

Cruise Weekly today

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

Mat to board Ama

THE inaugural Mat McLachlan Battlefield Tours Signature Cruise next year will sail on AmaWaterways' brand-new vessel *AmaSofie*.

The ship, which will launch later this year, will play host to the history-focused cruise, as it sails through the Netherlands and Belgium.

Passengers will explore World War I and World War II battlefields, with the cruise timed to coincide with major historical anniversaries.

Guests will explore Ypres Salient and the Menin Gate on the 110th anniversary of the Battle of Menin Road Ridge, which involved many Australian divisions.

The cruise will then spend two days exploring sites from World War II's Operation Market Garden on the anniversary of the largest airborne attack in history, including visiting the famous 'bridge too far' at Arnhem.

Passengers will also uncover where the Battle of Waterloo took place in Belgium, which ended the Napoleonic Wars.

Other Mat McLachlan sailings next year will take place aboard *AmaMaya*, hosting a 'Riches of the Mekong' cruise.

Aus key as Uniworld expands



UNIWORLD Boutique River Cruises president & chief executive officer Ellen Bettridge has spoken of the importance of Australia to the cruise line, as it celebrates 50 years sailing.

Bettridge (pictured left with local managing director Alice Ager) is in Sydney this week for the first time since 2024 as Uniworld prepares to integrate its Luxury Gold sister brand into its itineraries (**CW** 03 Feb).

Our market will be key to the success of the partnership, Bettridge hinted, with Australia representing Uniworld's most important source of guests outside the United States.

"Australia is our second-largest source market, it is incredibly important to us," Bettridge said, speaking to **Cruise Weekly**.

"What I love about Australia is they come and they don't just

do one cruise, they do one after another, and they come back over and over again."

This positions Australia as critical to filling the cruise line's four new ships, *Emilie*, *Marlene*, *Sao Rafael*, and *Audrey*, which are set to debut over the next 18 months (**CW** 29 Oct).

Bettridge also hinted that even more ships may be on the way in 2028, thanks to the backing of The Travel Corporation's new ownership, Apollo Management.

"They looked at [Uniworld] and said, 'all you need is more ships'...they're willing to write that cheque and just go make it happen," she explained.

"There's a lot more to come... we are seeing an increase in capacity of 17% going from 2026 to '27...that's not small...and there will be another big increase from '27 to 2028," she teased. MS

Chapple Windstar

WINDSTAR Cruises has announced the appointment of Paul Chapple as its new vice president of hotel operations.

Chapple joins from Azamara, where he worked for a decade, most recently as associate VP onboard commercial strategy.

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Brown to Virtuoso

VIRTUOSO has appointed Crescent Seas chief executive officer Thatcher Brown as special cruise advisor to the chief operating officer.

The newly created role will see Brown provide strategic oversight to support the long-term growth and evolution of Virtuoso's cruise business, reinforcing the sector as a key strategic priority.

His focus will include strategy, structure, and future product positioning, with an emphasis on strengthening global partnerships that support Virtuoso's worldwide membership, while ensuring the category is well-positioned for sustained success both in the near term and over the coming years.

He will work closely with senior vice president global partnerships Cory Hagopian, while vice president global cruise Lori Sheller will continue to lead day-to-day execution.

Brown previously served as Virtuoso's senior vice president global products, before departing in Aug to lead residential cruise line Crescent, a role he lasted just six months in.

His tenure leading the residential cruise line saw its charter of Regent Seven Seas Cruises' *Seven Seas Navigator* collapse, as it instead pivoted to focus on plans for its first newbuild (CW 06 Nov).

Scenic serves up rewards



SCENIC Group has officially launched its new Scenic & Emerald Rewards, bringing the Scenic Club and EmeraldEXPLORER programs together into one streamlined platform (CW 28 Jan).

The new program has a simplified four-tier structure, recognising travel across Scenic and Emerald's ocean, river, and escorted land journeys.

Designed in response to guest and travel advisor feedback, the new Scenic & Emerald Rewards consolidates the existing status points from the previous two programs into a single consolidated balance, providing members with one account and a simpler way to earn and redeem rewards on every booking.

The program is free to join for guests returning from their first journey, and introduces a four-tier structure across both brands.

Enhanced benefits ensure members receive meaningful

recognition, exclusive privileges, and elevated experiences as they progress through each tier.

Members can look forward to benefits including new pre-release itineraries, exclusive event invitations, private transfers or airport hotel stays on eligible journeys, complimentary accommodation on longer trips, priority onboard services, and much more, with special benefits at every level.

Also introduced with the program's official launch is MyRewards, which allows members to earn 1% of eligible new booking value as a monetary amount to redeem on a future journey with either brand.

All existing members have been automatically transitioned into the new program.

Members in tiers that were merged have been moved to the new equivalent or higher tier, with status points adjusted upwards - [CLICK HERE](#). MS

Carnival 2027/28

CARNIVAL Cruise Line has unveiled new sailings for 2027/28, which see it home port two ships in Baltimore for the first time, as *Carnival Miracle* and *Carnival Pride* offer Caribbean itineraries.

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THERE is bad news for those who have been planning a cruise in Estonia, with temperatures so cold that parts of the sea surrounding the country have frozen.

Estonians have this week been able to drive across a 20-kilometre stretch of frozen sea linking the country's main two islands.

The so-called "ice road" connecting the islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, located between the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Riga was officially opened on Sun, with a line of cars waiting to use it that afternoon.

Authorities decided to open the ice road after locals had spontaneously begun driving across the frozen sea.

Ferries had struggled to keep up regular service following weeks of temperatures dropping to -10 degrees.

Preparing the road is not easy, and it requires around-the-clock monitoring, said Marek Koppel, a road maintenance supervisor at the Estonian construction company in charge of building and managing it.

Workers have to measure ice thickness every 100 metres to determine the areas with more than 24 centimetres of ice, the minimum required for safety, while also smoothing over ridged ice and cracks.

Discover more with Ponant



PONANT Explorations Group is inviting travel advisors and their clients to its 2026 Discovery Sessions, hosted in five Australian cities this Mar and Apr.

Taking place in Brisbane, Adelaide, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne, Ponant's destination specialists will share the latest news across its small-ship fleet and itineraries, from polar expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctica to the Kimberley, the Mediterranean, Raja Ampat, and the Spice Islands.

Two new exclusive event-only incentives will also be on offer during the evenings.

Advisors who make a booking after a Discovery Session will go into a draw to win a family on a Ponant expedition to the Kimberley or a 10-night exploration of French Polynesia on board Paul Gauguin Cruises' *Paul Gauguin*.

Agents who attend the events will also go in the draw to win a \$200 dinner voucher.

Other limited-time incentives

include saving up to 30% on 2027/28 voyages, plus a €300 shipboard credit (approximately A\$505) per person for all attendees.

Guests can also enjoy 5% savings on staterooms and 10% on suites for departures within 12 months following the event.

In addition, they are invited to go into the draw to win a \$1,000 voucher towards their next Ponant voyage, while past guests are invited to share a wildlife moment from their trip for the chance to win one of three additional \$1,000 vouchers.

Ponant's Discovery Sessions are an opportunity for new-to-cruise attendees to learn more about expedition cruising and the company's offerings, as well as inspire past passengers with newly announced itineraries.

Interactive destination maps, immersive content at Ponant's Inspiration Station, and practical insights from expert speakers will also be offered - **CLICK HERE** for more information. JHM

CLIA UPDATE



with Joel Katz
MD, CLIA Australasia

Taking cruise to Canberra

CLIA is firmly focused on creating a better environment for cruise operations and has a busy program of advocacy and government affairs work underway in Australia and NZ.

As part of this, CLIA led a delegation of cruise line executives in Canberra last week where we took the opportunity to meet with ministers and departmental officials to ensure the industry's perspectives are clearly understood.

Together, we are advocating for balanced regulation, efficient border processes, fair port charges, and strong infrastructure - all the ingredients that will help make Australia a more attractive cruise destination and allow the local cruise economy to thrive.

This work is ongoing, and it's not just limited to Canberra.

Around Australia and NZ, we are closely engaged with all governments, as well as ports, destinations and industry stakeholders, working to gain better support for cruise tourism and the enormous economic contribution it makes.

Our aim is to improve Australia's competitiveness, attract more ships, safeguard jobs, and create greater economic opportunities in destinations around the country.

By representing cruise lines collectively, CLIA is working to create the conditions that support cruise growth, protect guest and crew wellbeing, and enable travel agents to confidently sell cruising.

