

Cruise Weekly today

CRUISE Weekly today features three pages of all the latest cruise industry news, plus a full page from **Silversea**.

Silversea adds SALT

SILVERSEA has unveiled more than 100 new sailings for 2028/29, including new SALT culinary voyages and a South America circumnavigation.

Highlights include experiencing Carnival in Venice and Rio de Janeiro, New Year's Eve in Madeira and Sydney, and SALT voyages built around Europe's truffle season, in destinations such as Tuscany, as well as the markets of Southeast Asia - head to the **back page** for more info.

An Australian Star is born



MURRAY River Paddlesteamers' *Australian Star* (pictured), the country's first five-star, overnight river vessel, is now operating, having set sail on her inaugural cruise on Mon.

Australian Star is now offering cruises of three to seven nights year-round along the Murray River from Echuca.

Launched alongside Murray River Paddlesteamers' parent company, APT Travel Group, *Australian Star* was more than three years in the making.

The much-anticipated ship's launch, originally scheduled for Feb, faced several delays, amounting to roughly eight months due to technical and commissioning hurdles.

She passed her testing procedures and trials last month (**CW** 09 Sep), giving cruisers their first sneak peek at the vessel on the river.

Australian Star is now offering intimate journeys through the region's history, culture and nature, with daily excursions to farm stations, wineries and heritage towns.

Journeys also offer riverside barbecues beside crackling campfires under starlit skies.

Accommodating 38 guests in

five-star comfort, the ship blends heritage and contemporary elegance as one of the largest wood-fired paddlesteamers.

Australian Star boasts a deluxe lounge offering sweeping river views, a gourmet restaurant, outdoor relaxation areas and a passenger lift to all decks.

The ship's 19 staterooms offer en suites, air-conditioning, complimentary Starlink wi-fi and luxury linen.

Australian Star is powered by a hybrid diesel/steam propulsion system featuring a 1907 wood-fired steam engine.

Backed by \$2.25 million in funding from the Victorian Government's Regional Tourism Investment Fund (**CW** 23 Apr 2025), *Australian Star* joins Murray River Paddlesteamers' smaller, 16-guest overnight paddlesteamer *Emmylou*, which will continue to offer multi-day cruises from Echuca.

Murray River Paddlesteamers director Craig Burgess said the launch of *Australian Star* was a watershed moment for Australian river cruising, as well as the rural tourism sector.

It is hoped the ship will attract new high-yield domestic and overseas visitors to Victoria. *MS*

New President cruise

EXPLORA Journeys has introduced its first Presidents Journey, which will be hosted by the cruise line's head Anna Nash aboard *Explora II*.

The journey will sail from 09-16 Dec through the Mediterranean, departing from Barcelona to Tenerife.

Guests will be able to join conversations with Nash and members of the Explora leadership team, offering an opportunity to share what matters most to them and explore the future of cruising.

Exclusive experiences include privileged access to The Convent, Gibraltar and the luxury Royal Mansour hotel in Casablanca's Art Deco district.

Flights on us

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Passion play open

SCENIC Group has opened pre-registration for the 2030 Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany, which has been performed every 10 years since the 17th century.

Travellers will have the opportunity to experience the play as part of a European journey with its Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours and Emerald Cruises & Tours brands.

The passion play is scheduled to return from 18 May 2030 to 06 Oct 2030 - the 43rd time Oberammergau has hosted it.

Residents of the village will take to the stage to perform the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, having done so since 1634.

Mair tops Trafalgar

TRAVELMANAGERS

personal travel manager Lorraine Mair has been named Trafalgar's top-selling travel advisor of the brand's river cruise product.

Contributing to Mair's success was her development of a tailored package specifically for her community of clients.

She combined rail and river as a seamless way to experience Switzerland and the Rhine.

Mair has since booked a group of both solo travellers and couples.

Record season in Newcastle



THIS year's record cruise season started in Newcastle yesterday, with the arrival of Princess Cruises' *Crown Princess*.

More than 30,000 cruise tourists are set to visit Newcastle over the coming months, with *Crown (pictured)* yesterday bringing the first 3,000-plus into the city.

A record 18 cruise ships are scheduled to dock in Newcastle between Oct and Apr, including five maiden arrivals, making it Newcastle's biggest-ever season.

Supporting this growth is the Newcastle cruise memorandum of understanding, which brings together Port Authority of New South Wales, Destination Sydney Surrounds North, Newcastle Tourism Industry Group, and seven local councils to promote the region and grow its tourist offerings for visiting cruise ships

(*CW* 13 Jun 2025).

Port Authority chief executive officer John McKenna said the long-term development of cruise in rural NSW is having a positive impact on local communities.

"Cruise schedules naturally fluctuate from year to year, but it's fantastic to see Newcastle welcoming its biggest cruise season on record this year," McKenna said.

"Over the longer term, cruise visitation to Newcastle has increased steadily by around 13% on average year-on-year over the past decade.

"We're proud to safely pilot these vessels into Newcastle and continue to support industry and government efforts to strengthen the region's appeal as a key cruise destination through the MOU partnership," he said. *MS*

Viking's new brox

VIKING has launched its 2027-2029 Ocean Voyages Brochure, which features new Alaska and Japan itineraries.

Providing travel advisors and their clients with a comprehensive look at the line's ocean program over the next three years, the brochure features 248 pages of larger maps, clearer itinerary overviews, and more voyage planning tools than before.

The brochure features itineraries ranging from eight days through to the 170-day 'Viking World Voyage III', alongside overnight stay information, and a selection of shore excursions.

It also showcases Viking's range of pre- and post-voyage extensions, combination journey options, and a voyage calendar designed to help advisors identify sailing opportunities across the fleet.

Managing director Michelle Black said the new brochure reflects the growing trend of travellers planning further ahead for future holidays.

"This brochure brings together our ocean voyages through to 2029," she said.

"Many travellers are taking a longer-term view when it comes to travel, giving themselves more time to choose the destinations and departure dates that best suit them," Black added.

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BACKPACK has clawed his way to the top, winning Alaska's 12th annual Fat Bear Week after a close public vote attracting over 100,000 ballots.

The gentle giant, officially known as Bear 89, edged out Bear 910 with just over 50% of the vote to claim the heavyweight crown at Katmai National Park & Preserve.

The annual contest celebrates brown bears bulking up on salmon ahead of their winter hibernation, with some males tipping the scales at around 500 kilograms.

Backpack, son of former champion Holly, is known for his peaceful nature, preferring quiet strength over brawling with rivals.

The secret to their success is a serious salmon feast, with bears able to devour up to 30 fish a day as they stockpile the fat reserves to survive winter without food or water.

Disney Believe revealed



DISNEY Cruise Line's newest ship *Disney Believe* will sail from Fort Lauderdale from late next year, the brand has announced.

Believe, Disney's fourth Wish-class ship, will make her maiden voyage on 18 Dec 2027 and will sail four- and five-night itineraries to destinations in the Bahamas and Caribbean, the *Orlando Sentinel* reports.

Highlights aboard *Believe*, announced yesterday at an event aboard *Disney Wish*, will include a Frozen-themed dinner show, themed lounges, and main stage shows based on *Tangled* and *Encanto* (pictured).

There will also be a tower suite

inspired by the Magic Kingdom.

The Grand Hall, which will feature a bronze statue of the Disney character Moana, will be an "architectural meeting of the sea and sky" inspired by the Pacific Islands.

There will also be a broad slate of new venues for dining, drinking, and entertainment geared toward passengers of all ages, including the Wishing Well lounge, inspired by *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

Other highlights will include a new *Zootopia*-inspired multi-storey entertainment hub.

Bookings for *Believe* will open on 19 Oct. *MS*

Freedom dry dock

CARNIVAL Cruise Line's *Carnival Freedom* has become the latest of the brand's ships to return to service following an extensive dry dock.

The enhancement saw *Freedom* receive a new whale tail funnel, which comes in at a lower height, allowing the ship to access to additional ports.

Freedom's dry dock took place over 35 days in Marseille, with other enhancements including a refreshed video arcade, updated retail spaces, accessibility improvements throughout the ship, and a redesigned casino with over 100 new gaming machines.

The ship now also showcases Carnival's new 'From Sea to Shining Sea' bow crest, which is being introduced aboard each of the cruise line's ships.

Freedom will arrive into Barcelona today, and will welcome guests aboard for an eight-day Mediterranean cruise before going on a 13-day Carnival Journeys transatlantic voyage to Port Canaveral, and then repositioning to Virginia.



SAILING INTO OPPORTUNITIES

CLIA Australasia executive director Joel Katz on the growth in cruise.

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Cruise Weekly is Australasia's leading travel industry cruise publication.

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