World's largest battery-electric ship 'China Zorrilla' begins Argentina–Uruguay passenger service

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News

Built by Incat Tasmania at Hobart, Australia, the world's largest battery-electric ship 'China Zorrilla' (Incat Hull 096) began commercial passenger service for Buquebus across the Río de la Plata (River Plate) estuary between Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Colonia del Sacramento (Uruguay) – about 55–60 km, roughly 90 minutes. The official launch ceremony was held in Buenos Aires on 21 Oct 2026. It is 130 m long and 32 m wide, with over 40 MWh of lithium-ion batteries weighing more than 250 tonnes, and carries 2,100 passengers and 225 vehicles.

Key facts

Ship	China Zorrilla (Incat Hull 096) – named after Uruguayan actress 'China' Zorrilla (1922–2014)
Builder / operator	Incat Tasmania, Hobart (Australia) / Buquebus
Battery	Over 40 MWh, 250+ tonnes; Corvus Energy lithium-ion system
Propulsion	8 electric motors driving Wärtsilä waterjets; speed 25 knots
Size / capacity	130 m × 32 m; 2,100 passengers, 225 vehicles; 2,300 m² duty-free shop

Timeline	Floated out 2 May 2025 (Hobart); reached Uruguay on heavy-lift ship 'Black Marlin' in Sep 2026; launch ceremony 21 Oct 2026

Background

- Science: the 2019 Nobel Prize in Chemistry went to John B. Goodenough (USA), M. Stanley Whittingham (UK–USA) and Akira Yoshino (Japan) for developing the lithium-ion battery. During charging, lithium ions move from the cathode to the graphite anode.
- Geography: the Río de la Plata is the wide estuary formed by the Paraná and Uruguay rivers flowing into the Atlantic; it forms the Argentina–Uruguay boundary. Uruguay's grid relies largely on wind and hydropower, so the ferry runs almost carbon-free.
- International: the International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a UN specialised agency headquartered in London; it administers the MARPOL convention on ship pollution. Incat is also building three 129 m battery-electric ferries for Denmark's Molslinjen.
- India: Kochi Water Metro, India's first water metro, was launched by the PM on 25 Apr 2023 with electric-hybrid boats built by Cochin Shipyard (CSL). India's first indigenous hydrogen fuel-cell passenger vessel (built by CSL, owned by IWAI, 50 passengers, LT-PEM fuel cell) began commercial service on the Ganga at Varanasi on 11 Dec 2025.

Tamil Nadu link: under the Union Ports Ministry's Green Tug Transition Programme (50 green tugs by 2030), V.O. Chidambaranar Port, Thoothukudi, ordered a fully electric 60-tonne bollard-pull tug in Dec 2025 (₹385.76 crore; Knowledge Marine & Engineering Works; delivery within 2 years).

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