



NCL schedules gap year from Sydney

EXCLUSIVE

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line will not base a ship in Sydney for the 2024/25 wave season, opting instead to sail from Melbourne as part of a temporary adjustment to its presence in Australasia.

The strategic shift was picked up by **Cruise Weekly** in the line's reveal of maiden itineraries for *Norwegian Sun* between Mar and Oct 2025, which will see the ship return to Far North Queensland for the first time since 2019.

Prior to that, the 1,936-guest *Norwegian Sun* will offer five one-way sailings between Melbourne and Auckland from Dec 2024 to Mar 2025, with the ship making just one visit to Sydney on 13 Jan during one of these itineraries.

Norwegian Spirit, which recently left Sydney on charter operations for next summer, will return to Sydney from late 2025.

The brief adjournment marks



the first time Norwegian Cruise Line has not based a ship in Sydney since the brand debuted in Australia in 2017, excluding the pandemic when all cruise ships were locked out of Australia.

Instead, *Norwegian Sun* will begin a new series of 14 cruises in the Asia Pacific region, including three sailings between Cairns and the Fijian port of Lautoka, the first time NCL has used either city as a turnaround point.

The Mar-Oct season will also see NCL make maiden visits to Port Douglas and Townsville as part of this schedule.

Additional maiden calls for *Sun* will include Mystery Island, Port

Vila, Dravuni Island and Noumea.

Travellers will be able to explore the South Pacific in greater depth, with *Sun* to offer three island-hopping itineraries between Fiji and Tahiti which also call in Aitutaki in the Cook Islands.

The revised deployment also confirms the operations of *Norwegian Sun* after NCL last year cancelled seven months' worth of sailings as a result of a "fleet redeployment" (**CW** 27 Nov 2023).

Norwegian Sun is the slightly larger and younger fleet-mate of *Norwegian Spirit* and offers 15 dining options including French, Italian, Brazilian, Japanese and other Asian cuisine options. **ML**

Cruise Weekly today

CRUISE Weekly today features two pages of the latest cruise industry news, plus a cover wrap from **Riviera Travel**.



On location in Ecuador

Today's issue of **CW** is coming to you courtesy of **HX**, which is hosting us aboard *Santa Cruz II* this week on a cruise around the Galapagos Islands.

TODAY we are exploring Quito before embarking on **HX's** *Santa Cruz II* for a Galapagos Islands cruise later this week.

Some of the highlights of Ecuador's capital include Calle La Ronda, a cobblestone alley featuring restored historic buildings, and a lively evening bar scene.

Meanwhile, the Church of La Compania is arguably one of Quito's most recognisable monuments, located in its historic centre, and carved entirely of volcanic stone.

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SPELLBOUND by Magic Castle on the newly named *Sun Princess* (**CW** 24 Apr) may be proof that pop culture can transcend into the afterlife.

The ship's hugely popular magic-themed bar features 'Invisible Isabella' on the piano, and ever a skilled pianist she is.

According to her back-story, the lesser-known second cousin of Hungarian composer Franz Liszt became a piano virtuoso, who by the age of 25, had performed in 64 of the 80 countries the world offered at the time.

But it's her remarkable ability to replicate the more modern tunes that is truly spellbinding.

During **CW's** visit last week, Invisible Isabella demonstrated that despite crossing over to the next life some 100 years ago, renditions of Coldplay's *Clocks*, Michael Jackson's *Beat It* and Prince's *Purple Rain* were in her repertoire.

Rock out with Royal

ROYAL Caribbean Group brands Royal Caribbean International and Celebrity Cruises have teamed up with Hard Rock International to offer loyalty members across the three companies a range of reciprocal benefits.

The global partnership will cover accommodations, meals, discounts, and cruises.

Medallion a pocket tech revolution



EXCLUSIVE

FOR a device around the size of an American quarter, Princess Cruises packs a lot into its wearable Medallion technology.

The tiny device, around 2.5cm in diameter, controls guests' entire cruise experience - it's waterproof, sand, salt and heat resistant.

But for such an important piece of technology, Princess Cruises wants guests to forget they are even carrying it, providing access to everything a cruise traveller does onboard.

"Honestly, the whole objective is for people to forget they even have this with them and instead everything unfolds before them to improve their cruise holiday," said Princess Cruises Head of Communications, Vicki Johnson.

Medallion facilitates contactless payment for anything onboard, unlocks guests' stateroom door on approach, manages access on and off the ship and helps crew personalise customer service.

Such service can be as simple as addressing guests by name,

creating an instant rapport that elevates the overall experience.

So revolutionary was Carnival Corp's Medallion upon its launch in 2017, it led the cruising giant to the headline stage at CES, the first time a non-tech company or a travel company had done so.

Seven years later, Johnson said Medallion has not evolved per se, but done what it always intended.

It has also been embraced by older travellers who sceptics said would reject the device in favour of the old-school keycard.

"We believe in this - when you make the entire guest experience easier to consume and to make it personalised for you, you will want to participate in it," Johnson told **Cruise Weekly**.

Alongside the hyper-connected and new Princess mobile app which works in tandem with the Medallion, guests can also access services by tapping their device on user-friendly portals located throughout the ship.

Through the app, travellers can connect both their party and any other guest as a 'Shipmate', which

once approved, turns Medallion into a GPS locator to pinpoint their exact whereabouts onboard.

And while it makes for a great souvenir and has a battery life of about two years, Medallion is not meant to be reusable, with Princess often updating both the componentry inside the device and the technology supporting it.

"This way, you're guaranteed that it works," Johnson enthused.

In part, Medallion was inspired by Disney's MagicBand wearable.

In fact, Princess Cruises' President, John Padgett, was a leading figure in the design and evolution of both products.

It's therefore understandable that Medallion - originally slated to be rolled out across the entire Carnival Corp network of brands - is now exclusive to Princess. *ML*

Labadee on hiatus

ONGOING social upheaval in Haiti has forced Royal Caribbean International to extend its suspension of calls to its private island of Labadee until at least the end of Sep.

The line initially called off visits to the private port back in Mar (**CW** 15 Mar) due to the volatility on the ground in Haiti.

RCI ships sailing in the region have replaced scheduled calls at Labadee with Falmouth, Grand Turk, George Town, Bimini, Perfect Day at CocoCay or with a day at sea.

DFAT's Smartraveller website currently lists Haiti as 'Do Not Travel', citing an extension of the government's State of Emergency policy until 03 May.

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