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APT's food for thought

EXCLUSIVE

APT'S renewed push on the European river cruise market is already paying dividends, with bookings for a trio of new ships close to sold out this year.

Speaking with *Cruise Weekly*, Chief Executive Officer David Cox said the reaction from Australians - the primary source market for the three new vessels - has been "fantastic", and early 2026 sales are also strong.

One of the unique selling points aboard *Ostara*, *Solara* and *Estrela* is the wider variety of dining choices available, with APT pushing the boundaries of what rival river cruise brands have previously offered.

The new vessels have been specifically designed with Australian travellers in mind, providing a potential edge over the crowded and highly competitive European river space.

Cruise Weekly today

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

"We think we have hit the mark in giving our customers what they want, and it makes total sense for the Australian market that for 14 nights on board, they do not want to eat in the main dining room every night," Cox explained.

"The main dining room on these new APT ships cannot fit everybody in, and that hasn't been done before, so guests instead have a choice of six venues and seven dining options."

Cox said so far, Aussies have accounted for 95% of all bookings, and while the current average age of passengers is around 65, the APT chief is confident that in time, the contemporary feels of the new vessels will see a wider demographic begin to book trips.

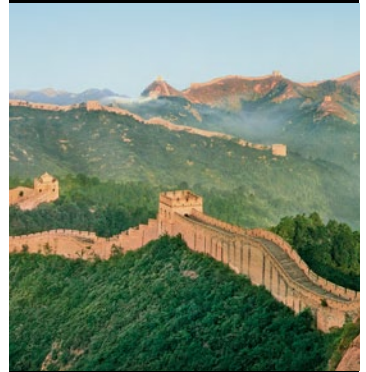
Cox qualified that "it was not a driver" to skew younger than 55, but that with wider dining choices, e-bikes on board, and a diverse list of land excursions, there is a broader age appeal.

Learn more about *Solara* and *Ostara*, which sail the Rhine and Danube [HERE](#), and the Portuguese-based *Estrela* [HERE](#).



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Ahoy marketers

MARKETING leads, CMOs, and business owners across the cruise sector are being called upon to help guide industry operators through the next 12-24 months.

The *FY26 Marketing Roadmap: The Rocky Road Ahead* survey has been crafted by marketing and creative agency Scooter to gain a clearer picture of how the cruise, travel and tourism industries are approaching marketing strategies in FY26.

The aim of the feedback will be to build a clearer picture of the challenges faced within verticals such as cruise, and where opportunities may exist.

Complete the short survey [HERE](#) and help create a more informed future for everyone.

A report using the survey's insights will be available from Jun, with insights to be covered exclusively by **CW**.

HLO cruise grows

HELLOWORLD'S cruise sales have continued to grow strongly over the financial year, with circa 40% growth across its top 20 destinations and cruise lines.

The news is a relative positive for Helloworld, which yesterday updated its reporting expectation to between \$52 million and \$56 million, below the previously stated \$56m to \$62m.

Ponant to Swap2Zero by 2030



EXCLUSIVE

PONANT is still committed to the 2030 delivery of its Swap2Zero net zero project (**CW** 23 Nov 2023), Deputy Chief Executive Officer Global Business Belinda Hindmarsh has told **CW**.

However, the nature of what exactly will take to the seas by the end of the decade is not yet known, she conceded.

Ponant recently secured European Commission funding for Swap2Zero (**CW** 30 Oct) - a win that will make the business case for the project far more attractive, she enthused.

However, describing Swap2Zero (render **pictured**) as a nesting doll of projects, Hindmarsh admitted it is unclear what the greatest challenges will be to the ship taking to the oceans.

"There's a lot of components to the partnership, and [it's about] thinking about what's going to be realistic by the time 2030 comes," she posed.

"Is it a phased approach, where

we get some of the way, maybe not net zero, but close to, and then the rest will follow as those sustainable technologies are developed as well."

The availability of hydrogen and the ability to store it at sea are two key question marks for Swap2Zero, Hindmarsh noted, as Ponant prepares to commit to a build partner for the project.

"I think the key challenge [is] not just about the shipyard, it's also about all of the renewable fuel and energy sources: how do you fuel it at sea, how do you get access [to it], and even if you build the vessel which has the capabilities, where can you sail?"

"We need to commit very soon in terms of where we're going to make this happen...if you're ready in 2030, you have to know where you're going to be sailing by 2028.

"We have multiple business cases in terms of what destinations we're looking at, because realistically what's going to be ready?" *MS*

Allianz backs NCL

ALLIANZ Partners has launched cruise-specific travel insurance for Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) passengers.

The latest offering allows guests to conveniently get a quote and purchase travel insurance directly through NCL's website when booking their journey.

Allianz's Cruise Travel Insurance offers essential benefits such as onboard medical and evacuation coverage, protection for cabin confinement, and formal wear coverage for passengers.

These benefits were traditionally offered as an add-on package, and are now seamlessly integrated into the standard travel insurance policy purchased through the NCL website, simplifying the process and offering more convenience for travellers.

"Our commitment to product innovation and keeping customers at the heart of everything we do is evident in our new partnership with Norwegian Cruise Line," Allianz Partners Executive Head of Travel Damien Arthur said.

"Our data shows that cruise travellers have a high propensity to purchase travel insurance," he added.

"We've now made it even easier for them to get cover that is better suited for their needs," Arthur enthused.



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THE United Kingdom's answer to the Leaning Tower of Pisa could turn one seaside town into a popular hotspot - and potentially a new port of call for the country.

St Andrew's Church in Burnham-on-Sea leans by 15 degrees, and local tourism chiefs are frustrated their crooked cathedral does not attract nearly as many visitors per year as Italy's.

The UK's answer is in fact more than three times wonkier than Italy's, yet has less than 100 Google reviews, compared to almost 175,000 for the Tower of Pisa.

Could Burnham-on-Sea be the next fledgling cruise destination for one plucky line?



Prestige peels back curtain



REGENT Seven Seas Cruises has offered a sneak peek at *Seven Seas Prestige* - the first in a new class of ship which the line says will begin "a new legacy for all-inclusive, ultra-luxury cruising".

Scheduled to launch late next year, a fly-through video of the maiden Prestige-class vessel showcases a bright and elegant Starlight Atrium and Galileo's Bar encased by a glass ceiling.

The spaces have been designed by Studio Dado, the same firm behind the line's Explorer-class ships, which it says took inspiration from classical and Renaissance-era architecture.

Regent Seven Seas Chief Luxury Officer Jason Montague said capping guest numbers at 822 on a ship capable of hosting

hundreds more allows the line to offer hospitality like never before.

"I truly cannot wait for this magnificent ship to join 'The World's Most Luxurious Fleet', and the new legacy of all-inclusive, ultra-luxury cruising that begins with it," he said.

Studio Dado Founding Partner Yohandel Ruiz said the atrium will be a space that feels both timeless and contemporary.

"Our goal was to get people to stop in their tracks, awe-struck by its sheer scale and magnificence."

Flanked by spiralling twin staircases, the atrium also serves as a central conduit between the casino, Prestige Lounge, Meridian Lounge, coffee shop, concierge desk and the main reception.

CLICK HERE to see the video. *ML*

Virgin spices up


VIRGIN Voyages has added some serious star power to its remaining 2025 Celebration Voyages, with Spice Girl icon Melanie C and Kathy Sledge of Sister Sledge fame both joining as headliners.

The British pop artist and DJ Melanie C, known to many as Sporty Spice, will headline a five-night Celebration Voyage aboard *Scarlet Lady*, which departs Lisbon on 22 Jul, calling into Porto and La Coruna before concluding in Portsmouth, UK.

Virgin has also revealed that American disco singer Kathy Sledge will lend her voice to an 11-night Mediterranean journey from Athens, departing 18 May aboard *Resilient Lady*.

They mark the final Celebration Voyages before the series transforms into the Red Hot Sailing Club for 2026, set to introduce fresh entertainment and programming.

The first journey in the revamped collection will depart Miami for the Caribbean on 12 Mar.



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