

Virgin Voyages season set to bring Brilliant boost to Portsmouth

Portsmouth International Port is preparing to once again become the UK destination for global cruise brand Virgin Voyages.

Their first ship, Scarlet Lady makes her homecoming on 27 July, closely followed by their newest addition, Brilliant Lady, on 22 August – making Portsmouth the first port in the world to welcome the complete fleet. The summer of sailings will bring a significant economic boost to the region, with industry data and independent reports estimating that each call can generate up to £1.5m, through tariffs, supply chain uplifts, and passenger and crew spend.

Owned by the Portsmouth City Council, Portsmouth International Port is predicted to contribute £10.3m in profit to the council this year, funding vital services for residents and investment in local businesses.

The port's partnership with Virgin Voyages began in 2021 when the new cruise line launched its first ship, Scarlet Lady, from the city. Since becoming the UK backdrop for the brand, more than 72,000 Virgin Voyages passengers are estimated to have travelled through Portsmouth, leading to significant cruise growth for the port.

Cllr Steve Pitt, Leader of Portsmouth City Council said: "The investment we have seen from the port's partnership with Virgin Voyages has had a resounding impact on the city. Not only does the port support other areas of the council financially, cruise lines are also working with local traders and communities to put Portsmouth on the map for their guests. For residents, having the city as the port of such a distinguished brand is an exciting recognition and we are proud that Virgin chose to make Portsmouth their home."

Virgin Voyages ships have become a regular sight through the harbour, with the port welcoming more than 30 calls from Scarlet, Valiant and Resilient Lady, and a further six expected this year. Six to 13-night itineraries are set to take passengers as far as Reykjavik and Morocco, as well as two special comedy and celebration voyages.

Nirmal Saverimuttu, CEO of Virgin Voyages said: "Portsmouth has become a meaningful part of our journey. It's where we introduced Scarlet Lady to the world and, four years later, where we're celebrating the arrival of Brilliant Lady. Along the way, our full fleet of Lady Ships has passed through, making Portsmouth the first and only port in the world to have welcomed all of our vessels. Each one marks a new moment in the evolution of this incredible brand.

The city has welcomed us from the start and been a great partner. As we continue to expand globally, it feels right to mark these milestones in a place that reflects our values, shares our maritime spirit and has supported us every step of the way."

Mike Sellers, director of Portsmouth International Port said: "Every cruise call to the port is highly valued and a great boost to the city. We have built a successful relationship with the Virgin Voyages team over the last few years, and we are very proud to be the brand's UK home port. Both the port and brand have grown through this partnership, with this year set to be our busiest year for cruise so far, with over 90 calls expected. Virgin Voyages' fresh approach to cruising also brings a new demographic through the terminal, who get to experience all the brilliant benefits of travelling from Portsmouth."

Virgin Voyages' Scarlet Lady will make her highly anticipated return on Sunday 27 July, with regular sailings throughout August and September. Brilliant Lady will arrive on 18 August for a selection of technical and media events before setting sail for New York where she will make her debut.

Putting on the Ritz: luxury superyacht makes Portsmouth its first UK port of call

Today saw another first for Portsmouth International Port, as Ritz Carlton's luxury superyacht Ilma made her debut arrival into UK waters.

Andrew Williamson, head of cruise and ferry at Portsmouth International Port said: "It's been fantastic to host Ritz Carlton at the port and celebrate their first visit to UK shores, on a beautiful sunny day in Portsmouth. Ilma sailed in this morning with 386 guests, who we are proud to have welcomed today. The Captain also informed us that many of the guests have plans to spend a couple of days in the city.

This ultra-luxury brand is part of the Ritz Carlton group and is at the high-end of our boutique cruise offering. The ship runs on cleaner LNG fuel (liquefied natural gas), making it our first LNG cruise ship. Ilma is also shore power ready, meaning she will be able to plug in to our new shore power system which will be completed later this year."

Entering service in October 2024, today marks her inaugural call to Portsmouth and the start of a nine night cruise around the British Isles. Ritz Carlton is set to return to Portsmouth in 2026, as part of a busy cruise schedule for the port.

Ilma will depart at 1900 tonight, setting sail to Holyhead.

Dover Cruise announces another major upgrade

Two months on from Dover's announcement that it is ready to welcome cruise ships of up to 350m loa following upgrades to its mooring infrastructure, the transformation continues. Further investment will allow for a state-of-the-art passenger boarding facility in the historic Cruise Terminal 1.

Created by mobility experts TK Elevator, the new boarding bridge will ensure a seamless and stress-free embarkation for thousands of cruise guests each year. It is expected to be operational from 2027.

Peter Wright, Head of Cruise at the Port of Dover said:

"It's been brilliant to see such significant changes across our cruise terminals since we launched our long-term vision to 2050 only a year ago. Expanding our cruise capacity is central to that vision, and this latest step on the journey will deliver a much-improved experience for guests."

Ignacio Medina, CEO of Airport Solutions at TK Elevator said:

"Driven by our passion for moving people and enhancing their journey, TK Elevator is proud to support the Port of Dover in its transformation into a future-ready cruise hub. Our sustainable and efficient boarding solutions are designed to meet the evolving needs of seaports while placing passengers and operational excellence at the core".

Belfast Harbour celebrates 1500th cruise call with Princess Cruises' Regal Princess

Belfast Harbour welcomed the 1,500th cruise ship to call in the city, as Princess Cruises' Regal Princess arrived in Northern Ireland on 18th June.

The landmark was announced by Cruise Belfast, the partnership between Belfast Harbour and Visit Belfast which markets the city as a leading cruise ship destination.

Since the first cruise ship arrived in Belfast in 1996, the industry has grown exponentially and now contributes approximately £25m a year to the local economy.

To date almost 2.5 million cruise passengers have come to Northern Ireland on cruise ships and in 2025 there will be 148 cruise calls by 58 ships from 31 different cruise lines calling at Belfast Harbour during the seven-month cruise season – including first time calls from 10 cruise ships.

Regal Princess is Belfast's most frequent cruise caller, with this latest visit the 32nd time it has called in Belfast since 2015, and the fifth time it has stopped in Northern Ireland this year. Princess Cruises has brought almost a third of the total number of people who have visited Northern Ireland on a cruise.

Michael Robinson, Port Director of Belfast Harbour said: "It is a fantastic achievement to have reached this milestone of welcoming 1,500 cruise calls to Belfast Harbour. The cruise sector brings significant numbers of people to the city, directly supporting local tourism businesses in the economy while also boosting the profile of Northern Ireland as an international destination.

"Belfast Harbour has committed to our largest ever port investment in order to facilitate further growth of the cruise sector. Feedback from our cruise line partners and visitors about the quality of the local offering and service is always positive, and we are excited about what more can be achieved."

Regal Princess' Captain Aldo Traverso said: "It's an honour for Regal Princess to be a part of this significant milestone at Belfast Harbour today. Visiting this vibrant city has been met with warmth and hospitality, making it a favourite stop for our guests on their British Isles voyage. We look forward to many more calls to come."

Mary Jo McCanny, Director of Visitor Experience and Destination Initiatives at Visit Belfast said: "We are proud to mark the arrival of Belfast's 1500th cruise ship, a major milestone that reflects just how far the city has come as a world-class cruise destination. Over nearly three decades, Cruise Belfast has helped establish Belfast as a welcoming, exciting, and high-quality port of call, with strong partnerships, exceptional visitor experiences and a growing global reputation.

"Cruise tourism is an important part of our visitor economy, supporting local businesses and connecting millions of visitors with the culture, heritage and warm welcome that Belfast City Region is known for. As we continue to build for the future this milestone is both a celebration and a launchpad for the next chapter of growth for the city."

Among the ships calling at Belfast for the first time this year are Viking's newest vessel, the Viking Vela and Virgin Voyages first ship, Scarlet Lady. The largest vessel visiting Belfast this year will once again be the 333 metre-long MSC Preziosa.

In a further indication of the city's growing status in the cruise industry, this year will see Belfast Harbour facilitate eight 'turnarounds' – which means passengers beginning and ending their trip in Belfast boosting overnight stays in city hotels.

The 2025 cruise season will come to an end on 6th November 2025.

Azamara Cruises and English Heritage host first ever AzAmazing event at Dover Castle

One of Britain's most iconic landmarks was transformed into a vibrant medieval festival for its first AzAmazing event on 6th June.

As part of Azamara Journey's port of call visit, hundreds of guests were transported back in time through centuries, interacting with knights and jesters to experience the Castle's incredible heritage and culture through this exclusive event.

Sonia Limbrick, Head of Business Development for Cruise at the Port of Dover said: "We are so lucky to have this beautiful Castle on our doorstep, which attracts people from across the world with its rich history and spectacular views. It has played such an important role in society for centuries, so to be able to showcase this to Azamara Cruises' guests in a way that's never been done before was incredible.

Thank you to the wonderful teams at English Heritage and Azamara Cruises. We can't wait for them to return next year."

Becky Smith, Manager of Dover Castle added: "We were delighted to welcome over 500 of Azamara's guests for this exclusive English Heritage event, which immersed them in the stunning culture, heritage and views of Dover Castle in a truly unique way."

The call on 6th June was part of Azamara Journey's 12-night cruise, from Lisbon to Copenhagen. She will return on 2nd July 2026 for a 13-night European cruise.

Port volunteers Southampton Saints named VisitEngland's Tourism Superstar 2025

VisitEngland has revealed the winner of its Tourism Superstar 2025 competition with port volunteers Southampton Saints taking the title.

The Southampton Saints are made up of 13 port cruise welcome ambassadors who greet visitors at the city's port.

VisitEngland Director Andrew Stokes said: "VisitEngland's Tourism Superstar competition is all about finding the individuals within England's tourism industry who are doing something extra to make visitors feel special, going above and beyond to make their experiences truly exceptional.

"The Southampton Saints pull out all the stops when they welcome cruise ship tourists at the city port with

a friendly smile and helpful information on local attractions and must-see places. They also provide the all-important first impression, setting the standard for what visitors can expect from their tourism experience in England. I thank them for their hard work and I congratulate the team on this well-deserved win.”

Executive Director GO! Southampton – Business Improvement District Limited Stephen Manion said: “Southampton is absolutely thrilled and honoured to win this prestigious VisitEngland award. We are very proud of our Saints, who are amazing ambassadors for this great city, sharing their passion and love to make the visitor journey more enjoyable and memorable. Thank you to everyone who voted.”

This year’s Tourism Superstar competition ran from 12 February until midnight on 23 March culminating at the end of English Tourism Week, which took place from the 14-23 March, and with the public voting for their favourite amongst 10 finalists. VisitEngland’s Tourism Superstar search in 2025 saw the largest number of votes ever cast with more than 18,000.

The Southampton Saints were presented with their Tourism Superstar award at the VisitEngland Awards for Excellence 2025 event at the Brighton Dome Corn Exchange on 4 June.

Isle of Man welcomed an additional two cruise ships this week in a boost to the local visitor economy

The Isle of Man welcomed two unscheduled cruise ships this week, as weather-related changes to itineraries brought additional visitors to Manx shores.

Among the vessels was Ambition, operated by Ambassador Cruise Line, which made her maiden call to the Isle of Man. The second vessel Silver Wind, operated by Silversea Cruise Line, also arrived as a result of itinerary changes, with the vessels carrying 1350 passengers between them. Passengers disembarking during these visits were able to enjoy a taste of the Island’s vibrant and welcoming tourism, retail and hospitality scene, and contributed to the local visitor economy.

Sarah Maltby MHK, Political Member with responsibility for Tourism, Motorsport and Heritage, added: ‘We were delighted to welcome both ships to the Isle of Man, and it was a great honour to be invited on board Ambition to extend a warm Manx welcome on her maiden call. These unscheduled visits highlight the Island’s growing reputation as a flexible and appealing destination in the Irish Sea, underpinned by strong infrastructure and stakeholder collaboration. Opportunities such as these allow us to build valuable relationships with cruise operators, showcase the Isle of Man’s offering first-hand, and reaffirm our commitment to supporting and growing the visitor economy.’

The Isle of Man is currently scheduled to welcome a total of 54 cruise ships throughout the 2025 season, running from April to October. However, as with all cruise destinations, itineraries remain subject to change due to operational and weather-related considerations.

SeaDream sails into heart of London



SeaDream Yacht Club's SeaDream II made its maiden call in central London this week, sailing up the Thames past Tower Bridge before docking alongside HMS Belfast.

The 112-guest yacht will remain in London until 24 May when it starts SeaDream Yacht Club's Norway and Northern Europe season. It begins with a seven-night Scandinavia and The Kiel Canal voyage to Oslo.

While in London, SeaDream II will host VIPs, media and trade partners at exclusive on-board events.

Dover's cruise season is thriving with four inaugural calls in May

With Carnival Miracle launching her 2025 UK season on Sunday 18th May, plus a double inaugural call day yesterday, 21st May with Windstar's Star Pride and Ponant's Le Laperouse visiting, Dover Cruise's high season is well under way.

Le Laperouse's sister ship, Le Bellot also sailed into the Kent port for the first time earlier on in the month, meaning that over 3,000 new guests have travelled into the region in May.

Peter Wright, Head of Cruise at the Port of Dover said: "We are thrilled to launch our 2025 season with Carnival and their guests, and to see another member of their fleet begin her set of nine turnaround calls this year."

"We also had the pleasure of welcoming both Star Pride and Le Laperouse for their debut calls yesterday. It was wonderful seeing these two unique ships moored alongside each other in front of the White Cliffs and making use of our wide-ranging facilities catering for different ship sizes and styles."

May and June are typically the busiest months for cruise calls, with the Port's ability to handle three vessels simultaneously making it a popular choice for the beginning of the Northern European cruise season. Following the recent announcement that it can now welcome ships of up to 350 loa, an exciting future is ahead for Dover.

Port of Aberdeen celebrates strong financial performance including cruise growth

Port of Aberdeen, the UK's oldest existing business, announces a strong financial performance for 2024, reinforcing its role as a catalyst for sustainable economic growth and a key driver of energy transition.

In the first full year of operations since opening the new £420 million Aberdeen South Harbour, strong revenue performance – combined with careful cost management – continued to drive growth. As a Trust Port, all profits are reinvested into the port's development, directly benefiting its stakeholders.

Roy Buchan, Chair, Port of Aberdeen, said: "The port exists for the benefit of our stakeholders – from the local community and customers to those leading the country – and these positive relationships are essential to our success. We look forward to building on our achievements and sustaining this momentum into 2025 and beyond."

The port's diversification strategy continued at pace in 2024. Cruise traffic totalled more than one million gross tonnes of vessels for the first time, bringing more than 24,000 guests to the region. Large volumes of cargo crossed the quayside and the North Sea's largest subsea isolation valve – weighing 440 tonnes – was decommissioned at South Harbour.

Bob Sanguinetti, CEO, Port of Aberdeen, said: "Success in a highly competitive market is hard-earned. These projects rely on meticulous planning and the commitment of our skilled team to deliver a safe, high quality, and responsive service to our customers. While this new operational landscape is exciting, it also remains uncertain, and this uncertainty shapes our outlook for 2025 and beyond.

"While our foundations are strong, the market is changing. Oil and gas activity – which accounts for almost two thirds of our revenue – is being impacted by the Energy Profits Levy and wavering investor confidence, while delays to consenting and grid connections are affecting timelines for offshore wind.

"Against this backdrop, we see significant opportunities ahead. With the right policy and investment support, we can become an international hub for offshore wind – supporting the accelerated growth of this key sector whilst continuing to support existing customers to develop and grow their business."

The port also reported progress in its efforts to become the UK's first net zero port by 2040*:

- Scope 1 – 42% reduction, primarily due to the expanded use of hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) as a fuel for port equipment and vehicles.
- Scope 2 – 0.5% reduction, following the port's switch to a renewable energy tariff midway through the year, with the full benefits of this change expected to be reflected in future reporting.
- Scope 3 – 1.5% increase, alongside significant progress in the development of the port's three green shore power projects, which will start reducing scope 3 emissions from Q2 2025.

Bob Sanguinetti continued: "To fulfil our purpose of creating prosperity for generations, sustained public and private sector collaboration will be essential to unlock the full potential of Port of Aberdeen for Scotland and the UK. We look forward to further strengthening our partnerships across our extensive stakeholder community over the next 12 months."