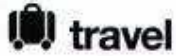


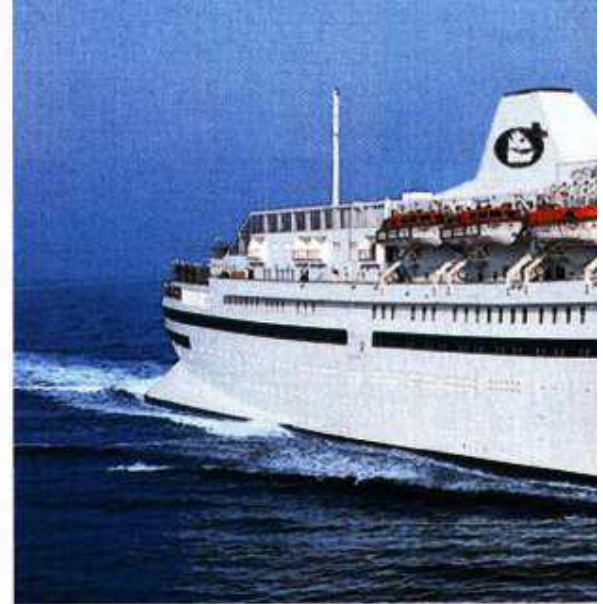


**SA Motor**  
**Thursday 1/9/2011**  
**Page: 74**  
**Section: General News**  
**Region: Adelaide Circulation: 360,875**  
**Type: Magazines Lifestyle**  
**Size: 1,695.41 sq.cms.**  
**Frequency: bi monthly**

**Brief: CICRUISE**  
**Page 1 of 3**



# GODDESS on the sea



**T**he sun melts like liquid honey into the cobalt-blue ocean, passengers fling streamers overboard in farewell and live piano music hangs on the sea air – it's as if you've stepped back in time to the classic cruising era of days past.

The *Athena* has only just pulled away from port for a four-night cruise around WA's south-west coast, but the cocktails are already flowing and a conga line has formed on the deck below, joyously snaking its way between passengers as they enjoy rainbow-coloured drinks. Simply put, aboard the *Athena* you can't help but have a good time.

Originally launched in 1948 as the MS *Stockholm*, the *Athena* has undergone numerous facelifts, but from its traditional teak decking to the painted shuffleboard, it continues to exude old-world charm.

If you're after the opulence of one of today's megaships – such as an onboard ice-skating rink and numerous pools – this may not be the ship for you. Rather,

carrying just 550 passengers, the *Athena* offers an intimate cruising experience focused on impeccable service and first-class cuisine. This means you don't have to fight crowds of 3000-plus just to get a morning coffee or for a turn on the shuffleboard.

The *Athena's* point of difference is its affordable prices and old-fashioned service; by the end of dinner on our first night, our waiter knew us by name and whether I preferred red or white.

There's plenty to do aboard this 160m-long Portuguese-registered ship. When the sun's out, most passengers are drawn to the Calypso Deck. This is a place for drinking cocktails by the pool, listening to live music or just watching the sea go by on a lazy afternoon.

Spread across eight passenger decks are five bars and lounges, a cinema, library, nightclub, photshop, internet café, card room, and a small gym and health centre.



Dinner each night is followed by a show in the Calypso Lounge where dancers dressed in sequins and feathers amaze you, magicians wow you and the hilarious *Miss Athena* pageant leaves every passenger in stitches. While during the day dancing lessons, bingo, quizzes and craft sessions fill the hours.



**LEFT: Relax aboard the *Athena*.**

**OVER PAGE: Sunset at Albany; Albany War Memorial; Bunbury's Dolphin Discovery Centre.**

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The four-night voyage included stops at the Western Australian seaside towns of Albany and Bunbury, worthy destinations in their own right.

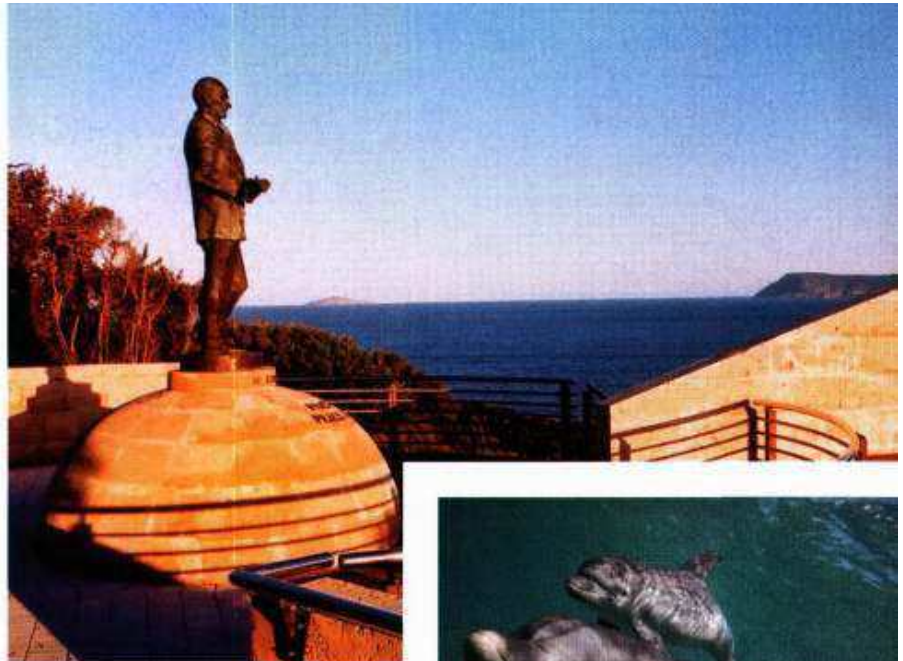
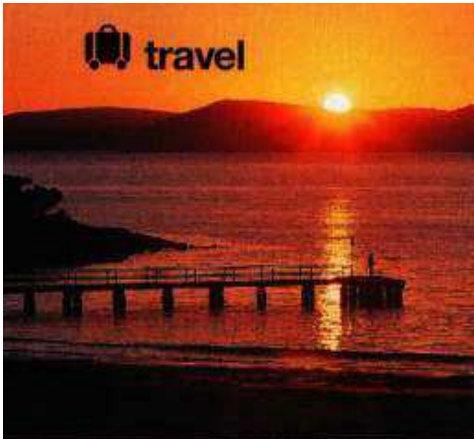
In Albany, visit the Princess Royal Fortress, one of Australia's best outdoor military museums. It was in this town in 1914 that 30,000 men departed for Gallipoli

– for many, this was their last ever glimpse at the country for which they fought and lost their lives.

Albany is renowned for its natural beauty and turquoise waters that tempt you in for a dip. To explore the beauty, hire a bike and enjoy the many kilometres of sealed paths that take you to some

of the town's most prized sights.

From Bunbury, take a 20-minute drive to Ferguson Valley, a region making a name for itself thanks to award-winning boutique wineries and microbreweries. While you're there, stop in at Gnomesville, a bizarre collection of 3000-plus garden gnomes that have invaded the road side and nearby bush. ►



► In Bunbury, visit the Dolphin Discovery Centre where you can swim with wild Dolphins or take an eco-cruise to observe these playful creatures from a boat.

A short voyage aboard the *Athena* is perfect for first time cruisers wanting to test out the water or couples and families looking for an affordable break, and is sure to have you returning for more.



Find out more about the *Athena's* 2011-12 season by calling Travel on **8202 4589** or email [travel@raa.com.au](mailto:travel@raa.com.au)

*Classic International Cruises' Athena will return to Australia for another season of voyages in the 2011-12 season, including five cruises to and from Adelaide. Longer cruises to Bali and the UK are also available.*

*The writer was a guest of Classic International Cruises.*