



Cruise Weekly today

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

Brent St back again

PERFORMING arts school Brent Street is returning to this year's Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) Awards next week, fresh from its success on *America's Got Talent* last year.

Dozens of talented Brent Street performers will take the stage, in a show that pays tribute to cruise line entertainers around the world.

This year will be the third time Brent Street has led the entertainment at Australian cruise's night of nights, and the first since advancing to the finals of *America's Got Talent* last year, when they performed a routine from last year's CLIA Awards.

AKTG adds two new sales directors

EXCLUSIVE

ABERCROMBIE & Kent Travel Group (AKTG) has expanded its sales roster, as it looks to build out a team to serve as a "one-stop shop" for both the A&K and Crystal Cruises brands.

Cruise Weekly can reveal Anoushka Kudav (pictured left) has been appointed as Sales Director New South Wales/New Zealand, who will join from luxury line Silversea.

Kudav, who begins her new role today, will share the NSW region with incumbent Sales Director Alexa Papoulias, who will also continue to manage the ACT.

Also joining the sales team is Lisa Hunt (pictured right), who started earlier this month, and will look after Victoria & Tas.

She comes to AKTG from APT Travel Group.

Vice President Sales & Partnerships Susan Haberle told



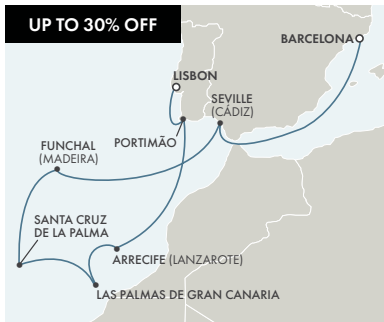
CW AKTG's new-look sales team is the best she has worked with in her career.

"With the increase of the team, that's really increasing our trade support and our commitment to trade, who are super important to this future journey with us and these expansion plans," she said.

"They'll be the one-stop shop for both A&K and Crystal for trade partners," she added.

Travel advisors who book Crystal can now also benefit from AKTG's Connoisseur Club, which will bolster its ranks with top Crystal sellers, having traditionally been focused more on the A&K brand.

"We've increased our membership by 25% in our Connoisseur Club for '25 based on '24 sales, and that criteria now is going to include Crystal sales as well," Haberle added. *MS*



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Applause for *Ovation*

LOCAL leaders have hailed the arrival of Royal Caribbean's *Ovation of the Seas* in Eden last weekend (**CW** yesterday), and cruise's effect on New South Wales' South Coast.

Federal member for Eden-Monaro Kristy McBain said the region is keen for more cruise ship visitors to experience the Sapphire Coast's offerings.

"We want more visitors to support our amazing small businesses and to stimulate our local economy," she told **Cruise Weekly**.

"It's fantastic to see the cruise industry rebounding from COVID-19, because we couldn't be happier welcoming visitors," McBain added.

"Eden has long been a cruise ship destination, and it's one of the only ports where you can actually get off in the township itself."

State member for Bega Michael Holland hailed the Government of NSW's planning modifications, which allowed for ships as large as *Ovation* to call in Eden.

"Our tourism sector is going to benefit from the thousands of passengers who come ashore when these vessels berth in Eden," he said.

"It means more jobs, more revenue for local businesses and more people who'll get to see this very special place for themselves," Holland told **CW**.

Ama lauds year one growth



GROWTH in the first year of the Australian arm of the AmaWaterways business has been lauded by co-owner and VP of Sales, Gary Murphy, in a presentation to delegates of the Virtuoso Forum in Perth.

According to Murphy, the luxury river cruise line is surging beyond initial expectations when it began with Virtuoso.

"We have more business on the books out of Australia and New Zealand for travel this year than we did out of North America in our first year as preferred with Virtuoso," he said yesterday.

"Our first booking out of the Australia and New Zealand market was from a Virtuoso agent," Murphy added.

The AmaWaterways executive suggested that among the many drivers for the business were active vacations, a variety of short excursions, a focus on sustainability - including getting rid of plastic keycards - and locally sourced foods on the ships.

He also pointed to new ships, which will continue to create

growth opportunities while confirming AmaWaterways will maintain its focus on the trade.

"We are trade focused and we believe in paying you a high commission, working with you to drive sales into your office," Murphy said.

"We're not looking into advertising on TV and taking the business rep - if we ever do get a direct booking, just call us up, we'll turn it across to you right up to the final payment.

"You are our bread and butter and we want to keep things alive," he added.

Things were not all rosy for AmaWaterways however.

Delegates noticed the absence of local boss Steve Richards, who was not at the Virtuoso Forum due to a back injury, but Murphy saw the lighter side.

"He threw out his back a couple of days ago, and if you know Steve at six foot five, that is a lot of back to throw out," he quipped.

"But that's where I draw the line, Steve, I'm not helping you get dressed in the morning," **DF**

Virtuoso winning big with cruising

CRUISING has been a significant contributor to Virtuoso's recent success, Senior Vice President of Global Operation, Michael Londregan revealed at the Australia & New Zealand Forum taking place in Perth.

Admitting that it was no secret the business took a huge hit during the pandemic, Londregan said it is now 239% above where it was in 2019 in terms of leisure sales.

"[For] Virtuoso's overall business around the world, we've had great growth in our cruise business up 27%, hotels up 30%, on-sites up 22% and tours up 20% - this is the global number."

The company continues to grow, adding 30 new agents in 2024, including eight locally.

"Our business for '24 is up 17.4% and if you break that down by category, the huge winner for us is cruise," Londregan added.

The figures appear set to continue, with the *Virtuoso Lux* report for 2025 placing adventure cruising as the industry's biggest travel trend, with ocean cruising was sixth.

Meanwhile, destinations that were largely made possible by cruise placed well in the emerging destinations of 2025 list, with Antarctica taking out the number one spot.



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VIRTUOSO Forum Australia and New Zealand has seen all sorts of presentations, as well as some interesting personal development sessions from out-of-the-box leaders.

One such session was from Adam Sellers, a freediver, qualified diving instructor, and mental health advocate, explaining to delegates how they can overcome pressure.

It was obvious that there was one guest in particular who certainly wasn't feeling any pressure about the Forum or having to take the stage.

AmaWaterways' Gary Murphy regaled attendees with an update on the progress of the business just a year after it opened up its Australian office.

Despite the fact he was without local boss Steve Richards, Murphy flew through the presentation with ease.

Maybe he had rehearsed it enough times in front of the mirror, or it was a message Murphy genuinely believed in, but it was a flawless delivery.

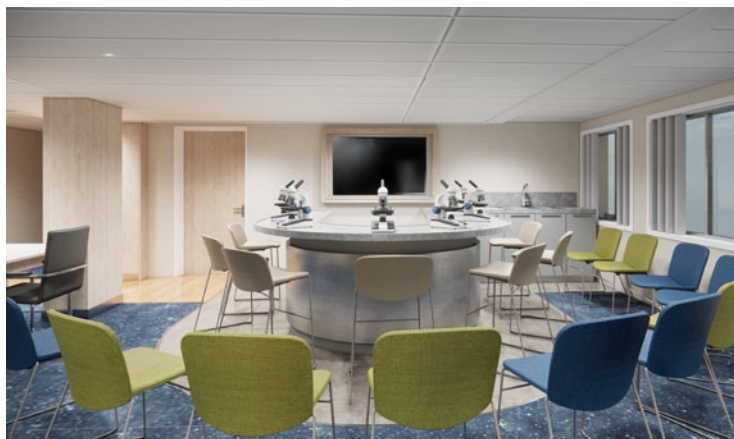
It was only when he reached the end that he realised he actually had a PowerPoint presentation to go with it.

"Ah, I didn't click," he laughed...there's a slide, there's another slide, the story continues, and the end."

Death by Powerpoint?

Not while AmaWaterways is on stage.

Upgrades coming to HX ships



HX WILL spend more than €7 million (A\$11.6 million) on *Fram* and *Spitsbergen* to improve the guest experience and enhance the fleet's operational efficiency.

Drawing on a cash injection from a consortium of investors (**CW** 13 Feb), the ships will undergo their upgrades in Panama and Spain, emerging in Apr and May respectively.

Headlining the changes will be all-new and interactive science centres to help guests engage with the expedition experience.

Polar cabins across both ships will receive new bathrooms, while *Fram* will see twin bed options added to two categories as part of a full refurbishment.

Dining will also be enhanced on both ships, with *Spitsbergen* to introduce a new bistro concept offering snacks through the day and a new design to be introduced at the Explorer Bar.

Fram's Aune restaurant, which specialises in international cuisine, will receive an updated galley and general improvements to boost efficiency.

Accessibility will also be

enhanced, with new interpreter systems allowing guests to listen to lectures and presentations in multiple languages.

HX Chief Executive Officer Gebhard Rainer said the works reflected the cruise line's commitment to a world-class expedition experience.

"From enhanced public spaces to a stronger focus on science and education, these upgrades will elevate every aspect of the journey," Rainer said.

"When guests step aboard in spring 2025, they'll experience a more immersive, comfortable, and seamless adventure - built on our dedication to continuous improvement." *ML*

Mitsui into the US

JAPANESE line Mitsui Ocean Cruises has joined forces with a US-based Virtuoso agent to increase its brand awareness in the US and Canada markets.

The line operates a sole 458-pax ship *Mitsui Ocean Fuji* and is eager to sell directly to cruisers in the region.



Gathering fans of cruise

CLIA'S advocacy work is a key part of our mission, and over the past week we've been busy at a series of events designed to strengthen our cruise community and gain greater recognition of the importance of cruising. This has included events in Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland, each involving industry stakeholders, political leaders and business representatives who help support cruise operations. By joining with our allies in business and key figures in government, our industry is working to ensure a better understanding of cruising's economic importance and the employment it supports. Our cruise line members have helped give this work an extra dimension by hosting guests aboard their ships. Princess Cruises' Royal Princess provided the setting for last week's 'Cruising Means Business' event in Melbourne, while Cunard's newest ship Queen Anne provided the venue for a similar event in Auckland.

Meanwhile in Sydney, CLIA joined a panel discussion with other businesses leaders at a forum hosted by the NSW Taxi Council, for the launch of its Taxi Driver Ambassador Program. Through these advocacy initiatives and others, CLIA and cruise lines are working to ensure we maximise support for cruising

