

Cruise before the dollar drops again

With the local dollar at record highs against the US and Euro currencies, luxury cruises have never been cheaper for Australians.

THE AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR YESTERDAY HIT THE 110 US cent mark – for the first time since 1981 – but weakened slightly after news reports about the death of Osama bin Laden.

With no guarantee that the exchange rate will remain favourable, travel agents and cruise lines are recommending immediate purchases for cruises priced in US dollars.

Cruise lines with USD pricing include Seabourn, Seadream, Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Crystal Cruises, Disney Cruise Line, Norwegian Cruise Line and Pandaw Cruises.

A Seabourn spokesperson told **Cruise Weekly** that the latest fares (see page 3) represented unparalleled value.

"We've already seen very strong growth in Seabourn cruises from the Australian market in the past year and we anticipate this will continue given the favourable exchange rate and the wider range of luxury cruise offerings now available thanks to Seabourn's six-ship fleet," the spokesperson said.

"Not only are many loyal Seabourn customers taking advantage of the strong dollar to book extra cruises and longer cruises, the strength of the Australian dollar is also attracting new cruise passengers to the Seabourn brand."

Bargains can also be found among lines priced in euros, such as Hapag-Lloyd Cruises.

Hapag-Lloyd's Sydney-based representative, Gerd Wilmer, director, Landmark Travel, said fares are about 20% cheaper.

"A 19-day Antarctica cruise on MS *Hanseatic* has a lead-in of €10,490 – it was AU\$17,483 at 60 euro cents, and is now AU\$14,570, at 72 euro cents."

Yesterday the Australian dollar was buying 73.9 euro cents. 🌀

Fly for free with APT

APT'S NEW 2012 EUROPE RIVER CRUISE brochure features a range of free flights to Europe and Russia, as well as discounts of up to \$2,600 per couple.

The early booking deals are applicable on almost the entire range of APT's 57 2011 European itineraries, and are valid for bookings made before 30 September 2011.

Deals include free return airfares to Europe plus airport taxes of up to \$700pp on 2012 itinerary departures booked in cruise suite categories E and D, as well as for departures in March, October, November and December on all suite categories.

In addition, APT is also offering Russian river cruise savings such as an earlybird Companion Fly Free deal (including taxes of up to \$700pp), for selected departures and cabin category bookings.

SuperDeal savings off brochured cruise prices of up to \$2,600 per couple are also available on selected 2012 European voyages.

Prices for APT's 2012 season start at \$6,395 per person, twin share, for a 15-day Magnificent Europe cruise between Amsterdam and Budapest (based on 16 or 18 March departures).

For full program details see your local travel agent, or phone the team at APT on 1300 229 804. 🌀

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TODAY'S CRUISE WEEKLY

Welcome to today's consumer issue of **Cruise Weekly**, featuring four pages of cruise news and photos.

A new era in luxury cruising is upon us...



L'Austral

Uber exclusive French cruise line, Compagnie du Ponant, launched its newest mega-yacht, *L'Austral*, last week.

Designed by Jean-Philippe Nuel and built at the Italian Fincantieri shipyard *L'Austral* is a decidedly sleek vessel, whose appearance is softened somewhat by smooth contours and arched windows.

Created to capture the feeling of a private yacht, *L'Austral* is a small seven-deck ship, featuring 132 (all outside)

cabins (95% of which have a private balcony) and a relatively large crew of 139.

In terms of decor, Nuel went for understated elegance onboard *L'Austral*, by utilising a neutral colour palette interspersed with splashes of red to liven her up.

Onboard features include two restaurants, 24-hour room service, a 260-seat theatre, three bars (including a piano bar), library and internet room, elevators to all decks, a beauty centre spa and fitness centre, laundry, outside pool and boutique.

Following her launch Compagnie du Ponant has scheduled *L'Austral* to feature a series of Mediterranean voyages, kicking off on 31 May with a seven night voyage taking in Venice, Sibenik, Split, Korkula, Kotor, Dubrovnik, Hvar, Pula and Rovinj.

For details see your local travel agent, or visit the Travel the World website at www.traveltheworld.com.au.



L'Austral

CRUISE CALENDAR	
SYDNEY	
Pacific Jewel	Wed 20 Apr
Pacific Pearl	Sun 24 Apr
BRISBANE	
Pacific Dawn	Thu 21 Apr
Pacific Sun	Sun 24 Apr

100 ship milestone

THE CRUISE GIANT CARNIVAL, TREATED MORE THAN 227,000 cruise passengers to a glass of champagne last week, to celebrate the milestone delivery of Carnival Corporation's 100th ship, the 130,000-tonne *Carnival Magic*.

The largest toast of its kind at sea was enjoyed by cruisers sailing across the company's 10 brands, including P&O Cruises Australia and Princess Cruises' local ships.

"It is particularly meaningful that delivery of Carnival Corporation & plc's 100th ship is for the Carnival Cruise Lines brand, which provided the foundation upon which Carnival Corporation & plc was established and ultimately grew into the largest cruise operator in the world with 10 global brands," said Chairman and CEO of Carnival Corporation & plc, Micky Arison.

Worldwide sale and new Caribbean

Today is the last chance to save with Royal Caribbean, which has also released its 2012-13 Caribbean program.

ROYAL CARIBBEAN INTERNATIONAL IS DEPLOYING 13 ships to the Caribbean next year for cruises from four to 12 nights.

The line-up includes *Oasis of the Seas* and *Allure of the Seas*, the largest cruise ships at sea, as well as *Freedom of the Seas*, *Explorer of the Seas*, *Monarch of the Seas*, *Majesty of the Seas*, *Adventure of the Seas*, *Brilliance of the Seas*, *Jewel of the Seas*, *Liberty of the Seas*, *Mariner of the Seas* and *Navigator of the Seas*.

Departure ports include four in Florida, as well as New York, New Orleans, New Jersey, Maryland and Texas, to destinations such as the Bahamas, Bermuda, Mexico, and the islands of St Maartens, St Thomas, St Lucia, Antigua and Jamaica.

Adam Armstrong, commercial manager, Royal Caribbean Australia, said the line delivers "an incredible holiday experience" for Australians who have dreamed of a Caribbean cruise.

"Our unmatched ships, amazing staff and

crew and exciting itineraries make holidays unforgettable," he said.

"There's something for everyone onboard, from relaxing in the solarium to participating in the DreamWorks character parade to attending a Broadway musical, to practising your ice skating on board."

"Our unmatched ships, amazing staff and crew and exciting itineraries make holidays unforgettable."

Meanwhile, Royal Caribbean's three-day 'WOW Sale' ends today (Tuesday, 3 May).

Book now for sailings from August 2011 and receive up to US\$200 onboard credit per cabin and half-price deposit.

The benefits apply to all cruises including Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Alaska, Asia and the Caribbean.

For details, contact a travel agent or visit -

www.royalcaribbean.com.au



Allure of the Seas

Take in Europe and South Africa on the one cruise!



Athena

Classic International Cruises has made the bold decision to drop the Suez Canal off *Athena's* itinerary in favour of South Africa next year, during her 40-night return voyage from Australia to the UK.

The exciting new itinerary sees guests travel onboard CICs 600-passenger *Athena* from Perth on 14 April 2012 to Portsmouth in the UK, taking in Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic isles of St Helena Island, Ascension Island, the Canary Islands and the Cape Verde Islands, as well as Mauritius, South Africa, Morocco and Portugal along the way.

Aussies who are keen to experience the voyage and South Africa, but don't have the luxury of 40-nights up their sleeve, may want to instead take advantage of either its first 18-night segment from Fremantle to Cape Town, or its second 22-night segment from Cape Town to Portsmouth.

The full 40-night voyage is priced from \$6,995 per person twin-share, whilst prices for the 18-night segment start at \$3,575pp/ts and for the 22-night segment from \$4,220pp/ts.

In addition, fares for solo travellers cruising in selected cabins only incur a surcharge of 30% above that of twin share pricing.

For full details on the voyage itinerary, as well as all *Athena's* offerings visit your travel agent or see www.classicintcruises.com.



Giraffes in South Africa

British lines celebrate

P&O CRUISES WORLD CRUISING AND CUNARD ARE celebrating the wedding of Prince William to Catherine Middleton with a range of cruise deals.

P&O Cruises World Cruising deals include: a 49-night voyage from Sydney to Southampton onboard *Arcadia* departing 09 March 2012 including calls at ports such as Mauritius, Cape Town and Madeira, from \$7,839 per person twin share; and a 23-night cruise onboard *Oriana*, departing Singapore to Sydney on 01 February 2012 stopping at Vietnam, Hong Kong, Brunei and Bali from \$2,949 per person twin share.

Cunard deals include a 26-night voyage from Sydney to Singapore onboard *Queen Mary 2* departing 07 March 2012, and calling at ports throughout Japan, Thailand and Vietnam, from \$6,549 per person twin share with up to US\$350 onboard credit; and a 24-night voyage onboard *Queen Elizabeth* sailing from San Francisco to Sydney departing on 04 February 2012, from \$5,859 per person twin share as well as additional onboard credit up to US\$350.

For more details contact your local travel agent.

Rugby discounts

RUGBY FANS EAGER TO GET OVER TO NEW Zealand for the 2011 Rugby World Cup will be interested to learn that until the end of May, Adventure World has "considerably reduced" the price of its rugby cruise packages onboard HALs *ms Volendam*.

All 20 packages include Category B match tickets, airfares where applicable, accom onboard *ms Volendam*, all meals onboard, 24 hour complimentary room service, onboard entertainment, a Rugby World Cup 2011 Adventure World supporter pack, and port charges, government fees and gratuities.

Reduced prices start from \$3,499pp for a four-day 'Finals Weekender' package including tickets to the Bronze Final and the Final in Auckland's Eden Park.

See your local travel agent for details, or visit www.rugby.adventureworld.com.au.

Seabourn grows Europe

SEABOURN'S 2012 EUROPEAN SEASON IS shaping up to be a sizzler, with the ultra-luxury line announcing a record number of voyages throughout the region, onboard its fleet of intimate ships.

Spread over eight months, the cruise line's 2012 European season will, for the first time ever, see six Seabourn ships in the region, sailing to spectacular shores spanning from Norway's North Cape to the Black Sea coast, stopping in at 165 different destinations, on cruises ranging in length between seven and 19 days.

The increase in offering has a lot to do with the positioning of the cruise line's newest vessel *Seabourn Quest* (which debuts in June this year), in European waters for an extended April-to-November season.

During her stay *Quest* will explore the the Mediterranean, treating guests to a series of adventures including seven-day cruises between Venice, Athens, Istanbul, Rome and Barcelona, as well as a trio of longer Holy Land cruises, in May, September and November, with port calls in Israel, the Turkish Aegean coast, Cyprus, Crete and Rhodes.

Also included in Seabourn's 2012 line up are summer cruises in Scandinavia, the Baltic and the Norwegian Fjords onboard *Seabourn Pride* and *Seabourn Sojourn*, whilst *Sojourn* will also introduce a new home port of Hamburg, offering a 12-day Celtic cruise between Lisbon and Hamburg, a 12-day Baltic roundtrip cruise and a 10-day cruise to Copenhagen.

Prices for the 2012 season start from US\$2,678pp for a seven-night *Seabourn Pride* voyage departing from Rome on 10 November with calls into Naples and Mykonos.

For program info see your travel agent.



Review: Silver Spirit

by Louise Goldsbury

Such is the variable weather of North Queensland's summer that a tropical cruise does not always go to plan.

At first it seems disastrous that Silversea cancels our visit to the Whitsundays – the centrepiece of a seven-night sailing from Sydney to Cairns.

The complimentary excursion was supposed to begin with a catamaran trip to the Great Barrier Reef, followed by two hours of swimming, snorkelling and diving.

A semi-submersible boat, with an enclosed viewing chamber, was also on hand for those who prefer to stay dry. We had been looking forward to this underwater adventure, and now we would miss out.

But as much as I try to be disappointed, I feel strangely nonchalant; nor do I hear a word of complaint from anyone else.

This is probably because being "stuck onboard" the *Silver Spirit* is hardly a punishment; in fact, it seems a shame to get off at all.

The two-year-old ship is faultlessly beautiful and every passenger (regardless of accommodation category) is entitled to butler service.

When I ask our female butler for vodka, I receive a one-litre bottle, and am even more surprised two days later when she enquires if I need more.

Gourmet meals are also included in the fare (except for two specialty restaurants), with a different option for every day.

A popular favourite is the open-air, poolside grill where diners cook their own steak or fish on a sizzling hot-rock at their table.

Another slick venue is Stars Supper Club, which serves a five-course tapas menu from 9.30pm.

Only 30 or 40 people tend to come here for the late-night dinner while a jazz duo plays on stage. You can close your eyes and pretend you're in New York.

La Terraza, for breakfast in the mornings and Italian for lunch, has outdoor and indoor seating for 200.

The décor of the main restaurant is gorgeous and the food is delicious, leaning towards an Australian flavour.

One day we are treated to lunch in the galley (the ship's kitchen) where the chefs serve everyone at each station: soup, seafood, stir-fry, fondue, a carvery and a champagne bar.

This kind of experience is only possible on a small ship with 500 passengers. But it actually feels like fewer people than that, because *Silver Spirit* has a very high

space-to-guest ratio, meaning there is loads of room and virtually no queues or crowded areas.

On two occasions I have the gym, sauna and steam room to myself, and in the evenings there is rarely anybody in one of the best vantage spots, the Observation Lounge.

I strongly recommend this luxury ship for its superior onboard experience, especially the service and dining.



Silver Spirit in Sydney



Verandah Suite

MSC loves a buffet

MSC IS EXPANDING THE DINING OPTIONS OF cruisers, by introducing a casual evening service at buffet restaurants onboard its fleet.

The evening service has no fixed sitting times, meaning that guests can dine when they please.

Ocean Star Pacific delays

ACCORDING TO REPORTS THE FIRE-DAMAGED *Ocean Star Pacific* is now slated to return to service on 29 May, despite earlier whispers that she may be back sailing as early as this week.

Ocean Star Pacific was taken to Curaçao where she underwent repair work, alongside pre-planned renovations, following the outbreak of a fire in one of her generators during a cruise off the Mexican coast last month.

Renovations undertaken onboard *Ocean Star* include the laying of new carpets, new upholstery, and new drapes, as well as various improvements to her public rooms.

Disney in San Francisco

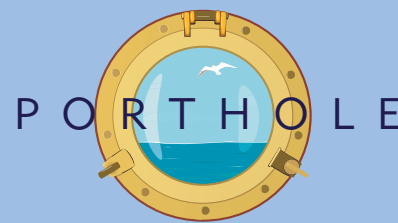
DISNEY CRUISE LINE'S *DISNEY WONDER* CALLED into the port of San Francisco last week, marking the first time the cruise line has ever called into the port.

Artemis gets a facelift

P&O CRUISES' *ARTEMIS* HAS ENTERED DRYDOCK for a month long remodeling, from which she will emerge a new ship, *Artania*, operated by German cruise line, Phoenix Reisen.

The transformation is said to be costing in advance of \$27 million, and will see *Artania* score 96 new balconies across Decks 5 and 6, as well as an enlargement of her spa, the conversion of her casino into a bar, a facelift for the majority of her public rooms, restaurants and cabins, and an overhaul of her mechanical systems (including her propellers, steering, shafts, stabilisers and bow thrusters).

In addition *Artania* will also be stripped of her P&O colours, to be replaced with the Phoenix branding stamp.



FEVER STRIKES PASSENGERS ONBOARD *LIBERTY*.

Last week Royal Caribbean released a fever onboard *Liberty of the Seas*, 'A Saturday Night Fever'.

The launch of the musical in *Liberty's* 1,320-seat Platinum Theatre, marked the first ever time a Broadway musical has graced the decks of a Royal Caribbean cruise in Europe.

In fact the smashing debut is only the third full Broadway show to be staged on a cruise ship, with 'Hairspray' currently running on Royal Caribbean's *Oasis of the Seas* and 'Chicago' playing on *Allure of the Seas*.

So far, 'Saturday Night Fever', the story of Tony (played by the British actor Lucas Rush), the ambitious Brooklyn teen who spends his Saturday nights disco dancing, has drawn rave reviews from *Liberty* guests, with many leaving the theatre with a distinctive groove in their step.

CRUISING FROM HOME.

An inventive cruise enthusiast, Carrie Duwelius, has won a US only competition run by Carnival, by creating a cruise ship out of everyday items.

The Build a Ship competition, run by Carnival, asked contestants to fashion their very own vessel out of materials that they could scrounge up from their own home.

For her entry Carrie crafted a large 2D vessel using cardboard and various other household items, which was then voted by the public as the best vessel on show.

For every entry and every vote, Carnival donated US\$1 to the US St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

For her efforts Carrie won her family a seven-day Caribbean cruise onboard *Carnival Magic*.

Carrie's entry is pictured below.



Explore Russia's White Sea with a touch of Island flair



MS Island Sky

Adventurers have two chances to explore the once forbidden Russian White Sea region next year, onboard Wild Earth Travel's newly renovated 116-passenger *MS Island Sky*.

The first 15-day voyage, titled 'White Sea Odyssey', departs from Edinburgh, Scotland, on 05 June 2012, and takes passengers to the Shetland Islands, Bergen, Nordfjorden, Central Norway, Lovunden and Traena Islands, the Lofoten Islands, Tromso, The North

Cape, Murmansk, Solovetsky Islands and Archangelsk.

The second White Sea Odyssey II itinerary departs from Archangelsk on 19 June 2012, and cruises to the Solovetsky Islands, Murmansk, The North Cape, Tromso, Lofoten Islands, Lovunden and Traena Islands, Central Norway and Bergen.

Both voyages will be accompanied by a team of expedition experts including, renowned military historian Major JGH Corrigan MBE; university lecturer, historian and author, Imogen Corrigan; and Norwegian-based sociologist Thomas Nilsen, who will provide guests with fascinating insights into the regions visited.

Prices for the voyages start at AU\$6,760pp, including return airfares from London to the port of embarkation, cruise accommodation with all meals, lectures, shore excursions, gratuities and transfers.

For details see your travel agent, or visit www.wildearth-travel.com.

