

Cruise Weekly today

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

We need a Hero

ROYAL Caribbean's new *Hero of the Seas* has officially floated out for the first time, putting it on track to debut in Aug 2027.

As part of the milestone at the Meyer Turku shipyard in Finland, the vessel's dry dock was filled with more than 340 million litres of water overnight before she moved into the outfitting pier, where she will continue to take shape over the next year.

The Icon-class ship, which can cater for 7,600 guests, will offer seven-night eastern and western Caribbean adventures from Miami, with every cruise visiting Royal's Perfect Day CocoCay in the Bahamas.

River cruising hot for new OTA MyHoliday2

RIVER cruise is proving more popular than ocean cruising for new Australian OTA MyHoliday2, which just a few months ago launched its B2B cruise website (**CW** 30 Apr).

MyHoliday2 director Gemma Giandomenico (**pictured**) said Europe and the Mekong are proving hot for the company through the first four to five months of its B2B operations.

"We are booking a lot of European river cruises for 2027 and have exhausted our group allotments for the popular Amsterdam to Budapest route," she told **Cruise Weekly**.

"We are also selling a lot of our Mekong cruises, which we charter [using *RV Tourn Tiou II*], and have four charters going in 2027," she explained.

MyHoliday2's dedicated cruise subdomain is powered by Traveltek - a partnership it forged



this year to make its expansion into the cruise sector - and currently features 15 different cruise lines that plug straight into an API, providing live pricing and instant bookability.

Giandomenico said her focus will now turn to developing this

side of the MyHoliday2 business.

"For the next couple of years, we want to concentrate heavily on building our agent portfolio in our B2B division, bring on more staff and expand further into both B2B and cruise markets," Giandomenico said. *MS*



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Escape expansion

EXCLUSIVE

LUXURY Escapes is set to open its third physical store in premium shopping centre Westfield Chermiside in Brisbane in Nov, founder and CEO Adam Schwab has revealed exclusively to **CW**.

Schwab also noted that eventually, he would like a network of 10 stores around the world including Australia, NZ and Singapore.

"It is a great way to engage our customers," he said.

"We see hundreds of people every week and build some major relationships with customers who wouldn't have otherwise come in - a lot of people just want to have an in-store experience." *JHM*

Amazon on Quest

SEABOURN has unveiled a new 30-day itinerary inviting travellers to experience the best of Amazon River cruising.

Departing Miami in Nov 2028, the 'Amazon Explorer: Rivers & Waterfronts' will visit 15 destinations across seven countries, combining Caribbean islands, scenic Amazon River cruising and stops along the Amazon River.

Guests will also enjoy an overnight stay in Manaus, providing extra time to explore one of the Amazon's most culturally rich destinations.

Little room for error in Aus

THE Australian cruise sector has almost everything passengers want, but because of its structural disadvantages, it must get the fundamentals right to remain competitive, something Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) CEO Bud Darr says it is failing to do.

Speaking to **CW**, the CLIA head said the Australian market contains many handicaps, such as its large and isolated geography, airlift capability gaps, and limited connectivity with other cruise markets (**CW** yesterday).

On top of that, Australia's economics and operating environment make the market even more expensive, he said.

"Port costs are extremely high here to call on many of the terminals, pilotage costs are high," he explained to **CW**.

The bigger problem for the cruise sector is uncertainty, Darr said, particularly noting the potential changes to the *Coastal Trading Act*, which has been under review for the past two years (**CW** 21 Aug 2024).

"There's some potential to make a significant misstep, which could be quite harmful if things are not done the right way," he explained.

"Stability is extremely important, and we are seeing some signs that it's not that stable," Darr added.

"There is uncertainty over a range of tax-related and environmentally related



regulations - all of those things create uncertainty that causes reluctance," he explained.

The CLIA head pointed to Brazil as a cautionary example, arguing that Australia shares similar geographic disadvantages with the South American country.

"Brazil also has this problem of geography - it is a long way away, and cruise ships and guests have to come a long way, and there's cost and time associated with that," Darr explained.

"That market saw, in one year, a 20% year-on-year decline in cruise passenger volume, and a corresponding drop in economic output as well.

"There are some signs there that things maybe are on the proper trajectory now, but they are still not to a point where they're showing any positive growth where the rest of the industry is showing substantial growth."

While results in Australia are not that bad, Darr revealed the country has shed \$1.1b year-on-year in economic contribution, as first revealed in *Australia's Paddock to Port Economic Impact Report* (**CW** 04 Aug). *MS*

Atlas' record high

ATLAS Ocean Voyages (AOV) has recorded its best single-day booking performance in history on 31 Aug off the back of rising demand across its current fleet, as well as future sailings aboard *Atlas Adventurer*.

While AOV noted close-in demand for limited availability on Antarctica sailings in Nov 2026 and strong advance bookings for 2027 as highlights, the momentum was also reflected in what guests are booking.

"Aug 31 was an important milestone for Atlas, but what is most significant is what is driving the momentum," president and CEO James A. Rodriguez said.

"Guests are telling us what they value through what they are booking."

"They are choosing the suite categories, experiences and destinations that allow them to go deeper into a place while still having the comfort, service and sense of privacy they expect from a luxury vacation."

Advance bookings for *Atlas Adventurer* are building strongly ahead of her Nov 2028 debut in Japan, the line noted, with 50% of Owners Suites already reserved.

The vessel is then scheduled to operate subsequent sailings across Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean. *ZH*

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IT IS safe to say everyone would like to have some bling on their wrist, but some would go to extreme lengths to make that possible...booking a luxury cruise perhaps?

Explora Journeys' newest vessel *Explora III* has a range of luxury watches at her boutique store, Chopard, boasting brands such as Cartier, Rolex, and the Chopard house brand, with prices reaching north of €60,000 (A\$96,642).

Some of the watches on offer include a Mille Miglia Patina chronograph for around €10,000 (A\$16,107), a gold Chopard L'Heure du Diamant for €57,200 (A\$92,135), and a Daytona in Everose gold on a Oysterflex strap for the aforementioned €60,000.

Rolex ambassador Brian Hau, who was recently onboard *Explora III*, told the *AFR* that, on land, customers would put their name down on a list to purchase these watches and not hear a thing for years.

All of the onboard prices include Italy's 22% value-added tax (VAT), with non-Europeans able to reclaim 21% due to the boutique's third-party facilitator Global Blue, which takes a cut of the sale.

However, Aussies must declare goods worth \$900 or more, along with paying the standard 10% GST and 5% duty when returning home.

Star now ready to shine



A NEW sneak preview has been revealed of Australia's first luxury overnight river vessel, Murray River Paddlesteamers' *Australian Star* as she prepares to launch.

The ship (pictured) recently successfully completed and passed all of her testing procedures and trials, with her debut set to be a three-night cruise on 18 Sep.

Australian Star plans to transform the iconic Murray River into a luxury cruise destination, featuring 38 deluxe, air-conditioned staterooms, a plush lounge with panoramic river views, an onboard restaurant, and multiple outdoor spaces to take in the scenery.

Backed by funding from the Victorian Government's Regional Tourism Investment Fund, the vessel features an energy-efficient, hybrid diesel/steam propulsion system, powered by an original 1907 woodfired steam engine.

Murray River Paddlesteamers is also backed by APT Travel Group, which three months ago acquired a majority stake in the cruise line (CW 04 Jun).

APT Travel Group chief executive officer David Cox said the acquisition is a natural fit for the tour operator, as it approaches its 100th anniversary.

"As we near our centenary in 2027, this acquisition speaks to everything the APT Travel Group is about: looking to the future with a nod to the past; investing in Australian local tourism; and giving our guests access to experiences that are truly one-of-a-kind," he said.

"The Murray River is woven into this country's history, and for us to now be custodians of vessels that keep that history alive is something we are very proud of.

"After nearly a hundred years of delivering exceptional experiences to travellers around the world, we can't wait to bring more of that same standard to our own backyard."

Murray River Paddlesteamers is currently offering savings of \$500 per couple and a reduced solo supplement of 45% on *Australian Star*'s three-, four- and seven-night cruises from Echuca for those booking by the end of the month - **CLICK HERE**. MS



One week to go!

THERE is now just one week to go before CLIA's flagship Cruise360 conference, giving us a great opportunity to put cruising on the national agenda.

In the lead-up to this year's event, CLIA has been working to ensure Australia's cruise community is being heard by local political leaders.

With CLIA's Global CEO Bud Darr in Australia last week, we mounted a busy schedule of advocacy events, political meetings and media opportunities to highlight the issues we need to overcome.

Darr sent a warning that Australia is becoming uncompetitive as a cruise destination and losing opportunities to other countries, despite record numbers of Australians cruising.

His message to government is that regulatory certainty and sound policy settings are needed to lift Australia's competitiveness and our ability to attract more ships to local waters.

Over the past week, we put this message forward at industry events, on television, online, and in newspapers, and it's a message we will continue to drive home.

The opportunities presented by a growing global cruise market are enormous - as we'll discuss in detail at Cruise360 - but we need better policy settings in Australia to ensure we don't miss out.

