Record 2023 season confirms industry recovery for Britain

Cruise Britain celebrates 15 years with 500% rise in transit guests since 2009

The cruise sector successfully bounced back for ports and service providers around the UK in 2023 with record guest and call numbers from north to south, east to west.

Landmark figures for guest and call numbers have toppled previous pre-pandemic records. 2499 calls were welcomed across the year, pushing the previous 2019 record into second place. Growth rates for guests were extremely marked with the number of passengers embarking on their cruise at a UK port exceeding 1.5 million for the first time; this record year shows 26% growth against the previous highest in 2018.

In terms of transit passengers enjoying a day ashore in the UK, ports welcomed 2.16 million guests, representing 24% more than in 2019 which was itself a record year. With each transit passenger being worth a conservative average of £70 to the local tourism economy every time they step ashore, the visitor figure for 2023 means a vital tourism injection of around £150 million to Britain's coastal economies. This is in addition to the economic benefit brought through cruise line and port operations. In a boost to the inbound tourism economy, early figures show that over three-quarters of transit passengers were non-UK nationals with key markets being the USA and Germany.

'The popularity of cruises into and round Britain shines even more brightly than it did pre-Covid,' said Ian McQuade, Chair, Cruise Britain. 'Cruise is now an important part of the tourism landscape for many ports and destinations, and we are seeing the rewards for an industry that has consistently worked together to recover, regenerate and develop. Whilst Round Britain and Ireland cruise popularity continues to grow, there is a very strong success story for British port calls as part of a multi-country chain of discovery. As Cruise Britain celebrates the association's 15th birthday, a look back into the archives shows a doubling of call numbers and embarkations; plus a tremendous 500% increase in transit passengers since 2009!'.

'Looking ahead to this year, we see the growth trajectory continuing with England's south coast and Scotland continuing to underpin national cruise growth,' added McQuade. 'Regional ports in all four of our nations reported record 2023 figures and all will look to build on that growth'.

In 2023, cruise passengers arrived for the day or embarked through 57 cruise ports aboard 123 individual ships, with the vast majority of ships calling on multiple occasions. 53 different cruise lines were welcomed in UK ports varying from vibrant city centre locations to small coastal boutique towns. Cruise port and cruise line numbers are broadly in line with 2022 but more individual ships were welcomed than in the previous year.

'The UK continues to offer and expand our incredibly diverse cruise holiday experience for guests and this is one of the most powerful reasons for the growth that we are seeing. Traditional strengths such as fabulous historical attractions are increasingly complimented by outdoor and adventurous activities that explore Britain's glorious coast and countryside, and off-the-beaten-path experiences,' commented McQuade. 'Cruise Britain and all its members continue to work with cruise lines, industry partners and stakeholders, and government to support the development of cruise as a resilient and profitable sector of the travel industry.'