

Cruise Weekly today

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

RCG confirms buy

ROYAL Caribbean Group (RCG) has officially announced its partnership with Sandals Resorts International (**CW** yesterday), acquiring 50% equity in the company as opposed to a previously speculated majority stake.

As part of the agreement, Royal will take an interest in Sandals' and its sister brand Beaches' portfolio of resorts across the Caribbean, with the cruise line most likely to integrate sailings with stays at Sandals properties.

This new joint venture will feature a board led by RCG chief executive officer Jason Liberty and Sandals executive chair Adam Stewart.

Stewart will retain a leadership role which would see existing reservations, loyalty programs and resort operations continue as usual.

He is also hopeful that the partnership will stimulate further expansion of Sandals' portfolio of hotels and resorts.

Royal's purchase was reportedly around US\$3 billion, compared to the previously-reported US\$6b, with the company securing debt financing from Morgan Stanley to fund the acquisition.

Aus is key for Azamara

AZAMARA'S Australian bookings are up 70% for 2028, compared with the same point last year, directly influencing its decision to pursue an extended deployment in the APAC region, chief international sales officer David Siewers (**pictured**) has told **Cruise Weekly**.

The cruise line's strong booked position has given it confidence to continue investing in Australia, Siewers said, at a time when many other companies are pulling out of the country.

Azamara's typical extended seasonal program in Australia begins around Aug to Oct, and spans through to Apr, putting its local investment on par with that of much larger brands such as Carnival Cruise Line, Royal Caribbean, Princess Cruises and Celebrity Cruises.

The line's success in Australia is one of the cornerstones of its global growth, Siewers said.

"Australia has been such a linchpin in our overall deployment and revenue strategy because if you can get a strong base load on your ships, that allows you to maintain your premium as you move forward, and Australia does give us that book of business," he noted.

"[This market] is willing to pay a premium to have a fully inclusive product from the very beginning, and that's where we see the average per diems [at their] highest in international markets -



I believe the highest globally is in Australia," he explained.

"You're willing to pay for the right product as long as there's value and inclusion there, and so to have the strong base load at good APDs is basically the winning formula."

Australian demand is so strong, Siewers said, that Azamara has created a 139-night world cruise sailing from Sydney, which it announced late last month (**CW** 27 Aug).

The cruise is a shortened version of the 195-night full voyage, allowing Australians to board without having to take an international flight.

Siewers said: "The reason we did it is because of how well Australia has gone.

"We said that we actually need to diversify what a world cruise is and make sure that there is a starting point that appeals to our growing Australian market." MS

ACA's new committee

THE Australian Cruise Association (ACA) has named its new executive committee, following yesterday's board meeting, with Brendan Connell re-elected as chair.

The Port of Brisbane executive first took on the role last year (**CW** 18 Sep 2025).

He will be supported by the South Australian Tourism Commission's Andrew McKinnon who has been named deputy chair, in addition to Martin Bidgood of the Port Authority of NSW, who remains treasurer, with both retaining their respective posts on the board.

Accompanying them as board members are Shayne Murray of Cruise Broom, Joanne Brown of InterCruises Shoreside & Port Service, Mladen Vukic of APT Travel Group, and Aletta Macdonald of Tourism Tasmania.

CEO Jill Abel said that the appointments reflect the diversity of its members across the wider cruise industry.

"With our *Strategic Action Plan* providing a clear framework for the work ahead, we will remain focused on addressing the barriers to growth, strengthening Australia's competitiveness and ensuring our country is well positioned to capture future cruise opportunities," Abel said.



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Galveston on hold

TRUSTEES of Galveston Wharves are considering pausing discussions about a potential fifth cruise terminal (**CW** 15 Jul).

According to the board's 22 Sep meeting agenda, trustees want to wait until a port mobility study is conducted.

If a new terminal was to be built, the port would be responsible for filling a slip, building a new pier, as well as a berth and parking structure.

Officials have reportedly been in exclusive talks with Royal Caribbean Group about opening the new cruise terminal 14, which would be located adjacent to Royal's current cruise terminal 10.

Ambassador nabs *Sirena*



AMBASSADOR Cruise Line has acquired *Oceania Sirena* and announced its launch in Germany through a new brand, Ambassador Kreuzfahrten (**CW** breaking news).

Sirena, which Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings announced it had sold earlier in the year (**CW** 31 Jul), will join the Ambassador fleet in 2028, following the completion of a leaseback agreement that allows the ship to continue operating for Oceania for two more years.

The ship, which accommodates 670 guests, will be renamed *Ambella* (pictured), and will be the first ship to sail for Ambassador Kreuzfahrten.

Ambella's addition to Ambassador's fleet will allow the cruise line to continue its mission of becoming "Europe's leading cruise line for affordable quality in the silver-age market".

She will sail out of Bremerhaven and Kiel, providing a fully German-speaking guest experience, personalised service, upscale dining and destination-focused itineraries.

Between May and Sep 2028, *Ambella* is expected to offer two repositioning cruises and 11 itineraries focused on destinations in Northern Europe and the Baltic, as well as voyages to Southern Europe.

Ambella will also host Semester at Sea programs outside the German summer season, as part of Ambassador's long-term partnership with the Institute for Shipboard Education.

Ambassador said it believes *Ambella's* size, upscale ambience, and service-oriented approach present a compelling offering for discerning German couples, experienced cruisers and river cruise enthusiasts looking to discover ocean cruising.

"The acquisition of the *Oceania Sirena*, her future launch as *Ambella*, and the launch of Ambassador Kreuzfahrten represent a significant milestone in our journey to establish Ambassador as Europe's leading cruise provider for affordable quality in the silver-age segment," CEO Christian Verhounig said.

"When we launched Ambassador in 2021, we recognised a clear market gap for an affordable, high-quality cruise experience that is authentic, welcoming and accessible.

"We set out to combine the traditions of classic cruising with the standards and expectations of today's guests, and this philosophy remains fundamental to our success...entering the German market with Ambassador is the next phase of this growth strategy," he said. *MS*

New Beach Club

HOLLAND America Line (HAL) has unveiled a new Beach Club and food pavilion at RelaxAway, Half Moon Cay, Carnival Corp's private island.

There will also be refreshed bars, updated cabanas, new clamshells and daybeds, renovated eateries, and pickleball courts, with passengers enjoying the enhancements from Oct.

The Beach Club will also feature dedicated waiter service for passengers.

Guests will experience the enhancements on more than two dozen Caribbean itineraries ahead of RelaxAway's 30th anniversary celebration next year.

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A NEW vessel just departed Hobart on a five-month voyage around the world - with no-one on board.

This vessel is no cruise ship - she is an uncrewed ocean drone, launched by researchers from the CSIRO, who will conduct a climate study in the Southern Ocean.

Saildrone Explorer is around seven metres long, and travels on the surface of the water to collect data on the amount of carbon dioxide being absorbed into the ocean surface.

The information will be crucial in analysing and predicting climate change, according to *The Mercury*.

Wind and solar energy are used to power the vessel, which set off on Sun.

The drone can operate in remote waters for months at a time, with the CSIRO expecting the model to travel around 22,000 kilometres.

Four Seasons gets cooking

FOUR Seasons Yachts has unveiled its chef-in-residence program for next year, with talent from Michelin-starred restaurants around the world to join featured voyages aboard *Four Seasons I*.

Joining cruises in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean will be Guillaume Galliot (**pictured**) of the three-Michelin-starred Caprice in Hong Kong and Bertrand Noeureuil of the two-Michelin-starred L'Orangerie in Paris.

Also on board will be Yoric Tieche of the one-Michelin-starred Le Cap in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat; Guillaume Bracaval of the one-Michelin-starred est in Tokyo; and Evan Neumann of the one-Michelin-starred Auro in Napa Valley.

Each residency will include a four- to five-course tasting menu at Sedna with curated wine pairings, a one-day takeover of another onboard venue, and a welcome reception hosted by the chef at Horizon Lounge.

Additional culinary talent for the program's second iteration will be announced soon, while further details on the next chapter of



Sedna will be unveiled in the coming months.

"The first season of the chef-in-residence program reinforced just how special it is for our guests to experience the talent and creativity of these extraordinary chefs firsthand," said Ben Trodd, chief executive officer of Marc-Henry Cruise Holdings, joint owner and operator of Four Seasons Yachts.

"For 2027, we wanted to build on that experience, bringing exceptional talent from across the Four Seasons portfolio even more intimately into the journey.

"Each featured sailing will carry the signature of one chef, in one region, at one moment in the season, creating a culinary experience that exists only on that voyage." *MS*

More in the Med

CELESTYAL has released its lineup of shore excursions for its winter Eastern and Western Mediterranean deployments, with almost 200 experiences now available to book.

Within the program are 118 excursions for Western Mediterranean sailings aboard *Celestyal Discovery* between 2026-28, as well as 72 excursions on *Celestyal Discovery* in the Eastern Med during winter 2027/28, with half-day, full-day, and two-day options available.

Highlights include the full-day 'Mamas and Tapas' tour, which takes guests from Malaga into rural Andalucia to visit an olive oil mill before enjoying a five-course lunch in the home of one of the locals, starting from £98pp (A\$184).

Guests can also take part in a hands-on cooking class in Tangier, private flamenco lessons and tapas in Cadiz, a food tour of Palma's Mercat de l'Olivar, a 'Taste of Istanbul' experience, as well as a journey on the mountain railway from Volos.

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