

CRUISE NEWCASTLE

2025-26 VISITATION MONITOR



Cruise Ship Newcastle Harbour
Credit: Destination NSW



Destination
Sydney Surrounds North

www.dssn.com.au/cruise

CONTENTS

Newcastle Memorial Walk
Credit: Destination NSW



03

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

04

STATE OF THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

05

KEY TRENDS

06

NEWCASTLE CRUISE MARKET

07

2025-26 NEWCASTLE CRUISE SEASON

09

NEWCASTLE CRUISE PASSENGERS

10

CRUISE MARKET ECONOMIC IMPACT

11

NEWCASTLE SHORE EXCURSION TOURS

12

2026-27 CRUISE SEASON

Disclaimer: The details contained in the “Cruise Newcastle 2025-26 Visitation Monitor” are presented in good faith and Destination Sydney Surrounds North (DSSN) has sought to ensure its contents are true, correct and based on the best available information at time of production. DSSN accepts no liability arising whatsoever from or in connection with the information contained. Some information contained in this publication has been provided by third parties and may be subject to change, modification, conditions and availability. The “Cruise Newcastle 2025-26 Visitation Monitor” is copyright and cannot be reproduced without the prior written permission of DSSN.

Image Credits: We acknowledge and appreciate all photographs and images supplied by Destination NSW for use in this publication



Bistro Molines, Mount View, Hunter Valley
Credit: Destination NSW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cruising continues to be one of the world's most popular ways to travel, with millions of people choosing ocean voyages each year for their holidays. In 2025, global cruise numbers grew again, reflecting strong traveller confidence and an increasing interest in luxury, and expedition experiences.

Australia maintained its position as one of the world's leading source markets, though national economic output softened due to fewer ship visits.

For Newcastle and the Hunter region, the 2025–26 season brought both highlights and challenges. While several ships made memorable visits—including three maiden calls and the arrival of the exclusive residential vessel *The World*—the season was impacted by broader national capacity reductions and two cancelled visits (due to protest). Even so, passenger engagement remained strong, with most visitors choosing to explore the city and surrounding regions, supporting local businesses, tour operators, and visitor attractions.

Looking ahead, Newcastle is preparing for its biggest cruise season ever. With 17 ships scheduled to arrive between October 2026 and April 2027, the region is set to welcome more than 30,000 passengers and 15,000 crew.

This momentum underscores the region's strategic position between the major ports of Sydney and Brisbane and highlights the ongoing opportunity to strengthen Newcastle's role as a premier east-coast transit destination.

The following report provides an overview of global and national cruise trends, insights into passenger behaviour, and a detailed look at Newcastle's cruise performance over the 2025-26 cruise season and opportunities for the future.

**Source:* Cruise Lines International State of the Industry 2026 and Australian Cruise Association Economic Impact Assessment of Cruise Tourism 2024/25 prepared by AEC Group Ltd.

Stockton Sand Dunes, Worimi Conservation Lands, Port Stephens
Credit: Destination NSW



STATE OF THE CRUISE INDUSTRY 2025

Global Cruise Market¹

- In 2025, there were 37.2 million ocean going cruise passengers globally, up 7.5% on 2024.
- It is forecast that 38.3 million ocean-going passengers will cruise annually in 2026 reaching 42.1 million in 2029.
- Australia is placed fourth in the top 10 cruise source markets, with 1.4 million Australians cruising in 2025 – up 9.5% on 2024. The USA makes up 55% of people cruising and the rest of the top ten make up 33%.
- Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific rank seventh in the top ten 2025 destination regions. Top destinations are the Caribbean/Bahamas (44% of passengers) and the Mediterranean attracting one out of every 6 global cruise passengers in 2025.
- Most ships sailing today and scheduled to sail in the future are small- to mid-size ships. 70% of ships in the global fleet are small and mid-size ships.
- In 2025, there was 310 in the ocean cruise line fleet increasing to 327 in 2026.

Australian Cruise Market²

- Economic impact of cruise tourism in Australia was \$7.32 billion in 2024-25, a decline of 13.2% on the record output achieved in 2023-24.
- Cruise ships visited 56 ports in Australia during the 2024-25 season (up 14.2%), however visit days were down 2.7%.
- 68 cruise ships over the 2024-25 season operated in Australian waters – a decrease of 9.3%
- 1.4 million Australians took an ocean cruise during 2025 of which almost 83% sailed within Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific.
- Around one-third of Australian cruisers are aged under 40, which aligns with global trends.
- Sydney is the major hub of cruiser origins (53%), followed by Brisbane (22%) and Melbourne (13%).
- The average cruise length is 8.1 days - popularity of short-break getaways for Australian's.

Source:

1- State of the Cruise Industry Report 2026 – Cruise Lines International Association.

2 - Economic Impact Assessment of Cruise Tourism in Australia, 2024-25 – Cruise Lines International Association Australasia and the Australian Cruise Association.



Newcastle Museum
Credit: Destination NSW

Circ 1850 Homewares, Morpeth
Credit Destination NSW

GLOBAL CRUISE TRENDS

- Luxury cruise travel has more than tripled the luxury cruise fleet (from 28 ships to 97 ships in 2024) and it is forecast that 1.5 million will chose a luxury cruise experience by 2028.
- Expedition cruising is the fastest growing sector of the cruise industry, experiencing a 22% increase in passengers year-over-year and an estimated 150% capacity increase in the expedition sector is forecast to 2029.
- Private island experiences are popular with cruise lines who continue to invest in private islands and beach clubs which generate more profits. Royal Caribbean will open its first private cruise destination in the Southern Hemisphere, Lelepa, on the shores of Vanuatu in 2027 with the first sailing in October 2027 ex Sydney and the second ex Brisbane.
- Cruise is a popular choice for travellers who wish to travel on their own – making up about 5% of the cruise market and rising.
- Rising demand for curated shore excursions, cultural immersion, and longer time in destinations.
- The future of cruise continues to be the younger generation:
 - 46-47 yrs are the average age of a cruise traveller with 36% being under the age of 40
 - Strong growth from Gen-X and Millennials and Gen-Z.



NEWCASTLE CRUISE MARKET

In 2025-26, the Port of Newcastle had eight cruise ships booked over the season, however due to a protest that coincided with two cruise ship arrivals two visits were cancelled.

The decline in cruise ship visits to Newcastle was impacted by the 2025-26 Australian cruise season experiencing a market contraction. Capacity was down approximately 9.3% compared to peak.

In 2026-27, Newcastle will receive a record of 17 cruise ship visits bringing over 30,000 passengers to the region.

CRUISE SHIP VISITS TO NEWCASTLE PORT SINCE 2016-17

YEAR	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25*	2025-26#	2026-27 Booked
Cruise Ship Visits	5	10	16	12	0 Pandemic Closures	14	16	9	6	17

*Four cruise ship visits were cancelled due to a protest and extreme weather conditions. # Two cruise ship visits cancelled due to protest.



Cruise Ship Newcastle Harbour
Credit: Destination NSW

2025-26 NEWCASTLE CRUISE SEASON

Over the 2025-26 Newcastle cruise season, the first cruise ship to arrive was Silver Nova on 19 October 2025 and the last was Viking Orion on 31 March 2026. Unfortunately, due to the impacts of a protest in late 2025, Viking Venus (29 November) and Viking Orion (1 December) visits were cancelled.

During the 2025-26 cruise season Newcastle received:

- Cruise visit bookings: 8
- Cruise visits: 6 (two cancelled due to protest)
- Actual Passengers onboard: 8,386
- Actual Crew onboard: 4,284

The region received three maiden visits (Silver Nova, Celebrity Edge and Crown Princess) and a mix of cruise ships as follows:

- Three smaller high-end luxury cruise ship visited with a capacity of 720–940 passengers offering itineraries either to or from an international destination/s; and
- Two larger cruise ships visited:
 - Celebrity Edge (11-night Sydney to Great Barrier Reef) with a mix of domestic and international passengers (2,869 passengers); and
 - Crown Princess (4-day Hunter Coast Seacation) with 100% domestic passengers (3,030 passengers).

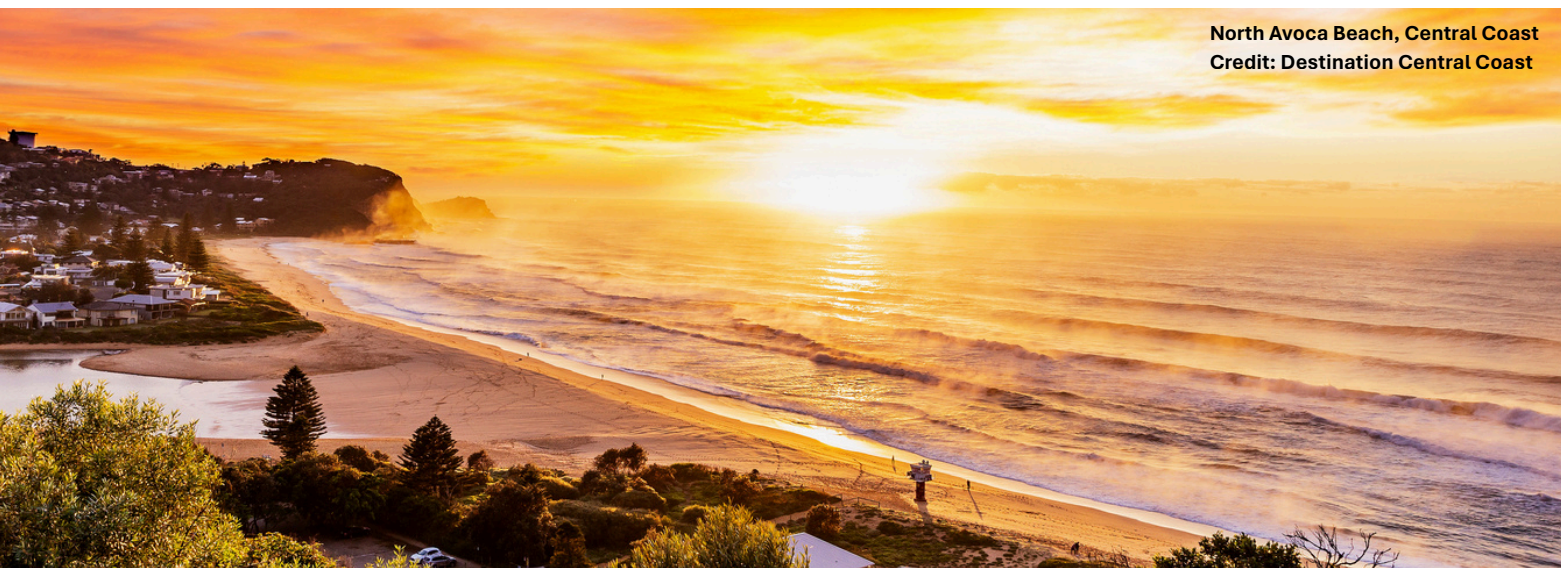
The region also received an overnight visit by The World, bringing over 170 high-net worth visitors to the region. MS The World is the largest privately owned residential superyacht, operating as an exclusive floating condominium featuring 165 luxury apartments. Residents vote on an endless, customizable global itinerary that spans over 100 ports annually.

Fort Scratchley, Newcastle
Credit: Destination NSW



CRUISE SHIP VISITS IN 2025-26

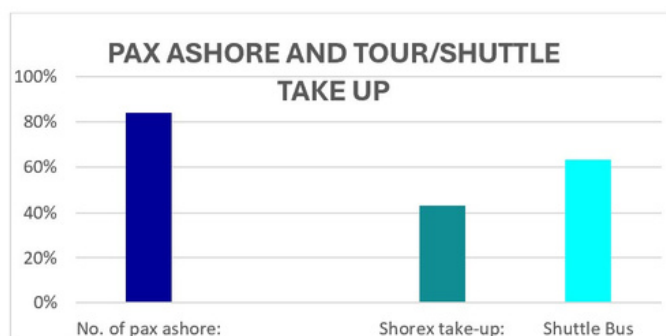
CRUISE SHIP	CRUISE LINE	DATE NEWCASTLE	ARRIVE	DEPART	CRUISE ITINERARY
SILVER NOVA Maiden Visit	Silversea Cruises	Sun, 19 Oct 25	08:00	18:00	Grand Australia Melbourne to Melbourne 47 days.
VIKING VENUS Visit cancelled protest	Viking Ocean Cruises Ltd	Sat, 29 Nov 25	08:00	18:00	Bali to Sydney via Darwin and Qld - Newcastle prior to arriving in Sydney
VIKING ORION Visit cancelled protest	Viking Ocean Cruises Ltd	Mon, 1 Dec 25	12:00	19:30	17 days Bali to Sydney via Darwin and Qld
CELEBRITY EDGE Maiden visit	Celebrity Cruises Inc	Sat, 13 Dec 25	08:00	18:00	11 Nights Sydney to Great Barrier Reef return to Sydney
THE WORLD	Row Management	Fri 19- Sat 20 Dec 25	14:00 Fri	23:00 Sat	Round the World - Sailing in January 2025 from the USA West Coast. One year, five continents, 30 ports of call.
VIKING VENUS	Viking Ocean Cruises Ltd	Mon, 23 Feb 26	08:00	18:00	29 days Sydney to Bangkok via Bali, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur
CROWN PRINCESS Maiden visit	Princess Cruise Line	Fri, 20 Mar 26	09:00	17:30	4 day Hunter Coast Seacation ex Brisbane - cruise continues round Australia (29 days total).
VIKING ORION	Viking Ocean Cruises Ltd	Tues, 31 Mar 26	08:00	18:00	78 days - Sydney to Vancouver - via Asia & Alaska



NEWCASTLE CRUISE PASSENGERS 2025-26

Onboard the cruise ships that visited the port of Newcastle in 2025-26 there were 8,386 passengers on board of which:

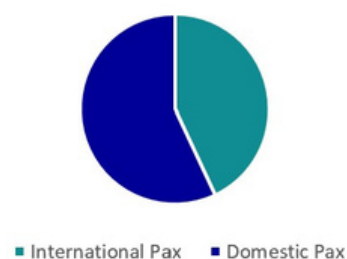
- 84% of passengers went ashore. Ships carrying international passengers on longer cruise itineraries had a greater number of passengers ashore in comparison to shorter cruises attracting domestic passengers:
 - International – 96% ashore
 - Domestic – 73% ashore
- Over 3,000 passengers took an organised shore tour (43% of passengers ashore).
- Passengers on board the high-end smaller cruise ships were more likely to take an organised shore tour (on average 88% of passengers) as some cruise lines provide selected inclusive shore tours.
- Almost 4,500 passengers used the shuttle bus from the Port of Newcastle to the CBD (63%).



Passengers onboard the six cruise ships that visited over the 2025-26 season were greater from the domestic market due to two larger cruise ship visits offering shorter cruises targeted to the domestic market:

- 57% Domestic Passengers
- 43% International Passengers

ORIGIN OF PASSENGERS ON BOARD



International passengers cruising in Australia are primarily from the USA, Western Europe, (UK, Germany, France) and New Zealand.

Crew

There was almost 4,300 crew onboard the six cruise ships that visited Newcastle in 2025-26 with around 20% going ashore.

Note: A portion of crew are required to stay onboard each cruise ship



CRUISE MARKET ECONOMIC IMPACT

Over the 2024-25 cruise season the total economic output from cruise tourism in Australia declined by 13.2% (A\$1.11 billion) due to fewer ships visiting Australia.

New South Wales represents the largest share of cruise total economic output (53.8%) due to Sydney's position as Australia's primary cruise port followed by Queensland. With the opening of the Brisbane International Cruise Terminal in 2022, Sydney and Brisbane act as gateways to support cruising around the country and throughout the region. Newcastle being located on the east coast between Brisbane and Sydney offers opportunities to increase transit visits from cruise ships departing from either port.

Newcastle also had a decline in the economic impact of the cruise market due to fewer cruise ship visits. In 2024-25 it is estimated that cruise contributed over \$10.5 million to the local economy.

Cruise passengers spend per day on average in transit ports is:

- Domestic Cruise Passengers: \$195 per day
- International Cruise Passengers: \$270 per day
- Crew: \$134 per day

***Source:** Australian Cruise Association and Cruise Lines International Association Value of Cruise Tourism economic Impact assessment for Australia 2024-25 financial year.



NEWCASTLE SHORE EXCURSION TOURS 2025-26

Over 3,000 passengers participated in an organised shore excursion tour within the region in 2025-26.

Key experiences that featured in shore excursion tours undertaken by cruise ship passengers in 2025-26 were:

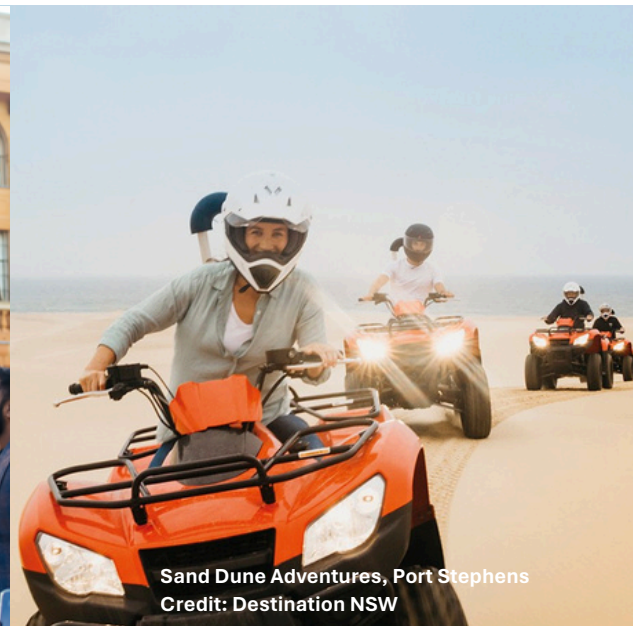
- City highlights and best of Newcastle
- Nature and Wildlife
- Wine tasting and food
- Walking tours
- Soft adventure e.g. cultural quad bike tours and Newcastle Coastline by RIB

Key destinations for organised shore excursion tours over the 2025-26 cruise season were Newcastle, followed by the Hunter Valley and Port Stephens. Shore excursion tours vary by cruise ship and the passengers on board. The smaller high-end luxury cruise ships offer an all-inclusive pricing including select shore tours at each port of call.

Cruise Newcastle works with product to develop new experiences suitable for the cruise market and over the past two seasons twelve new products have been featured in shore tours. A new product update was distributed to Ground Handlers in June 2026 featuring new experiences in each destination: Newcastle, Hunter Valley, Port Stephens, Lake Macquarie, Maitland/Morpeth and Central Coast.

There is an opportunity to expand further the shore excursion tours offered to cruise passengers especially for destinations that have the ability to develop unique and bespoke experiences within 1-1.15 hrs drive of the Port of Newcastle as well as Sydney.

For information and resources to assist in developing a shore excursion tour visit dssn.com.au/cruise



2026-27 CRUISE SEASON

The 2026-27 cruise season will be a record with 17 cruise ships booked to visit Newcastle between October 2026 and April 2027.

This includes:

- Six maiden visits by cruise ships to the region
- Nine larger cruise ships with a capacity of 2,000-3,000 passengers
- Eight high-end smaller and mid-sized luxury cruise ships with a capacity ranging between 620-1,700 passengers.

It is estimated that over 30,000 passengers and 15,000 crew will arrive in Newcastle over the 2026-27 cruise season.

**Newcastle Cruise Schedule is available online
visit dssn.com.au/cruise**



Shoal Bay, Port Stephens
Credit: Destination NSW



Destination
Sydney Surrounds North

Cruise Newcastle 2025-26 MONITOR

Prepared by:
CRUISE PROJECT MANAGER
E: CRUISE@DSSN.COM.AU

Image Credits: We acknowledge and appreciate all photographs and images supplied by Destination NSW for use in this publication.