

Cruise Weekly today

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Princess marks commitment to Oz

PRINCESS celebrated its 50th anniversary cruising across Australia on the weekend, with the arrival of *Discovery Princess* into Sydney Harbour last week marking the line's commitment to the region.

Discovery has since departed for a 14-day round-trip New Zealand itinerary, calling into Milford Sound, Dunedin, Picton, Tauranga, and Auckland, before returning to Sydney where she will be home ported until 07 Apr.

By the 2026-2027 season, *Royal Princess* and *Grand Princess* will also be home porting in Australia.

The following year, *Sapphire Princess* will home port in Western Australia.

"We've been here for 50 years, so in many ways, we've grown as Australia has grown," Princess Cruises President Gus Antorcha said, speaking exclusively to **Cruise Weekly**.

"We have wonderful, loyal guests, who enjoy our product and we have demand from that following, so it makes sense for us to deploy ships here - we have year round capacity, and then we have seasonal capacity," he said.

Built in 2022, the Royal-Class *Discovery Princess* is the cruise line's newest ship to ever be home ported out of Australia, and offers local passengers new capacity, hardware and features - a reflection of the importance of the local market to the cruise line, Antorcha said.

In the last couple of years, a number of cruise lines have left Australia, including Disney Cruise Line (**CW** 10 Aug 2024), Cunard Line (**CW** 03 Nov 2023) and Virgin Voyages (**CW** 27 Feb 2024), while local brand P&O Cruises Australia has now been folded into Carnival (**CW** 04 Jun 2024).

Antorcha conceded Australia

has some challenges and that markets have their ups and downs, but he felt positive about the growing potential of the Australian market and its importance to Princess.

"We look forward to continuing our strong partnerships with state and federal governments, supporting the cruise industry's growth and delivering economic benefits to local communities across Australia," he said.

Antorcha also noted the line's growing focus on the wider Asia Pacific region, with a third of the Princess fleet to be based there by 2026-2027.

"We announced earlier this year that we'll be deploying a second ship to Japan - Southeast Asia is the counter season to Japan - so Australia is poised to see more of our capacity and growth as the region as a whole becomes more important to us," he said. *JHM*



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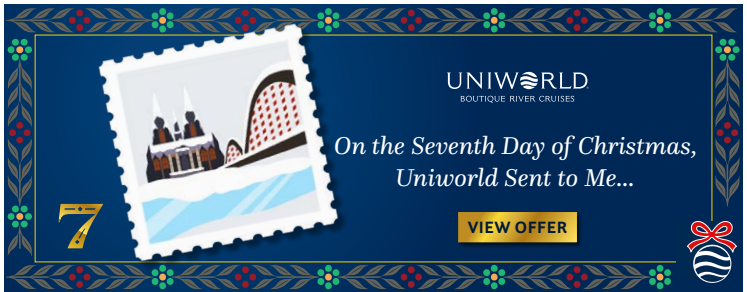
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Regent to debut new epicurean space

REGENT Seven Seas Cruises has revealed new immersive culinary experiences which will be available on *Seven Seas Mariner* and *Seven Seas Voyager*.

The new Epicurean Enrichment Studio (pictured), a state-of-the-art culinary theatre, will debut on board both ships, offering a range of food-inspired experiences.

Created by Kathryn Kelly, Executive Chef and Director of Culinary Enrichment, the Epicurean Enrichment Studio will debut aboard *Mariner* on her 2026 World Cruise next month, and on *Voyager* from May.

The space's programming will include the Epicurean Passport Series, which will be the cornerstone of the new venue.

Guests will enjoy immersive lectures focusing on the culinary history, signature ingredients, and recipes from the destinations the cruise line visits.



It will also offer exclusive culinary experiences across more than 20 distinct regions including Polynesia, Southeast Asia, Iberia, India, and Patagonia.

Participants will receive a keepsake passport stamped upon completing each culinary region, along with illustrated recipes.

The venue will also hold chef-hosted dining experiences, by invitation only, seating no more than eight guests.

Each evening begins with a cocktail hour and culinary insights into the different cuisines served on board, led by the cruise line's culinary teams. *MS*

New French tax

THE French Senate has voted in favour of a new €15 per passenger tax (around A\$26) for cruise ships.

Local news network *Euronews* reported the new levy is expected to follow a "polluter pays" model, which seeks to transfer both pollution and prevention costs onto the polluters themselves.

The National Assembly will now consider the motion before it can be passed into law, with a decision expected later this month.

Estimates place an annual value on the new levy at €75 million per year.

France has become increasingly cruise-negative in recent years, with the resort city of Cannes announcing a ban of all cruise ships carrying more than 1,000 passengers from next year.



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A COUPLE'S cruise honeymoon was saved by none other than Chief Executive Officer of Royal Caribbean, Michael Bayley.

A man and his wife, posting on Reddit, told of how they had booked a New Year's cruise with Royal Caribbean, only for an unexpected pregnancy to get in the way.

The wife would've been 23 weeks pregnant at the time of the cruise - slightly too far along for the line's policy.

Royal Caribbean at first said they would not be allowed to pick a new cruise, with medical reschedulings essentially handled case-by-case.

However the couple persisted, even reaching out to CEO Michael Bayley via his publicly available e-mail.

They soon got a call back from Bayley's office, informing them they are being granted a one-year credit for the balance - and a rescued honeymoon.

HLO hails cruise

HELLOWORLD Travel Group General Manager Cruise Steve Brady (**pictured**) hailed the company's cruise line partners for their support and collaboration, while reflecting on the big opportunity available in 2026.

Brady, speaking at a Helloworld Preferred Partners Event in Sydney last week, said the company is already expecting strong growth for next year.

"Strong outbound travel gives us a great opportunity for fly-cruise, which is a core focus in the year ahead," Brady said at the event.

"Our wholesale brands Cruiseco and Creative Cruising continue to perform strongly, and we can return to continuing air land packaging, launching our Signature collection, and building real momentum," he added.



Meet the crew

Cruise Weekly speaks with Holland America Line's **Willem Waltheer**.

Job title: Executive Chef aboard *MS Noordam*

Home country: I was born in Suriname, but now I live in the Philippines.

How long have you been working on cruise ships? Since 2001. I started with Seabourn, then Silversea, then worked shoreside for 15 years before coming back on board with Holland America Line in 2019.

What's the best thing about working aboard MS Noordam? I love the fast-paced environment we are in - not one day is the same as the next. There are 101 people in my team, and I really enjoy helping them achieve their best through planning, management and motivation. When you look at the number of events we cater for, it's just incredible, and when we do a ship turnaround it's a whole new environment that we are creating. Every day is a new day, and I love getting results together. I see myself not as a boss, but a coach and I really love building the capabilities of my team.

What is your favourite cruising destination? My favourite city would have to be Buenos Aires in Argentina. It's a fabulous mix of the modern and historical, with such a variety of neighbourhoods each with their own style and chemistry.

Explain what your job is day-to-day? I start in the morning at about 7:00am in the Lido Market, checking in with my team before a meeting at 7.45am where we make sure things are on track. I look at the requisitions from the team for the following day, making sure they are available and within budget. That's followed by looking at the lunch setups, and then I usually go to the gym for about an hour before a bit of a nap. I look at the future orders coming on board, and also oversee sanitation which is the foundation of everything we do culinary-wise. Before dinner we do a food tasting, and then there are usually a lot of emails to be dealt with. It's busy but I honestly wouldn't know what to do if I had a day off.

Who is the most famous person you've served? An absolute highlight was meeting one of my motor racing idols Arie Luyendyk - also known as "the flying Dutchman". He's an Indy 500 winner and one day I heard he was dining in the Pinnacle Grill! He cruises with HAL quite a lot and we have become friends.

How do you spend your time at home? I spend time with my family - I'm about to become a grandfather. I am a keen golfer, do daily workouts, and of course when I'm home it's my turn to cook.



Burnie on the up

BURNIE will enjoy a strong cruise season in 2025-26, bucking the broader trend of less voyages visiting Australia's rural ports.

Around 20 vessels are scheduled to visit Burnie between Dec and Apr - a 50% increase on the 14 vessels that called last year.

HX Galapagos 27-28

HX HAS announced its 27-28 Galapagos Islands season, with a standalone brochure.

The line has just extended its partnership with local voyage operator Metropolitan Touring by three years, with four standout itineraries offered.

CLICK HERE for more information on the program.



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