

### Cruise Weekly today

**CRUISE Weekly** today features three pages of all the latest cruise industry news.

### Solution ahead?

**AMSTERDAM** has revealed it will introduce a river ship quota starting next year, as part of the city's ongoing efforts to combat overtourism.

While the exact number is still being determined, city officials previously announced intentions to cap river cruise calls at 1,150 per year by 2028 (**CW** 26 Apr 2024).

The European River Cruise Association is currently working to reach a compromise with the Netherlands capital, which it believes could mean docking in the city during set time periods.

"We can perfectly manage that," said Robert Verbeek, an association board member.

"River cruising could be a solution and is not part of the problem," he emphasised.

Amsterdam welcomed nearly 2,000 river ship calls in 2024, city officials noted.

### Waterslide lawsuit

A **PASSENGER** injured falling through a broken acrylic waterslide panel on Royal Caribbean's *Icon of the Seas* last week has engaged attorneys and is planning to sue for compensation.

## Princess commits to Oz

**PRINCESS** Cruises has no plans to follow Cunard, Virgin Voyages and Disney Cruise Line out of Australia, saying it is "absolutely committed as the oldest cruise line now operating in Australia".

Speaking to **Cruise Weekly** at the NZCA conference in Napier this week, newly minted Princess Cruises Vice President Asia-Pacific, Matthew Rutherford, said the line is even looking to expand in the local market.

"We've got a depth of passengers that love the brand, so we're still looking to be here and expand when we can.

"We just want to work with our stakeholders on getting our operating costs realistic and it's not just New Zealand, it's Sydney [too] and it's another area we're going to work on," he added.

Rutherford (**pictured**) said there are developments in the pipeline on how both Princess Cruises and cruise lines in general aim to work better and more efficiently with port authorities and regulatory bodies around the region.

Addressing delegates at the NZCA conference, Rutherford urged New Zealand to pay close attention to how Japan operates its cruising sector as a potential source of knowledge, as the country deals with a range of regulatory issues (**CW** 14 Aug).

Princess last week unveiled its biggest-ever Japan season, which will run from Mar-Dec 2027 (**CW** 08 Aug) and feature *Sapphire*



*Princess and Diamond Princess.*

Rutherford said there were several helpful takeaways for New Zealand as it relates to Japan, particularly with operating costs.

"For cost side, I mean, it's just low, it's substantially low, five times lower - it's not even in the ballpark of this region," Rutherford stressed.

"And it's not just the big ports - the little mum and pop ports - everyone's out there competing for business.

"So what's different is that they're all incentivising cruise to come and they see the value of tourism to their economy, and they're all working really hard to get the tourists into their region, to benefit from it, and then the government is over the top, guiding the process, making sure everyone wins," Rutherford said.

"It's fair, equal, it's a very collaborative approach to growing cruise tourism, and then talking about growing cruise tourism, we just added another ship to our deployment.

"It'll be the biggest Japan season ever done, and Princess will be the biggest brand operating out of Japan." **ML**

### CCL is note-perfect

"**THE** most family-friendly water park at sea" will headline Carnival Cruise Line's new ship *Carnival Festivale*, which will debut from Orlando's Port Canaveral in 2027/2028 (**CW** 07 Apr).

The new Excel-class ship will sail six- and eight-day Caribbean cruises from Florida's Space Coast, with reservations open now.

Music has inspired unique experiences across a number of the new Carnival ship's key zones, including the Studio 724 live entertainment venue, and the brightly coloured Festival promenade zone.

Meanwhile, the three-deck-high Sunsation Point is anchored by Carnival WaterWorks Ultra, *Festivale's* flagship water park, the biggest in Carnival history.

The family-focused ship will feature 1,000 interconnecting rooms, nearly 70% more than the first three Excel-class vessels, and will introduce a dedicated space for Carnival's Turtles program for children six months to two years.

There will also be more experiences for *Festivale's* youngest cruisers on the open decks, while all youth spaces will be boosted.

Itineraries during *Festivale's* maiden season will include destinations such as Amber Cove, St. Thomas, and more.

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### Como back to Arctic

**COMO** Hotels & Resorts has announced the return of its 'Como Journey: Into the Arctic' for 2026 (**CW** 18 Oct 2024).

The itinerary debuted this year, and two more will now be scheduled for 2026, in May and Sep.

Operated in partnership with Natural World Safaris, the journey offers travellers the opportunity to explore Svalbard aboard *Polarfront* - a former Norwegian weather ship transformed into an Arctic expedition vessel.

The ship accommodates just 12 guests in seven suites, and also features a sauna and a hot tub.

Expeditioners will depart on 'Arctic Safaris', exploring ice-filled fjords, snow-capped peaks, and remote islands via Zodiac and land excursions.

They will witness polar bears, walrus, whales, Arctic foxes, and Svalbard reindeer in their natural habitat; while gaining exclusive insights through onboard lectures, photography workshops, as well as discussions on Arctic ecology, sustainability, and culture.

The journey will also feature elements of Como's Shambhala Wellness experience, allowing guests to rejuvenate onboard with treatments from expert bodyworker Matteo Pasquali - more info on the cruise **HERE**.

## New RCG res to arrive in '26

**ROYAL** Caribbean Group's (RCG) new iTravel Cruise reservations platform (**CW** 10 Jun) is set to begin rolling out in 2026, President & Chief Executive Officer Jason Liberty has revealed.

The admission is so far the most concrete timing the company has given for the debut of the highly anticipated development.

The iTravel Cruise platform - not affiliated with the similarly named travel agency network - is being built by IBS Software, and will be rolled out in Australia, Senior Vice President Sales & Trade Relations Vicki Freed confirmed to **Cruise Weekly** earlier this year.

Liberty, speaking on board the new *Star of the Seas* (pictured) this week, said the technology is being looked at by RCG as a wholesale "travel platform", rather than just a new reservation system, which will allow advisors to add on more to bookings than just the cruise itself.

"It is our plan to begin to launch that new reservation system in the middle of next year," Liberty told advisors in a panel session, to much applause.

Liberty said the system will first roll out to Silversea, before a potential rollout on Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruises next year but more likely in 2027.

"As you can imagine, when you're doing this, it's not going to be a light switch kind of situation...you want to make sure as you replace the heart that [the



body is] fully stabilised."

It will be available in a wide range of currencies and languages, with one of RCG's key considerations being the simplification of group bookings.

Freed yesterday likened the new platform to the "Amazon of booking technology", with advisors wishing to book supplementary products, such as cabanas on Royal's private destinations, able to do so at the point of sale, rather than being forced to switch booking systems.

Liberty said the software has also taken the future heavily into consideration, with the build taking a "Lego blocks" approach, allowing RCG to bolt on changes and updates, as opposed to being forced to reconstruct the technology from scratch.

"It's that journey to make sure we're incorporating as much as we possibly can, as well as thinking through the vacation economy as the world continues to evolve," he said. *MS*



On location on board  
*Star of the Seas*

Today's issue of **CW** is coming to you courtesy of Royal Caribbean, which is this week hosting us on board the inaugural voyage of *Star of the Seas*.

**ROYAL** Caribbean's brand-new *Star of the Seas* is making her first-ever port call today, at the cruise line's private Bahamian island, Perfect Day at CocoCay.

However, the celebrations kicked off in earnest last night, with lucky trade guests from around the world treated to a cocktail party, and tastings from *Star's* variety of specialty dining venues.

Today will see passengers disembark to explore CocoCay's 10 unique districts.

### Godmother switch

**ROYAL** Caribbean is scrambling to announce another godmother for its new *Star of the Seas*, after Diana Ross cancelled her appearance just days before the naming ceremony (**CW** 06 Jun).

The American singer withdrew due to "unforeseen circumstances", with the cruise line now on the hunt for a replacement ahead of the ship's christening on 20 Aug.



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**LIFE** onboard cruise ships for entertainer James Bustar must never be dull, especially when passing through ship security, but he takes it in his stride.

Self-described as Australia's most chaotic and hilarious juggling comedian, Bustar recently shared with **Cruise Weekly** some of his more outrageous encounters, particularly the "looks of sheer terror" on the faces of security officials as he tried to get his props through the x-ray.

Bustar once endured a six-hour customs detention in Singapore after his juggling props were confiscated, which only ended once he filed court paperwork to get them back.

Conversely, he was bemused by the irony of Japan port officials happily allowing three sharp axes onboard, classed as 'tools of the trade', but then panicking at the sight of Bustar's juggling knives.

But perhaps his best story came when the entertainer accidentally hit a man in the front row of the audience with his juggling club, only to later find out the man was blind.

Approaching the audience member afterwards to say sorry, the impacted guest had the last laugh by saying "it's alright, I didn't see it coming".

Bustar is a regular entertainer who can often be found on Royal Caribbean or NCL ships.

## Viking playing agents' tunes



**PREMIUM** cruise line Viking recently hosted select agents from TravelManagers in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne to exclusive dress rehearsals of the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra and acrobatic ensemble Circa in the lead up to their performance, *The Art of the Fugue*.

After watching as the acrobats contorted their bodies on stage accompanied by musicians, agents were treated to a banquet dinner, where they connected and chatted about the show over a delicious meal.

The event was an example of a Viking Privileged Access shore experience, giving travel agents the opportunity to experience these shore excursions first-hand and have the ability to share them with clients in the future.

Other examples of Viking Privileged Access events include visiting seldom-seen collections with before- and after-hours access to world-class museums, or having access to private homes and palaces not typically open to the general public.

These include a behind-the-scenes tour of the Munch Museum with art educators and museum directors or visiting

Highclere Castle, where *Downton Abbey* is filmed.

"This unique experience was made possible through our valued collaboration with Viking Cruises, a partnership we're incredibly proud of," said Kellie Woodward, business leader at Travel Associates Kew. **JHM**

"Together, we aim to offer our clients more than just holidays, we create unforgettable moments that go far beyond the ordinary."

**Pictured** at City Recital Hall after the Sydney performance is Michelle Michael-Pecora, Julie Painter, Elyse Palmer, Michelle Lehn, Jennifer Jones, Kim Mason, and Antonella Damiano.

## Tauk out to roam

**TWELVE** new itineraries by land, river and small ship aimed at travellers aged in their 40s and 50s will feature in a new brand launched by upscale guided firm Tauk.

Bookings for the 'Roam by Tauk' range will open by the end of 2025, with departures for five itineraries ready in 2026 and the remaining seven beginning a year later.

The small group tours will cover six continents, range in length from five to 11 nights, and be priced similarly to Tauk's higher-end tour range.

Guests can expect the flexibility to personalise, active options, and a 'half-on, half-off' approach that balances signature experiences with plenty of time to explore or unwind independently.

Optional excursion offerings include hot-air ballooning over the pyramids of Teotihuacan, dining inside a private Gastronomic Society in San Sebastian, and canoeing beneath Dordogne's castles.



## On Board: *Star of the Seas* AquaDome Market

Royal Caribbean's new *Star of the Seas* introduces an updated food hall, the AquaDome Market, as cruise lines up their grab-and-go game. This ship's iteration offers five unique food stands, including a taste of barbecue, Thai, South American favourites, and more. There is plenty available for sweet teeth also, such as fresh crepes.