

Virgin Voyages says “sea you soon” to the UK after making Portsmouth their home for the last five years



Virgin Voyages’ Valiant Lady made an epic departure from Portsmouth last night (27 August) as the cruise line waved a fond farewell to its UK home port after another successful season. For the last five years, the global brand has made Portsmouth International Port its UK home and broken a number of records along the way.

A special sail past event was held at Southsea Castle as the 278m vessel departed for Amsterdam on an 11-night cruise to Reykjavik. Over three calls this turnaround season, 15,000 Virgin Voyages passengers have passed through Portsmouth’s terminal

Portsmouth’s well-established relationship with Virgin Voyages began in 2021 when the brand launched their world-first passenger sailings from the city, with Scarlet Lady operating “at sea” voyages around the UK at reduced capacity due to COVID restrictions. The brand-new line made an impression on the industry with its new approach to cruising, and has become a top choice for adult-only voyages.

Three more ships followed, all making their UK debut in Portsmouth, and in 2025 the port became the first and only in the world to welcome the complete fleet when Brilliant Lady spent a week alongside, hosting invited guests before its first commercial sailing to New York.

Andrew Williamson, head of cruise and ferry at Portsmouth International Port, said: “Virgin Voyages hasn’t simply been a customer of the port, it’s been a genuine partner to Portsmouth as a city and a key part of our cruise story. Over the last five years we have grown together with a shared pioneering spirit. The port has established itself as a popular choice for cruise lines by developing our operations, improving our terminal and upholding our sustainability credentials.

“Across Scarlet, Valiant, Resilient and Brilliant Lady’s inaugural seasons we have now welcomed more than 72,000 ‘sailors’ through Portsmouth with the help of our amazing team and partners at the port, who take the operational challenge of getting thousands of passengers off and on the ship in their stride.”

In recent years, Portsmouth International Port has experienced exponential growth, contributing an estimated £400m annually to the national economy. In 2023, a new cruise terminal extension opened to allow for the increase in cruise passengers. The innovative net carbon neutral building generates more energy than it consumes, featuring sea water to heat and cool the building, wind and solar technology, and

internal and external living walls to help purify the air.

Cllr Steve Pitt, Leader of Portsmouth City Council, said: "This year we have celebrated 100 years of Portsmouth being made a city, 50 years of the city council operating the international port, and five years of Virgin Voyages calling Portsmouth its UK home port. Portsmouth International Port has demonstrated time and time again that we can work with global brands to create a unique experience for their guests.

"The benefits of cruise tourism can be felt across the city, with each call generating up to £1.5m to the local economy and profit from the port going straight back in to funding vital council services."

Portsmouth also boasts the UK's first high-voltage, multi-berth, multi-user shore power system which went live last month (July), and welcomed Valiant Lady as the first commercial cruise ship connection. This also marked the first time any Virgin Voyages ship had connected to shore power in Europe, switching off their engines while in port and reducing emissions.

Jill Stoneberg, senior director of social impact and sustainability at Virgin Voyages, said: "Progress happens when the infrastructure on land and the technology at sea come together, which is exactly what this moment represented. Seeing Valiant Lady connected in Portsmouth turns that ambition into something tangible.

"Shore power is one piece of a much bigger decarbonisation journey and partnerships with forward-thinking ports like Portsmouth are essential to moving that work forward."

Virgin Voyages surprised the city with an open letter, thanking Portsmouth for making them feel at home since 2021, and looks forward till next time.

Dear Portsmouth,

Well, here we are. Today is Valiant Lady's final call of the season, and after everything we've packed into our time together, "thanks for having us" doesn't quite cover it.

What a summer it's been!

We chased a total solar eclipse out to sea and watched the sky casually steal the show. Day turning to night in the middle of the ocean? Bit of a show-off, if you ask us.

We brought Comedy Fest onboard, filled the ship with some seriously funny people, and learned an important lesson: never make eye contact with a comedian when you're sitting in the front row. You've been warned.

We sailed off in search of sunshine, stayed out late, ate extremely well, danced even later, and came home with camera rolls doing most of the remembering for us.

And through it all, Portsmouth was where the adventure began.

There's something special about seeing Valiant Lady docked at your waterfront. Whether you were about to step aboard or spotting her from the top of Spinnaker Tower, she certainly knows how to make an entrance. (And an exit, for that matter.)

A home port is about more than where the ship docks. It's the buzz before sailaway, the waves from shore, the warm welcomes back, and the port Crew who helped send thousands of Sailors off on their next adventure.

So, before Valiant Lady sails away from Portsmouth one last time this season, consider this our love letter from sea to shore.

To everyone in Portsmouth who welcomed us and waved us off, and to the Sailors who came along for the ride: thank you for being part of one very memorable chapter.

We came. We sailed. We laughed. We stared directly at the sun.
(With the proper eclipse glasses, obviously. Even rebels read the safety briefing.)

And somewhere along the way, Portsmouth became part of the story.
Until next time.

With love from,
Virgin Voyages