

Cruise Weekly today

CRUISE Weekly today features three pages of all the latest cruise industry news.

Vesta ready to sail

VIKING has taken delivery of its latest ocean ship, with *Viking Vesta* presented by the Fincantieri shipyard in Italy. A ceremony at the facility handed over the keys to the 499-stateroom ship, which will spend her maiden season in the Med and Northern Europe. "We look forward to welcoming guests on board the *Viking Vesta* during her inaugural season and in the years to come," CEO & Chair Torstein Hagen said. The cruise line's focus now shifts to its first hydrogen-powered ships *Viking Libra* and *Viking Astrea*, due for delivery in the next two years.

Virtuoso's double-digit cruise growth

CRUISE is significantly growing in importance to Virtuoso, the network's new Vice President of Global Cruise Lori Sheller (pictured) told **CW**.

Virtuoso's cruise boss, who started at the company around two months ago (**CW** 12 May), noted the growth of the sector within the network's larger product portfolio.

"[The company's] global network cruise sales grew by 12% year-over-year in the first quarter of 2025," Sheller noted.

"Across the different segments, yacht sales increased nearly 40%, river cruises increased by 24% and expedition cruises increased by 18%."

When asked why cruise is growing so quickly with Virtuoso travel advisors, Sheller noted the range of various styles and approaches to the sector, meaning there is something for



every traveller.

"For advisors, the diversity of offerings presents great opportunities both for those who specialise in cruises and those who are looking to expand their revenue streams.

"They can capitalise on this by offering clients tailored, one-of-a-kind experiences that highlight the unique benefits of each preferred partner and cruise type.

"The ease of booking a

luxury all-inclusive cruise is also especially compelling right now... it offers clients peace of mind and clarity around value."

Also providing an incentive to Virtuoso advisors is the network's Cruise Icons program.

Around 30 of these top cruise sellers from Australia were recognised this year (**CW** 12 Mar), with the tag rarely failing to help stimulate bookings for designated travel advisors.

"From 2023 to 2024, their Virtuoso preferred supplier cruise production saw an estimated 45% increase," Sheller added.

Virtuoso recently hosted its annual Symposium at sea this year (**CW** 19 May), such is the growing importance of the sector to the advisor network.

The company chartered Crystal Cruises' *Crystal Serenity* to bring together almost 400 top industry leaders for the conference. *MS*

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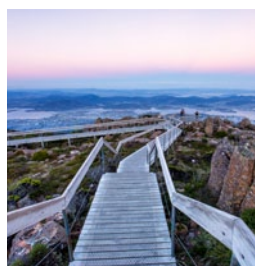
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HAL's new chews

'DESTINATION dining' has come to Alaska, with upgrades made at Holland America Line's (HAL) Denali Lodge.

The changes reflect a broader initiative to align land-based offerings with HAL's onboard dining, with the introduction of refreshed menus, a reimagined restaurant, and a focus on regional authenticity.

"Our goal is to create memorable dining moments that reflect the flavours and spirit of Alaska - from wild salmon smoked chowder and pan-roasted Alaskan cod to cocktails crafted with Denali Spirits and Anchorage Distillery vodkas, and desserts made with local berries," Director of Food & Beverage Marisa Christenson said.

HAL's executive chefs are currently training the facility's culinary staff, before the lodge reopens later this year.

Ship recycling rule

NEW regulations governing how cruise ships are recycled at the end of their operational lives have taken effect under the remit of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

Under the Hong Kong Convention, which was rolled out yesterday, key environmental and safety hazards are addressed, with distribution obligations shared by ship owners, building yards and the flags under which the ship is registered and recycled.

The Convention restricts the use of hazardous materials on ships such as asbestos or ozone depletion substances, and outlines working conditions at recycling yards.

Currently, there are 24 signatory nations part of the Hong Kong Convention, which together cover 57.15% of the world's shipping by tonnage.

Pearl will never discount



SHORT-TERM discounting will never happen at Pearl Expeditions, even though value-added inclusions such as pre-expedition land arrangements may be offered in the business' formative months, according to Executive Chair Sarina Bratton.

The expedition line must maintain its pricing integrity, even in its early days, she said.

Bookings for Pearl's maiden Papua New Guinea season in Oct are still quite low, which Bratton admitted is not helped by the brand having only launched to the market last week.

On board *Paspaley Pearl* this week, Bratton told **Cruise Weekly** that she is in discussions with a company in Papua New Guinea about offering some pre-trip experiences together, perhaps as an incentive.

"I'm happy for us to do some value-added inclusions, but not discount the rate," she said.

"If you ever think about boutique or luxury products - take Paspaley Pearls for example - you never see Paspaley discounting their pearls," Bratton added.

Another area the company is adding value is in the Kimberley.

Whereas many expedition operators in the region use Darwin as a turnaround, *Paspaley Pearl* guests will embark or disembark in the remote Western Australian town of Wyndham.

While Wyndham does have

an airport, it is used for charter flights only, with Kununurra the more accessible option, located around 100km away.

For this reason, Pearl includes a one night stay in Kununurra and a six-hour excursion to the Ord River either side of a Kimberley expedition for guests joining or leaving the ship here.

Guests can also organise through Pearl a four-night land extension in Kununurra, which includes a luxury lodge stay and helicopter touring in the region to the Bungle Bungle ranges and the El Questro lodge. *ML*

Claiming on cruise

TASMANIANS are the most likely to lodge a claim on their travel insurance relating to a cruise, new data from Southern Cross Travel Insurance (SCTI) has revealed.

When comparing claims versus policies sold, the Apple Isle is the most prolific, SCTI found, with 16% of these resulting in a claim.

Victoria was next at 11.2%, followed by Queensland at 10.1% and WA at 9.8%.

Nationally, SCTI said Aussies are 42% more likely to make a cruise claim than Kiwis.

Most claims arising from a cruise relate to treatment for illnesses onboard, which can be quite expensive.

One claim paid totalled \$11,000, including \$900 for a telehealth consultation and \$1,600 for 17 hours of care, while the most expensive claim amounted to \$11,000.

SCTI said the high cost of medical treatment on a cruise ship should be a reminder to Aussies to ensure cruise cover is included as part of their travel insurance policy.

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WESTERN AUSTRALIA WALKING ON A DREAM



MSC Cruises hit the big screen yesterday in *F1*, the new movie which stars Brad Pitt as an ex-racing driver lured out of retirement to mentor a younger teammate.

The cruise line takes centre stage as one of the key sponsors of Pitt's APX GP F1 Team (pictured).

MSC has built a key relationship with F1 over the past few years, with the two organisations recently announcing a multi-year extension which will see it continue as a global partner of the sport through to the end of the decade (CW 27 May).

The cruise line last night took a number of its key trade partners to IMAX Sydney to watch the movie on opening night, revving up excitement for both MSC's and Pitt's latest fast-paced adventure.



NCL's new CMO

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line (NCL) has named Kiran Smith as its Chief Marketing Officer.

She succeeds Adam Malone, who is stepping into a new role as Senior Vice President of Guest Experience.

Celestyal releases 2027-28



CELESTYAL Cruises has launched its 2027 program, as well as early voyages in 2028, all on sale now.

The line will offer a summer Greece and Mediterranean season, alongside a winter Arabian Gulf deployment, with nine itineraries available across 182 departures between Mar 2027 and Mar 2028.

Sailings range between three and 14 nights on the 1,360-guest *Celestyal Discovery* (pictured) and seven and 14 nights on the 1,260-guest *Celestyal Journey*.

Highlights will include eight departures of the seven-night 'Heavenly Greece, Italy & Croatia' itinerary, calling at Kefalonia, Corfu, Katakolo, Kotor, Bari, and Dubrovnik, priced from \$1,559 per person twin share.

There will also be 13 departures of the three-night 'Iconic Arabia' cruise in 2027, and five departures in early 2028, round trip from Abu Dhabi.

The cruise calls in Dubai and Sir Bani Yas Island, priced from \$609 per person twin share.

"This program represents our second year of operating our two-ship fleet year-round across these two iconic regions," CCO Lee Haslett said.

"The return of some well-loved itineraries across the

Mediterranean, Adriatic and the Greek Isles, and our continued commitment to the Arabian Gulf, allows guests to experience the perfect blend of iconic landmarks and hidden gems, while enjoying the outstanding hospitality for which we are known". MS

A ship of laughs

VIRGIN Voyages' UK Comedy Fest sets sail from Portsmouth later this year, with English comedian Jack Whitehall to take the stage.

The six-night voyage on *Scarlet Lady* sets sail from Portsmouth, visiting A Coruna, Bilbao, and Bordeaux.

There will also be a Miami Comedy Fest cruise, which will set sail on 10 Aug.

The five-night Caribbean voyage on board *Valiant Lady* and will be headlined by Sonmore, Sahib Singh and Mark Viera.



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