

Cruise Weekly today

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

A Celeb is arriving

CELEBRITY Cruises is officially entering the river cruise market, with its brand-new premium line, **Celebrity River Cruises**, scheduled to depart on its inaugural sailings in Aug 2027.

The new venture brings **Celebrity's** signature premium amenities, contemporary aesthetic, and culinary focus onto some of Europe's most iconic waterways.

Celebrity's custom, purpose-built riverboats are inspired by the open, modern silhouette of its popular ocean-going Edge-class ships.

Head to the **back page** of **Cruise Weekly** for more info.

Windstar turning rivers into oceans

WINDSTAR Cruises sees an opportunity to convert river cruisers to ocean sailings by positioning its small-ship product as a natural next step for those who may otherwise be hesitant to make the move.

Managing director global commercial Helen Beck (**pictured**) said the similarities between river cruising and **Windstar's** voyages could be exactly what first-time ocean cruisers are looking for.

"There are a lot of people who start with river cruising," Beck told **CW**.

"[It's] a really good opportunity for us as **Windstar** to be the bridge between river cruises and ocean cruises."

Beck said river passengers can sometimes be reluctant to try ocean voyages because of perceptions around ship size and the open waters.

"The river guest is on the river



because they don't want to go on the ocean...they think it's too big, [there's] the motion, all of the stereotypes to some degree," she said.

Beck said **Windstar's** capacity of between 148 and 342 guests provides a natural crossover, as well as the style of the itinerary that travels between the hearts of the destinations they visit.

"There's similarity [in] that atmosphere on board, I think, that casual relaxed luxury."

The river to ocean crossover could give travel advisors another

way to approach existing river-cruise clients, Beck believes.

"We think it's an interesting approach for us as well...you probably have river cruisers in your database who may be looking for something different," she added.

The expansion comes as **Windstar** shifts some of its capacity to the benefit of the Australian market.

A second ship will deploy year-round in Tahiti from 01 Mar, alongside longer 10-, 11- and 14-night South Pacific itineraries aboard **Star Breeze**.

Beck also highlighted Japan, where the new **Star Seeker (CW 24 Jun)** is sailing 'Grand Japan' itineraries through the Seto Inland Sea, before sailings in Vietnam and Thailand.

She said the Asian sailings are shaping up as key opportunities for Australian advisors. **ZH**

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RCG to wear Sandals?

ROYAL Caribbean Group (RCG) is reportedly set to buy a majority stake in Sandals Resorts International, valued at over US\$6 billion, the *Financial Times* reports.

The deal would be RCG's biggest in history, and would see it take control of Sandals' portfolio of 20 resorts across the Caribbean, as well as its sister brand Beaches Resorts.

With properties across islands such as St Vincent, St Lucia and Barbados, Sandals pitches its resorts as romantic getaways for couples, with the Beaches brand targeted toward families.

As part of the deal, RCG would become the controlling shareholder, with the current owners, the Stewart family, retaining equity holdings.

Sandals has been looking for a prospective buyer since founder Gordon Stewart passed away in 2021.

The company, which is the largest private employer in the Caribbean, had attempted to sell on several occasions over the past decade.

RCG's last major purchase took place in 2018 when it bought a majority stake in Silversea, before eventually taking full control.



Ritz-Carlton growing



THE Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection has expanded its APAC reservations team, welcoming four new starters to the business.

Appointments include Wanda Ferrand, who has joined Ritz-Carlton as its first dedicated reservations manager.

Ferrand has extensive experience in the luxury cruise sector, joining from Explora Journeys, and having previously worked for Crystal while the cruise line set up its APAC office.

Ritz-Carlton has also appointed its first experience officer, Amelia Lake, who joins the line from outside the travel industry.

She will manage all of Ritz-Carlton's post-sale elements.

Ferrand and Lake will both be based at the cruise line's APAC head office in Sydney.

Ritz-Carlton has also appointed two new professional voyage associates, Abbey Anderson and Ellie Sayer.

Joining from Silversea and based on the Gold Coast, Anderson will offer sales, support and account management, collaborating with agents and trade partners.

She is joined by Sayer, who will be based in Sydney, and is a former travel advisor with a background in luxury hotels.

Ritz-Carlton's reservations team now numbers eight, with the four new starters currently in Fort Lauderdale for four weeks of training, before undertaking a voyage on *Evrina* in Europe.

They will start their roles at the end of next month. *MS*

Pictured: Ferrand, Anderson, Sayer and Lake.

RSSC revving up

REGENT Seven Seas Cruises (RSSC) has expanded its collaboration with Motorsports Lab with four immersive European land programs next year.

The pre- and post-cruise programs span seven voyages, and invite guests to experience the automotive cultures of Barcelona, Goodwood and Italy's Motor Valley.

Guests will enjoy supercar and classic car driving, private automotive access, motorsport activities, regional cuisine and cultural experiences.

The collection includes two distinct 'Motorsport Magic' experiences in Barcelona, House of Motorsports at Goodwood in England, and Supercar Escape in Bologna.

"The most meaningful travel experiences connect guests with the people, culture, and passions that define a destination," RSSC president Wesley D'Silva said.

"Through our expanded collaboration with Motorsport Lab, guests can go beyond traditional sightseeing to experience some of Europe's most iconic automotive regions through exclusive access, expert guidance and unforgettable moments."

The new programs build on previous Motorsport Lab-curated experiences which debuted last year.

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IT IS that time of year again, an event that should be marked on everyone's calendar - Fat Bear Week.

Now in its 12th year, this annual contest sees the bears of Alaska's Katmai National Park and Preserve go head-to-head to see who is the chunkiest of the chunky.

Speaking of which, allow us to honour last year's champion, Chunk (aka Bear 32), who weighed in at a whopping 544 kilograms (1,200 pounds).

This year, he's up against 15 other brown bears that fit the bill, including big-name players such as Gully and two-time champion Grazer.

The event sees 16 bears face off in a single-elimination, bracket-style tournament, in which the general public can vote online to decide who is the champion of chunky.

Online voters can review before and after photos of the bears, comparing how lean they were at the start of the summer and how fat they got toward the end.

Contrary to popular belief, these bears are not actually weighed, as votes decide their chunkiness based on looks as well as which back story they liked the best.

Eligible bears must frequent the river in the park.

There is still time to get votes in, which can be done **HERE**.

Mitsui christens Sakura



JAPANESE luxury cruise line Mitsui Ocean Cruises has christened its newest ship, *Mitsui Ocean Sakura* (pictured), the second vessel in its fleet.

The traditional naming ceremony took place in Yokohama last week, ahead of *Sakura's* first voyage, which departed on the weekend (**CW** 25 Aug).

Those behind the ship were honoured during the ceremony, with Mitsui's crew members and employees collectively serving as the ship's godparents.

The debut of *Sakura*, formerly *Seabourn Sojourn*, sees her join *Mitsui Ocean Fuji*, which debuted in Dec 2024 (**CW** 12 Dec 2024), in the cruise line's fleet.

Named after the Japanese word for cherry blossom, the 458-guest *Sakura* is a spacious, all-suite luxury ship with ocean views from every stateroom.

Her compact size allows access to a diverse range of ports throughout Japan, including a number of smaller destinations.

Joe O'Sullivan, managing director of Mitsui's Australian representative Cruise Traveller,

said the launch of *Sakura* elevates the appeal of the cruise line as a perfect, value-for-money way to fully experience Japan.

"The expanded fleet will provide travellers with more opportunities to experience Japan through the eyes of the people who know it best, combining authentic cultural encounters, exceptional cuisine, distinctive destinations and the heartfelt Japanese hospitality that has defined the company's passenger shipping heritage for more than 140 years," he said.

"Unlike a typical cruise around Japan, a journey with Mitsui Ocean Cruises is a curated, cultural discovery experience, blending small-ship intimacy and personal service with meaningful encounters and genuine local insight, appealing not only to cruise travellers, but also to lovers of history, cuisine, culture and small-group exploration."

To celebrate the milestone, Cruise Traveller is offering special fly-free packages for voyages around Japan in 2027.

CLICK HERE for more information on the packages. *MS*



CLIA UPDATE

with Joel Katz
MD, CLIA Australasia

The human touch

IF YOU ever needed proof that our industry thrives on human connections, you need only consider the conversations that place at Cruise360 last week.

With almost 900 people gathered in Sydney, it was not only a record attendance but also the most upbeat and focussed audience I've ever seen at Cruise360.

Throughout the event, one consistent theme emerged in almost every discussion – that the opportunities available to us in an expanding cruise sector are huge, and that travel advisors with a focus on human connections are best-placed to unlock them.

It was a point that came up again and again – that applying the human touch has never been more important, and that this is the key to understanding the client and the more meaningful experiences they seek.

After listening to these conversations, I think we can stop asking whether AI will replace the human travel advisor.

As sales performance coach Nicole O'Sullivan said on stage, that's the wrong question.

The real question is 'what will the customer choose a human for?'

Given the passion among our Cruise360 delegates this year, it's clear the modern traveller has plenty of good reasons to choose a human.



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