

NZ Government blocks Ponant season

THE New Zealand Cruise Association (NZCA) says a decision by Immigration NZ (INZ) to prevent Ponant's *Le Laperouse* from operating her planned upcoming domestic program (**CW** 04 Jan) is a "huge backwards step for New Zealand cruise".

The shock announcement, which came just over a week before the planned 08 Feb season start, has come despite extensive negotiations to gain approvals from the Ministry of Health.

"At the extremely last minute, Immigration NZ has now denied entry for some of the ship's crew who they have deemed to be non-essential," said NZCA Chief Executive Officer Kevin O'Sullivan.

The regulator has denied visas to 61 of the 90 crew on the ship and blocked its entry into New Zealand waters, with Minister of Immigration Kris Faafoi saying the impacted staff include

"hairstylists, bartenders and masseuses".

Critical worker visas were granted for 29 officers and engineers, but the remainder of the hospitality crew must come from New Zealand, INZ said.

The ship had continued to steam towards New Zealand despite two visa applications being denied, Faafoi said, stressing that due to COVID-19, "our border is closed".

"NZ citizens and residents are the only people we will let into New Zealand...those that have come without visas have been turned around, and that is what will happen to those on board."

The Minister said clear border processes were in place, but Wild Earth Travel, the NZ firm which had chartered the ship to operate the season had "begun marketing and selling cruises before the process played out...I

can charitably call that unwise".

"Getting ahead of those processes creates risk for businesses and for people and that has occurred in this case."

It's understood that Ponant has been engaged in urgent talks to resolve the issue, with the cruise line's Asia Pacific Chair Sarina Bratton confirming "we have informed INZ that we will try to identify some local NZ citizens who could perform some hotel department roles on board".

She also noted the crew has multiple certifications including roles ensuring operational safety, and that 14 New Zealand residents had also already been contracted for the season including naturalists, musicians and a nurse.

"We remain hopeful that we can reach an agreement with INZ to allow our ship to deliver the expedition experiences," she said.

Cruise Weekly today

Cruise Weekly today features two pages of all the latest cruise industry news.

New Viking brox

VIKING has released its 230-page 2022-2023 River Cruise brochure, featuring Asia, Central Europe, Egypt, Russia and the United States.

The brochure also includes a preview of 2023 departures, details on new ships, and a dedicated section on Christmas Markets.

The 2022-2023 River Cruises brochure showcases a new cruise destination, the Mississippi River, with Viking's first custom-built vessel in the United States, *Viking Mississippi*, debuting in Aug 2022 and sailing voyages on the Lower and Upper Mississippi - call 138 747.

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A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD New Zealander who found a NZ\$5 bill floating in the ocean has sold it online for almost NZ\$1,000.

The boy spotted the old-style bill floating near Sumner Beach in Christchurch, and proudly showed his parents, who thought it might be worth seeing how much it could fetch online.

The boy's father decided to put the bill up for auction on New Zealand-based site Trade Me to see if it caught anyone's eye, and it did, with a fierce bidding war yielding a winning bid of NZ\$1,000 (A\$930).

Windstar still visiting Aus



WINDSTAR Cruises has outlined its sailings through May 2023, with Australia kept in the fold despite last year's cancellation of local voyages (**CW** 20 May 2020).

The Windstar Voyage Collection 2021-2023 includes the cruise line's first-ever comprehensive itineraries to Australia in 2022 aboard the newly transformed *Star Breeze* (pictured), visiting small, rarely visited ports of call, such as Middle Percy Island in the Northumberland Islands, and Thursday Island.

There will also be overnights in Brisbane, Port Douglas, and Sydney, plus a late-night departure in Melbourne, across a total of eight local itineraries.

However voyagers will not have to wait until next year to come Down Under with Windstar, with *Wind Spirit* to sail from Tahiti to Australia, stopping at Vanuatu and Pantara Island, from 11 Nov.

The Collection also details the transformation of its three Star Plus Class ships, which have received new restaurants, new

suite choices, environmental improvements, more deck space and outdoor dining, with a guest capacity of 312 per yacht.

Crews head home

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line (NCL) will repatriate all non-essential crew members.

Many of the seafarers joined NCL recently to prepare the ships for a resumption of service via the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's Framework for Conditional Sailing.

However, it has been reported NCL recently informed these crew members they would be repatriated, with efforts beginning with seafarers joining either *Norwegian Encore* or *Norwegian Joy*, which would return crew members to Asia and the Philippines respectively, in a process similar to last year's efforts.

Choose your stream

CHOOSE Your Cruise is hosting its first live stream concert on Sat at 8pm AEDT.

Set to feature artists from both the upcoming 2021 Super Cruise and previous Choose Your Cruise itineraries, the event will be streamed free, and can be accessed by **CLICKING HERE**.

To celebrate the occasion, travellers can currently book the Super Cruise with a \$500 discount, available across all cabin grades, until the end of next month.

The discount is off the overall price of the cabin, and is available for new bookings only.

View cabins and pricing **HERE**.

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