

Australian Star's debut on the horizon

EXCLUSIVE

MURRAY River Paddlesteamers' five-star overnight riverboat, *Australian Star* (pictured), is on track to debut this summer, after sailing on the Murray River for the first time last week, **Cruise Weekly** can exclusively reveal.

After 32 months of construction on the banks of the Murray in Mildura, the 220-tonne riverboat sailed 748km upstream to Torrumbarry Weir near Echuca, where she arrived on 30 Nov.

Final works will begin on the paddlesteamer over the next two months, which will see the upper deck completed and all cabins and public areas fitted out before she begins her program of three-, four-, and seven-night cruises in Feb 2026.



A formal christening ceremony will be held the following month.

"Seeing *Australian Star* pass safely through the Torrumbarry Weir was a tremendous relief, especially given the lower-than-expected water levels," said Murray River Paddlesteamers Director, Craig Burgess.

"It marks the culmination of a 2.5-year journey involving more than 80 Victorian suppliers and craftsmen who have poured their skill, passion and dedication into bringing this remarkable vessel to life," he added.

Speaking on the milestone,

Minister for Tourism Sport & Major Events Steve Dimopoulos, said: "*Australian Star* is a game-changer for regional tourism.

"This world-class, five-star paddlesteamer will not only celebrate the heritage of the Murray River but also attract visitors from across Australia and overseas...delivering significant economic benefits for Victoria."

Murray River Paddlesteamers has announced savings of 15% on any three, four or seven-night sailing aboard *Australian Star* from Echuca in 2026 or 2027, for bookings made by 31 Dec. JM

Parton to lead PR

CELESTYAL has announced the appointment of Janet Parton as Vice President of Marketing, PR and Customer Experience, taking over from Anna Gregori (**CW** 27 Oct).

Parton moves into the role immediately from her previous position as VP of Business Development and Managing Director of Celestyal Travel.

Cruise Weekly today

Cruise Weekly today features three pages of all the latest cruise news.



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— Carla Vassallo, Personal Travel Manager, NSW



Missing pax found

AN AMERICAN woman who went missing during a HAL cruise was found alive over a week after her disappearance.

The woman, who had failed to return to the ship, was found in a Caribbean hotel.



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CRUISE WEEKLY

On location on board
Noordam

Today's issue of *Cruise Weekly* is coming to you courtesy of Holland America Line, aboard its **Noordam**.

WE'RE now cruising up the eastern Australian coast, heading for Melbourne tomorrow and then our final destination, Sydney, where we will disembark on the weekend.

Last night our group enjoyed dinner at Canaletto, another specialty restaurant, where Holland America serves Italian classics including pasta made fresh daily.

Guests have also been making the most of the onboard entertainment, with one of the standouts being the Rolling Stone Rock Bar where RSL favourites are played in several daily sessions by the highly skilled onboard band.

ACA farewells 2025 in style



LAST night, the Australian Cruise Association (ACA) threw a soiree at the Opera House to farewell the end of 2025 and celebrate the midway point of the 2025/26 cruise season.

"It hasn't been the easiest year, but I think that we've ended it on a positive note," ACA CEO Jill Abel told *Cruise Weekly*.

"We're really focused and quite united between the cruise lines, CLIA and the ACA and the direction that we want to enhance the industry and take it to the next level, so it's a nice way to end the year.

"Mostly I think everyone works so hard, so it's nice just to share a bit of friendship, and that's what keeps us all bound together.

Meanwhile, Port of Brisbane's Brenden Connell, newly elected ACA Chair, noted the association's major focus next year on working with governments, the Cruise

Lines International Association and the wider industry, as the organisation develops a positioning paper on how ACA members view the sector and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

"We'll put those views to government and ask them to give us some help and support so that we can keep doing what we do, which is generate economic activities in towns and cities across Australia and of course, businesses," he said.

"It's a very busy time for the cruise industry, so good luck - I'm confident it will be a successful year for the industry - have a great Christmas and a really prosperous 2026." JHM

Pictured: Viking's Jane Moggridge and Jo Harris with Abel (centre) greeted *Viking Orion* as she sailed by during last night's event.

Sonata goes for two

TWO "chef-driven passion projects" will debut aboard Oceania Cruises' *Oceania Sonata*, as hinted at in *CW* late last month (*CW* 18 Nov).

La Table par Maitres Cuisiniers de France will seat just 18 guests and offer an intimate and elegant dining experience, featuring a rotation of menus crafted by Oceania's two Executive Culinary Directors, Chefs Alexis Quaretti and Eric Barale.

This venue will also be serve as the reprisal of Oceania's famed Dom Perignon Experience, a six-course tasting menu paired with three vintage champagnes.

Meanwhile, Nikkei Kitchen will bring passengers the chance to indulge in dishes inspired by the blending of Peruvian ingredients and Japanese technique.

Nikkei cuisine is identified through distinctive dishes marked by fresh seafood, bright citrus, soy-based sauces and spicy peppers, with Chef Gustavo Sugay to work alongside Quaretti and Barale on the development of the venue's menu.

Sugay has previously worked alongside the Oceania team to bring a collection of 12 innovative Nikkei dishes to the line's signature pan-Asian restaurant, Red Ginger, in the past 12 months.

Polishing Jade & Gem

NORWEGIAN Cruise line's *Norwegian Jade* and *Norwegian Gem* are set to undergo dry dock enhancements next year.

The two ships will receive revitalisations over a three-week period in Apr-May, according to reports.



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THE Muppets are set to appear on Disney Cruise Line, according to whispers on fan pages dedicated to the brand. Although no official announcement has been made from Disney, there is speculation the popular cast of puppets will be making their way to the high seas.

The Muppets are featured virtually in the Midship Detective Agency game on *Disney Fantasy*, and in 2006, they starred as live characters in the *Muppets Ahoy!* stage show on *Disney Wonder*.

The live Muppet show *Two Guys and a Few Muppets* was also performed on the maiden voyage of *Disney Treasure*.



Atlas 27-28 season

ATLAS Ocean Voyages has announced its 2027-28 Antarctica season, which includes 23 new expeditions, as well as more 'fly the Drake' options, and bonuses including air credit.

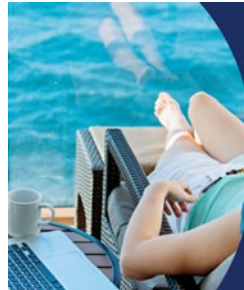
The new 2027/28 Antarctic program will see two of the cruise line's expedition ships, *World Navigator* and *World Traveller*, which accommodate less than 200 guests each, offer expedition packages to the great white continent from nine to 13 nights.

This season's program features a record six expeditions that enable guests to cross the Drake Passage by air instead of sea, with travellers flying from Chile to King George Island in the South Shetland Islands.

The new program also includes two festive sailings.

All-inclusive fares start from US\$10,498 per person, based on twin share occupancy.



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Meet the crew

Cruise Weekly speaks with Holland America Line's Niek van der Kolk.

Job title: Hotel General Manager aboard: *Noordam*

Home country: The Netherlands but now I live in South Africa.

How long have you been working on cruise ships? Since 2009.

When did you join Holland America Line? I've worked for this company my whole cruising career, starting as a waiter at the Pinnacle Grill and then I studied International Hospital Management and Business Administration to work my way up into my current role.

What's the best thing about working aboard *Noordam*? Just look out the window - the ocean, our fantastic itineraries and all the regions we visit. I also love the diversity of my job, all of the different nationalities on board and learning so much from their culture and religions. There's definitely never a dull moment.

What is your favourite cruising destination? I have to say New Zealand. I visited for the first time in 2014 and again just recently, and it's just so beautiful. It's a young country, with spectacular scenery, beaches, wineries, skiing and snowboarding and lovely people. I said I'd love to live there one day, but my wife is South African and so that's where we are now.

Explain what your job is day to day: Put simply, making our guests happy. I spend most of my time in guest-facing areas, but there are also a lot of aspects behind the scenes - everything including safety, supplies, making sure all the machinery is working. Our equipment needs to be maintained, we need to be ready to adapt when things change, and we constantly work hard to meet and exceed our guests' expectations.

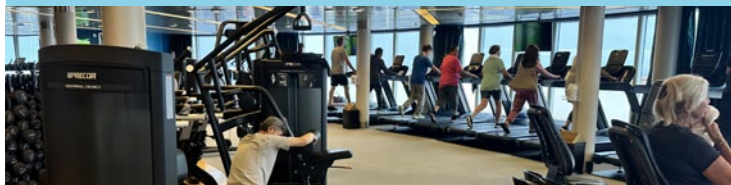
What do you enjoy most about your job? I find the strategic aspects fascinating, planning ahead for every possibility. I also love the diversity of our guests who are different depending on the itinerary we're undertaking, making sure we are ready to meet any challenges head-on.

Who is the most famous person you have served? I think it would have to be Princess Margriet of the Netherlands, the sister of the late Queen Beatrix.

How do you spend your time at home? I like to hike, spend time with family and friends and play with my three-year-old son.



CRUISE WEEKLY On Board: MS Noordam



The Fitness Centre

Adjacent to the Greenhouse Spa & Salon, the large fitness centre aboard Holland America Line's *Noordam* is equipped with state-of-the-art workout machines and weights. The professionally staffed facility also offers a wide array of classes such as yoga, indoor cycling and Pilates, while other exercise options include the Pickleball court and Promenade Deck.



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