When a cruise ship is coated with high quality paint the smoothness of the hull reduces friction with the water, therefore allowing the ship to travel further using less fuel. The result of this is not only reduced operating costs but also fewer emissions.

This can save a cruise line hundreds of thousands of dollars in fuel over the space of a year and naturally this saving is reflected in the final price paid by the consumer for their cruise holiday.

A great example of savings made are confirmed by Cunard when *QM2* was re-painted during a dry-dock in Hamburg in 2008. Her highly efficient paint job shaved \$30,000 per day off the fuel bill – not bad!

Celebrity Millennium completes revamp

In time for its positioning voyages via Sydney in November, Celebrity Cruises' *Millennium* has been 'Solsticised'.

AFTER a three-week renovation in Miami, the 12-year-old, 91,000-tonne *Celebrity Millennium* has new interiors, more bars and restaurants, additional balcony cabins and spa-inspired AquaClass suites.

Millennium is the fourth and final Millennium Class ship to undergo the line's US\$140-million program to retrofit older vessels with the best features of Celebrity's newer Solstice Class.

Claimed as "the major enhancement" is the introduction of Celebrity's AquaClass category of staterooms, which offer balconies, exclusive and complimentary access to the Blu specialty restaurant, complimentary access to the Persian Garden and relaxation room in the AquaSpa, and in-room amenities such as bathrobes, slippers, toiletries, bottled water and teas.

Other new dining venues include Qsine, which presents its menu on an iPad, the Bistro on Five creperie, and Café al Bacio and, for those with a sweet tooth, the Gelateria.

New drinking holes include the ice-topped Martini Bar and Cellarmasters wine bar, as well as the addition of 50 boutique beers to Michael's Club.

Carnival sales star in town

CARNIVAL Cruise Lines has appointed its "super sales aficionado," Vicki Tomasino on a secondment as Senior Manager - Business Partnership.

Tomasino hails from California and has more than 25 years cruise industry experience - including 75 Carnival cruises.

In her new role she will be charged with helping Australian travel agents to continue to successfully sell *Carnival Spirit* cruises, drawing on experience attained during her previous role as the line's Regional Vice President of Sales in the USA.

She'll be around for the next six months, leading the Carnival Cruise Lines 'Trade Brigade' as it engages with travel agents in the lead-up to *Spirit's* Oct arrival in Australia.

Carnival Cruise Lines Australia director Jennifer Vandekreeke said the company was "really fortunate to have someone as experienced as Vicki on board, particularly as we move into such a critical sales period".

Among other upgrades are the Celebrity iLounge, the "exhale" bedding program, and an expanded collection of original art.

Millennium will return to Australia in Nov, for the first time since 2009, on its way to Asia for Celebrity's inaugural Asian season.

Two one-way positioning cruises are available on the transformed ship: a 19-night Trans-Pacific sailing departing on 02 Nov 2012 from Honolulu to Sydney, with fares from \$2,205 ppts (including gratuities); and a 17-night Australia and Asia cruise departing 22 Nov 2012 from Sydney to Singapore, priced from \$1,785 ppts.

Celebrity will for the first time ever operate two vessels in Australasian waters in 2012-13, with *Millennium* joined by *Solstice*.

"These ships continue to raise the bar for cruising down under with their elegant and modern design and innovative amenities," said Royal Caribbean's Adam Armstrong.

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Cruise lines save by using smaller agents

A US investment analyst has published a report which claims that cruise lines have managed to reduce their costs by spreading the base of their distribution across more smaller travel agencies which are less likely to reach override targets.

Robin Farley, who works for Swiss-based investment bank UBS, wrote that "cruise lines have meaningfully shifted share to lower cost distributors in the past few years".

She cited statements by both Carnival and Royal Caribbean about their increasing spread of business, saying this means that both operators' "effective commission rates have come down without the companies having to resort to commission cuts as a result of this share shift to selling through lower-cost agents".

In a recent Carnival Corporation statement the cruise giant noted that "no controlled group of travel agencies accounted for 10% or more of their revenues".

Interestingly, the report also disputes suggestions that cruise lines are trying to save costs by increasing direct sales, with US figures showing that between 70% and 80% of all cruise holidays are still booked via agents.

Farley also forecast that 2013 would be a "year of yield recovery for pricing momentum lost during 2012," with this year's fares hit by the global economic conditions and the *Costa Concordia* debacle in Jan.

She cited other positive trends including a high rate of repeat cruisers, the growth of homeporting in the USA and below-average capacity growth across the global industry.

ICCA launches new modules

THE International Cruise Council Australasia has released details of two new training modules which will officially debut later this month to boost agent cruise sales skills.

Dubbed *ICCA Fleet Overview* and *Cruise Sales & Service*, the new modules are the first in a number of changes to be introduced to ICCA programs this year to reflect "growing agent demand for cruise information," according to ICCA general manager Brett Jardine.

They also follow the appointment of Peter Kollar as ICCA Training and Development Manager in Feb this year, who has undertaken a revamp of existing training modules and the production of new ones.

"The past five years has seen new ships, fleet upgrades and a whole range of onboard product innovation," Kollar said.

He said the *ICCA Fleet Overview* module gives an in-depth analysis of each ICCA cruise line member, covering their target markets, destinations and unique selling points.

And the *Cruise Sales & Service* module builds on the former *Cruise Selling Techniques*, providing a stronger focus on client retention.

"Travel agents, both new and experienced, really need to stay on top of all the latest changes and also need to think about how travel agencies can maximise their operations with today's social and business tools in mind," Kollar urged.

He said that ICCA would also upgrade its *Cruise Geography* modules this year to reflect global port upgrades and new tour options.



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- the ability and a willingness to travel consistently across Southern NSW, and attend functions on evenings or weekends as required

Apply online at careers.carnivalaustralia.com Job Reference: CAR/534700

Tahiti availability extended

PAUL Gauguin Cruises has extended a special offer on a 7-night Tahiti & Society Islands Escape to be now valid until 30 Jun 2012.

The package leads in at \$3805pp including return economy class airfare with Qantas and Air Tahiti Nui via Auckland to Papeete and the luxury cruise onboard *m/s Paul Gauguin* which accommodates 332 passengers.

That's the price for departures during Jun, while fly/cruise fares for the 21/28 Jul and 04/11 Aug departures start at \$3989.

The trip includes all shipboard amenities, meals, activities, entertainment and onboard gratuities, as well as 24 hour room service, and a mini-bar replenished daily.

Higher category cabins include in-suite bar setup and butler service with the voyage calling at Raiatea, Taha'a, Bora Bora, Moorea.

For more information contact Wiltrans International on 1800 251 174 or see www.wiltrans.com.au.

Visionary Williams surveys the Vista

GLOBUS family md Australasia, Stewart Williams, is justly proud of his contributions to the latest Avalon Waterways vessels, which both feature "wall to wall panoramic windows" like the *Avalon Panorama* which he helped launch last year.

Last week Avalon debuted *Avalon Vista* and *Avalon Visionary*, and like all Avalon Suite Ships they include a feature which Williams insisted upon to help them appeal to Aussie cruisers - a very fancy onboard cappuccino machine.

Williams is pictured on Fri at the double christening in the Netherlands, in the historic Dutch harbour town of Enkhuizen with *Avalon Vista's* Captain Schoustra (left) and the vessel's godmother, Canadian cruise industry personality Vanessa Lee.



French canal barging bargain

FRENCH Travel Connection is offering a significant discount on crewed canal barge holidays in France, with couples able to save \$899 on twin share cabins for bookings made by 31 May 2012 and travel through until Oct.

Popular products on offer include *La Belle Epoque*, a luxury 12-passenger hotel barge cruising through Burgundy between Pouilly-en-Auxois and Tonnerre.

The six night voyage is priced from \$3648pp including accom, all meals and drinks with meals, guided touring, entrance fees and use of mountain bikes; highlights include quaint villages, world-class vineyards, traditional markets and of course wine tasting.

The 39-metre barge has a crew of five including a captain, tour guide, two housekeepers and a master chef.

For more information call 1300 858 304.

Seabourn kicks off cruisers

AN elderly couple have reportedly been escorted off the *Seabourn Sojourn* after refusing to attend a mandatory safety briefing.

According to *USA Today*, the couple, a 90-year-old man and his 84-year-old wife, were on the second leg of a cruise, meaning they had already taken part in a safety drill when they had first boarded.

The husband attended the drill but his wife declined, saying she didn't feel well and had done it previously.

Cruise lines have implemented new, stricter safety briefing policies following the *Costa Concordia* incident in Jan, in which 32 people died on the first day of a cruise - with the briefing scheduled for the following morning.

Under the new policies ships conduct the drills once all passengers are on board before the vessel actually departs.

Fisherman sues Princess

A PANAMANIAN fisherman who was stranded for 28 days at sea and claims his cries of distress were ignored by *Star Princess* has sued Princess Cruises in a Florida court, accusing the cruise line of negligence.



CARNIVAL Cruise Lines says it plans to take cruisers to new dimensions on its new *Carnival Breeze* when it debuts next month.

The vessel features a so-called "Thrill 5D Theatre" on deck 4, which offers a three dimensional cinema experience - along with other effects such as vibrating seats, squirting water, bubbles and air blowers which immerse viewers in the movie action.

The initial movie line-up includes *Happy Feet 4-D Experience*, *The Polar Express 4-D Experience* and *Speed Racer 4-D Adventure*.

And if that's not enough to entice guests, the ship will also feature live Hasbro Game Shows where cruisers play gigantic versions of Connect 4, Yahtzee and even Operation.

And of course there's a signature Carnival feature - a massive WaterWorks water park.

Breeze has just successfully completed her sea trials - for a sneak peek at the new ship see cruiseweekly.com.au/videos.

Oceania's first for kids

OCEANIA Cruises will introduce its first ever childrens programs next year, with Alaska voyages for 2013 to include the expansion following passenger feedback.

It's hoped the move will encourage older cruisers to bring their grandchildren on voyages to the spectacular region.

Single Middle East cruise visa

GULF Cooperation Council countries may launch a new single visa system as early as September this year, according to an overnight report in *Gulf News*.

The proposal could allow cruise visitors to more easily take tours in the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

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