Turnarounds highlight of Falmouth's record season

The beguiling chance to step onto a luxury cruise liner to start and finish a holiday in Cornwall for the first time in decades has been a draw for thousands of passengers in a record season which has reinforced Falmouth Harbour's reputation as a world class cruise destination and brought an estimated £4-6 million into the local economy.

The 44 visits – up from 29 in 2022 – saw 11 of the largest ships at anchor in Falmouth Bay and the Carrick Roads where guests enjoyed the short tender ride through the impressive harbour entrance, past Pendennis and St Mawes Castles, to shore. A further 33 cruise ships called alongside, berthing at A&P Falmouth's dock facilities near the centre of town.

The 216m cruise ship Ambition, operated by Ambassador Cruise Line, made four visits to Falmouth during 2023 incorporating passenger turnarounds for the first time – once again giving Cornish residents the opportunity to join a cruise from their home port without a long drive or flight. Ambassador are looking to continue this offering into 2024 with several cruises from Falmouth UK and other European destinations.

Falmouth Harbour CEO Miles Carden says, "The popularity of cruise is growing and this year has proven that Falmouth Harbour can accommodate a full range of cruise ships, working closely with Cruise Britain and port partners including A&P Falmouth and with our outstanding Pilotage provision ensuring vessels can berth or anchor safely and on time.

"We want these ships and their passengers to have the very best experience here and to come back. The value to Falmouth and Cornwall is immense: with an estimated per passenger spend of £70, this season alone could be worth in the region of £4-6million."

A huge amount of work has gone into making this season a success with collaborations and teamwork between A&P Falmouth, providing berthing, towage and cruise passenger reception; Falmouth Harbour ensuring safety of navigation; the Team of Falmouth Pilots who bring the vessels safely to berth or anchor; the volunteer Cruise Ambassadors that give the passengers an amazing welcome; the Town BID team; the Town council; Ships agents and many others.

The idea that Ambassador could utilise Falmouth for passenger turnarounds originated from a Cruise Britain event, demonstrating how important this networking group is to our industry.

Not only have the cruise ships visiting Falmouth been more numerous in 2023 than ever before but they are also becoming notably bigger and more state of the art. One of the largest vessels of the year was the 331m long MSC Virtuosa, with a gross tonnage of 181,541 and capacity for up to 6,200 guests. This size of ship can sit comfortably in Falmouth Bay, overlooked on each side by Henry VIII's twin castles.

"There are clear signs the cruise industry is embracing sustainability and understands it has to make big changes if it wants to continue to thrive as the world decarbonises," says Miles Carden. "Falmouth Harbour has already taken significant steps towards protecting and improving our precious environment, including protecting sensitive seabeds and regenerating seagrass areas: the revenue and harbour dues collected from visiting cruise ships helps make these environmental schemes affordable and allows us to do more to protect our Seagrass and other environments."

With the visits to Falmouth Harbour beginning in early April and continuing until the end of October, this cruise traffic has provided a welcome boost to tourism and with many of the calls taking place outside the traditional holiday period the additional footfall has been especially valuable to local businesses.

September was the busiest month with 11 cruise calls in total including a last-minute visit from the 131m luxury cruise ship, Le Champlain, operated by the French line Ponant.

The season had a surprising end with an unusually long 4 day visit from Saga's Spirit of Adventure as the vessel took welcome shelter from storm Ciaran in Falmouth, giving guests the chance to explore the town. Throughout history, The Harbour has provided welcome shelter from storms, this will never change

Cruising can give travellers the option to take a holiday without having to buy a plane ticket and this has been the case with many of the cruise visits to Falmouth this year. Passengers have been able to embark and disembark a cruise from their home port, minimising the impact of long distance travelling or flying.

Falmouth Harbour expects 2024 to be even busier than '23 with more than 50 cruise ships already scheduled to visit.