

## Record cruise ship visit christens new berth at Portland Port

Portland Port welcomed a record 5,000 passengers in the first cruise call at its newly developed deep-water berth.

MSC Virtuosa has brought the greatest number of guests of any single vessel visiting the port so far.

She was the first cruise ship to use the port's new berth, which is part of a £26m redevelopment project to boost capacity and drive growth.

Passengers took complimentary buses into Weymouth and the local area during the 12-hour stop over by the MSC Virtuosa.

Ian McQuade, Portland Port's commercial general manager, said: "The arrival of the MSC Virtuosa marks a major milestone for the port.

"She has brought the greatest number of passengers of any single cruise ship by some margin, considerably more than our previous record of 3,500. Guests from the ship have used our fleet of over 12 complimentary buses to explore the local area and its attractions. They are among a record 130,000 guests who will be visiting Portland on cruise ships this year."

He added: "It is exciting to see our new berth in operation for the first time as part of the largest ever investment in the port and its infrastructure.

"Increasing our capacity and facilities is key to the development of the port, its continued growth and our ability to build upon our contribution to the local economy, which stands at about £10m from cruise calls alone."

Redevelopment of deep-water quays at the port will enhance its cruise and cargo handling operations as well as its service provision to vessels including those from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. It will enable the port to meet rising demand and keep ahead of the trend for increasing sizes of cruise ships, including liners of up to 350m in length.

As well as 5,000 passengers, the MSC Virtuosa has 1,500 crew aboard. She called into the island on a four-day 'Portland and Cherbourg Getaway' from Southampton. MSC Virtuosa was the fourth cruise call of the year at Portland, and is the first of 18 calls before the end of May. She last visited Portland in 2021 when she was the first cruise ship to call after the onset of the Covid pandemic although with fewer passengers. She is due to return later this year.

She followed calls by the Holland America Lines' MS Zuiderdam and Hurtigruten's MS Otto Sverdrup, which both made their inaugural visits to the port when they stopped on consecutive days earlier in April.

Portland Port is based in South Dorset and has operated on a commercial basis since 1996. It has a number of commercial tenants and provides maritime and marine related services.