

Inaugural calls boost cruise business in Dorset

Luxury and specialist cruise ships have been among a record number of liners calling at Portland Port for the first time in 2025.

Twelve vessels have made their inaugural visits with one more due by the end of the year, carrying more than 14,000 passengers. Including ships' crew, this has contributed more than £1.25m to the local economy. Two cruise lines – Silversea and Albatros Expeditions – have sent ships to Portland for the first time.

The milestones come as Portland Port continues to work hard to attract new and diverse lines and ships to Dorset. Its cruise business contributes circa £10m to the local economy annually, according to industry figures.

Ian McQuade, Portland Port's commercial general manager and chair of Cruise Britain, said: "We have been fortunate to welcome more ships making their inaugural calls at Portland. Some have been from cruise lines with whom we have established strong and supportive relationships over a number of years while others have been from lines choosing Portland for the first time. It is also encouraging to see the growth of calls by specialist luxury and expedition ships, which demonstrates the increasingly popularity of the area as a destination for a wide range of passengers."

"It is also a resounding vote of confidence in the hard work, investment and time that goes into the growth and diversification of the port's cruise business. It has been a successful cruise season so far and we look forward to a strong finish to the year." McQuade added.

Luxury cruise line Silversea sent three ships to Portland on a total of six calls this year: the Silver Spirit, the Silver Dawn and the Silver Shadow. Other ships to visit for the first time were Albatros Expeditions' Ocean Albatros, AIDAluna, Le Boreal, Carnival Miracle, MS Europa 2, Ambition, Seven Seas Grandeur, Norwegian Jewel and Viking Vela.

As well as Ocean Albatros, other luxury expedition ships to call have include Ponant's Le Boreal and the Hebridean Princess, which carries just 50 guests. The Viking Vela, from luxury line Viking Ocean Cruises, has been among five unscheduled calls so far this year which have materialised from a record-equalling 18 enquiries.

With deepwater berths, flexibility and a positive attitude, the port has gained a reputation for being able to welcome ships diverted at short notice from their original destination due to such factors as weather or industrial action.

A total of 64 ships carrying more than 100,000 passengers are due to have called at Portland by the end of this year with 11 on the cruise calendar in October and November.

The port has also hosted familiarisation trips for representatives from Fred Olsen, Silversea, Princess and Windstar cruise lines to promote the area and its attractions to attract more ships to the area. The £10m that cruise calls bring into the local economy annually 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. Activities for passengers on Ocean Albatross included a Jurassic Coast Walk and a visit to Stonehenge. Guests on such expedition ships are also more likely to visit RSPB nature reserves and take part in beach cleans.

The port opened a £26m deepwater berth in 2023, allowing it to welcome larger vessels, including ships up to 350m in length on opposite berths on the same day. The cruise business continues to develop in the UK, including Portland.

Cruise Britain, which promotes the UK as a cruise destination, including Portland Port, and Cruise Ireland were jointly awarded Destination of the Year at the 2025 Seatrade Cruise Awards in September. This marks the first time that the British Isles as a combined cruise entity has bid for an internationally recognised travel honour and is testament to the increasing strength of the relationship supporting the British Isles cruising region.