

Cruise Weekly today

Cruise Weekly today features three pages of all the latest cruise news plus a full page from **Norwegian Cruise Line**.

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CRUISE through wave season with Norwegian Cruise Line and discover your one-stop shop for the brand - visit the wave hub on **page 4**.

Cruiseabout Erina

CRUISEABOUT'S next location will open in Apr in Erina on New South Wales' Central Coast.

The location will be run by Flight Centre team leader Chelsea Hayes, who is now recruiting for the store.

Cruiseabout GM Brad Kennedy said more locations in Victoria and Queensland are also close to opening.

NCL eliminating NCFs a win for agents

EXCLUSIVE

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line's elimination of non-commissionable fares has been hailed by travel advisors across the sector, who praised the brand for its support of the profession.

The change comes into effect from May, allowing advisors to earn commission on the entire cruise fare, excluding taxes.

Jean Summers, director of product & marketing for Brisbane-based travel agency Clean Cruising, told **CW** the move is a clear demonstration of the extent to which Norwegian values its trade partners.

"The proportion of these fees within the overall cruise fare varies significantly between cruise lines and can, in some cases, make up close to 30% of the total fare," she explained.

"Although it's been discussed with various cruise lines over



the years, we have generally not had any success in seeing this addressed," Summers added.

Gillian Woodley, owner of Woodley & James Travel Associates, and a member of the Travel Associates Advisory Board, said most cruise lines persist with this less transparent way of pricing simply because they can.

"There isn't enough regulation

to enforce them to pay commission on those extras... once a few cruise lines start [culling them] hopefully others will follow suit," she said.

Viking, Explora Journeys, and Virgin are among the few other lines that have eliminated NCFs.

"I really believe advisors support cruise lines who support them," Woodley added. **MS**

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The rising cost of ambiguity in cruise branding

OPINION

Chris LaColla is the Principal of LaCoVen, which invest in digital products and systems within the travel industry.



Got an opinion to share? Let us know in up to 400 words via email to info@cruiseweekly.com.au.

OCEANIA Cruises recently formalised an “adults-only” positioning across its brand.

At first glance, the move looks incremental; the product already skews toward adults in practice, with an onboard experience defined by fine dining, great service, and unique itineraries rather than family programming.

However, commercial teams tend to be cautious about drawing explicit lines around audience definition.

Cruise inventory is perishable, demand is uneven, and broad appeal has historically felt safer than precision.

That logic was built for a different discovery environment.

Travellers are increasingly shopping using AI tools like ChatGPT that synthesise preferences, constraints, and trade-offs into a single response.

These systems perform best when they find clarity, repetition, and consistency across sources.

In that context, broad positioning does not preserve optionality because it weakens

the signals that help AI tools recommend it to travellers who would love the product.

AI facilitated searches include much more detail than traditional searches do.

The questions that users ask are longer and more specific, so these models are seeking matches across multiple data sources in order to return the most relevant answer.

Reaching the correct audience requires stating your positioning

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In a world of AI-facilitated discovery, broad positioning doesn't preserve optionality - it weakens the signal

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in simple, repeatable terms, and reinforcing that definition across owned and third-party channels.

Seen this way, Oceania's adults-only positioning seems to be more a change in amplification than product.

When making a traditional search, a shopper would see smaller ships, elevated dining, and a service-forward experience, and infer that the product is primarily for adults.

In AI search, shoppers may not even see the product if the tool cannot reliably infer the same from the information it can find.

This has direct commercial implications; by explicitly stating that they are for adults only, Oceania is providing context that AI tools need to confidently surface the brand correctly.

Stronger signal clarity improves the quality of discovery, meaning that the brand will be surfaced to its target audience.

That supports conversion, satisfaction, and yield without relying on broader reach.

What is notable about this move is how little it depends on new technology; many travel brands are discussing AI strategy through the lens of tools and optimisation layers.

In practice, some of the most consequential steps right now are structural.

Clear audience definition and consistent language determine how AI systems interpret a brand long before any tooling is applied.

Oceania's decision positions them to take advantage of new customer behaviours.

By tightening their brand positioning, they are structurally more prepared to succeed in a world of AI facilitated discovery.

With rapidly growing adoption of AI planning tools, the cost of broad positioning will grow exponentially in the days ahead.

Brands like Oceania that present a strong, focused signal will increasingly outperform those that remain ambiguous.

MSC picks President

MSC Cruises is preparing to welcome Roberto Bruzzone aboard as president in Jul, according to media reports.

Bruzzone joins from Royal Caribbean Group's new Marine Center of Excellence in the UK, where he held the title of SVP, marine & managing director, RCG UK.

His resume also includes senior roles at several other major cruises lines, including Silversea, TUI Cruises, and Hapag-Lloyd Cruises, in addition to 14 years working at Carnival Corporation.

Based at the cruise line's Geneva headquarters, Bruzzone will report directly to CEO Gianni Onorato.

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New Ponant collection dives into culture

PONANT Explorations has unveiled a new program of 40 themed voyages for 2026 and 2027 that focus on art, music, gastronomy, and wellbeing.

The cruise line has renewed its partnership with the Opera National de Paris for two northern summer departures, with dancers from the Opera Ballet joining guests on board,

which will include Roxane Stojanov in the Med next year.

There are also several cruises aimed at art enthusiasts, including two that welcome experts from the celebrated Christie's Auction House on board for talks.

Other highlights include a jazz-focused voyage and several cruises centred on gastronomy.

A date with a Star

THE first cruise of Murray River Paddlesteamers' new five-star river vessel *Australian Star* will take place on 23 Feb, the line has announced.

The ship will be christened by her newly announced godmother, local tourism leader Kathryn Mackenzie.

Australian Star's first cruise will depart from Echuca.



PICKLEBALL is quickly becoming the *sport-du-jour* of the cruise sector, with ships that lack a court slowly becoming outnumbered by those that do have one.

Despite its proudly small ship sizes, Unforgettable Croatia is not about to be left behind, recently going to great lengths to accommodate one family of crazed picklers.

Founder Graham Carter explained that Unforgettable Croatia's ships do not accommodate space for a pickleball court, due to their small size, and the fact the sport is not particularly well-known in Croatia.

However so as to not leave the family disappointed, the company flew in a nearly full-sized inflatable court for the duration of their cruise, which the crew set up alongside the vessel during swim stops.

Welcome to Cruise

TOURISM Western Australia's 'Welcome to Cruise' workshop in Geraldton in Feb is now open for booking.

The forum, which will take place on 26 Feb, is designed as an introduction to cruise for tourism businesses, highlighting the opportunities the sector can provide.

CLICK HERE for more information and to book.

Atlas to build sailing yacht



ATLAS Ocean Voyages has announced it is building a luxury expedition sailing yacht (render pictured), marking the next phase of its growth.

The new vessel, which will launch in 2028, will belong to the new Atlas-class of ships, named for the cruise line itself.

Atlas Adventurer's first season will see her explore destinations across Asia, including Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines; as well as African nations such as the Seychelles, Madagascar, Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique, and more.

Adventurer will accommodate up to 400 passengers and introduce a significantly expanded onboard experience, including all-suite staterooms, increased space and amenities, and a broader range of dining, wellness, and social offerings.

The 210-metre ship will include seven dining venues and specialty restaurants, and a new culinary studio for hands-on, destination-inspired programming.

There will also be five social spaces, including lounges and

cocktail bars, along with two outdoor bars.

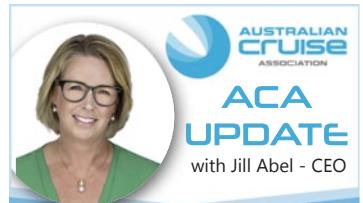
Other facilities will include an expanded fitness and wellness centre, a large swimming pool, and purpose-built expedition capabilities, including Zodiacs, luxury motorboats, and a marina platform with an ocean pool for water-based activities.

The ship will feature hybrid propulsion and solid sails fixed to three carbon masts, and will also be equipped with dual-fuel engines, as well as electric hybrid propulsion, thanks to a large nine-megawatt marine battery system that enables high speeds in light wind conditions.

Additionally, *Adventurer* will be equipped with a reinforced hull and will have ice class 1B (polar category C) capability.

President James Rodriguez said *Adventurer* represents the next evolution of the Atlas brand.

"It allows us to expand our destination footprint into regions our guests have been asking us for, while further solidifying Atlas' position within the luxury expedition cruise category," Rodriguez said. *MS*



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**ACA
UPDATE**

with Jill Abel - CEO

Expedition ecosystem

A RESILIENT and competitive cruise sector is built on strong partnerships, so it is encouraging to see so many of our members working together to deliver high-quality, destination-led cruise experiences across our region.

The recently announced 2026-27 calendar from our newest member Pearl Expeditions is a strong example of how collaboration across the cruise ecosystem can support sustainable growth.

From the cruise line itself through to the destinations, ports, local operators and communities they engage with, expedition cruising relies on deep cooperation to unlock experiences that are both meaningful for visitors and valuable for host regions.

Pearl's upcoming program places a clear emphasis on Australian destinations, including the Kimberley, Rowley Shoals, Arnhem Land, the Torres Strait Islands, and the Great Barrier Reef, alongside regional neighbours such as Papua New Guinea.

These itineraries highlight the role that small-scale, purpose-built expedition cruising can play in showcasing remote regions, dispersing visitor spend and supporting culturally sensitive and environmentally responsible tourism.

This reinforces that Australia's cruise offering is strongest when destinations, operators, and lines work together with a shared commitment to long-term value.

ACA is proud to represent a membership that spans the full cruise value chain, and to support the partnerships that continue to position Australia as a globally respected cruise destination.

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