Carnival wi-fi growth

AFFORDABLE new onboard internet packages will be rolled out across the entire Carnival Corporation fleet as part of a major bandwidth upgrade.

Already available on 30 ships and expected to be in place on 40% of the fleet by year’s end, Carnival said it would expand to the “majority” of its 101-ship fleet across ten brands by Dec 2016.

Carnival said the enhanced “WiFi@Sea” system is faster and more reliable, even when at sea. Plans will be priced based on usage, with social media-only plans at a low fee (CW 04 Nov 14).

Carnival said trials have resulted in increased guest satisfaction and higher usage rates.

Norwegian office opens

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line Holdings today formally debuted its new Australian office, having assembled a crack team of sales, marketing and operations leaders headed up by Steve Odell, former SilverSea vp Europe and Asia Pacific.

Harry Sommer (pictured with Odell), who’s NCL’s executive vice president of international business development, is in Sydney to kick off the operation which will grow to about 40 people over the next few months.

A local call centre is being established in the Sydney CBD, covering all three brands: Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas.

Lisa Pile, formerly executive director of Global Luxury Sales for Fairmont Raffles Hotels, will head up sales for Oceania and Regent Seven Seas, while Norwegian/Star veteran Nicole Costantin will look after the Norwegian brand as vice president of sales Australia/NZ.

Ben Angell, formerly with Royal Caribbean and then Virgin Australia, is vice president of marketing across all three brands, while Elizabeth Krstevski, ex The Cruise Team, is manager of operations and the contact centre.

Australia is already in the top three markets for each brand, so having a local presence absolutely makes sense, Odell told CW today.

Today’s launch is just the first step, with the local call centre expected to go live early in Dec, while the Australasian focus will see brochures with A$ and NZ$ pricing, and a much stronger engagement with the retail travel trade to significantly boost the company’s distribution.

More from Norwegian in next Tue’s issue of Cruise Weekly.

Look inside Azamara

RENDERINGS showcasing the forthcoming onboard concept on Azamara Club Cruises have been released by the line this week.

As part of the “Reimagine Azamara” project, a top-to-toe revitalisation will see the ships take on an “oasis at sea” look, utilising the expertise from some of the world’s leading interior design consultants.

Alongside the designers, Azamara participated in a detailed process to select colours along with furnishings & fabrics. Azamara Club Cruises president and ceo Larry Pimentel said the line was excited about digging into every aspect of its onboard offering during the dry dock.

“Keeping all areas of our ships contemporary in design as well as offering services and amenities that match is paramount.”

Azamara Journey will enter drydock in the Bahamas in Jan, with sister Azamara Quest being upgraded in Singapore next Apr. For a full tour of the reworked ship’s renderings, CLICK HERE.
Wave season 2015/16 is go!

TUESDAY’S arrival of Princess Cruises’ mega-liner *Diamond Princess* into Sydney Harbour has officially kicked off the 2015/16 wave season of Carnival Australia. The 2,706-passenger vessel’s stop at the Overseas Passenger Terminal was the first of 170 port calls by Carnival Corporation family ships to Sydney until the end of Apr next year - part of a total 538 calls Australia-wide.

The number of turnaround visits and transit calls are a 21% increase on last year’s season. A total of 22 ships spanning seven of the company’s ten lines will tie up in Sydney over the course of the season - nearly a quarter of its entire global fleet. Combined, they will transport more than 530,000 passengers over the busy summer peak.

Carnival Australia chief executive Ann Sherry said that labelling the 2015/16 season as another record summer cruise season would not be an understatement.

“In 2005-2006, we heralded a bumper cruise season with 10 ships from across our fleets sailing locally and making 141 calls to Australian ports.

“A decade on, the number of ships has more than doubled and the number of local calls has more than tripled,” Sherry said.

Among the seasonal summer visitors this season will be *Golden Princess, Carnival Legend*, three from Holland America Line, two P&O Cruises World Cruising ships, one Seabourn vessel and all three Cunard Queens on world voyages.

Carnival Australia launched its season with a grand soiree at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney - see page three for more.

Blend wine on HAL

GUESTS on Holland America Line’s new *MS Koningsdam* will be able to partake in the art of winemaking as an activity when the ship debuts in Apr next year.

Described as the only purpose-built wine-blending venue at sea, guests will be able to create their own drop from a selection of five barrels and then enjoy it at dinner or within their staterooms.

Wine blending sessions will be held daily for a nominal fee.

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CARNIVAL Australia ceo Ann Sherry had a mighty big rival for attention this week at the cruise giant’s season launch at the Museum of Contemporary Art, overlooking Circular Quay.

Speaking to media at the launch (see page three), Sherry was greeting attendees when, right on cue, the sailaway party for *Diamond Princess* chose that very moment to get going.

With a typically energetic cruise director revving up over 2,000 guests onboard, little did she know she was talking right over the top of her local boss.

The situation provided the perfect illustration of the excitement surrounding the launch of another cruise season.

As is often the case, the louder you talk, the louder your surroundings also become, and as Sherry continued, the music and entertainment kicked things into another gear.

Sherry is pictured with the noisy *Diamond Princess* behind.
Power of cruising

WESTERN Australia is leading the nation in terms of growth in the cruise sector, with visiting ships generating 1275 3 million in 2014/15, a $135 million increase on the previous year.

To capitalise on this growth, Tourism WA and the WA Cruise Committee is implementing a cruise shipping strategy focusing on marketing the state as a world-class cruise destination.

As part of this strategy, in 2015/16, Tourism WA (a Platinum member of CDU) will host cruise education workshops; The Cruise Ready workshops provide insights into how tourism businesses can tap into the cruise market, and the Welcoming Cruise Passengers to the West workshops deliver training to support tour guides and volunteers.

CDU will assist other states to roll out similar programs, with a focus on regional destinations.

Busselton, in the Margaret River region, has set the benchmark as a new cruise destination with a scheduled visit by Queen Mary 2 for Feb 2017.

Margaret River has also received federal government funding to construct a new landing platform on the Busselton Jetty to improve the passenger experience.

With support from CDU, Tourism WA also commissioned research earlier this year to gain feedback from passengers on their experiences during cruise ship visits to the destination as they embarked on the Diamond Princess and Dawn Princess. A staggering 100% of cruise passengers surveyed reported a positive overall experience during their visit. What a fantastic result!

QMJ refurb details

ALL 172 “Grills Suites” on board the Queen Mary 2 will be restyled to maximise space as part of a major refurbishment project being undertaken by Cunard next May (CW 16 Jul).

Suites will have new carpet along with elegant textures and fittings inspired by rugs from the original Queen Mary liner, while restaurants will also be upgraded.

SuperShuttle cruise

SHARED ride firm SuperShuttle is now able to transport guests flying into Orlando, Florida to the Port Canaveral cruise terminal. Fares for the sector start from $US35 one way or $60 return, a potential cost saving of up to 75%.

Freighter taking pax

PASSENGERS are now being welcomed onto a freighter ship chartered by MSC Cruises freight division for regular voyages from Europe to Australia via the Suez.

The MSC Monterey can carry six guest cabins on the 91-day roundtrip, leaving about four times a year. Mauritius and Réunion will be visited on the southbound trip & back via Singapore and Colombo.

Sherry & her band of merry men

CARNIVAL Australia boss Ann Sherry, along with executives and senior management from many of the corporation’s seven locally represented lines were on hand on Tue to see in the new season.

The cruising giant hosted guests to a gathering at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, which overlooked the season’s first visitor, Diamond Princess, as it sailed away to New Zealand.

Sherry told attendees it was just the start of a massive cruise season for Carnival and Australia.

“We celebrate with Diamond Princess, because she is emblematic of the ships which are now coming into Sydney. “Bigger, brassier, but really, she arrived full of international guests, she leaves today with a mix of international and domestic travellers heading around New Zealand,” she added.

The Carnival boss implored every cruise enthusiast in and near Sydney to put 25 Nov into their diaries, with the induction of Pacific Aria & Pacific Eden into the P&O Cruises fleet sure to be a spectacle for the harbour. Sherry is pictured above centre with Stuart Allison, Princess Cruises; Sture Myrmell, P&O Cruises Australia; Tony Archbold, Holland America Line/Seabourn & Anton Loeb, Carnival Cruise Line.

Wellness on Celebrity

A RANGE of new healthy living shore excursions have been launched by Celebrity Cruises, designed by best-selling author & businesswoman Randi Zuckerberg.

Dubbed ‘Take Care of Yourself’, the range includes activities such as stand-up paddleboarding in Ibiza, canoeing in Naples, cycling in Falmouth, visiting a mineral spa facility in Melbourne and more.

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Website: www.cruiseweekly.com.au | Phone: 1300 799 220 | Fax: 1300 799 221 | Email: info@cruiseweekly.com.au

Editor: Bruce Piper info@cruiseweekly.com.au
Contributors: Matt Lennon, Guy Dundas, Jenny Piper, Jasmine O'Donoghue
Advertising and Marketing: Sean Harrigan and Magda Herdzik
Business Manager: Jenny Piper accounts@cruiseweekly.com.au
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