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New NSW port head

THE Port Authority of New South Wales has announced John McKenna as its new CEO.

The Port's former Chief Customer & Commercial Officer will take over from Philip Holliday (*CW* 13 Dec).

CLIA welcomes HX aboard



CLIA Australasia has welcomed HX Expeditions as its newest Regional Expedition and Ocean Cruise member to support its ongoing growth in the local market (*CW* breaking news).

Membership in CLIA Australasia will now grant HX Expeditions access to the local travel advisor community, port representatives, destinations, suppliers, and many other industry stakeholders.

HX can now take part in CLIA Australasia's online and live travel agent training programs and will see it represented in the association's ongoing government advocacy initiatives.

The induction of HX also marks the brand's maiden alignment

with CLIA and comes a year after it decoupled from former parent company Hurtigruten, which itself exited CLIA nine years ago for what it called "strategic reasons".

CLIA Australasia Managing Director, Joel Katz, welcomed the arrival of HX to the association.

"Expedition cruising is an area of remarkable innovation right now - especially in areas like conservation and sustainability - and so we're delighted to have HX join our community at such an inspiring time," Katz said.

HX Sales Director for Australia-New Zealand Amber Wilson said the company is pleased to be part of CLIA in this region.

"HX has embarked on an exciting new phase in its 130-year history, and we are pleased to share that journey with CLIA and its 6,000-strong travel agent membership in Australia and New Zealand," Wilson said. *ML*

Virtuoso cruise chief

VIRTUOSO has named Lori Sheller Vice President of Global Cruise.

The former MSC Cruises and Swan Hellenic sales executive will lead Virtuoso's global cruise strategy.

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Viking cuts it *Thoth* with new Egypt ship

VIKING recently floated out its newest Nile ship, *Viking Thoth* (pictured) which is set to debut in Oct.

The new 82-guest vessel will be the cruise line's eighth in Egypt, joining Viking's growing fleet of state-of-the-art ships for the Nile.

Thoth touched water for the first time ahead of her debut on Viking's '12-day Pharaohs & Pyramids' itinerary.

The ceremony was held at Massara shipyard in Cairo, with *Thoth* to now move into her final stage of construction, which will see her moved to a nearby outfitting dock for final construction and buildout.

Thoth will be the first of two to debut on the Nile this year for the cruise line, with *Viking Amun* set to debut in Sep (CW 22 Apr).

"Egypt is a country of profound historical and cultural significance, which makes it a



destination of great interest to our guests," Chairman & Chief Executive Torstein Hagen said.

"With two new ships, the *Viking Thoth* and the *Viking Amun*, debuting in 2025, we are very proud to continue expanding our elegant fleet and introducing more curious travellers to this phenomenal region."

Thoth is an identical sister ship to the upcoming *Amun*, as well as the cruise line's other Egypt ships, *Viking Osiris*, *Viking Aton*, *Viking Sobek*, and *Viking Hathor*.

Viking plans to welcome four new ships in Egypt in the next two years, which will bring the cruise line's Nile fleet to a dozen by 2027. MS

Aurora sells out

FIVE Mediterranean voyages making up the maiden non-Polar season for Aurora Expeditions has sold out in record time, the company said.

As part of the cruise line's maiden small ship season (CW 05 Sep 2024), *Sylvia Earle* will explore the Iberian Peninsula during the northern summer, taking travellers to Morocco and Spain.

The success has seen the cruise line decide to expand its 2026 season, with *Greg Mortimer* to add five new sailings in Europe and three in her next Oceania season.

Aurora's new ship, *Douglas Mawson*, will also take on an expanded workload, with 18 Mediterranean voyages to make up its 2026 schedule.

The program includes expedition sailings along the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers.



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AS FAITH in dating apps subsides, could they be replaced by cruise ships?

One cruise ship couple is on a “perpetual honeymoon”, after being married at sea on board a stranded residential vessel last year (*CW* 02 Sep).

The two shipmates met in Belfast, from where they were meant to depart last May on a three-year, around the world cruise on board *Villa Vie Residences’ Villa Vie Odyssey*.

However issues with the ship’s rudder saw the vessel marooned in Northern Ireland for four months - enough time for the two to meet, fall in love, and get engaged.

The couple last month said “I do” on board *Odyssey*, off the coast of Costa Rica.

The pair had a private ceremony with family and friends on board, before a second ship-wide event with 300 guests the following day.

Darwin’s record cruise year



A RECORD 113 ships called into Darwin during the 2024/25 cruise season, a milestone which has been welcomed by the Northern Territory Government.

The increased visitation saw more than 80,000 travellers from around the world disembark and explore the NT.

Darwin’s cruise season injected around \$181m into the Territory’s economy and supported more than 500 local jobs.

Minister for Tourism & Hospitality Marie-Claire Boothby said Darwin continues to grow as Australia’s northern gateway and is an increasingly more popular stop for ships heading to or from Southeast Asia or circumnavigating the country.

“The influx of cruise passengers offers great support for our community, from local tour operators and hospitality venues to retailers and cultural

attractions,” Boothby said.

“Our tourism operators and retailers always welcome these visitors with open arms and show them what a wonderful place the NT is.”

A customer survey conducted on passengers from 13 ships found 91% were satisfied with their time in Darwin, with 61% partaking in some shopping and more than one-third dining at a local restaurant.

Attention in the NT capital now turns to the expedition sector for further support during winter, with around 60 ships scheduled to call in Darwin before the end of 2025 and collectively seeing more than 11,000 travellers embark or disembark.

Tourism Top End GM Samantha Bennett said the organisation is proud to provide a taste of the NT and inspire travellers to return, stay longer and spend more. *ML*

Costa plan finishes

COSTA Cruises’ strategic path of fleet enhancements, new routes, and more, is set to be completed later this year, when *Costa Serena* undergoes an extensive dry dock.

The plan, which was launched in 2021, has seen Costa’s fleet undergo significant improvements, with all ships upgraded to offer high-quality fittings, amenities, and product innovations, for a total investment of more than €200 million.

Serena will emerge with a vibrant new food court featuring new restaurants and bars, such as Archipelago, starred chef restaurant Pizzeria Pummid’Oro, the new Sushino Costa, and more.

There will also be a fresh and modern design for the main restaurants, redesigned pools and bars, and completely renovated suites.

The plan will also see *Costa Fortuna*, the cruise line’s longest-serving ship, exit the fleet, and transfer to her new, yet-to-be-announced owner in Sep 2026.

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