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Azamara set to widen the customer net

AZAMARA Cruises will launch a new ecommerce-enabled website and ramp up its digital advertising and public relations efforts as it seeks new customers, with the newly independent cruise line also hinting at plans to further expand its fleet in the future.

Speaking on board the newly revamped *Azamara Onward* in the Mediterranean overnight, the company's President Carol Cabezas (**pictured**) said the line had a hugely loyal following of past guests, comprising about 45% of business, but with a fourth vessel in the fleet it was important to continue to add both "new to brand" and "new to cruise" clientele by reaching out in new and innovative ways.

What won't change, Cabezas noted, is Azamara's longstanding partnership with the travel trade.

"Our travel partners have been extraordinary in introducing



guests to our brand, we recognise that, and we also know that they work tirelessly to make sure that their guests have a wonderful experience," she said.

"So we will continue to support and rely on our travel partners to be the major sourcing of our guests," Cabezas added.

She also confirmed the long-term strategy for Azamara was

"absolutely to grow the fleet".

"That can happen in different ways," Cabezas said.

While the immediate focus for the Azamara team has been on getting *Onward* ready for her naming ceremony and inaugural revenue cruise next week, "at the same time we're working through our plans for the future".

"Our investors are extremely supportive, and they are absolutely focused on growing our brand because they think what we're doing is something that speaks to a vacationer today, and there's room within that vacation audience to have more of this product for them".

Destination immersion will continue to be a key pillar for Azamara, with Cabezas highlighting features of the line's itineraries including more late nights and overnights in port and "country-intensive" voyages.



On location aboard
Azamara Onward

Today's issue of CW is coming to you courtesy of Azamara Cruises, which has launched the brand new *Azamara Onward*.

TODAY the first port of call for *Azamara Onward* will be Marseille in France, a port which has been operating for more than 2,600 years.

Guests will be immersed in the destination, with a City Sights tour taking in cafes, charming markets, Marseille's famous cliffs, key landmarks and the shopping district.

Over the weekend *Onward* heads to Italy for a visit to the Cinque Terre via Portonevere, where the townsfolk will turn out for an Azamazing day of welcome to passengers.

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Ponant gets set to grow

PONANT has expanded its Asia-Pacific team by implementing a newly created structure, with the changes coming as the line continues to joyously celebrate yesterday's momentous restart of international cruising in the Kimberley (**CW** 27 Apr).

Julie Rogers has been promoted to the newly created role of Sales Director Asia Pacific, which will see her responsible for managing the Australian and New Zealand sales team, while maintaining her portfolio of other emerging Asia-Pacific markets including India, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and more.

Rogers' team will include Annabelle Brown as Business Development Manager (BDM) for Vic, Tas and SA - taking over from Craig Farrell who is moving on to a new travel industry role outside of cruising early next month.

The domestic portfolio previously managed by Rogers will transfer to new team member Janelle Ramsey, who is now BDM for Qld, NT and WA.

NZ business will now be managed by Bianca Bratton who has been promoted to become BDM New Zealand, while

also maintaining her expertise as Ponant's Paul Gauguin Specialist for Asia-Pacific.

Julie Golding continues as BDM for NSW & ACT and will help guide and mentor new starters Ramsey and Brown, while Charlotte Crauck from Ponant's customer service team has been promoted to fill a new National Inside Sales Executive role supporting the cruise line's team of BDMs.

Karen Smith has been permanently appointed as Customer Service & Reservations Manager, while Kim Herdiana remains as Team Leader APAC.

Kristin Jansson, who has been on maternity leave, is returning to Ponant and will take on a new role to be revealed shortly.

And finally a new role of Partnerships & Engagement Director Asia Pacific has been created, with a search for a suitable candidate to commence in the coming weeks.

Ponant is also expanding sales support for its teams in China and Japan, in alignment with border reopenings over the coming months and to serve the pent-up demand from these regions.

Onward to a new cruise



THE Aussie onslaught into Europe's rebounding cruise experiences continued overnight with this group boarding the new *Azamara Onward* in Barcelona, Spain as the ship's first guests.

The shakedown voyage will take the ship to Monte Carlo, Monaco for her formal naming ceremony, before her inaugural revenue voyage onward to Venice.

The ship is the fourth in the Azamara fleet, with the same configuration and design as sisters *Azamara Journey*, *Azamara Quest* and *Azamara Pursuit*.

A major makeover has seen staterooms and public areas revamped, along with the addition of the Atlas Bar, offering "innovative artisanal cocktails created using the latest techniques, from smoking domes to nitro infusions,"

Azamara said.

There's also a new Chef's Table addition to specialty restaurant Aqualina, treating guests to a seven course culinary journey of dishes which capture the flavour and essence of some of the destinations visited by the ship.

In addition, four brand new Signature Shows offer a variety of evening entertainment options, including the Sinatra-themed Club Crooner; Amped Up offering classic 70s rock; Wanderlust featuring an eclectic mix of sounds from around the world; and the psychedelic disco themed Groove Tonight.

Pictured ready to get their party on are, from left: Anna Russell, Clean Cruising; Natalie Bax, Azamara; Michelle Julius-Baty, Ignite Travel Group; Belle Osmic, Azamara; Arrivia's Noriye Oto and Angela Jenkinson; Casey Russell, Clean Cruising; & Azamara's Kristina Sambaher.

Silver Nova reveal

SILVERSEA Cruises has announced details of *Silver Nova*, the line's 11th vessel which is scheduled for delivery next year.

Said to have a "revolutionary asymmetric design," *Nova* will offer all-new outdoor spaces including an outward-facing pool deck, an al fresco dining area and a sky bar offering panoramic views from the rear of the ship.

CEO Roberto Martinoli said the 728-passenger *Silver Nova* "represents the next iteration of Silversea's unique take on luxury," with the ship to feature eight dining venues.

Patagonian offer

EXPEDITION cruise company Australis is celebrating the return of international travel to Chile with a US\$1,000 discount on 2022/23 cruises.

The deal applies to four-night voyages departing from Punta Arenas or Ushuaia, for bookings made until 31 May.

Prices start at US\$4,840 plus taxes for two people, and the discounted rates are commissionable to agents.

For bookings travel agencies should contact their preferred South American wholesaler, or alternatively deal directly with Australis with details online at www.australis.com.

Insurance webinar

A FREE cruise insurance webinar for travel advisors is being hosted by Victory Travel & Cruise Lawyers.

Taking place at 1pm AEST on Thu, the 'Cruise Insurance: Why Your Clients Need It & What You Need to Know' webinar will be hosted by Victory's Victoria Roy, who will explain why travel insurance is necessary, what you need to know about cruise travel insurance policies, how they work, and how you can help travellers who need to claim.

CLICK HERE to RSVP.

Creative RCI savings

CREATIVE Cruising will host a joint webinar with Royal Caribbean International (RCI) BDM David Ninham on 31 May at 1pm AEST, discussing the brand's upcoming local homeport season.

The webinar will also include a brief product information session, with Creative currently offering instant savings on bookings confirmed by 02 May.

Clients who use Future Cruise Credits before 02 May are also being offered an additional onboard credit worth up to US\$100 - for more information and to register for the free webinar **CLICK HERE**.

AQV program out

THE 2024 river, lake and ocean program for American Queen Voyages (AQV) has been released.

Strong pent-up demand for river, lake, and expedition cruises in destinations across North America has prompted American Queen to release its 2024 small ship program now, with almost 300 all-inclusive sailings for the season.

Eight river, lake, and ocean ships will take guests on immersive journeys through the heart of the United States along the famous Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Cumberland, Snake, and Columbia rivers.

Also on offer will be voyages across the Great Lakes, to Canada and New England, the Southeastern United States, and Mexico.

There will also be a full program of deep-nature expedition voyages to remote places in Alaska.

Travellers can currently save up to US\$2,000 per couple on the newly released 2024 river and expedition program, with all-inclusive cruises starting from US\$1,385 when booking before the end of Jun.

All cruises with American Queen include onboard beverages, a range of off-ship activities, onboard wi-fi, and gratuities.

For more information call American Queen's Australian representative Cruise Traveller, on 1800 507 777.

AQV's parent company Hornblower Group is in the process of taking over Australia's Journey Beyond.

Oceania '24 Collection



OCEANIA Cruises has unveiled its 2024 Voyage Collection, with a whopping 250 sailings making it the line's biggest ever program.

Open for booking on Thu next week, the Collection encompasses more than 130 Grand Voyages across seven ships and all seven continents, with destinations including Turkey (*inset*), Icy Strait Point, Paradise Bay, the Philippines, the Caribbean, and more.

The season will see Oceania greatly expanding its offering in Australia (*pictured*), deploying two ships locally for the season - *Regatta* and *Nautica*.

Itineraries include a 35-night circumnavigation of Australia, and a series of four 10-day sailings round-trip from Papeete.

Other highlights of the 2024 Collection include intriguing new ports of call such as Beppu, Bluff, Castro, Coron, Djupivogur, Gatun Lake, Heimaey, Port Royal, Kumamoto, Limerick, Sao Francisco do Sul, Seydisfjardur,



Szczecin, and Taranto.

Itinerary lengths on the season range from seven to 82 days.

"Next to our reputation for serving the finest cuisine at sea, Oceania Cruises is widely acclaimed for developing the most enticing and destination-rich itineraries in the cruise industry," said President & Chief Executive Officer Howard Sherman.

"With our 2024 Collection, we have set a whole new standard for destination innovation with an astounding mix of marquee destinations and exotic new locales, blended together in creatively crafted voyage offerings," Sherman enthused.



"HE NEVER smiled or spoke." If the name that popped into your head upon reading this assessment was President of Russia Vladimir Putin, you would be correct.

That was the evaluation of an Australian former cruise ship cabaret singer, who claimed to the *Daily Mail* Putin posed as a guard aboard Soviet-built cruise ship *Aleksandr Pushkin* to spy for the KGB during the Cold War.

The vessel, which last sailed for the now-defunct Cruise & Maritime Voyages as *Marco Polo*, was in 1985 chartered by British line CTC to sail from Europe to Australia, with her Soviet crew.

The singer said the "scowling, stony-faced security guard" she believes to have been the future Russian despot used to stalk her back to her cabin.

"I'd open the cabin door and I'd turn around and wave and smile and say thank you very much," the singer described.

"He never smiled, he never spoke to me, not a single word."

While the singer remains the only source for Putin's supposed whereabouts aboard *Aleksandr Pushkin*, a fellow performer also told the *Daily Mail* it was an open secret the ship was crawling with KGB officers - a role in which Putin served from 1975 to 1991.

She also remarked: "if only we had known what he had planned for the world, we could have tossed the bastard overboard and done everyone a favour!"