

WAVE OF EXCITEMENT

SWEEPS AUSTRALIA'S CRUISE INDUSTRY

The boom in Australian and New Zealand cruising continues this Wave season and hopes are high that the excitement will spill over into demand for international cruising which declined in some key markets last year.

By Ian McMahon

A RARE dual appearance by Princess Cruises' superliners, *Dawn Princess* and *Sun Princess*, in Sydney harbour at the beginning of the month provided a distinctive start to Australia's 2011/12 cruising "Wave season".

The current Wave season (October 2011 to April 2012) will see an unprecedented flotilla of ships from cruise lines around the world operating in local waters.

Port cities around in Australia will see visits from some of the finest ships of the world's leading operators.

Beyond the immediate economic benefits delivered, these visits will pique public interest, giving a further boost to the burgeoning popularity of cruising and new opportunities for agents to stimulate increased cruise sales among their clients.

Wave season action will be dominated by Carnival Australia. Its lines will have 15 ships here including P&O Cruises' *Pacific Jewel*, *Pacific Dawn*, *Pacific Pearl* and *Pacific Sun*; Cunard Line's *Queen Mary 2* and *Queen Elizabeth*; Princess Cruises' *Sun Princess*, *Dawn Princess*, *Sapphire Princess*, *Diamond Princess* and *Pacific Princess*; and P&O Cruises UK's *Oriana*, *Aurora* and *Arcadia* and Seabourn's *Sojourn*.

Providing a classic example of the sort of event that generates massive media coverage and raises public perceptions of cruising glamour, Cunard's newest liner *Queen Elizabeth*, will have a spectacular "Royal Rendezvous" with her big sister *Queen Mary 2* in Sydney, February 22-23. (Melbourne and Fremantle will also enjoy maiden visits by *Queen Elizabeth*.)

Carnival Australia senior vice



Cunard's newest ship, *Queen Elizabeth*, arrives in Southampton for her naming ceremony. By February she will be in Australian waters.

president Jenny Lourey said the company's trade arm, Complete Cruise Solution, will take about 3500 travel agents on "walk-arounds" of its ships during the season.

"Getting on board a ship is the best way to get a feel for the product and really give agents the knowledge they need to sell a range of brands," she said.

But there will be plenty of action beyond that supplied by Carnival's cruise lines. Royal Caribbean's superliner *Rhapsody of the Seas* returned to Sydney on October 16 for her fourth consecutive summer cruise season operating out of Australia and Holland America Line's *Volendam* set sail from Auckland on October 22 en route to Sydney where she is based for the 2010/11 cruising season.

Silversea's *Silver Shadow* will circumnavigate Australia, and its newest vessel *Silver Spirit* will make her maiden voyage to Australia in the latest demonstration of the luxury line's major commitment to the Australian market.

Other luxury lines bidding to share

the limelight with Silversea will include not only Seabourn, whose newest ship *Sojourn* is making her first visit here, but also Regent Seven Seas and Crystal Cruises who are bringing *Navigator* and *Crystal Serenity*, respectively, to local waters.

Indicating that the headlong growth in Australians' appetite for cruising shows no sign of slowing, Carnival's Lourey said her company's 15 ships will carry a total of 220,000 passengers this Wave season – a 16 per cent increase on the previous milestone of 190,000 passengers, achieved last summer.

She said every state in Australia will see ships calling at ports ranging from Broome in the west to Cooktown in the north and Hobart in the south.

Interestingly, International Cruise Council Australasia (ICCA) figures show that it was the success of local cruising that underpinned Australian cruise market growth in 2009. Passenger numbers in other key markets – Alaska, the Americas, Asia and Europe – declined.

Cruise industry executives put this

down to the Global Financial Crisis particularly the drop in the Australian dollar early in 2009 but they are looking to a resumption of strong overall growth on the back of a successful Wave season.

Comments ICCA general manager Brett Jardine: "Historically cruises operating from local ports (Australia and New Zealand) have been well patronised and our annual statistics reflect the fact that if capacity is available it will be supported."

"So in my view this is an exciting time for the cruise industry and no doubt, along with the increased capacity there will be plenty of good deals around."

"Looking ahead to 2011/12 we can already see capacity is going to be greater again so the next few months will be a good test for the next 18 months."

"Anecdotally the cruise lines are reporting a 'bounce' in international cruise regions that slowed in 2009 and with the strength of the dollar right now forward bookings for 2011 are already well ahead of previous years."

Frommer hits cruise ship 'monstrosities' but industry says 'choice'

ARTHUR Frommer, described as the USA's "foremost travel authority and publisher of the world's largest-selling series of travel books", has taken aim at what he calls "the horrendous transformation that is now taking place in the character of cruising".

Frommer, speaking with his daughter, Pauline, on his syndicated US radio program lashed out at "monumental new monstrosities that jam 4-6000 people into a cruise ship".

He accused cruise operators of limiting port visits to increase onboard spending and deplored the Las Vegas-style entertainment on offer.

However Australian cruise industry executives point out that large 4-600 passenger ships are just one facet of an increasingly wide and diverse range of cruising product coming on to the market – including expedition ships, boutique luxury vessels and yachts and ocean cruisers.

They also noted that there are distinctive differences between the product offerings of brands such as Cunard, Holland America, Princess and Celebrity.

Carnival Australia senior vice president Jenny Lourey pointed out that her company offered a great variety of cruising experiences across a range of six highly differentiated brands with ships in every size category – very small, mid-range and "superliners".

She noted that Carnival Australia's Wave season fleet will range in size from the 450-passenger *Seabourn*

Sojourn to the 2600-passenger *Queen Mary 2*.

Royal Caribbean Cruises managing director for Australia, Gavin Smith, said: "Cruising is about finding a balance between a variety of entertainment options paired with shore visitation programs that give an insight to local cultures.

"Guests find the balance they want on different ships of different sizes –

'Cruising is about finding a balance between a variety of entertainment options paired with shore visitation programs that give an insight to local cultures. Guests find the balance they want on different ships of different sizes – that's the strength of the industry' – Gavin Smith

that's the strength of the industry."

Frommer told his radio audience: "It used to be that you would cruise in order to see the world, to enjoy foreign cultures.

"Cruises instead are being turned into amusement parks and the new cruise ships are vying with one another to pack in more bells and whistles, more toys and games.

"One of the newest ships ... is boasting that it will have more bowling alleys than all the others (laughter from daughter Pauline), that it will have multiple rock climbing walls ... The whole thing is an imitation of Vegas."

He also claimed that "because of the

fact that these new ships are so heavily dependent on onboard spending they will hardly ever stop in a real port city".

He cited a Caribbean cruise program of six-day voyages where "half of their departures of the six days that they are at sea, three of those days will be spent solely at sea going nowhere.

Pauline Frommer: "That's partially because they are so big that they can't find docks big enough to ..."

builds seem to be trending bigger and bigger, "there is a balance that cruise lines are achieving at the same time.

"From a business point of view, the cruise lines are able to achieve greater economies of scale with more passengers on their ships, however cruising on a larger ship still offers plenty of 'personal space' for consumers keen to avoid crowds."

Royal Caribbean's Gavin Smith said Frommer's comments contained some "half truths".

For example, said Smith, it is true that "some of the large ships certainly challenge cruise infrastructure" but he noted that port cities are building suitable facilities so they can enjoy the economic benefits.

Smith said that the days of voyaging to primarily provide point-to-point transportation – such as between Australia and Europe or across the Atlantic in the first half of the 20th Century – had passed and cruise companies now competed with resorts for clients.

In providing resort experiences, cruise lines "are sensitive to meeting people's tastes", he said as is evidenced by the growing patronage cruising is experiencing.

Carnival Australia's Jenny Lourey said her company takes great care to work closely with South Pacific island countries to ensure port visits bring benefits to their populations and give passengers authentic insights into their cultures.

New ships accelerate spectacular river cruise growth for Avalon Waterways

WHILE International Cruise Council Australasia figures showed a leveling out in demand for river cruising in 2009, all the anecdotal evidence points to a return to spectacular growth in the coming 12 months.

Earlier this month, for example, Avalon Waterways reported that sales for 2011 were up 149 per cent on sales achieved this time last year.

And the release of new early bird deals – offering savings of \$400 per couple and free cabin upgrades for bookings on specified voyages made before December 15 – should accelerate this growth.

The company says a key factor has been the launch of new ships, including *Avalon Panorama*, claimed to be Europe's first "Suite Ship".

Set to debut in May 2011, *Panorama* will have two decks of all-suite accommodation which, according to Avalon will offer 30 per cent more cabin space than the average competitor "and wall-to-wall panoramic windows that transform the entire suite into an open-air balcony". (*travelBulletin*, June).

The "sold out" sign is already up on most of *Panorama's* 2011 cruises.

"Other than in October and November 2011, virtually all departures are either sold out or close to sell-out," said a company spokesperson.

"The majority of bookings for *Panorama* have come from Australia and New Zealand, which is pleasing given the ship was designed with the Australian market in mind."

Panorama's scheduled May 2011 launch closely follows the recent launch of two other new ships for 2010, *Avalon Luminary* and *Avalon Felicity*.

Launched in June, *Avalon Luminar* became the 10th luxury vessel to join the Avalon Waterways fleet in the past six years. This followed the introduction of *Avalon Felicity* in March, as well as *Avalon Creativity* and *Avalon Affinity* last year.

The company claims this means it has "the most modern fleet on the rivers of Europe".



Almost fully booked out ... 'Suite Ship' *Avalon Panorama* will offer 'wall-to-wall panoramic windows that transform the entire suite into an open-air balcony' the company states.

A 35-night cruise with a difference

SAILING ship *Star Clipper* will call at 15 ports in seven countries on a rare 35-night cruise from the Caribbean to Athens in April-May next year from \$8700 per person.

Passengers can buy segments of the cruise: 18-nights across the Atlantic from St Maarten to Lisbon, Portugal (from \$3160); 10-nights Lisbon to Malta (\$4440) and seven nights Malta to Athens (\$3029).

The Lisbon/Malta and Malta/Athens legs will be discounted by 35 per cent for bookings before January 31, 2011. Ports of call also include Ponta Delgada in the Azores, Tangier (Morocco), Motril, Palma de Mallorca and Mahon (Spain) Tunis (Tunisia) Pantelleria and Siracusa (Italy) Katakolon, Monemvasia, Mykonos, and Hydra (Greece).

Star Clipper, which carries a maximum 170 passengers in the style and ambience of a private yacht, is scheduled to depart St Maarten on April 9 and arrive at Piraeus (Athens) on May 14.

Sister ship *Star Flyer* will make a 28-night cruise across the Atlantic from St Maarten on April 2 to Monte Carlo, priced from \$7060. Ports of call include Ponta Delgada, Lisbon and Portimao (Portugal) Tangier (Morocco) Motril, Cadiz, Ibiza and St Tropez.

ICCA completes three-year overhaul of its agent training

THE International Cruise Council Australasia (ICCA) has conducted a major overhaul of its training programs, reports the council's general manager Brett Jardine.

"Over the past three years we have completely rebuilt and updated all our cruise training modules," he said.

The council has focused particular attention on its cruise geography modules "which are always very popular with agents", according to Jardine.

He said: "In September this year we completed a total revamp of our Australia, New Zealand, South Pacific and Antarctica training information and earlier in 2010 we released a brand new cruise geography module – Asia and the Indian Ocean.

"I would encourage consultants that have not done any training for a while to take advantage of the free modules they get as part of ICCA membership and come back to update some of the areas they may have already completed in years gone by ...

"Education is like a bath and occasionally you need to take one!"

A highlight of ICCA activities this

year was its 2010 Masters Conference on the Yangtze with Viking River Cruises.

"It was a huge success," said Jardine.

"There is always strong demand for our Masters Conference cruises and we anticipate releasing details on our 2011 Masters in the near future – many will be surprised at what we are planning.

"Gaining Masters accreditation is a significant achievement and will enable agents to make the most of the current level of enthusiasm that exists amongst Australian and New Zealand consumers for cruising."

Jardine cited comments from participants in this year's Masters conference to endorse his claims.

Travel Impressions' Paul Barnett completed his Masters in 2001 but returned for a repeat experience at the 2010 conference and said this had proved invaluable.

"This was a totally different and new learning experience for me so I can't stress the value of taking part in the Masters conference again," said Barnett.

Ramsgate Travel Service manager

Justine Sealey was also glowing in her praise of the conference and the "very energetic and engaging" Masters trainer Scott Koepf.

Sealey said the Masters conference "far exceeded my expectations. We have all come away armed with an immense amount of knowledge and ideas and having the opportunity to share these with some like minded participants has been excellent".

Jardine points out that consumer awareness of "the great value of cruising" is growing and that will mean increased retail competition.

"It is important that agents can demonstrate to their clients a specialised knowledge of the cruise sector," he said.

"And the easiest way to do this is with ICCA accreditation which is effectively issued by the cruise industry – giving agents instant credibility."

■ ICCA will again offer Australian and New Zealand cruise consultants the opportunity to attend Cruise Lines International Association's (CLIA) five-day Cruise3sixty conference in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in April 2011.

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Silversea Cruises has good news for single travellers

SILVERSEA Cruises has reduced its single supplements on a range of 2011 voyages in destinations including the Caribbean, the Orient, Australia, Alaska and the Pacific Coast, Europe, the Middle East and South America.

Single travellers booking Vista, Veranda or Midship Veranda suites on a choice of 25 different voyages can now pay single fares from just 110 per cent of the double occupancy fare. They can also benefit from shipboard credits on selected voyages.

Single occupancy fares start from \$3305 per person for a seven-day "San Juan-Puerto Rico-Barbados" voyage departing January 22, 2011 aboard *Silver Cloud*.

A nine-day sailing aboard the 382-guest *Silver Shadow* from Singapore-Vietnam-Hong Kong voyage departing April 6, 2011 costs from \$7247 per person, single occupancy.

Meanwhile, Silversea has launched a redesigned website www.silversea.com including colourful animated photography and images by award-winning photographer Dana Neibert.

The aim is to reinforce the Silversea brand image with an ambience of style

and sophistication. "We've gone beyond our goal of making the new website more intuitive and user-friendly," said the line's vice president of worldwide marketing Linda Schultes.

She said visitors can readily navigate the new site by clicking on tabs that offer information on destinations, ships, services, programs, special offers and more.

New animated itinerary maps are complemented by up-to-date port descriptions supplied by Fodor's Travel, and a new interactive deck plan tool enables visitors to view ship details, images, three-dimensional suite diagrams and 360-degree virtual tours.

Additionally, a new Google custom search feature has been added to improve accuracy of keyword searches.

Social media share options now appear on each page, enabling visitors to share content on Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other popular sites.

Silversea says other improvements include an enhanced Voyage Journal section located on the home page, expanded Expedition Team section with profiles and schedules, and the



debut of the Silversea Expeditions Blog.

It displays country-specific versions of the site based on the currency of the visitor's geographic location.

There is also a redesigned Silversea Expeditions microsite (www.silversea.com/expeditions) with new images and videos of *Prince Albert II* in Antarctica, the Arctic, Central and South America.

■ An example of the imagery thrown up by Silversea expedition voyages is

this extraordinary sighting of a family of polar bears (above) spotted by guests aboard a recent *Prince Albert II* Arctic adventure.

"Watching in awe from their zodiac boat, the group felt privileged to witness such an intimate encounter with the King of the Arctic," a Silversea press release reported.

Silversea points out that the 132-guest *Prince Albert II* is "small enough to explore some of the world's most pristine and fragile landscapes up close".

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Viking plans promotional events in conjunction with travel agent partners

VIKING River Cruises is planning a series of "Legendary Cruise Nights" to showcase the creative consumer events it can run in conjunction with partnering travel agents.

Viking's managing director Australia and New Zealand Teresia Fors stresses that the company is dedicated to working with travel agents, paying commission on the full price of all river cruises (including items such as port charges).

She said that the "Legendary Cruise Nights" presentations will be run in Adelaide (October 25), Brisbane (November 4), Melbourne (November 10), Sydney (November 15) and Perth (November 30).

"We are firm believers in the effectiveness of professionally run cruise nights and we want to take the opportunity to showcase events that are different and memorable, which we can later reproduce on behalf of travel agents," said Fors.

"These are 'turn-key' events that Viking takes full responsibility for, and they are executed in collaboration with a travel agent partner."

She said invitations will be distributed by the end of the month.



Next year Viking River Cruises will introduce a new vessel to its China program, the Viking Emerald.

Fors also cites the appointment of business directors Gideon Cheilyk (QLD) and David Reeves (NSW) as evidence of the strategic importance that the company attaches to the travel agency distribution channel.

She said providing marketing and promotional back-up to "supporting travel agents who want to grow their river cruise sales" is a key focus for Viking.

Viking says it is the world's largest river cruise company and it is offering 20 itineraries in 2011 ranging from eight to 17 days in duration.

It claims to be the only river cruise company operating in the six regions of Europe, Russia, Ukraine, China, Egypt and, as recently announced, Cambodia.

While the majority of its river cruises are in Europe, the company is also a Russia specialist with a comprehensive

journey along the Volga, Neva and Svir between Moscow and St Petersburg and one trip through Ukraine between Kiev and Odessa. In China, Viking claims it has "the very best ship, featuring all-balcony staterooms and fully equipped Western-style kitchens".

Itinerary details, dates and pricing are available in Viking's 2011 River Cruise Atlas on the company's website www.vikingrivercruises.com.au.



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