

Cruise focus for new listed player

THE new owner of Holiday Planet, Red Gum Resources, has signalled a major push into the online cruise market with the implementation of “new Online Cruise Booking Engines to provide dynamic search-book-pay functionality across 90% of the global cruise lines”.

Holiday Planet, which also operates the Cruise Planet site, is being taken over by the WA-based firm and will seek a relisting on the ASX as The Australian Travel Group Limited.

The company is also expanding into wholesale operations with the acquisition of Asia Escape Holidays, with further deals believed to be in the pipeline.

See today’s issue of **Travel Daily** for further details.

Packed Russia in 2015

SIX full charters of the recently refurbished *MS Yesenin* features in the Travelmarvel Russia River Cruising guide for 2015, out now and headed by a 12-day Treasures of Russia river cruise operating between Moscow & St Petersburg.

Travelmarvel gm David Cox said the program’s extra inventory will help it cater to increased demand.

Three pages today

Today’s issue of **TD Cruise Update** features three pages of all the latest cruise information.

Berlitz ‘facts’ under fire

RIVER cruise lines have disputed several claims made in the inaugural edition of ‘Berlitz: River Cruising in Europe’ (**CU** 05 Jun), labelling some sections “inaccurate” and “disappointing”.

Among the hardest hit is Scenic Tours, with the majority of its ship reviews containing factual errors.

Aside from two vessels, Berlitz lists various other companies, from Tauck to Transocean Flussreisen, as the manager/operator of Scenic ships.

Scenic Tours has confirmed to **TD Cruise Update** that it owns, manages and operates all of its ships sailing in Europe.

Other alleged errors, according to Scenic Tours, include the classification of its outdoor balconies as French balconies, wrong cabin totals for six vessels (Scenic Jade and Scenic Jewel are the most “off”, listed at 63 instead of 85), while the Scenic Gem is incorrectly reported to have an indoor heated pool and movie screen.

Justin Brown, Scenic Tours Australia’s general manager operations and administration, said the company would be addressing “a number of inaccuracies” with the book’s author and publisher.

“The guide has been published without any verification from us and it is disappointing that it is now in the public domain,” Brown told **TD Cruise Update**.

“We look forward to the next edition with the errors amended,” he added.

Descriptions of several other lines’ cabin layouts are also lacking in detail, another spokesperson suggested, with little distinction between the positioning of beds, bathrooms and balconies.

While cruise lines welcomed the concept of the independent Berlitz guide, many expressed concerns about the level of fact-checking but all anticipated an improved second edition to be published next year.

Tas sea arrivals rising

TOURISM Industry Council Tasmania (TICT) has reported arrivals to the state on *Spirit of Tasmania* for the 2013/14 financial year were up 8% year-on-year and showed ongoing strength in domestic arrivals.

The organisation said the figures would provide encouragement regional operators in the state’s northwest around Devonport.

“The figures released today by Spirit of Tasmania also indicating strong forward bookings is welcome and should generate renewed confidence for operators in those regional parts of Tasmania that are not currently experiencing the strong business activity of Hobart,” TICT chief executive officer Luke Martin said.

RCI confirms Treacy

ROYAL Caribbean International has confirmed Sean Treacy will relocate to Sydney to take up the role of regional commercial director Asia-Pacific, replacing the promoted Adam Armstrong.

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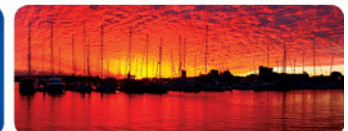
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CRUISE NEWS & VIEWS
 with Brett Jardine
 GM, CLIA Australasia

Hotels & Cruises


TWO weeks ago, CLIA confirmed that Starwood Hotels had joined our Executive Partner membership ranks – in my view a great opportunity to demonstrate the many synergies that exist between the hotel and cruise industry.

Apart from stating the obvious that cruise ships can be positioned as hotels on water (and they are in many respects), the shore-side hotel industry plays an integral role in the success of the cruise passenger experience. I have to say it is refreshing that an organisation such as Starwood (and their many iconic hotel brands) see a role in complimenting the cruise industry as opposed to it being a competitor.

For the well-educated travel retailer, allowing for delays and of course potential jet-lag is reason enough to make sure the cruise portion of a trip is commenced following a few nights of R&R close to the point of embarkation.

Starwood have been a member of CLIA USA for many years and based on this we have already identified some key areas where we can share ideas and knowledge that will benefit the Cruise Industry, the Starwood Group and our Travel Agent Members.

We anticipate a prosperous relationship with Starwood & look forward to making some exciting announcements in the near future.



Low water levels in Danube

A NUMBER of river cruise lines operating in Europe have been affected to different degrees by unusually low water levels in a small section of the Danube River.

The segment, located between Regensburg & Passau in Germany, has resulted in some lines making alternate arrangements to ensure minimal disruption on itineraries.

Viking River Cruises has suffered the largest inconveniences, with passengers on at least 11 itineraries so far affected.

The line's Swiss-based nautical and operations teams have been working with local partners and authorities on the situation.

Two operations of the 'Romantic Danube' itinerary and one 'Passage to Eastern Europe' have seen pax transferred to alternate ships identical to the one booked.

Pax on departures of the 'Grand European Tour' between Budapest and Amsterdam in both directions up to 01 Jul are also being moved due to limited movement of the original vessel.

Some segments of the river currently unnavigable have also forced Viking to replace itinerary portions with coach transport, with shore tours still operating.

Any guests scheduled to depart past 02 Jul are being advised to

presume operations will be as normal, with the line saying it will contact pax if they are affected.

Water levels have caused slight issues for some other lines, while others have not seen any impact, according to statements sent to **TD Cruise Update** yesterday.

APT said none of its itineraries had been affected, with minimal disruptions on one Travelmarvel sailing which did not affect the overall itinerary timings.

John Molinaro of Uniworld said the line was monitoring water levels in case contingency plans had to be made, but to date, no sailings had been impacted.

The newest line to commence operations, Emerald Waterways, said its vessels *Emerald Star* and *Emerald Sky* had not been forced to make any itinerary changes.

Scenic Tours has reported it was necessary to enact a ship swap on two sailings from Amsterdam to Budapest and vice versa, with guests of *Scenic Diamond* and *Scenic Ruby* swapped over.

This procedure was undertaken while guests were on their Scenic FreeChoice activities, with Cruise Directors also swapping to ensure minimal interruptions.

Three Avalon Waterways cruises were slightly affected, with some nearby town visits requiring short coach trips, although no ship swapping was required.

Guests were offered additional shore excursions complimentary for any inconvenience caused over the two affected days.

Each line added they were monitoring the situation but expected river levels to return to normal levels shortly.

MSC eye subcontinent

INDIA will feature on more MSC Cruises itineraries from 2018 after the line takes delivery of its four ships currently on order, which are scheduled for delivery in 2018.

Mumbai & Kochi will be visited by *MSC Orchestra* on its 33-night Grand Voyage from Dubai to Fremantle early next year.

MSC Cruises country head India Amit Mathur said the line had seen a 30% rise in sales from the Indian market in the last year, with many Indians heading to Europe to sail the Mediterranean.

Third Sydney rocket

CAPTAIN Cook Cruises will next month take delivery of its third Sydney Harbour "super rocket", with the new vessel to be named the *Annabelle Rankin*.

The vessel is named after Rankin, who was the second Australian female to sit in the Senate & first from Queensland in parliament.

Celebrities on the sea

AMERICAN cable network Turner Classic Movies has advised the list of veteran movie and TV actors who will participate in its annual TCM Classic Cruise.

Among the slew of stars to set sail on the voyage will be Richard Dreyfuss, Shirley Jones, Roger Corman, Tab Hunter, Ann Blyth, Diane Baker, James Karen and *Jeopardy* host Alex Trebek, along with producers, film authors and movie historians.

The fourth incarnation of the popular voyage will be a six-day voyage departing Port Canaveral on 21 Oct aboard *Disney Magic* and will stop at private Disney island Castaway Cay & Key West.

Spa Suites on Odyssey

PENTHOUSE spa suites have been added to *Seabourn Odyssey* ahead of its second Aussie season.

The suites are located above the onboard Spa at Seabourn and offer 50sqm of space, a private verandah, separate bedroom and living area and walk-in closet.



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Viking Star floats out

SEVERAL weeks ahead of schedule, Viking Ocean Cruises has floated its first vessel, *Viking Star*, in a ceremony at Fincantieri Marghera shipyard in Venice. The ceremony marks the final stage of construction for the first of three vessels for Viking, with *Star* to take to the seas next year.

Atlantic City eyes port

CRUISING has been identified as a potential saviour of the Atlantic City tourism economy, with Mayor Don Guardian saying he would like to position the city as an ideal port for cruise ships. Guardian said small ships would be preferred over mega-liners, with early studies on a site able to accommodate ships up to 60m in length now completed. Funding to make the project a reality will now be sought from the US Federal Government.



Amsterdam world sail

HOLLAND America Line has released a round-the-world cruise aboard *MS Amsterdam*, with the 114-night voyage to transit both the Panama and Suez canals, with shorter segments also available. The voyage, departing from Fort Lauderdale, Florida on 05 Jan next year, will visit 45 ports in 25 countries including six in Australia.

Cunard film premiere

HOLLYWOOD director Mark Lund will host the international premiere of independent movie *Justice is Mind* on 29 Oct aboard Cunard's *Queen Elizabeth* vessel. The psychological thriller has been critically acclaimed since its US release last year at cinemas across the country. In addition to the premiere, Lund will conduct a film-making presentation for cruise pax. The week-long voyage will leave Rome on Oct 24, with the film production seminar on 25 Oct ahead of the premiere on 29 Oct, with the itinerary dotted with visits to Mediterranean ports.

THREE generations of the Tauck family joined company executives, special guests and dignitaries in Bingen am Rhein last weekend to officially christen the company's newest riverboat, *MS Savor*.

Offering capacity for 130 pax, the Inspiration-class vessel boasts an innovative loft-style cabin on the lower deck, which features a large window and elevated seating area accessed by a small staircase.

The second new-generation ship follows the inauguration in Apr of sister vessel *MS Inspire*, which took place in Basel (CU 10 Apr) and collectively represents a 55% jump in river cruise capacity.

Suite sizes vary from 150-225 square feet, with four of the smaller cabins exclusively set aside for solo travellers.

MS Savor will be deployed on two itineraries - the 12-day

'The Blue Danube', priced from \$4,790ppts & the 10-day 'Danube Reflections', priced at \$4,590ppts.

The newest vessel brings Tauck's total river cruising fleet to six, alongside *MS Treasures*, *MS Swiss Jewel*, *MS Swiss Sapphire* and the *MS Swiss Emerald*.

Pictured above at the *MS Savor* christening, from left is Tauck Chairman Arthur Tauck Jr, Godmother Liz Tauck Walters and Captain Michael Szekely.

MEANWHILE, Tauck has today announced it will add three new vessels to its fleet before 2016.

Coming next Apr will be *Esprit*, the fifth Jewel-class vessel, with two more Inspiration-class ships to sail alongside the brand new *MS Savor* and *MS Inspire*.

Esprit will operate on the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers, cruising 14-night voyages on the popular Amsterdam to Budapest routing as well as between Basel and the Dutch capital city.

Basel-based shipbuilding firm Scylla AG has been tasked with construction of the new vessels.

FURTHER, the line is also set to launch four new river cruise itineraries this year, two of which will sail on the Seine in France.

These will include the 23-day 'Belle Epoch: London to Monte Carlo' and the popular 8-day 'Castles on the Rhine: Family Riverboat Adventure.'

Zegrahm likes singles

SOLO traveller supplements have been abolished on four 2015 voyages to be operated by Zegrahm Expeditions, valid for new bookings only.

The four eligible voyages will depart to Antarctica (21 Feb), Indonesia (24 Feb), Brazil (11 Mar) and the Galápagos Islands (08 Jun), with solo travellers able to pay double occupancy fares.

Details at www.zegrahm.com.

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