

CRUISE

WEEKLY



Thursday 24 January 2013

Industry awards finalists revealed

Cruise specialist agents dominate the contenders for the International Cruise Council Australasia's annual awards.

MORE than 20 agencies and 16 consultants are in the running for next month's 2012 Cruise Industry Awards.

The 15 awards across seven categories will be announced at a gala dinner at the Hilton Sydney on 09 Feb, with approximately 500 industry members expected to attend.

The five finalists for Cruise Agency of the Year in Australia are Ozcruising (Philip ACT), Cruiseabout (Turrumurra NSW), Our Vacation Centre (Gaven Qld), Phil Hoffmann Travel (Glenelg SA) and Bicton Travel (Bicton WA).

Agents from two of these agencies -- Cruiseabout's Robert Watson and Our Vacation Centre's Avlon Murphy -- are finalists for Australia's Cruise Consultant of the Year, along with Lance Mumby from Cruise Express (Balmain NSW), Martine Hero from Clean Cruising (Brisbane) and Gina Maitland from Alpha Travel (Claremont WA).

Ozcruising's Courtney Vidotto is also shortlisted for the Rising Star award, up against Emma Blacklow from RACT Travelworld (Collins St, Hobart) and Stacey Skinner from Jetset Travel (Warrnambool, Victoria).

In the New Zealand awards, Cruise Agency of the Year finalists include Cruise Republic (Auckland), Lets Cruise (Auckland), Cruiseabout (Parnell), Cruiseabout (Tauranga) and House of Travel (Papamoa).

Three of these agencies also have candidates for Cruise Consultant of the Year, including Cruise Republic's Sarah Goldfinch, Lets Cruise's

Mark Smith and Cruiseabout Parnell's Debbie Christian, as well as Cruiseabout Ponsonby's Sue Grigg and Boutique Mondo Travel's Lisa Roebuck.

Rising Star hopefuls include Andrew Lennox from Cruiseabout (Wellington), William Henderson, from Infinity Holidays (Auckland) and Danielle Hennessy from House of Travel (Motueka).

Australian Agency Promotion of the Year finalists are Harvey World Travel (Umina NSW) for "Voyager of the Seas Sampler Cruise", Harvey World Travel (Surrey Hills, Victoria) for "Cruise Sale 2012", Travelrite International (Balwyn, Victoria) for "Film Festival at Sea", Travelworld (Carindale Qld) for "Cruising to Social Media Success", and Just Cruises (Brisbane) for "We've Got the Spirit Sale".

The New Zealand promotion winner will be either iCruise's "September iCruise Month" or The Private Travel Company's "The Healthy Living Show".

Network Promotion of the Year (Australasia) finalists are Cruiseabout (Australia) for "Choose your cruise", Flight Centre (Australia) for "Unbeatable cruise sale", Mondo Travel (New Zealand) for "Let's talk cruising with Jackie" and United Travel & Harvey World Travel (New Zealand) for "2012 Cruise Expo".

Carnival continues buy-back

CARNIVAL Corporation has renewed its authorisation for the repurchase of up to US\$1 billion of its common stock and declared a quarterly dividend of US\$0.25 per share.

Since the beginning of the fiscal year 2013 the company has repurchased 2 million shares of common stock valued at US\$78m, bringing the total amount purchased to date under the 2007 US\$1b authorisation to \$835m.

This week, the company's board increased the remaining US\$165m repurchase authorisation to US\$1b.

"Our ongoing share repurchase program demonstrates our continued confidence in the earnings power of our global brands," said Micky Arison, Carnival Corp ceo.

Yangtze river gets bigger

THOSE looking for Yangtze River cruises are about to get a load more options with Century Cruises announcement that it will launch two new 398-pax sister ships, *Century Paragon* and *Century Legend* in Mar and Apr respectively.

The vessels have been designed in collaboration with European architects Yran and Storbratten, who are responsible for ships in the Disney, Seabourn, HAL and Viking, and will be tailored to the Western market.

Both ships will sail three- and four-night itineraries between Chongqing and Yichang.



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Cruise News & Views



Brett Jardine - General Manager, ICCA

Orion Rescue Operation

With news headlines over the weekend showing one of our member lines performing heroics in the Southern Ocean (as it rescued a stricken French sailor), I thought we should all clearly understand what the "law of the sea" involves when a ship is called upon in such times.

The cruise industry takes very seriously its obligation to be a responsible member of the maritime community and assist others on the seas that are in distress.

While it is unfortunate that sanctioned and safely executed diversions from itineraries to assist other ships in distress may create an inconvenience for cruise ship passengers, such actions are an important and humane response.

Additionally, the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), to which ICCA member lines adhere, states that "the master of a ship at sea which is in a position to be able to provide assistance, on receiving information from any source that persons are in distress at sea, is bound to proceed with all speed to their assistance, if possible informing them or the search and rescue service that the ship is doing so".

This obligation to provide assistance applies regardless of the nationality or status of such persons or circumstances in which they are found.

In this case a happy ending and no doubt any readers of this column would join me in congratulating the Captain, crew and all the team at Orion Expedition Cruises on their efforts.

Silverseas to give Sydney the flick?

Italian-owned Silversea Cruises says it may be forced to bypass Sydney altogether for its future cruises because of lack of berths and the high cost of new port fees.

"SYDNEY has become my most expensive port in the world to turn around in - compared to a lot of European cities, it's double," said Michael Paulus, director Strategic Itinerary Planning & Scheduling for Silversea in an exclusive interview with **CW** at the Seatrade Hong Kong Cruise Forum in Kowloon yesterday.

He said that one of his company's ships, *Silver Whisper* couldn't get dock space in Sydney for one of its cruises next year, and will instead go to Melbourne.

Silver Whisper is one of four purpose-built ships in the Silversea fleet, smaller, intimate vessels for the ultra-luxury market and the economic loss to Sydney will be high, says the company.

Paulus said "Our guests tend to be very wealthy".

"They buy pre/post packages, spend up to \$500 per day on a hotel room, not to mention the dinners, the expensive jewellery and shopping.

"When you look at the economic power of a small luxury ship like ours, our guests might spend more per person per day than those say, on a larger ship.

"It's not just us, take my competitors, Regent, Oceania, Crystal, we all have the same issues as small, independent operators, because there's such a limited number of berths in Sydney and when you've got P&O and the more regimented operators taking up dock space, it's a challenge for us to berth in Sydney," he added.

John Tercek, vice president Commercial Development for Royal Caribbean Cruises agrees.

"It's a real problem getting ships into Sydney and its become a big issue for our industry in terms of planning and it really restricts our growth," he said.

"We see that Australia is an important and growing market, but you have to be able to

turn the ships," Tercek added.

But Silversea's Paulus says the biggest issue he has with Sydney is the high cost of operation and being penalised by port authorities for being a small ship.

"Right now, the new pier fees and head taxes we are charged, Sydney has become an expensive port for us to use".

Asked if the line might drop Sydney altogether one day, Paulus replied, "possibly, yes".

"Even though *Silver Whisper* has only 382 pax, I'm being penalised because I have to pay the minimum fee they charge that's based on a twelve-hundred pax ship, so regardless of being a small operator, I'm not paying a premium on a per-berth basis to be in Sydney," he adds.

"It's still a world-class destination, people want to go there, but I have to make sure I'm selling those cruises to make it worthwhile to be there," he added.

Michael Paulus is pictured below (left) with John Tercek.



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MSC goes YouTube

PROVING it's digital media savvy, MSC Cruises has launched its very own YouTube channel, featuring its full catalogue of fleet videos, including *MSC Divina - Ship Tour*. See www.youtube.com/user/MSCCruiseLines.

Costa Serena tragedy

TRAGEDY has again struck Costa Cruises, with reports that a *Costa Serena* crew member died following a fall down a ventilation shaft. The ship was on a 10-day South America voyage when the accident occurred, with Costa saying that whilst investigations are ongoing it appears the man, a mechanic, died whilst performing some maintenance works.

Avalon avoids all-inclusive pricing

While other river cruise lines move toward fares including drinks, tours and transfers, Avalon Waterways has other ideas.

FLEXIBILITY and lower prices are more important factors for travellers, according to Christian Schweitzer, marketing manager Australasia, Avalon Waterways.

"All-inclusive pricing needs a rethink and is likely to fall out of favour," he told *CW*.

"People don't want to pay for things they won't use.

"They'd prefer a wider choice of options among their excursions and activities, and the ability to pay only for the options they want," he added.

Schweitzer's comments follow rival operator Uniworld Boutique River Cruises' announcement last week that it would become all-inclusive in 2014 (*CW*, 15 January), while Australia's APT and Scenic Tours will make the switch this year.

"Avalon has opted to do a number of things differently," Schweitzer said.

"You still get wine and beer with lunch and dinner, but not alcohol all day, because in our experience, clients don't necessarily want that.

"So rather than build that cost into the price, we offer a drinks package, which people can pre-purchase online after booking," he added.

Avalon has also decided to keep transfers and some shore excursions optional.

The end result, he said, is cheaper fares.

"We've found that clients don't want to do all excursions every day, sometimes they want to wander off on their own," he said.

"And as many Australians don't come to Europe just for a river cruise, they won't always come straight from the airport, so we sell transfers separately at a very reasonable \$50," he added.

Avalon recently introduced the ability for consumers to pre-pay for options online.

"By being flexible, this presents a better value proposition," Schweitzer said.

Avalon's river cruises are "often several thousand dollars lower per couple than the two other major river cruise operators", he claimed, but declined to name the companies.



CRUISE EXPRESS

Cruise Express is recognised as a leading specialist cruise agency and is looking for passionate, fun-loving team players to fill two new positions in their Sydney office

Documentation Specialist

This role requires you to process new and existing group reservations, generate accurate confirmations and invoices, assist with group operations and prepare client documentation.

To apply you must have previous reservations experience, a strong customer service focus, exceptional administration and time management skills and a good working knowledge of Excel. Cruise product knowledge and experience with GDS systems and Tramada Next Gen will also be a distinct advantage.

Accounts Administrator

This role incorporates a range of general accounting tasks including reconciliation of accounts, debtor and creditor analysis and monthly report preparation and interpretation.

The successful applicant will have a minimum 3-5 years travel accounts experience, strong communication skills, high attention to detail and the ability to meet regular deadlines. A working knowledge of Tramada Next Gen and QuickBooks is strongly preferred.

Email applications in confidence to Meg Hill at meg@cruiseexpress.com.au or call 0418 612 581

NCLH a big hit on NASDAQ

THE first day of NASDAQ stock exchange trading for Norwegian Cruise Line's parent company, Norwegian Cruise Line Holding, last week, went well with shares soaring.

Trading under the symbol NCLH, the shares were floated at US\$19, and closed the day at US\$24.79, up an impressive 30.47%.

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Princesses drop in on agents



PRINCESS Cruises' 'Captains' Rachaelle Tyrrell (business partnership manager) and Meg Koffel (PR manager) delighted a slew of travel agencies across Sydney yesterday, with surprise sales calls.

"It's a really exciting time in cruising," said Koffel.

"Cruising is a success story of tourism, with double digit growth, and it just keeps getting bigger, and Princess will lead the way," she added.

Whilst taking the temperature of travel agencies across Sydney to get a sense of what is selling and what agents are talking about, the duo also used the calls to reinforce the brand's key messages, including Princess' points of difference, such as local departures, Aussie currency onboard and no tipping required.

The ladies were also quick to point out that Princess has scooped up the afta Best Cruise Operator (Australia) award for the past three years running.

Also on the agenda was ensuring agents were aware of the brand's '100% Relaxation, Rejuvenation, Exploration' campaign, whereby cruisers can save between 10% and 35% off a selection of NZ, South Pacific, Asia, Australia, European or Alaskan voyages.

The cruise line is also offering, for a limited time, a free balcony upgrade.

Alan Edwards, manager at Flight Centre Epping is pictured above between Tyrrell (left) and Koffel (right).

Serving up a Royal dinner

ROYAL Caribbean's newest online video is titled 'Plating for the Palate: Royal Caribbean Serves Up Sensational in the Main Dining Room', and is available to view by **CLICKING HERE**.

HK terminal open soon

HONG Kong's cruise market is on a rising tide with city's brand new US\$1b Kai Tak cruise terminal set to be commissioned mid-June.

According to HK's Commissioner for Tourism, Philip Yung the new terminals' iconic design will not only make it a landmark in Victoria Harbour, but will take cruise travel to a whole new level.

He said it can berth the world's largest cruise vessels, two big ships at once in the 850m long terminal, and its highly efficient pax clearance and baggage handling facilities aim to provide the quickest possible convenience and efficiency for guests.

Pax will also be able to see unrivalled views of the Harbour from a special viewing area on the roof of the terminal.

Yung said Hong Kong is fully geared-up to welcome cruise ships of all sizes and travellers from anywhere in the world.

Protector when you need one

THE British Royal Navy has come to the aid of Hurtigruten's 276-guest *MV Fram*, after the latter became at risk of getting trapped in thick ice off the coast of Antarctica.

According to a statement from the Navy, the *HMS Protector* spent two hours guiding *Fram* to safety.

"Ice breaker *HMS Protector* broke through the densely packed ice which had surrounded the *MV Fram*, blocking her path and trapping the bow, as she carried passengers through the Antarctic Sound," the statement said.

Speaking in the wake of the incident Commanding Officer of *HMS Protector*, Captain Peter Sparkes, said "This is what we do in the Ice Patrol Ship, we are the Royal Navy's equivalent of a Swiss Army Knife – red, versatile and always there when you need us".



PASSENGERS aboard a routine ferry service on the Tangalooma Express had an unlikely visitor in the form of a seal, who jumped onto the boat's back platform as a crafty method of avoiding a shark who had designs on the seal for that evening's dinner.

The seal, which was showing evidence of bite marks on its neck and back, playfully jumped on and off the boat to the delight of onboard passengers.

Marine authorities were called and checked over the seal, who they were surprised to see in warm waters as seals usual haunts are in much colder waters than those provided by sunny Qld.

After receiving the all clear from marine experts, the seal was then released back into the wild in the hope that he will find his way back to his home.

To see a video of the seal upon its entry onto the deck, click on www.bit.ly/sealboat.

Destiny loses thrusters

THRUSTER problems have forced itinerary changes to *Carnival Destiny's* current five-day Caribbean cruise, which departed 21 Jan.

The voyage will not be calling at Grand Turk and Half Moon Cay as scheduled, but will instead call at Key West and Freeport.

In a note emailed to guests the cruise line said "Regrettably, neither Grand Turk nor Half Moon Cay have the tug boats needed to assist the ship".

The note went further to reassure passengers of that the thruster problem did not compromise ship safety, and added that guests will also receive a US\$50pp onboard credit, whilst pre-booked excursions at the cancelled ports would receive a full refund.

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