



CDC moves to voluntary compliance

STRICT regulations controlling the resumption of cruising in American waters will be lifted this weekend, with the expiry of the current Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) Conditional Sailing Order, which is being replaced by a new voluntary framework.

Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) has hailed the move, saying it "recognises the cruise industry's unwavering commitment to providing some of the highest levels of COVID-19 mitigation found in any industry".

The transition was flagged some months ago when the CDC updated its Conditional Sailing Order (**TD 26 Oct**), with CLIA telling *Cruise Weekly* the sector is the only segment of the travel and tourism industry which requires exceedingly high levels of vaccination of both passengers and crew prior to embarkation.

"When cases are identified as a result of the high frequency of testing onboard, cruise ship

protocols help to maximise onboard containment with rapid response procedures designed to safeguard all other guests and crew as well as the communities that the ships visit," CLIA said.

"Further, cruise is the only sector that continuously monitors, collects, and reports case information directly to the CDC...given this oversight and the uniquely high vaccination rate required on board, the incidence of serious illness is dramatically lower than on land, and hospitalisations have been extraordinarily rare even while landslide hospitalisations are peaking," the organisation added.

CLIA said ocean-going members will continue to be guided by "the science" and "the principle of putting people first", with proven measures that are adapted as conditions warrant to protect the health of cruise passengers, crew members, and destinations.

Under the new voluntary COVID-19 program, cruise lines

can opt in to follow all of the CDC recommendations and guidance, and vessels will continue to receive a colour status based on the level of coronavirus infection.

Operators which are not part of the program will be listed as "grey" on the CDC website, meaning their health and safety protocols have not been reviewed by the regulator.

It's expected that most major cruise lines will opt in to the new rules, with companies continuing to significantly go above and beyond the guidelines.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky this week told a hearing in the US Senate that "the Conditional Sail Order and the fact that the industry has stepped up and is now interested in doing and exceeding the compliance with the sail order, without the order even necessarily needing to be in place, is a real testimony to how well that has worked and how we've worked collaboratively with the industry."

Genting share hit

SHARES in Genting Hong Kong, the parent company of Crystal Cruises, Dream Cruises and Star Cruises, resumed trading overnight after a four day suspension, and are already down more than 56% after the company declared bankruptcy for its German shipyard division (**CW 12 Jan**).

Viking Neptune floats out from Fincantieri

FINCANTIERI'S shipyard in Ancona continues to roll out vessels for Viking, with the float-out overnight of the new 930-passenger *Viking Neptune* which is expected to be delivered during the upcoming northern summer season.

It's the eighth ship in the series which currently comprises firm

orders and options for up to another 12 vessels.

Viking's partnership with Fincantieri is also seeing the shipbuilder's Vard subsidiary construct the new Viking expedition fleet, with the company taking delivery of *Viking Octantis* just before Christmas (**CW 05 Jan**).

The Bard at sea

CUNARD Line is taking Shakespeare to the high seas this year with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in a first-of-its-kind partnership.

Available exclusively on board *Queen Mary 2*, guests will enjoy tailored theatrical performances by RSC, available for all guests, including a unique blend of Shakespeare's iconic love scenes in a brand-new piece, *Boundless as the Sea*.

Guests will also have the opportunity to view critically acclaimed new work from RSC with *Miss Littlewood*, in its trans-Atlantic debut.

The musical explores the life of one of theatre's most playful and radical figures.

For those interested in learning what it takes to be an RSC actor, the cast will be leading a series of workshops that explore their craft.

Guests will also be able to access 'Shakespeare Tales', informal events where the actors will perform their personal favourite sonnets and speeches, and answer questions from the audience.

In addition, *Queen Mary 2* will host a touring exhibition, 'Digital Diorama: An Augmented Journey Through Shakespeare's Stratford', in which guests will use devices to experience scenes from the playwright's stories come to life before their eyes.



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Princess to pay \$1m environmental fine

PRINCESS Cruises has pleaded guilty to once again violating a probation agreement, which was imposed in 2017 after the cruise line's criminal conviction for environmental crimes.

The United States Department of Justice (DOJ) has announced details of a plea agreement, under which the Carnival Corporation brand will pay an additional \$USD1 million fine and undertake remedial measures "to ensure that it and its parent... establish and maintain the independent internal investigative office known as the Incident Analysis Group".

The 2017 case saw Princess convicted and fined a whopping USD\$40 million "after pleading guilty to felony charges stemming from its deliberate dumping of oil-contaminated waste from one

of its vessels and intentional acts to cover it up," the DOJ said.

Under a previous five-year probation agreement, all Carnival Corp vessels operating in American ports were required to comply with a court-approved and supervised environmental compliance plan, including third-party audits and oversight by a court-appointed monitor.

In 2019, Princess was convicted of six violations of the probation deal and fined another USD\$20 million after interfering with the court supervision by sending teams to ships to prepare them for the independent inspections.

In the case detailed this week by the DOJ, Princess pleaded guilty to failing to establish and maintain the independent internal investigative office, with a report on the probation

concluding the cruise line's repeated failures to comply with the orders "reflects a deeper barrier: a culture that seeks to minimise or avoid information that is negative, uncomfortable or threatening to the company, including to top leadership".

Under the plea agreement, Carnival is required to restructure so its investigative office reports directly to a committee of its Board of Directors, and must be given the authority to initiate investigations on its own, and to determine their scope.

Carnival's management will also be restricted in its ability to remove the head of the Incident Analysis Group.

The plea agreement and factual statement were signed by Carnival Corporation Chair Micky Arison and CEO Arnold Donald.



RESIDENTIAL cruise ships are known to be an expensive venture, but they may be about to get a little bit more affordable, thanks to new cruise line Storylines.

The company's upcoming ship *Narrative* is offering fully furnished one- to four-bedroom residences, along with studios and two-storey penthouses, with prices rising to USD\$8 million, but starting as low as USD\$400,000.

The homes are available as outright purchases, although a limited number of 12 and 24-year leases are also offered.

According to founder & Chief Executive Officer Alister Puntton, an undisclosed number of the 547 units have already been sold, and the residences are on track to sell out by the end of the year.

Those who snap up a home on board *Narrative*, currently under construction in Croatia, will receive an all-inclusive life at sea, with a host of impressive amenities, such as 20 dining concepts and bars, a microbrewery, three swimming pools, a library, a movie theatre, a state-of-the-art wellness centre, a bowling alley and a solar powered hydroponic garden farm.

Narrative is scheduled to begin a 1,000-day maiden voyage across six continents in late 2024, with the ship spending an average of three to five days in each port.

American Cruise Lines adds domestic air

US-BASED small ship coastal and river cruise operator American Cruise Lines has added a new flat-rate domestic airfare option for all of its US cruises, available to each of its 19 cruise hubs in 16 states.

American now offers explorations of 31 states from Alaska and Florida, with its fleet having doubled in size over the last five years.

"Each year, the line continues to build new small ships right here in the USA and expand its offerings on land, air and sea," said American Cruise Lines Executive VP Carter Robinson.

"We are always looking for

new ways to personalise our guest services from booking to boarding, and the new flat rate airfare will create a seamless experience for many of our guests," he added.

American is also offering complimentary pre-cruise hotel stays for its river cruises.

Robinson said American had also recently added more than 50 new shore excursions as well as private cruise coaches which follow the riverboats.

The new flat rate airfare option can be selected at the time of cruise booking and is not subject to future changes in fares.

AQV names VP

HORNBLOWER Group, the US-based cruise company which is in the process of buying Australia's Journey Beyond, has appointed Jethro Beck as Vice President of Marine Operations for its American Queen Voyages (AQV) river cruise business.

Beck joins the company from his most recent role as Head of Marine Operations for ultra luxury startup The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection, with his career also including positions with Holland America Group serving Princess Cruise Lines, P&O Cruises Australia, and Seabourn Cruise Line.