



P&O's Pacific Pearl arrives with Auckland Nines fans to launch a dual 2017 cruise season

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More than 1700 Nines supporters have sailed into Auckland this morning on P&O's Pacific Pearl, marking the start of a four-month season of cruises from New Zealand estimated to contribute \$20 million to the nation's economy.

Around 40 per cent of guests on the P&O cruise are Australian, boosting the number of international visitors to the two-day Downer NRL Auckland Nines event which begins tomorrow.

The four night cruise, which departed Sydney on January 31 was joined by famous past players, providing the ultimate way for fans to prepare for the biggest rugby league event in the New Zealand calendar.

Guests were joined by Rugby League personalities Steve Price, Steve Menzies and Brad Fittler and renowned former referee, Bill Harrigan, who hosted footy-themed activities, meet-and-greets and Q&A sessions with fans during their cruise across the Tasman.

Pacific Pearl's arrival marks the start of a special year of cruising for New Zealanders, with the cruise line offering two seasons from Auckland in 2017.

Pacific Pearl will be based in Auckland until March 27 for her final season of cruises from New Zealand before she leaves the P&O fleet. Then in September, her sister ship - the 2000-guest Pacific Jewel - will arrive in Auckland to offer P&O's first ever season of spring cruising, sailing on 8 roundtrip itineraries from the city until October 31.

Between them the two ships will carry about 30,000 New Zealanders on cruise holidays, underlining the growing popularity of cruising amongst Kiwis.

P&O Cruises President Sture Myrmell said the cruise line was excited to offer two New Zealand cruise seasons in 2017.

"With 18 cruises sailing from Auckland throughout the year, we will be giving New Zealanders the biggest ever selection of cruises from their doorstep. It's all part of our commitment to investing in New Zealand and bringing more choice to the market," Mr Myrmell said.

"Our cruises will also be making a valuable economic contribution, with guest and crew spending, provisioning and port charges expected to contribute close to \$20 million into the local economy.

Mr Myrmell said P&O, which was recently announced as the Official Cruise Line Partner of the NRL in 2017, was excited to be bringing more rugby league fans to New Zealand for the Nines.

"Many of our guests are big fans of the game, so it's fantastic to be able to offer an exciting line up

of rugby league cruises this year including the Nines.

"With transport, accommodation and meals all included in the cruise fare plus transfers and entry to the game, cruising to the Downer NRL Auckland Nines with P&O is a great value way to experience one of the most exciting competitions in the Rugby League calendar, " Mr Myrmell said.

For more information visit pocruises.com.au, call 13 24 94 or see a licensed travel agent.

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About P&O Cruises

Sailing local waters for almost 85 years, P&O is Australia and New Zealand's only homegrown cruise line and the largest cruise operator in the region, offering a fleet of five ships cruising year round from eight home ports in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. With a contemporary look and feel, P&O's ships carry more than 460,000 guests a year on great value holidays. Itineraries range from short getaways and cruises exploring the Australian coast to longer holidays to the South Pacific and exotic destinations such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Asia. In June 2017 P&O Cruises will welcome its latest ship, Pacific Explorer, while in 2019 it will take delivery of its largest ever ship, a 3000-guest, 113,000-tonne vessel which will be the biggest ship ever to be based full time in Australia.