

Portland Port looks ahead to 2025 cruise season

Portland Port in Dorset is looking ahead to a bumper 2025 after it welcomed more than 117,000 passengers on a total of 52 cruise ships during 2024. It hosted calls from vessels on 10 out of 12 calendar months – all months apart from January and March – from 18 different lines carrying a host of different nationalities.

The port also fielded more enquiries than ever before about unscheduled visits which resulted in a record nine short-notice stops, including Cunard's Queen Mary 2 on June 1. These were due to weather conditions elsewhere or strike action in France.

It was one of the port's most successful years for cruise calls in its 28-year history. Highlights also included the first call by Princess Cruises' 345-metre-long Sun Princess with 4,300 passengers in her maiden season. After ships docked at the port's £26m deepwater berth, passengers disembarked for organised tours to a range of destinations or boarded the port's complimentary shuttle bus service into Weymouth. The calls contribute circa £10m to the local economy, based on statistics from the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) trade body for spend per passenger.

Now the port is gearing up for the 2025 season when there are 60 cruise ships provisionally scheduled to call with over 100,000 passengers. This will include five turnaround calls by the luxury Hebridean Island Cruises' Hebridean Princess, which carries just 50 guests. This year, 2025, will be the fourth consecutive season since Covid with over 50 calls and 100,000 guests. It will also be a record call number for a normal cruise season. There will also be inaugural visits in 2025, including the first ever calls by luxury cruise line Silversea and expedition cruise line Albatros Expeditions.

The first call of 2025 was a short notice visit by the Spirit of Discovery, with just under 1,000 passengers onboard, at the start of a 49-day trip to the Caribbean and South America. It was diverted to Portland on 7 January due to weather conditions elsewhere. Passengers were taken on complimentary buses to stops in Portland and Weymouth on the evening of its arrival and during the next day, bringing an out of season boost to the local economy.

Ian McQuade, Portland Port general manager commercial and chair of Cruise Britain, said: "It has been another highly successful cruise season and one of our best so far. Positive feedback from cruise lines and their passengers demonstrates just how much they enjoy coming to Portland for the array of local attractions and warm welcome they receive.

The sustained demand for calls and the record number of short-notice visits is testament to relentless work behind the scenes by a dedicated team to attract and accommodate ships and bring circa £10m to the local economy. It also justifies the faith shown to open our £26m deepwater berth in 2023 to accommodate some of the world's largest vessels of up to 350m in length.

We are very grateful to all those who have contributed to the success in 2024 and have made passengers feel so welcome, including our dedicated welcome team, shuttle bus operators and all those in local shops and businesses. We are looking forward to another busy season in 2025 and further ahead as Portland continues to grow in popularity."

At the end of 2024 Ian was re-elected to serve a further three year term as chair of Cruise Britain. He initially took the reins of the trade group in April 2023 on an interim basis before being confirmed in the role full time. Ian said: "It is a great honour to be the chair of Cruise Britain and I am delighted that my tenure has been extended by a further three years".

Among the lines to call at Portland Port in 2024 were Ambassador, AIDA Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Compagnie Française de Croisières, Cunard, Disney, Holland America, Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises, MSC Cruises, Plantours, Princess Cruises, Ponant, Phoenix Reisen, Regent Seven Seas, Saga, Seabourn Cruise Lines and TUI Cruises. There were five double cruise call days when the port hosted two ships at the same time on its deepwater berth. They included October 15 when the greatest number of passengers – 7,954 – arrived in a single day on the Holland America Line’s Rotterdam and the MSC Cruise’s MSC Virtuosa. The highest number of passengers on any ship was 5,441 on the MSC Virtuosa when she called on October 15.



Ian McQuade, Portland Port’s commercial general manager and chair of Cruise Britain, right, and Sun Princess Captain Craig Street, left, exchanged commemorative plaques to mark the ship’s inaugural call at Portland Port in Dorset. Made of Portland Stone, the port’s shield was quarried and carved on the island.

Sun Princess, on her first voyage in UK waters has a gross tonnage of 177,882 and breadth of 42 metres, she is the largest ship in Princess Cruises’ 16-strong fleet and called at Portland after spending her first summer cruising in the Mediterranean. Ian McQuade and Sun Princess Captain Craig Street exchanged commemorative plaques to mark the ship’s inaugural call. There were a total of 11 inaugural calls, including the Queen Mary 2, German line Plantours Kreuzfahrten’s MS Hamburg, French line Ponant’s Le Champlain, CFC’s Renaissance, the Oceania Sirena, Seven Seas Mariner and AIDAsol. The final cruise call of 2024 was the AIDamar on December 10 with 2,097 passengers.

The £10m that cruise calls bring into the local economy is based on statistics from the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) trade body for spend per head of passenger. The figure includes expenditure in shops, bars, cafes, tourism attractions along with transport and tours. In addition, further expenditure comes from the crew that are given time off when in port along with berthing revenues through the port itself and businesses in the local supply chain. Typically, about 50% of visiting cruise guests go on organised excursions, the majority of which stay in Dorset. Most of the remaining passengers explore the local area using the port’s complimentary shuttle bus service, either choosing to stay on Portland or travel into Weymouth. Some also use taxis to travel to and from Portland to Weymouth and local destinations.

A variety of businesses benefit from cruise visits throughout the year, including off-peak calls in the autumn and winter. The Portland Port estate provides employment for circa 300 people in non-seasonal work. The port itself directly employs 57 in this total. About half of the people employed live on Portland and the rest in Weymouth, or very close by. There are also indirect employees – such as hauliers and suppliers – as a consequence of direct employment.