

Portland Port's cruise season kicks off with AIDAsol

The arrival of AIDAsol at Portland Port has heralded the start of the UK port's cruise season.

A total of 2,194 passengers and more than 600 crew were travelling on board the AIDA Cruises vessel, which pulled alongside at Portland's new deepwater berth. It was the penultimate stop of a 117-day world cruise, ending in Hamburg on February 21.

The eight-hour stopover was the first of five calls planned for AIDAsol in Portland this year.

Ian McQuade, Portland Port's commercial GM and chair of Cruise Britain, said, '...The cruise market continues to grow in the UK and globally. A great deal of hard work constantly goes into winning valuable cruise business in the face of tough competition across the UK and Europe.'

He added, 'The vast majority of cruise calls this year were booked two years ago in 2022 and we are already well advanced in planning our itinerary for 2025 and 2026.'

Latest figures from Cruise Lines International Association show cruise passenger numbers will reach 36m in 2024 - up on 31.5m in 2023. They are expected to rise to 37.2m in 2025, 38.5m in 2026 and 39.5m in 2027.

McQuade said that 'as well as raising the profile of the area and contributing to the local economy, cruise ship visits extend the tourist season beyond the summer peak.' There are cruise calls in 10 out of 12 months this year at Portland - all months except January and March. 47 cruise calls and 110,000 passengers will visit South Dorset from February to December.

'We're grateful for the warm welcome and support provided by local residents, businesses, tourist attractions and organisations who see the benefit of cruise visits for the area,' continued McQuade. 'We're looking forward to another superb year sharing the delights of our area with tourists from all over the world whilst supporting the growth of the local economy.' According to CLIA, 63% of cruise passengers revisit a destination they were first introduced to through cruising.

Cruise ships due to arrive at Portland this year include Disney Cruise Line's Disney Dream in September, Princess Cruises' Caribbean Princess in May, TUI Cruises' Mein Schiff 3 in June, Oceania's Oceania Nautica in August and Holland America Line's Rotterdam in October, before the final call of the season on December 10 by AIDA Cruises' AIDAmara.

For the first time, Portland Port will also welcome Ponant's Le Champlain and Compagnie Française de Croisières' Renaissance - each serving the French market - with the latter planning to make three calls at Portland in 2024.

As well as AIDAsol, Le Champlain and Renaissance, the nine inaugural calls booked include: Princess Cruises' Sun Princess and Caribbean Princess, Norwegian Cruises Lines' Norwegian Pearl, Regent Seven Seas' Seven Seas Mariner, Seabourn's Seabourn Sojourn and Oceania Cruises' Sirena.

The port has contracted a professional traffic management company for all calls, which includes the provision of traffic marshals, and has worked with bus operators to stagger the arrival of vehicles and limit the number on the road at any one time.